

Response to Interventions Effects on
Reading Behaviors, Attitudes and Performance

Jeanne M. Griffin

Concordia University Portland



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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction	4
Chapter 2 – The Issue	10
Chapter 3 – Outcomes and Evaluation	27
Chapter 4 – Action Plan	29
Chapter 5 – Results and Next Steps	37
References	65
Appendix A – Survey	68
Appendix B – Individual Reading Intervention Documentation	69



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Abstract

The objective of this action research project was to investigate the effect that Response to Intervention groups had on the reading behaviors, attitudes and performance of four third grade students. The data about attitude and behavior changes were collected and evaluated through surveys and observations by the researcher. The data on student performance was collected through Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2) and the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) state test. Data analysis suggests that Response to Intervention reading groups increased student performance and positively affected reading behaviors and attitudes. The author also suggests areas for further study of Response to Intervention groups.



Action Research Proposal

Chapter One – Introduction

Tucked away in a city that is both suburban and semi-rural is a school district that prides itself on its small town charm. The surrounding neighborhood has a bustling business district and an average income that is slightly above the national norm. The violent crime rate is low with no homicides or murders reported in 2003. The city of 55,500 boasts that in the last census report 54% of their population has had some college, ranging from Associate of Arts to Doctorate degrees. The population and the district have been experiencing changes in the minority population numbers, which have been growing. The growing minority population of the district has yet to affect this site. In this bustling community is nestled a small gem of a school that is dealing with expansion of numbers due to district restructuring.

This school is one of the oldest, well-established schools in the district and it is located near the business district in the suburban area of town. The school is 84-years-old and has gone through many transformations during this time. Today the building houses kindergarten through fifth grade. This small, quaint school has always had more in-district transfers and volunteer hours recorded than any other school in the district, keeping student numbers around 300. These transfers have kept the school class sizes ranging in the low to mid twenties for most grade levels. This year the student population is growing due to another school in the district that did not meet NCLB regulations,

allowing the parents a choice of this school or one other in the district. Twenty-five of those families decided to transfer their children to this school. The site also had increased enrollment due to families moving into the surrounding area.

The students are instructed by a staff of 23 licensed teachers, supported by 11 classified staff. Forty-two percent of the teachers have Master's Degrees or are Nationally Board Certified, and one is currently working on obtaining a Masters. The staff has been recognized with many awards, including an Oregon state teacher of the year. The average years of service of the staff range from four to twenty-five, many have spent the majority of their teaching years in this building. There is one administrator at the site. This elementary faculty has been participating in professional development in the area of writing for the last two years, showing an improvement on the state benchmark scores. Because these scores have shown improvement for two years in a row, with 85% and 70% meeting or conditionally meeting for 2006 and 2007, the area of focus for the next two to three years will be on improving statewide reading scores for every student in the building.

Because this school has always been small, the atmosphere in this building is family and student-oriented. The volunteer hours by the parents in this building are extremely high, 18.7 hours per student. The hours spent by the volunteers and the staff help create a feeling of welcome and safety for all who enter the building. Because of this atmosphere and the size of the student population, strong bonds have been formed by

both families and staff as they watch the students grow through the elementary school years. The student population has risen this year to 392, approximately 51 more students than were projected at the end of 2006-2007 school year. Because of this increase, an additional teacher was added to the staff in September of 2007, and class sizes increased to the mid to upper twenties per classroom. Of the 392 students, 79% are Caucasian, 14% Hispanic, 6% Asian, with the remainder being a mixture of African and Native American. Out of this student population, 30 students are English Language Learners (ELL) and 15 are Talented and Gifted (TAG). Because of the affluence of the surrounding area, the site is not eligible for Title 1 funds. Title I funds are allocated by the district to schools whose number of students eligible for free and reduced lunch has met a certain criteria, usually of percentage of the overall student population. This school has never met these criterions; about 30% of the student population currently are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Because the school does not qualify for Title I funding, they do not have a reading teacher on-staff in the building. The Special Education teacher services students that have an IEP that are at this site. To help students who struggle with reading, the faculty implemented a "Between the Bells" program after school for students in first through third grades. These students, who would usually go home at 2:00, stayed an additional 25 minutes for reading interventions and instruction then went home on a later bus at 2:25. This program is no longer viable due to the change in the dismissal schedule with all students now being released at 2:25.

The student population takes the state benchmark tests each year at this school. For the purpose of this study the researcher will be focusing on 3rd grade state reading scores. These statewide scores are expressed in Rausch Interval Table (RIT) units. While state reading test scores will be watched closely, RIT scores showing student growth will be the focus of the faculty. Every student in the building should show the growth of 6-7 points on the RIT scores, an equivalent of one year's growth. Test scores for 2006 showed 85% of 3rd graders at this site passed the state reading test. In 2007, preliminary test results show that 74% of 3rd graders passed the test. In 2007, the state of Oregon raised the points needed to pass the 3rd grade reading test by four points, making it more difficult to pass the test. The decline in tests scores shows this increase in difficulty.

The researcher has taught at this school for the last three years as a 2/3 blend or 3rd grade teacher and is currently working on a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, having completed the requirements for a reading endorsement. The researcher has become the "go-to" person in the building for reading interventions and DRA training due to the reading endorsement. The researcher has also been on Site Council for the last two years, currently working on the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for 2007-2008. The area of focus for the SIP plan for 2007-2008 will be the reading gains made by all students in the building. The researcher is also on the Climate Committee for this site, dealing with school wide positive behavior methods (PBS) to improve student self-management of undesired behaviors.

This year the researcher is teaching in a third grade classroom with 26 students. One student is African American, two are Hispanic and ELL, and the rest of the student population is Caucasian and English speaking. There are three students who have IEP's and are seeing the Special Education teacher, with two males identified as TAG. There are 13 females and 13 males in the researcher's classroom. The researcher's student population is currently being screened for reading and language acquisition difficulties.

Because this site does not qualify for Title I funding and a change in the schedule resulted in the loss of the "Between the Bells" program, these struggling students are receiving no additional interventions at this time. Site Council has been looking for ways to help struggling readers who are "too high" to qualify for special education. These students struggle in regular classrooms and need more focused interventions and small group instruction. The principal on this site brought information to the Site Council at the end of last year about the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. RTI is a Special Education screening model that is being used in districts around the metropolitan area surrounding this site. This staff has been piloting the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) portion of the RTI model for the last three years for the district. As a member of the climate committee the researcher is very familiar with the PBS model for behavior interventions. The school is now looking at the literacy interventions portion of RTI to help students struggling in reading. The Site Council last year did anonymous surveys of the staff about the willingness to implement this model of reading intervention.

The principal and a first grade instructor also attended a two-day workshop about the RTI model and reported back to the staff. After much discussion and learning about the RTI model, and the reading of staff surveys, the faculty had some concerns with the model. Educational assistant time will be scaled back in the classroom so these aides can run the intervention groups for each grade. This was a big stumbling block for some of the faculty. In the end the staff committed to the RTI plan for at least the next two years, again piloting this model for the district. The question for the researcher becomes this: “How will RTI reading intervention affect reading behaviors, attitudes and performance for identified struggling readers in the third grade research classroom?”



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Chapter Two - The Issue

Every year in September educators enthusiastically greet students as the new school year begins. Hopes and energy levels are high for both the students and the teachers. As the month of September wanes educators are busily assessing their students for reading behaviors and levels. When the assessing is finished and the data collected, there are always a number of students who fall below the expected grade level, some as much as one, two or three years below. These students struggle in all academic areas as educators struggle to differentiate their instruction. One attempt at differentiation is the Response to Intervention model of reading intervention. How will RTI affect reading behaviors, attitudes and performance for these identified struggling readers in the third grade research classroom?

Because the research site does not qualify for Title I funding, the only source of assistance for the teacher is the special education teacher at the site. When a teacher turns to the special education teacher in the building for help, these struggling students' assessments are shared with Student Assistant Teams. The discrepancy between the struggling student's achievement level and IQ must be sufficient enough to qualify or even be tested for special education. If they do not qualify, tracking begins and can go on for one to two years if the student is working just above the level that would qualify them for special education. This discrepancy model is called the "wait to fail" model by

educators. In the past, the “wait to fail” system has been utilized by this school. Students, teachers and the parents struggle through this process while the student receives classroom interventions. Usually these struggling students need additional small-group focused instruction that can be difficult to provide in the classroom setting.

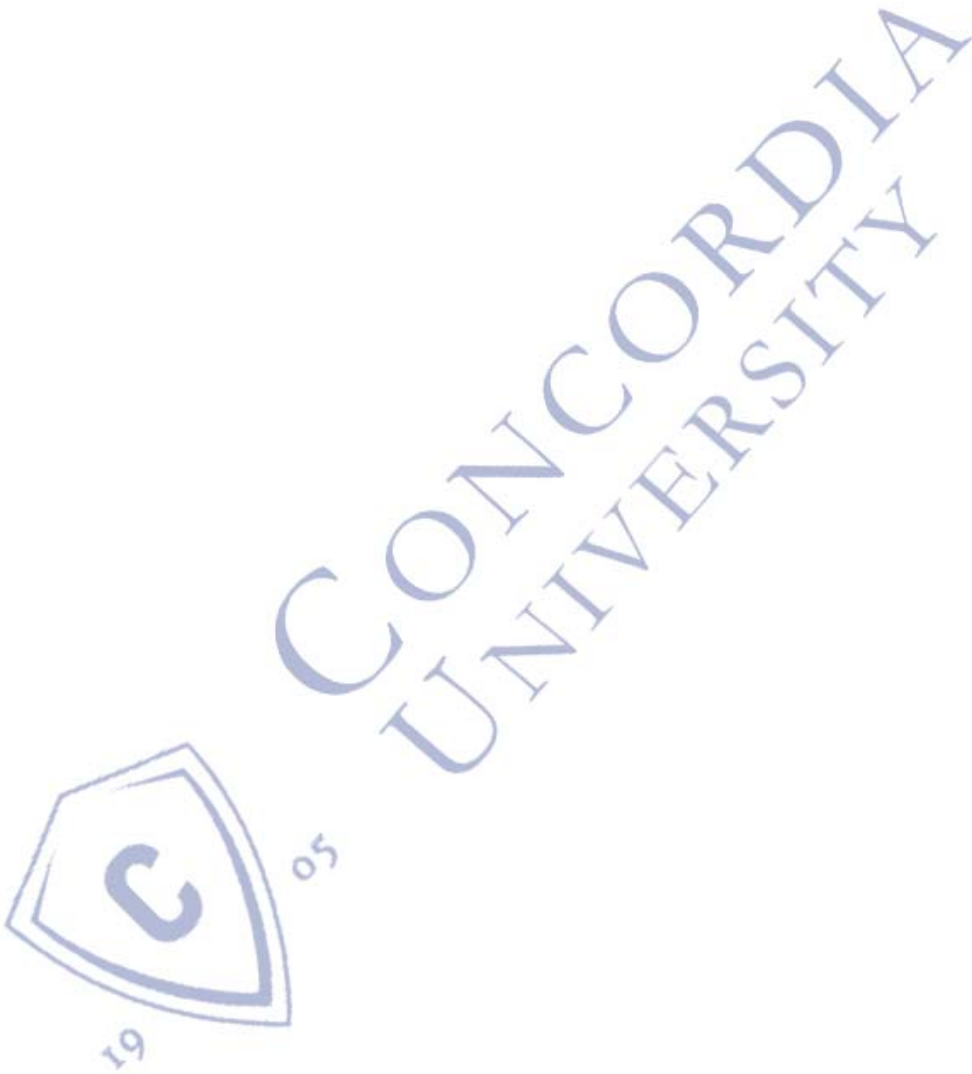
The research site has been struggling with this issue for the last few years. The staff has been trying different ways to help these struggling students including the Between the Bells program, a homework club and an on-site summer school program. However, State reading test results still show a building wide decline in reading scores from 2005-2007. Some of this decline is due to the increased difficulty of the state test. RIT scores also show a decline and this is the area of most concern for the staff. Another assessment that shows lack of progress for these students is the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA 2). Grade level teams track all students in their grade levels by DRA 2 and meet regularly to strategize interventions to help these students succeed in a classroom setting. Despite these building wide programs, student scores continue a downward trend.

Staff frustrations with the “wait to fail” model have become clearly defined in the last year. The special education teacher at the research site has voiced her frustrations about helping only a small number of students at the site when so many others need additional assistance. She found time in her busy schedule last year for targeted interventions for two groups of students who did not qualify for special education under

Oregon law. She only could see the two groups three days a week for 20 minutes because of her regular work duties at the site. She is restricted by the laws in the state of Oregon about qualifying students for special education and the students she can work with. The state currently uses the discrepancy model (wait to fail) to which the staff objects. The principal and Site Council starting looking last year at options to help the research site better serve these struggling students.

Due to the lack of progress in reading and staff dissatisfaction with the discrepancy model, a critical question at this school became what model should this site implement that would help enough of the student population make a positive impact on reading for these struggling students? Due to lack of funding for additional staff or materials, the adopted model of reading interventions had to be something that could be implemented using the existing resources at the school. Site Council also discussed this issue over the last 24 months. Last May the principal surveyed the staff about adopting the RIT reading intervention program. The staff agreed to try the model for at least the next 24 months, using educational assistants and the librarian to run the intervention groups. The teachers at the site agreed to use classroom time for other intensive interventions for these struggling students so they get a double dose of literature study. The district has approached the research site and asked them to pilot this program for the district. If the research site agrees there might be additional funds available for materials, but not for hiring any additional staff. The researcher wants to study how RTI reading

interventions will affect reading behaviors, attitudes and performance for identified struggling readers in the third grade research classroom.



Literature Review

With the implementation of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model at the research site, the author plans to monitor the progress of four third grade readers as they work with the intervention groups. Eighteen students were placed in two intervention groups by the third grade team; three of these students were from the researcher's classroom. Wanting to find more information about RTI's effectiveness with struggling readers, the author has collected related articles and books from a variety of sources.

The reviewed RTI literature has helped the researcher focus on four areas of study that need to be explored before the actual research begins. These four areas of study are: The differences between the RTI model and the discrepancy model of identifying struggling students, early intervention effectiveness in helping struggling readers, assessment data used to inform individual instruction for these identified readers, and how educators help these students succeed in a regular education classroom.

What is the difference between the discrepancy model and Response to Intervention?

The reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) was signed into law by President George Bush. This law allows the states to discontinue the use of the IQ-achievement discrepancy when identifying students with learning disabilities (Davis, 2007). The discrepancy model of identifying

students has been used in the public school system since Congress passed the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1975 (“NICHY” 2007). The Handicapped Act set the federal qualifications (No Child Left Behind) for the individual state’s decisions regarding struggling students eligibility for special education interventions.

Under the discrepancy model, students in the state of Oregon must be working 15 points below their tested IQ level (personal communication, October 15, 2007). This discrepancy between achievement and IQ must be established for a student to receive special education assistance. If this discrepancy cannot be established the student is then monitored over a period of time, sometimes years, before any outside interventions are implemented. This “wait to fail” model for these students is a point of contention for many educators in our building. Bob Sornson (2007) stated in October’s Educational Leadership that “Waiting for a child to develop a significant discrepancy between potential and achievement is a discredited idea” (p.43). The discrepancy model is frustrating for students, parents and educators as they monitor lack of progress in these students. The struggling students can be harmed emotionally and academically when interventions are delayed until achievement is sufficiently low (Gersten 2006). These complaints from educators and special education teachers about the discrepancy model have lead to the reforms that we are beginning to see in this area of education.

“Response to intervention represents the possibility of fundamentally changing our idea of disability” said Douglas Fuchs a co-director of the National Research Center

on Learning Disabilities (Samuels, 2006, p. 2). The students who struggle with language acquisition are numerous in the field of education today. Some of these students will be identified as learning disabled and receive help, but many more will not qualify and be left in the regular educational setting. RTI offers educators a more proactive, multifaceted approach to identifying these students than the single dimension between achievement and ability (Bradley, 2007). Instead of an IQ test and a point system of discrepancy, RTI looks at classroom achievement, informal test scores such as the Developmental Reading Assessment 2, state reading test scores, and teacher observations. RTI expands the identification of these struggling students past a single point in time test that may not be an accurate descriptor of student ability or achievement. RTI also offers immediate interventions to those students who are identified by the team. If these students are eventually identified for special education, they are receiving interventions that help diagnose the difficulties they are experiencing in language acquisition. These interventions are tracked by data collection that aids the grade level teams and student assistant teams (SAT) in determining the best educational decisions for these students. “Accumulated evidence show the discrepancy model has not been effective” (Brown, 2007). Margie Bell’s study in the International Reading Association found the following about Walled Lake Consolidated Schools in Oakland County Michigan:

Prior to RTI, Walled Lake's three Title I schools had a special education referral rate around 10-15 students per year per school. In 2003-2004 special education referrals ranged from 0-3 students. More importantly, with the new model, each school was able to reclassify many learning disabled children as regular education students. Between 2002-2004 the percentage of students classified as special education students dropped in each of the three Title I school by 15 percent, 53 percent, and 44 percent respectively. (p. 12)

With the RTI model in place the identified students received interventions even if they did not qualify under the discrepancy model, allowing them to receive the early interventions immediately.

The researcher will monitor the progress of the four students in Response to Intervention in her classroom while they work with the intervention groups. One female student in the group is a returning student from last year. This student has been tracked by the student assistant team (SAT) and the classroom teacher for the last 14 months using the discrepancy model; she also attended the summer school program. This year she is in an intervention group and her progress will be monitored along with the other two female students in the researcher's classroom. Students could move between the two groups or graduate from either one of the groups.

Early Interventions in the RTI Model

With the discrepancy model of qualification for students with learning difficulties, the classroom teacher is responsible for any interventions the struggling students receive. These interventions are administered in the classroom setting as time and resources allow. There are no additional resources for the teacher or the struggling student. Sadler states “The “wait to fail” or discrepancy model worked against early identification and early interventions for students. The discrepancy model went against what we know about teaching pre and early readers and over 20 years of research” (2007, p.1). The lack of targeted interventions available to these students hampers the progress of the struggling reader.

Research has shown that early interventions have an impact on school readiness. The Ypsilanti Perry Preschool Project was conducted from 1962-1967. This was a longitudinal study of 123 students who were tracked through fourth grade monitoring the interventions of pre-school versus no preschool for the control group. The findings were as follows:

Preschool had an immediate and positive impact on the measured aptitude of children in the project. While differences in measured aptitude gradually diminished during the post treatment period, differences in academic achievement between the experimental and control groups increased over time. Experimental

group children were found to be more successful in school as evaluated by the schools' own criteria of success. (p.2)

Research shows that students who are helped earlier have a better chance being successful in school, even after the child has stopped receiving interventions. The interventions have a long-term impact on academic achievement. Lack of interventions also have a strong impact on student performance. "Approximately 75% of children identified with reading problems by third grade are found to be struggling in reading at ninth grade" (Sadler, 2007, p. 3). Response to intervention offers the "promise for treating children before they fall behind their peers" (Samuels, 2006, p. 2).

W. David Tilly tells us, "RTI is an evolution, not a revolution. RTI is not an instructional program, curriculum, a strategy, or an intervention. RTI is a three tier system, of delivery" (2007, p.1). RTI is a system of decision making and problem solving (Perini, 2007). After assessing the students, they are placed in one of the three tiers in RTI. Where the student is placed is dependent on the intensity of the problem the student has shown during assessments. Tier one is the *core* level where the students receive regular classroom instruction. This intervention is successful with approximately 80 percent of the student population (Mellard, 2007). Tier two is the *strategic* intervention and is used with targeted students, usually about 15 percent of the student

population (Mellard, 2007). Tier three interventions are *intensive* and are administered by the special education teacher in the special education classroom; serving approximately five percent of the student population (Mellard, 2007). Using assessment data to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions shows clear evidence of student achievement or lack of progress (Sprague, 2007).

The RTI model incorporates researched based interventions for students who have been placed in the tier two strategic intervention groups. The identified struggling readers are monitored by Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIEBELS) to check on the effectiveness of the intervention. If progress is being made, the student will continue with the strategic intervention group. When a student shows lack of progress, the teams meet to decide if the intervention has targeted the needed skill. The student can be reassigned to another strategic intervention group that targets a different skill, then monitored for progress in that group. “The RTI focus on regular objective assessment helps us to decide whether to maintain, modify, intensify or withdraw an intervention” states Jeffrey Sprague (2006). The focus on individual interventions helps the educators target instruction in the classroom too. The students who do not show enough progress have more documentation to help support special education testing. Even if they do qualify for special education, these students have received interventions while they wait for the testing process to proceed. This is a major difference between the discrepancy model and RTI.

A concern with the Response to Intervention approach is shared by Russell Gersten. Interventions need to be conducted by well-trained personnel and with the large scale implementation of RTI these conditions might not be met. “Consequently, a child could be a nonresponder due to the teacher’s lack of skill or training or failure to implement the RTI system regularly and with fidelity” (Gersten, 2006, p.103). The interventions are a critical component of RTI and must be reliable and valid for this model to be effective.

Screening done on young children can also be a concern. “One of the ironies of the screening measure used for detecting potential reading disabilities in young children is that the earlier the student takes the assessments, the less valid and potent a predictor the measure is” (Gersten, 2006, p.104). When to assess the students and place them in the intervention groups must also be taken in to consideration when implementing the RTI model.

In contrast to the early intervention model, Krasen submits in Educational Leadership that “free reading” time works with all groups tested so far, including university students (2007). Krasen claims that late interventions can work too if there are no reports or questions, just plenty of opportunity for light reading in an area of interest for the student. “Light reading is a conduit to more difficult reading later in life” (2007, p. 72). This claim refutes the “once a poor reader, always a poor reader” claims made by other researchers.

Based on the students in the author's classroom, interest level does play a huge part in reading, but readers who struggle find it much harder to find and enjoy a book at their reading level. The researcher will be monitoring the progress of the four students in the author's classroom to see if early strategic intervention instruction will change the reading habits, attitudes and performance of these students.

Data Driven Instruction

The Response to Intervention approach proposes that instruction can not be a "one size fits all model" (Gersten, 2006, p. 103). The belief is that individual student needs must be addressed to help these children achieve academic success. Using data to drive instructional decisions is part of the RTI model. "RTI maps the specific instructional strategies found to benefit a particular student" (Hilton, 2007, p.16). This data helps teachers and administrators make better decisions about teaching methods.

If this approach is to be successful, collected data must be authentic, valid and reliable. Again Gersten cautions us about the RTI model, "DIEBELS is not descended from Mt. Olympus and is not inviolate. Benchmarks are guidelines for indicating which students are likely reading at grade level or below grade level by the end of the year" (2006, p. 103). Assuming that the data is valid and reliable, this model gives the educator an awareness of the individual progress of students (Sornson, 2007).

Instructional decisions in the RTI model are data based, not biased based" (Gersten, 2006). The success of the model depends as much on the decisions the educator

makes in the classroom as it does on the interventions the student receives. “One very exciting dimension is that RTI does not tell you what to think: it tells you what to think about” (Tilly, 2006, p. 5). RTI focuses teachers on instruction rather than on the students themselves. “The RTI model redirects initial evaluation from “what’s wrong with this student” to instruction and focusing on what does this student needs to succeed?”(Sadler, 2007, p.4).

The researcher is interested if individually based instruction using the hard data from the assessments help accelerate the reading performance of the four students being tracked. The researcher will attempt to target and focus on the data to inform instruction for these three students.

What can teachers do to help struggling readers succeed in the regular classroom?

There are many strategies teachers can adopt to help the struggling readers in their classrooms. A school wide plan of targeted interventions tied to valid assessments is one option. Teachers can also adopt the “whole child concept” looking at achievement *and* behavior of struggling readers. The structure of the literacy block is something else grade level teams could study and brainstorm. The research site has literacy blocks that are structured so that all the students are present during instruction. Currently these blocks are for 60 minutes a day, with silent reading being an additional block of time in each classroom. What is taught and how it is presented is up to the individual teachers. The

researcher wants to study how RTI can fit into and help advance the success of these struggling readers at the site

Carol Sadler was the keynote speaker at a Response to Intervention Summit conference in May of 2007. Sadler shared with her audience the big idea of RTI, “We have an obligation to think of students as difficult to teach before we label them as unable to learn” (p.23). Thinking must shift for staff and administrators using the RTI model. This cannot be a classroom approach; it must be a shift in thinking for the entire building. Teachers and support staff need to be willing do “teach what works” for the student, not what they are used to teaching (Sadler, 2007). So what does work? The school must be willing to start with a plan that assumes students have different needs (Feldmen, 2006). The biggest challenge building wide is giving students what they need. (Tilly, 2007). This is where the targeted interventions and valid assessments of the RTI model come into the picture for these struggling students.

The students also need to be viewed with a whole child approach. “The brain is an integrated instrument, social, emotional and educational” (Perkins-Gough, 2007, p.10). The implication of the whole child approach has some districts combining RTI and the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) systems together. At the research site, the teams for both RTI and PBS are combined and tracked for both behavior and reading interventions. The three tiers from both of these models correlate when studying the percentages of students in each tier. In Tier one – 80% of students in both PBS and RTI respond to the core curriculum for behavior and academics. Tier two students, approximately 15% of

the student population, need strategic interventions for either reading or social behaviors. In Tier three – 5% of students need intensive interventions in either reading or problem behaviors. Monitoring of these students show many of the children who struggle in reading also struggle with social behaviors; these students are currently in Tier three for both the RTI and PBS models.

The structure of the literature block for struggling students becomes a critical component in the success or failure of these children. Richard Allington states in *What Matters for Struggling Readers; Designing Researched-Based Programs*, “More time should be spent reading than on word work type activities. Teachers must consider volume read per day (2006 p.45). Krasen also agrees with this approach stating “More free reading time correlates to; reading better, writing better, spelling better, better grammar and a larger vocabulary” (2007, p. 72). Sadler shared that children need to be reading for at least 90 minutes of the school day (2007). Teachers should be open-minded when structuring the schedules for reading time in the classroom and pay attention to the minutes read per day by the student population.

In Response to Intervention research shows that tier one and tier two curriculum needs to be complimentary and collaborative to be effective (Brown, 2007). Both curriculum need to be research based with authentic assessments included in the instruction. Gersten also states that, “Interventions need to be tied to the core reading program” (2006, p. 103). At the research site teachers instruct their students during their literature block time using materials of their choice including a Harcourt reading

adoption. The tier two strategic interventions are not tied to any specific reading curriculum but are based on phonics and phonemic awareness, fluency and comprehension.

Summary

There is evidence that targeted, early interventions work for students challenged in reading. There is also evidence that supports valid, reliable assessments for collecting data on struggling students. Data should inform instruction. Teachers need to try and use the collected data to target individual student needs. Response to Intervention is a building wide approach to teaching reading to struggling students. The researcher will study the impact on this program with the four identified students in the author's classroom.



Action Research Proposal

Chapter Three-The Goal of the Action Research Project

The goal of this action research project is to study how Response to Intervention (RTI) affects reading behaviors and attitudes of a selected group of struggling readers in third grade. In this study the researcher also hopes to identify teaching strategies that help these struggling students become more confident readers in the classroom setting.

The outcomes of this study will have several benefits for the staff, the researcher and the students at the research site. The staff will be confident in the intervention strategies used in RTI, based on the data collected and classroom observation. Data should show growth or lack of growth for each individual student. The data will also show what interventions students did or did not respond to, giving valuable information to the teacher. Successful RTI students will show enough growth to move to another group in RTI or exit the group altogether. Students who fail to show growth will have these interventions in their files to document what has not been successful for this student. If students continue to stay stagnant in the groups then it will be easier to qualify them for special education based on the data collected. Students who do not show growth also are getting immediate interventions while the process to start qualification for special education begins.

Over the course of this study several data collection instruments will be used, both from the teachers' and the student's point of view. From the teacher's point of view four

instruments will be used to collect data. Progress monitoring of each student in the RTI program in the researcher's classroom will be done by using the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA2). DIEBELS testing might be used at the site if the staff can be qualified to administer the test before the year is done. This will be decided by the training schedule within the district. Observation and reflection will also be used by the researcher for the students in her room. The author will look for common obstacles and habits to inform instruction in reading so these students can become more successful in the classroom.

The students in this study will be interviewed about their attitudes toward reading before, during and after the RTI and classroom interventions. The surveys used will be taken from the DRA 2 and the researcher's rubrics and questionnaires. The researcher will study these interviews and surveys to find patterns about the student's attitude and motivation toward reading.

The building wide reading goal for all students at the site is one year's growth in reading as shown by DRA2 assessments and state test scores in reading. DIEBELS scores would show readers who are-at risk and need more interventions. Third grade is the baseline for the reading test because it is the first time the test has been administered to this age group. The state test scores will be included in the data collected and analyzed for the action research proposal at this site.

Action Research Proposal

Chapter Four – Action Plan

The goal of this action research project is to assess how RTI reading interventions affect reading behaviors, attitudes and performance for identified struggling readers in the third grade research classroom. During the literature search the researcher discovered other possible solutions to help these struggling readers. Districts have been struggling with this issue for years and many programs and strategies have been implemented and studied. In this chapter the researcher will explore possible solutions to the problem presented by readers who struggle in the regular education classroom.

Possible Solutions

One possible solution for struggling readers is the Reading Recovery program that has been widely adopted in North America. This program originated in New Zealand 30 years ago and focuses on reducing the number of first-grade readers who are reading below grade level (Wilson, 2007). These students receive an extra 30 minute lesson a day for 12 to 20 weeks by a specially trained Reading Recovery teacher. This program boasts that 75% percent of students who finish the 12 to 20 week course of study meet grade-level expectations in reading (Wilson, 2007). This program is similar to the Response to Intervention program in several ways; they both target low achieving readers early and cover approximately an 18 week course of study while the lessons are

targeted to individual needs. The biggest difference is that in Reading Recovery the interventions are given by a specially trained teacher and once the student has been discontinued or graduated, the interventions stop. In RTI the interventions are given by teachers or aides who have been trained using the intervention materials. The interventions continue until the student shows enough progress to succeed in the regular classroom or is identified for special education.

In an evaluation of the costs and benefits of Reading Recovery, Bonnie Grossen of the University of Oregon discovered some flaws in the original study. Grossen claims that the “Persons responsible for success collect the data on success” (2007 p.1). The other claim that is refuted by Grossen is the 75% claim of success. The students that are discontinued from the program at the end of the course of study are not necessarily readers and may still need other interventions (2007). So while Reading Recovery does offer support to low-achieving students’ research shows a mixed review for the success of the program.

Reading Recovery is also very expensive to initiate in a building. The Reading Recovery Council of North America estimates the cost of the program to be \$60,000 annually for the specially trained teacher or \$3,750 per student (2007). The research building is not Title I funded and certainly cannot hire and train another teacher so the researcher rejects this solution.

Another possible solution would be to implement Reading First, a federally funded grant program. This project provides assistance to states and districts to establish a scientifically based reading program for students in kindergarten through grade three

(Department of Education, 2007). This program focuses on early reading instruction in classrooms to ensure that all children are proficient readers by the end of third-grade. This program also includes diagnostic assessment tools for screening and measuring the success of the students.

The Reading First project differs from the Response to Intervention strategy because Reading First focuses on classroom instruction as opposed to early interventions outside the regular classroom. Teachers are expected to use a scientifically research based reading program to ensure that effective reading instruction is being provided to students in the early grades. This program expects all teachers to use this reading adoption which takes away the choice of reading instruction in the classroom. The district where the research classroom is located already has an adopted reading program that teachers have the option of using as they teach literature. The teachers also have the option of supplementing other reading strategies in the instruction of reading. Teachers would also balk at the idea of teaching from only one source, nullifying years of experience related to reading instruction.

There also has been a huge controversy over the Reading First adopted materials. There are numerous research articles available on this subject. A most effective argument was made by the Office of the Inspector General on September 23, 2007.

The legislation that established Reading First was clear. Reading First funding was intended to support programs with strong evidence of effectiveness, demonstrated in scientific research. Yet in practice, the U.S. Department of Education allowed a small group to ignore the intent of Congress and direct funds

to a select set of commercial textbooks, most of which lack any evidence of effectiveness (p. 27).

Due to the controversy surrounding the research regarding the McGraw-Hill reading adoption, this does not seem like a good fit for the research site. Also, Reading First grants are awarded based on the numbers of students below the poverty level. Because the research site could not meet these requirements the site would not be eligible for the grant. This, combined with the staff resistance to teaching from only one source and the need to adopt new materials, possible solution is not one the researcher could consider at the site. Because of these accumulations of facts, the researcher rejects this possible solution.

Success for All is another intervention program used by schools in 48 states. More than 1,300 schools in over 500 districts have used this whole school reform program (What Works Clearinghouse, 2007). This program was developed in conjunction with Johns Hopkins University and is distributed by a foundation with the same name.

Success for All (SFA) is a whole school reform program. Students are taught in mandatory 90-minute blocks after being leveled by reading ability, regardless of age or grade level. The teachers use district or school provided materials that target needed skills. There is also a full-time Success for All facilitator employed by the school that helps with the leveling of reading abilities and tutors some kids who need additional help. The belief of Success for All is that all students must be reading at grade level by third grade to find success in school (What Works Clearinghouse, 2007). There is mandatory training for teachers and principals throughout the program implementation. “The staff

development model used in whole school Success for All reform emphasizes relatively brief initial training with extensive classroom follow-up, coaching and group discussion” (What Works Clearinghouse, p. 1). The research is mixed about the results for Success for All. The studies included 6,000 students attending more than 90 elementary schools across the United States. The study concluded that the extent of evidence for SFA to be moderate to large for alphabets, comprehension and general reading achievement (What Works Clearinghouse). Comprehension showed mixed effects, ranging from zero to seventeen percentile points.

This program differs from Response to Intervention because this is a whole school reform, not interventions for a targeted group of students. Because this program is a whole school effort, the costs are very high, approximately \$80,000 in the first year, about \$50,000 in the second, and \$35,000 in the third year. Teacher training and ongoing support are a required part of the SFA program and are included in the program costs (Successforall, 2007, p.1). Because of the cost of the program and the whole school reform model, the researcher rejects this solution.

The choices for possible solutions at the research site are limited because the site does not qualify for Title I funding. Lack of district funding for additional staffing or materials also hamper the effort to support the identified students. Maintaining the status quo is not an option due to the staff dissatisfaction with the “wait to fail” or discrepancy model. This site needs an intervention that can be implemented with the resources we currently have available at the site. Because of these limitations, Response to Intervention is a good fit for this school. The researcher will study how RTI reading

interventions affect reading behaviors, attitudes and performance for identified struggling readers.

Action Plan

Because the research site implemented the Response to Intervention model school wide in October, informed consent will not be necessary. The researcher has been tracking the four students she nominated and placed in the groups with the third grade team. These students were qualified by DRA2 data and classroom observations. The researcher also observed book selection techniques and the total amount of minutes read during silent reading by these four students. The students keep reading logs which are monitored by the researcher as well. These third grade students have also taken reading surveys that are part of the DRA2 reading assessment. There are also home surveys the parents fill out at the beginning of each school year about their child's reading behaviors. During reading conferences specific goals are set and worked on with these and the other students in this third grade classroom.

Since this research project actually started in the fall, the outline of the project will take place over several months, from early October to May of 2008. The first four students selected for the groups could change over the year. Movement is expected and hoped for because that movement will show progress. The third grade team will reassess these students during scheduled staff development time. The staff is projecting at least 18 weeks of interventions for the majority of the students in the three groups. Students who remain stagnant after this period of time will then be tested by the special education

teacher on site. As new students are added, the tracking process and data collection will remain the same. Additional surveys may be added to the ones already in use with these students. As students exit the groups the researcher will administer interview questions to the graduating students. The questions will cover their attitudes about reading and the intervention groups' effectiveness for these students' personal development in literature.

During winter term as the intervention groups continue, the four students will also be getting extra help in the classroom. The researcher will be trying different techniques to help these struggling readers. These classroom interventions will include fluency and comprehension work, in addition to written summaries of story lines. The book selection and minutes read should also change over the course of the winter term. The researcher will be taking field notes for reading behaviors that change in these students. Goals will also be reassessed and modified as needed to keep improvements for these students on track. The students will be surveyed or interviewed about reading practices in the regular classroom. The researcher will focus on what has helped the students improve or enjoy reading more over the course of the year.

At the research site the state test in reading is usually administered twice a year, once in the fall and once in the spring. The researcher is anticipating the testing to be in late fall or early winter, than again in April or May. The data from the state test will be included if the results are released in time.

Spring term will see a continuation of intervention groups and classroom strategies to help these struggling readers succeed. Data collection, observations, field

notes, interviews and surveys will be administered as students move in and out of these groups. The researcher will also reflect on how the techniques she has chosen are working in the classroom to help these readers. The strategies in the classroom will be differentiated over the course of the year to target the individual needs of each student. The culmination of the project will be in May of 2008 when all of the data will have been collected. The researcher will look for patterns for both Response to Intervention groups and classroom strategies. The researcher will analyze and look for common threads throughout the data. All of the completed data and conclusions will be part of the researchers completed action research project.



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter Five – Results and Next Steps

The state of Oregon has been using the IQ-achievement discrepancy model since 1975 to identify special education students. In 2004 the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) was passed and allowed states to move away from the IQ-achievement model (Davis, 2007). This change in the law allowed districts in the state of Oregon to rethink their qualification of special education students. This opportunity was embraced by many districts surrounding the research site since 2004. In the spring of 2007 it was clear that the staff at the site were frustrated with the IQ-discrepancy or “wait to fail” model being used at the research site. Due to the decline of state test reading scores, site council had been looking at other options for the last nine months. The table below show change during the past four years in the percentage of students meeting standards in reading in effect during the 2005-2006 school year in the research district.

2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
85%	84%	84%	74%
(Old Standards)	(Old Standards)	(Old Standards)	(New Standards)

After many discussions the staff approved the change to Response to Intervention (RTI) in the spring of 2007 for these struggling students. At this time the district approached the research site and asked them to pilot the program for the district and the

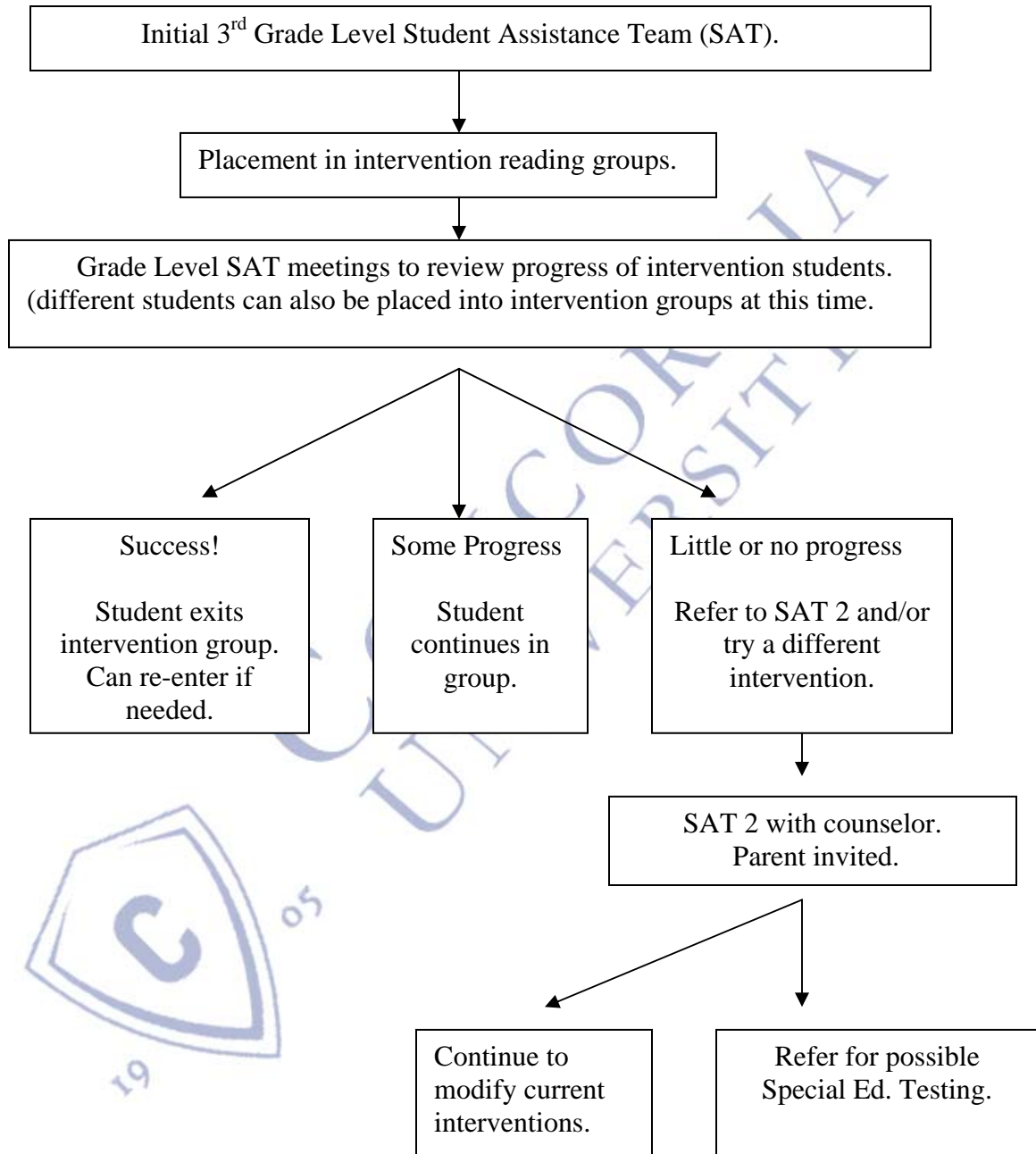
site agreed. In the fall of 2007, RTI was implemented at the research site but the discrepancy model was still in place for identifying special education students. At this time the writer decided to research RTI to answer this question “How will RTI interventions affect reading behaviors, attitudes and performance for identified struggling readers in the third grade research classroom?”

The writer’s 3rd grade classroom is a bright, sunny room in the corner of the research building. There is a cozy reading corner that has blankets and pillows for students’ use when reading. There are shelves of leveled books in brightly colored baskets that have student labels attached to them. There is a floor lamp and a brightly colored rug on top of the carpet on the floor. Each student has their own “browsing box” that they decorate and use for the year. In the browsing boxes are “just right” books that the students read during silent reading every day. Students may bring reading material from home, the school library or the classroom library and keep them in their browsing boxes. Students get new books in their browsing boxes when they come into the classroom in the morning, and the library is closed during silent reading time. When students are reading in the classroom they are positioned around the room with blankets and pillows and read silently and with a buddy for 30-50 minutes per day. Some students who are more challenged by reading, work with the writer during this reading time. There is additional “word work” time in the classroom to work on strategies that can help improve student’s reading. This word work time is differentiated and based on assessments to help each student target the needed skills to succeed. The researcher has worked diligently to help all students succeed in reading in this classroom:

- A leveled library.
- Guided book groups.
- Silent reading everyday for extended periods of time.
- Buddy reading to help with fluency, word work activities that are targeted to each student's needs.
- Authentic assessments.

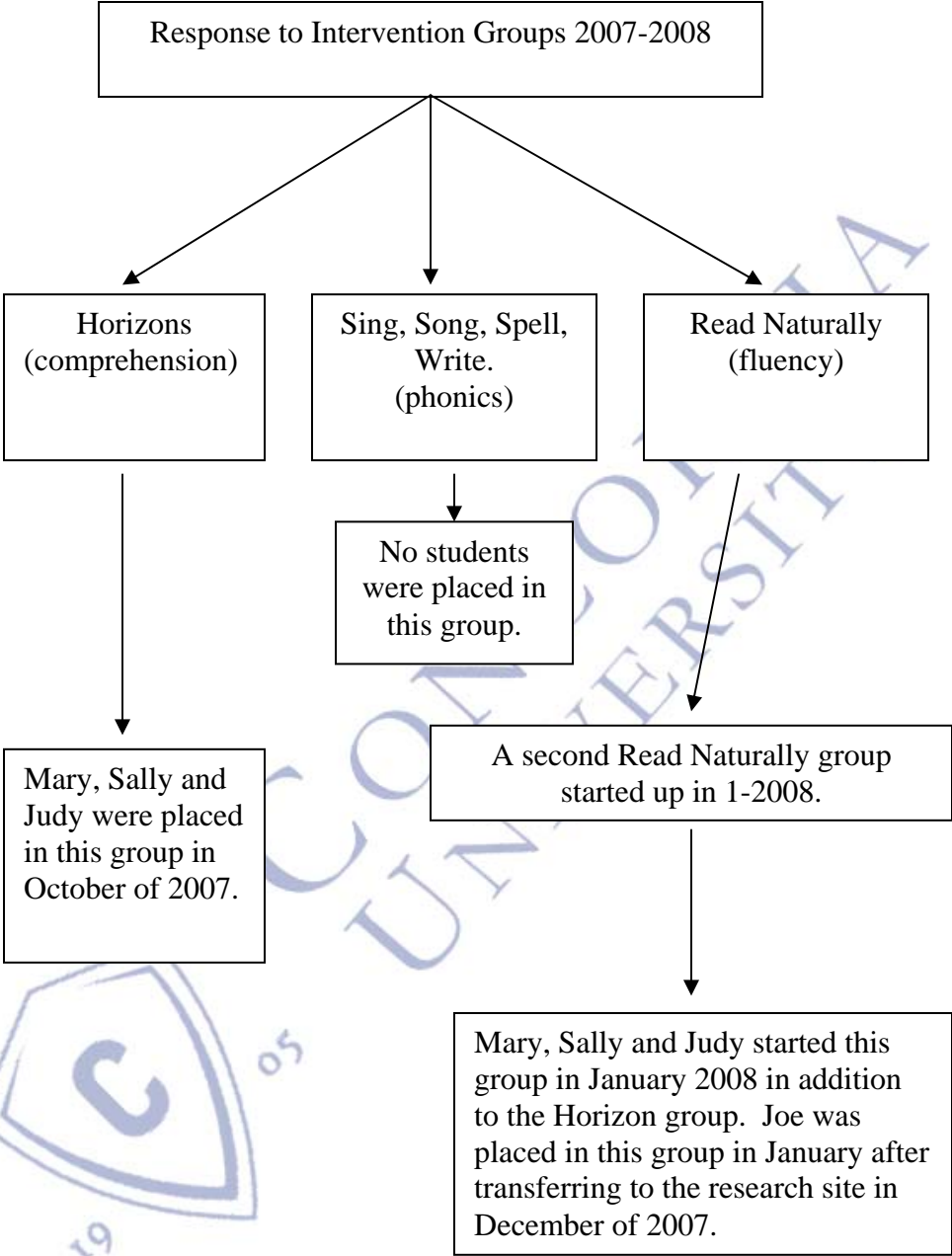
Still, each year there are students who struggle to make gains.

After the teachers assessed their students with the Developmental Reading Assessment 2 (DRA 2) the writer and the third grade team met and decided who would be eligible for entry into RTI groups. All struggling third grade students were assessed for comprehension, fluency and phonics RTI groups. The research site used *Horizons* for comprehension interventions, *Read Naturally* for fluency interventions, and *Sing, Song, Spell, Write* for phonic interventions. The third grade team used a site council Reading Intervention Implementation Calendar throughout the year for grade level meetings to reassess each student's progress after they had been placed in the Response to Intervention (RTI) groups. Students are exited from the RTI groups for different reasons: gains sufficient enough to be in the regular education classroom for reading instruction, moved to a different RTI group for further intervention instruction, or dropped from a group for insufficient progress. Those students who are dropped for lack of progress will be screened for Special Education testing, using the RTI data to show what hasn't worked for that particular student. See graph below.



During the 2007-2008 school year, the third grade team became aware of the need for an additional fluency group. The DRA2 assessments showed a greater need for this intervention than the six slots available to the grade level student group. The third grade team pooled their additional aide time together to add a second grade level Read Naturally group. As a member of site council, the researcher was aware that additional funds were available from the district because the RTI program was being piloted by the research site. After approaching the principal for use of the funds to purchase additional Read Naturally materials and to use the grade level aide time, a second Read Naturally program started up in January of 2008. These intervention groups were the choices for the struggling readers in the writer's classroom for the 2007-2008 school year.

In October of the 2007/2008 school year the third grade Student Assistance Team (SAT) decided which students to place in 18 RTI spots open for third grade students. The site council had decreed that these openings be filled by need, not by each classroom having an equal number of students placed in each of the three RTI groups. The writer placed three students in two of the RTI groups in October: one female ELL student named Mary (all participants were given assumed names) was placed in the Horizons comprehension group. Two Caucasian English speaking females named Julie and Sally were also placed in the Horizons comprehension group. In December of 2007 an ELL male transfer student named Joe was placed in the Read Naturally RTI group. The three students in the Horizons group were placed into the additional Read Naturally group that started in January of 2008. Throughout the school year the researcher reassessed and tracked these four struggling readers. See graph below.



Mary

Mary was a transfer student from a school within the district that did not meet Adequate Yearly Progress for two years under the No Child Left Behind Act. Because of the failure to meet these requirements, buses were provided for any transfer students to the writer's school. Mary transferred into the researcher's classroom in October of 2007. Mary was a quiet, reserved ELL student who seemed very unsure of herself upon arrival to her new school. Mary was a happy student who worked very hard throughout the year in all subject areas. Mary was well dressed and well cared for but the researcher never met any family members throughout the school year. Support at home for academics was questionable through the year. Mary did share with the writer that mom wanted to hold her back in third grade if Mary did not meet requirements in both the reading and math OAKS state tests. Mary was very motivated to learn.

One of the first assessments the writer used with Mary was the DRA2. Mary was reading at a DRA2 level 12. This positioned Mary at an early first grade reading level. The DRA2 assessment tests numerous areas of reading. After discussions with the third grade SAT members, which also included the Intervention teacher, Mary was placed in the Horizon's group in October of 2007. This group worked on comprehension, spelling work and reading out loud four days a week for 30 minutes each day. When tracking Mary, the SAT members looked at assessments in the RTI group, DRA2 assessments and the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) test scores. The Horizon RTI assessment results were communicated in writing on a weekly basis to the researcher.

The Individual Reading Intervention Documentation paperwork from the Intervention teacher became a part of Mary's student file.

Mary continued to struggle in reading throughout the fall term and received a score of 190 on the OAKS test in December of 2007. To pass the state reading test (OAKS), Mary would have to get a 205 test score, a 15 point RIT (Rausch Interval Table) gain. A seven to eight point RIT gain is the goal for all readers in the research school, a reading goal outlined in the School Wide Improvement plan adopted by site council and the staff in the fall of 2007. Mary would need to make two years growth in eight months time to meet the OAKS state test score. At this time Mary's DRA2 reading assessment level had climbed to 16, mid-first grade. A decision to leave Mary in the Horizons Response to Intervention group was made on November 8, 2007. This decision was based on the DRA2 assessment showing some progress and the Individual Reading Intervention Documentation. The Intervention teacher reported comprehension and fluency had both improved based on Horizons assessments with Mary scoring a 75%, a 12% improvement. Mary had scored a 63% on the entry level assessment for Horizons in October. Mary's spelling was the lowest portion for both assessments and brought down her overall score.

In November and December, Mary continued to work hard in both her RTI group and in the classroom. During silent reading in the classroom, Mary and the researcher set goals to help her improve her reading skills. The goals that were set by Mary and the writer were

- Look at the pictures or clues in a story,
- Reread to make sure the story made sense,
- Practice reading and retelling the story orally and
- Read at least 30 minutes per day.

Mary missed some classroom time due to ELL and RTI pull-out. The writer scheduled her to miss whole group spelling and some silent reading time. Mary loved to write and she and the researcher decided together what academic areas Mary should miss in the regular classroom. Mary did her spelling work with her RTI group and still received targeted goal setting and small group work when she was in the researcher's third grade classroom. The SAT team met in January of 2008 to reassess all of the third grade RTI students.

By December Mary had started making real progress with comprehension. She also started showing more confidence in her reading skills. She was now reading 35-40 minutes per day and checking for understanding as she read. Her DRA2 assessment showed her reading at a level 20, an early second grade level. Fluency was holding Mary back in the DRA2 assessment. Words per minute are assessed and Mary could not pass level 24 on the DRA2 because of fluency. Her comprehension tested high on the level 20 assessment but she could not pass level 24 due to fluency. At the January 16, 2008 SAT meeting, the third grade team decided to add the second Read Naturally RTI group. Mary was then placed in this Read Naturally group and was retained in the Horizon's comprehension group too. Mary now was pulled out of the writer's classroom for 90 minutes a day for targeted interventions and ELL groups.

By March of 2008 Mary was reading 40-45 minutes per day in the classroom and was meeting all of her previously set goals. Her fluency improved but slowly and still impacted her DRA2 reading scores. In April of 2008 Mary took the OAKS state reading test for the second time. Her score was a 205, she had met the state reading benchmark. Mary had made a 15 point RIT gain and met her goal of passing her state reading test. Her DRA2 score was a 28, the end of second grade. The timed fluency portion of the DRA2 assessment held her level back throughout the year, but the state test does not take fluency into consideration so fluency did not impact her OAKS score.

In the end of the year exit survey the researcher questioned Mary about her experience in the RTI groups. Mary stated that the RTI groups helped her sound out words and understand what she read better. She preferred the Read Naturally group over the Horizon group because you read the material twice and “you could figure out the word and what it meant.” Mary stated that the small group work in RTI helped her more than her classroom work did. She received immediate help in the small group and she thought that was very beneficial to her. When questioned about negative aspects of the RTI groups, she stated that “it was all good’ showing her optimistic spirit. Mary’s pleasure at passing the OAKS state reading test was absolutely contagious. Everyone that helped Mary throughout the year shared in her radiant joy in her accomplishment. All of Mary’s hard work had paid off.

Sally

Sally was a transfer student who came from Arizona. Sally had attended three schools in three years in three different states. Sally was a happy and a well mannered

girl whose mother occasionally helped out in the researcher's classroom. Sally made friends easily but was very nervous and worried quite a bit. Sally's also had numerous absences during the school year due to health issues.

In September the writer assessed Sally using the DRA2 and Sally initially sounded great. She was quite fluent and had good expression but read a little too fast and sometimes inserted words. When assessing Sally's comprehension the writer discovered that Sally had many misconceptions and confusions about the literature storylines. When asked by the writer about her reading Sally replied "I can read words but sometimes I have trouble talking about what I read." The researcher had to drop Sally down in DRA levels to find her independent level. Sally's reading level in the fall of 2007 was a level 12, early first grade. This confused her mother who thought Sally was reading at grade level because she sounded good when she read out loud. Because the mother was in the classroom occasionally, she and the writer had conversations about Sally's reading. The mother started to understand that Sally needed to talk about the storyline to help make sense of the literature. It became clear that Sally's biggest road block to reading success was understanding what she read.

When the Student Assistance Team met and placed the third grade students in RTI groups in the fall of 2007, they decided to place Sally in the Horizons group. This intervention would give Sally an additional 30 minutes four days a week in a small reading group. The focus of the Horizons intervention group was comprehension which was a good match for Sally. The writer and Sally also set goals for her in the regular classroom. One of these goals was for Sally to pick "just right books" for her browsing

box. Sally had a tendency to read books that were above her independent reading level. Sally also started to keep a reading log with two to three sentence summaries of what she had read that day. Sally needed to learn to make meaning out of the text in the book for her comprehension to improve. The second goal was for Sally to stop inserting words into sentences. This goal she worked on in buddy reading activities in the classroom.

When the third grade class took the OAKS reading test in December, Sally scored a 194, needing a 205 to meet the state requirements. Sally needed a score of 201 on the OAKS test in the spring to meet the School Improvement Plan goal of one year's growth for all students. Sally started working on her goals with the researcher.

In December the SAT met again and looked at the data for all the third grade RTI students. After reading her Individual Reading Intervention Documentation and looking at her DRA2 scores, the team left her in the Horizons RTI group. The intervention teacher shared that Sally rushed through the worksheets that accompanied the program but she also shared that Sally's comprehension was improving. Sally Horizon's assessment was an 84% in December, placing her in the middle of her group. Sally's DRA2 level was a 16 at this time.

Sally worked hard in the classroom and in RTI groups throughout the winter. Sally still had a tendency to rush through both reading out loud and retelling of the storyline. Sally had a hard time pacing her reading appropriately. She read either too fast, or too slow. Because of this, the SAT added Sally to the Read Naturally RTI group in January of 2008. Sally was now in two Response to Intervention groups.

By March, Sally's DRA2 level was up to 24. Comprehension was improving more every week, but her pacing on fluency tests was still fluctuating a lot. The data showed more improvement in comprehension than it did in fluency. Sally was quite aware of her goals and even wrote them down on her spring DRA2 assessment. Sally was working hard on improving her reading skills. Sally was reading books at her level in the classroom and her written summaries were much more accurate with storylines details than they were at the beginning of the year. In March of 2008 Sally scored a 205 on the OAKS state reading test. She had moved up eleven RIT points and had met both the state benchmark and the School Improvement Plan goals. Sally was reading at a DRA2 level 28 by the end of the 2008 school year.

In Sally's exit survey she stated that the RTI groups "Helped me be a better reader." When questioned how, she replied that now she could read chapter books and understand them. She also thought she skipped fewer words while reading out loud. When questioned about the bad things about RTI groups she replied that missing the classroom time was difficult. Sally was the only student who stated that on the exit survey. Sally agreed with Mary that the Read Naturally group was the most helpful for her because she could practice reading out loud more often. Sally thought that the RTI groups and the classroom reading experience were equally helpful to her over the year. Sally's made these improvements despite frequent absences throughout the year. The SAT members considered dropping her out of RTI groups due to these absences. By the end of the 2008 school year Sally was reading at a beginning third grade level.

Joe

Joe was an ELL transfer student who came into the researcher's classroom in December of 2007. Joe had already been at two schools that year, the researcher's classroom was the third one for Joe during the 2007-2008 school year. Joe was a happy spirit who was very intelligent, polite, and had a strong work ethic. Joe's smile could light up a room and the other students welcomed him with open arms. Joe was a little too social and loved to talk, even when he shouldn't. This did impact Joe's progress in his RTI group. Joe transitioned well into the researcher's classroom and fit right in, a little nervous at first, but eventually settling in easily.

When assessing Joe's reading level with the DRA2 in December, the researcher discovered he was a level 18, first grade range. Joe's fluency and vocabulary were his biggest roadblocks. Joe was fluent in his first language but Joe's vocabulary in his second language hurt his fluency. In reading groups the writer soon discovered that Joe's comprehension was very high, in spite of his fluency, and that he loved to read. Joe also took the OAKS state reading test in December and scored a 195, needing a 205 to meet the benchmark. Joe's second language slowed down his fluency, so the SAT members placed Joe in the Read Naturally group that started up in January of 2008. Joe was pulled out 30 minutes for each group, four times a week, in addition to his ELL pullout. Joe would receive three months less time in the RTI groups compared to the other three students in the third grade classroom.

The goals that were set in the writer's classroom with Joe revolved around word work that built vocabulary, fluency work and behavior while in the RTI group. Joe's

behavior in the RTI group improved quickly and the researcher and Joe worked on his other goals in the classroom.

At the SAT meeting in January, the intervention teacher shared her Individual Reading Intervention Documentation with the group. Joe was having a hard time remembering the steps and procedures for his fluency group. The teacher also shared that Joe was easily distracted and would rather visit with other students. Joe was slow at completing the stories in the Read Naturally program but students work at their own pace so this did not affect other students in the group. Joe had only been in the group for two and one half weeks so the SAT members decided to leave Joe in the RTI group at this time.

By March of 2008 Joe was performing better in his RTI group. Joe's words per minute had improved on his Read Naturally assessment and his DRA2 level was up to a 28. Joe's comprehension, which was already high, was improving along with his fluency in the classroom. At this time Joe shared with the researcher that his family might be moving again. The move would have been Joe's fourth school of the year. Joe asked his parents if he could please finish out the year at this school and they listened to his plea. They did move, but they got him to school on time for the rest of the year. Joe was thrilled to stay put!

When Joe took the OAKS state reading test in the spring of 2008, he scored a 213, an eighteen point RIT gain. That is almost a three year gain. His DRA2 level was a 34 by the end of year, a mid-range third grade level. Joe had made dramatic improvement over the course of five months. The researcher believes strongly that leaving Joe at this school

despite the hardships for the family was the right decision for Joe. Joe was happy, stable and secure and able to concentrate on his academics. All of these things combined to help Joe reach his potential in reading.

In his end of the year survey, Joe said that the RTI reading group helped him be a better reader by teaching him that he needed to read faster and learn new words. When questioned about the negative things about the group he said they weren't any. He shared that he liked to go and found them fun. He did state, "I was very nervous my first day, but it got better." Joe thought that both the classroom work and the RTI group helped him become a better reader. He thought the silent reading everyday helped him practice reading and he absolutely loved the classroom library. Joe was ready to learn and he landed in the right environment to help him succeed.

Julie

The last student placed in the RTI groups in the researcher's classroom was a female student named Julie. Julie was a quiet, withdrawn Caucasian student who had been in the writer's classroom for two-years. Julie was a very sad student who had learned many avoidance techniques throughout the years. During reading Julie would ask to use the bathroom, get a new book from the library, she would do anything but read. Part of the motivation for the researcher in implementing RTI groups came from having Julie in her class for both second and third grades. The writer realized that Julie would need more time for one-on-one reading instruction than the researcher could provide in the regular classroom.

When assessing Julie in September of 2007, the researcher found that Julie's reading level was still flat from the year before, a DRA2 18 (first grade range). Despite summer school, the Between the Bells program and 2nd grade reading groups, Julie had not made much progress in reading. While working with Julie, the researcher found that when she came to words in the story she did not know, she stopped and sat there, not using any strategies to help herself figure out the unknown word. Julie's letter recognition and phonics were strong, but Julie needed reading strategies to help her read past an unknown word. Julie hated being wrong and this also slowed down her progress and willingness to try. Julie also needed help finding books at her reading level. Her classroom reading goals were have her guess and go on when she came to a word she did not know, reread for meaning, and read books at her independent reading level. The researcher, along with the counselor and Julie's parents, had been meeting and tracking Julie for 14 months by the beginning of third grade. We all knew that Julie needed additional help, but she worked just high enough that there was concern about whether she would qualify for Special Education Services. Julie was one of those students who fell through the cracks of the system. She needed help, but how could it be provided for her? The RTI groups became the only additional service the researcher could find to provide the needed interventions for Julie.

In the October SAT meeting, the third grade team placed Julie in the Horizons RTI group. This would allow Julie time to read out loud and work on comprehension four days a week for 30 minutes in addition to her regular classroom reading time. When assessed within the RTI group, she was in the lower 20th percentile of the group for both

the pre-assessment and assessments throughout the year. Julie highest score all year was a 79% on her RTI progress reports. She consistently worked at the lowest end of the intervention group, but she was making progress. Best of all, Julie started showing more confidence in herself as a reader.

In December of 2007 Julie took the OAKS reading test for the first time scoring a 185. Julie was 20 RIT points below the passing grade. At this time the SAT2 members, along with the counselor and the parents, decided Julie should be tested for Special Education Qualification in January of 2007. To qualify, Julie would have to have at least a 15 point discrepancy between her test score and her IQ score. Julie did not qualify because the discrepancy point difference between IQ and test results was 12 points. Julie was working at her IQ level so she did not qualify for any additional help under the discrepancy model. After 15 months of tracking this student, no interventions were available under the current Oregon qualifications for Special Education. Response to Intervention groups were the only available resource outside the regular classroom for Julie.

Julie started making faster reading progress when she learned not to stop at unknown words. She also continued working on reading the appropriate leveled books. Julie wanted to read what her girlfriends were reading, even if she didn't understand the book. One of the biggest hurdles for Julie was not being so embarrassed if she didn't know a word. The intervention teacher and the writer worked closely together on strategies to help Julie. Over the winter, Julie started making slow progress in reading. She still scored the lowest in the RTI group and was working at the level of the Special

Education students in the researcher's classroom, even though she did not qualify for Special Education.

In January of 2008, Julie was placed in the Read Naturally group in addition to Horizons. The SAT members hoped that the fluency work would help Julie make more progress. She was now pulled out of the classroom for one hour four days a week. The blocks were in two thirty-minute blocks, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Julie's DRA2 score at this time was a level 20, mid second-grade range.

In April of 2008, Julie took the OAKS reading test for the second time. She scored a 200, a fifteen point gain. She was still four points short of passing the test. Julie, her parents and the SAT members, decided to have her take the test a third time to see if she could make up the four points, but she actually scored two points lower the third time. Julie had made a lot of progress, a 15 point RIT gain, but she still could not meet the third grade benchmark in reading. Julie DRA2 score was a 24 in the spring of 2008. Julie was reading in the late second grade range.

In Julie's exit survey she shared that one good thing about RTI is that they helped her learn to read better. She said, "They helped me say the words correctly." This was a big deal to Julie, who wanted to look like she could read at a higher level than she did. Out of the two groups, again Julie liked the Read Naturally group. "We only had to read" she stated. In the Horizons group, she told the researcher she did not like the questions about the storylines very much. When the writer asked how the groups made her feel, she said they made her happy. She shared that she trusted herself more to help herself with her reading rather than always having to ask someone for words she didn't know.

Overall, even though she did not pass the OAKS test, Julie's reading had improved over the school-year.

Summary: Mary, Sally, Joe, Julie

The writer tracked these four students over the year to see how RTI groups might affect their reading experience in a third grade classroom. These four students were a diverse group, two Hispanic and two Caucasian students, one male and three females. Three out of four of these students were in the Horizons RTI group and all four were in the Read Naturally group. In the exit survey all three students who were placed in both of the groups enjoyed the Read Naturally program better than the Horizon's group. Reasons for these opinions varied; there were fewer questions in the Read Naturally work, or liking the timed portion and the graphing of words per minute in the Read Naturally group. All four students showed growth in reading over the 2007-2008 school year. The question is, how much of that growth can be attributed to the Response to Intervention groups?

When the research site started up RTI groups in the fall of 2007, the district became interested in the Response to Intervention structure for early interventions. RTI is not a program; it does not espouse a certain set of materials other than the interventions that are used should be researched-based. It is a prevention model to help bridge the gap between the regular classroom and Special Education. The district asked the research site to pilot the program for the district with certain strings attached. The district wanted the site to implement DIEBELS as soon as possible for exit data on students in RTI groups. The research site agreed and began the process of implementing RTI. The district seems

to be moving toward the RTI model and away from the discrepancy model for identifying Special Education students, but the process will take about four to five years to complete. While this change takes place, the students at the research site will be receiving early interventions in RTI groups with the DIEBELS testing starting up in the 2008-2009 school year.

One of the main reasons the research site adopted the RTI model was the frustration of the staff with the discrepancy or ‘wait to fail’ model. Students who are struggling with reading are tracked and work within the classroom but don’t receive any outside interventions to help them succeed. Students can be tracked for years which is very frustrating to staff member and parents. With the RTI model there is less staff frustration because these struggling readers get immediate help while they are being tracked. These struggling readers get the best possible support at the earliest possible moment to reach their highest potential (Sadler, 2007). Ongoing conversations with staff members at the Student Assistance Team (SAT) meetings also help the staff feel less isolated when trying to help these struggling readers. When teachers have a grade level team to discuss problems and solutions with, the feeling of isolation is lessened for staff members. The ongoing interventions and assessments also help establish a paper trail of what has worked or failed for these students. When staff members do try to qualify them for Special Education, there is a lot of documentation and assessments to share from the RTI groups. When interventions fail over a long period of time, it is clear these students should be looked at for further help. RTI groups can also help lessen the number of

students who are tested for Special Education because many students do respond to the interventions, taking them off the list to be tested for Special Education.

How did RTI groups affect the reading behaviors, attitudes and performances of the struggling readers in the researcher's classroom? In Mary's case, her attitude about reading was fairly positive; she had already learned the pleasure of reading. Mary was very self-conscious when answering questions at the beginning of the year, her answers sounded more like questions, asking the teacher if she was correct. By the end of the year, Mary's confidence had soared and she was surer of herself in groups and in one-on-one reading. Mary's reading behaviors were more relaxed and she was willing to buddy read, something she shied away from at the beginning of the year. Mary's performance was outstanding in both the DRA2 assessment and the OAKS reading test: two-year growth in both areas. Mary met both the school and state goals in reading.

When the researcher met Sally she was very nervous and unsure of herself. Her low comprehension affected her attitude, behaviors and performance in reading. Sally suffered from a lack of confidence that was obvious in group work. After RTI targeted interventions, the researcher noticed Sally gaining more confidence in her answers. She raised her hand more and was willing to share her thoughts and feelings about a reading passage. Her behaviors also improved by learning she needed to read literature she could understand and talk about. The gain in Sally's performance was the lowest of the four RTI students: two-year progress in the DRA2 assessment and an eleven point RIT gain on the state reading test. Sally's burgeoning confidence made considerable difference in

her classroom work. Her success in reading overflowed into other academic areas, raising her overall grades on assessments.

Joe came to the researcher's classroom with a good attitude about reading. He liked to read but was very social and had a tendency to be off-task during silent reading. RTI groups helped Joe's attitude and behaviors during reading instruction. Joe became more serious about reading time when he realized he needed to improve his fluency for his reading to improve. Joe read more minutes during silent reading towards the end of the year and loved to buddy read so he could get in more time reading out loud. Joe's performance was outstanding: an eighteen point RIT gain and over two-year growth in the DRA2 assessment. The fluency work in the Read Naturally RTI group was the targeted intervention Joe needed to succeed in reading.

Julie's case seems to highlight the benefits of RTI instruction. How did RTI affect Julie's reading behaviors, attitude and performance? Since she was in the writer's classroom for two consecutive years, the biggest difference between those two years was the RTI groups. One of the noticeable differences in Julie after RTI was her attitude toward reading. Julie became more confident in her abilities and was willing to try new strategies once she started seeing improvement in her reading. Instead of giving up, she started working harder. Julie's performance speaks for itself: two-year growth in the Oregon state reading test and one-year's growth in the DRA2. Julie's reading behavior also changed. Julie started choosing books at her independent reading level during silent reading and spent more minutes actually reading. Julie made progress in all areas of reading, even though she did not pass the state test in reading or qualify for Special

Education. These RTI interventions were the only help outside of the classroom available to Julie.

Students seemed to respond to the extra one-on-one help they received in RTI groups. 75% of the struggling students in the RTI groups in the writer's classroom met the state benchmark in reading. The average RIT gain for these four students was 14.75%, over two year's growth. Can this growth be attributed to RTI groups, classroom instruction or a combination of the two? Richard Allington, (2006) Stephan Krasen (2007) and Carol Sadler (2007) all agree that the total number of minutes read per day can affect the reading skills of struggling students. One of the strategies that was used in the researcher's classroom was observing the minutes read per day by these four students. Building up stamina, having these students read at their level and supporting them by having high interest reading materials and goals were part of classroom instruction. But this instruction alone does not account for the differences in attitudes, behaviors and performance of these four students. In their exit surveys all four students had positive praise about the groups. All four stated that they believed the RTI groups helped them become better readers. That is a great endorsement by the students involved in the groups. Response to Intervention perhaps had a greater impact than the classroom instruction by itself. Targeted, early intervention helped these struggling readers.

Reflections on RTI

After completing the research the writer has learned to be more reflective in her reading instruction. While RTI helped many students including the ones in the

researcher's classroom, there are issues that need further study when implementing the RTI structure. How many minutes should students be pulled out of the classroom? What core academics should they miss while they are absent from the classroom? Does RTI replace literature instruction in the classroom? Who is the most qualified to teach reading in the building, the teacher or the RTI intervention teacher? All of these issues were discussed thoroughly at third grade SAT meetings. The writer's core beliefs became clearer after this research: students do benefit from additional one-on-one reading instruction if the assessment of the targeted reading skills is valid and students are placed in the correct RTI group. The missed class time in the classroom should be discussed with the students being pulled out to get their feedback. It is difficult to balance the pull-out time and classroom instruction but these students need a "double dose" of literature instruction. Once is not enough with students who are two years behind in reading levels. The balancing of the missed classroom instruction is an important point to address when implementing RTI groups.

Classroom instruction also needs to be targeted to each individual student's needs. This is particularly important for these struggling readers. Goals need to be set after valid assessment is complete. Reading curriculum should also be reflected upon to help insure that classroom instruction in the core reading program is sufficient for *all* students. One of the benefits of RTI is that the discussions of staff members help address what is being taught in each third grade classroom. This helps to centralize instruction in both classroom interventions and core reading instruction.

The materials used and the personnel teaching the RTI group is another issue that needs to be studied when starting up RTI. The research site needed to use existing personnel and materials to start up groups. People were pulled in from all over the building and schedules were hashed out to find time that would work building wide. Concessions were made by all staff members to get the groups up and running. Overall the RTI implementation was a huge success building wide. There was one staff member that taught a RTI group the first year, but after that asked to be excused from leading the group. The staff member who replaced her is enthusiastic and loves doing the groups, so matching the correct staff member with good materials is something to be addressed.

The research site experienced success with the implementation of the RTI model for reading interventions. The model will also be followed in the 2008-2009 school year. Materials will be changed in the phonics group, being replaced with a researched based program, but otherwise the existing structure will remain intact. DIEBELS data will be used to help with an exit strategy for students in RTI along with the DRA2 assessments. The staff expressed a desire to look at math interventions for targeted students but staffing and scheduling issues will delay the implementation of RTI math groups. Overall the researcher found the experience of researching RTI both enlightening and informative, changing the experience for struggling readers was very inspiring for the writer.

Suggestions for Further Study

Some of the issues that came up at the research site surrounding the implementation of RTI were:

- Qualified personnel to teach the RTI groups,

- How to exit students from RTI groups,
- The interventions used in each group and
- Implementing a school-wide core reading program.

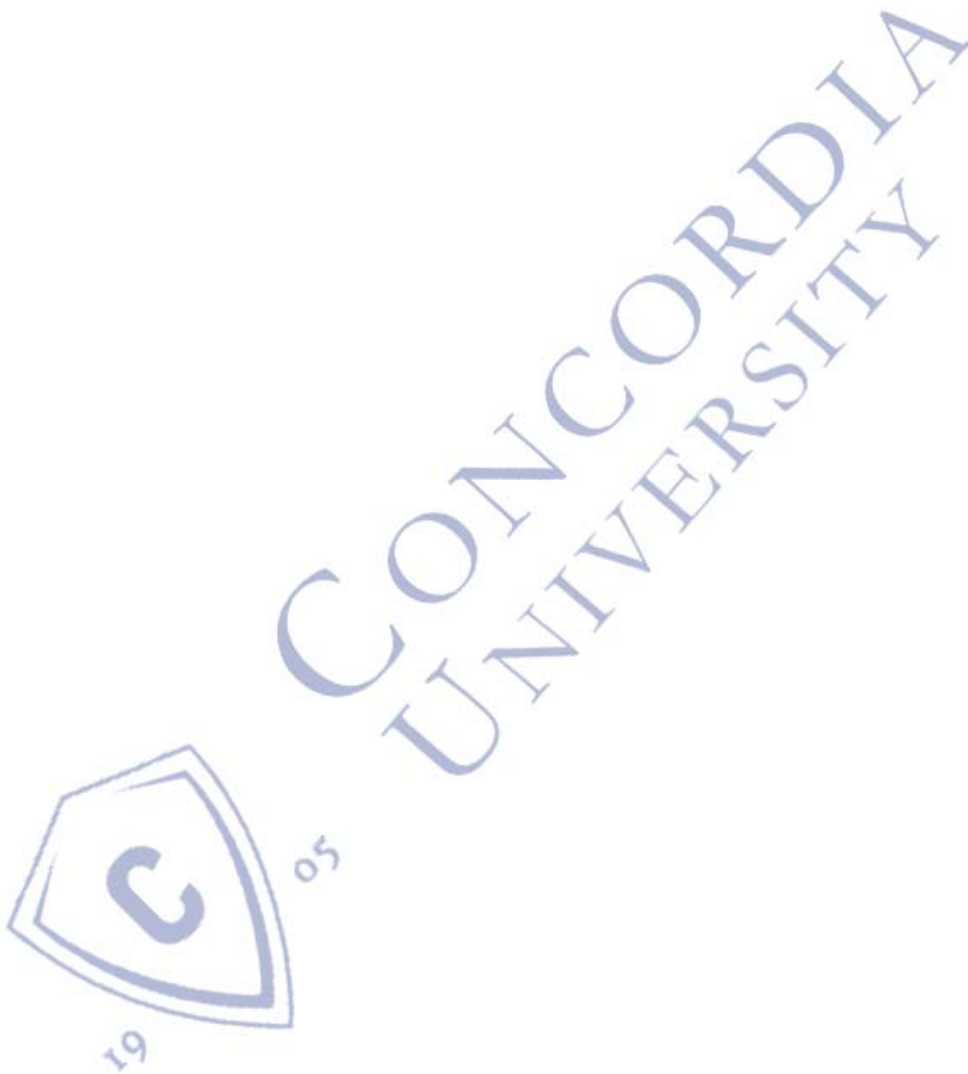
The author suggests the following suggestions for further study.

The writer's school chose to use teacher assistants and the librarian to run Response to Intervention groups. These assistants were trained to use the intervention materials. Some of the interventions were scripted and easy to use, but one intervention was more open to interpretation and this caused some problems with one RTI group. Personnel and training can affect intervention groups. A possible research question might center on effective use and training of personnel in implementing RTI groups.

Exiting students from RTI groups became an issue for the third grade SAT members. DIEBELS was not being used so hard data was lacking for exit purposes, making the decision too subjective. The research site used DRA2, but this assessment is limited by the number of books available at each level. The author suggests further research into the use of other informal assessment tools, such as DIEBELS, as RTI exit criteria.

The interventions used in each of the three RTI groups could affect the performance outcomes of students. RTI is only a structure; there are not any recommendations for the interventions used in each group. The research site studied what other districts were using and was limited by what it could acquire by monetary restrictions. It may be an interesting and useful research to use different interventions than the ones used in this research project.

Lastly, different students and different teachers may produce different results. Further research could involve more students, students at different reading skill levels or teachers with different training in reading interventions.



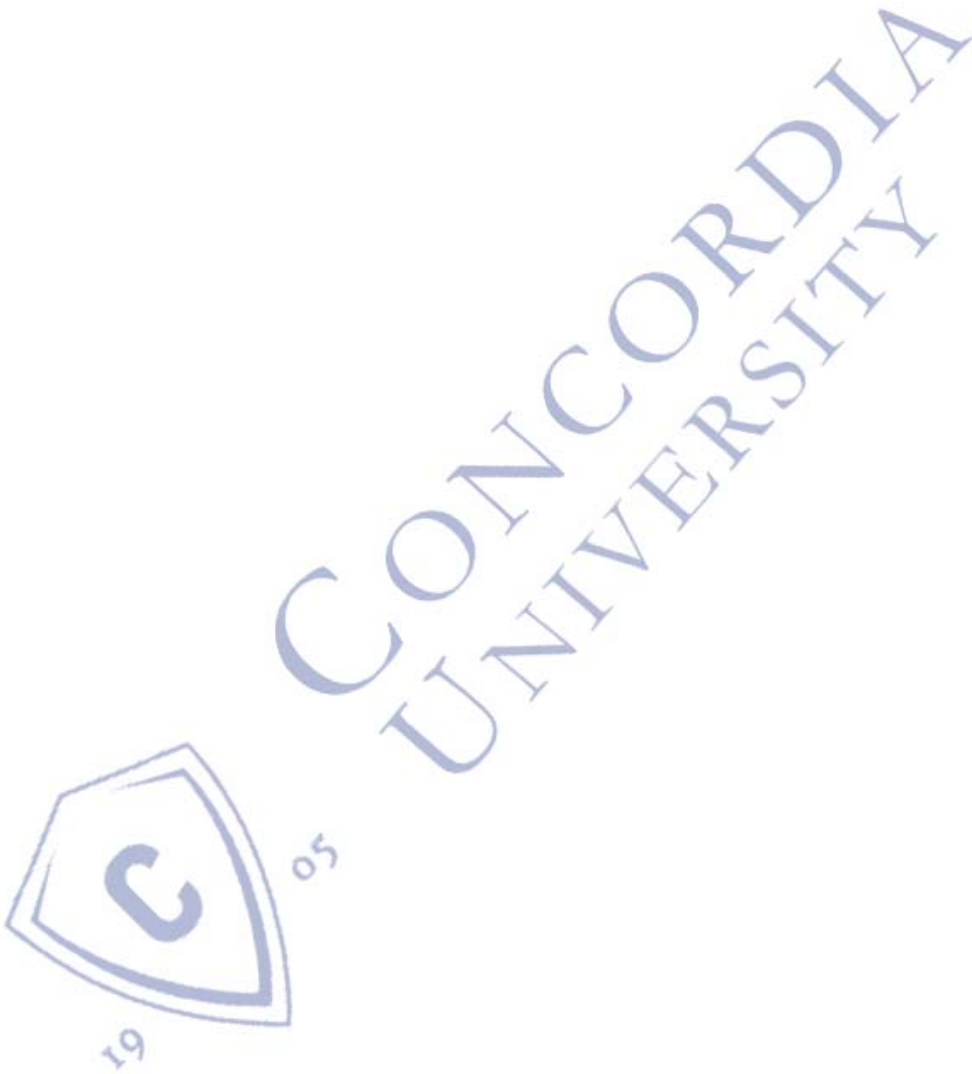
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Survey

Name: _____ Date _____

1. What are some good things about RTI Groups?

2. What are some bad things about RTI Groups?

3. How did the groups help you?

4. How did going to the groups make you feel?



