

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: AN INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORK
FOR STUDENT SERVICES

By

Desiree Heather Narvey

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gather information on how best to support the implementation of Response to Intervention as a student services framework in support of inclusion. The key components of the Response to Intervention framework and roles of administration and student services teams working within its framework were explored to possibly assist in developing an action plan for its implementation in the school division being studied.

The literature contends that as a framework for the systematic use of assessment data to effectively allocate resources and supports in order to improve learning for all students, the implementation of Response to Intervention is complex and challenging since it is often distinguished by specific features of leadership, commitment, and corresponding professional development.

A naturalistic qualitative research design and constructivist methodology were employed in this study to gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions of RTI implementation (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Three focus groups, one with administrators and another two with representation from resource and classroom teachers, counselors, coordinators, and educational support services personnel and clinicians, were conducted by an outside facilitator. Each focus group interview was transcribed and then given to the researcher who employed NVivo 9 Software to analyze both themes from the literature and emerging ones. The data were further analyzed according to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) consensus, supported and individual themes as well as Rubin and Rubin's

(2005) concepts and themes indirectly revealed and those that emerged from comparing interviews.

The findings suggested that Response to Intervention changed the way participants conceived of inclusion. The study also suggested roles for administrators and student services teams in improving communication and collaboration in the face of change. In addition, the research findings and conclusions suggested ways in which coordinators and consultants may build capacity with their student services teams.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background Context

Those working in schools have increasingly complex roles for providing appropriate programming to support the academic and social needs of all students. To meet these challenges and goals student services teams consisting of resource and special education teachers, counselors and often clinicians have endeavored to work collaboratively with general education teachers, while understanding their own unique roles and responsibilities in supporting students with diverse and exceptional needs. In addition, the *Appropriate education programming in Manitoba: Standards for student services* document (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006) and current research practices of principals as instructional leaders (Eaker, 2002; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005) have created an expectation for principals to assume responsibility for the education of all students and for educators to adopt the principles of inclusion, a way of thinking and acting that allows all individuals to feel accepted, valued and safe (*Appropriate education: Standards for student services*, 2006, p. 1).

Strong leadership has always been an integral part of meeting student needs: “Leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to effects of the quality of the curriculum and teachers’ instruction” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 2). Working in isolation can perpetuate only a narrow and circumscribed approach to addressing student concerns. The role of administrator continues to evolve into one of providing “learner leadership” (Schmoker, 2005) in an inclusive school setting. It is also a role that places the principal as ‘leader of leaders’ to foster the abilities of teachers in

leading innovation and participating in collective decision-making (Chrispeels, 2004). Successful leaders combine the most progressive elements of psychological authority with aspects of professional and moral authority (Sergiovanni, 1999, p. 58). With these responsibilities comes the challenge of having the knowledge base and skills necessary to create and lead towards a common vision, as well as have the moral compass to believe in inclusion and that all students can learn.

With the recent legislation, *Appropriate education: Standards for student services* (2006), principals have a responsibility to provide an inclusive environment for the learning of all their students. This responsibility is entrenched in the *Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming)*, S.M. 204, c.9 proclaimed on October 28, 2005 and both the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom* and the *Human Rights Code* of Manitoba that specify there must be reasonable accommodations of students with special needs unless they cause demonstrable undue hardship in terms of excessive cost, hazard, or impact on others. For principals, the vision and moral compass have been well established in these documents and support the following definition of inclusion:

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe. An inclusive community consciously evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p.1).

Principals' actions need to reflect the written policies and procedures that are outlined in these policies and provincial legislation. As part of these policies, including *The Public Schools Act*, principals must provide the following to all students:

1. Equal access to an education.
2. Early identification of exceptional learning needs.
3. Referrals for specialized assessments if the in-school team is unable to assess why a student is having difficulty meeting the learning outcomes...and cannot meet learning outcomes even with differentiated instruction and accommodations.
4. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) for students who are unable to access the regular curriculum.
5. Reasonable accommodation for students who have exceptional learning needs that affect their behavior. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p.14)

In order to make these provisions, administrators require a deep understanding of student diversity and exceptionalities, as well as collaboration skills to lead and empower their student services teams and general educators to this end. In order to achieve this, they need to share their vision and be able to articulate their action plans for making inclusion a reality. The concept of the administrator as a leader of leaders is critical to understanding how to improve outcomes for all students, including those with exceptionalities.

In a time when meeting the demands of an increasingly diverse student population can be a daunting task, many schools have incorporated professional learning communities (PLCs) into their organizational framework. Although there is no universally agreed upon definition of a PLC, its conceptual framework “evident in the

policies, programs, and practices of the school [or Division]” falls into three categories (Eaker, Dufour & Dufour, 2002): (1) a solid foundation consisting of collaboratively developed and widely shared mission, vision, values, and goals; (2) collaborative teams that work interdependently to achieve common goals, and; (3) a focus on results as evidenced by a commitment to continuous improvement” (p. 3). In addition, collective inquiry is often “the engine of improvement, growth and renewal in a professional learning community” (Dufour & Eaker, 1998, p. 25). The collaborative and supportive roles played by student services teams may complement the professional learning communities already at work in our schools. Most teams work along side the subject or grade level teachers to discuss the students who are and are not reaching the learning outcomes. These teams might collaborate on methods of differentiation and adaptation that are required to assist struggling learners. As well, it is conceivable that teams support teachers by providing meaningful interventions for their students either in class by means of co-teaching, or by individualized or small group instruction when deemed necessary.

It is important for student services teams to share a common vision with criteria for achieving the vision. Unless student services personnel know what it is they are supposed to be achieving in terms of their work with classroom teachers and their students, research is clear that they will not meet the expectations that are established for them (Stiggins, 2007). In addition, without expectations and goals, it will be difficult for school services teams to devise action plans and therefore they will be ineffective in channeling their energies and resources towards improvement (Erkens, Jakicic & Jessie, 2008). For example, if the school goal is to improve the literacy and numeracy levels of

students, then through collaboration with subject or grade level teachers, service team members will develop goals to meet this outcome. This may result in resource teachers providing interventions through co-teaching to support struggling students in literacy. If the student services team does not have the skills to support classroom teachers in this area, then team members can acquire the skills through professional learning opportunities.

Improvement through professional development opportunities found in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at division level or workshops offered by outside organizations, may not necessarily match the knowledge and skills levels that need to be developed in each school team. Current professional learning models rely heavily on one-shot workshops and inservices that do not provide the follow-up, guided practice or opportunities for reflection in order to deepen understanding (Braden, Huai, White & Elliott, 2005; Little & Houston, 2003). Some models allow for intensive follow-up sessions following general ones, but this rarely ties in with school action plans that are necessary to produce systematic, school-wide change (Braden et al., 2005; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005). Most models do not account for student services personnel being on different places of the learning continuum and consequently, do not differentiate to address individual or school needs: “Teachers (resource and classroom teachers) do not learn best from outside experts or by attending conferences or implementing programs installed by outsiders” (Schmoker, 2005, p. 141). Furthermore, they do not provide the descriptive feedback and guided practice to make the new skills set viable and sustainable. Professional development that is directly linked to the specific needs of student services teams has greater relevance, and the greater the

relevance of professional development, the greater the acceptance by staff. Functioning together, the teams can evaluate the effectiveness of their new skills in meeting student needs (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004).

Historically, student services teams consisting of resource teachers, counselors and clinicians have worked mostly independent from one another, as well as from classroom teachers (Fisher, Grove & Sox, 2000; Fisher & Frey, 2004). Resource teachers have used the consultative-collaborative models to work with classroom teachers; however, this model does not capture the collaboration required to meet the needs of student diversity in the schools today. This model places the resource teacher in the expert role, rather than in an equal leadership position among peers. Resource teachers have provided direct service to students through pull-out programs, while special education teachers managed their students in self-contained classrooms (Dufour et al., 2004; Fisher et al., 2000). In both cases, “students with the greatest academic needs were completely missing essential instruction in one content area in order to receive services in another” (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004, p. 110). Counseling models, such as the one found in the *Manitoba sourcebook for guidance and counseling services: A comprehensive and developmental approach*, Manitoba Education (2009) provide information on core competencies and student programming, but seldom lend themselves to collaboration or shared responsibilities.

This thesis argues that newer models, such as Response to Intervention (RTI) (Bender & Shores, 2007; Fuchs, Fuchs & Vaughn, 2008; Whitten, Esteves & Woodrow, 2009) or the “Pyramid of Interventions” (Dufour et al., 2004) provide the most promise for student services. This model provides an organizational framework for meaningful

instruction, interventions and universal supports for all students. RTI promotes shared roles and responsibilities among all educators, including the student services team and administrators to ensure that all students, regardless of their abilities, achieve the expected curricular and programming outcomes. The model of RTI relies on the administrator as a leader and learner of learners, distributed leadership, collaboration and a skilled professional staff. Embedded in its organizational framework are professional learning communities, a process already at work in the schools in the Division involved in this study. According to Buffum, Mattos and Weber (2010), for schools that are already engaged in the PLC process, “implementing RTI will not be a new initiative, but instead a validation and a deepening of their current practices” (p. 53). A student services model or framework that is embedded in a divisional one but with different roles for its student services teams develops a common language and framework that is necessary for inclusion.

Depending on the lens through which Response to Intervention is viewed, it is classified differently in many contexts. Murawski and Hughes (2009) view RTI as a “new method of identifying students with learning disabilities” (p. 267). RTI is a three-tiered model (Bender & Shores, 2007; Fuchs & Deschler, 2007). It is not a specific model or program according to the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (2005). It is a school-wide initiative, the aim of which is to raise student achievement (Whitten, et al., 2009). In fact, there is no one model or approach since many variations can be conceptualized (National Joint Commission on Learning Disabilities, 2005). However, the classification that best suits Response to Intervention in terms of facilitating inclusion is ‘framework’. In its guiding principles, the International Reading

Association (2006) views RTI as a framework for prevention to help schools identify and support students and not as a model to be imposed on schools. Since many variations of RTI can be conceptualized, it is necessary that school communities be given flexibility in addressing their unique needs (International Reading Association, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

As Coordinator of Student Services in an urban school division, I was motivated to work with division staff to implement a student services framework that embeds the Standards for Student Services while creating opportunities for distributed leadership, collaboration and professional development. Since student services teams do not work in isolation from classroom teachers, a common framework between student services teams and existing professional learning communities in each school is essential. Response to Intervention provides this common framework. As such, the focus of my thesis was to gather information on how best to support the implementation of Response to Intervention as a student services framework to support inclusion.

To that end, the nature of this study was threefold. First, the study described Response to Intervention within the context of inclusive practices. Next, it described the components of Response to Intervention and the roles of student services teams and administrators within it. It also identified factors that promoted or impeded its implementation. Finally, this study may have aided in the construction of an action plan to assist with its implementation. For the purposes of this study, student services teams consisted of the resource and special education teachers, counselors, as well as clinicians such as speech language pathologists, social workers and psychologists. The study also included the principal and vice principal, where such a position exists. By virtue of their

role as leader of leaders, school-based administrators need to be active participants in developing and implementing Response to Intervention in order to provide and sustain a common vision, programming supports, and professional development opportunities for their staffs (Allington, 2009; Dufour, 2002; Dufour, 2008; Whitten et al., 2009).

Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the participants' understandings of the components of Response to Intervention?
2. To what extent are current school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to Intervention?
3. What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school-based practice?
4. What factors promote or impede the implementation of RTI?

These research questions provided a focus for the study and guided the literature review.

They also informed the research methods presented in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

In the changing face of school reform, there was a need for greater clarity in the role of student services teams and administrators in supporting classroom teachers to address the needs of an increasingly diverse population within an inclusive framework. The *Appropriate educational programming in Manitoba: Standards for student services* document or AEP (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006) addressed the nine standards: Access, Early Identification, Assessment, Planning in Education, and Student Discipline, provided specific roles for principals and student services but did not provide a process or model for making these roles operational. Current consultative-collaborative

models did not represent the complexities required to implement and sustain inclusion, nor did they provide a process for facilitating collaboration, shared responsibilities, or school wide interventions. Research on professional learning communities addressed many elements of collaboration and provided a framework for addressing the learning needs of all learners, but did not consider the unique roles and responsibilities of student services teams in the process.

This researcher found no empirical research in a search of theses, publications, journals, references, and books on the subjects of professional learning communities specific to resource teachers, student services personnel and/or special education teachers. However, the roles of resource and special education teachers were abundant in research on collaboration and Response to Intervention (RTI) (Bender & Shores, 2007; Fisher, et.al, 2000; Ross & Blanton, 2004; Shores & Chester, 2009). Professional learning communities is the foundation of the Response to Intervention Model in that RTI will not exist without them. However, the complexities involved in implementing and sustaining RTI need to take into account the leadership of the administrator and the distributed leadership of student services teams and classroom teachers (Erkens et al., 2008). Implementation must also address collective inquiry and evidence based practices to ensure high levels of learning for all students. Research on RTI Models for school improvement had reported its positive impact on raising student achievement (Howell, Patton, Deiotte, 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009). However, like PLCs operating in each school, RTI was not sustainable without a clear vision and informed and distributed leadership at all levels: Manitoba Education, the school division, and individual schools (Fullan, Rolheiser, Mascall & Edge, 2001).

As a Coordinator of Student Services working at the Division level, I believed that a student services framework that aligned with the organizational framework and principles of Response to Intervention would support my collaboration with school teams. Similar to the role of principals as ‘learning leaders’ my role in working with student services teams and administrators “is to provide opportunities [for them] to work together in self-managing teams...always with the expectation for improved learning. [My] job is to monitor, discuss, and support [their] progress in achieving higher levels of... learning” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 146). This approach is supported in the literature on professional development for resource and special education teachers. For example, Sparks (2002) and Nelson (2009) believe that high quality professional development needs to match specific, ongoing learning goals. Learning is contextual, and activities should be integrated into the educational program and be designed in a systematic manner. When school teams are engaged in PLCs within the Response to Intervention framework, they can self-assess their practices in relation to student learning. Discussion centers on how they will respond when students are not learning (Dufour et al., 2004). My role in this collaborative process is to monitor and support the progress of student services teams by contributing resources and professional development to support their capacity-building endeavors.

Response to Intervention provided the framework needed to facilitate and sustain continuous improvement in student services in support of inclusion. Therefore, this research study may have advanced knowledge in the field of student services by illuminating findings related to the roles and responsibilities of student services teams and administrators using Response to Intervention as their framework. In addition, it

may have assisted school divisions by providing a process for implementing RTI, thereby improving communication and collaboration in the face of change. Finally, it may have also provided Coordinators/Consultants with suggestions for building capacity with their student services teams.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this research study, the following terms and operational definitions were utilized:

Appropriate Educational Programming (AEP)

AEP is a collaborative school-family-community process where school communities create learning environments and provide resources and services that are responsive to the lifelong learning, social and emotional needs of all students (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006).

Class Reviews/Profiles

Based on the work of Brownlie (2006), the class review process uses teams consisting of the classroom teacher, administrator, resource teacher, counselor and sometimes clinicians to identify classroom goals based on students' strengths, to establish needs of individual students without labeling them (medical, language, learning, social-emotional), and to identify and provide supports and resources to assist the classroom teacher.

Clinician

An individual trained in the provision of support services within the school setting who provides services for students with exceptional learning needs and consultative services for school personnel and parents; and certified under the Teaching Certificates and Qualifications, Manitoba Regulation 515/88, as speech-language pathologists, school

psychologists, school social workers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists or reading clinicians (2006).

Cluster Site Schools

Cluster sites are schools with high percentages of students with special needs. Although these sites still provide inclusive programming, the higher concentration of special needs students often results in more specialized staff with programming to reflect it.

Collaboration

Collaboration “is to co-create strategies and actions together” (Erkins, 2008, p. 18). Collaboration “recognizes and values the collective wisdom residing within the school and creates “the structures and culture to allow staff members to tap into that wisdom” (Dufour, 2008, p.2).

Continuum of Supports and Services

A range of programming and services designed to support students with exceptional needs (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 25).

Coordinator of Special Education

A teacher with special education certification whose duty is to co-ordinate special education services and to provide special education, resource and regular classroom teachers with consultative services (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, pp. 25-26).

Co-teaching

A process in which the classroom teacher and resource teacher, counselor or clinician jointly share ownership, responsibility and decision-making for providing effective programming for students in the classroom (Friend & Cook, 2002).

Counseling and Guidance Services Support

Teachers who provide support for activities that involve counseling students and parent, evaluating students' abilities, assisting students in personal, career and social development, providing referral assistance, working with other staff members in planning and conducting guidance programs for students (Manitoba Education, 2009, p. 26)

Essential Learnings (EL)

ELs are descriptions of what needs to be learned or a summary of the outcomes in simple clear language (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 3).

Evidence-based Practices

Evidence-based practices are educational practices and instructional strategies that are supported by scientific research (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009).

Inclusion

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 26).

Inclusive Education

Providing all students with the supports and opportunities they need to become participating members of their school communities (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, p. 26).

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

Refers to the written documentation of a specific plan to support a student's exceptional learning needs; the written IEP may range in length from one page documenting student-specific adaptations developed by a student's teacher(s) in consultation with the parent(s), to a lengthier documentation of a student's programming outlining student-specific outcomes developed by a larger team that may also include resource, clinical and other student service supports (Manitoba Education, 2011, pp.26-27).

Professional Learning Community (PLC)

PLCs involve educators working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for students (Dufour, Dufour & Eaker, 2005).

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Response to Intervention is "a process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction based on student's response" (Bender & Shores, 2007, p. 7).

Resource Teacher

A teacher whose principal duties are to diagnose individual educational problems, to prescribe special remedial measures for use by teaching staff, to give direct assistance to teachers and students in need of special help and to provide school personnel and parents with consultative services (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 28).

School-based Student Services Support Team

Typically includes a school administrator, resource teacher(s), counselor(s), classroom teacher(s) and others who have responsibility for students with exceptional learning needs; the team helps schools develop exemplary practice in inclusion and in promoting the planning, development and monitoring of IEPs for students in all aspects of their school life (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 27).

Special Education Teacher

A teacher with a special education certificate specialized in working with students with special needs. It is common practice to refer to special education teachers as resource teachers (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 28).

Student Services

Staff and services provided by the school division to meet the needs of students who have exceptional learning, social/emotional, behavioral, sensory, physical, cognitive/intellectual, communication, academic or special health-care needs (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 28).

Student with Exceptional Learning Needs

A student with exceptional learning needs requires specialized services or programming when deemed necessary by the in-school team because of exceptional learning, social/emotional, behavioral, sensory, physical, cognitive/intellectual, communication, academic or special health-care needs that affect his or her ability to meet learning outcomes (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 28).

Universal Design

The process of creating systems, environments, materials and devices that are directly and repeatedly usable by people with the widest range of abilities operating within the largest variety of situations (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006, p. 28).

Delimitations of the Study

The Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming), S.M. 2004, c.9, proclaimed on October 28, 2005, provides an expectation that school divisions in Manitoba will provide all students with appropriate programming that supports student participation in both the academic and social life of schools. The standards contained within the *Appropriate Educational Programming (AEP)* document provide school divisions with a framework to use in developing a local policy for appropriate educational programming. The purpose of this study was to work with student services teams and administrators in the design and implementation process itself.

This study recognized that Response to Intervention implementation is complex and challenging since it is often “distinguished by the specific characteristics of leadership, commitment, and corresponding training” (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007, p. 132). This study assisted in the development of an implementation plan for RTI and illuminated the challenges of its implementation.

The literature on Response to Intervention was varied in that some models included more than three tiers and others focus on either academics or behavior, but not both. The idea of tiers in RTI conveys the level of student need; the more needy the

student, the greater the number of tiers and more targeted or individualized instruction (Grigorenko, 2009). This researcher selected primarily literature pertaining to three-tiered RTI models, and included ones that addressed both academics and behaviors since both are “inextricably linked” (Buffum, et.al, 2009, p. 111).

Using a naturalistic qualitative design, this study was confined to one urban school division in Manitoba. However, this sample fit the purpose of the study, the questions being asked and the constraints being faced (Patton, 2002). The purpose of the study, to implement a new student services framework, was specific to the school division involved in the study. The research questions outlined how school and student services team practices were aligned with RTI, how they delineated roles and responsibilities for student services teams and administrators and how they may suggest a possible action plan for implementing RTI. The strength in this process was that the participants in the study were able to provide relevant and rich information because they have been involved in the design of the process (Madriz, 2000; Patton, 2002).

The research method used in this study was focus groups. Focus groups were a particularly salient method given the naturalistic qualitative design of this study. The research occurred in the context of real life experiences and reflected the experience and insights of those being studied (Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). A cross section and representation of administrators, resource teachers, counselors, classroom teachers and clinicians were selected at random and invited to voluntarily participate in the study to achieve a balance allowing for various perspectives and meanings among them (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2008). To foster an environment of trust and openness, a facilitator from outside the division who used focus groups as her research methodology

for her doctoral thesis in Education facilitated the focus groups. Also, an assistant from outside the division, organized and tape recorded the sessions, and transported the tapes to and from the transcriber. Participants were invited into the focus groups by the researcher and were selected by open invitation and voluntary involvement. Volunteers indicated their interest in participating by emailing the assistant. All efforts were made to protect their anonymity and they were allowed to withdraw at any time.

Lastly, classroom teachers also referred to as general educators in the literature, play a significant role in Response to Intervention and as such, they participated in the focus groups. This study, however, did not address their specific roles and responsibilities. This researcher acknowledged their significant role in RTI in terms of shared responsibility of all students, best practices for classroom instruction and progress monitoring, but saw merit in having their roles and responsibilities explored through a separate study. Given the breadth of the role of classroom teachers at Tier 1 in providing evidence-based instruction and interventions, a research study could focus on this alone.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the features of Response to Intervention, to explain how school and student services teams practices could become aligned with RTI, and to identify the roles of student services teams and administrators in creating a possible action plan that explains how best to implement it within the school division. Within this context, a naturalistic qualitative design was used. Since this research was naturalistic, it did not offer the quantifiable and less biased point of view of the outsider. Consequently, the findings of this thesis may have been influenced by the background, experiences, values, viewpoints and interpretations of this researcher

(Patton, 2002). Also, because of my positionality in that I work in the division as Coordinator of Student Services, there may have been perceptions of coercion that were clearly addressed in the ethical protocols of this work. Although a facilitator from outside the division facilitated the focus groups, participants could have known each other and said what they thought I wanted to hear in my role as coordinator because they realized that I was the researcher involved in this study and biased towards RTI.

However, the goal of the study was not to debate whether RTI should be implemented within the division; rather, how it could be implemented in an inclusive and transparent manner such that all those responsible for student services clearly understand their roles and feel that they have voice in the process. It was also hoped that since the questions were framed in the third person, as a semi-structured perceptual study, this researcher was somewhat removed from the responses. This researcher ensured that data analysis procedures were embedded such that data were presented in an unbiased manner, regardless of the personal views of the researcher, and that disconfirming evidence was also clearly articulated to present alternate viewpoints from that of the researcher. Also, because of this researcher's position, Coordinator of Student Services in this Division, my analysis and interpretation may have enriched the findings by perceiving certain degrees of nuanced understanding (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002).

The overall findings of the study may not be generalized due to the qualitative nature of this study and the lack of fidelity in implementing each component of RTI including the PLCs at its foundation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Implementation fidelity refers to the degree to which a program or intervention is delivered as intended (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Since RTI relies on the implementation

of best practices in terms of classroom programming and interventions, it is difficult to ensure that each lesson, program and intervention is implemented in a consistent, systematic way in every classroom or school. The lack of consistency in program implementation would compromise its fidelity, making it difficult to generalize teaching or programming results from one context to the next. Also, this study was further limited in its disproportionate representation of focus group participants in focus group three. Whereas Focus group 2 was represented by all three school levels (early, middle, senior), Focus group 3 was comprised primarily of participants from senior years. This skewed composition may have hindered the group's ability to achieve a balance allowing for various perspectives and meanings among them. In addition, given that participant names and identifies were concealed to maintain anonymity, the transcripts from the focus groups could not track who made comments, or how often; therefore, impacting upon the reliability of this study.

Organization of the Study

This chapter provided a framework for exploring the features of a Response to Intervention Model, as well as the roles and responsibilities of student services teams and administrators within its framework. Chapter Two presents a review of related literature, and a discussion of the theoretical framework of the research study. Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study and describes both the data collection techniques and data analyses. Chapters Four and Five present the research findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

RTI and Inclusive Practices

Educational reform and school improvement initiatives have focused on improving social conditions by increasing student achievement and embracing inclusion (Dufour et al., 2004, Fullan, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In Manitoba, the right to an inclusive education for all students has evolved over approximately sixty years. Prior to 2004, legislation had stated that school boards were required to make provisions for all residents who had the right to attend school and who required special programs for their education. Although progressive at the time, this legislation had not addressed placement in regular classes or the nature of appropriate programming. Over the next couple of decades the rights of all students would continue to evolve through integration and then mainstreaming in the least restrictive environment (Blais & Van Kemp, 2005). Finally, in 2004, Manitoba passed legislation assuring the rights of students to appropriate educational programming and it was later proclaimed on October 28, 2005. Instead of viewing students with special needs as separate from the general population, this legislation drew upon the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, *The Education Administration Act*, *The Human Rights Code of Manitoba*, and *The Public Schools Act of Manitoba* for its guiding principles. Accordingly, the *Appropriate Educational Programming: Standards for student services* (Manitoba Education, 2006) defined inclusion in terms of a belief system, a way of thinking and acting allowing for every individual to feel accepted, valued and safe within an inclusive community (p.1).

In addition, *Appropriate Educational Programming* (2006) established the framework for developing appropriate programming for students with diverse needs.

Through a consultation process with stakeholders in education, parents, administrators and students, appropriate educational programming became defined as:

A collaborative school-family-community process where school communities create learning environments and provide resources and services that are responsive to the lifelong learning, social and emotional needs of all students.
(2006, p.1)

Appropriate educational programming in Manitoba: Standards for student services

(2006), also referred to as *AEP*, provides a very detailed description of inclusive schools. These schools are described as providing learning environments that are accessible to all students. It introduces the concept of “universal design” as a method for ensuring that schools, classrooms, curricula and materials provide all students with access to the resources they require, regardless of their diverse learning needs. It does not preclude alternative learning environments in its statement that “students learn in different places and locations” (p.5). Further, *AEP* identifies school-based student services support teams to include a school administrator, resource teacher, counselor, classroom teacher and others who have responsibility for students with exceptional learning needs. The document also defines students with exceptionalities for whom they provide appropriate programming as those “who require specialized services or programming when deemed necessary by the in-school team because of exceptional learning, social/emotional, behavioral, sensory, physical, cognitive, intellectual, communication, academic or special health-care needs that affect their ability to meet learning outcomes” (p. 5). The legislation and *AEP* document take extraordinary measures to enshrine the rights of all students to an appropriate education in an inclusive school setting.

The organizational framework and processes for providing the culture for reform have been difficult to sustain, but legislation such as *Appropriate education programming: Standards for student services* (Manitoba Education, 2006) and organizational frameworks such as Response to Intervention provide both an expectation and foundation for possibilities (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004; Fullan, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). In *School change and teacher knowledge: A reciprocal relationship*, Frey and Fisher (2004) identify four principles found in the constructs of special education reform:

1. Authentic assessment and instruction is cyclical and should be in continuous improvement of teaching and learning.
2. Ongoing cycles of planning, action, and reflection characterize effective teaching, learning, assessment, and organizational change.
3. Relationships and expectations matter because learning is a social activity.
4. Shared leadership, commitment, and communication build a culture of learning, respect, and achievement. (p. 60)

These constructs of educational reform are found in Response to Intervention, or RTI, which has been in existence in the American education system since the early 1970s.

In the United States, RTI gained prominence in 2004 with the passage of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) and momentum from the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation, as a process for identifying students with specific learning disabilities and exceptionalities. Prior to this time a discrepancy model, a method whereby an intelligence quotient (IQ) was used to establish the difference between a student's cognitive level and his/her achievement, determined the eligibility of

students with disabilities to receive funding and supports (*Federal Education of the Handicapped Act*, 1975). Often this deficit model, traditionally referred to as a “wait to fail” approach, required students to participate in curricular content in order to calculate a discrepancy between IQ and achievement sufficient enough to label them learning disabled (Reschly, Hosp & Schmied, 2003). Since the discrepancy typically did not happen before grade 3, students experiencing academic difficulty missed out on two or more years of effective interventions waiting for a diagnosis. Once the diagnosis was made, academic achievement expectations were different for these students compared to their same age peers. These students were essentially labeled, and the belief that they were incapable of achieving success in regular classrooms followed them through their school careers (Bender & Shores, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009).

At the National Summit on Learning Disabilities (2001), Response to Intervention was referred to as the most promising method for identifying students with learning disabilities (Whitten, Esteves & Woodrow, 2009). *The President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education* recommended a process of early identification, intervention and assessment that was linked to classroom instruction, the RTI model. The major difference between this approach and the discrepancy model was that students involved in RTI received instruction, remediation and intervention before a significant discrepancy occurred, if at all. The change in the identification process also altered the numbers of students identified as learning disabled, disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in using language and which may manifest itself in an inability to receive or produce language or to do mathematical calculations at

developmentally appropriate levels (U.S. Office of Education, 1977). Fewer students were being identified as learning disabled and recommended for special education placements when their learning environments were structured around early intervention and assessment practices that were closely linked to instruction (Bender & Shores, 2007). More recently, RTI has evolved into a model and framework that supports all students, ensuring that they receive timely supports whenever they struggle with concepts and skills, and preventing them from falling significantly behind in their grade level outcomes. In addition, RTI meets the needs of students who may require greater challenges and enrichment when they have already reached or extended their learning beyond the curricular outcomes.

Unlike the United States where Response to Intervention has received national attention, RTI models and frameworks are elusive and non-evident in their implementation in the Canadian education system. Some universities, such as the University of British Columbia, have faculty members conducting research into the area. Their research samples include schools operating within the RTI framework, but do not report on district or division-wide practices. Here in Manitoba, some school divisions list their interventions on the pyramid that is generally associated with the RTI tiers representing levels of intervention. These interventions, however, are not systematically connected to early intervention and assessment practices that are usually linked to instruction. Therefore, implementation varies from school to school and is relatively ineffective in producing systemic change. Neither Manitoba Education nor our Provincial Government has included RTI in policy changes. Manitoba Education has produced several support documents on struggling learners and those with

exceptionalities, but has not clearly delineated a process for how schools should respond when students do not learn. Similarly, *Appropriate Educational Programming* (2006) provides standards for student services without a model or framework in which schools and their divisions can operate to achieve these standards.

Appropriate Educational Programming like RTI presupposes that all students can and will learn. Both processes support most students being successful in general education classrooms. RTI supports AEP by providing a structure for all students, with or without disabilities, to be successful. Although the belief system in Manitoba school divisions is ostensibly one of inclusive practices, the researcher believes that status quo is based more on a deficit than strengths based model. Our system currently identifies students presenting with learning difficulties and waits for their academic performance to widen significantly from grade level expectations before identifying them as having significant cognitive delays and then involving them in pull-out or segregated learning environments (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009). Using assessment for learning to improve instruction for all students in a timely fashion is the general premise of RTI. This premise along with the belief that all students can learn supports the philosophy of inclusion and may be useful in assisting student services teams in aligning their practices with the standards to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Research has been done on the efficacy of RTI since the early 1960s. Yet, the model and its process have gained momentum among educators and researchers only with recent legislation (*IDEA*, 2004 and *NCLB*, 2004). Although its success as a process for identifying students with learning and reading difficulties has been largely

unsubstantiated, research supports the use of RTI as a progress-monitoring tool. “In fact, frequent progress monitoring and implementation of specific educational interventions based on that monitoring—the essence of RTI” are among the best instructional practices available (Bender & Shores, 2007, p. vii). With few exceptions, research shows that all students can learn with effective strategies and interventions, but may require more time and practice (Howell et al., 2008).

There has been much research on the overall effectiveness of RTI principles, and most of the research has been in the area of reading instruction, although some research in math and content areas has occurred as well. In many school districts in the United States, RTI is being adopted to ensure that research-based instruction and assessment are employed as methods to reduce the number of students who might otherwise be referred to special education (Kaufman & Wandberg, 2010). It has proven especially effective in benefiting students who are challenged by the academic content (Bender & Shores, 2007). Yet there is much controversy over the efficacy of the RTI model because much of the language used in the literature is characterized “by moral imperative and political activism rather than science” (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009, p. 130). However, all students can benefit from this process, as resource, special and general education teachers become more fluent in truly individualized progress monitoring and instruction (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007; Kavale, Kauffman, Bachmeir & LeFever, 2008).

Key Components of Response to Intervention

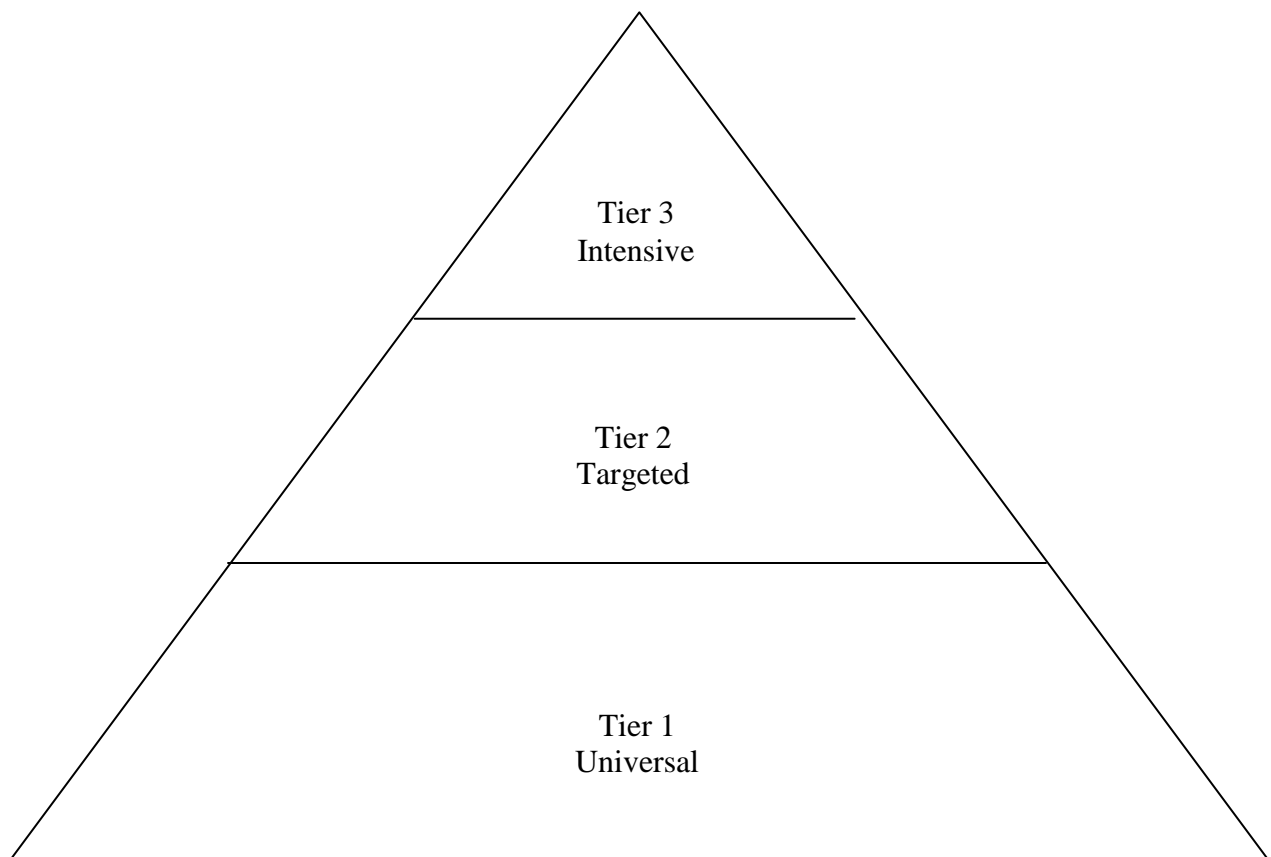
Response to Intervention (RTI) is “a process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring student progress, and adjusting instruction based on student’s response” (Bender & Shores, 2007,

p. 7). The driving force behind RTI is prevention, and it is based on the premise that failure to respond to effective classroom instruction may be the result of a learning disability (Brownlie et al., 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009). When students fail to learn in classrooms providing high quality instruction, interventions are provided with increasing intensity and frequency. This model, appearing quite straightforward, actually requires “much consideration and planning of the specific intricacies to make it valid, reliable, and feasible” (Bender & Shores, 2007, p. 7). Three components make the model operational: 1) the use of multiple tiers of intervention; 2) a problem-solving or standard treatment protocol to identify and provide supplemental instruction to children who are not responsive to high quality classroom instruction; and 3) an integrated assessment and data collection process to inform instruction and decision-making for identification and instructional supports (Bender & Shores, 2007; Coleman, Buysse & Neitzel, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009). Since “behavior and academic achievement are inextricably linked” the same principles that apply to students’ academic needs in RTI also apply to students’ behavior needs (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 111). Studies have shown that through systematic data collection and interventions, academic achievement has resulted in a decrease in behavior difficulties and behavior interventions have resulted in improved academic achievement (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 111). Therefore, a Response to Intervention Model that focuses on both behavior and academics becomes essential when planning for student learning.

A Multi-Tiered Model

RTI is a multi-tiered instruction model that promotes success for all learners (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie et al., 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009). Usually consisting of three tiers, Tier 1 provides universal supports to all students (Figure 2.1). It is characterized by high quality instruction using evidence-based programming and instructional methods. It supports students working within the provincial curriculum at grade level outcomes who are benefiting from differentiated instruction and adaptations to support their academic, social, emotional and behavioral development.

Figure 2.1: The three-tiered response to intervention model



Adapted without permission from *Response to Intervention* (Bender & Shores, 2007)

Tier 2 interventions represent more focused or targeted teaching methods directed towards struggling learners. Students are still working within the provincial curriculum at grade level outcomes, but they require support beyond differentiated instruction and adaptations. Along with core instruction, students receive focused supplemental instruction in small groups, research-based interventions targeted at specific strengths and needs, and progress monitoring. For students who are not responding to Tier 2 interventions, Tier 3 supports students with the most severe intensive interventions. In Manitoba this would include students receiving Level 2 and 3 provincial categorical support and those students in the senior years with the modified, individualized and English as a second language course designations. For these students, their core instruction and intensive interventions are specifically designed to meet their individual needs. In addition to receiving universal supports from classroom instruction, their instruction is delivered in small groups or individually, with frequent progress monitoring. In many cases their individualized programs do not follow the provincial curriculum or are limited in the number of outcomes they reach because of significant behavioral or cognitive difficulties. Regardless of the student's abilities, ideally the multi-tiered components of Response to Intervention provide instruction and supports to meet the needs of diverse student populations. The tiered hierarchy moving from universal to targeted and then to intensive supports represents the increased frequency and intensity of supports that students need and receive. Within this model it is assumed that there are criteria allowing students to complete the intervention at whatever tier and return to the regular classroom (Grigorenko, 2009, p. 120). The exception would include students with significant cognitive disabilities who are likely to receive multi-year

funding from Manitoba Education since they will likely require intensive supports and resources for their entire school careers.

In order to move inclusive education from belief to practice, all students should benefit from the universal Tier 1 supports. However, these supports will meet the needs of approximately 80 to 90% of the student population (Bender & Shores, 2007; Howell et al., 2008; Whitten et al., 2009). Approximately 10 -15% of all students will benefit from Tier 2 supports, and 1 - 5% will require and benefit from Tier 3 supports. These percentages vary in the literature but most report that approximately 85% of students should have their needs met with regular supports from their classroom teachers (Bender & Shores, 2007; Howell et al., 2008; Whitten et al., 2009). The challenge for schools is to provide the framework and resources for making quality core instruction and interventions available to students when necessary.

One major component distinguishing RTI from other educational reforms or models is universal screening. Universal screening, usually conducted three times a year with all students, identifies students who are at risk of not meeting the curricular outcomes as well as those who may require interventions beyond Tier 1 (Fisher & Frey, 2010; Whitten et al. 2009). These classroom based screening or benchmark assessments usually cover reading and math skills, but can also assess a range of other skills from kindergarten readiness to social-emotional competencies. Universal screening also enables collaboration among classroom teachers, resource and special education teachers, counselors and specialists such as reading clinicians and speech and language pathologists (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster & Saunders, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010). In addition, screening provides an opportunity for schools to engage parents in their child's

education (Burns, Jacob & Wagner, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Schools can communicate assessment results to parents and involve them in planning for their child's improvement and success. Universal screening provides schools with an opportunity to allocate resources and supports based on areas of need (Fisher & Frey, 2010). Using universal screening data, school teams can decide whether the support of specialists such as reading and math clinicians are required or in which classrooms educational assistants should be placed in order to assist classroom teachers with providing more targeted supports and interventions.

When universal screening identifies students at risk of not reaching academic or behavioral outcomes for their grade levels, diagnostic assessments provide specific information regarding students' strengths and needs. Using multiple pieces of data in the form of classroom observations, authentic assessments, running records, informal reading or math inventories, information found in cumulative and clinical files, and achievement tests, clear pictures of particular challenges faced by students are provided. These student profiles assist classroom teachers with valuable information to inform their instructional strategies and programming (Allington, 2009; Brownlie, 2006; Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Although students and schools may benefit from universal screening, research by Reynolds and Shaywitz (2009) and Whitten et al. (2009) claim that certain precautions need to be taken into consideration when using its data. Sometimes false negatives and false positives can arise. Since no screening measure is comprehensive enough to provide a full picture of a learner's abilities, some students can be overlooked. As well, some students performing at grade level may be identified as being at risk. However, if

school personnel understand that screening is a starting point, they can continue to collect multiple pieces of data on students before determining whether any intervention beyond the classroom is required for student programming.

Universal screening and subsequent diagnostic testing are key features of Tier 1 in the Response to Intervention Model, however some critics feel that these assessments are limited by the skills and knowledge of school personnel (Orosco, 2010; Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009). For example, The National Reading Panel (2000) claims that RTI does not address issues unique to English as Additional Language Learners (EAL). When teachers, both general and resource/special education, are unfamiliar with the developmental levels and needs of EAL students, they tend to over refer and recommend placement in special education classes (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higuera, 2005; Burns, Jacob & Wagner, 2008). RTI can be a viable support to EAL learners in that it can provide early intervention to improve academic achievement. However, the model needs to provide the “socio-cultural interface that allows for contextualization (e.g. assessment, instruction and intervention) between emerging school literacy concepts and students’ prior knowledge or experience from home or community” (Orosco, 2010, p. 266). Providing proper assessments and supports to EAL learners is not the only concern researchers have of the RTI model. The universal screening and diagnostic testing required in the RTI approach demands “a high level of expertise among educators and affiliated practitioners. Specifically, the staff involved with different levels of interventions should (a) be qualified to make diagnostic and clinical judgments, and; (b) be knowledgeable of and skilled in applying different evidence-based interventions” (Grigorenko, 2009, p. 125). Unless staff is knowledgeable and skilled in providing

reliable assessments, they will not be able to use the data to inform instructional practices and provide meaningful interventions.

Response to Intervention has been acknowledged as a framework for promoting early intervention and the identification of students with possible learning disabilities only after they have received high quality classroom instruction and a series of interventions (Bender & Shores, 2007; Howell et al., 2008; Whitten et al., 2009). However, curricular outcomes and benchmarks assess only “static knowledge about content or skills” (Barrera & Liu, 2010). This can lead educators to implausible causes for the student’s failure to meet expectations. Inexperienced staff may reach the conclusion that this student has a learning disability rather than reasons linked to insufficient background knowledge, English as an additional language, or influences due to cultural biases inherent in school practices and assessments (Barrera & Liu, 2010). For these students, a more dynamic assessment measuring the change in students’ level or rate of learning is recommended (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

High quality classroom instruction and evidence-based interventions are features of Tiers 1 through 3. In order to improve classroom instruction at Tier1, teachers need to incorporate differentiated instruction and small group work into their classroom practices (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Differentiated instruction refers “to a method of instruction or assessment that alters the presentation of the curriculum for the purpose of responding to the learning diversity, interests and strengths of pupils” (*Appropriate educational programming in Manitoba: Standards for student services*, 2006, p. 25). As well, teachers who are able to group their students according to instructional goals and differences provide opportunities for scaffolding

learning and instruction in which “the teacher breaks a complex task into smaller tasks, models the desired learning strategy or task, provides support as students learn to do the task, and then gradually shifts the responsibility to the students” (Buffum et al., 2009, p. 211). Some authors refer to this process as “The Gradual Release of Responsibility Model” and stress the importance of embedding the practice into the RTI instruction in order to address individual learning rates and needs (Fisher & Frey, 2010; Routman, 2009).

In addition to using differentiated instruction, strengthening core instruction through evidence-based teaching practices at Tier 1 ensures that the vast majority of students will acquire the skills and knowledge needed to reach curriculum based outcomes. It is unrealistic to presume that a one-size-fits-all curriculum is appropriate for every student. Similar materials and whole-class lessons only produce lower academic achievement, whereas materials that are varied according to multiple reading levels and interests produce higher levels of reading comprehension and achievement and learning outcomes (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Other evidence-based practices at Tier 1 include, but are not limited to, effective grouping of students, explicit teaching of literacy and math strategies, and co-teaching (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010; Friend, 2007).

Progress monitoring is another feature of the multi-tiered RTI model. Used with increased frequency as students ascend the tiers, progress monitoring refers to the formal and informal assessment of student performance to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and/or interventions (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010).

For students following the curriculum, usually curriculum outcomes or benchmarks are used to measure their progress and make decisions to guide instruction and intervention. However, other informal measures such as observations, checklists, rubrics or self-assessments may be used for both purposes (Coleman, Buysse & Neitzel, 2006). Even though the data collected through progress monitoring can be used to inform instructional practices, teachers need to be skilled at responsive teaching in order to produce positive outcomes for students. Teachers without these skills continue to provide ineffective instruction resulting in a high number of over referrals to resource and special education programs (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Conversely, when teachers are provided with responsive teaching skills, dramatic academic growth can occur with their students. This was illustrated in a study conducted by Gelzheiser, Scanlon and Hallgren-Flynn (2010) in which teachers were provided with professional development in the *Interactive Strategies Approach*. Implemented at two middle schools, teachers were shown how to use student data to plan and individualize reading lessons that ran for forty minutes every day over the course of one semester. All students involved in the intervention were receiving special education services and had reading goals as a domain in their individual education plans (IEPs). At the end of the intervention, students gained an average of three reading levels for both accuracy and comprehension as measured by the pre and post-tests of the Fountas and Pinnell's *Benchmark Assessment System* (2007). Not only does this study give validity to the positive effects on students' literacy when teachers are trained in responsive teaching, but it provides an example of an intervention that works with middle years students. Unfortunately, other such examples from middle and senior years are lacking in the

research on Response to Intervention (Gelzheiser, Scanlon & Hallgren-Flynn, 2010).

Although middle and senior years have been mostly left out of RTI conversations, there are some exceptions (Burns & Gibbons, 2008).

The students involved in the aforementioned study were already identified for receiving special education services; however, it is interesting to note that in their concluding thoughts, the researchers raise the question of whether some or many of the students “would not have evolved into disabled readers if responsive intervention had been implemented earlier in the students’ educational careers” (p. 228). Prevention and more responsive teaching practices are key concepts associated with Response to intervention “such that the entry point into special education becomes both more specific and more sensitive to those who need such education” (Grigorenko, 2009, p. 114). With RTI, classroom teachers and specialists are expected to acquire the skills necessary to delivery high quality instruction and interventions to all students.

Protocol Versus Problem-Solving Approaches to RTI

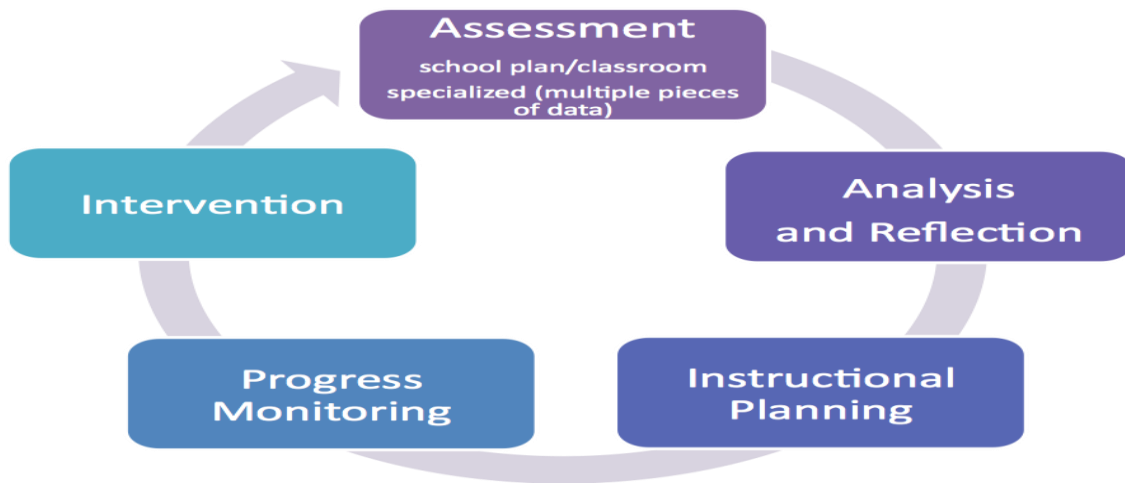
The decision-making process for implementing interventions and determining special programming in Response to Intervention can take many forms; however, the protocol and problem-solving processes are most prevalent in the RTI literature. The protocol process offers pre-established qualification criteria, a limited number of intervention programs, and a regimented staff training, progress monitoring and decision making format. The problem-solving process features more specific student plans that are created collaboratively with many staff, multiple interventions, and complex staff training, progress monitoring, and decision-making (Bender & Shores, 2007; Buffum et al., 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Both the protocol and problem-solving approaches have their strengths and weaknesses and for this reason, Response to Intervention includes a blending of the two (Bender & Shores, 2007; Buffum et al., 2009). The protocol process clearly utilizes a scientific process for strategies and assessments, and the standard interventions are in place and readily available to students. As well, there is a structured progression between tiers. For example, Reading Recovery is a Tier 2 early intervention in literacy for at-risk students in first grade. Screening of students occurs in September and is based on well-defined criteria. Only trained personnel certified in Reading Recovery are allowed to provide the intervention and progress monitoring is complex in nature using validated and reliable observation surveys of early literacy achievement, running records, and weekly performance graphs (Clay, 2002). Interventions are provided according to its set of *Standards and Guidelines* (Fuchs et al., 2008) and as a Tier 2 intervention, the goal is to discontinue students so that after they receive the intervention they will return to Tier 1 core classroom instruction. However, if students do not progress sufficiently to become ‘discontinued’ from this intervention, they are referred to Reading Clinicians who provide more intensive and frequent Tier 3 interventions (Honchell, 2010). Part of the Reading Recovery protocol is to develop partnerships with classroom teachers, other professionals and parents who can provide literacy development to students/children at risk. Working collaboratively, Reading Recovery provides classroom teachers with high-quality professional learning in the area of literacy. As Honchell (2010) suggests, “this professional [Reading Recovery teacher] provides the school with an onsite literacy expert to support the literacy instruction offered by all teachers in the primary grades” (p. 37). This protocol-based approach assumes that professionally trained staff will be

available to implement the program, and that well-developed materials will be available. These factors pose certain limitations that result in whether or not school divisions have the resources and finances available to implement protocol-based interventions. Another concern is that if most of the implementation is provided by highly trained staff, this intervention can be difficult to sustain over time (Burns, Jacob & Wagner, 2007; Grigorenko, 2009).

The problem-solving approach to Response to Intervention appears to be more consistent with the decision-making process used by professional learning communities (PLCs). The RTI process addresses the four essential questions asked by professional learning communities, the heart of Response to Intervention (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009). These questions are: a) What do we want all students to learn? 2) How will we know when they've learned it? 3) How will we respond when they do not learn? 4) And, how will we respond when they have already learned (Dufour, Eaker & Dufour, 2005). The members of the problem-solving team fluctuate depending on which questions are being addressed and which data are being used in the process. For example, one team may evaluate the results of universal screenings in math and literacy and would require the membership of an administrator, literacy and math teachers, resource and literacy specialists, whereas grade and subject level teachers may meet to discuss results of their common assessments and plan strategies and instruction based on their findings. Regardless of the team or its members, the problem-solving approach in Response to Intervention follows similar steps (Figure 2.2): assessment, analysis and reflection, instructional planning, progress monitoring and intervention.

Figure 2.2: The Response to Intervention problem-solving process



Adapted without permission from *Response to Intervention* (Bender & Shores, 2007)

Student services teams usually participate in the problem solving processes responding to students who have not learned or who have already learned. At all tiers and in all teams, professionals analyze the root cause of the learning difficulty or failure (Howell et al. 2008). They do so in a way that allows them to define the problem, gather data and evidence to identify the problems and then use reflection to inform their instruction. Through this collaborative process, teams can identify best practices and evaluate the effectiveness of possible solutions (p. 45). When teachers monitor student progress on a regular basis, they can identify problems and intervene in a timely fashion. These timely interventions support the belief that all students can and will learn. As well, since the problem-solving process used to address why students are not learning is data driven and evidence-based, the solutions overcome the stereotypes of poverty, race and ethnicity (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Howell et al. 2008). Rather than label students, teachers identify criteria that students should meet, design backwards to students' baselines, and then

provide instructional strategies to assist them in reaching the criteria. This supports the philosophy of inclusion.

Similar to the protocol approach, the problem-solving approach in Response to Intervention has its shortcomings. Fuchs, Moch, Morgan and Young (2003) concluded that proponents of this approach must prove that it is “worthy of the descriptor ‘scientifically based’”(p. 167). The research base is neither valid nor reliable in offering guidance to educators on how to implement the problem-solving approach because “this lack of procedural guidance creates a guarantee that RTI will lack fidelity of implementation...and see enhanced levels of subjectivity in both diagnosis and in treatments” since there are so many variables that cannot be adequately controlled (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009, p. 131). Research studies using the protocol process have illustrated “a significant impact on student progress (Marston, 2005); whereas evidence supporting the problem-solving approach is less plentiful and persuasive (Fuchs et al., 2003). Since problem-solving is dependent upon the knowledge and skills of teachers engaging in the process, RTI may not be feasible for large scale adoption (Fuchs et al., 2003). Problem-solving teams are left with the task of identifying types of interventions to weave into each tier along with the responsibility of how student progress should be monitored. Also, although there is some evidence of effective problem-solving leading to meaningful interventions at early years, it is less apparent how RTI would be applied at the middle and senior years (Strangeman, Hitchcock, Hall & Meo, 2006).

Another issue concerning the problem-solving approach to RTI is that its primary focus is on literacy. In research conducted by Fuchs and Fuchs (2004) the improvement in grade 3 math problem-solving responses to a 16-week treatment (experimental group

vs. control group) was examined. The study involving 120 students included both students at risk and not at risk in math as determined by a state standards test. Using a regression-discontinuation research design, all students in the study acquired the problem-solving skills, even though the students who were identified as at risk in math acquired the skills at slower rates. The explicit teaching of the skills along with the fidelity in implementation and progress monitoring were cited as contributing factors to student success, as well as the problem-solving process that was used with teachers involved in the intervention. Even though program/intervention fidelity may not be controlled for in other settings as it was in this study, this study demonstrates how the problem-solving approach is transferable to other subject area and grade levels. From an instructional standpoint, RTI can be used for any subject using frequent data-sensitive measurements (Batsche, 2005).

Research that uses the Response to Intervention Model explicitly is limited in the literature. Yet its problem-solving component has been used in the education system for several years, albeit by many other names: teacher assistance team model, pre-referral intervention model, instructional support team model, school-based consultation team model and problem-solving model (Grigorenko, 2009). Successful use of these models as part of school district-based implementations of RTI in the States is abundant (p. 124). Therefore, the problem-solving approach is a research-based component of RTI.

The problem-solving approach has several strengths over the protocol approach in that it draws experiences and expertise of many, not just a few who are assigned to implementing the intervention or program. When several experienced teachers and student services personnel look at data, they can find many solutions (Bender & Shores,

2007; Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009). In the event one solution does not work with a student, team members can draw upon others recommended by the team. The strengths of the team can be used to address learning difficulties experienced by all students, not just ones who meet the criteria in the protocol approach. Buffum, Mattos and Weber (2009) caution that protocols often have ‘cut points’ to identify the group needing the intervention. For example, students who read only 60% of the words on a Dolche Reading list may qualify for a sight word intervention. However, classroom teachers working with all students may identify some students in need of phonological awareness even though they scored above the 60% cut off. Once student error patterns are identified, classroom teachers can problem-solve to identify strategies and programming options to strengthen core classroom instruction to address individual student needs. The individualized nature of this approach is based on the belief that no single intervention will be successful for all students. Another benefit of this process is that teachers “may be more likely to embrace the selected intervention because their expertise has been used to make diagnostic decisions” (Buffum et al., p. 29) unlike the protocol approach which places other professionals in the expert role.

Integrated Assessment and Data Collection

The third component of Response to Intervention is an integrated assessment and data collection process to inform instruction and decision-making for identification and programming supports (Bender & Shores, 2007; Coleman, Buysse & Neitzel, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009). In this sense, RTI emphasizes student outcomes rather than deficits and makes a clear connection between identification and instruction (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). The model

refers to assessment as a process to inform instruction and intervention, and considers yearly test summative test scores insufficient in determining student ability (Strangeman, Hitchcock, Hall & Meo, 2006). Multiple sources of data on students are required to program effectively for students. Often RTI is viewed in the literature as a “form of dynamic assessment because it measures change in students’ level or rate of learning” which is important in gauging whether instruction and interventions are effective (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006, p. 23). As well, both summative and formative assessments can assist teachers and schools in evaluating program effectiveness at all tiers. In *Pyramid Response to Intervention* (2009) Buffum, Mattos and Weber state: “educators who rely on interventions alone to meet the needs of students who score below proficiency will never solve the basic problem these children face” (p. 77). Within the curriculum, the data collected, analyzed and reflected upon should result in “improved education experiences for the individual student and feed back into communities of practice [PLCs] that focus on continuous school improvement” (Fisher & Frey, 2010, p. 102). On-going data collection is crucial to the problem-solving model, also referred to as the decision-making model in recent RTI literature (p. 20). Without careful analysis and reflection of the data, all students will not develop or learn to their full potential.

While universal screening and personalized learner assessments in the form of surveys, interest inventories and interviews can assist classroom teachers in differentiating classroom instruction, they are not determining factors for Tier 2 interventions. Rather, subject area and grade level teachers and often resource teachers meet regularly to look at a collection of data to guide instruction for students not responding to early intervention in the regular classroom. If the available data does not

provide information explaining why students are not learning, then further diagnostic information may be requested before recommending another level/tier of intervention. As well, when students experience severe learning difficulties over an extended period of time, classroom teachers along with resource teachers, counselors, administrators and/or specialists gather more specialized data to determine intensive interventions (Buffum et al., 2009; Whitten et al., 2009).

Not all students will be successful in reaching outcomes when presented with timely classroom interventions, evidence-based core classroom instruction, and Tier 2 interventions. For these students the integrated assessment and data collection will result in a referral to an educational psychologist for a psychological assessment or another qualified specialist who can help to assess why the student is not learning. According to the RTI model, these specialists will have already been part of the problem-solving discussions. However, now if poor quality instruction can be ruled out as a plausible cause based on the data collection, more specialized data may identify other causes that will result in new strategies and instructional procedures to be implemented. The range and specificity of assessments and data collection widen as students progress through the Tiers of intervention. According to the synthesis of research findings and conclusions drawn by Coleman, Buysse and Neitzel (2006) there is “an emerging body of empirical evidence to support claims that RTI is an effective method for identifying children at risk for learning difficulties and for providing specialized interventions either to ameliorate or to prevent the occurrence of learning disabilities” (pp. 26-27). Unlike previous ‘wait-to-fail’ processes such as the dual-discrepancy model, the RTI model presents students with several opportunities to succeed academically before resource and special education

programs become involved (Burns, Jacob & Wagner, 2007). This process, however, does not include students with exceptional needs who have been previously assessed and identified through Children's Special Services. Their special needs have been identified prior to starting kindergarten because of failure to reach developmental benchmarks and subsequent medical diagnoses. Consequently, schools are made aware of the special programming they will require based on specialized assessments, and individualized education plans are developed in collaboration with their Children's Special Services team (*Protocol for transitioning students with exceptional needs into kindergarten*, 2006).

Roles and Responsibilities of Principals and Student Services Teams in RTI

Principals

The pathway to Response to Intervention is not unlike other educational reforms in that obstacles exist. Implementation is more successful and sustainable when the leadership is established at the government, school division and school levels. Having an aligned vision provides a common language and organizational framework that is necessary in guiding schools in the RTI reform. In order to implement RTI effectively at the school level, the principal must assume the role as an instructional leader and leader of learners, distributed leadership must occur among all teachers, and collaboration and communication must be of paramount importance. According to Whitten et al. (2009), "RTI as a practice is very much dependent on the full collaboration and teamwork of school personnel, parents, and learners" (p. 26). Messages from principals about the efficacy of RTI as part of the school improvement process are more likely to be embraced by staff and parents as a worthwhile framework for raising student achievement (Shores

& Chester, 2009). When principals have extensive knowledge about RTI, are committed to prevention-anchored practices and assure that evidence-based practices are implemented, RTI has been proven successful (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). However, this process takes time and principals need to support their staff by providing time and resources necessary for teachers to acquire the skills, knowledge and problem-solving abilities to address the learning needs of their students. Principals also need to inform parents about the RTI model and the level of involvement for their children (Friedman, 2010). Creating distributed leadership organized by teams at various levels and tiers and engaging parents in the community best accomplishes this.

Donaldson, Marnik, Mackenzie and Ackerman (2009) believe that an important role for principals is to learn along side their teachers. Principals should be just as involved in evaluating assessments and evidence-based practices: “The principal who continues to learn with and from teachers is sending a double message; I value my role as an instructional leader, and I value you as my colleagues in this central endeavor” (pp. 10-11). This ties in with the “leaders as ministers” belief espoused by Jackson and McDermot (2009). Focusing on the root word of administrator, which is minister, removes the “personal power from the leadership equation and replaces it with service” (p. 36). Ministers in the school sense are devoted to serving the school and its community and have a moral obligation to improve the conditions for student learning. Response to Intervention requires moral leadership in order to change practices to ensure inclusive school cultures and practices. Moreover, principals play an active role in all facets of problem-solving, developing action plans and interventions in RTI, since they are key figures in the implementation process: “Where they are both aware of and

sympathetic to an innovation, it tends to prosper. Where they are ignorant of its existence, or apathetic, if not hostile, it tends to remain outside the bloodstream of the school” (Bender & Shores, 2009, p. 163). Full implementation of Response to Intervention depends on their leadership and involvement.

Studies in New Zealand attribute the success of new initiatives to the leadership role of principals. When three universities collaborated to train and implement Resource Teacher Learning Behaviorists (RTLBs), schools changed their organizational framework to embrace the inclusion paradigm and adopted high levels of skills to meet the diverse academic and behavior needs of its students. The success of this initiative was attributed in large part to “the supportive management committees and principals who work energetically and innovatively with them (RTLBs) to find the best possible learning environment and learning strategies for each student” (Thomson, Brown & Jones, 2003, p. 109). Similar to this initiative, Fullan (2001) cites the accomplishments of Anthony Alvarado and Alan Bersin in the San Diego City Schools District in 1998. Focusing on literacy first and later math, these principals selected instructional leaders with strengths in these areas, provided professional development, included prevention and intervention strategies, and provided regular achievement reports. As a direct result of their efforts, reading and numeracy results improved dramatically among white, Hispanic, and African-American students. This evidence echoes the words of Fullan (1994):

Reform in special education represents just about all the issues involved in bringing about educational reform. The solutions to inclusion are not easily achieved. It is complex both in the nature and degree of change required to identify and implement solutions that work. Given that change requires-

persistence, co-ordination, follow-up, conflict resolution and the like-leadership at all levels are required. (p. 27)

To be effective, principals along with their student services teams have sought to establish an interdisciplinary process for identifying and delivering supports to students and teachers (Frey & Fisher, 2004). Principals leading RTI efforts cannot afford to work independently from each other or from general educators if they want inclusion to be a reality.

Fullan (2001a) finds:

Evidence in both business and education [indicating] that effective leaders have a bias for action. They have an overall sense of direction and start into action as soon as possible, establishing small scale examples, adapting, refining, improving quality, expanding, reshaping as the process unfolds. (p. 28)

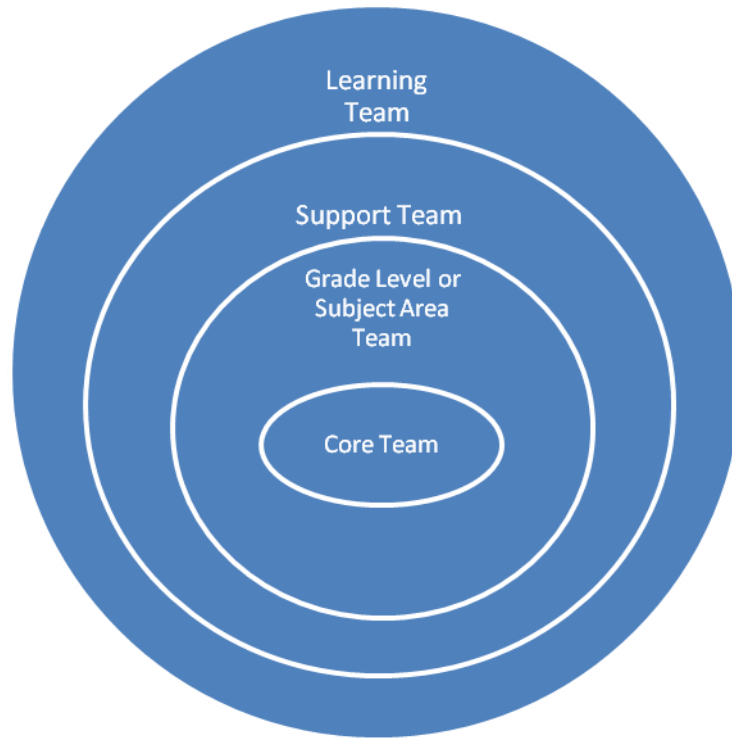
Principals leading Response to Intervention in their schools must look for opportunities to provide small-scale successes before expecting larger ones. By beginning small, they build in success and develop a following of teachers who believe and desire to be part of the process.

Moreover, networking throughout the school system and beyond is essential. According to Fullan (2001), purposeful interaction among principals accomplishes two things: “Quality knowledge is shared and sorted; and mutual commitment is generated. Mobilizing the minds and hearts of peers across the district is key to deeper, lasting reform” (p. 2). Through the purposeful interaction of networking, administrators are able to challenge their own practices and beliefs and through collective inquiry can struggle with others to create meaning (Frey & Fisher, 2004). Similar benefits are evident with

principals who network with their colleagues from within or outside their divisions. Their purposeful conversations can add clarity to their school vision and process for achieving it. Therefore, it is the principals' responsibility to network with other administrators to clarify meaning and direction for Response to Intervention.

The degree to which principals are involved in Response to Intervention varies from tier to tier, and is best explained in terms of the teams created to support it. The teams described in the RTI literature in many ways mirror the teams described in many of the student services documents created by Manitoba Education (Figure 2.3): core team, in-school team, and school support team (*Appropriate educational programming in Manitoba: Standards for student services*, 2006, p.7). Although the core team is comprised of the classroom teacher, the student, and the student's parent, principals are responsible for supporting teachers in providing quality core instruction based on sound assessment practices (Whitten et al., 2009). At the next team level, the literature differentiates between grade/subject level teams and in-school teams. In the literature on grade level teams (Bender & Shores, 2007; Buffum et al., 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2004; Whitten et al., 2009), the role of the principal as leader of learners is to ensure that this team functions as a professional learning community that works collaboratively on common assessments, data analysis and instructional practices. Providing regular meeting time and available resources to these teams is a challenge but the responsibility of the principal.

Figure 2.3: Team structure



Adapted without permission from Manitoba Education, *Student Specific Planning*, 2010

The third level, the support team, consists of resource teachers and other professionals providing strategies and effective practices for teaching students who are struggling academically and behaviorally. The professionals may include speech language pathologists, reading clinicians, coordinators, psychologists and social workers. Manitoba Education distinguishes between the in-school and school support team but the role of principals remains relatively similar in both models. Distributed leadership supports the collaboration of all team members who develop and provide Tier 2 interventions. Principals are responsible too for ensuring specialized assessments occur when students require more intensive interventions and cognitive assessments (*AEP*,

2006). Similar to the core and grade/subject level teams, principals must provide adequate time and resources for the support team to be effective.

The most distinguishing feature of the RTI teams compared to Manitoba Education's team model is the formation of a leadership team within each school. Often referred to in the literature as the navigation team, the learning team or implementation team, the leadership team is responsible for implementing and sustaining Response to Intervention within the school. Bender and Shores (2007), Buffum et al. (2009), Fisher and Frey (2004) and Whitten et al. (2009), include administrators, student services personnel, teacher leaders/department heads and parents as members of this team. As its leader, the principal engages the leadership team in important functions such as establishing baselines to identify school needs, involving staff and parents in RTI development, developing school interventions and resources, providing targeted professional development, and communicating RTI procedures and programming (Whitten et al., 2009). The principal also functions as a liaison between the learning team and the school division in communicating its strengths and needs in terms of resources, professional development, and RTI successes. The role of the administrator within all the collaborative contexts of RTI is "to recognize and value the collective wisdom residing within the school and create the structures and culture to allow staff members to tap into that wisdom" (Dufour, 2008, p. 2). Their complex roles as instructional leaders and leaders of learners provide the impetus for RTI reform in their schools.

Successfully building leadership competency and setting direction "requires skills in articulating a vision for new opportunities, fostering an acceptance of group-based

goals through a focus on common goals, and creating high-performance expectations for excellence” (Daly, 2009, p. 177). In his study of teachers and site administrators, Daly found the building of organizational capacity to be positively affected by leadership styles that are collaborative and inclusive. Dufour (2008) builds a case for a leadership that recognizes “the collective wisdom residing within the school, and [leaders] create the structures that allow staff members to tap into that wisdom” (p.2). They welcome the perspectives of others in order to find “common ground”. However, they are also skillful “in communicating and building consensus around shared purpose and priorities” (p.3). When equity and excellence are emphasized, teachers align with principals in restructuring efforts and redefine themselves as the necessary change agents (Frey & Fisher, 2004). It is through this collective wisdom and collaboration that the teaching and learning process can be refined to meet the needs of all students in inclusive schools.

Principals too are instrumental in providing coherence in professional development. They need to feel competent and comfortable as instructional leaders in recognizing opportunities for professional development and in supporting their teachers to practice their art in context. The successful transformation of schools into professional learning communities depends on many factors, including leadership. At the school level, the principal’s role as leader of leaders and learner of learners is instrumental in empowering teachers and in fostering a school culture in which every student can learn (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004). Principals can provide opportunities for teachers to work together and learn from each other. They can create a framework for teacher leaders to coach other teachers who may be acquiring new skills. They can provide release time for teachers to observe teachers and programs in other buildings.

Principals can also create the internal structures to provide PLCs with time to be effective and learn from each other. As well, along with their staff, they can provide school based professional development to match the skills needed by their teachers to deliver effective programming to their students (Jackson & McDermott, 2009; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Walstrom, 2004; Little & Houston, 2003; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

Student Services Teams

Although the leadership role of the principal is critical in implementing and sustaining Response to Intervention, student services teams can just as effectively impact upon a school. Resource teachers, counselors and clinicians need to develop sophisticated collaborative skills, since individually it is impossible to be omnipotent even though they are often cast into an expert role (Ross & Blanton, 2004; Thomson, Brown & Jones, 2003). Educators with a repertoire of skills and experiences understand the full complexity of teaching and understand that student learning needs to extend beyond individual expertise. General and special educators agree “teaching and learning are most successful when they occur in the context of valued relationships” (Viadero, 1995, p. 18). Without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as needed in order to be an agent for a societal improvement.

In the Response to Intervention model, collaboration adopts different meanings depending on its context. When the context involves teaching students with exceptional needs, collaboration can be defined as a system of strategically planned cooperative activities in which student services personnel and general educators share roles and responsibilities for student learning (Erkens, 2008; Wiggins & Damore, 2006) as is the

case at Tiers 1 and 2. Still within this context, collaboration can be viewed as a process not a product when communication, common planning time, shared visions for student goals and instructional strategies, and management of classroom environment is considered (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling & Bushrow, 2007), all inherent to the team processes. Collaboration is also referred to as a style (Friend & Cook, 2002). In the same way that artists use various styles to convey information and feelings about their subjects and ideas, teachers use various styles or approaches when interacting with colleagues. Collaboration is a specific style of interaction used by teachers and administrators when they “are engaged in a specific process, task or activity” (p.5). It is further defined by its focus on mutual goals, shared responsibility for participation and decision-making, and shared accountability (Friend & Cook, 2002; Sparks, 2002). Within the context of Response to Intervention, collaboration means that all members of the school community play a role in determining the direction of the school and its potential for change. It is the essence that builds and sustains effective teaching and learning in schools (Glickman, 2003). To be most comprehensive and effective, however, student services teams must adopt a blending of these definitions and contexts in order to provide the framework and services for creating and sustaining a collaborative RTI school culture, a culture that supports learning for all students, including those with exceptional needs.

Building relationships and sharing leadership among classroom teachers and student services teams builds trust. In a study of an urban early years school, Fisher, Grove and Sax (2000) found that “despite administrative changes, budget cuts, and class size reductions, the school initiative of inclusive education was maintained because

teachers shared the vision, resources were available, training was provided, and a cultural shift was created. The findings of the study suggest that teacher knowledge and commitment to school change was not only the reason for change, but also the reason change was sustained (Frey & Fisher, 2004). The notion of being part of a larger, collective decision-making group increases ownership, responsibility, and ultimately success (Chrispeels, 2004). Rather than view resource, special education teachers and counselors as experts, shared responsibility for all students through a collaborative framework will foster a culture in which all students belong and all students can learn.

Whether instruction and assessment is provided by the classroom teacher or shared among resource, special education, or other professionals, distributed leadership among all professionals is necessary in RTI. Leadership within RTI is visible through active participation in the problem-solving process. At Tiers 2 and 3 and within the RTI team structures, when teachers have opportunities to participate in professional learning communities, modeling, coaching, and implementing action plans, they share school leadership (Bender & Shores, 2009). Some of the roles of student services personnel in the RTI problem-solving process involve benchmark assessments, curriculum-based measurements, diagnostic and specialized assessments, progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and positive behavior supports. Implementing RTI is a coordinated effort by all staff.

As the shift from mainstreaming to inclusion has required a new conception of what schools should be, collaboration has become increasingly important (Thomson, Brown & Jones, 2003). Whereas mainstreaming, sometimes referred to as integration, is the process of moving students from the outside to the inside of general classrooms,

inclusion requires “the organizational structures to change to meet the needs of diverse groups of learners” (p. 102). This social constructivist viewpoint is a new way for thinking and acting about the education of students with exceptionalities. Through the constructivist lens (Herr & Anderson, 2005) the contemporary social context in which we view the education of students with special needs is considerably different than before 2000. Since we view all students as equal members of our school community, the programming we provide for students is likely to change as well. Educators are responsible for changing the school environment to match our beliefs that all students belong and can learn. Therefore, rather than view students’ difficulties within the regular classroom as problems existing within themselves, social constructivists attribute the failure to include all students “as the result of such factors as school organization, programs, curriculum, quality of instruction, and performance demands that do not meet the diverse needs of students” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 102). Just as the shift from mainstreaming to inclusion has changed our belief system in the way we think and act about all students, it has also changed the school culture in the way we work with our colleagues, both special and general educators.

A collaborative framework is necessary in order to align our belief system with our practices. In order to facilitate inclusion, “attention must be given to the physical environment of the classroom, the instructional strategies employed, the classroom management techniques used, and the educational collaboration that occurs among faculty” (Voltz, Brazil & Ford, 2001, p. 25). This is best achieved through professional learning communities; however, the “study of one’s profession, especially when done in community with others, where the learning is richer and deeper, has not been the norm of

the education community” (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 1). School schedules, facilities, and isolation among educators, is counterproductive to the interaction required to make inclusion a reality. Since “knowledge is most fruitfully constructed in a social context providing opportunities, the structures and schedules, for school-based educators to come together to learn in community is an important challenge” (p.1), one that requires the shared leadership and collaboration of administrators, student services teams and general educators.

Similar to other initiatives, the successful implementation of RTI is reliant upon the direction provided by key individuals at both the Division and school levels (Bender & Shores, 2007; Howell et al., 2008; Whitten et al., 2009). At the school level, this direction is usually provided by the administrator, resource or special education teacher, and other teachers who are referred to as the school’s navigation, leadership, or learning team (Whitten et al., 2009). Unlike members of the core, grade/subject level and support teams, the learning team is responsible for the big picture issues related to the implementation of RTI. Among its responsibilities are conducting baseline assessments, professional development, and ongoing evaluation of the teams’ effectiveness (Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009). Engaging student services teams and general educators in the implementation process encourages their ownership of the program. In addition, “when teachers take on a leadership role in process development, they may act as liaisons between the rest of the faculty and the administration” (Shores & Chester, 2009, p. 99). Research on successful and sustainable school reform has shown that teachers were more apt to embrace changes when the process matched their beliefs, addressed the needs of struggling students, and when they received ongoing professional

development and support. Student services team members on the learning team can convey to other teachers their commitment to RTI in terms of assisting struggling learners, and can address teacher concerns by listening and providing support during the process. In addition, their leadership and collaboration create the structures necessary to sustain the RTI model (Bender & Shores, 2009; Howell et al., 2008).

At various levels, Response to Intervention relies on the communication and collaboration of student services team members and general educators (Figure 3). First and foremost is the core team comprised of the classroom teacher, the student and the student's parent(s): "The information gathered by the classroom teacher is the first source of student learning" (Manitoba Regulation [MR] 155/05). Although not directly involved with this team, student services personnel share pertinent information with classroom teachers during transition meetings between grades or levels. This information usually identifies students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2009). As well, resource and special education teachers may assist classroom teachers in administering universal screening and then work collaboratively to analyze data and plan for instruction. In order to ensure a common language, common assessments and the implementation of evidence-based practices, grade level or subject area teams comprised of classroom teachers collaborate to improve instruction at Tier 1, universal supports. This is the second formally organized team in the RTI model. Resource teachers and counselors work collaboratively with these teachers to share effective instructional practices and strategies that work best with struggling students, and discuss differentiated instruction and adaptations in terms of best practices.

The third collaborative team, referred to as the support team, consists of resource and special educators, counselors, speech and language pathologists, reading clinicians and other professionals who can assist struggling learners. The structure and membership within this third team remains fluid, since it depends on the needs of individual students. The support team members offer support to classroom teachers, assists grade or subject level teams analyze student performance, and assists with appropriate interventions (Whitten et al. 2009). The levels of expertise associated with the support team members can address the needs of students with exceptionalities, as well as struggling learners. For example, reading specialists can provide programming suggestions for students reading significantly below grade level and counselors can collaborate on behavior intervention plans for students whose behaviors are preventing them from participating in the curriculum. Resource teachers may engage in co-teaching, which is a unique blend of service “in which a general educator and a special educator or clinician jointly instruct pupils in a single classroom” (Friend & Cook, 2002, p. 171). In this intervention, they may plan an intervention with the classroom teacher that focuses on delivering reading comprehension and vocabulary awareness to English as Additional Language Learners. At this level, speech and language pathologists may engage in co-teaching opportunities as well. Specific students may require assistance with their receptive and expressive language skills. With the intervention provided by a speech and language pathologist, these students will receive instruction to bring them in line with the developmental levels of their peers. When collaborative teaching is not enough, the support team may collaborate with other professionals and specialists in their decision to provide more intensive interventions or further assessment. Throughout this process all the individuals

involved share the ownership, responsibility and decision-making process for providing effective programming for the student.

It is the support team, consisting primarily of student services personnel, who collaborates on the programming of students receiving Tier 3 interventions as well. Most of the Tier 3 students receive Level 2 and 3 funding from the Province and consequently, have individualized education plans. To develop the goals and objectives of their individualized programs, the student's core and support teams meet at least two times a year to identify student strengths and needs based on relevant assessment data. Then throughout the year, the teachers and student services personnel responsible for implementing the program, frequently monitor the student's progress towards the objectives and adjust programming as necessary. Ongoing and effective communication and collaboration are necessary to ensure student development in relation to her/his strengths. This collaboration extends into coordinating assessments, implementing interventions, using progress monitoring, evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions, and documenting the process in the IEP.

However noble, sophisticated, or enlightened proposals for change and improvement might be they come to nothing if teachers don't adopt them in their classrooms and don't translate them into effective classroom practice (Viadero, 1995, p. 13). Through collaboration, problem-solving and co-teaching, teachers on various RTI teams can facilitate an action plan for implementing change. This process mitigates many challenges faced by resource teachers as they support general educators in matching the learning environment to student's behavioral and academic needs. Through collaboration at all tiers, these teachers can problem-solve the ecological factors that are

contributing to the changes in student learning. The classroom teacher is crucial to this process: “For effective and lasting change to take place, the classroom teacher has to play a major role in defining the problem and developing solutions” (Thomson, Brown, Jones, 2003 p. 104). Teachers who collaborate with other teachers around instructional practices are better at providing systemic change than teachers who work in isolation. This is supported by Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1999) who contend that teacher knowledge is more than content and pedagogy--it also includes experience, reflection and collaboration.

Further evidence of the impact of knowledge in practice in changing teacher performance can be found in a study by Fisher, Sax, Rodifer and Pumpian (1999). Rather than provide formal training to general educators, special educators worked along side them in the regular classroom to problem solve curricular issues for students with exceptional needs. This collaboration resulted in an increase in cooperative grouping, critical thinking skills development, concept mapping, and differentiated instruction. Furthermore, as general educators understood the needs of students with disabilities, their teaching practices changed (Fisher et al., 1999). This change impacted positively on school change as well. When general and special educators participated in collaborative inquiry, jointly using data to formulate and answer questions about student learning, classroom practices changed and student learning improved. Developing an inquiry orientation through collaboration improves teacher knowledge with respect to teaching a diversity of students (Ross & Blanton, 2005). It is difficult to build similar skills and knowledge outside the collaborative framework.

Student services personnel can use knowledge in practice to meet their professional development needs as well as those of classroom teachers and administrators. To make Response to Intervention a reality, teachers require more knowledge of students with learning disabilities, human development, sociology of different ethnic groups, and student populations requiring differentiated instruction and adaptations (Firestone, et al. 2005). Recent research also suggests that literacy instruction includes and benefits all students and therefore, special education and general educators need to acquire skills for delivering literacy instruction (Allington, 2009). Literacy is “the ‘Rosetta Stone’ in the translation of curriculum” and having teachers and administrators trained in this area will assist students with and without disabilities (Fisher, Frey & Thousand, 2003, p. 46). With the increased number of students with disabilities included in general classrooms, teachers need to become skilled at providing access to educational opportunities through assistive technology. Professional learning that supports teachers and their collaborative teams in understanding the complex learning needs of their students will result in students achieving their learning potential. This knowledge in practice can be planned and orchestrated through the leadership teams.

Deep learning has to be fostered at all levels as well. Deep learning involves more than teachers providing compensatory strategies to students who cannot demonstrate certain skills. For example, educators cannot provide a scribe to a student who is writing below grade level without using strategic teaching to advance his/her writing skills, or accommodate students reading significantly below grade level with alternate reading materials without providing intervention or strategies for closing the gap. Deep learning is a matter of “ambitious goals (that) raise the bar and close the gap

for all [students] with respect to literacy and numeracy... This means new capacities need to be developed through the system” (Fullan, 2006, p. 2). Through coordinated efforts at all levels, professional learning needs to strengthen the skills of resource and special education teachers working within the collaborative framework of the RTI model. In order to be effective in these communities, student services along with their administrators, need to learn how to access and analyze student data, problem-solve ways to teach students who are not learning, create action plans, and monitor student learning as well as their own (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Fullan, 2006; Erkens et al., 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008). All teachers need to be developing their skills and deepening their knowledge to teach and reach all learners.

Deep learning is also a bi-product of successful learning communities. Several research studies report on improved student outcomes, lower drop-out rates, higher graduation rates among students living in poverty, and increased staff satisfaction, when teachers and administrators worked together in a PLC (Bobbett, Ellett, Teddlie et al., 2002; Lee, Smith & Croninger, 1995). Through the RTI leadership team, student services along with their principals can identify and develop ongoing learning opportunities because “the decisions these leaders make affect how professional development is enacted and make considerable difference to the teachers who work there and how they approach instruction.” (Firestone, Mangin et al., 2005, p. 414). Teachers strengthen their knowledge and understanding of student learning when professional development “is focused on relevant content matter and is organized with a coherent aim” (p. 415). Professional development needs to provide opportunities for teachers “to engage with, modify, and incorporate those ideas into their own teaching” (Little &

Houston, 2003, p. 87). All too often professional development focuses on content and pedagogy (Frey & Fisher, 2004). Far too many teachers recall inservice workshops in which they are talked at by well meaning speakers who present strategies that teachers should be doing in their classrooms. Hirsh (2001) refers to these traditional staff development experiences as adult pull-out programs (p. 10). Other researchers agree that professional learning activities should be based on teachers' needs and should occur on an ongoing basis through collaborative models (Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001). Resource and general educators need to meet routinely to problem solve around issues that are inherent to inclusion. When these meetings occur within the framework of PLCs and the RTI teams, teachers develop a common language, reflect upon their new skills and knowledge, and implement changes with greater support and confidence. The result is a deeper understanding of student needs and diversity.

Reflective practices are being promoted in University coursework and professional development in order to increase staff awareness in inclusive practices and to help them understand their roles in matching students to their learning environments (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore & Montie, 2006). Inherent to PLCs and the RTI framework, is reflection:

It serves as the foundation for continuous learning and more effective action in educational practice so that children are successful in school and in life. It is a complex process that requires high levels of conscious thought and commitments to change practice based on new understandings (p. 11).

In a study involving three Universities in New Zealand, five hundred special education teachers received training to become Resource Teachers Learning and Behavior

(RTLBs). Their programming, which extended over one year, involved acquiring skills to become reflective practitioners. Through the course of their studies they acquired reflective skills to consider their practice in terms of “its effectiveness, its consistency with their own assumptions and beliefs, its consistency with best practice, and its consistency with the role of the RTLB (Thomson, Brown, & Jones, 2003, p. 104) which is to work effectively within school systems using collaborative problem solving to facilitate change where necessary. Using effective practices case studies to measure results of the RTLB program, this study found that reflective practice led to appropriate changes in terms of school focus, structure and theory-based practices. The number of teachers adopting inclusive practices increased dramatically, and there were fewer students involved in pull-out programs or referrals to specialists. The reflection and collaborative problem- solving model used in this program is similar to the problem-solving processes that are infused into the tiers and teams of RTI.

Student services teams and their administrators recognize the value of distributed leadership and collaboration as they work together to plan for and teach students with diverse learning needs and exceptionalities. Any educational reform can be wrought with challenges; however the potential of Response to Intervention to address the needs of struggling and exceptional learners is worth our efforts. Appropriate programming for all students is essential to their inclusion and is only possible through a framework that identifies students’ strengths and needs through relevant assessments and collaboration among professionals found in PLCs, the foundation of RTI. Response to intervention provides the framework for engaging teachers in the authentic assessment and instruction cycle of continuous improvement of teaching and learning. For this to occur, student

services and general educators must share responsibility for student learning.

Additionally, they must collaborate in their problem-solving to address complex issues in order to respond to students who have not learned, or have already learned. Response to instruction and intervention must be timely and preventative. The organizational framework of RTI provides the focus on assessment, evidence-based practices, and problem-solving processes that promotes cultural and instructional change in schools.

Although Response to Intervention is not a silver bullet, it offers a working framework to guide schools, their administrators and student services teams closer to inclusion.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Constructivism was the conceptual framework of this study. Constructivists perceive the human world to be different from the physical or natural world and therefore, must study it differently. The study involves “the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 96). Humans have distinct perceptions of the world around them based on their cultural and linguistic experiences with no two viewpoints being exactly the same. It is their collective experiences that produce what constructivist philosophers refer to as a worldview, and “no worldview is uniquely determined by empirical or sense data about the world” (Patton, 2002, p. 97). The researcher attempts to capture these different viewpoints through open-ended interviews and then without judging which perceptions are right or wrong, creates a common reality or shared worldview (Patton, 2006). The constructivist philosophy, built on ontological relativity, holds various assumptions as articulated by Guba and Lincoln (1989):

“Facts” have no meaning except within some value framework, hence there cannot be an “objective” assessment of any proposition...Phenomena can only be understood within the contexts in which they are studied; findings from one context cannot be generalized to another; neither problems nor solutions can be generalized from one setting to another. (p. 98)

A constructivist approach was suited to this study since “it is less focused on finding the limitations of a study or the extent to which the results can be generalized” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 241). The focus group data collected from participants were particular to the members of the school division being studied and therefore the outcomes were not contingent upon whether they can be replicated in another division. Constructivism was suited to the research topic, the study, and its focus group participants. Response to Intervention requires the involvement and collaboration of several professionals: administrators, resource teachers, counselors, classroom teachers and clinicians. Their perceptions of RTI create reality and the implications of those constructions impact upon their interactions with others (Patton, 2002). In order to understand the RTI components, how school and student services team practices can become aligned with RTI and the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework, perspectives and collective experiences of participants were both relevant and necessary. Without their involvement, any research findings would have been narrow and circumscribed. Everyone providing programming and instruction to students was entitled to a voice to influence how it may happen without being judged which perceptions were right and wrong in order to create a common reality or shared worldview (Patton, 2002).

The research method, focus groups, provided the participants with this opportunity, providing rich and relevant research data.

Summary

This chapter presented a literature review on Response to Intervention and Inclusive Practices. The theoretical framework was presented through a review of the literature relating to social constructivism and ontological relativity. Chapter Three will detail the qualitative research methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the key components of Response to Intervention and roles of administrators and student services teams working within its framework to assist in developing an action plan for its implementation in the school division being studied. The specific research questions this study answered were:

1. What are the participants' understandings of the components of Response to Intervention?
2. To what extent are current school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to Intervention?
3. What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school-based practice?
4. What factors promote or impede the implementation of RTI?

This chapter describes the research methodology and methods, and then provides a description of the participants and procedures of the study and includes the following components: (a) demographics of the focus group participants; (b) composition of the focus groups; (c) the process of implementing the focus groups. Following these descriptions, information will be shared on data collection techniques, data analysis and interpretation, researcher positioning, validity and reliability, and confidentiality and ethics.

Research Methodology

Unlike research methods that refer to specific techniques used in interviews and observations, research methodology is a general term referring to general logic and

theoretical perspective for a research project (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative research methodology is an approach to educational research that “emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural settings, uses inductive thinking, and emphasizes the subjects’ point of view” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 274). Based upon the literature review in Chapter 2, a naturalistic qualitative design was employed. Qualitative designs are naturalistic in that “the research takes place in real-world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the [group] of interest...and people are interviewed with open-ended questions in places and conditions that are comfortable for and familiar to them” (Patton, 2002, p. 39). Naturalistic researchers then analyze their data “and then convey to others, in rich and realistic detail, the experiences and perspectives of those being studied” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 2). Naturalistic qualitative research was a good match for this study since it involved participants with responsibilities for implementing Response to Intervention. Their perceptions were grounded in the group's observable experiences, but the researcher added her own insight into why those experiences exist. The researcher provided a complex, holistic picture, “taking the reader into the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). In this case, the study explored how student services and school teams can align their practices with the Standards and Response to Intervention. This process may have been helpful to student services teams and administrators in making practical decisions or improvements in their roles and responsibilities with similar implementations (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

Research Methods

Whereas methodology refers to the general logic and theoretical perspective of research, methods refer to the specific techniques that are used, such as surveys, observations and interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Data for this study was collected from focus groups, also a method technique. Focus groups, for qualitative researchers, are structured group interviews that “foster talk among the participants about particular issues” (Morgan, 1997, p. 109). Focus groups are “advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information...[and] when time is limited (Creswell, 1998, p. 124). Usually consisting of seven to ten participants and a facilitator, they provide multiple perspectives and are beneficial in exploring general topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The group participants “can stimulate each other to articulate their views or even to realize what their own views are” (p. 109). Naturalistic researchers use “nuanced stories they hear from different people to construct a portrait of what improvements can be made” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 22). They don’t classify responses into narrow categories such as true or false since this obstructs the full story (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 23). Focus groups “result in especially powerful interpretive insights” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 903). According to these authors (2005), “Real-world problems cannot be solved by individuals alone; instead, they require rich and complex funds of communal knowledge and practice” (p. 903) similar to those found within focus groups (p. 903). Focus groups were a particularly salient method given the constructivist theoretical framework used in this study. By including a variety of stakeholders as participants in the focus groups, responses were shaped by many varied

experiences and background knowledge. The sum of their conversations provided rich data for the research study being conducted.

Being interviewed can confirm the interviewee's status, as the conversational partner learns he or she is important enough to be included in the group of those being interviewed (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 90). Although this is the ideal situation in focus groups, sometimes individuals may feel uncomfortable sharing experiences, feelings and beliefs, especially when these are different than other individuals in the focus group (Creswell, 1998). This may result in a limited amount of quality data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Although the involvement of individuals from varied backgrounds is advantageous, it can also present challenges. Some participants talk too much or too little, or the facilitator has difficulty keeping the discussion on topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The facilitator needs to be skilled in the art of facilitating focus groups prior to holding one for research purposes. This was achieved by engaging a facilitator who used focus groups as her data collection method for her Doctoral Thesis. Her skilled facilitation skills allowed "for the proliferation of multiple meanings and perspectives as well as for interactions between and among them" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 904). To assist the researcher and focus group facilitator in using effective and valid qualitative and focus group questioning techniques, the work of Rubin and Rubin (2005) was explored. Moreover, given the positionality of this researcher, participants may have felt a sense of coercion, telling the researcher through the facilitator what they wanted the researcher to hear. However, according to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005), focus groups can "function to decenter the role of the researcher" (p. 904). Also, many participants may have felt empowered and honored to be a selected participant of the

focus group, which gives the interviewee a sense of status (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As such, the focus groups may have facilitated “the democratization of the research process, providing participants with more ownership over it and promoting more dialogic interactions and the joint construction of more polyvocal texts” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 904).

Research Participants and Procedures

Professional (certified) staff had an opportunity to participate in the focus groups from the urban division involved in this study. Consisting of 1054 division staff in total, certified staff and non-certified staff totaling 661 and 393 respectively, the school division was comprised of 26 schools with 15 at early years, 6 at middle years, and 5 at senior years (see Table 3.1). In terms of the professional staff with full time equivalency, there were 42 administrators, 520 classroom teachers, 42 resource teachers, 27 counselors and 30 staff from Educational Support Services (behavior team interventionists along with coordinators of student services, psychologists, social workers, speech language pathologists and reading clinicians). It was the professional staff from the division who was identified through open invitation and voluntary involvement to be part of this study.

Table 3.1 School division demographics

Category	Total	Percentage of Total in Category
Schools:	26	
Early Years	15	58%
Middle Years	6	23%
Senior Years	5	19%
Students:	8471	
Early Years	3394	40%
Middle Years	1836	22%
Senior Years	3241	38%
Staff: (in full time equivalency)	1054	
Certified (professional staff,		

classroom teachers, student services personnel, clinicians)	661	63%
Non-certified (educational assistants, librarians, technicians, bus drivers)	393	37%
Certified Staff: (in full time equivalency)	661	
Administrators	42	6%
Classroom teachers	520	78.5%
Resource teachers	42	6%
Counsellors	27	4%
Educational Support Services (reading clinicians, speech language pathologists, psychologists, social workers, behavior interventionists)	30	4.5

This study protocol was reviewed by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB) of the University of Manitoba under the title “Response to Intervention: An Inclusive Framework for Student Services”. ENREB approval was received on August 9, 2011 under protocol number E2011:049. (see Appendix A for a copy of the “Approval Certificate”). After receiving approval from ENREB, this researcher applied to the assistant superintendent in charge of research for approval to conduct this research study in the division. (See Appendix B for a copy of the “Letter to Superintendent of School Division”). Permission to conduct the research was granted on September 7, 2011 with the following conditions: 1) receiving permission from principals to invite their staffs to participate in the research study and, 2) submitting a summary of the research findings to the senior administration upon successful defense of this researcher’s thesis.

This researcher emailed all principals to ask for permission to invite their staff to participate in the research study (see Appendix C for “Letter of Invitation” and Appendix D for “Letter of Consent”). After receiving permission from twenty-five out of twenty-

six schools in the division, the researcher sent electronic letters of invitation and consent to their staffs inviting them to participate in this study. All focus group participants were selected by open invitation and voluntary involvement. Volunteers for the study communicated their intent to participate in the study to an assistant from outside the school division who was paid by the researcher. This assistant registered the participants, collected their demographic information and letters of consent, organized the three focus groups based on the guidelines provided by the researcher, tape-recorded the three sessions, and transported the tapes to and from the transcriber. After all transcriptions were made, the assistant sealed the tapes in an envelope and gave them to the researcher to store in a locked filing cabinet. As well, the assistant provided a hard copy of the demographic information, omitting all names of individuals and their schools. Both the assistant and the transcriber signed letters of confidentiality. (see Appendix E for “Letter of Confidentiality”).

For the focus groups, research participants were categorized according to their position and level. In keeping with the protocol submitted to ENREB, all the administrators were placed in one focus group, Group 1. Other participants were grouped according to their availability and to achieve a balance in position (i.e. counselors, resource teachers, ESS clinicians) and school level (i.e. early, middle, senior years). Eight administrators participated in Focus Group 1, while the remaining participants, fourteen, were divided between Focus Groups 2 and 3 to provide multiple perspectives necessary for exploring general topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). However, when some participants were not available on the date they were scheduled to attend, the assistant reconfigured the groups in order to make both groups viable in terms of

numbers. Although this created an unequal distribution in representation among levels in the third group, the numbers were needed in order to create a climate in which a meaningful focus group conversation could be fostered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The three focus groups were conducted by a facilitator paid by the researcher, and were held in a conference room at a hotel outside the division being studied. The facilitator, a former University of Manitoba graduate student who conducted focus groups for her doctoral thesis, signed a letter of confidentiality and facilitated all three focus groups. After each one, the facilitator met with the researcher to share general impressions regarding the tone and dynamics of each group and the participants' responses to the structure and wording of the research questions. With this feedback, the researcher was able to provide the facilitator with some definitions of key terms to assist in the subsequent discussions in Focus groups 2 and 3.

Each focus group was 60 to 75 minutes in length and included an explanation of informed consent, the signing and collection of related forms, and a general discussion around confidentiality and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. After the initial protocol, the facilitator guided the focus groups through the four research questions and probes (Table 4.1).

Table 3.1, "Research participants", describes the volunteers who participated in this study, identifying their position, their gender, their level (early, middle, senior), and their years of experience. Permission to use this demographic information was obtained by requesting an amendment to the initial protocol. Permission for the amendment was received from ENREB on March 16, 2012 (see Appendix G for "Amendment Approval Certificate"). The focus group participants did not proportionally represent the

distribution of administrative, teaching or clinical jobs in the division; however, all 22 volunteers for this study were selected to participate in order to align with the research indicating between seven and ten people are ideal for focus groups (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Table 3.2 Research participants

	Position	Gender	Early, Middle or Senior Years	Years of experience
Focus Group 1	Administrator	Female	Senior	16
	Administrator	Male	Senior	33
	Administrator	Female	Early	29
	Administrator	Female	Early	30
	Administrator	Male	Middle	20
	Administrator	Female	Early	16
	Administrator	Female	Early	27
	Administrator	Male	Early	16
Focus Group 2	Resource Teacher	Female	Middle	19
	Other	Female	Early	26
	Psychologist	Female	All	16
	Classroom teacher	Female	Senior	7
	Classroom teacher	Female	Early	14
	Behavior Intervention Resource Teacher	Female	Early/Middle	17

	Resource teacher	Female	Early	19
Focus Group 3	Resource teacher	Female	Early	23
	Classroom teacher	Female	Middle	15
	Resource teacher	Female	Senior	30
	Classroom teacher	Male	Senior	18
	Other	Female	Early/Middle	37
	Resource teacher	Female	Senior	24
	Counsellor	Female	Senior	26

Figure 3.1, “Percentage of research participants representing all focus groups”, illustrates the composition of subgroups involved in the research study, whereas Figure 3.2, “Percentage of staff in the school division” illustrates the total combination of all staff in the division. Administrators comprised the most participants, while resource teachers represented the second highest subgroup in attendance. Classroom teachers and ESS/Other were equally represented, and counselors were the subgroup with the least representation. Participants who identified themselves as ‘other’ were either coordinators and/or clinicians who straddled both Educational Support Services and curriculum and instruction. All subgroups invited to participate in the study were represented in at least one of the focus groups.

Figure 3.1 Percentage of research participants representing all focus groups

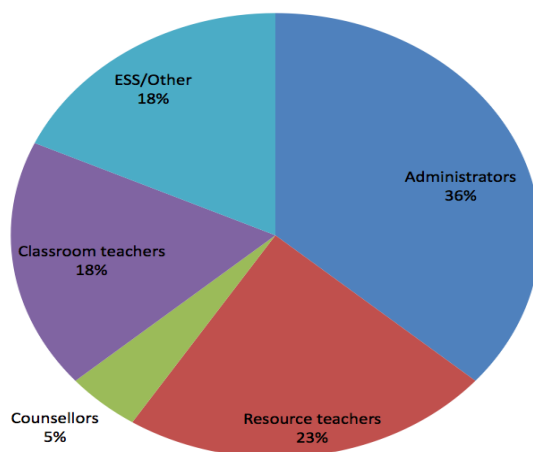


Table 3.3 Percentage of division staff participating in all focus groups

Position	Number in Division	Number Participating In Focus Groups	Percentage from Division Participating In Focus Groups
Administrators	42	8	19%
Classroom Teachers	520	4	1%
Resource Teachers	42	5	12%
Counsellors	27	1	4%
Educational Support Services (reading clinicians, psychologists, social workers, behavior interventionists)	30	4	13%

In Focus Group 1, the administrators consisted of principals and vice principals. Of the 42 full time equivalent administrators in the division being studied, 8 (19%) participated in this study. Moreover, there was representation from all school levels (early, middle, senior) years. The division consists of 15 early years, 6 middle years, and 5 senior years schools, and all three levels were represented with 5, 1, and 2 administrators respectively. There was representation of females and males from each

level except at middle years where there was male representation only. The administrators participating in the study ranged between 16 and 33 years of experience in education with the group mean being 23 years. Although 10 administrators volunteered for the study, only 8 attended the focus group and since convenience sampling was used in this study, all administrators who volunteered to participate were selected.

Although administrators comprised Focus Group 1, resource and classroom teachers, counselors and Educational Support Services (ESS) staff comprised Focus Groups 2 and/or 3. An even distribution among staff was seen as ideal for these two focus groups, however, due to the 14 participants limiting their availability to only one of the two focus group dates, the groups were designed accordingly. Focus Group 2 consisting of 7 participants was represented equally by two resource teachers and two classroom teachers, while three ESS and other staff comprised the remaining participants. All participants were female, and all levels were represented: three from early years, one from middle years, and one from senior years, as well as one from early/middle years, and one from all levels. Experience in education ranged between 7 and 26 years, with the mean being 17 years.

Focus Group 3 presented differently from Group 2 in its composition. Fifty-seven percent of its participants were from senior years, and other than one participant from ESS, representation was school-based (resource, counselor, classroom teacher). Focus group 3 consisted of seven participants including three resource teachers, one counselor, two classroom teachers, and one staff representing 'other'. All participants were female except for one male classroom teacher at senior years. Their educational experience ranged between 15 and 37 years with the mean being 25 years.

Figure 3.2. Percentage of research participants representing Focus groups 2 and 3

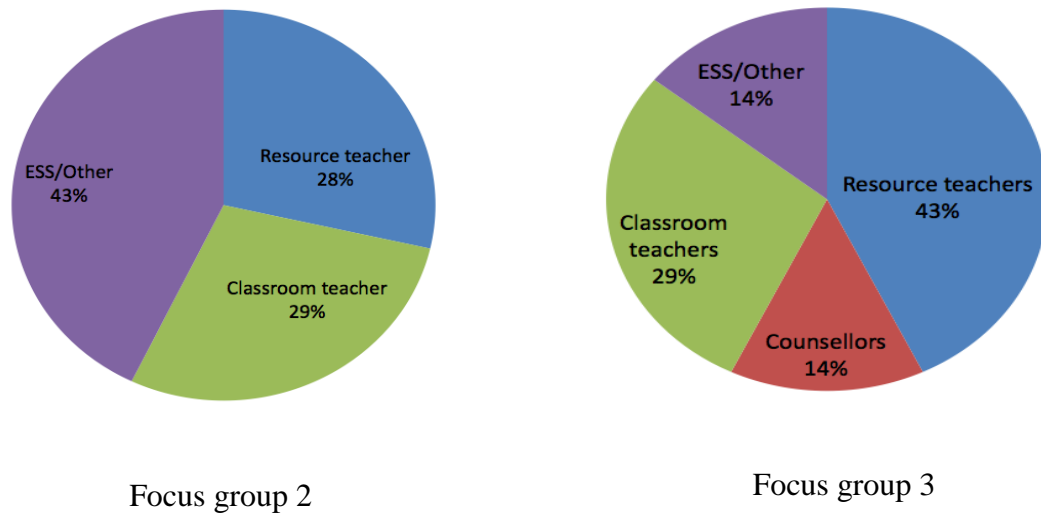
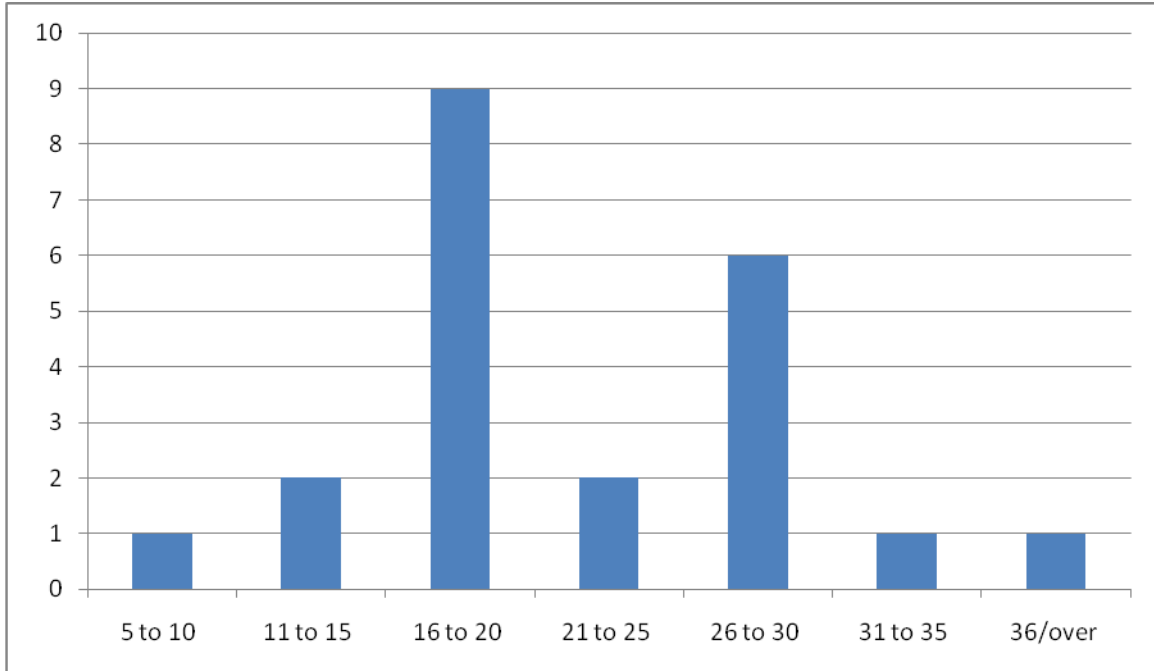


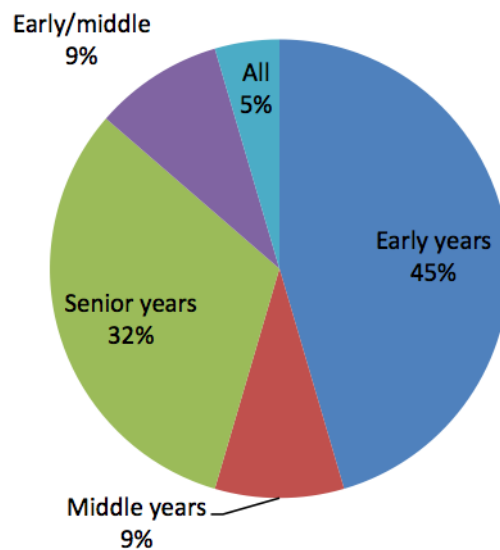
Table 3.2, “Participants’ years of experience in education”, illustrates the range of experience among the focus group participants. With the fewest years of experience being seven and the most being 37 years, the mean number of years of experience for the total group is 21.7 years. Although focus groups one and three had similar mean scores for their subgroups, 23 and 25 years respectively, focus group two had a mean score of 17 years for educational experience. No participants with fewer than seven years of experience volunteered for this study.

Table 3.4: Participants' years of experience



According to the literature review in Chapter 2, Response to Intervention (RTI) has unique strengths and challenges in its implementation at early, middle and senior years (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). To capture these differences, representation from all school levels was desirable. Figure 3.3 below illustrates the percentages of research participants from each level.

Figure 3.3: Percentage of research participants from early, middle, senior, all level



Data Collection Techniques

Qualitative research relies on the voices of the participants in order to understand a process, practice or problem, and to decide whether it needs to be improved and possibly how (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 242). People's perceptions are reality since "Reality is constructed by people as they go about living their daily lives" (pp. 243-244). In reference to focus groups, the data referred to the interview transcripts and facilitator feedback. Serving as both the evidence and the clues, data involved the specifics required to reflect upon the questions that were asked during the focus groups.

For the purposes of this research study, a single method for collecting data was used. Given the constructivist theoretical study, focus groups are a particularly salient method for collecting data. The focus group participants had a variety of skills, professional training and years of experience. One focus group consisted of administrators only to avoid the perception of power and coercion. The other two focus groups represented a cross-section and representative sampling of resource teachers, counselors, administrators, classroom teachers, speech language pathologists, social workers, psychologists, reading clinicians and coordinators with backgrounds in curriculum and instruction. The participants represented three school levels: early, middle and senior years. As well, the clinicians working in Educational Support Services represented the perspectives of an out-of-school support team. Because three focus groups were conducted rather than one, with each group consisting of participants with varied background skills and experiences, the data contained multiple perspectives lending themselves to a deeper understanding of what is required to implement Response to Intervention (Creswell, 1998).

To avoid a conflict of interest and perceived perceptions of power and coercion, this researcher did not participate in the focus groups in any way. A facilitator, who gained experience as a focus group facilitator through her doctoral thesis work was hired by the researcher. The focus group data were recorded by two tape-recorders in case one malfunctioned, and the facilitator recorded reflective notes to share with the researcher to convey any difficulties arising from the participants' understanding of the focus group questions in order to create better clarity for subsequent focus groups. When participants arrived at the interview site, they were asked to complete a consent form containing a pledge of confidentiality. The facilitator reviewed the purpose of the study, the plans for using the results, and the fact that participants could withdraw from it at anytime. All taped recordings were given to a transcriber immediately following the focus groups. The transcriber, paid by the researcher, ensured that no names appeared in the transcription. Both the facilitator and the transcriber signed letters of confidentiality.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Within the contexts of this study, data analysis referred to the systematic searching and organization of transcripts from the focus groups to search for patterns. Analysis “involve[d] working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (Bogden & Biklen, 2007, p. 159), whereas data interpretation related the findings to broader concerns and concepts (p. 159). After transcripts of the focus group conversations were received by the researcher they were downloaded into NVivo9 (2011). This software was then used to establish word frequencies for themes found in the literature, as well as emergent ones from focus group conversations. Also, NVivo9 was used to help identify

the context of each comment segment which assisted with their coding. For the purposes of this research study, comment segments were manageable units of focus group conversations counted each time a different participant spoke. This assisted the researcher with comparisons within each focus group, as well as among the three focus groups.

In addition to NVivo9 software, this researcher cut the three focus group transcripts into comment segments in order to analyze and synthesize the information according to trends and patterns. This information was subsequently used to relate the findings to broader concerns and concepts emerging from the research findings and the insights provided by the researcher's positionality.

A constructivist approach was used in this study, "because it [was] less focused on finding the limitations of a study or the extent to which the results [could] be generalized" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 241). An emergent theme development was used in this process described above. Even though "themes and concepts by which to code" were found in the literature review in Chapter 2, they did not entirely fit this researcher's data or "original insights" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 209). Therefore, finding those that emerged from the group interviews "[were] more important than borrowing concepts and themes from the literature" (p. 210). Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested several ways in which the researcher can develop his/her own concepts and themes. They can be summarized as follows: a) questions researchers asked, b) concepts and themes interviewees frequently mention, c) concepts and themes indirectly revealed, d) concepts and themes that emerge from comparing interviews, e) concepts and themes suggesting new concept and themes, and f) typologies suggesting concepts and themes. This

researcher used the themes found in the literature as the primary method for coding. The concepts and themes mentioned during the focus groups, ones indirectly revealed, and ones that emerged from comparing focus groups were used as the secondary methods for coding. Participant responses were charted in two ways. First, data was graphed according to the frequency with which participants' comment segments aligned with the themes explored in the literature (see Table 4.2). Then, data was graphed according to the frequency of participants' comment segments that presented as emerging themes (see Table 4.3). As well, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) consensus, and supported and individual themes were used to establish the frequency of mention based on the participants. All themes were used in the analysis and interpretation of the research findings.

Researcher Positioning

The very nature of naturalistic qualitative research implies that the researcher is one member of a group actively participating in discourse and reflection, but not controlling the group in its actions. The participants use inquiry as a means of working as a collaborative community: "they seek to engage their members in learning and change; they work toward influencing organizational change; and they offer opportunities for personal, professional, and institutional transformation" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, pp. 36-37).

My role in the school division is one of coordinator of student services. As such, I am responsible primarily for the placement of students with special needs. In addition, I work with school teams at 13 of the 26 schools and have the additional responsibility of several portfolios including but not limited to resource, the Aboriginal Academic

Achievement grant, Restitution and RTI, along with their sub-committees. The 13 schools are grouped according to their family, meaning that one family is comprised of the early, middle and senior years schools that feed into or receive the same students within their catchment area. I also work in collaboration with the clinicians (social workers, psychologists and speech language pathologists) who service these schools, and partner with Manitoba Education and several community agencies.

As part of the student services administrative team in the school division I have participated in the *Student Services Review* (2009). This review produced several recommendations one being the development of a student services model or framework to align with the *Standards for student services* (2006). After researching several models, Response to Intervention emerged as a promising framework for both student services and school-based teams. This researcher's subsequent advocacy for RTI and its recent adoption by our school division clearly revealed my bias in its favor.

Since almost all if not all the participants in this research were known to the researcher through pre-existing relationships, there was the potential for limitations and ethical considerations to accrue regarding notions of coercion. Although the focus groups were facilitated by someone other than this researcher, participants knew that I was the researcher. Participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the study, that the focus groups were confidential and not related to conditions of employment, and that the researcher did her best to alleviate any sense of bias in the reporting by acknowledging positive and negative data that were reported in the focus group. Based on the openness of the pre-existing relationships, it was hoped that participants were forthcoming when it was explained that their honest responses were valued. In addition,

the data collection and resulting data analysis were approached with objectivity and integrity in order to ensure the research validity (Janesick, 2004). Given the nature of qualitative inquiry, however, presenting the study in an unbiased manner is unrealistic. The analysis and discussion of the data will offer balanced perspectives through the literature, emergent themes in the data, and this researchers knowledge.

Validity and Reliability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have linked four criteria to the validity and reliability of qualitative research because from this point of view, “reality can never be fully apprehended, only approximated” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 11). These include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to the truth of the findings, transferability to their applicability in other contexts, dependability to whether the findings could be repeated, and confirmability in terms of the degree of the researcher’s neutrality.

Credibility, the consistency between the data that are collected and reported, refers to the researcher’s description of the research site, the school division, and the subjects involved in the study. It also refers to the consistency and accuracy with which the voices of all the focus group participants are reflected in the transcripts, interpretations and conclusions of this research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 73). Credibility was established by providing demographic information about the school division involved in this study, along with descriptive information about its priorities, recent Student Services Review, and the researcher’s positionality. To improve reliability, audio recordings were used as the data. Participants were told that taped recording of the focus groups was a condition of their participation in them. The

facilitator read the transcripts of the focus groups to ensure that the information was an accurate reflection of the commentary and experience in each group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Since the transcriber did not participate in the focus groups and consequently, was unable to identify the participants, her only method for chunking the information from the conversation was to begin a new paragraph whenever a different participant spoke. Therefore it was impossible to conduct a member check. However, given her expertise as a transcriber trained in note-taking from audio-recordings, the researcher believed the transcripts were highly accurate, adding to the credibility between the data obtained and reported.

Transferability is viewed not as important in qualitative research as it is in quantitative research. Across the division, the research findings have applicability and transferability to schools throughout the division. Across divisions, Response to Intervention may prove useful as an organizational framework to other student services teams in Manitoba; however, the research findings would very much depend on a division's baseline. For those fully immersed in professional learning communities, adopting RTI may not result in much of a paradigm shift. Given the provincial organization of schooling, the research findings related to potential designs or roles and responsibilities of student services may resonate with others interested in Response to Intervention. What is transferable, however, are the research questions and process used in this study.

In terms of dependability, the findings could be replicated if the initial sampling is appropriate and representative (Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). The sample used in this study consisted of participants who had knowledge of the research

topic and were representative of the personnel involved in the implementation of RTI. Everyone in the division had been presented with the same baseline information on Response to Intervention. As well, the participants were chosen from a variety of backgrounds and levels to bring their expertise to the focus groups.

Reliability for this research study was enhanced by the researcher's experience in the division. Having taught for 29 years, the researcher was well immersed in the culture, and has had time to develop rapport and foster trust with people working in the division being studied. Furthermore, the prolonged engagement in the culture of the school division provided this researcher with a more nuanced understanding of the concerns and data, but also presented more limitations around my bias.

Confidentiality and Ethics

Focus group participants were selected by open invitation and voluntary involvement. Once approval to conduct the study had been acquired by the Assistant Superintendent, an electronic letter of invitation was sent to all current administrators, student services school teams, Educational Support Services personnel and classroom teachers who responded directly to the paid facilitator via email if they chose to participate. Each focus group lasted between 60 and 75 minutes. The interviews were conducted at times convenient to the participants, but outside of school responsibilities and off school division property. Participants were informed that tape-recording the focus group interview was a condition of their participation. No risk was anticipated. Each individual was informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Since a paid transcriber omitted all names and references to schools and the division involved in this study, none of the comments made during the focus groups were tied to any

individuals. The facilitator gathered demographic information on each participant of each focus group, but no names of the participants or their schools were given to this researcher. No descriptions or quotations that might identify specific individuals were used. Following the successful defense of this thesis, the tapes of the interviews and focus groups were destroyed. As well, all electronic copies were deleted from this researcher's computer and memory sticks. Prior to this time, approximately six months, they will be kept in a locked cabinet in the office of the researcher, and electronic data were kept in a password-protected file.

Informed consent was obtained in writing from every participant. Because of the nature of the study and because participants may have known each other, complete anonymity was not possible in this study. Nonetheless, every effort was made to keep the identities and comments of the participants confidential. No confidential records were consulted for the research. Participants were asked in advance (via letters of consent) not to discuss the content of the focus groups outside of the groups and they signed a pledge of confidentiality at the beginning of the focus groups. Tape recordings were transcribed by a secretary from outside the division paid by the researcher involved in this study. No names or pseudonyms were used in written or oral analyses, interpretations, and summaries of the study. If participants happened to volunteer information during the focus groups that could jeopardize the privacy of other individuals, schools or the division, that information was disguised so as to be unrecognizable. If participants decided to withdraw after the focus group was over their comments were removed from the transcripts. If their contributions were already coded thematically, given the constructivist nature of the study their individual comments were removed, but their

contributions to the supported and consensus themes remained. As noted in the letters of consent and instructions for the interviews, participants were asked to be discrete making such comments during the focus groups, and to keep individuals' comments confidential following them. Participants were not compensated for their participation.

Summary

Chapter Three presented the research design for the study, including an overview of qualitative research, as well as the study's methodology, data collection and data analysis techniques. This chapter also described the twenty-two participants involved in the three focus groups for this research study, as well as the demographics of each focus group. In addition, the focus group process, including roles of the facilitator, assistant and transcriber were delineated. This chapter also addressed issues of reliability, validity and confidentiality, and ethics specific to conducting focus group research within this researcher's school division. This chapter also addressed the research participants and procedures used in the research study. Chapter Four will present the research findings and Chapter Five the conclusions of this research study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gather information on how best to support the implementation of RTI as a student services framework in support of inclusion. The key components of the Response to Intervention framework and roles of administration and student services teams working within its framework were explored to possibly assist in developing an action plan for its implementation in the school division being studied.

The study compared the RTI components from the literature to the perceptions of administrators, student services teams and Educational Support Services staff.

Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the participants' understandings of the components of Response to Intervention?
2. To what extent are school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to Intervention?
3. What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school based team practices?
4. What factors promote or impede the implementation of RTI?

What unfolds in this chapter is an examination of the four research questions and probes using a naturalistic qualitative design and constructivist theory. In this approach, themes found in the literature were the primary method of coding (Table 4.2).

Table 4.1 Research questions and probes

Protocol Questions	Probes
1. What are your understandings of the components of Response to Intervention (RTI)?	1. When you think of RTI what comes to mind? 2. Where did you learn your definitions and perceptions of RTI? 3. What effect do you think the components of RTI has on students' achievement? Teachers' knowledge individually and collectively?
2. To what extent are current school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with RTI?	1. In what sense are they aligned with RTI with respect to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaming and collaboration? - Problem-solving? - Evidence based practices? - Interventions? Please elaborate and provide examples whenever possible.
3. What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school based practices?	1. What factors and circumstances support or impede their ability to carry out these roles? Please elaborate and provide examples. 2. Do student services and administrator roles need to change from current practices to make RTI a reality? If so, how? If not, why not? Please elaborate.
4. What factors promote or impede the implementation of RTI? Please elaborate and provide examples.	1. What factors impact upon your level of engagement in RTI? Engagement at the school level, Division level? Please elaborate. 2. Has professional development played a role in your understanding of RTI? If so, in what ways. If not, why not? 3. Describe any professional development required to build skills, knowledge and understanding of RTI. For you personally, for school teams, for the school division. 4. Which of the tiers requires the most professional development, resources, and financial supports? Explain what these resources and supports would look like. Does this correspond with the greatest needs? Please elaborate and provide examples.

The concepts and themes mentioned during the focus groups, ones directly revealed, and ones that emerged from comparing focus groups were used as the secondary methods for coding (Tables 4.2, 4.3). Using this approach, the researcher endeavored to understand the perceptions of focus group participants (administrators, resource teachers, counselors, classroom teachers, ESS clinicians) regarding Response to Intervention and its implementation in order to understand the issues that contribute to and/or prevent the school and the division’s alignment to it. As well, Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) consensus, and supported and individual themes were used to establish the frequency of mention based on the participants.

Table 4.2: Frequency of participants’ mention of themes found in literature

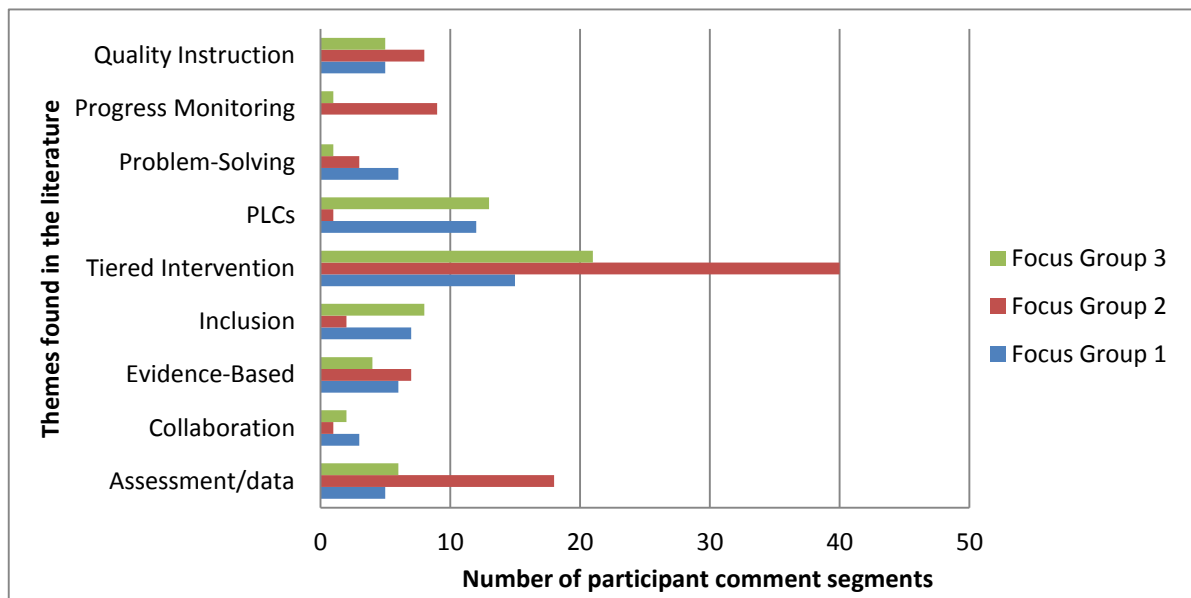
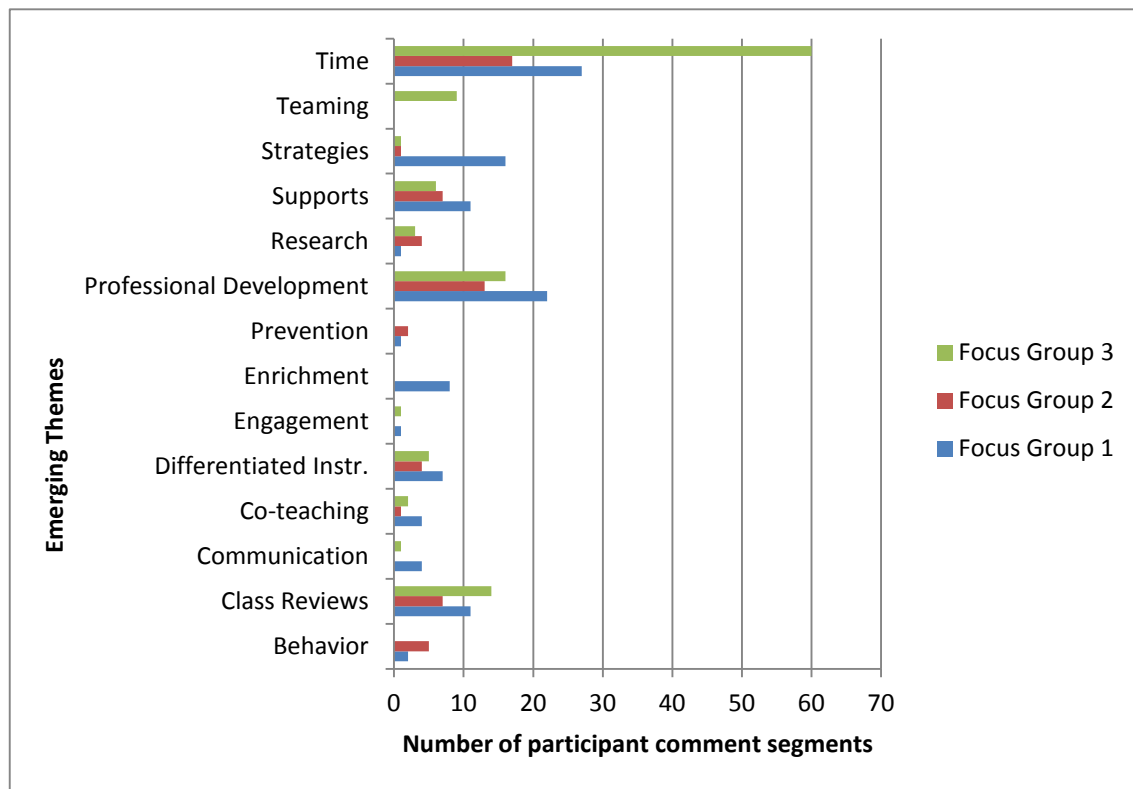


Table 4.3: Frequency of participants' mention of themes emerging from focus groups



In the examination of each question and subsequent probes, the perceptions of participants involved in this study were referenced with the literature to demonstrate similarities and differences between the perceptions of school and division personnel and the components of Response to Intervention found in the research. Common themes were developed for each research question through the use of NVivo 9 Software, themes that emerged from comparing interviews and concepts and themes indirectly revealed.

Research Question 1

Research Question One asked: When you think of RTI, what comes to mind? This question to focus group participants was aligned with the literature review in Chapter Two. Response to Intervention is described as “process of implementing high-quality, scientifically validated instructional practices based on learner needs, monitoring

student progress, and adjusting instruction based on student's response" (Bender & Shores, 2007, p. 7). Interventions are provided with increasing intensity and frequency when students fail to learn in classrooms providing high quality instruction. Essentially, RTI is a multi-tiered model promoting success for all learners (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie et al., 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores and Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009).

All focus group participants were able to identify several components of RTI, but with different depths of understanding. Participants from the administrators' focus group viewed RTI as "a tiered model to help support students who are not successful in school". Several references were made to RTI being a model to support "all students" including those requiring enrichment or behavior interventions. One administrator commented:

It is the range of things you can offer to meet different children's needs. If their needs are for enrichment then that enrichment could also be tiered from differentiated instruction in the classroom to something where they've got an IEP because of their enrichment. I think we also have to include behavior when we think about RTI and the various levels of service that we provide.

Another participant remarked that RTI is not static, rather "it is a point in time and with the understanding that students can move between different tiers". No administrator commented directly on all students belonging in Tier 1, the classroom, or the importance of strengthening classroom instruction and progress monitoring to prevent students from requiring services and supports from Tiers 2 and 3.

While many administrators commented on the notion of students 'moving among the tiers' to correspond with their levels of need, two comments reflected a broader

understanding of RTI describing it as a “service delivery model or framework” where the multi-tiers represent the level of resources, support and services provided to students rather than the notion of students being slotted into tiers. One administrator spoke to the RTI process as:

...the way your school goes through (the framework) so that there (are) various tiers based on need and how we collaborate together to recognize the need, first of all, as quickly as possible and then respond as quickly as possible, and with our aim always being to keep kids at Tier 1 with the rest of their peers so we have inclusion but then as needs are greater going up within the tiers.

Assessment, collaboration and responsiveness are key components of the RTI framework. Although only collaboration is directly stated above, assessment is apparent in the phrase “recognize the need” and responsiveness in the phrase “as quickly as possible”.

Administrators who have a deep understanding of assessment and the collaborative process in their decision-making practices will be able to improve teaching practices and interventions for students (Fisher & Frey, 2010). If they rely on interventions alone to meet student needs, they “will never solve the basic problem these children face” (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009, p. 77). Other than one administrator connecting these key components of RTI to explain the process, no other comments reflecting a deeper understanding of RTI were mentioned in the initial question, “When you think of RTI, what comes to mind?”

Although the term inclusion was addressed through several references to “All students”, one administrator described what it looked like for her/him:

One of the best things about RTI is that you don't have to label the child. You can have a child with special needs that doesn't have anything in Tier 3 or Tier 2. Because you can remove all of those labels and just look at what the needs are and what services can be delivered.

This comment represents a paradigm shift in the way we have viewed and responded to students with special needs in the division being studied. The RTI framework provides universal supports to all students within the regular classroom, Tier 1. Using authentic assessment, effective instruction, progress monitoring and responsive teaching, the classroom teacher understands the academic and social-emotional strengths and needs of each student. The labels provided by funding processes and diagnoses do not translate into effective teaching and learning practices (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004; Fullan, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Being able to look beyond the labels and use authentic assessment and instruction to improve teaching and learning for all students, reflects a deep understanding of the purpose of Response to Intervention, to support inclusion. However, this deep understanding is not evidenced by all administrators.

In response to Research Question 1, Focus group 2 consisting of Educational Support Services and resource and classroom teachers, included more references to Tier 1 supports and more detailed descriptions of Tier 2 and 3 interventions than the administrators in Focus group 1. These differences are probably attributed to their roles and responsibilities. Whereas administrators might view RTI in general terms and as an organizational framework from their perspective, classroom and resource teachers might view RTI in terms of their actions in the teaching and learning process. Two participants in Focus group 2 made reference to RTI being "a model of prevention" and three

participants commented on it being a “service delivery model”. One participant conceptualized it as “a model of prevention or a service delivery model approach that the Division is somewhat adopting as a kind of data-based problem-solving approach”. Another participant viewed it as “a model of prevention...but also a model where you want to see students who are able to narrow gaps [in learning]”. Perceptions of RTI appeared to vary depending on the role of the participant. One participant who is not a classroom teacher explained:

I see looking beyond the classroom level of support...if the supports that we have to provide so that the student can function in the classroom aren't enough then we're looking for something that has a little more intensity, maybe a little more specialized.

All comments made in response to this research question showed understanding of the multiple tiers associated with Response to Intervention.

Focus group 2 participants also showed a clear understanding of the following RTI components: 1) importance of quality Tier 1 instruction; 2) data-driven instruction; 3) progress monitoring. The importance of quality classroom instruction was captured through the comment:

I would say intervention starts in the classroom so the classroom teacher needs to be teaching and if the student isn't learning then they need to change their way of teaching so that the student can learn. And if the student still isn't making progress then you have to impose some other intervention.

Two respondents further explained their perceptions regarding poor classroom instruction. When students are exposed to poor quality instruction, they are more likely

to require resources and services found in Tiers 2 and 3. This is supported in RTI literature as well (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Participants in Focus group 2 described features of quality classroom teaching too. Student needs “vary so much that we’re adapting and using differentiated instruction as much as possible at Tier 1”. Another participant suggested, “We’re looking at the classroom first to find out if they are aware of learning styles. That’s why we’re doing class profiles (reviews).” It was noted by several participants that classroom teachers are improving in their ability to teach reading by using running records and implementing a variety of strategies for different students.

One of the reasons cited by participants as improving classroom instruction is the focus on assessment and progress monitoring. For the RTI model to work, data collection has to occur frequently so that meaningful interventions can occur in a timely manner. One participant suggested, “Literally, every three weeks there [should be] a probe to see if the child has advanced in reading. Has that child made advances in math?” Another participant described data collection as inherent to problem solving. With RTI “we’ve been starting to take real data, not frequency data for behaviors. Real data in seeing ‘is it working. And it’s really amazing when people start taking the data before the intervention.” Another focus group participant associated the use of curriculum-based measurement with RTI, citing the reasons as being more authentic and easier to administer.

Through regular monitoring of student progress, teachers can evaluate the impact of their instruction (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Three

references were made to progress monitoring in a timely fashion with suggestions to vary instruction and interventions when students were not learning or making sufficient gains. Even though classroom instruction may be effective, two respondents made reference to some students who will require “something a little more different, intensive” in order to meet their needs. Some of the examples given in support of this view include students for whom adaptations and differentiation are insufficient to meet their individual needs. At Tier 2 “we have something like reading recovery. I think it’s a very clear Tier 2 type of intervention and when students don’t succeed in reading recovery... they are referred out of the program for further specialized support.” Although many comments made by group participants showed they could conceptualize the three tiers, some felt that evidence of resources and services at Tier 3 were lacking in practical application. When students had significant learning or behavioral needs, in general participants felt that resources and services were insufficient in meeting these needs. On the whole, the participants’ understanding of RTI in Focus group 2 is consistent with the key concepts found in the literature review of chapter 2.

Demographically different than Focus group 2, Focus group 3 was more heavily represented by resource teachers and counselors. It was also overrepresented by senior years staff who represented four sevenths of the participants. In response to Research Question 1, this was reflected in the research findings. One participant suggested, “I think of the triangle and the different tiers of response to intervention- Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3. I think of Tier 3 being the smallest population of students being served.” A second participant added to the first comment:

Then within Tier 1, the bottom level, it's that different strategies can be put in place to intervene for students even starting out with universal assessments so that students are assessed and then we can find there are interventions needed and if those interventions can be done within the classroom. And then if it's not working bring in other people to help which would be more of a Tier 2 scenario and then what other people can be brought in or what other interventions can be done to help students be successful.

One participant identifying her/himself as a classroom teacher felt that RTI was “a way of aligning [her/his] teaching to the needs of the students. One comment addressed inclusion:

I think of it as a job we need to do that addresses the needs of all students and is inclusive of not just those intense populations but those regular students as well. So it is a pyramid that includes everyone.

In addition to including all students, one participant described RTI as involving all staff at all levels alluding to student's education as being everyone's responsibility: “Not just student services. It's typical of student services in our area, but this is encompassing the whole school—our whole division”.

For Question 1 the participants' comments in Focus group 3 were noticeably briefer and fewer than the other two focus groups. In response to the question, “When you think of RTI what comes to mind?” six comments spanning two-thirds of a page were made by this focus group. This contrasted greatly with Focus group 1 contributing 11 comments the length of one and one-third pages, and Focus group 2 contributing 33 comments spanning four and one-third pages. The succinct responses may be a

reflection of the high percentage of senior years staff participating in this focus group as compared to the other ones, 57% in Focus group 3 compared to 29% and 14% in Focus groups 1 and 2 respectively. Not only were the responses from this focus group fewer, in response to this first question, they did not reflect depth in understanding the RTI process. These findings may be consistent with the research citing the difficulty of implementing RTI at the senior years level where the focus is still primarily on content, and collaboration between general and special educators is an exception, not common practice (Buffum, Mattos, & Webber, 2009).

Research Question 1, Probe 2

The second probe relating to the first research question asked participants where they learned their definitions and perceptions of RTI. The three groups were extremely varied in how they acquired the definitions and understandings of RTI. The focus group of administrators developed their knowledge from three sources, a divisional workshop, a textbook distributed by senior administration, and by serving on the divisional RTI steering committee. The second focus group with the highest percentage of representatives from Educational Support Services followed by a fairly equal representation of resource and classroom teachers from all levels acquired their definition and perception of RTI from a greater variety of sources. In addition to receiving their information from the divisional workshop, textbooks and serving on the division's Steering Committee, Focus group 2 representatives acquired their information through course work, resource teacher meetings, reading research and other divisional events. The third focus group that provided the least depth in describing RTI, interestingly enough had the most exposure to it. These participants acquired their understanding

through conferences, journals, professional learning communities in their schools, the divisional inservice, textbooks, the divisional steering committee, and through research. One participant from Focus group 3 who referenced an RTI conference in the United States indicated, “it affirmed so much of what we are already doing and then sort of gave some more indications as to what we could do to improve the process”.

Within the context of the second probing question, Focus groups 2 and 3 reflected upon the broader view. Some noted the disparities in RTI knowledge among certain groups and at each level (early, middle, senior):

I think it’s different too, how people know about it if they are a classroom teacher or a specialist. I think that classroom teachers don’t have a lot of knowledge because they haven’t had the opportunity (Focus group 2).

Similar beliefs were shared by the following participants:

I would agree with that because I was a classroom teacher and as a classroom teacher unless I tried to seek out that information I knew that our student services took care of that and our administration, but I wouldn’t necessarily be privy to how everything was allocated (Focus group 2).

To do something [classroom teachers] don’t have any idea what it is, but I also think a lot of variability amongst the administrators about what RTI is (Focus group 2).

One participant alluded to the initial implementation of RTI as ineffective. Rather than focus on providing the knowledge to administrators and resource teachers, classroom teachers should be provided with opportunities to increase their understanding:

“I think that unless it’s kind of unleashed bottoms up, I don’t think you’ll ever get true buy in” (Focus group 2). This was described in detail by other participants:

Well I agree because not only was I exposed to the RTI, but in our meeting in the division, the resource teachers were given a book with RTI and I was looking at this book and reading this book and going ‘the teachers need to know this information’. I got one book but I passed it on but it takes a while to get through it. You have to start exposing classroom teachers to this information (Focus group 2).

They [classroom teachers] need explicit and directed structure...they need to be given that time. The resource teachers were exposed to that at the resource teacher meetings. We were given a book, we had a little study group, that we had the opportunity to talk about it and I think most of us are in roles where we have that opportunity to meet in these kinds of conversations. I know when I was in the classroom I always felt out of the loop with new initiatives or framework because you’re so busy getting and doing what you need to do in your classroom and you’re not given—you really don’t have time, as you said, to seek it out unless you are really, really interested or really think it effects you (Focus group 2).

According to the research participants’ perceptions, RTI knowledge varies among early, middle and senior years staff:

I know for us it wasn’t clear to anyone in our school when it first came out and it’s just through the division, but I think I’m in a different grade level than

everyone here from what I gather from everyone says. I'm not sure. I'm in high school [laughter is audible] (Focus group 2).

I'm from early, middle and high school and I agree, early years are different (Focus group 2).

I think an early years principal will be very different than a senior years principal (Focus group 2).

Divisionally, one administrator felt that other than the initial introduction to RTI through a divisional inservice and a textbook distributed by a superintendent, RTI has not “received the same kind of emphasis that some of the other prior focuses were given, but I think it just put a title to a lot of things that we have been doing in the past”.

The level of understanding regarding the definitions and perceptions of RTI vary among staff. According to the focus group conversations, although opportunities to learn about RTI exist among administrators, educational support services personnel and resource teachers, classroom teachers appear to be the group with the least understanding of RTI definitions and principles.

Research Question 1, Probe 3

The research question probe 3 asks: What effect do you think the components of RTI has on: a) students' achievement? b) teachers' knowledge individually and collectively?

In terms of RTI's impact upon student achievement, the respondents from all three focus groups agreed that there was a positive correlation:

“It helps us to clarify what kinds of supports students need on an individualized basis.” (Focus group 1)

What I like about RTI is that it’s an extension of our Professional Learning

Community. So we’ve been over the past several years really focusing on PLCs on the data that we’ve collected about students and then now to take that data and say, ‘this is how we’re going to meet this child’s needs based on the data’. I think based on my staff, ok, today, we’ve been doing PLC’s we’re going to add that RTI framework and just help our teachers to understand what the various strategies are in meeting all the kid’s needs. (Focus group 1)

I’d say for sure [it improves academic achievement]. If you look at it from the perspective of ‘if we didn’t have some interventions...what would the outcomes be? (Focus group 1)

If you were using RTI with best practices in education you’re using the best possible practices in teaching literacy and math skills and you’re using the best possible class wide interventions an school wide interventions in terms of behavior that we know are evidence based we’re making a difference with our students then we’re going to have a little less need for the interventions at Tier 2. (Focus group 2)

My understanding of RTI, I get a lot more work out of the students when I adjust my instruction and my expectations to the student...I think a lot of it is in the way

that I would individualize but---well differentiated instruction, not individualize it. The performance improves so I get more work out of all the students. (Focus group 3)

It helps people identify what the needs of the students are so that they meet them where they are then they move them along so in that sense, the kids can be more successful. (Focus group 3)

Some focus groups expressed difficulty in knowing exactly how RTI has made a difference, but feel that it has in some tangible way:

The effect of prevention is difficult to measure; it's impossible to measure. We feel that it is helping but we don't know—what would have been the baseline situation if these interventions hadn't been in place. (Focus group 1)

I think it can vary. I can identify students where it's worked very nicely for them, where you can kind of go "Oh, wow, this is great!" (Focus group 2)

One participant implied RTI's positive impact on student achievement, given the increased data classroom teachers have on their students. One administrator stated: "It is interesting to see how much knowledge teachers have about their students". In addition to increased teacher knowledge, participants reflected on the positive impact of the RTI decision-making process on student achievement:

I think as a teacher when you are doing RTI—which is meeting with other teachers, developing those common assessments, discussing the students' work, you know what you're looking for then. And if you are more focused, you can

help the students get—really—you can set those learning targets and you can help those students get there. And that’s being part of it. If there is a different ability you can scaffold for them. You can put in the different learning styles within class. (Focus group 3)

When I think about how RTI affects student achievement, it really supports team work and team decision making about students and where they fit with your response to intervention so whether it’s differentiated instruction or a little bit more intervention, I always have that triangle in mind and how—it’s not just a sole teacher but a group that makes the decision about---after the assessments perhaps have been done, someone else will look at further assessment but it’s a team decision about where the students fit on those triangles. Intervention is then put into place and student achievement is more positive. (Focus group 3)

Some focus group participants were cautious about the impact Response to Intervention is having on student achievement. In theory, they acknowledge that student achievement should improve, but unless the RTI components are implemented with fidelity, according to the framework, they feel that its effect on student achievement is immeasurable:

Even in IEPs there is no progress monitoring. Very rarely is that plan looked at to see even ‘has it worked’ ...is the data been collected? (Focus group 2)

Very rarely is the frequency data taken or any of that data to see if it’s working or is it just a piece of paper [referring to IEPs]. (Focus group 2)

But there has been a lot of service provided at different levels and then I can think of several students where you know what they need and you can't give it to them.

There are no services available or provided. (Focus group 2)

It's only been unleashed for two years. I mean has there even been data taken, pre-intervention, post intervention? (Focus group 2)

These quotations illustrate an understanding of what is needed to improve student outcomes: progress monitoring, data collection/analysis, and effective programming/interventions. The last comments reveal a misconception about the data collection process. Data collection is an ongoing process of teaching and learning and therefore, teachers should be able to gauge whether their instruction and interventions are working during the progress monitoring phase. Missed opportunities for re-teaching and trying new strategies will occur when teachers replace assessment for learning with assessment of learning.

When asked about the effect RTI has had on teachers' knowledge individually and collectively, participants responded:

It's a logical extension of what we've been doing all along. (Focus group 1)

All resource teachers and those who were interested in RTI were invited to be part of the study group and from there they designed a PATH [strategic plan] for the school division and so all schools ... were provided with the PATH of ... where schools are, what we need to do, so that came form that process so there is some growth taking place as a result throughout the division. (Focus group 1)

I think we were kind of talking about that it varies from teacher to teacher. Not every teacher knows. (Focus group 2)

A lot of variability of teacher's knowledge of RTI. A lot of variability. (Focus group 2)

And even if they know about it, how it's implemented. (Focus group 2)

Some participants referenced the facets of RTI that are widely known and practiced by division staff:

The good thing they are doing are the PLCs. (Focus group 2).

It's just like co-teaching, the really good teachers do it and the really bad teachers don't (Focus group 2).

And the classroom profiles. The mentoring piece that goes on there (Focus group 2).

Several participants supported PLCs and class profiles (reviews) as contributing to their understanding of RTI:

I think the class profiles will give the teachers a better understanding of RTI as well, because you are seeing that will be the biggest piece for them as a classroom teacher to understand all that different services available or the needs of your kids and then how you're meeting those needs. (Focus group 2)

I think it has made a huge difference in our PLC group. There are three of us science teachers who are developing an assessment and we are really focusing on using the new software and new assessment for teaching and adapting that to the criteria that we want to use in science teaching. (Focus group 3)

I see teacher's knowledge and skills help with the RTI. The PLCs will help the teachers develop. (Focus group 3)

I think too that inclusion has drawn the need for teachers to become more skilled, or more knowledgeable about addressing the needs of all the students in the classroom because the profile within any classroom is immense. (Focus group 3)

In describing the impact that RTI has had on teachers' knowledge individually and collectively, senior and middle years teachers expressed frustration over learning something new when they have not mastered what they have already been given:

I know at our level we're behind other divisions, by far, and when our division gets a hold of something it's a push for it right away. ALP's came into high schools so now we have 100 - 200 sheets of paper... Where we come from it's a feeling at the high school level and middle years we have the regular kids, the adapted kids, the IEP kids, and then the kids who fall separate from there and the teachers are just overwhelmed and now this RTI is something new but we have these other things we haven't even close to mastered (Focus group 2)

In addition, senior years teachers felt that obstacles prevented them from acquiring and then acting upon RTI knowledge as a collective:

If the classroom teacher isn't involved in the process what do [students] care about handing in ten pages of what I expect them to do if they haven't bought in. They may look at it, and I may be able to test or assess the student to see if they are improving but really, if they are sitting in a grade 10 science class in a chemistry unit, what are they doing for 8 of the 10 classes? You know when they are functioning at a grade 4 level so unless we have something to parallel at a much lower level, it's a lot of the struggles that's what we're having. We're hitting a dead end with RTI (Focus group 2).

Classroom teachers felt that their knowledge of RTI was insufficient in assisting students performing significantly below grade level. They wrestled with the question of how they as classroom teachers can accommodate learners without lowering expectations.

Research Question 1, Probe 4

Research Question Probe 4 asked: Has the current approach to RTI changed the way you conceive of inclusion? Whether participants reported RTI has or has not changed the way they perceive of inclusion clearly depended on their role and level at which they worked. The administrators described how it had changed their view of inclusion in five of their six comments. They used the following illustrations to explain their thinking:

To follow an RTI model, there wouldn't even be any special education or regular education...they're just all kids and these are the ways that we are meeting their needs. When we list our strategies at the different levels, we don't always have to think that it's for our kids that are EBD3 [Emotionally, behaviorally disturbed],

that's just good research based intervention that's good for any child having those struggles (Focus group 1).

I don't know that every classroom teacher can be expected to be a resource teacher...but I think what the point is that all those children sitting in front of them whether they are a funded child or a child from a group home, they are the classroom teacher's child and that teacher has supports based on the different levels of the tier (Focus group 1).

In high school many years ago, the delivery model was this is the curriculum and you keep up or you don't keep up or you pass or you fail and over the years there has been far more emphasis placed upon tailoring the instruction to meet the needs of the student. Generally, our interventions are much more successful and focused for the students who have difficulty (Focus group 1).

Participants felt that the shared responsibility of students by classroom and resource teachers has been a catalyst for inclusive practices:

At the high school level, before when students were having problems we would send them off to the resource teacher but now we have a lot of work being taking place inside the classroom and teachers are developing strategies for RTI.

Sometimes resource teachers will come in for a period also to guide things along (Focus group 1).

Talking about resource teachers, there really is collaboration between the whole team and the expectation is that all teachers are resource teachers and in order for our teachers to get there we need collaboration within the classroom (Focus group 1).

Professional learning communities, the foundation of RTI has provided a process for understanding and meeting the needs of all students:

When I think that through these discussions and PLCs, I think that our teachers are having a more thorough understanding of each student in the classroom and so that in itself is helping with inclusion because they are seeing each kid as an individual regardless of their abilities (Focus group 1).

On the whole, administrators felt that Response to Intervention has changed the way they conceive of inclusion. The framework has helped their staff view students without labels and have adapted several strategies that can be used in multiple contexts. Previously, classroom teachers did not assume ownership for students with disabilities and special needs. However RTI has shifted their thinking towards accepting responsibility for teaching all students in their classes. Similarly, more students are having their needs met within the regular classroom instead of having them pulled out and programmed by the resource teacher in a separate setting. Administrators have also indicated that professional learning communities, the foundation of RTI, have assisted teachers in better understanding the needs of individual students. As well, the problem-solving process inherent to RTI and PLCs has facilitated collaboration and teaming between classroom and resource teachers ultimately resulting in improved inclusive practices.

The remaining comment by an administrator was neutral in that it recognized the importance of ongoing professional development in light of the implementation of RTI, but did not clarify whether this contributed to a change in thinking about inclusion.

Focus group 2 was ambiguous about whether Response to Intervention has changed their view of inclusion. All six comments reflected their belief and/or support in following the RTI framework; however, their comments reflected pessimism in whether the supports and resources would be made available in order to fully support all students within the RTI framework. You can hear the conflicting thought processes through the following comments:

For me it really hasn't. I think if it's changed my thinking in any way, it is in the fact that school divisions need to provide students with the services they need to move forward. And I know there [are] lots of budget restrictions—they [students] need to be our priority. When you talk about inclusion it's not all about differentiating and adapting and I think that's a really important part of it but what you want is for students to feel that they can function in that classroom and be independent learners and be a part of that community without making so many changes and I think we can do that for a lot of kids and I think they just don't have or are given that opportunity. So in that way, I don't know if that's really a change in thinking, but I think it's made me feel more adamant about saying okay, if this is the framework, if this is the mode that we want to follow, then we need to use it and we need to stand behind it and the division needs to stand behind it and show us that it's valued and they really do believe in it. Because I think we

have a lot of people who believe in it, but I'm not sure that we have what we need in place (Focus group 2).

Even if you don't adhere to the philosophy of RTI, if a kid's not reading after they've had reading recovery then we need something right there after that because I work in the middle school and high school and there are a fair number of kids who can't read. Some of them don't read until grade 8. And guess what their behavior is like in the classrooms. Unforgiveable (Focus group 2).

It would be nice to have an evidence-based program and if they don't respond to one then the next ones on the line...if we don't get them reading by grade 3, they aren't buying so much what we are selling (Focus group 2).

Especially when they are coming into grade 6 reading far below grade level, it's tough and so not only are teachers trying to meet challenges how they are going to provide instruction in the classroom, what kinds of assignments can you give these students when everybody is reading at a different grade level (Focus group 2).

The views expressed in the comments above do not directly support RTI as having changed their perceptions of inclusion in that common sense should dictate that if a student is not learning or reading, then strategies and instruction should be made available to assist the student. However, their examples reflect the process and key components of RTI. Some of the participants have accepted the framework of RTI, but

are concerned about the supports and resources not being provided to ensure that all students are successful academically. They accept RTI as being the vehicle driving inclusive practices, but question whether the practices, supports and resources within schools and the division will make inclusion a reality.

The participants in Focus group 3 had differing viewpoints regarding the impact of RTI on their conception of inclusion. Student services personnel such as resource teachers and counselors, who identified their roles during the focus group conversations, stated no change in their belief system. Some respondents assumed a neutral stance saying that “inclusion has always been there and continues to happen”, without describing whether the picture of inclusion has changed over the years or not. It is interesting that resource teachers and counselors in this group identified no change in their thinking about inclusion since the adoption of RTI, but one teacher clarified that her/his answer “would probably be different if she/he were back in the classroom”. Similar to participants in Focus group 2, Focus group 3 participants did not negate the impact of RTI on inclusion but have identified many factors preventing it from becoming a reality. As one participant stated: “I don’t think that the approach the school division has taken [has given us] a lot of direction there. I think that individual schools as teams have interpreted and made use of the RTI model to their own desire”. Similar sentiments were echoed by other participants in this focus group:

It has to be more flexible. I don’t think we’re at the ‘it has to look different’ but not ‘why it looks different’ or when it should look different at a certain stage’ in some buildings (Focus group 3).

The apparent lack of knowledge among classroom teachers has created obstacles and perceptions of RTI creating more work with less supports. As many participants stated:

I'm worried about resource teachers feeling they've been told you must be in the class co-teaching or doing whatever all the time that that's not necessarily the intent of RTI or inclusion and so that's a bit of a concern (Focus group 3).

For me right now, RTI is a bunch of red tape that I have to go through before I can get a student help...where I have to prove this and prove this and prove this and we aren't going to look at anything until the profiles are done...and meanwhile I'm sitting here for a month with a student that I can't reach and nobody's going to do anything until classroom profiling is done...And as a teacher I know a lot of teachers are feeling "what is RTI"? And if I'm screaming for help, why aren't I getting it? Where is that intervention? Where's the response? (Focus group 3).

Other participants have articulated that their belief in inclusion has changed:

From the role that I have been exposed to RTI, my conceptions of inclusion have been a little more towards the curriculum. I still want to put kids first, but I'm prepared to sacrifice my ideals, supporting kids emotionally and behaviorally over learning the curriculum, and give them more of a curriculum focus---a little bit more, but not too much. Kids are more important than the curriculum (Focus group 3).

It has enabled us too to see what areas on the pyramid that we are weaker in the triangle—where we need more supports and just not an overwhelming amount we are putting into place. It's just nice to see it on that framework (Focus group 3). In Focus group 3, only five of the sixteen responses were clearly positive toward RTI having changed people's perceptions about inclusion. Eleven of the sixteen responses were ambiguous in that they stated obstacles to RTI implementation, but really did not express whether their perceptions of inclusion changed with the implementation of RTI. Three respondents stated directly that RTI did not change their beliefs.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked: In what sense are school and student services practices aligned with RTI with respect to: 1) teaming and collaboration, 2) problem-solving, 3) evidence-based practices and 4) interventions. To analyze the responses made by participants, conversation segments were coded according to focus groups and then were categorized as aligned or not aligned. Then within each of these categories their responses were grouped with respect to: 1) teaming and collaboration (15 segments), 2) problem-solving (10 segments), 3) evidence-based practices (17 segments), and interventions (52 segments). In terms of collaboration, five of the responses were from administrators in Focus group 1, six from Focus group 2 and nine responses were from Focus group 3. Focus group 2 did not cite teaming as one of the ways that school and student services team practices were aligned with RTI, and yet this has the most student services personnel.

According to Whitten et al. (2009), “RTI as a practice is very much dependent on the full collaboration and teamwork of school personnel” (p. 26). Professional learning communities, the foundation of RTI, relies on the collaboration of general education (classroom teachers) and resource teachers and even more comprehensively, upon the multiple teams that exist within the school and division levels (Friend, 2002; Sparks, 2002). The focus group participants cited examples congruent with the literature:

I think we’ve been on the course for a collaborative student services model for years, but now we are actually seeing it ‘take root’ and possibly through this Response to Intervention Model, it has been allowed to flourish (Focus group1). The work I’ve done at both the elementary and middle years schools, I think that I’ve seen a lot of teachers collaborate to try and come up with more effective ways of differentiating or meeting needs of kids at the Tier 1 level, for sure, the classroom based level (Focus group 3).

In high school...I think that there is a lot of RTI that is going on that administrators are not aware of...sometimes [classroom teachers] will go to the resource teacher for strategies and they will work together (Focus group 1).

The problem-solving approach in Response to Intervention is the decision-making process at work in the professional learning communities (PLCs). Collaboration and teaming are essential to the PLC process, for without it there will be no clarity in what we want all students to learn or in our response when they fail to learn (Dufour, Eaker & Dufour, 2005). Participants viewed their involvement in PLCs as one way school based practices are aligned with RTI:

I think what was mentioned before about the fact that we have already started on this road towards the collaboration and the teaming with our PLCs, but maybe this provides more of a focus, or we're trying to look at providing more consistency across the division so that all schools are working towards these things (Focus group 3).

The PLC model provides opportunities for resource teachers and guidance counselors to sit down and discuss with classroom teachers and help those teachers understand better how they can support students in their classrooms (Focus group 1).

A supporting feature of collaboration is communication. One administrator commented on communication being integral to alignment with RTI:

Our in-service this morning—we had 14 people at our table. We were talking about how we have more effective communication methods. We had 5 administrators, 6 student services, 3 assessment coordinators and so there's a big group there and everybody has some knowledge of something and that's without even having a teacher there involved. Communication is a huge issue (heads nodding by other administrators) (Focus group 1).

Since educational assistants feature prominently in all school staffs, administrators viewed their involvement in collaboration and teaming as another important factor in aligning school practices with RTI:

...there is more inclusion in ways that we see less pull outs than we have previously seen. We are very supportive of the students in the classroom that have become part of the [classroom] community and the educational assistants are

developing professionally to be able find ways through the teacher to support students in the classroom as well (Focus group 1).

I think in our school we are trying to do teaming with our EAs as well as teachers and not just student services so the effort is being made and the support from the administration is there so far (Focus group 3).

One participant from Focus group 3 spoke about alignment in general terms: “I’m not suggesting we aren’t aligned. We are aligned with the practices. It’s just a time factor”.

The school division involved in this study has taken a structured approach to implementing and supporting professional learning communities over the years. The quotations cited in this section support their prevalence in the division, as well as their connection or alignment with RTI practices.

The problem-solving process in RTI relies upon collaboration as data are collected, analyzed, and reflected upon in order to identify teaching strategies and interventions for individuals and groups of students. In order to be effective, problem-solving requires multiple perspectives (Bender & Shores, 2007; Buffum, Matos & Weber, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010):

I think everyone whether clinicians, guidance, resource teachers in terms of problem-solving bring some strengths to the table. And when they are shared openly, what are some of the needs of the students somewhere around the table someone can say, ‘I can assist in this capacity’, or make some suggestions so you can get that assistance (Focus group 1).

The class review process implemented by several schools in the division is a collaborative process for identifying students' strengths and needs, establishing classroom goals, and allocating supports and resources to assist classroom teachers (Brownlie, 2006). One participant spoke of the benefits of the class reviews:

The class reviews have been really wonderful for that—the problem-solving, the decision making so that when the teacher leaves, all of the supports are sitting around that table offering suggestions like it's a real problem-solving focus—the reviews—so that they [participants] leave feeling they've got some decisions, they've got some support and we've got an action plan to follow to meet the various needs (Focus group 1).

Response to Intervention emphasizes student outcomes rather than deficits, and connects identification with instruction (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Quality classroom teaching and intervention depends on data collection and implementation of evidence-based practices (Fuchs, Moch, Morgan & Young, 2003). Participants from each focus group provided examples of their alignment to RTI with respect to these practices:

I think teams are using that evidence to drive instruction and for planned programming. It certainly has been the focus in the past 8 years – 10 years (Focus group 1).

People are really looking at evidence but are kind of working from their guts in terms of how they interpret all of this and what they do with all this in the classroom (Focus group 3).

Evidence-based...students do well...student's performance is a baseline in improvement. Is it individual students or the whole class-whatever. This is the kind of evidence (Focus group 1).

Participants from Focus group 2 provided concrete examples of evidence-based interventions in the division:

Roots of Empathy is an example of evidence based programming that is being run in all of our early and middle years schools. It's a good response to intervention in terms of increasing social skills and decreasing aggression.

I think at our Tier 1 we're trying hard to do some of those things in our school in particular. People are doing similar learning with Regie Routman in terms of literacy.

I think too there's a change in the intervention/anxiety programs now...and at the high school there is the Suicide SOS and screening for depression so there are bits and pieces. So if the province buys on and there is a program that they want put into place it increases the likelihood of money being funded.

The challenge for all schools is to provide the framework and resources for making quality classroom instruction and interventions available to all students when necessary. With Response to Intervention being a multi-tiered model, there are many opportunities for students to receive the supports they need to reach the outcomes, and few opportunities to fall between the cracks of failure (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie

et al., 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009). Three administrators in Focus group 1 articulated increased teacher knowledge at Tier 1:

I think also as teachers develop strategies they realize that these aren't just strategies that will work on children that have been designated as special needs but they are good sound strategies that will help with all kids.

I agree that all classroom teachers are becoming—have a lot more strategies and are becoming more like resource teachers.

About a clinician who has got a strategy...not just for that one kid in the class but for all students in the class then it's transferable to all learners. We want our teachers to become resourceful like our resource teachers.

Encouragingly, there were 21 comments from participants indicating an alignment of school and student services teams with Response to Intervention, and only 15 comments from participants describing how the division is not aligned with RTI. Two respondents referred to difficulties regarding collaboration:

In the high schools there is a disconnect between the classroom teacher and student services in administration, in terms of primarily communication. And I think that has the most to do with the roles that are played by those groups. The teachers are tied to classrooms and again in high school, students may have four different teachers during a semester whereas student services and administrators have more flexibility in their time so we have the opportunity to sit down and meet about planning for the students, and generally what ends up with that

planning is that it's told to the teacher because there isn't a whole lot of time to involve the teacher in the planning process. There is sort of a disconnect (Focus group 1).

At elementary school the problems come to the student services team. [Sometimes there is the response from student services], 'I can do this to help them by must doing this for them'. But then they aren't part of the solution. So even for us (administrators) sometimes, we just solve it because it is time effective but it would be good if they were more involved in the decision-making (Focus group 1).

This observation by an administrator strikes a chord with the research on leadership and the role of the principal. According to Chrispeels (2004), the role of the principal is to foster the abilities of teachers in leading innovation and in collective decision-making. Shared leadership is crucial for education reform and improving the educational outcomes of all our students (Whitten et al., 2009).

One respondent from Focus group 2 explained how collaboration exists and data are gathered; however, the results of the collaboration and data gathering are not being integrated into student programming. That is," the effects of the problem-solving processes are not resulting in changes to the teaching/learning process or improved student outcomes" (Focus group 2).

High quality classroom instruction and evidence-based interventions are features of Tiers 1 through 3. In addition to using differentiated instruction, strengthening core classroom instruction through evidence-based teaching practices ensures that the majority

of students will acquire the skills and knowledge to reach the outcomes (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Without evidence-based practices, RTI does not match its aspirations. This perspective was shared by participants in all focus groups:

Well I see very little effort to find evidence for things that are done. Student services tries its best to provide information which is evidence based which is anecdotal mostly, but when I saw the evidence based practices first of all I was thinking in terms of literature (Focus group 3).

In high school there is little time to gather much evidence and by the time you have it, the semester is pretty much finished (Focus group 1).

I think this is the most important part of it—the data base thing and it's just not being done (Focus group 2).

So if we're staying really true to those evidence-based programs we're sticking to the planned process and outcomes (Focus group 2).

It's important to look at the effect size, which is critical. Does it really result in a really positive outcome or these kids as opposed to statistical significance? So for me I think there's gradations in evidence-based practices that we need to become more aware of it if we're really truly going to be an RTI division (Focus group 2).

And use things that have a beneficial effect, just not a statistical significance

(Focus group 2).

Interestingly enough, the last two comments reflect some of the controversy surrounding Response to Intervention. Some research indicates that a protocol approach is necessary with pre-established criteria, a limited number of intervention programs, and reliable staff training and program implementation. However, in being responsive to student needs, a component of RTI, often several strategies have to be implemented before improving student's learning. Through this problem-solving approach, teachers can respond to students in a timely fashion and collaborate with peers when other interventions are required (Bender & Shores, 2007; Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009). For this reason, Response to Intervention relies on both approaches, protocol and problem-solving.

In relation to the question how are current school and student services team practices not aligned, six respondents made reference to the tiered interventions. Staff at the high school level described how the needs of their students are reconfiguring the shape and proportion of tiers on the RTI triangle:

I think the triangle, while the bottom has all the students and then less numbers of students in the middle tier and then this high at-risk group at the top, I think because of demographics, at least where we are, I think the bottom is the bottom and the middle is---I think the shape is not the triangle anymore---it's becoming a totally different shape (Focus group 3).

Some schools can fit very well into the triangle in terms of their percentages and other schools are different so would it not make sense that the amount of support given to those rectangular schools would get more [supports]? (Focus group 3).

So the needs are greater, the needs are more varied. Every classroom teacher at the bottom of that grade 9 class has everything from two year old cognitive levels to university levels...But the people providing the intervention piece ...there aren't enough hours in a day to get to the number of students to have whatever we need to do with them (Focus group 3).

Moreover, one participant felt that interventions occur naturally at high school:

In high school there is an opportunity for some natural streaming to occur as well so you have a student who gets that high school experience, especially after grade 9, they can select courses that they are naturally more interested in and so those courses you have less of a need to provide supports (Focus group 1).

There has been talk of a set school day 8 to 5 where there is time for meeting ...you would likely lose an awful lot of the co-curricular...type of programs so what you would gain in terms of planning and collaborative time, you would lose from something else (Focus group 1).

Although RTI addresses the needs of all students, school teams have expressed difficulty in addressing the needs of gifted students. Enrichment is another area where school and student services practices are not aligned:

I think of the enrichment end as well, and the reason I bring it up is that it doesn't get mentioned very often other than...reports where we have to say what we have been doing on the enrichment end. We do gravitate naturally to students who need the extra support and who are struggling rather than those who are over achieving (Focus group 1).

Since Response to Intervention is rooted in professional learning communities focused on four questions: What do we want all students to learn? How will we know when they've learned it? How will we respond when they have not learned? And, how will we respond when they have already learned? As educators, we need to concern ourselves with providing enrichment interventions and evidence-based practices for those students who are capable of meeting the learning outcomes (Dufour, Eaker & Dufour, 2005).

Research Question 3

Research Question Three asked: What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school based teams? Implementation of Response to Intervention has been proven successful when principals have extensive knowledge of RTI, are committed to prevention-anchored practices and assure that evidence-based practices are implemented (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). In their roles as instructional leaders and distributing leadership throughout their staff, administrators can align the vision and provide a common language and organizational framework that is necessary in guiding RTI reform (Whitten et al., 2009). The initial coding for analyzing responses to Question 3 was formulated from the literature review. Participant responses were then categorized according to the themes: a) RTI knowledge and skills, b) instructional leadership, c) distributed leadership.

The theme of RTI knowledge and skills includes the descriptors of a common vision and language, familiarity with the components of RTI, and using skills to apply their knowledge and understanding of RTI (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Two comments from participants identified these aspects as key to the administrator's role:

Like the classroom profiles, divisionally, do we know what our priorities are?
I'm wondering do we really understand where our kids are in terms of literacy at the middle school and senior level? Do we know? (Focus group 2).

Administrators need to be part of the instructional, or PD. They have to have the understanding of restitution or various forms of supports in order to model that and follow through (Focus group 3).

Without being able to articulate a vision or identify goals, school divisions will be unclear with respect to its priorities. Moreover, if administrators are unable to role model the essential skills and knowledge relevant to RTI, its implementation will be inconsistent and ineffective (Shores & Chester, 2009).

Participant comments for Question 3 were categorized into instructional leadership if they described administrator's actions promoting a common vision towards inclusion and high levels of student achievement (Thomson, Brown, Jones, et al., 2003).

In terms of administrators, I don't want to sound too critical because I know they are on board and already trying and they are encouraging us to do it, but they really do have to provide a role model and really demonstrate how it happens (Focus group 3).

And just the fact that she [the administrator] sets out her schedule so if people need an extra set of hands for available time, administrators can actually be out there...they realize what teacher's are going through and getting to know those students because those students are everybody's students (Focus group 1).

As administrators we have to make sure that teachers are comfortable with [RTI] because as soon as they feel something new is being introduced, there is a little bit of anxiety that sets in and that [RTI] is just a formal term for something they have been doing for a long time and they already do have the skills (Focus group 1).

Administrators who are confident in their abilities to lead change and assist teachers in the process, will be more successful in reforming their schools (Fullan, 1994).

Participant comments for Question 3 were categorized as distributed leadership if they described the administrator's role as one of a 'leader of leaders' in their ability to foster the abilities of teachers in leading innovation and participating in collective decision-making (Chrispeels, 2004). Responses that demonstrated such an understanding are as follows:

They're in charge of the system in their building or in their Division for RTI so what are the needs, what are the biggest needs now, and how are we going to address them? (Focus group 2)

One of the things we're going to change in our model for next year is that for the month of September rather than jump in with two feet and already be assigned to classrooms and have our resource and guidance schedules created, they won't be

created until after our reviews... We [will] have each of our resource teachers spending time in every single classroom in the school to get an idea what the EAs are doing, the teachers are doing [before we assign resources and supports] (Focus group 1).

[In response to the Student Services Administrator who enabled clinical staff to participate in the class review process with their school assignments]... what is really great is the release for the clinicians that also came to be part of those meetings because they are so knowledgeable and having their expertise around the building they are not only giving ideas to case managers, but for other students as well (Focus group 1).

[Administrators] can set up if we are co-teaching or PLC groups where teachers can help each other and share strategies that are effective whether it's with specific students or certain behaviors that present themselves. It is really to facilitate a little bit of collaboration (Focus group 3).

For student services teams, their leadership role in RTI is important as well in that collaboration, communication and problem-solving skills are foundational to their work with classroom teachers in support of inclusive practices (Bender & Shores, 2007; Howell et al., 2008; Whitten et al., 2009). With the implementation of RTI, resource and classroom teachers are teaming and fewer students are receiving services outside the classroom and away from their peers. Collaboration is paramount:

I think teachers are feeling like they are part of the team, and I think that at the elementary level, teachers are realizing that the resource teachers are not coming in and taking the child out and fixing the child and then the child comes back—it is important that the child be in the classroom to get what is going on with everybody (Focus group 1).

I think student services is finding what those students needs are inside the classroom and...communicating that with the classroom teacher and how they can be of service to them. If there is a certain area identified, they can collaborate saying, 'I can bring this to the classroom' (Focus group 3).

I think the fact that every school has Educational Support Services personnel assigned to schools for a certain amount of time per cycle...so that they can help us with our plans and talk about what we can do for the students (Focus group 1).

[The role of student services in our school] has been to itemize the varying things we do to respond to interventions, the intensive, the regular and the targeted.

Then we simply went through and itemized what we're doing well? What do we need some work on and what do we definitely need work on...As a student services team we look at what is the crucial piece right now. Part of it was consultation time (Focus group 3)

There are also perceptions of a lack in clarity in the role of the resource teacher as the older consultative-collaborative model morphs into one that aligns with the RTI framework:

I'm not sure the role of the resource teacher, at some levels, is as clearly defined or understood (Focus group 3).

I think some roles are evolving because now you see student services to be more co-teaching than probably it has in the past. I think that it's a work in progress (Focus group 1).

The RTI framework, with an emphasis on the resource and classroom teachers working together to strengthen Tier 1 instruction and interventions, is perceived to be responsive rather than prescribed. One participant stated:

I think this is sort of what plays into the classroom composition so there needs to be a huge amount of flexibility with student services to meet the needs no matter where they are. It doesn't necessarily have to be equal amongst classrooms but to address the needs of individuals (Focus group 2).

Based on the data reviewed for this research question, the presentation was organized into roles of administrators and then student services teams. Focus group participants described the role of administrators as leading the way in terms of the organizational framework and allocation of supports and resources in their building. Their role was viewed as one of an instructional leader as well, having the skills necessary to role model good teaching practices. In addition, they orchestrated opportunities for collaboration and teaming to facilitate PLCs, co-teaching and problem-solving. These participants' descriptions of the administrators' role aligned with the practices of professional learning communities as reported in the literature. Not specifically mentioned by participants but important to the administrator's role in

implementing RTI was the focus on a vision and common language. It is virtually impossible to align RTI practices with the division or within the schools unless all staff are able to visualize what they are working towards, and are using a common language to articulate it.

Research Question 3, Probe 1

Probe 1 of Research Question 3 asked: What factors and circumstances support or impede their ability to carry out these roles? Upon initial reading of the focus group conversations, themes were identified and then categorized by theme according to two groups, support or impede. A total of twenty-two conversation segments were analyzed. Eight of these segments spoke to the factors and circumstances supporting professionals' abilities to carry out their roles, and fourteen addressed the factors and circumstances impeding their ability to carry out their roles in implementing RTI.

Having a solid knowledge base of RTI principles and concepts assists resource teachers and administrators in making connections to existing committee work and their own schools. One such example was cited by a focus group participant: "Our Literacy Committee with a really strong PLC has decided they want to focus on RTI. So I would say that this year the language is used a lot" (Focus group 1). Similarly, another participant commented:

We have already started on this road towards the collaboration and the teaming with our PLC's but maybe this (RTI) sort of provides more of a focus or we're trying to look at providing more consistency across the division so that all schools are working towards these things (Focus group 3).

Participants also viewed trust as an important foundation to implementing new ideas. Without trust, the relationships required for collaboration, problem-solving and successful teaching and learning would not occur (Erkens, 2008; Viadero, 1995):

Developing that trust among staff because I've certainly seen at school this year there's a willingness to work together to co-teach where teachers are not in a situation of mistrust, where they aren't worried if what they are going to do is going to be helpful (Focus group 1).

Time is often one impediment to new initiatives. Several participants appreciated the creative time-tabling by administrators to facilitate staff collaboration and problem-solving:

One of the roles of the administrator is [developing] our timetable. We may not be happy that we give up preps for our meeting time but they are available to us and we do use the time to meet. We have a common prep time and it's nice to meet with other teachers and to discuss the common assessments (Focus group 3).

We did start a speed dating kind of consultation where all the EAs a...43 plus [teaching] staff talking and literally only has a couple of minutes but everybody was in the library and I think it worked really well. People were circulating talking about their kids (Focus group 3).

I would say there is more time being created for teachers to meet. I mean that's been something I think schools are working on. Trying to find more time for teams to meet and problem solve together and look at a common criteria for kids learning (Focus group 3).

Another contributing factor to whether administrators or student services teams have the ability to carry out their roles, is routine. New skills and knowledge develop automatically when they are revisited often and engrained in practice. This is evident in the following comments:

It's also keeping those [class] reviews alive. Like we did the reviews, then do them again in January, but then what are we doing to do until then and even after that to make sure there is fluidity with them. ...Have those ongoing discussions so they're not just a snapshot and we move on. We need to commit to this (Focus group 1).

Sustaining educational reform is difficult especially if the obstacles to implementation appear to outweigh the supports (Frey & Fisher, 2004; Fullan, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The focus group participants cite several reasons for administrators and student services teams not being able to fulfill their roles with regard to RTI implementation. Lack of skills and knowledge is cited as one reason:

Administrators need to be part of the instructional, or the P.D. And I'll use the example of co-teaching and there couldn't be an administrator at the session because they were made to go to the Workplace Health and Safety so as a division; we need to align ourselves (Focus group 3).

One of the difficulties we have in putting in assistance for kids, like you may call it scaffolding from administrators and student services is that we don't have enough people who are really knowledgeable in certain subject areas. Like science is a problem (Focus group 3).

Last summer there was a workshop that they could go to for restitution and in our school, administrators are busy and being pulled every way. One went in the morning and one went in the afternoon. So how can you get a complete picture? (Focus group 3).

I think there is a lot of variability among administrators in what they know about RTI (Focus group 2).

In addition, focus group participants indicated a significant contrast between the current role of resource teachers and their ideal role in relation to the RTI framework:

Resource teachers have really become managers or crisis intervention people. There are very few resource teachers who really—almost has some luxury to be able to sit and work with students. Individually that needs support academically it ends up being that they are doing lots of other things (Focus group 2).

I'm not sure that the role of the resource teacher, at some levels, is as clearly defined or understood and it could be because maybe the resource teachers there haven't had the same amount of experience or there's been a lot of movement from school to school, so how do you establish something in your building? (Focus group 3).

A lot of resource teachers at middle years are also classroom teachers...I don't think you can do resource for two periods and then go and teach science and then come back and be a resource teacher (Focus group 3).

[After coming out of having done six class reviews] and saying, how am I going to go back and do what I said I would do and make sure that I do it? I think that as resource people we feel we're always sitting in meetings and we aren't doing what we want to be doing (Focus group 1).

Two focus group participants view lack of time as a major obstacle to fulfilling roles of administrators and student services teams:

Release time. Support time for teachers to meet because if you don't get the release time, or I use at-risk money. High schools don't get that. Some of the other schools don't get that but that's how I get my teachers to meet so that's been very supportive of our cause (Focus group 1).

The comment above also addresses the perceived disparity among schools in being able to utilize special funds to create more opportunities for meeting time. Another participant stated:

[We need more] time to accomplish the tasks of the role. Because the role won't change—the duties are expanding. The counselor's role is becoming the counselor with a little bit more resource pieces. It doesn't mean that my counseling role is any less. It just means that there are other things that need to be taken care of in a timely matter so that role is expanding (Focus group 3).

The diminished ability to carry out their roles in student services has been articulated by the following focus group participants:

Sometimes in our situation I wonder if it would be beneficial to have an additional resource teacher because our resource teachers seem very over loaded and just managing what they need to (Focus group 1).

I think the role of RTI should be focused on the kid, not on regulations [referring to staffing formulas] (3).

We need to double the amount of student services (Focus group 3).

One participant who spoke to the very heart of Response to Intervention, being able to respond to student needs, commented on the impact of misguided leadership:

I think that some school administrators mandate some things for the student services support that maybe makes it difficult to be as responsive as we want to be in terms of ‘it has to look this way’, very procedural rather than very responsive. You have to be able to look at situations in different ways and not always have one answer on how it should be done (Focus group 3).

Research Question Three, Probe 1 presented focus group findings related to the factors and circumstances that support or impede the ability of administrators and student services teams in carrying out their roles. Participants expressed that positive relationships, trust, collaboration and teaming, class reviews, a sustainable implementation plan, and providing time for all the above to support and advance the establishment of RTI practices. Contrastingly, focus group participants identified impediments to their ability to carry out their roles. The difference between existing and expected roles of resource teachers, the knowledge level of administrators, scheduling issues, time and discrepancies among schools were cited as the reasons.

The research findings concerning Research Question Three, Probe 1 provide a framework for understanding how the roles of administrators and student services

personnel need to change from current practices in order to make RTI a reality.

Therefore, Research Question Three, Probe 4 asked: Do student services and administrator roles need to change from current practices to make RTI a reality? If so, how? If not, why not? Please elaborate.

Fourteen segments of participant comments were analyzed for this question. After the initial reading, comments were grouped according to the roles: student services school based teams, school administrators, divisional leadership, classroom teachers and Educational Support Services.

In terms of student services team roles needing to change, one participant commented: “I would expect that student services are much more aligned to RTI and I would expect more from student services myself. I think they should be on top of that and be well versed in that” (Focus group 3). Another participant, obviously from student services, commented on their role needing to change in several ways: “We definitely need work on...consultation time. Consultation and profiling (class reviews) and all those kinds of things” (Focus group 3). An administrator from Focus group 1 believes that “some of the roles are evolving because now you see student services to be more co-teaching than probably it has in the past. I think it’s a work in progress”. Furthermore, a participant described how:

There needs to be a huge amount of flexibility within student services to meet needs no matter where they are. It doesn’t necessarily have to be equal among classrooms but to address the needs of individuals (Focus group 2).

Through the focus group discussions there is clearly a shift in roles for student services towards maintaining students in the classroom rather than pulling them out and placing them in segregated settings:

I think classroom teachers are feeling like they are part of the team...they are realizing that the resource teachers are not coming in and taking the child out and fixing the child and then the child comes back. It is important for the child to be in the classroom to get what is going on with everybody (Focus group 1).

With RTI Student Services teams are more focused on what the students' needs are in the classroom "and finding a way of communicating that with the classroom teacher. If there is a certain area identified, they can collaborate" and identify what they can bring to the classroom (Focus group 1).

The teaming between Educational Support Services clinicians and schools has become more embedded in school practices. One comment spoke to the value of team meetings where "they can help us with our plans...and talk about what we can do for students" (Focus group 1). Their expertise extends beyond the students assigned to them but applies to other students as well (Focus group 1).

In terms of administrators, "they have to provide professional development opportunities to teachers to increase their comfort level and skills regarding RTI" (Focus group 1). They also need to enable resource teachers to identify areas of need so that they can organize co-teaching opportunities or PLCs "where teachers can help each other and share strategies" (Focus group 1). This distribution of leadership can be extended to all staff by having them participate in the allocation of resources and supports. One administrator explained her/his transparency in allocating co-teaching and student

services time. After completing the class review process with all staff, together they identified the students and classrooms requiring targeted supports. The schedule for resource and guidance was created afterwards. There was also an opportunity for frequent review periods in case student and classroom needs changed and supports need to shift to reflect these changes. This example of distributed leadership is contrary to the more authoritative style where collaboration, problem-solving and decision-making are exercised by the administration alone. However, distributed leadership is a function of the RTI framework.

Instructional leadership is viewed as an important administrative role as well. They have to be role models “and really demonstrate how it happens” (Focus group 3). A similar view was stated by an administrator in Focus group 1 adding, “They realize what the teachers are going through and getting to know those students because those students are everybody’s students”.

Another role of the administrator is to “make sure that everybody has what [s/he] need[s]” (Focus group 2). The administrator “helps to prioritize the collective needs and to help problem-solve how they are going to be addressed” (Focus group 2).

Divisionally, one participant from Focus group 2 commented on the importance of establishing priorities:

When we talk about something like literacy, increasingly I’m wondering do we really understand where are kids are in terms of literacy at the middle school and senior level. Do we know? Are we in crisis there also? Are we giving it the priority that we should? We may not?

Participants expressed that the role of administrators includes fostering and supporting a culture of distributed leadership.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked: What factors promote or impede the implementation of RTI? A review of the literature in Chapter 2 identified several themes relating to the factors promoting or impeding the implementation of Response to Intervention. Leadership at all levels is crucial factor and is “second only to effects of the quality of the curriculum and teachers’ instruction” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 2). In their leadership role, administrators create the climate for inclusive practices and with a competent skills and knowledge base, foster the abilities of teachers to lead Response to Intervention educational reform through collaboration and problem-solving (Chrispeels, 2004; Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, 2002; Frey & Fisher, 2004).

Research Question 4, Probe 1

Probe 1 in Research Question 4 asked: What factors impact upon your level of engagement in RTI? Engagement at the school level? Engagement at the Division Level. Please elaborate. Eight comment segments were analyzed from the three focus groups and then analyzed according to the following themes found in the literature: knowledge, leadership and collaboration and problem-solving. Comments were further analyzed according to participants’ levels of engagement, at the school and at the Division levels.

The two participants who commented on their knowledge of RTI addressed a willingness to increase their skills and knowledge competency in this area. One administrator stated:

I think of RTI, for myself, the same as a lot of other things, the more practice someone has of it, the more they implement it, the more they use it, the more knowledgeable they are and the more involved they become at the Division level. If I'm very proficient at something I'm very happy to share it at the Divisional level with my colleagues. But if I'm feeling that I'm really in the learning stages, then I'm not as engaged or liable to volunteer at the Divisional level as I feel there are probably others much more suited to helping than I am (Focus group 1).

Perceptions of competency correlate positively with the level of engagement at the school and division levels. The challenge for administration and division leaders is to identify the skills and knowledge of their staff in order to provide the supports, training and structures necessary to develop competencies.

Even though classroom teachers and school based student services teams share responsibility for student learning, it is perceived that student services are the experts in Response to Intervention. One focus group participant stated,

And maybe I'm being unfair to student services. I know they have a lot to do very often, but I would like them to have time to become experts at it and then make presentations and then kind of help the rest of us to make us not spend as much time on it to develop our skills (Focus group 3).

This was supported by the subsequent comment, "We would like that, too". This speaks to other conversations mentioned previously in Chapter Four, that Student Services has received professional development in RTI that has not been made available to classroom teachers. This perception could also be based on historical patterns where student

services, primarily resource and special education teachers, have been responsible for implementing new initiatives. For example, in the 1990's resource teachers were trained in the *Success for all learners* document (Manitoba Education and Training, 1996). Following the training, they were expected to provide workshops to classroom teachers, especially in the area of differentiated instruction (DI). Unfortunately, what resulted was that the strategies did not transfer into classroom practices. If the expectation of classroom teachers is that RTI professional development will be provided by student services, there may not be the shared responsibility for all students. It is a joint responsibility for acquiring knowledge and teaching skills to reach and teach all learners. Student services teams and classroom teachers may acquire most of the skills they need for successful RTI implementation through existing professional learning communities (Braden et al., 2005; White & Elliott, 2005; Little & Houston, 2005).

Similar to the responses for Research Question 3, the factors and circumstances that support or impede the ability of student services teams and administrators to carry out their roles, focus group participants identified transparency as impacting upon their level of engagement both at the school and division levels. Since fair does not always mean equal, staff appreciate understanding and participating in the allocation of resources and supports. One administrator stated:

At our school level, we hope to show on our P.D. day now that we've done a class review on each class and now we want to share with staff that transparency piece about the needs in each of the rooms because even the resource teachers are saying, "Could you believe so and so saying that her class had that many needs when so and so across the hall has so much more". But to that teacher we have to

recognize that what she feels are her needs. Our hope is that by sharing a school review of all our classrooms that we can come to the point where we collaborate and say, “You know what? I think I can give up my resource time for this amount...as I look at the needs of those across the school” (Focus group 1).

This desire for transparency is expressed by another administrator, but divisionally:

I think there is also a discussion that happens when you look at the divisional resources being spread around and I think of our clinicians and how they become involved in RTI. We need to have a sense of fairness in terms of their input in all of our schools, but some school have more needs than other schools and I don’t know if there is transparency or if there is really reality being looked at in that (Focus group 1).

Transparency in allocating resources and supports not only promotes understanding and fairness, but it is an indication that priorities have or have not been established and RTI initiatives are or are not being supported and aligned throughout the division. Having “a strong, consistent political and system leadership with a small number of clear goals” are a few of the “fundamental elements needed for whole system-level change” (Levin, 2011).

For some participants, there is a perception that the ability to access supports and resources can affect levels of participation in RTI at both the school and division levels. One participant cited changes “to the staffing formula” as it correlates to changing demographics in certain schools (Focus group 3). Another participant from Focus group 3 viewed commitment from the division level one factor in providing adequate resources and supports to a divisional initiative:

In the Division Restitution Committee, we do a lot of work and there are some of the [Educational Support Services Administrators] working with us and they are doing a lot of work for the Committee to facilitate –find money, finding resources...They are on board and they want to help as much as they can. They're faced with the same issues, lack of money, lack of resources, lack of time.

One administrator described discrepancies among schools in terms of allocation of supports and resources as impacting upon one's engagement in RTI practices:

I think about the schools that I have been at where there have been a lot of supports and resources in place and yet I go to another school and you can have one student who is really struggling and if you don't have supports for that student you know that's not a successful situation. You have to think about the schools that already have ideas in place and for these students that really makes it more conducive to model RTI well to be successful.

Factors related to transparency, allocation of resources and supports, and equality among schools were cited as contributing to participants' perceptions of their abilities to implement RTI. Two administrators cited the class review (Brownlie, 2006), as a process for addressing these factors and enhancing RTI implementation. One administrator stated:

I actually have high hopes for the class review process because I think that once we have a better understanding of each of our individual classes, I'm hoping that at the ESS level or at the Clinician level, they are going to use those to kind of dictate where they are going to spread out those resources. And I think I've seen

a little bit of that this year with the Behavior Team and how they didn't assign themselves to schools in September. They waited until the end of September to collect data on observations before they started fitting themselves into schools. Furthermore, the class review process was cited as having greater flexibility in being able to respond to changing demographics and student needs (Focus group 1). It has also assisted school teams in "identifying needs that [they] didn't know were even there before" (Focus group 1). Learning about the needs through the class review process has made them improve their responsiveness.

Leadership continues to influence perceptions about the factors that impact upon the level of engagement in RTI at both the school and division levels. The knowledge and support given by administrators, reflected in their transparency regarding allocation of resources and supports, as well as the culture they build around supporting all students, is critical in staff engagement in RTI. According to Levin (2004), "behavior is rooted in social settings, which means that the primary determinants of professional behavior are related to what colleagues and superiors do and value" (p. 309). The beliefs and actions of administrators towards Response to Intervention will continue to influence the level of engagement by staff in the division involved in this study.

Research Question 4, Probe 2

Probe 2 in Research Question 4 asked: has professional development played a role in your understanding of RTI? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? A total of 16 conversation segments were analyzed for this question. After an initial reading they were categorized according to similar themes.

One participant stated that reading about RTI in a variety of settings has provided rich professional development:

My PD has been through university courses more so than what we've done as a I've sat on the Divisional Committee in the past but I'm quite interested in it because of its positive effect of what it's done for inclusion. So I've done a lot of reading...there is so much out there on RTI right now (Focus group 1).

The theme of 'reading about RTI' as a means of developing professionally was mentioned by seven other participants. Two of these participants referred to book studies initiated by resource teachers, one referenced a book study organized by student teachers assigned to their school (Focus group 2), and three other comments mentioned that classroom teachers would benefit from participating in a book study about RTI (Focus group 2). One focus group participant viewed staff choice in selecting their reading materials as valuable to the learning process as well (Focus group 2). It has been stated previously in this study that learning is a social activity. Book studies may be a valuable way to facilitate professional learning. According to Levin (2010), "people can come to feel justified in carrying out actions that they would never have considered under other circumstances; their personal norms are adjusted to fit group norms" (p. 309). Through book studies, teachers and administrators discuss RTI concepts, reflect upon their practices, and reconstruct their teaching and learning practices.

The theme of collaborative problem-solving was supported by four participants in this study. One administrator stated: "I am not as concerned with the definition of RTI or the term, as the skills that are developed through conversations or listening to people who

have other training and experience”. There is evidence that some participants view their professional learning communities as providing valuable professional development:

If we consider PLCs as part of PD ...we have been working on assessment.

There is a small group of us working on assessment and we've been working on it for two years now and it's really hard to keep momentum [without the time and continuity]. Every once in awhile the PD gets pulled away because of some administrivia” (Focus group 3).

A second participant from Focus group 3 confirmed that “it would be nice to have extra time to work on common assessments” for her/his professional development. An administrator expressed that the most growth with the RTI model “has come simply from problem solving situations within our schools. Like recognizing that students' needs aren't being met and then meeting with people to figure out how to best meet them”.

The remaining three comments addressed participants feeling that professional development has provided them with the knowledge and skills needed to implement RTI, but lack of time and resources prevent them from making it a reality: “As teachers we're getting together and saying, ‘yes, this is what we need to do’, but it doesn't get done because of time” (Focus group 3). The perception of knowing what to do, but not having sufficient time is supported by two other focus group participants:

I don't think it's PD we need as much as support. 90% of us know what we need to do. We just can't do it. I can't plan a social studies lesson for eight different levels because that takes about two hours and I have six classes to teach every day. I don't even have the planning time to do it. We all know what we need to do. It's just not the PD piece (Focus group 3).

A third participant mentioned, “What you’re talking about, we’ve already had the opportunity [to learn] at our school, but now we need the time to put those into place” (Focus group 2). Although it is unclear whether these respondents require time to work collaboratively or independently on applying their knowledge, if they have the knowledge of RTI as they claim they do, their time requirements would include conversations and collaboration with their peers. This is the essence that creates and sustains effective teaching and learning in schools (Glickman, 2003).

In addition to time, there is an issue of whether teachers understand how to differentiate instruction. Is it reasonable to spend two hours designing one social studies lesson? What is an effective teaching practice for engaging and teaching students ranging eight years in skills and abilities? These challenges may be addressed through book studies and the collaboration and problem-solving processes of PLCs, as noted by participants responding to this research question.

Research Question 4, Probe 3

Many responses to Probe 3 in Research Question 4 supported the comments about professional development in Probe 2. Research Question 4, Probe 4 asked: Describe any professional development required to build knowledge, skills and understanding about RTI. Ten conversation segments were analyzed and then sorted according to emerging themes. Three participant responses addressed unity and coherence between the division and schools, and among schools. One participant spoke to making it a division priority:

I think the first day of school would have been an excellent idea to bring everyone together, including the classroom teacher and spend a whole day on [RTI]...I think that would have been a lot better long term...to have all the

teachers, all the resource teachers, all the administrators in the same room (Focus group 2).

Similarly, another participant felt that “breaking into groups and school teams... provide everyone with the same definitions” would create a common vision and language (Focus group 2). Another participant from Focus group 2 described how it is important to have continuity from school to school and one way to achieve this is through PD at staff and pod meetings (middle school framework for team/grade level meetings), but there has to be someone who knows what s/he is talking about. This participant also commented on how the PD needs “to start with teachers and then work their way back” to include support staff such as resource teachers and counselors.

The theme of collaboration featured prominently in identifying professional development to enhance knowledge and skills. It was stated directly in three of the ten comments and referred to indirectly through mention of Pod meetings (Focus group 2), more trained staff on school teams (Focus group 3), and sharing with colleagues (Focus group 1). At the school level, one participant from Focus group 2 explained that PD in the form of a PD day or book study are useful only to a point:

What needs to be is that school teams have an opportunity and the time to sit and talk and plan and decide what it is their school’s greatest needs are and what they need to do about it. [They need] time to work through it.

Similarly, one participant addresses what professional learning should look like: “ So maybe our PD time has to look different so it becomes collaborative team working time—would that be helpful rather than having days where you all go and meet in someone’s gym?” (Focus group 3).

The collaboration desired within schools was also wanted between schools. This was evident in the following comment:

If people even across the schools could work together and develop some things and share...I think there are some resources that could be purchased...Some schools it's hard to get resources. Elementary schools are teaming to get resources and then you take a step into middle schools and all those resources are still back at the elementary school (Focus group 3).

Collaboration can occur between classroom teachers as they develop and build a library of strategies (Focus group 1). Collaborating with fellow colleagues, between schools and throughout the division taps into the collective wisdom and builds consensus around shared purpose, evidence-based practices, and priorities (Daly, 2009; Dufour, 2008).

In addition to collaboration, professional development on responsiveness was suggested to be beneficial: "I think that's what needs to be done across all levels. Let's start measuring it to see if it's all working" (Focus group 2). How do teachers, their learning communities and schools respond when students fail to learn? What does responsiveness look like? Teachers and schools may have general knowledge in this area, but whether it's reflected in their actions is evident in this participant's response:

[We need] more PD on responsiveness. We've been talking about reading and you wouldn't believe some of those math scores that have been coming out with...You think they can't read? They can't do math either. I mean, like big gaps between where they should be and where they actually are and it is pretty profound (Focus group 2).

The final theme emerging from the analysis of comment segments on this probing question addresses resources. Two participants from Focus group 3 stated that they don't need professional development per se; however, "It's not tangible resources. It's human beings—human resources". The second participant commented: "We need some trained people---it's not that we need more EAs. It means that we need more trained professional support in both academic and behavioral kinds of things". Although the first comment does not describe the human resources needed to support schools, the second comment is very specific about the level of support needed to make Response to Intervention a functional framework. One can infer that that the additional 'trained professional support' refers to resource teachers and counselors, otherwise the participant would have used the word 'teacher'. Traditional models place the resource teacher and counselor in the expert role, rather than in an equal leadership role among peers. With this role lies the expectation that the expert will fix the student, absolving the classroom teacher of any responsibility in finding a solution. Perhaps additional professional support staff are needed, but this will benefit students only if student services teams and classroom teachers collaborate to facilitate inclusion (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004; Fisher et al. 2000).

Four themes were addressed in response to this research question asking research participants to describe any professional development required to build skills, knowledge and understanding of RTI: unity and coherence, collaboration, responsiveness, and additional resources. In their responses it was evident that more unity and coherence about RTI was needed from school to school as well as from the division's leadership. This aligns with the literature review in Chapter 2 that emphasizes the importance of

establishing a common vision and language for any new initiative or educational reform. Collaboration, identified as the second theme, was viewed as a valuable form of professional development. Finding collaborative opportunities through existing PLCs or team meetings would provide participants with the time they require to problem-solve and to design common assessments. The third theme that emerged from the analysis was responsiveness. Since effective teaching and learning practices are predicated on the teacher and school's ability to be responsive to student needs, professional development in this area would be beneficial. Although teachers are familiar with this concept, according to participants' responses they require time and supports to apply these skills to their classroom practices. Lastly, it is noted that request for additional resources in the form of professional staff was identified as being more important than professional development. Although traditional forms of professional development include workshops and conferences, there is much evidence from research supporting that they alone will not sustain educational reform. Professional learning activities that are based on teachers' needs and that occur on an ongoing basis through collaborative models, such as those found in RTI, provide better opportunities for teachers to incorporate new ideas into their teaching (Little & Houston, 2003).

Research Question 4, Probe 4

Research Question 4, Probe 4 asked: What tier requires the most professional development, resources and financial supports? Explain what these resources and supports would look like. Does this correspond with the greatest needs? Please elaborate and provide examples. In total, 20 comment segments were analyzed; 30% of this total was from Focus group 1, 25% from Focus group 2, and 45% from Focus group 3. Table

5.1 summarizes the information regarding the supports required at each tier according to the perceptions of focus group participants.

Table 4.4: Summary of supports required at each tier

Tiers needing most supports	PD	Resources	Financial Resources	Description of resources and supports	Focus Group
1	√			If classroom teachers have a strong sense of differentiated instruction they are going to meet the needs of the students in a fast and broad way	1
1	√			It has to start at the university by providing the skills and some framework to student teachers who are excited about teaching	1
1	√			The more comfortable teachers feel with differentiated instruction or RTI the more liable they are to step outside their comfort zone and try new things. The PD could be opportunities to talk with people they feel comfortable with, or through a formal PLC or an informal interaction. They need to try what works and if it doesn't to try something else.	1
1	√			Classroom teachers know the kids the best and have the chance to find the most effective strategies because it's not some person parachuting in and trying to work the situation	1
1	√			Someone who is teaching and is very, very skilled is going to keep the lid on things.	1
1	√			If teachers were more trained and skilled at the lower level [Tier 1] then they would not require higher level interventions	1
All				Transcends all levels whether it involves reading, math, anxiety or depression	2
All	√		√	Money of PD for teachers: assessment, data, measurement. For high schools, focus on support for students with depression or who are suicidal	2
1,2	√	√	√	Classroom teachers require the most PD because they are on the front lines; most financial supports need to go to Tier 2 because additional supports are needed if the classroom teacher cannot respond effectively to meet the students' needs	2

1	√	√		Focus on prevention at Tier 1. If you can prevent an anxious person from becoming an anxiety disorder or prevent a person struggling with reading in grade 12 at grade 4	2
2, 3		√		Specialized support, which is what people find overwhelming.	2
1		√		Age appropriate materials	3
All					3
1		√		Human resources	3
All		√		Resources to accommodate students who will be required to stay in school until age 18 because of the recent legislation	3
3		√		Intensive supports for struggling students required to be in school until age 18	3
3		√	√	Students involved in the justice system will require intensive supports since many have been out of school for a number of years. Some of them don't even have a middle school education	3
All		√		Increase in EAL has tripled in the last year. Try to find resources and time to meet their needs is difficult	3
All	√			Require knowledge on what the research says to address a variety of needs: anxiety, depression, behavior, social-emotional, multi-handicapped	3
3	√	√		If a student has reached Tier 3 it's because their needs haven't been met at Tiers 1 and 2. In order to keep students in school until age 18, programs and the concept of the school's role in terms of educating students prior to high school needs to change.	3

The majority of research participants felt that Tier 1 had the greatest level of needs. Six respondents felt that all tiers were equally in need of supports and resources. In general, two participants felt that Tier 2 and four felt that Tier 3 had fewer needs in relation to Tier 1. Since Tier 1 supports all students, it stands to reason that it has the greatest level of need. In order to support all students within the regular classroom, teachers and support personnel including student services teams have to be highly skilled

and adept at providing high quality instruction and interventions in line with inclusive and evidence-based practices (Bender & Shores, 2007; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al. 2009).

Correspondingly, Tier 1 was identified by eight participants as requiring the most professional development. Participants noted that: “If classroom teachers [had] a strong sense of differentiated instruction they [were] going to meet the needs of the students in a vast and broad way” (Focus group 1). One participant also articulated, “If more teachers were skilled at the lower level [Tier 1] then [students] would not require higher level interventions” (Focus group 1). There was a general consensus, similar to the research, that if teachers were to respond effectively to student needs in Tier 1, they would not require the supports and resources of Tier 2 and possible Tier 3 supports (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010).

Research participants noted other areas of professional development required at Tier 1. Teachers need “opportunities to talk with people they feel comfortable with or through a formal PLC or an informal interaction” (Focus group 1). Ongoing discussions and PD need to be provided in the areas of assessment, data collection, and responding to students’ academic, social and emotional needs (Focus group 2). Prevention was a clear, emerging theme in Tier 1 that participants felt value in supporting each other through ongoing professional development.

Tier 3 was identified as another tier requiring ongoing support in terms of professional development, but by only one participant. The rationale for providing PD at Tier 2 stated by one participant: “If a student has reached Tier 3 it’s because their needs haven’t been met at Tiers 1 and 2. In order to keep students in school until age 18,

programs and the concept of the school's role in terms of education students prior to high school needs to change" (Focus group 3). Teachers require professional development to meet the needs of students who have not been successful in the contexts of regular Tier 1, senior years programming.

When asked which tier requires the greatest resources, four participants responded to Tier 1, two to Tier 2, four to Tier 3, and two to all tiers. The rationale for providing the most resources at Tier 1 was related to prevention and how all students, whether EAL, or presenting with cognitive, social-emotional difficulties, must have most of these needs met within the regular classroom first and foremost. The resources required at Tier 1 are described as human resources (Focus group 3), age appropriate materials (Focus group 3), accommodations for students required to stay in school until age 18 or returning to school from the Justice System (Focus group 3), and resources for EAL students (Focus group 3). Tier 2 resources are described as supports in addition to teacher resources (Focus group 2) and specialized support (Focus group 2). Whereas Tier 3 resources are described as specialized support (Focus group 2), supports for struggling students required to be in school until age 18 and those student involved in Youth Justice (Focus group 3).

Only three participants commented on financial resources. One participant identified the financial resources required to provide additional professional development to teachers working with students at all three tiers. Another participant commented on the most financial supports needing to be allocated to Tier 2 because "additional supports are needed if the classroom teacher cannot respond effectively to meet the students' needs" (Focus group 2). The third respondent noted that senior years students involved

in the justice system require intensive financial supports because a number of them have not been in school since middle years (Focus group 3).

Generally speaking, the perceptions of participants related that if Tier 1 is strengthened by improving classroom instruction for students with diverse learning needs, then supports and resources at Tiers 2 and 3 would be minimal in both the short and long term. This is supported by RTI research presented in the literature review. Fewer students will be identified as learning disabled or with behavioral difficulties when their learning environments are structured around early intervention and assessment practices that are closely linked to instruction (Bender & Shores, 2007). Jointly, when professional development and supports/resources are prioritized at Tier 1, all students will benefit and the need for Tier 2 and 3 supports will become diminished.

In terms of which tiers required the most professional development, resources and financial supports, ten participants reached consensus that Tier 1 required the most, and two participants supported the same at Tier 2 and four at Tier 3. Resources in general were perceived to be equally needed at all tiers. Only three participants commented on tiers requiring financial supports. One felt they were needed at all tiers, one felt they were needed at Tiers 1 and 2, while the third participant felt they were required at Tier 3 only. In their estimation the financial supports were required to provide ongoing professional development for teachers (Focus group 2), or Tier 2 because “additional supports are needed if the classroom teacher cannot respond effectively to meet the students’ needs” (Focus group 2), or for providing intensive supports to students involved in youth justice who have been out of school for a number of years” (Focus group 2). In general, if professional development, supports, resources

and financial supports were provided at Tier 1, participants felt strongly it would reduce the need for supports and resources at Tiers 2 and 3. This is reflected in the literature review in Chapter 2 which supports high quality instruction and progress monitoring as a means of addressing learning difficulties before they require targeted and intensive supports (Bender & Shores, 2007).

Consensus, Supported and Individual Themes

In addition to the themes identified in the literature, several themes emerged during the analysis of focus group transcripts and subsequent queries using 9Vivo Software (Table 4.5). These emerging themes were further analyzed in terms of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) consensus, supported and individual themes. The emerging themes requiring further exploration included: behavior, class review/profiles, communication, co-teaching, differentiated instruction, early years, engagement, enrichment, high school/senior years, middle years, prevention, professional development, research, supports, strategies, teaming, and time. These themes will be explored further in this section.

Behavior. Historically, positive behavior and academic supports have been intertwined within the Response to Intervention framework. Viewed as inextricably linked, academic achievement has correlated positively with decreases in behavior difficulties and behavior interventions have resulted in improved academic achievement (Buffum et al., 2009). Focus groups 1 and 2 supported this theme, while Focus group 3 made no comment in this area. Participant responses reflected the connection between academics and behavior: "If a kid's not reading after they've had reading recovery then

we need something right there...Some of them don't read until after grade 8 and guess what their behavior is like in the classrooms" (Focus group 2).

Focus group 1 participants documented their behavior strategies and interventions along with academic ones for the purpose of training new staff and evaluating shortcomings in terms of meeting student needs or providing staff development opportunities. Similar to approaches for improving literacy and numeracy, two participants felt that best practices needed to be developed for addressing behavior:

I'd like to think that ideally, if you're using RTI with best practices in education you're using the best possible practices in teaching literacy and math and you're using your best possible class wide interventions and school wide interventions in terms of behavior that we know are evidence based. We're making a difference with our students, and then we're going to have a little less need for the interventions at Tier 2 (Focus group 2).

Behavior was also described in terms of staff skills and resources and unpredictability. Two participants described a picture of feeling overwhelmed by the combination of student needs and by the level of skills required to address them:

In reading for example, classroom teachers are doing running records and it's getting better because they are giving strategies to the kids. But that's one area. You're talking about behavior and math and then there is still... (Focus group 2).

I think we need to value all those different areas. We try to look for a 'one way' to try and treat all this but really we're talking about anxiety, depression, behavior, social/emotional, severely handicapped, mentally, physically...we're

talking about whole fields of research and knowledge and what stands behind it, so I think that's part of what makes RTI so difficult for people to wrap their heads around (Focus group 1).

Participants also addressed their frustration with the unpredictable nature of behavior:

...When you have a high population of students with needs, our support staff is over loaded because they are individualizing [for] every student in every classroom. After the meetings [class reviews], it's hard to remember how many "what you said you're going to do here, what you said you're going to do there" and also how to find the time to respond or to the needs of the classroom. You know if this behavior escalates or if there is another new student, it changes the dynamics of that classroom and we have to divert our resources (Focus group 1).

Students with behavior issues that move in and you have no support in place and it's not just one child. Just one child and anybody can handle that but if you have multiple children then a whole host of issues: behavioral needs, emotional needs, academic needs (Focus group 2).

Focus group 3 with the highest number of high school participants, did not comment on behavior. Although this group consisted of the same percentage of classroom teachers, it was comprised of more counselors (14%), and significantly less ESS/other personnel than group 2 (29%). Perhaps the ESS/other personnel in the latter group address behavior in their roles or the difference between focus groups could illustrate distinctions among levels (early, middle, senior), or possibly behavior was never broached as a subject because other issues were more prominent in their discussion.

Class reviews/profiles. The class review process (Brownlie, 2006) featured prominently in all three focus groups. Previously referred to as class profiles, the class review process provides an opportunity for classroom teachers to meet with the administrator, resource teacher, counselor and ESS support team to identify her/his class goals, the strengths and needs of the whole class, and then the strengths and needs of all students in the class in the areas of language, learning, behavior, social-emotional, and medical needs. This process when completed for all teachers/classes in the school, supports inclusive practices, prioritizes staff supports and resources for the areas of greatest need, and assists the classroom teacher in providing effective instruction, and grouping students heterogeneously. For the past two years, Faye Brownlie had worked intensively with the school division involved in this research study spending a half day each in thirteen schools less than a month prior to the focus group discussions taking place. All participant comments regarding the class reviews were positive with many identifying the process as crucial to implementing Response to Intervention:

Just recently we did our class review that is similar to the PLCs where you're sitting down and talking about students and the classroom as a whole and generating goals for those classrooms , so I think there are more conversations about individual and collective needs of the school and RTI has probably lent itself quite well to some of those discussions (Focus group 1).

Some participants connected the class review process to a few of the key components of RTI, data collection, problem-solving and collaboration:

I think when you are applying the data, the class profiles, we've collected a lot of

data and now here is another use for that data, a very purposeful use that is guided. Because of the tiers it is easier to make use of this data rather than just having all this information and now the question of just what to do with it. It really assists in that process (Focus group 1).

The class reviews have been really wonderful for that, the problem-solving, the decision making so that when the teacher leaves, all the supports are sitting around that table offering suggestions. It's a real problem-solving focus, the reviews, so that they [teachers] leave feeling they've got some decisions, they've got some support and we've got an action plan to follow to meet the various needs (Focus group 1).

Our hope is that by sharing a school profile of all of our classrooms that we can come to the point where we collaborate and say, you know what, I think I can give up my resource time for this amount (Focus group 1).

Two participants identified a shift in practice with the implementation of the class review process. Assigning supports and resources in conjunction with the class review had assisted schools and Educational Support Services with assigning staff to the greatest areas of need:

I really think that so and so can use my time as I look at the needs of those across the school...Fair doesn't mean equal, making it based on need (Focus group 1).

I have high hopes for the class review processes because I think that once we have

a better understanding of each of our individual classes, I'm hoping that at the ESS level or at the Clinician level, they are going to use those to kind of dictate where they are going to spread out those resources...with the behavior team...they waited until the end of September to collect some data on observations before they started fitting themselves into schools (Focus group 1).

We hope to show on our PD day that we've done a class review on each class and now we want to share with staff that transparency piece about the needs in each of the rooms (Focus group 1).

That's another thing that's come up in our discussions about class profiles is we're identifying needs that we didn't know were even there before and then we have to learn about those needs and how to respond (Focus group 1).

One participant from Focus group 2 stated that the class reviews afforded classroom teachers with an opportunity to better understand RTI, "because you are seeing that will be the biggest piece for them as a classroom teacher to understand all the different services available or the needs of your kids and then how you're meeting those needs". For one administrator, feedback s/he received from an educational assistant revealed the learning power of participating in the class review process:

The feedback that I got today from one of the EAs was actually on her evaluation [of the class review process] saying that "I've done P.D. at the school this year by being able to participate in class reviews". What a great opportunity to have their feedback and having them get a sense of a team.

All participants articulated the merits of the class review process; however, two comments showed the challenges of implementation. One addressed the lack of resources and supports, while the other comment described the learning curve:

When you do the class profile and see the needs of your class and you have a really challenging year, but such a limited amount of resources and supports in place then how can you effectively meet the needs of all those kids? I don't know (Focus group 2).

Have we put into place some of the things of RTI—like the initial assessments and the class profiling—maybe some places have been able to do things more effectively and efficiently but in a timely matter so if it's done within the first three or four weeks of the year, they you are moving into response quickly but are we in a learning phase where it takes us longer to...we have all the assessments but they take a longer time to do, a longer time to evaluate and assess (Focus group 3).

Overall, the administrators understanding of the class review process in relation as key components of RTI was clearer than the participants in Focus groups 2 and 3. The administrators were also able to comment on how the process lent itself to greater transparency in terms of assigning resources and supports. Whereas participants from the other two focus groups identified challenges with the process that could be overcome with practice and adequate resources and supports. Based on the perceptions of focus group participants, the class review process was a catalyst for implementing response to intervention.

Communication. Communication was supported in frequency but very weakly by Focus groups 1 and 3. Challenges around communication emerged primarily from Focus group 1 but also Focus group 3. However, all references were within the context of high schools/senior years. Given their leadership role in the school, it is not surprising that administrators expressed the greatest concern regarding communication. They cited, “a disconnect between the classroom teacher, student services, [and] administration” in not being able to adequately communicate their roles. Secondly, they described ineffective organization frameworks as contributing factors to communication breakdown: “within the current structure, it is very difficult to have clear and meaningful methods of communication between classroom teachers and administration and student services” (Focus group 1). In addition, the number of staff was considerably greater at senior years which raised concerns regarding who needs to be involved in both the sharing and dissemination of information. Privacy was mentioned as an additional concern:

I don't know that they always have the best information in terms of what some of the group causes may be and it becomes part of this communication. There's always how do you make sure that the information you have is disseminated to the people who can benefit from that information... while also honoring the fact that it's private information that needs to be kept confidential...the two don't mesh very well (Focus group 1).

Focus group 3 was the only other group to comment directly on communication.

However, this reference described communication in terms of the criteria for students to demonstrate their learning in science:

Inquiry, knowledge and understanding, communication and synthesis, and social issues related to science...from that we are developing an evaluation that would help us to make those particular criteria/goals to make sure that the students are taught those things and that there are things in place for us to meet the individual needs of the students, as well (Focus group 3).

Co-teaching. Although not mentioned often but supported by research participants in all three focus groups, co-teaching presented as another emerging theme in this study. According to Dr. Friend (2006), co-teaching is two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a classroom. Within the context of Response to Intervention, co-teaching is a strategy for responding to students and/or classes with the greatest learner needs. As one administrator stated:

The template of the triangle—that's a visual, a graphic organizer so that we have all of this information and teachers can see "oh, there's the data", "there's the conversation"...it becomes very clear what the needs are or how we can enrich and it's working smart, I think. And also with our Division doing a lot more co-teaching in our schools and I think that lends itself not just to the kids in your room, that it's an extension. All the staff can see this—and how they might help the flow.

Co-teaching can involve the in-school support team consisting of resource teachers and counselors, or the out-of-school support team such as speech language clinicians and psychologists. Traditionally, these professionals provided individual supports to students, usually in a pull-out setting. However, more recently and usually through the class review process, these professionals have supported a wider range of

needs through co-teaching in the regular classroom. Since different schools are on various places of the learning continuum, the changing roles of the resource teacher and other professionals are evident. One participant suggested: “I think some of the roles are evolving because now you see student services to be more co-teaching than probably it has in the past. I think that it’s a work in progress (Focus group 1). One participant alluded to co-teaching as belonging to a more skilled and progressive set of teachers: “It’s just like co-teaching. The really good teachers do it and the really bad teachers don’t” (Focus group 2). Perhaps this last comment addresses the conditions under which co-teaching is successful. First the administrator as a school leader needs to understand co-teaching, how to implement it, and when it would be most useful. As one focus group participant commented:

They (administrators) need to be part of the instructional or P.D. They have to have the understanding of restitution or various forms of supports in order to model that and to follow through...And I’ll use that example of co-teaching and there couldn’t be an administrator at the session because they were made to go [elsewhere]. We need to align ourselves and say “If this is really important then all the powers to be have to get on the same band wagon and support and make sure that everybody can be in the right place at the right time to hear the same message. Because if we don’t hear the same messages then [we] really look different from school to school (Focus group 3).

Similar sentiments were heard at divisional workshops and meetings with resource teachers, outside the parameters of this research study. Many administrators only partially understanding co-teaching scheduled certain classroom and resource teachers to

co-teach at various times throughout the cycle. Some were scheduled only once per cycle. Since co-teaching requires common preparation and collaboration time, which was not built into their schedules, the co-teaching partners did not understand their roles in the classroom and whether they impacted upon the student learning was questionable because they were viewed as an extra pair of hands rather than a professional there to participate in intentional and strategic learning. Consequently, in the majority of cases no differences to student learning happened. As meaningful next steps, the division involved in this study has engaged Manitoba Education in a variety of professional learning opportunities, one involving a workshop with all administrators with follow-up involving their school staffs. This action plan will address some of the concerns raised by focus group participants. One administrator stated:

We have to make sure that teachers are comfortable with it because as soon as they feel something new is being introduced, there is a little bit of anxiety that sets in ...if we provide the professional development to make sure that the teachers are comfortable with it and they at they student services staff are able to identify the level at which teachers are comfortable and are using it in their classroom...so it's really to facilitate a little bit of collaboration to make sure that everyone is feeling comfortable with it and knows what it is all about and feels good implementing it.

The element of trust was mentioned by another administrator:

Developing that trust among staff because I've certainly seen a school that this year there's that willingness to work together and there's that willingness to co-teach where teachers are not in a situation of mistrust where they aren't worried if what they are going to do is going to be helpful. They are just going in there and

they just know that they are going to learn together in a true co-teaching model.

I'm looking forward to see how that is going to unfold.

Understanding the when, why and how to of implementing co-teaching is intricately linked to RTI. Unless implementing co-teaching is linked to the school's data and problem-solving processes as part of class reviews or PLCs, co-teaching will become an add on rather than an integrated, meaningful part of Response to Intervention. This sentiment was articulated by a participant in Focus group 3:

And I know I'm being a real naysayer here but I think we need to get some of that out and I do have a chance to be in lots of buildings, so I'm seeing a lot of different things. And I worry about that—if resource teachers are feeling they've been told you must be in the class co-teaching or doing whatever all the time that that's not necessarily the intent of RTI or inclusion and so that's a bit of a concern.

Co-teaching can add value to Response to Intervention implementation when it is part of the problem-solving processes used by schools to determine and meet student needs, and when school administrators, classroom teachers and support staff receive adequate professional training to sustain it.

Data. As part of assessment, an integrated data collection process is used to inform instruction and decision-making for early identification and program supports (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie, 2006; Coleman, Buysse & Neitzel, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009). With exception of Focus group 3 data, as an emerging theme, was mentioned several times throughout their discussions: Focus group 1 and Focus group 2. Data were also used in varying contexts. Most often

there was consensus about it being used in relation to the multiple tiers and progress monitoring. One participant stated that movement within the tiers was “heavily predicated on taking data. It is the most important part of the model” (Focus group 2). This was supported with the response, “I agree and I think [the tiers] impact on the amount of data we collect”. A participant from Focus group 1 revealed that the RTI tiers provided clarity among the data collection, analysis and level of services and supports: “Because of the tiers it is easier to make use of this data rather than just having all this information and now the questions of just what to do with it. It really assists in the process”. This was understood by another participant from the same focus group:

The template of the triangle—that’s a visual, a graphic organizer so that we have all of this information and teachers can see, “Oh, there’s the data. There’s the conversation”. And suddenly it’s all there and it becomes very clear what the needs are or how we can enrich and it’s working smart.

Progress monitoring was identified as an extremely important reason to collect and analyze data. Referring to the formal and informal assessment of student performance, it is used with increased frequency as students ascend the tiers (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Focus group participants touched upon data collection as being the essence of progress monitoring in order to determine whether their instructions and interventions were working effectively in a timely manner. The areas of literacy, math and behavior were cited most often in this context. Other references challenged whether progress monitoring was actually happening even though its importance was commonly understood. Several participants from Focus group 2 shared the following comments:

“Has there even been data taken?”

“And even in the IEPs there’s no progress monitoring.”

“You know what? In all our schools it’s not done a lot. Actually, it turned out...is this working? Very rarely is the frequency data taken or any of that data taken to see if it’s working or is it just a piece of paper [referring to the IEP].”

Two participants commented on the need to monitor progress between schools and across the division. By making these cross connections, priorities could be established divisionally:

Data is not being taken where we can compare grade 5 at one school with grade 5 at another school, and not just using running records but maybe using a host of other measures to get some sort of idea whether or not these kids are reading, because it is amazing how many of the kids are like, whoa, there’s a lot of gap.

We aren’t giving it the priority that we should (Focus group 2).

Another participant described his/her perception that schools and the division do not have the infrastructure right now to manage reading and math data on a wide scale. One participant responded saying that the Literacy Teams at some schools are currently sharing the data. In my position at the school division level I am aware of data being collected through report card outcomes and that some principals are meeting as critical friends to analyze and respond to the data. Also, through the assessment coordinator, the critical attributes of math and literacy are being mapped out along with strategies to assist teachers in improving their instruction to assist students in reaching the outcomes.

However, given the feedback from the focus groups, it is evident that a more systematic

method of sharing this information with classroom teachers and student services teams is required to align our practices and meet our priorities.

Subsequent themes that emerged from focus groups regarding data covered identification, problem-solving, programming, and professional development. One participant spoke to data driving instruction: “First, they have to be identified in those main areas and then [we’ll] be able to meet their needs” (Focus group 2). While another participant connected RTI to “a data-based problem solving approach that cycles back to see if the child is responding to the intervention or the instruction...a lot is the effectiveness of the intervention” (Focus group 2). Four participants established a link between the use of data and programming. They further explained how data analysis assisted teachers in selecting strategies to meet the needs of all students. It also assisted schools in identifying classrooms where the needs are the greatest. They can respond by scheduling co-teaching opportunities or by providing resource teacher, counselor or speech language pathologist time.

In addition to responses supported by their peers, two focus group participants independently voiced their perceptions of data. One participant from group 2 recognized a need for professional development in the area of data collection, citing the skills required to collect data consistently and with validity. The use of data with respect to evidence-based practices was challenged by a participant in Focus group 3:

You can find any data to support your position so I’m not sure that people are really looking at evidence but are kind of working from their guts in terms of how they interpret all of this and what they do will all of this in the classroom.

Although this view was not expressed by other participants in the study, this researcher believes that greater clarity and understanding is required by teachers and administrators in the area of evidence-based practices. In his article, *Leadership for evidence-informed education*, Ben Levin (2010) states that “in many areas from reading instruction to special education to leadership, research has led to changed ideas and practices, to the benefit of public education (p. 305). Although some teachers may desire autonomy in directing their own practice, a combination of skilled judgment and teaching principles is needed in our profession. This balance is articulated by Levin:

The argument that evidence-based practice is somehow antithetical to teachers’ professionalism can and should be rejected, in favor of understanding research as one of the key elements that shapes the way any profession understands and goes about its work. However, as in other professions, research has its best effect not through managerial direction but through professional belief supported by strong patterns of professional learning grounded in empirical evidence (pp. 306-307).

The data collection and decision-making processes inherent to Response to Intervention are most beneficial when teachers collaborate to use evidence-based practices to inform their instructional practices.

Differentiated instruction. Viewed as a sub category of effective instruction, differentiated instruction (DI) emerged as a consensus theme. Most participants alluded to DI as meeting the needs of students “in a vast and broad way” (Focus group 1). Ranging from students with significant cognitive and behavioral difficulties to students requiring enrichment, participants felt that through DI most students needs could be met within the context of Tier 1 instruction and supports within the regular classroom (n=6).

One teacher commented on the increased work production levels with his/her students when he/she “adjusted the level of instruction and expectations to student needs” (Focus group 3). One participant from middle school cited specific examples of her/his improved ability to differentiate literacy instruction after attending both divisional workshops and a conference in the states. They had impacted upon her/his ability to select reading materials, provide instruction and assignments to meet the challenges of teaching students in grade 6 who were reading at grade 2 (Focus group 2). Further to this comment, another participant drew parallels between the differentiation in teacher professional development and student learning: “We are probably as the students are in terms of understanding and it looks quite different from building to building” (Focus group 3). Another participant from Focus group 3 viewed DI as an off-shoot to team work and decision-making. For her/him it was about where students fit within response to intervention, whether they require differentiated instruction or an intervention.

The views of differentiated instruction expressed by the nine participants evenly distributed among focus groups reveals an understanding about providing effective instruction at Tier 1, as well as meeting the needs of all students. It also identified a need for differentiating professional development for teachers since they are at different places along the learning continuum with their knowledge and skills level of RTI.

Engagement. Throughout the research findings analyzed according to themes in the literature, focus group participants described their levels of engagement in RTI. Their participation in professional learning communities, collaboration with colleagues, problem-solving and providing quality instruction were identified frequently and described comprehensively. On only two occasions the term engagement was stated

directly by participants. The first reference contrasted the level of engagement between the school, among schools and at the division level:

I'm not sure of how much engagement there is at the Divisional level. We're engaged at the school level to a great extent but the schools operate pretty much independently. I don't have any dealings with any of the other administrators here other than my school when it comes to RTI (Focus group 1).

Another participant described being torn between pursuing her/his own interests such as developing common assessments and effectively implementing RTI. Although the level of engagement was not affected, competing interests impacted negatively upon the teacher's perceived effectiveness:

Of course, I don't have the time to do it but that's a factor. I have stuff that has been with me for some time and I haven't updated them, so updating is another factor. My interest in updating this stuff that I have is some of the facts that impact on my level of not necessarily engagement but it certainly affects my effectiveness in using RTI (Focus group 3).

Engagement in RTI at the school and division levels, and time factors have continued to feature prominently in the research findings.

Enrichment. Enrichment was an individually supported theme. The only group commenting on enrichment was Focus group 1. Three of their comments addressed meeting the needs of students requiring enrichment within Tier 1, the regular classroom. These same respondents noted that collectively, when we think of RTI, we think about meeting the needs of struggling learners, but seldom do we think of students requiring enrichment:

Generally our interventions are much more successful and focused for the students who have difficulty than we do for students who need enrichment... The reason I bring it up is that it doesn't get mentioned very often other than on the reports that we have to say what we've been doing in the enrichment end. We do gravitate naturally to students who need the extra support and who are struggling rather than those who are over achieving.

One participant distinguished between the levels of support for students requiring enrichment: "If their needs are for enrichment then that enrichment could also be tiered from differentiated instruction in the classroom to something where they've go an IEP". One administrator in this group identified how his student services team is purposefully documenting the strategies and programming for gifted and talented students in a similar way they document for struggling learners with the purpose of informing brand new staff the building.

Although it is not directly evident from their comments, it is implied that RTI implementation involves meeting the needs of all students including those requiring enrichment. RTI may have contributed to the participants' heightened awareness in this area resulting in the more thoughtful and purposeful planning and inclusion of these students.

Prevention. Prevention is one of the key features of the Response to Intervention framework. When classroom instruction and interventions are effective, students will not develop gaps in skills and knowledge and many learning disabilities will be diverted (International Reading Association, 2006). Even though this is a convincing argument for adopting the RTI framework, this theme was minimally supported my two focus

groups, 1 and 2. Two participants stated directly that RTI was a “model of prevention” (Focus groups 1 & 2), clarifying that it was both difficult to measure and necessary to focus on narrowing the gaps too. The third participant views prevention as intertwined with a data-based, problem solving approach to determine whether “the child is responding to the intervention or the instruction” (Focus group 2). There were no references to prevention made by Focus group 3.

Professional Development. Professional development has appeared copiously in the research findings in this chapter. However, further analysis of professional development as an emerging theme can impact upon the data analysis and interpretation by establishing which aspects are better understood and emphasized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a consensus theme, professional development (PD) had fifty-one direct citations as an emerging theme, second only to ‘time’ that had one hundred four. Every focus group made several references to PD with the most contributed by Focus group 1 followed by Focus group 3 and Focus group 2. Within this emerging theme, comments were analyzed and then categorized according to ideas. These ideas concurrent with professional development in order of most frequently mentioned included workshops, professional learning communities, reflection, collaboration, Tier 1, and resources. Workshops or conferences and seminars were viewed as meaningful ways to provide general information, such as an overview of the RTI framework to teachers and clinicians. These workshops were notably sponsored by the division or made available through the PD funding provided by the division. As an extension to the workshop process, participants mentioned the value in having staff share their new learning with their colleagues.

Professional learning communities, including pod meetings that follow similar structures were viewed almost equally in value to workshops for increasing teacher skills and knowledge. One administrator stated:

What I like about RTI as an extension of our professional learning community...we're focusing on the data that we've collected about students and then now to take that data and say...this is how we are going to meet the child's needs...and help our teachers understand the various strategies in meeting all the kids' needs.

Another administrator connected PLCs with an opportunity to hold critical discussions with colleagues prior to implementing new ideas: "Teachers can help each other and share strategies that are effective whether it's with specific students or certain behaviors."

Even though collaboration is inherent to professional learning communities, focus group participants mentioned it separately when discussing professional development: "Opportunities to collaborate, talk to people who have tried things and people who they trust and feel secure with to give suggestions" was mentioned as a valuable learning experience (Focus group 1). One participant considered collaboration to be a paradigm shift in the way we view professional development:

Maybe our professional development time has to look different so it becomes collaborative team working time. Would that be helpful rather than having days where [we] all go and meet in someone's gym or something like that? Do we need more to re-think what professional learning looks like? (Focus group 3)

While some comments viewed group PD either through workshops, PLCs or collaboration as important, a small percentage identified personal reflection time as valuable to their learning (n=12):

I would say that for some of our classroom teachers there are some needs to be able to spend more time just thinking about RTI and how they can implement the strategies and build a library of strategies that they can use with their students and share with their colleagues (Focus group 1)

Preceding the reflection time, one participant shared that teachers require time to practice what they have learned and to assess through trial and error the skills and strategies that are and are not effective. This process requires time for reflection in order to be constructive (Focus group 1). Similar to the idea of reflection, comments were made regarding teachers and clinicians selecting PD to contribute to their own personal growth. Similar to differentiating instruction for students, each staff in the division is on a separate place of the learning continuum and therefore must find professional development that addresses his/her area and level of need. For some there will be a need to learn more about the components of RTI, while others will need to clarify their understandings. Learning about RTI is an individualized process that was articulated by one administrator:

What we are seeing with the education of ourselves in our own professional development is there is probably more inclusion in ways that we see less pull outs than we have previously seen. We are very supportive of the students in the classroom that become part of that community and the educational assistants are

developing professionally to be able to find ways through the teacher to support those students in the classroom, as well.

Participants also felt that most of the professional development needs to be provided in Tier 1. Classroom teachers are the ‘front line’ (Focus group 2). Since the expectations of inclusive practices is to provide programming for all students in the regular classroom, Tier 1, then classroom teachers require a vast array of skills and knowledge to provide for the diversity of learners. Resources were mentioned jointly with Tier 1 and professional development. Focus group participants expressed the need for resources to support PD for classroom teachers, and in some cases to replace it: “It’s not professional development. It’s not tangible resources. It’s human beings—human resources” (Focus group 3).

There is merit in providing professional development through workshops and conferences, as well as reflection time. However, opportunities to learn “in a community with others, where the learning is richer and deeper” such as that found through collaboration and professional learning communities will be more apt to produce changes to sustain RTI implementation (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 1). This matches the perceptions of participants from all three focus groups.

Research. Research, although not mentioned often in the research data, is a consensus theme. Referred to mostly in the context of being evidence-based and important to RTI, research was also used in conjunction with inclusion, literacy, and professional development. In terms of evidence-based practices, participants viewed research as providing effective strategies and interventions to improve instruction. Using research to improve instruction and programming for students was cited as a defining

feature of RTI. Participants felt that “the decades of research on [RTI] provided the rationale for its adoption by the division involved in this study. One participant expressed a feeling of being overwhelmed by both the volume of research and the need to understand it:

We’re talking about whole fields of research and knowledge that stand behind [RTI] so I think that’s part of what make it so difficult for people to wrap their head around. I can conceptualize it in my own little reading world so that’s fine, but it looks different in other areas and maybe part of it is focusing on an area (making reference to the areas of anxiety, depression, behavior, social/emotional, severely handicapped). (Focus group 2)

One participant from Focus group 1 perceived “RTI to be great for inclusion” in that the research-based strategies and interventions were beneficial for all students with academic and behavioral struggles, not just those identified with special needs. Another participant commented on the prevalence of research on literacy and RTI. S/he further explained that with the implementation of RTI “we have been talking about it more in our division and being part of that whole process” (Focus group 2). Research based practices for literacy were common as Tier 2 and 3 interventions with the implementation of Reading Recovery and reading clinician involvement; however, more recently, research based practices in literacy have been extended to classroom practices to strengthen Tier 1 instruction and intervention.

The last reference to research was linked to one participant’s experience with professional development at University. Linking research to practice has been made

through graduate studies resulting in her/his own research at both the school and division levels.

In addition to the mostly positive comments regarding research, one participant questioned its role and relevance. From his/her perspective:

I see very little effort to find evidence for things that are done. Student Services tries its best to provide information which is evidence based which is anecdotal mostly, but when I saw the evidence based practices first of all I was thinking in terms of literature, educational literature. Again, the comment has been made that we're always fed with this stuff and we're always told that "the research says this, the research says that" and the tone of that comment is a dubious one. You can find any data to support your position so I'm not sure that people are really looking at evidence but are kind of working from their guts in terms of how they interpret all of this and what they do with all this in the classroom (Focus group 3).

Participants commenting on research supported its usage in evidence-based practices, but offer caution regarding its usage.

Supports. Through the focus group process, participants identified 'supports' as a consensus theme. Mostly anchored to the RTI framework and the areas in which additional supports are required, respondents identified supports at the school and division level that are necessary to implement and sustain RTI. One participant reflected that as a framework, RTI helps "to clarify what kinds of supports students need on an individual basis. If a student is excelling or needing supports, we can draw on those as a framework" (Focus group 1). Another participant from group 1 felt that even though the

education system needs resource teachers and counselors, it is the classroom teacher who needs to provide and coordinate Tier 1 supports for all students regardless of their needs. Two participants felt that financial and additional staffing supports need to be provided at Tiers 2 and 3 when supports at Tier 1 are deemed insufficient (Focus groups 1 and 2). One remarked on the disparity of supports among schools (Focus group 1), while the remaining, single comments reflected on the need for more supports in the areas of assistive technology and EAL (Focus group 1). Supports provided in various forms assist with the implementation and sustainability of Response to Intervention.

Strategies. The emerging individual theme of strategies appeared in multiple contexts with Focus group 1. Most comments about strategies were made in reference to teachers and collaboration. Most participants felt that teachers had greater access to a wider variety of strategies than previously, since “a lot of work is taking place inside the classroom and teachers are developing strategies for RTI” (Focus group 1). One participant identified the real work of the decision-making process of PLCs as helping teachers “to understand what the various strategies are in meeting all the kids’ needs” (Focus group 1). Another participant explained how teachers require “some time just [to think] about RTI and how they can implement the strategies and build a library of strategies that they can choose from to use with their students” (Focus group 1).

Prior to implementing RTI it was common practice for resource teachers and other so called specialists to use pull-out or parachute into the classroom to provide students with strategies. Two respondents explained the merits of having the classroom teacher deliver the strategies as part of effective classroom instruction: “They know the kids the best and have a better chance of getting the most effective strategies and getting

the vibe from students” (Focus group 1). The second participant mentioned, “When we use reading for example...classroom teachers are doing running records...and it’s getting better that way because they are looking at and giving different strategies to the kids” (Focus group 2).

With the increase in collaboration between resource and classroom teachers, respondents have noticed a seamless sharing of strategies:

I think that there is a lot of RTI that is going on that administrators are not aware of because the classroom is implementing strategies in the classroom.

Sometimes they will go to the resource teacher for strategies and they will work together and that doesn’t come across to administration...So I think that on a broad base it is happening very frequently (Focus group 1).

Classroom teachers are actively increasing their knowledge of strategies by collaborating with student services and their PLCs (Focus group 1). Through these venues teachers can assist each other by sharing effective strategies or problem-solving which strategies might be useful in particular situations (Focus group 1).

In addition to collaboration and teachers, the ‘strategies’ were noted in comments about inclusive practices. Rather than designating students as funded or having special needs, quite often the strategies used for one or a few students will be beneficial for all students (Focus group 1, two participants). Without referring directly to universal design, the participants discussed its principles. Classroom teachers can improve their instructional practices by offering a variety of strategies to all their learners, knowing that every student can benefit and choose whether they require it in order to achieve the outcomes.

Targets. The individual theme ‘targets’ was mentioned in relation to RTI implementation. Part of sound instructional practices and found pervasively throughout the research on RTI, learning targets answer the questions, what is it we expect our students to learn and how will we know when they get there? The teacher who commented on targets in Focus group 3 embedded learning targets into the teaching process:

I think as a teacher when you are doing part of RTI which is meeting with other teachers developing those common assessments, discussing the students’ work, you know what you’re looking for then. And if you’re more focused, you can help the students really get those learning targets and you can help those students get there...If there is a different ability you can scaffold for them. You can put in the different learning styles within class---really meet the kids where they are at but really know exactly what they need to get there.

Learning targets have been included in assessment practices for several years. Using backwards design, it is common to identify targets (outcomes) and then design backwards to students’ baseline to identify instructional practices that help them to reach the outcomes.

Time. Not surprisingly after previous comments discussed within the identified and emerging themes in Chapter 4, ‘time’ featured prominently as a consensus theme. A total of 33 comment segments were collected and collated from the three focus groups with the greatest number by far contributed by Focus group 3. Further analysis resulted in the segments being classified according to the categories of structure, collaboration, release time, effective use and learning.

A total of 17 comments made reference to time in relation to structures.

Administrators viewed RTI implementation as difficult especially at the high school:

Teachers are tied to classrooms...students may have four different teachers during a semester whereas student services and administrators have more flexibility in their time so we have more time to sit down and meet and talk about planning for students and generally the what ends up with that planning is that it's then told to the teacher because there isn't a lot of time for the teacher to be a part of that planning process so there is a kind of disconnect in there that makes it less beneficial than what it could be if there was more planning time where everybody can be involved in it (Focus group 1).

At the high school it was also felt that there "is very little time to gather much evidence and by the time [teachers] have it, the semester is pretty much finished" (Focus group 1).

Some participants expressed frustration over not having enough time to respond to students (Focus group 1, Focus group 2, Focus group 3). Several participants felt that resource and counselor time was insufficient in meeting the needs of their populations (Focus group 3).

Other comments referring to time and structure involve administrators who make their schedules available to staff so that in the event they require an extra set of hands in their classrooms, administrators make themselves available (Focus group 1). Another area refers to having the structures in place so that assessments and class reviews can be implemented in a timely fashion (Focus group 2). Several examples of administrators creating more meeting time were cited as well (Focus groups 2 and 3). Other administrators have found challenges in trying to provide common meeting time (Focus

group 3). Whereas, other focus group participants found that time is not the solution, but additional resources are (Focus group 3).

Collaboration time was identified as being important for successful implementation of RTI. At senior years where there is talk about extending the school day, this may provide additional opportunities for collaboration (Focus group 1). Early and middle years too feel that collaboration time is essential:

Not so much as a PD day or a book study—those things are useful to a point.

What needs to be is the school teams having the opportunity and the time to sit and talk and plan and decide what their school's greatest needs are and what they need to do about it...it needs time to work through [this process] (Focus group 2).

Other schools participating in this research study allude to the value of collaboration time built into their preps (Focus group 3):

It's nice to have that time as much as we grumble about it—It is nice to have that time to meet with the other teachers and to discuss the common assessments, to discuss the 'what we're doing, where we need to go, what we're finding in the classrooms'. If the administrators had not built it into our timetables, we would not be meeting.

For schools that do not have a method for creating common prep times, then release time becomes their option. However, this can be problematic. Releasing teaching by providing substitutes can be cost prohibitive (Focus group 1 and 3). Some schools who receive at-risk funds because their demographics have illustrated their level of need, may have extra dollars to provide release time for teachers to meet for class reviews and collaboration. However, most schools do not have these surplus funds and even though

their needs might be just as great as determined by the number of special needs students, they will not be able to qualify for these special funds (Focus groups 1 and 2).

Some participants felt that the RTI process was impeded because of a lack of time. Collaboration, which is pre-empted by top-down decisions by resource or administration often occurs as a result of not having enough collaboration time (Focus groups 1 and 3).

The remaining corresponding features of time according to research participants are linked to learning. There is a general consensus among focus group participants that resource teachers and many administrators have been given time to learn about RTI; however, classroom teachers who are instrumental in Tier 1 instruction and interventions for all students do not appear to be given the time to develop its knowledge and skills. One participant from Focus group 2 echoed these sentiments for the perspective of a specialist having been a classroom teacher:

I know when I was a classroom teacher I always felt out of the loop with new initiatives or new framework because you're so busy getting and doing what you need to do in your classroom and you're not given...you don't have time to seek it out (Focus group 2).

Other participants spoke of opportunities to select books that would help them in understanding RTI, but because of a lack of time they haven't been able to commence the book study (Focus group 2). Other respondents mentioned that they have engaged in RTI workshops and book studies, but have not had sufficient time to reflect upon the components or strategies in order to successfully implement them (Focus group 2, 2 participants).

Several impediments to learning about RTI have been cited by classroom teachers and administrators. A lack of coordination among the division and schools has prevented administrators from participating in RTI training with their staff. Co-teaching and universal design were prime examples (Focus groups 2 and 3). However, there are other examples where opportunities to learn about RTI have been created. Some schools have set aside staff meeting time to provide instruction about Restitution (Focus group 3). Some schools are given time to pursue their own interests, such as common assessments (Focus group 3). Three participants mentioned obstacles to their acquiring more knowledge about RTI. One discussed the resistance of experienced teachers (Focus group 2). Agendas at staff meetings and PLCs address frivolous matters such as hat rules when participants felt that time to become experts in RTI would be better spent (Focus group 3, 2 participants).

Differences among early years, middle years, senior years. Historically, Response to Intervention has clearly focused on early years with sporadic implementation at middle and senior years (Burns & Gibbons, 2008). For this reason, research on implementing RTI at the secondary level has only been available since 2007. As Burns and Gibbons state, “Generally speaking, middle schools and high schools have mostly been left out of the RTI conversation, with a few notable exceptions” (p. 84). Clearly there are notable differences and challenges among the levels and these became apparent during the analysis of the research finding.

After an initial reading of all three transcripts, the early, middle and senior years theme emerged. Using NVivo9 Software to sift through the data, 12 comment segments from early and middle years combined and 21 segments from senior years were identified

for further analysis. Upon further analysis, all comment segments were coded and then classified accordingly: general, structure, programming, collaboration and communication.

All three focus groups perceived differences among early, middle and senior years. However, probably because of the cross section of participants in Focus group 2, a repartee developed among participants:

I know for us it wasn't clear to anyone in our school when it first came out and it's just through the division, but I think I'm at a different grade level than everyone here from what I gather from what everyone says. I'm not sure. I'm in high school (audible laughter).

(Immediately following)...I'm from early, middle and high school and I agree, early years are different.

Throughout their discussion, a healthy banter continued resulting in clear distinctions among the levels. In Focus group 3, clear distinctions were made as well; however, given the prevalence of high school participants, the tone appeared to be somewhat harsher and more critical of their challenges. These perceptions were confirmed later by the focus group facilitator.

Many of the differences cited among participants related to the organizational framework or structure of each level. Typically, students in early years have one classroom teacher for the majority of their instructional day, whereas students in middle years will have one or two, and one for each subject area by the time they reach senior years. Having several teachers creates challenges for organizing and holding student meetings:

I think that the elementary and middle years is typically better suited to those meetings because the students have less different teachers during the day and so you can have that meeting with student services and administration and one teacher or two teachers as opposed to four teachers or more (Focus group 1). Not only is it difficult to find common prep time for teachers to meet, it is increasingly difficult to provide relief time to make sure all stakeholders can attend. The increased number of IEP meetings creates even more challenges (Focus group 2). Another general comment shedding light on the differences among levels pertains to expectations:

I'm wondering if it would be an insight to suggest that for the high school level, we are preparing kids for university and college and that we may have some different expectations than when we are working at the elementary level (Focus group 3).

This perception was shared in the context of the changing role of the resource teacher. Although they are involved in less pull-out at early and middle years, resource programs provide pull-out almost exclusively at senior years. Movement towards more inclusive practices may be a difficult if the perception is that this service delivery is a better match for classroom teachers who feel they are preparing students for university.

Another issue related to structure concerns the number of resource teachers who have had their time clawed back and have been assigned to teach subjects. Although this was not the case at senior years, early and especially middle years expressed concern over this trend:

I am not sure if the role of the resource teacher, at some levels, is as clearly defined or understood as it could be because maybe the resource teachers haven't

had the same amount of experience or there's been a lot of movement from school to school [which makes it difficult] to establish [RTI] in your building. A lot of resource teachers at the middle years are also classroom teachers. I don't think that's a possibility. I really think you can't do resource for two periods and then go and teach science and then come back and be a resource teacher. I don't think that's how the role works well and we have a lot of that at elementary. Not full time resource people (Focus group 3).

Even though classroom teachers are expected to provide an inclusive learning environment and programming for all students, they need the support and collaboration of the student services team. The shift away from pull-out services and segregated placements in order to teach all students in regular classrooms cannot translate into the classroom teacher is now on his/her own. Response to Intervention "shifts the responsibility for helping all students become successful from the special education [resource teachers] and curriculum to the entire staff, including special and regular education teachers" (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009, p. 2). Limiting or removing resource teacher time when their support is needed is not the intent of RTI.

Programming differences emerged as a difference among levels during focus group conversations. In high school, "there is an opportunity for some natural streaming to occur...after grade 9, [students] can select courses that they are naturally more interested in, and so in those classes you have less of a need to provide supports" (Focus group 1). Even though natural streaming occurs at the high school participants felt challenged by having to program for youth involved in the Justice system who are entering high school after interrupted schooling. One high school participant stated: "It's

the sheer numbers from where we are in order to deal with the population and the differing populations. And now we have a very high Justice component in the building. I've been here 15 years and I've never seen such a high Justice component" (Focus group 3). This issue is compounded by recent legislation proclaiming that students are required to be in school until age 18. One administrator cautioned:

If Tiers 1 and 2 haven't met the student's needs and again for high school this is becoming a more pressing issue because legislation has just been changed to say that we are supposed to try our very best to keep students in school until age 18, and so I think that what needs to change before anything is programs and the concept of what the school's role is in terms of education students prior to leaving high school. I think if this legislation actually does what it's hoping to do that high schools or the aspect of them won't look very much like what they currently do within three or four years (Focus group 1).

Similar programming challenges are not faced by early and middle years.

Another difference in programming among levels involves literacy and numeracy. In addition to meeting curricular outcomes, Response to Intervention aspires to high levels of literacy and numeracy for all students. Early years programming creates opportunities for students to improve these skills. A combination of programs including Mathsteps, The Daily Five, CAFÉ, Regie Routman's optimal learning model, running records, benchmarks and leveled readers are used by classroom teachers in early years to assess and program for students. Literacy is a focus across curricular areas, and Tier 2 interventions are provided for students requiring them. As students transition through the grades, into middle and senior years, literacy is not prioritized in the same way and

targeted and more intensive supports are not necessarily available for those students needing them: “If a kid’s not reading after they’ve had Reading Recovery then we need something right there after that because I work in the middle school and the high school and there are a fair number of kids who can’t read” (Focus group 2). One participant’s comment alluded to a shift in priorities in order to increase awareness and programming of students’ needs in the area of literacy:

Divisionally, do we know where our priorities are? I mean we are sitting around here about the behaviors... because it ends up being a crisis and personal safety issues—it’s a priority, right. But when we talk about something like literacy where increasingly I’m wondering do we really understand where our kids are in terms of literacy at the middle school and senior level. Do we know? Are we in a crisis there also? Are we giving it priority like we should? (Focus group 2).

Although RTI prioritizes programming that emphasizes high levels of literacy and numeracy, perceptions from focus group participants indicate it is far from being a reality at middle and especially senior years.

Collaboration and communication emerged as differences among early, middle and senior years, even though they were not mentioned frequently. One administrator expressed how collaboration between classroom and resource teachers is more visible now with the realization that resource teachers are not always going to be pulling-out students (Focus group 1). Another participant observed:

The work that I’ve done at both the elementary and middle years schools, I think that I’ve seen a lot of teachers collaborate to try and come up with more effective ways of differentiating or meeting needs of kids at the Tier 1 level for sure, ...and

the teachers see what they're doing is supporting the learners in their room (Focus group 3).

While collaboration and co-teaching are not as prevalent at senior years, there is evidence of movement in this direction. One administrator stated:

At the high school level, before when students were having problems we would send them off to the resource teacher but now we have a lot of work taking place inside the classroom and teachers are developing strategies... frequently under the advice of the resource teachers. Sometimes resource teachers will come in for a period also to guide things along.

Although there is some evidence of effective problem solving leading to meaningful interaction at early years, it is less apparent how RTI would be applied at middle and senior years (Strangeman, Hitchcock, Hall & Meo, 2006, p. 47).

Communication too presents challenges for senior years classroom teachers and student services teams. Two participants made reference to a “disconnect between the classroom teacher and students services in administration in terms of primarily communication” (Focus group 1). One participant attributed this disconnect to the different roles played by each. Oftentimes this has led to situations where administrators have resolved issues regarding students, rather than work through the process together. “But within the current structure, it is very difficult to have clear and meaningful methods of communication between classroom teachers and administration and student services” (Focus group 1). Similar difficulties were not identified at early and middle years.

Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter examined the four research questions and probes using a naturalistic qualitative design and constructivist theory. In this approach, themes emerged from the focus group conversations in addition to being identified through the literature review. This approach provided clarity around the perceptions of focus group participants (administrators, resource teachers, counselors, classroom teachers, ESS clinicians) regarding Response to Intervention and its implementation in order to understand the issues that contribute to and/or prevent the school and the division's alignment to it.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to gather information on how best to support the implementation of Response to Intervention as a student services framework to support inclusion. A study exploring the implementation of RTI as a framework was considered to be important since there was a need for greater clarity in the roles of student services teams and administrators in supporting classroom teachers to address the needs of an increasingly diverse population within an inclusive framework.

This study utilized the form of naturalistic qualitative research using a constructivist theory as the methodology. This format was chosen since the researcher deemed it important to implement Response to Intervention in a transparent manner so that all who have a role in its implementation had a voice. The research methods involved three focus groups consisting of representation from administrators in one group, and a combination of counselors, classroom and resource teachers, and educational support services personnel and clinicians comprising the other two groups. Questions for the focus groups were constructed based on the four research questions:

- 1) What are the participants' understandings of the components of Response to Intervention.
- 2) To what extent are school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to Intervention.
- 3) What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school based team practices?
- 4) What factors promote or impede the implementation of RTI?

The study revealed some consistency as well as differences between participants' perceptions of Response to Intervention and the research in the literature. This chapter presents significant themes, a synthesis of the findings based on the findings of the study. Their significance was determined through their frequency of mention and language and articulation of the participants, as well as how similar and different they were from the components of Response to Intervention discussed in the literature review. In addition, Lincoln and Guba's (1985) consensus, supported and individual themes contributed to the significant themes in this chapter by establishing the degree to which each theme was important to the participants individually and collectively in this study. The discussion and conclusions regarding the research findings, implications for practice, research and theory will be presented. Finally, questions for further study will be offered.

Significant Themes

Response to Intervention Influenced the way in which Schools Conceive of Inclusion

The implementation of Response to Intervention assisted administrators with fostering inclusive practices within their schools. Classroom teachers felt the judicious pressure to provide appropriate programming to all students within their classrooms, rather than pull out students to work with resource teachers in separate rooms.

Participants expressed how student education was everyone's responsibility, and that the education of students with exceptional needs was not the sole responsibility of student services.

Administrators described how RTI impacted upon their leadership role in viewing students differently. Labeling students became unnecessary because the focus was on identifying their needs and meeting them. Whether students had academic, behavior,

social-emotional challenges or required enrichment, their needs would be met within the classroom or more intensively through Tier 2 and 3 supports. Teachers described how they had a more thorough understanding of individual students in the classroom viewing each student as an individual, regardless of their abilities. Administrators commented that as a result of RTI, staff has become very supportive of the students with special needs who have become part of the classroom community.

Although there was much evidence supporting the premise that RTI implementation had changed the way in which educators conceived of inclusion, there were gaps between this belief system and the ability to put it into practice. Schools have provided the structures for including students in classrooms and activities with their peers, but not necessarily with the programming to meet their needs. Without understanding how to program for students with special needs, classroom teachers have become frustrated with the corresponding student misbehaviors. This phenomenon has been addressed by deploying more educational assistants to work with special needs students, rather than by building the capacity with professional staff. Although this study has demonstrated how Response to Intervention was a catalyst for inclusion, moving inclusion from belief to practice will require ongoing leadership and professional development, and appropriate staff assignments.

Pre-Existing Conditions Support the Implementation of Response to Intervention

The participants described several conditions that support the implementation of Response to Intervention. These included shared knowledge and common language, professional learning communities, skills and expertise, resources and supports, and professional development.

Common language and shared knowledge. A common language and shared knowledge resonated as significant conditions for RTI implementation. Administrators and other focus group participants referenced the multiple-tiers of intervention as assisting in their understanding of RTI in terms of a visual representation and in planning instruction and interventions to meet the needs of a diverse learning population. This understanding created expectations for all students to receive their primary instruction in the classroom, and several participants cited examples of classroom teachers consciously “pulling-in” their students rather than sending them out to receive instruction from resource teachers or other specialists. Both the general understanding of the multiple tiers of RTI and the belief that all students are serviced through Tier 1 universal supports aligned with the literature review (Bender & Shores, 2007; Brownlie, 2006; Fuchs et al., 2008; Howell et al., 2008; Shores & Chester, 2009; Whitten et al., 2009).

While participants identified common language and knowledge of RTI as a condition for its implementation, there was evidence of a limited understanding of certain groups. Classroom teachers have not had the same exposure to RTI as student services staff and administrators. Also, even though administrators and senior years staff understood its components, they were unable to facilitate the problem-solving and decision-making required to improve student outcomes within an inclusive framework. This limited understanding will not be sufficient to sustain RTI.

Professional learning communities. Similar to the research by Buffum, Mattos and Weber (2010), Professional Learning Communities were recognized as the foundation of Response to Intervention by the focus group with administrators and Focus

group 3 which was more heavily weighted with senior years staff and resource teachers. Focus group 2 which was significantly represented by Educational Support Services personnel, did not mention PLCs as important to RTI implementation. However, this made sense given that they do not have a role in professional learning communities in schools.

Administrators cited RTI as an extension to PLCs but added that with RTI, classroom teachers had a better understanding of the strategies, supports and resources needed to support all students. Participants attributed PLCs to improving their repertoire of skills in addressing academic and behavior issues, especially when clinicians and behavior intervention resource teachers participated in the process. In addition, administrators valued opportunities to join PLCs when at risk learners and their needs were being discussed. Professional learning communities needed to play an integral part in the RTI process in order to respond effectively to the diversity in student needs.

Skills and expertise. Skills and expertise among teachers, administrators and Educational Support Services staff were cited as preconditions for RTI implementation. Through professional learning communities and the data collection process, classroom teachers and school teams expressed being able to identify instructional strategies and supports for both inside and outside the classroom. Participants were much more aware of differentiating instruction and providing interventions within the classroom for students who were falling significantly below the curricular outcomes. In early years, participants revealed that these accommodations were easier to provide which was consistent in the research findings (Gelzheiser, Scanlon, & Hallgren-Flyn, 2010

Consistently, the Focus group consisting of a higher percentage of resource teachers with ESS clinicians viewed skills and knowledge as vital to improving student outcomes. These skills areas included quality instruction, progress monitoring, and evidence-based practices. However, administrators cited strategies and enrichment as part of the skills set required by classroom teachers; whereas, enrichment was not mentioned by any other group. Even though strategies were cited as important and used frequently by administrators, no examples were given. Similarly, even though administrators emphasized how RTI addressed students at both ends of the spectrum of exceptionalities, they were unable to elaborate on what it would envision. This was consistent with the research by Grigorenko (2009), Orosco, (2010) and Reynolds and Shaywitz (2009) stating that unless staff have the knowledge and skills to provide reliable assessments, they will not be able to use the data to inform their instructional practices. If RTI implementation relies on the skills and knowledge of its staff, then administrators would need to be able to articulate these practices to build capacity with them.

Resources and supports. Throughout the focus groups, references were made to administrators finding time for teams to collaborate. Participants were grateful to administrators who used creative scheduling, internal coverage and release time to bring teams together. Participants commented on how through common prep time, opportunities to meet with colleagues outweighed forfeiting the time. Bender and Shores (2007), Buffum et al. (2009), Fisher and Frey (2004) and Whitten et al. (2009) contended that the principals' responsibilities involve making sure their teams function as professional learning communities, and they have both regular meeting time and resources to address these challenges.

Although the evidence in the data showed that administrators and their school teams were creating more opportunities for schools to collaborate and assign resources and supports according to classrooms with the greatest needs, it may not be with the breadth of application needed in order to meet student needs. All focus groups advocated for increasing resources to address students requiring interventions at Tiers 2 and 3. However, Focus group 3 consisting of several senior years staff, advocated the strongest for having more time to implement more effectively what they already know: common assessments and differentiating instruction. It was well established in the literature and from the researcher's work in the division, that senior years structures presented obstacles to RTI implementation. Some of these obstacles included inflexible timetabling, content-driven curricula, natural streaming of students, and limited opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to design common assessments and to problem-solve ways to improve student outcomes.

While administrators and school personnel identified resources and supports as important conditions for RTI implementation and senior years had added time as a condition as well, the reality is that these exist in finite amounts. Given these limitations schools need to refocus on the supports and resources already in place and the processes of the RTI framework to build capacity with staff to more effectively and efficiently meet the needs of their students.

Assessment and data collection, analysis and reflection. All participants commented on various parts of the assessment and data collection process relative to RTI. Focus group 2 consisting of a large percentage of ESS personnel with resource teachers commented most significantly in the areas of assessment/data collections, quality

instruction, progress monitoring and problem-solving, a formal process involving analysis and reflection. It was this group who contributed almost exclusively to the research findings on progress monitoring too. For years, these disciplines (ESS personnel and resource teachers) have used assessment and data to plan for instruction and to explain functions of behaviors. Classroom teachers and administrators, however, have relied more heavily on summative assessments than assessment for learning. This can be problematic when teaching any student, but especially challenging when planning instruction for students with special needs. Teachers need to become more proficient at assessment for learning in order to address the complicated learning needs of students.

Progress monitoring. In many respects and at all levels, focus group participants expressed concern over not engaging in ongoing progress monitoring. As noted in the literature review, without these skills teachers will continue to provide ineffective instruction resulting in a high number of referrals to resource programs (Allington, 2009; Bender & Shores, 2007; Fisher & Frey, 2010). Of the three levels, it was reported that early years probably did the best job of progress monitoring because of the use of benchmarks and regular assessments in literacy and math. However, once initial screenings had been administered at middle and senior years, participants felt that student progress and the effectiveness of instruction and interventions were not monitored frequently enough for teachers to respond effectively to learner needs. Many participants mentioned how students' progress towards IEP goals and student interventions at Tiers 2 and 3 were not monitored as frequently as they should be according to the literature. Senior years teachers mentioned that they barely had enough time during first semester to gather data to determine and affect student progress, before the arrival of second

semester. Some participants commented on the need to monitor student progress to determine the effects of interventions, and not just to evaluate whether students are making progress. They felt this would help to determine which evidence-based practices and strategies were most appropriate and effective.

As students transitioned between levels, participants felt that data and assessment were not used beneficially to meet the needs of students struggling with learning. This was emphasized with respect to math, but especially literacy. Participants felt that although benchmarks and running records at early years assisted with programming for students falling short of expectations, the same did not hold true for students in similar situations at middle and senior years.

Administrators reported that their teams were using data to identify strategies needed by particular students. While other participants remarked that more questions surrounding the data were being asked, such as what does the data mean and what will we do with it, some participants connected their data to the RTI visual to begin conversations regarding student needs and the resources and supports required to meet them. While many participants alluded to linking data collection with problem-solving processes, individuals participating in the focus groups mentioned how they were using data to measure whether their instruction or intervention was working or not. For many teachers, curriculum based measures remain the focus of their assessment practices. This is especially true for teachers at middle and senior years. However, the assessment practices within Response to Intervention also focus on improving teachers' instruction. Schools need to build capacity in this area in order to respond effectively to all students.

Intervention. Response to Intervention shaped participants' perceptions about various levels of interventions required to meet students' programming needs. Participants responded that classroom teachers were more aware of their responsibilities towards providing classroom interventions for students failing to respond to classroom instruction. Some participants who were high school teachers reflected on the difficulties of differentiating instruction for students who are significantly below grade level in their skills, and also on the challenges of providing appropriate instruction and interventions for many students with high behavioral as well as academic needs.

In addition, with the adoption of the Response to Intervention Framework, school teams began evaluating the nature of their interventions in relation to student needs. Many participants reported their perceptions of having insufficient levels of expertise among their staff to provide effective interventions, and limited supports and resources available to provide varying levels of intervention. Moreover, many differences among early, middle and senior years were revealed with respect to literacy and at-risk learners. For examples, whereas early years had well-established classroom and Tier 2 and 3 literacy interventions, middle years reported few interventions beyond Tier 1, and senior years fewer still. Senior years reported frequently on their challenges in providing effective programming for students struggling with basic literacy and math skills, as well as for those students involved with Youth Justice and others experiencing difficulty with remaining in school until age 18. The perceived challenges faced by middle and especially senior years aligned with the research by Burns and Gibbons (2008) and Strangeman, Hitchcock and Meo (2006). In order to move from belief into practice,

teachers and staff providing interventions need to acquire the skills and expertise commensurate with levels of need.

Professional development. Administrators, student services teams and classroom teachers reported they require on-going professional learning opportunities commensurate with RTI implementation. Most of these opportunities should happen within the context of teaching and learning practices, therefore site-based. Professional learning communities, co-teaching and the class review process lend themselves to this process. The problem-solving and shared expertise that is inherent to these practices build capacity and community.

The Class Review Process Enhances RTI Implementation

A strong consensus among focus groups participants was cited on the class review process. This response was unexpected given that the class review was not presented to the division as one of the key components of Response to Intervention, and only half the schools in the division had implemented it. Not critically reviewed in the literature either, participants claimed the class review gave meaning and purpose to Response to Intervention in a guided way. Through the class review process, teachers and their support teams were able to speak to both the general and specific student needs in their class in relation to classroom goals. Having a voice to describe and request supports (resource, counseling, ESS) for their students made powerful their role as teachers and advocates. In addition, they commented on the process of allocating supports and resources to classrooms based on needs made sense. Since classroom teachers, administrators and student services teams were involved in the problem-solving process, a positive outcome of the class review was an increased transparency and sense of fairness in how resources and supports were allocated. One administrator shared a story

about classroom teachers offering to forgo resource supports because they could see on a data wall that the needs in other classrooms were greater.

Knowing that classroom and school needs change periodically, participants mentioned the value of on-going progress monitoring and data collection, and the need to revisit class reviews a couple times of year. They added that this practice would help to reinforce the changing needs, and the flexibility that schools must have to address them.

One administrator commented on the added benefit of involving educational assistants in the class review process. On the feedback form following the class review the EA had written that s/he “had done P.D. at the school this year by being able to participate in the class review”.

Other themes overlapping with the class review process were inclusion, problem-solving, time, resources and supports, and collaboration. Administrators’ voices were the strongest in all these themes, except time. Focus group 3 with more senior years participants felt that a lack of time prevented them from adopting class reviews. Given their concerns and the different framework in which they work, but also considering the value of the class review process, senior years should consider implementing the class review process in grade nine to increase their understanding of students who will be with them for next four years. In addition to developing a better understanding of their needs, teachers, student services and administrations can strategically plan which students and classrooms will require additional supports and resources.

Problem-solving as a product of the class review reached consensus with all groups but was mentioned minimally by Focus group 3. Other than during PLC time, it was evident that senior years did not have a process for problem-solving in a manner

similar to the class review process. Given the increasing numbers of at risk learners at senior years and in light of the recent legislation making school mandatory until age 18, administrators need to create opportunities for the class review process to occur in grade nine, if in no other grades. If student needs are addressed in grade nine, the transition year, then students may continue to be engaged and connected until their graduation.

Leadership Influences RTI Implementation

In order to implement and sustain Response to Intervention, leadership and commitment must be established at the division and school levels. Having an aligned vision provides a common language and organizational framework that is necessary in guiding schools in RTI implementation. All three focus groups questioned the degree of commitment and support in this endeavor.

Administrators. Several focus group participants alluded to the administrator's leadership in creating and sustaining inclusive practices in their schools (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Karhanek, 2004; Frey & Fisher, 2004; Fullan, 2008; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Focus group participants identified roles of administrators that fell into three categories: a) instructional leadership b) distributed leadership c) time, supports and resources. Similar to research on school reform and effectiveness (Vaughn & Robers, 2007), participants identified instructional leadership of the administrator as a critical component. As instructional leaders, administrators and other focus group participants felt that a strong knowledge and skills base was required in order to lead with a vision and common language, and to establish priorities within their buildings. Participants, other than administrators, described how they expected administrators to be role models and to avail themselves of the opportunity to attend professional development along with

their staff. Otherwise, participants felt it was difficult for administrators to understand and support what they were doing. Therefore, it is necessary for administrators to participate in professional development opportunities on practices and processes that need to be understood fully before implementing them. For example, participating in professional learning on class reviews or co-teaching along with their staff or prior to full implementation would provide the context, skills and knowledge for implementation, thereby side-stepping many challenges or back-pedaling along the way.

The research supported administrators fostering distributed leadership (Donaldson, Marnik, Mackenzie and Ackerman, 2009; Frey & Fisher, 2004). Since RTI requires collaboration and collective decision-making and problem-solving, participants felt that administrators were encouraging these processes. This was evident in the frequency with which professional learning communities, the class review process, and other collaborative opportunities were mentioned. The participants also viewed the role of the administrator was to participate in these processes, a task made difficult with competing priorities. It was explained that when administrators participated in these processes their decisions were less procedural and more responsive, a better fit with Response to Intervention. Administrators need to exercise their instructional and distributed leadership abilities in order to prioritize the skills and processes that are necessary for student success.

In addition, parent knowledge and involvement in Response to Intervention is critical. Although parents did not emerge as a theme from focus group discussions, in the literature they are viewed as essential participants in the teamwork, collaboration and

decision-making regarding their children. Therefore it is incumbent upon the school leadership to keep parents informed and involved in terms of Response to Intervention.

Senior administration. Leadership at senior administration was expressed through individual themes. One administrator referred to leadership at this level in terms of engagement. They were unable to gauge the level of engagement in Response to Intervention with senior administration. In Focus group 2, one participant expressed concern in the division's interest in RTI at the beginning of its implementation, but was surprised at their limited role since this time.

Other leadership roles for senior administration involve supporting the professional learning and providing the supports and resources required for implementing and sustaining Response to Intervention. If schools are required to establish literacy and numeracy goals and administrators are identifying class reviews and co-teaching as important strategies for Response to Intervention, then it is incumbent upon senior administration to support these endeavors by providing the necessary professional development, resources and supports for making it happen.

It is also important for senior administration to be aware of concerns expressed about literacy and the disproportionate number of at risk students in some school populations. Participants were in consensus about supporting literacy across all grades, and senior years strongly voiced their concerns over the lack of resources and supports to accommodate students deemed to be at risk of dropping out and those who were involved in the youth justice system. There was consensus among participants that the supports and resources allocated to schools are insufficient in responding in a timely fashion to the

vast number of diverse learning needs. Senior administration needs to collaborate with schools to address these concerns.

Leadership is vital to the implementation of Response to Intervention. It has “significant effects on student learning, second only to effects of the curriculum and teachers’ instruction” (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 2). Administrators need to practice instructional and distributed leadership in order to align their practices with Response to Intervention and impact positively upon student achievement.

The Roles of Student Services Teams Changes with RTI Implementation

Student services teams. Student services teams in this study have included resource teachers, counsellors, educational support services personnel and clinicians. The role of student services teams, especially resource teachers, has changed significantly with the implementation of Response to Intervention. The findings supported student services teams participating in the collaborative processes at the school level, including problem-solving and decision-making. Participants described their valuable contributions to the class review process, IEP and team meetings, where it was perceived that they play an active role. The research also established their importance to the assessment process, providing data to assist classroom teachers and support teams with strategies for effective instruction and implementation of interventions at Tiers 1 through 3 for specific students.

The role of the resource teacher featured prominently in this research. Participants communicated that they were engaged in collaboration with classroom teachers to establish students’ needs within the class through assessment, and they provided useful strategies for teachers to use with specific students, but which were transferable to the class as a whole. Examples of resource teachers engaging in co-

teaching with classroom teachers, or working with small groups of students within the regular classroom were frequent in this study. Concern was expressed however, over administrators assigning resource teachers to specific jobs, such as co-teaching for example, when needs were perceived by participants to be greater in other areas of the school. It was established that the role of the resource teacher also included working with individual or small groups of students to deliver targeted and intensive supports to students who required it. It was also perceived that there were not enough resource teachers or time available for them to deliver these supports to students in need of them. All focus groups achieved consensus in this area stating that resources and supports were insufficient to meet the myriad of needs requiring support at Tiers 1, 2 and 3. These comments may have some validity, however, in that although the division has experienced declining enrollment, the number of students with special needs have increased. It is possible that the staffing formula does not reflect these changes. Similar to these research findings, the literature review identified several ways in which resource teachers collaborate with classroom teachers and other professionals to support students in the regular classroom as well as at Tiers 2 and 3 (Arthaud et al., 2007; Erkens, 2008; Wiggins & Damore, 2006).

The role of the counselor was mentioned in this study too. Participants perceived that the role of the counselor has evolved into one closely resembling the resource teacher.

Conclusions and Discussion

This qualitative research study gathered information on how best to support the implementation of Response to Intervention as a student services framework in support of

inclusion. The findings suggest three broad conclusions. First, since Response to Intervention is a framework for all students, not just those with special needs, the roles of administrators and student services teams need to be developed within the larger context of general education. The division needs to align its vision and priorities with RTI on all levels in order for implementation to be effective and sustainable. This alignment relies on the leadership of administrators, as well as their collaboration with coordinators from both student services and curriculum and instruction. At every level, staff needs to understand roles and responsibilities in relation to RTI. Further, the division's alignment to RTI depends on the quality of coordinated professional learning. Since learning is contextual, activities should be integrated into school practices and be designed in a systematic manner.

The second conclusion suggests roles for administrators and student services teams using Response to Intervention as their framework. The roles of administrators should focus on instructional and distributed leadership. In these roles, administrators have responsibility for acquiring the knowledge and skills commensurate with RTI, and making transparent their vision for its implementation. Their roles and responsibilities also include facilitating collaboration, professional learning communities, and the class review process. As well, in their work with coordinators and senior administration, they provide high quality professional learning to match specific, ongoing learning goals such as in literacy and numeracy. According to this research study, a more specific focus should be given to progress monitoring and responsive teaching. Administrator roles not only support teacher development, but their own as well. Networking with other

administrators, especially at their level, to deepen their understanding of RTI and to problem-solve challenges they face, increases their ability to lead school teams.

The study findings suggest roles for student services teams as well. Increasingly, their roles gravitate towards collaboration and team problem-solving, as they along with administrators and classroom teachers share responsibility for all students. They gather assessment data at varying levels, but integrate their data with school teams as part of the collective decision-making regarding student instruction and intervention. Their role emphasizes prevention and intervention at Tier 1, but they collaborate with school teams and outside agencies when assessment information and team decision making indicates more targeted and intensive supports are required at Tiers 2 or 3. Resource teachers and counselors work with school teams and administrators to identify and program for school wide needs, and create opportunities for shared decision-making and transparency in allocation of supports and resources.

The third conclusion suggests ways in which coordinators of student services can build capacity with their student services teams. Knowing that collaboration and problem-solving result in improved teaching and learning, coordinators need to emphasize and role model this process in their work with school based teams. Participating in their class reviews, professional learning communities, IEP meetings, student services and educational support services meetings provide opportunities to strengthen existing structures and practices. Since learning is a social activity that is best facilitated contextually, coordinators need to provide professional development opportunities outside workshops and mass training sessions. Providing site-based training differentiates professional development and offers student services teams guided

practice in acquiring skills, practicing them in context, and reflecting with the coordinator as a coach. It is also beneficial to involve classroom teachers at every opportunity to build capacity and reinforce their collaboration with resource teachers. Reciprocal opportunities provided by coordinators of curriculum and instruction serve to reinforce this shared responsibility and assist in building capacity throughout the school and the division.

In general, the findings suggest that Response to Intervention changes the way administrators, classroom teachers and student services teams conceive of inclusion. In addition, the findings identify essential components and strategies for implementing RTI. These components and strategies along with the leadership roles of administrators and student services teams will assist in developing a common language and framework necessary to improve the implementation process of Response to Intervention. The “Essential components of RTI implementation” are presented in Table 5.1. These components are presented as a checklist organized according to themes used in the research findings and conclusions: leadership, collaboration and teaming, integrated assessment and data collection process, professional development. Leaders at the division and school levels can use the essential components to engage in dialogue with their teams and to establish next steps for implementation.

Table 5.1: Essential components of RTI implementation

Leadership	Aligned	Not aligned	Next steps required (D)ivision (A)dministrators (C)oordinators *(ESS) Coordinators (SS)tudent Services Teams (SB) School Based Teams
RTI is recognized as an educational reform to improve learning for all students			
RTI is a priority at the division and school levels. A common vision and language are shared			
Leadership has committed to long term, systemic change			
Inclusive culture and practices are fostered at all levels			
Multiple tiers of instruction and intervention are evident			
Instructional leadership is fostered			
Distributed leadership is fostered			
Literacy and math are priorities			
Leadership/learning teams consisting of the administrator, student services, and teacher leaders operate in each school			
Coordinators collaborate with administrators and school teams to plan PD at the division and school levels			
Collaboration and Teaming Practices			
Professional learning communities meet regularly to decide what students should learn, and to plan next steps when student have not learned or have already learned			
Class review process is implemented to establish classroom goals and needs, and to allocate supports and resources			
Time is provided for teams to collaborate			

Collective problem-solving/decision-making exists between classroom and resource teachers			
Teaming is reflected at all levels. Curriculum and student services coordinators team around leadership and professional development; classroom teachers team with resource teachers and counselors to provide instruction and interventions; staff in common roles team at the division level (i.e. resource teachers)			
Integrated assessment and data collection process			
Universal screening assessments are implemented			
Multiple pieces of data are used to inform the teaching and learning cycle			
Both the protocol and problem-solving approaches are used to provide instruction and interventions for academic and behavioral difficulties			
Assessment/data are collected and analyzed to inform the teaching-learning process			
<i>Success for All Learners</i> (differentiated instruction strategies) Manitoba Curricula and evidence-based practices are used to implement the curriculum			
Progress monitoring is used frequently to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and interventions			
Responsive teaching is used effectively			
Professional Learning/Development			
Staff is knowledgeable about the full range of exceptionalities			
Administrators identify PD to match specific, ongoing			

learning goals			
Coordinators of student services work with student services and school based teams on-site			
Coordinators coach school teams in problem-solving processes			
Professional development is embedded in the school culture: collaboration, class reviews, PLCs, coaching, mentoring, book studies, etc.			
Professional development occurs in many forms: book studies, courses, workshops, networking, research groups, study groups, etc.			

Implications for Practice, Theory and Research

This study recognizes that the implementation of Response to Intervention is a complex and challenging process involving elements of leadership, commitment and corresponding professional development. The findings and conclusions from this naturalistic qualitative study have significant implications for practice in the field of inclusive education, especially with respect to student services.

Implications for Student Services

One implication that can be drawn from this study is that the roles of resource teachers, counselors, and educational support services personnel and clinicians are changing to support inclusive practices. In order to meet the challenges of these changing roles, this research study strongly indicates that collaboration and participation in the problem-solving and decision-making practices of schools is necessary. This study suggests that opportunities to become involved in class reviews and professional learning

communities will strengthen the assessment and data collection process, as well as enrich the instructional planning and intervention process.

This study has indicated too, that student services teams often feel overwhelmed with high priority lists and daily challenges. Establishing priorities with administrators and school-based teams, especially through the class review process, is highly recommended in order to allocate time and find balance between prevention and intervention programming.

Similarly, the findings and conclusions drawn from this study suggest that resource teachers and counselors need to understand their priorities in relation to school needs and goals. This should be accomplished in collaboration with administrator(s), school-based teams, and classroom teachers. This study recommends that increasing opportunities to collaborate and work along side classroom teachers to build capacity will benefit teachers and all learners in the long run.

Implications for Administrators

This study has suggested that the role of administrators is laden with competing responsibilities, priorities and challenges. However, as this research study has concluded, the Response to Intervention framework coordinates many of the practices already at work in schools by establishing priorities and providing a process for allocating supports and resources. As noted in the research findings and conclusions, the challenge for administrators, especially at senior years, will be creating opportunities for professional learning communities, collaboration and the class review process. The problem solving and decision-making features inherent to these processes are important for student

success, as they are rooted in assessment, decision-making and the teaching/learning cycle.

As instructional leaders and learner of learners, this study supported the ongoing professional development of administrators in the areas related to the RTI components, class reviews and inclusive education. It is also recommended through this research study that principals embed new practices such as co-teaching and class reviews naturally, rather than as add-ons, in order for staff to understand the logical connections and processes as they pertain to the decision-making components of Response to Intervention. It is also highly suggested that administrators network more with their colleagues either through book studies, focused study groups, or professional learning communities to discuss common interests and challenges relevant to RTI implementation.

Findings and conclusions from this study strongly suggested that classroom teachers require more information about RTI, especially in the areas of evidence-based practices, progress monitoring and responsive teaching, in order to strengthen Tier 1 instruction and interventions to students. It is also recommended that administrators continue to build capacity with their school teams by identifying individual and collective needs and providing opportunities to address them.

Implications for Coordinators/Consultants of Student Services

Based on conclusions drawn from this research study, Coordinators of Student Services needed to support school-based teams in fostering collaboration between resource teachers/counselors and classroom teachers. As well, since learning is contextual, similar to the class review process, professional development should be made relevant within the social context of schools.

This study also recognized that resource teachers and counselors varied in their levels of knowledge and skills and consequently, coordinators should differentiate professional development to encourage everyone's growth along the learning continuum. The research revealed an interest in book studies, study groups and workshops as well as opportunities to learn along side their peers.

This study also indicated the importance of aligning practices and goals with schools and the division. It is recommended that annual student services goals align with division priorities and school goals.

One of the conclusions drawn from this study was the need for a common language and understanding of RTI. When Coordinators plan their own professional development it is recommended that in addition to attending workshops, conferences and study groups from outside the division, they participate in book studies, study groups and committees in their own division.

Implications for Senior Administration

This research study has suggested ways in which senior administration can support the implementation of Response to Intervention. Participants in this study initially felt supported in the adoption of the RTI framework when they participated in the Divisional workshop, had an opportunity to participate in the Steering Committee, and administrators received copies of the RTI strategic plan that they then shared with their school staff. Participants expressed their need to receive ongoing support from the Division's leadership in terms of priorities, coordinated professional development, and resources and supports.

The study also indicated that there were specific components of Response to Intervention that supported inclusive practices. These components included: professional learning communities, assessment, the class review process, and the decision-making cycle. It is recommended that these practices continue to be supported at the division level. The study also identified areas in which school practices were not aligned with RTI. These areas were progress monitoring and responsive teaching. It is recommended that these areas be considered when planning professional development for administrators and classroom teachers.

It is also important for senior administration to be aware of concerns expressed about literacy and the disproportionate number of at risk students in some school populations. The research findings and conclusions indicate perceptions that the supports and resources allocated to schools are insufficient in responding in a timely fashion to the vast number of diverse learning needs. It is recommended that senior administration collaborate with schools to address these concerns.

Implications for the Divisional Response to Intervention Steering Committee

This research study acknowledged the importance of the strategic plan (PATH) that was developed by the Steering Committee. It met the needs identified by focus group participants in that it shared a common language, priorities and goals, promoting unity and coherence across the division.

The research findings and conclusions suggested that knowledge and skills levels were varied among administrators and schools throughout the division. It was recommended that sub-committees be developed to address specific concerns arising from RTI implementation and then at specific times throughout the year, report back to

the Steering Committee to update progress made towards the PATH goals. In addition, the research revealed differences among early, middle and senior years. It was recommended that these differences be reflected in the composition and goals of the sub-committees. The research supported involving stakeholders in the change process and therefore, it is recommended that principals, student services staff and classroom teachers be consulted regarding sub-committee foci.

The study identified the importance of research and evidence-based practices. It was recommended that the committee encourage sub-committees to embed research into their work.

Moreover, the research study revealed considerable variability in RTI knowledge and skills across the division. In order to ameliorate these discrepancies the Steering Committee should consider establishing RTI reps at each school as a means of unifying the information shared among schools. This has proven successful with two other Divisional Steering Committees.

Other Implications

The findings and conclusions drawn from this study have implications for divisions outside the one involved in this research study. School divisions familiar with Response to Intervention may wish to compare their successes and challenges to the ones discussed in this study. In addition, for those divisions still struggling with inclusion, they may wish to draw upon the experiences of the division involved in this study in order to determine actions suited to their specific needs.

As well, this research study may have implications for practice in the field of student services by illuminating findings related to the roles and responsibilities of

student services teams and administrators using Response to Intervention as their framework. Moreover, it may assist school divisions with providing a process for implementing RTI, thereby improving collaboration, communication and practices in the face of change. Finally, it may also provide coordinators and consultants of student services with suggestions for building capacity with their teams.

Implications for Theory

Within the contexts of the research findings and conclusions of this study, constructivism as its theoretical framework will be discussed. Similar to the descriptions presented by Patton (2002), this study involved multiple realities constructed by participants from varying backgrounds and experiences with Response to Intervention. It was the implications of their constructions that contributed to the research findings. In addition, their collective experiences and different viewpoints contributed to a “worldview” (Patton, 2006). This worldview was essentially the reality of RTI created from their perceptions, and the perceptions created by sharing collective perspectives and experiences with other focus group members. This theoretical framework was appropriate for this research topic, since the purpose was “less focused on finding the limitations of the study or the extent to which the results [could] be generalized” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 241). In keeping with the integrity of this research theory, the reality created by the participants corresponded with the conclusions and recommendations of the research study. The facts created by the participants created meaning within the context of this study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

In general, the research findings and conclusions provided implementation criteria to give clarity and focus to the implementation process.

Questions for Further Study

Since this study included only the perceptions of twenty-two participants from the school division and some findings were unexpected, suggestions can be made for further research.

This study could be repeated at the division level, involving all schools, but aggregating the data to more clearly define the similarities and differences in RTI implementation among early, middle and senior years.

Moreover, it would be valuable to repeat this study in the same division in three years to evaluate whether RTI is having an impact and implementation gains are being made.

Given the significance of the class review process in this research study, it would be beneficial to design action research around its impact on RTI implementation.

Given the importance of research/evidence-based practices, studies on these practices could be conducted at early, middle and senior years.

Research into effective progress monitoring and responsive teaching at early, middle and senior years would be beneficial to develop these skills in all teachers.

Given the importance of and difficulties in communication and collaboration in the Response to Intervention framework at senior years, research into improving these processes would be valuable.

Since Response to Intervention addresses the needs of all students and the research study reported inadequacies in the area of enrichment, it would be valuable to conduct research into providing enrichment within the context of the RTI framework.

Given the increased number of students at senior years involved in Youth Justice and with literacy and numeracy scores significantly below grade level, research into appropriate programming for these students would be valuable.

Given the number of students with behavioral difficulties, research into best practices for positive behavior supports and interventions would be valuable.

Conclusion

This study gathered information on how best to support the implementation of Response to Intervention as a student services framework to support inclusion. Although RTI is a general education reform, it aligns with *Appropriate education programming in Manitoba: Standards for student services* document (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006) and as this study has concluded, RTI changed the way educators conceive of inclusion. It has also illuminated findings related to the roles of administrators and student services teams using Response to Intervention as their framework. In addition, it may have assisted school divisions in providing a process for implementing RTI, thereby improving communication and collaboration in the face of change. Finally, it has provided coordinators and consultants with suggestions for building capacity with their student services teams.

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APPENDIX A: ENREB APPROVAL CERTIFICATE



CTC Building
208 - 194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2
Fax (204) 269-7173
www.umanitoba.ca/research

APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

August 9, 2011

TO: Desiree Heather Narvey (Advisor J. Cranston)
Principal Investigator

FROM: Stan Straw, Chair
Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (EB)

Re: Protocol #E2011:049
"Response to Intervention: An Inclusive Framework for Student Services Teams"

Please be advised that your above-referenced protocol has received human ethics approval by the **Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board**, which is organized and operates according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2). This approval is valid for one year only.

Any significant changes of the protocol and/or informed consent form should be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation of such changes.

Please note:

- If you have funds pending human ethics approval, the auditor requires that you submit a copy of this Approval Certificate to the Office of Research Services, fax 261-0325 - please include the name of the funding agency and your UM Project number. This must be faxed before your account can be accessed.
- if you have received multi-year funding for this research, responsibility lies with you to apply for and obtain Renewal Approval at the expiry of the initial one-year approval; otherwise the account will be locked.

The Research Quality Management Office may request to review research documentation from this project to demonstrate compliance with this approved protocol and the University of Manitoba Ethics of Research Involving Humans.

The Research Ethics Board requests a final report for your study (available at: http://umanitoba.ca/research/ors/ethics/ors_ethics_human_REB_forms_guidelines.html) in order to be in compliance with Tri-Council Guidelines.

Bringing Research to Life

APPENDIX B: LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

August 22, 2011

Dear Sir,

I am currently enrolled as a Master of Education Student, Graduate Studies at the University of Manitoba, and am completing the requirements for my thesis research study in Master of Education in Educational Administration. The focus of my research study is the implementation of Response to Intervention (RTI) as a student services framework to support inclusion. The research findings may be helpful in providing a process for implementing RTI, thereby improving communication and collaboration in the face of change. It may also provide coordinators of student services with suggestions for building capacity with student services teams. As part of my research I am conducting three focus groups. The intent of this letter is to request your permission for administrators, coordinators, clinicians, resource teachers, counsellors and special education teachers to participate. Please read the details of the study, which are provided below and sign the bottom of the form if you are willing to give your approval. A copy of my Ethics approval is a separate attachment in my email to you.

Title of research study: Response to Intervention: An Inclusive Framework For Student Services.

Principal researcher: Desiree H. Narvey

Purpose of study: This study explores the implementation of Response to Intervention to Support Inclusion. Specifically, this study addresses the following research areas: the components of Response to Intervention, how school and student service team practices can become aligned with RTI, and the roles of administrators, student service and school teams in its implementation.

Procedures to be used: Administrators, classroom teachers, clinicians, coordinators and student services personnel will be asked to volunteer to participate in one of three focus groups (one focus group consisting of administrators and coordinators and the other two equally represented by classroom teachers, resource teachers and counsellors, and clinicians). The time involved with each participant/focus group is minimal, approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

I will NOT be participating in or facilitating the focus groups. A trained facilitator will lead each focus group, and each group will be arranged at mutually agreed upon times and take place outside our Division. I will be informing participants that the interviews will be tape-recorded, and a paid transcriber will be transcribing the notes at the end of the focus groups. No names of individuals, schools or the school division will be included in the transcription. I do not anticipate any risk to the participants, but each individual will be informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I will not be using descriptions or quotations which might identify specific individuals, schools, or our division. When I successfully defend my thesis, the focus group interview tapes will be destroyed.

Potential risk to participants:

The perceived risk in this study is considered to be minimal particularly since the focus groups will be conducted by a facilitator outside the division and the tapes will be transcribed by a paid transcriber. Both the facilitator and the transcriber will sign a letter of confidentiality as well as the participants.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the study at any time, or refuse to respond to questions they feel may be linked to them personally.

Confidentiality:

Data gathered in this research study will be used as part of my Master's thesis. Results from the research may also be published or presented in public forums; however names and other identifying information will not be used or revealed. Despite efforts to keep the personal information confidential, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed since focus group participants may know each other.

Included with this letter is a copy of the consent form that I will ask you to sign if you grant me permission to conduct my research.

If you have further questions or require further information, please contact me Desiree Narvey at

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Invitation to Participate

Research Project Title:

Response to Intervention: An inclusive framework for student services

Researcher: **Desiree H. Narvey, Master of Education Student, Graduate Student**

This letter describes a research project that I am conducting for my master's thesis, and describes how you might participate in the project if you choose. It also includes a request for you to participate and a way for you to indicate your willingness to participate. I have organized the letter around the following topics:

- 1) a brief description of the purpose of the research and the specific procedures that would involve you,
- 2) a comment about how your privacy will be protected and how your freedom to participate will be respected, and
- 3) a comment about how you can find out about the results of the study after the results are ready.

Purpose of the Research: This study explores the implementation of Response to Intervention to support Inclusion. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) What are the participants' understandings of the components of Response to Intervention? 2) To what extent are current school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to intervention?

3) What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school-based practices?

Procedures Involving Participants: If you volunteer for this study, you may be participating in a focus group discussion lasting about 60 minutes, but not more than 90 minutes. One focus group will consist of administrators and coordinators; the other two focus groups will consist of an equal representation of clinicians, classroom teachers, resource teachers and counsellors. It is possible that not all who volunteer for this

study will be selected to participate. As well, since each focus group will be comprised of 7 to 10 participants, and if the number of volunteers exceed 30, not everyone will be able to participate. ONLY those who are selected by the facilitator will be contacted to participate in the focus groups.

In so far as possible, the time and place of the focus group will be arranged at a mutually agreeable time, and will occur outside our school division (in a conference room at the Viscount Inn).

The focus group will be led by a facilitator from outside our school division. The requirements for confidentiality and non-disclosure will be upheld at all times during and following the study.

Recording and Transcription: The focus group discussion will be tape-recorded. The recording will be transcribed by a paid transcriber.

Confidentiality of Information: Although you may know the individuals participating in your focus group, every effort will be made to maintain anonymity and confidentiality during this study. You will indicate your willingness to participate by emailing the focus group facilitator. The facilitator will arrange the date and time of your focus group and will tape record the session. At the end of your focus group, the tapes will be given to a paid transcriber, again from outside the school division. No names of people, schools, or the school division will be included in the transcriptions. I will receive the transcriptions when they are completed, and the tapes will be placed in a sealed envelope by the transcriber and then stored in my locked cabinet until they can be destroyed at the end of the successful defence of my thesis, before December 2011. You will also asked to respect the privacy of others participating in the study. In particular, please do not discuss the detailed content of your interview or discussion group with others, whether or not they are also participants in the study.

Results of the study may be used by the division, published or presented in public forums; however, no names or other identifying information will be used or revealed. While I may be using descriptions or quotations from the transcriptions, they will not identify individuals, schools or division by name, content or context.

The perceived risk in this study is considered to be minimal particularly since pseudonyms will be used for individuals and schools. Despite efforts to keep personal information confidential, since you may know others participating in your focus group, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The benefit from participation is that you will have a voice in the implementation of response to intervention. There will be no remuneration for participants in this study.

General Comments: Included with this email is a "Written Consent Form". This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It will provide you a background to what the

research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

If you are willing to participate, I ask that you email the facilitator of the focus groups to acknowledge your participation in the research study. Her name and email information are listed below:

Facilitator: Dr. xxx
Email: [xxx](#)
Phone: xxx

I would also ask you to read and sign the attached "Written Consent Form" and bring it with you when you arrive 10 minutes before the focus group.

If you have further questions or require further information, please contact me at (204) xxxxxx, ext. xxx or via email at [xxx](#)

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Desiree H. Narvey

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF CONSENT



UNIVERSITY
OF MANITOBA

Letter of Consent

Research Project Title:

Response to Intervention: An inclusive framework for student services.

Researcher: **Desiree H. Narvey, Master of Education Student, Graduate Studies**

Contact Information: **XXXXXXXXXX**

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This letter describes a research project that I am conducting for my master's thesis, and describes how you might participate in the project if you choose. It also includes a request for you to participate and a way for you to indicate your willingness to participate. I have organized the letter around the following topics:

- 1) a brief description of the purpose of the research and the specific procedures that would involve you,
- 2) a comment about how your privacy will be protected and how your freedom to participate will be respected, and
- 3) a comment about how you can find out about the results of the study after the results are ready.

Purpose of the Research: This study explores the implementation of Response to Intervention to support Inclusion. Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions: 1) What are the participants' understandings of the components of Response to Intervention? 2) To what extent are current school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to intervention?

3) What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school-based practices?

Procedures Involving Participants: : If you volunteer for this study, you may be participating in a focus group discussion lasting about 60 minutes, but not more than 90 minutes. One focus group will consist of administrators and coordinators (supervisory staff) and the other two focus groups will consist of an equal representation of classroom teachers, clinicians, resource teachers and counselors from early, middle and senior years. Since the focus groups will be comprised of staff representing each of the groups listed above and from all three levels (early, middle, senior years), it is possible that not all who volunteer for this study will be selected to participate. As well, since each focus group will be comprised of 7 to 10 participants, if the number of volunteers exceed 30, not everyone will be able to participate. ONLY those who are selected by the facilitator will be contacted to participate in the focus groups.

In so far as possible, the time and place of the focus group will be arranged at a mutually agreeable time, and will occur outside our school division (in a conference room at the Viscount Gort).

The focus group will be led by a facilitator from outside our school division. The requirements for confidentiality and non-disclosure will be upheld at all times during and following the study.

Recording and Transcription: The focus group discussion will be tape-recorded. The recording will be transcribed by a paid transcriber.

Confidentiality of Information: Although you may know the individuals participating in your focus group, every effort will be made to maintain anonymity and confidentiality during this study. **I will NOT be participating in or facilitating the focus groups.** You will indicate your willingness to participate by emailing the focus group facilitator, YounYoung Park (younyoungpark@hotmail.com). The facilitator will arrange the date and time of your focus group and will tape record the session. At the end of your focus group, the tapes will be given to a paid transcriber, again from outside the school division. No names of people, schools, or the school division will be included in the transcriptions. I will receive the transcriptions when they are completed, and the tapes will be placed in a sealed envelope by the transcriber and then stored in my locked cabinet until they can be destroyed at the end of the successful defence of my thesis, before December 2011.

You will also asked to respect the privacy of others participating in the study. In particular, please do not discuss the detailed content of your interview or discussion group with others, whether or not they are also participants in the study.

Data collected during this research study will be used in the researcher's master's thesis. Results of this research study may be used by the division, published or presented in public forums; however, no names or other identifying information will be used or revealed. While I may be using descriptions or quotations from the transcriptions, they will not include names of individuals or schools to provide anonymity.

The perceived risk in this study is considered to be minimal particularly since pseudonyms will be used for individuals and schools. Despite efforts to keep personal information confidential, since you may know others participating in your focus group, absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time, or refuse to respond to questions they feel may be linked to them personally. If a participant chooses to withdraw from this research study after participating in the focus group they will contact the focus group facilitator by email. The facilitator will meet with the participant at a mutually agreed upon time to review the focus group transcript and delete and destroy the participant's data.

General Comments: I will give you a copy of this consent letter for your records. It is only part of the process of informed consent, because it gives you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about anything mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so feel free to ask for clarification or new information whenever you want.

Your signature at the bottom of this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management/Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Coordinator (HEC) at 474-7122, or email [xxxxxxx](#). A

copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

How to contact the Researcher, Desiree Narvey:

Telephone number: xxx-xxxx

Email address: [xxxxxxx](#)

The researcher's advisor, Dr. Jermome Cranston, may be contacted at:

Telephone number: xxx-xxxx

Email address: xxxxxxx

APPENDIX E: LETTER OF CONFIDENTIALITY

Letter of Confidentiality

I, _____ hired by Desiree Narvey (researcher) as the facilitator or transcriber (circle one) to conduct focus groups for her research study on Response to Intervention: An Inclusive Framework for Student Services, have agreed to the following conditions:

To maintain the confidentiality of participants, schools and the school division participating in the study.

To keep confidential any of the focus group conversations or as recorded in the tapes of the session or the subsequent transcriptions.

To release the tape recordings and transcriptions of the focus groups and not store any copies either recorded, taped or electronic after the focus group participants have received a copy of the research summary (facilitator), or after the focus group tape-recordings have been transcribed and made available to the researcher.

Signed this _____ day of _____ in the year _____.

Signature: _____

APPENDIX F: SCRIPT FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Script for Focus Groups/ Interview Protocol

All three focus group sessions will use the following script and research protocol questions (Appendix G) as closely as possible. Note that written consent to participate will have already been obtained before each participant participates in the focus group (Appendix B).

Facilitator : This is a study about three questions:

- 1) What are your understandings of the components of Response to Intervention?
- 2) To what extent are current school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to Intervention?
- 3) What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school based practices?

This focus group session will be tape recorded. Your participation in the focus group is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Your identity and comments will be kept confidential throughout the project, including whenever results are published or shared in any form. To insure confidentiality, this facilitator will not be identifying you to the researcher of this study. If you wish a summary of the results of the study, I will email it to you after the researcher successfully defends her Thesis, before the end of December 2011.

I also ask that you keep confidential your own comments that you make during the focus group session, as well as comments made by others in the group. That is, please do not tell others exactly what you or other group members said in this session, in order to respect others' privacy.

Are there any questions about what I have said?

After answering any questions, the focus group facilitator will ask the Research Protocol Questions

Research Protocol Questions:

1. What are the participants' understandings of the components of Response to Intervention?

Probes:

- When you think of RTI, what comes to mind? How would you describe RTI?
 - Where did you learn your definitions and perceptions of RTI? Provide examples whenever appropriate.
 - What effect do you think the components of RTI has on:
 - Students' achievement?
 - Teachers' knowledge and skills base? Individually and collectively?Please elaborate and give examples whenever appropriate.
 - Has the current approach to RTI in the school division changed the way you conceive of inclusion? Explain your thinking.
2. To what extent are current school and student services team practices aligned and not aligned with Response to Intervention? Please elaborate

Probes:

- In what sense are they aligned with RTI with respect to:
 - teaming and collaboration?
 - Problem-solving?
 - Evidence-based practices?
 - Interventions?Please elaborate and provide examples whenever possible.
 - If your sense is that school and student services team practices are not aligned with RTI, why are they not? Explain.
3. What are the roles of student services teams and administrators in establishing RTI as a framework for student services and school based practices? Please describe and provide examples.

Probes:

- What factors and circumstances support or impede their ability to carry out these roles? Please elaborate and provide examples.
- Do student services and administrator roles need to change from current practices to make RTI a reality? If so, how? If not, why not? Please elaborate.

4. What factors promote or impede the implementation of RTI? Please elaborate and provide examples.

Probes:

- What factors impact upon your level of engagement in RTI? Engagement at the school level? Engagement at the Division level? Please elaborate and provide examples.
- Has professional development played a role in your understanding of RTI? If so, in what ways. If not, why not?
- Describe any professional development required to build skills, knowledge and understanding of RTI. For you personally, for school teams, for the school division.
- Which of the tiers requires the most professional development, resources and financial supports? Explain what these resources and supports would look like. Does this correspond with the greatest needs? Please elaborate and provide examples.

Facilitator concludes: Those are all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add to our discussion before we close our focus group?

APPENDIX G: AMENDMENT APPROVAL CERTIFICATE



**Office of the Vice-President
(Research and International)
Research Ethics and Compliance**

Human Ethics
208 - 194 Dafoe Road
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3T 2N2
Fax 204-269-7173

AMENDMENT APPROVAL

March 20, 2012

TO: **Desiree Heather Narvey**
Principal Investigator

FROM: **Stan Straw, Chair** Signature deleted. (ENREB)
Education/Nursing R

Re: **Protocol #E2011:049**
"Response to Intervention: An Inclusive Framework for Student Services Teams"

This will acknowledge your Amendment Request received March 16, 2012 requesting amendment to your above-noted protocol.

Approval is given for this amendment. Any further changes to the protocol must be reported to the Human Ethics Secretariat in advance of implementation.