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Response to intervention: teachers' needs for implementation in gifted and talented programs

Stephen Matthew Seedorf
University of Northern Colorado

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

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RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: TEACHERS' NEEDS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN GIFTED AND TALENTED PROGRAMS

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Stephen Matthew Seedorf

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Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

_____
George Betts, Ed.D., Co-Chair

_____
Stuart Omdal, Ph.D., Co-Chair

_____
Corey Pierce, Ph.D., Committee Member

_____
Kathleen Fahey, Ph.D., Faculty Representative

Date of Dissertation Defense __April 22nd, 2011_____

Accepted by the Graduate School

_____
Robbyn R. Wacker, Ph. D.
Assistant Vice President of Research
Dean of Graduate School and International Admissions

ABSTRACT

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There is a discrepancy currently in public schools when comparing the identification and instruction of underachieving students with gifted and talented students. A three tiered identification and instructional model was developed out of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) with emphasis coming from the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). The Response to Intervention (RtI) model has proven to be a successful tool for identifying student need, implementing interventions, and monitoring the effectiveness of the interventions. This model has been explored for use with gifted and talented students, but the implementation in most schools has been lacking fidelity due to small amounts of resources, training, and support. This study utilizes qualitative research methodology to investigate necessary components when implementing RtI with gifted and talented students. An extensive review of the current literature, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions revealed five common themes teachers and administrators need to consider for successful implementation of the RtI model on a school-wide basis. The identified themes are as follows: Awareness, support, professional development, time, and high quality tier one differentiation. These five themes are cyclical in nature and should be used as a group in a systematic approach to implementing RtI in Gifted and Talented programs.

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Last, but certainly not least, I have to thank my family. More influential than anyone, the four members of my family provided unwavering and honest love, support, and encouragement the last 10 years. To my brother, Greg, my inspiration for going into the field of gifted and talented education: I hope someday I can make you as proud of me as I am of you. Your intellect and creativity has been and will continue to be an inspiration for me. To my wife, Jenn: Thank you for encouraging me to follow my passions, supporting me in every step, and never doubting that I will succeed. Thank you for being the most understanding wife during the countless hours of homework and related projects. I could not have done this without you. Finally, to my parents, Ron and Deb: You have been the best role models of successful and driven adults a young person could hope for. Thank you for pushing me, believing in me, and ***never*** letting me down. There are not enough words to thank the four of you for what you have done for me in the last 10 years of college. Thank you and I love you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Although educating gifted and talented students has progressed greatly since the Terman studies (1925) or even the Marland report (1972), there are still significant discrepancies and difficulties in how gifted and talented (GT) students are identified and instructed in school. Most public school districts have limited financial resources to fund all educational programs. Typically GT budgets receive minimal allocations partially due to the misconception that GT students will be academically successful on their own and any additional instructional opportunities are non-essential. However, GT students have unique educational, social, and emotional needs that warrant specific instructional opportunities (Betts & Neihart, 1988; Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2010; Hughes, Rollins, Pereles, Omdal, Baldwin, 2009; Johnsen, 2000; Silverman, 1993).

In 2001, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) underwent reauthorization and was renamed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). Among the components of reauthorization were three elements that proved to have significant impact on all aspects of education. First was the emphasis on standards based testing. To a much higher degree than ever before, schools were held accountable to demonstrate student growth on academic achievement tests (such as the Colorado Student Assessment Program, in Colorado). Scores from these individual achievement tests would help provide an overall evaluation of the school's performance. Initial legislation stated that all students in schools receiving state and federal funding shall be proficient in reading,

writing, and mathematics by the year 2014 (NCLB, 2001). Since the initial reauthorization of the law, the timetable has been moved back, but the emphasis on universal proficiency remains. Although all students reading, writing, and doing math on grade level proficiency is laudable, the emphasis for instruction became focused to a greater degree than before on students who were below the proficiency level. This emphasis was further intensified with the implementation of the second element: Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a school-level assessment based on 42 criteria. Schools not making AYP were slated to be penalized, receive less federal financial support, or be turned into a charter school. The AYP scores of all schools, published in all local newspapers, contributed to all NCLB testing being in the "high stakes" category as not only were schools being evaluated, administrators and teachers pay and sometimes employment has often been linked to AYP.

The third element having great impact to come out of NCLB was the directive to only use of scientifically validated teaching methods in schools for all students. For students who did not respond to this standard curriculum, a series of interventions in a tiered approach was implemented to instruct and monitor the progress of struggling students (NCLB, 2001). Empirically validated teaching practices were included in NCLB to move schools and teachers to utilize proven practices rather than rely solely on methods that were only theoretically-based and not shown through research to produce results. The process of identifying student need, implementing research-based interventions, and monitoring effectiveness, later took form as the Response to Intervention (RtI) model.

Although the RtI model has the potential to be used as a school-wide model of identification and differentiation, due to wording and implications from legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), RtI has been implemented primarily as a method for identifying struggling students who may have a Learning Disability (Cummings, Atkins, Allison, & Cole, 2008; Fuchs,Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Kavale, 2005; NASDSE, 2005; Pasternack, 2002; Speece, Case, & Molloy, 2003; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). When implemented effectively, RtI provides a solid framework for identifying student need, applying research-based interventions, and monitoring progress of all students. This same process does not need to be limited to struggling students as the progress toward proficiency in the general curriculum (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005; Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2010; Hughes, Rollins, Pereles, Omdal, Baldwin, 2009; Johnsen, 2000; Rollins, K., Mursky, Shah-Coltrane, Johnsen, 2009). Rather, RtI should be used as it was intended, for all students as a means of differentiation and providing research-based interventions for students of all levels. Special education students, Gifted and Talented (GT) students, students with behavioral needs, English Language Learners, and other sub-populations need to be provided the same opportunities for interventions to fit student need, regardless of what the need may be (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Davis, Rimm, & Siegle, 2010; Hughes et al., 2009; Johnsen, 2000; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008; Rollins et al., 2009; Stewart, Benner, Martelle, & Marchand-Martella, 2007).

Implications from federal law have been that RtI is required for special education identification procedures and little else, whereas the actual law merely allows for the use

of RtI and does not limit its use with other populations or programs. Due to a lack of federal legislation, this leaves programs such as GT and ELL to still use other methods of identification and programming, effectively closing them off from the mainstream population. Potentially, through the use of the RtI model in the GT context, all students get exposed to enrichment and academic advancement opportunities at the universal level (Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Davis, Rimm, Siegle, 2010; Hughes et al., 2009; Johnsen, 2000; Rollins et al., 2009). Consistency in identifying student need (regardless of if the need is advancement or remediation) will increase among teachers, which in turn increases the likelihood of implementing interventions with fidelity; i.e. faithfully, as intended, and exact. With multiple processes in place for identifying special needs students, English Language Learners, and Gifted and Talented students, teachers are often left feeling overwhelmed, confused, and frustrated. When feeling overwhelmed, it becomes human nature to only focus on the most visible and pressing needs, in this case students who are struggling in school and who may be considered to be identified for special education.

Rationale for the Study

The progression of identification of gifted and talented students has evolved from the rigid use of intelligence testing to examining a "body of evidence" to show a student's gifted abilities and needs (Davis & Rimm, 2004). Although this progression has taken GT students and programs in a positive direction, with the use of RtI for special education identification, there is once again a procedural gap in public schools. RtI is an all-inclusive model of education where all students benefit from differentiated instruction that fits their needs. As it is currently being implemented in the vast majority of schools,

RtI is only being used for special education or at-risk students (Canter, Klotz, & Kowan, 2008). If only used for special education students, differences in identification and programming procedures between sub-populations leads teachers to only focus on the most significant needs as mentioned previously. A review of current literature revealed that although many GT educators believe RtI would be beneficial for use with their population of students, there is a gap in understanding how to implement the model on a school-wide level. A small percentage of public schools are implementing RtI for all students and have had success with the program. This research will investigate the necessary components for implementing RtI for all students to assist teachers and administrators bring it into their own schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effective instructional practices, programs, and procedures in GT programs and how they relate to the RtI model. Qualitative methodology was used to investigate effective implementation of GT programs along with GT teacher and administrator perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and needs for implementing RtI with GT students. The intent of this research was to provide GT teachers with a better understanding of what is required to implement RtI with this population of students, illuminate the similarities of what is being done currently and the RtI model, and expand the view of the school in which they work.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Q1 How do schools and districts currently identify students for GT programming and how does that relate to the RtI model?

Q2 What do GT teachers need to effectively implement RtI for GT students?

Q3 What can teachers and administrators do to advocate for the use of RtI in their school and make implementation successful?

Definition of Terms

Gifted and Talented Students

Much like the progression of identification and programming, the definition of Gifted and Talented students has evolved over time. Lewis Terman (1925) defined giftedness as the ability of an individual to score of 140 or higher on the Stanford Binet IQ test. Since that time, definitions have been expanded to include characteristic-based definitions (Gagne, 2000; Tannenbaum, 1986), multiple intelligence theory (Gardner, 1999), and multi-faceted definitions including creativity and productiveness (Renzulli, 1978). The Marland report (1972) produced a composite definition, taking into consideration multiple theoretical perspectives to comprise a holistic definition of gifted students. This definition was modified by congress in 1978 and then again in 1988. The 1988 definition is as follows:

> The term 'gifted and talented students' means children and youth who give evidence of high performance capabilities in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities (P.L. 100-297, Sec. 4103. Definitions).

For purposes of this study, the participants were all selected from Colorado school districts. Although state and federal definitions of GT students are similar, in order to

eliminate confusion The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) definition of Gifted and Talented students is as follows:

> Gifted and talented children means those persons between the ages of five and twenty-one whose abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment are so exceptional or developmentally advanced that they require special provisions to meet their educational programming needs. Children under five who are gifted may also be provided with early childhood special educational services. Gifted students include gifted students with disabilities (i.e. twice-exceptional) and students with exceptional abilities or potential from all socio-economic and ethnic, cultural populations. Gifted students are capable of high performance, exceptional production, or exceptional learning behavior by virtue of any or a combination of these areas of giftedness:
> - General or specific intellectual ability.
> - Specific academic aptitude.
> - Creative or productive thinking.
> - Leadership abilities.
> - Visual arts, performing arts, musical or psychomotor abilities. (CDE, 2004)

Response to Intervention Model

Nearly all states have adopted a different definition of the Response to Intervention model (Zirkel & Krohn, 2008). Some definitions are more specific to special education, whereas others are more inclusive of all students. For purposes of this study, the Colorado definition will be used due to the familiarity of the participants with this definition. The Colorado Department of Education defines RtI as "a framework that promotes a well-integrated system connecting general, compensatory, gifted, and special education in providing high quality, standards-based instruction and intervention that is matched to students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs" (CDE, 2008, p.3). Colorado's definition has been regarded as one of the more inclusive and seamless models for incorporating interventions for all students (Rollins, 2009), which makes it the most beneficial for use in this study.

Assumptions

This study recognized the following assumptions:

1. Teachers and administrators may not accurately describe their respective schools in interviews and focus groups in the interest of preserving reputations of individuals, schools, and districts.
2. Teacher and administrator opinions and perceptions may differ greatly in the intended application of RtI.
3. Teachers and administrators representing their schools and districts may not have all necessary information about the implementation of RtI to accurately portray how it is implemented in their respective schools.

Limitations

Due to the qualitative research methodology, this study employed a small sample size of participants for data collection. To ensure meaningful data were derived from all participants, the researched used rich thick descriptions of all responses. The sample of GT program descriptions and experiences may provide a framework for other professionals to use in their own schools: However, the experiences and procedures used by these professionals will not necessarily work in all school settings and should be used by other professionals with discretion.

Researcher bias could have also had an impact on data collection and synthesis as I have been an advocate for the use of the RtI model in gifted education programs and of appropriate education for gifted and talented students. To guard against such bias, I first examined my own beliefs and biases about the use of RtI in a GT setting in order to raise my awareness. I also used a rigorous approach to data collection in an attempt to only be

an instrument in the process (Creswell, 1998). A specific set of questions was used to gather information from the participants and the only variance from the set questions was to clarify responses and follow up on potentially significant comments. In order for this study to be of use to the professionals in the field of Gifted and Talented education, it should accurately reflect participant responses in an attempt to explain all facets of RtI implementation.

Conclusion

Although identification and programming for GT students has progressed, there is now a discrepancy in school systems in identifying student need. Special education students, and other at-risk or struggling students, receive interventions through an RtI model framework. This same framework should be applied to GT services as a method for identifying students in need of enrichment or advancement (Coleman & Hughes, 2009; Davis & Rimm, 2004; Hughes et al., 2009; Johnsen, 2000; Rollins et al., 2009). The intended use of the model, and state definition, include all students. If the RtI model was applied to the GT population as well as struggling learners, all students would benefit from enrichment, students in need of more advanced content would have more access to programming, and teacher overload from different procedures would decrease. The purpose of this research was to provide an idea of the necessary tools, resources, and professional development to make RtI successful in GT programs. With this knowledge and information, teachers and administrators may become better advocates for appropriate GT programming in their own schools.

Chapter II reviews the current literature regarding the use of the Response to Intervention model for special education students as well as gifted and talented education students. Intended uses, current uses, and future implications for RtI will be discussed to provide a framework of understanding for the model as a whole.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Educating the gifted and talented has progressed over the last 50 years due to a number of factors. These include federal reports and legislation in most states, federally funded research and the Jacob Javits Act, the development and implementation of instructional and programming models, and professional research by university personnel and other privately sponsored research agents. Current changes and shifts in what are considered "best practices" are also undergoing changes. With influence from the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), efforts of the National Association for Gifted Children to identify the research-based practices in the field, and research in reformative tiered instructional practices, gifted education identification procedures and programming are perhaps at one of the biggest turning points in recent history.

Educating the Gifted and Talented

Definition of Gifted and Talented

The publication entitled *The Education of the Gifted and Talented*, more commonly referred to as *The Marland Report* (1972), has provided a foundation for state and local definitions of giftedness, the identification of gifted and talented students, and the impetus for programming. The original definition from 1978 has been modified and adapted to fit changing views of GT students. The current federal definition, which is derived from the original Marland Report is as follows:

> The term ‘gifted and talented students’ means children and youth who give evidence of high performance capabilities in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities (P.L. 100-297, Sec. 4103. Definitions).

Individual states often have taken this definition and either applied it directly or modified it to fit the ideas, constructs, and needs of the state. Individual states, however, are not required to use this definition as a foundation as there is no federal mandate or federal funding to school districts. For purposes of this study, being that all participants are from the same Western state and are familiar with the that state’s definition of Gifted and Talented students, that definition will be used. The state definition of GT students to be used in this study is as follows:

> Gifted and talented children means those persons between the ages of five and twenty-one whose abilities, talents, and potential for accomplishment are so exceptional or developmentally advanced that they require special provisions to meet their educational programming needs. Children under five who are gifted may also be provided with early childhood special educational services. Gifted students include gifted students with disabilities (i.e. twice-exceptional) and students with exceptional abilities or potential from all socio-economic and ethnic, cultural populations. Gifted students are capable of high performance, exceptional production, or exceptional learning behavior by virtue of any or a combination of these areas of giftedness:
>
> - General or specific intellectual ability.
> - Specific academic aptitude.
> - Creative or productive thinking.
> - Leadership abilities.
> - Visual arts, performing arts, musical or psychomotor abilities. (CDE, 2004)

Although state and federal definitions of giftedness remain extensive and encompassing of many areas, researchers have attempted to simplify definitions to pinpoint how to identify students for GT programming. Renzulli (1978) established a “Three Ring” definition of giftedness which focuses on the development of gifted

behaviors. These three areas are above average ability, creativity, and task commitment (Renzulli, 1978). This definition has been widely researched and regarded as one of the more extensively used in public schools because of its simplicity but directness. Through this definition, teachers were able to begin to understand GT students on a new level by looking at creativity and task commitment, which in turn lead to more meaningful instruction in an attempt to facilitate the development of the "creative-producer."

In an effort to describe gifted and talented students in more detail, Betts and Neihart (1988) created the "Profiles of the Gifted and Talented." The profiles consist of six different types of gifted students. Each type is listed with characteristics for identification, academic and affective needs, and suggestions for home and school support. The Type I gifted student is the "successful," who are the teacher pleasers and academically achieving; however, they are dependent and do not take risk in their education. The Type II is the "challenging," who are creative, do not conform to rules, and are frustrated with education. Type III gifted students are referred to as the "underground" in that they mask their giftedness so teachers and peers do not identify them as gifted. Type IV gifted students are the "dropouts" because interests and passions are not manifested within the school system and they become disenfranchised with the school environment. Type V gifted students are labeled as "multi-exceptional." Multi-exceptional students are those who are identified as having a disability in addition to gifted and talented needs. The final type of gifted students identified by Betts and Neihart (1988) is the type VI, or the "autonomous learner." The autonomous learner is one who is self-actualizing, learns for intrinsic purposes, and is independent in their education. Through the profiles of the gifted and talented, teachers were able to expand

their views of GT students, much like with the three-ring definition from Renzulli. These two widely used tools in the field, along with many others, have helped progress the general knowledge of GT students in today's schools.

Leaders in the field of gifted and talented education have modified definitions almost continuously in an attempt to explain the phenomena of giftedness, which will ultimately lead to higher quality programs for gifted and talented students. Changes in how professionals view gifted and talented students are reflected in definitions, identification procedures, and eventually programming options.

Identification

When GT programs and research were first developed, gifted students were originally identified by one score, the composite IQ of more than 140, generally from the Stanford Binet Intelligence Test (Terman, 1925). In order to qualify as a participant for the Terman longitudinal studies, a minimum IQ of 140 was required. Identifying giftedness through an intelligence test was common practice for many years, and even still exists in some districts today. However, as definitions were expanded, such as the Marland report and the Three Ring definition from Renzulli, more assessments were used to evaluate a wide variety of students' abilities rather than just one IQ score. Identification procedures need to match definitions of giftedness, or educators will not be identifying what they define as giftedness.

Most districts in the state selected for this study currently recognize that collecting a "body of evidence" for a student is the most comprehensive method of identification that still matches said definitions. In the state definition used for this study, intellectual ability, academic aptitude, creativity, leadership, and visual/performing arts and

psychomotor abilities are included (CDE, 2004). The body of evidence for most schools in this state still needs to be representative of this definition, therefore it needs to include multiple pieces of information to show above average ability in one or more of these areas. Intellectual ability is assessed using individual or group administered cognitive abilities assessments (such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children 4th Edition, Stanford-Binet IV, Cognitive Abilities Test, and the Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test). Academic aptitude can be measures by individual achievement tests (such as the Colorado Student Assessment Program, Northwest Evaluation Association, Galileo, Woodcock-Johnson Test of Achievement 3rd edition, and the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test), work samples from classroom activities, and teacher observations. Creativity can be assessed by creativity measures (such as the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking or Guilford's Alternative Uses Task), work samples, and teacher observations. Leadership is generally reported by teachers, administrators, or even other students in referral forms. Leadership is also demonstrated through involvement in a variety of activities. Performing and visual arts in addition to psychomotor abilities are rated by teachers and other professionals to judge above average ability. A body of evidence for an individual student should include several strong indicators from one or more of the areas shown (preferably at least two areas) (CDE, 2004).

Programming

Once students are identified for gifted and talented programs, the question of what type of programming they need begins. The Colorado Department of Education set the following "Big Ideas" for schools to consider in regards to GT programming: Programming is linked to identification, is systematic, occurs along a set of continuums,

encompasses a variety of services, is monitored and documented in a structured process, and the results of programming services, options, and strategies link to student achievement and program evaluation for accountability.

Rogers (1999) updated a meta-analysis of research in the field of Gifted and Talented education and provisions for such programming. Rogers grouped the provisions into three main areas: Instructional management services, instructional delivery services, and curricular services. Instructional management services include individualization, grouping permutations, and acceleration permutations. These three areas refer to the optimal environment for students based on individual need. Students may be working on individual assignments or projects, group work with same-age peers, or advanced to a higher grade level to work with peers of similar ability. The process of changing the environment based on ability level is one area of differentiation.

The second provision, instructional delivery services, refers to the process of student learning and access to information. The five areas of this provision are projects (independent study and small group); self-instructional materials; hands on activities (ie. Games and simulations; lecture, discussion, and mentoring; and pacing, instructional modifications of process. GT students need a variety of instructional activities and learning opportunities to stay engaged in the general curriculum. Modifying the process of learning is often the most effective method of keeping GT students engaged.

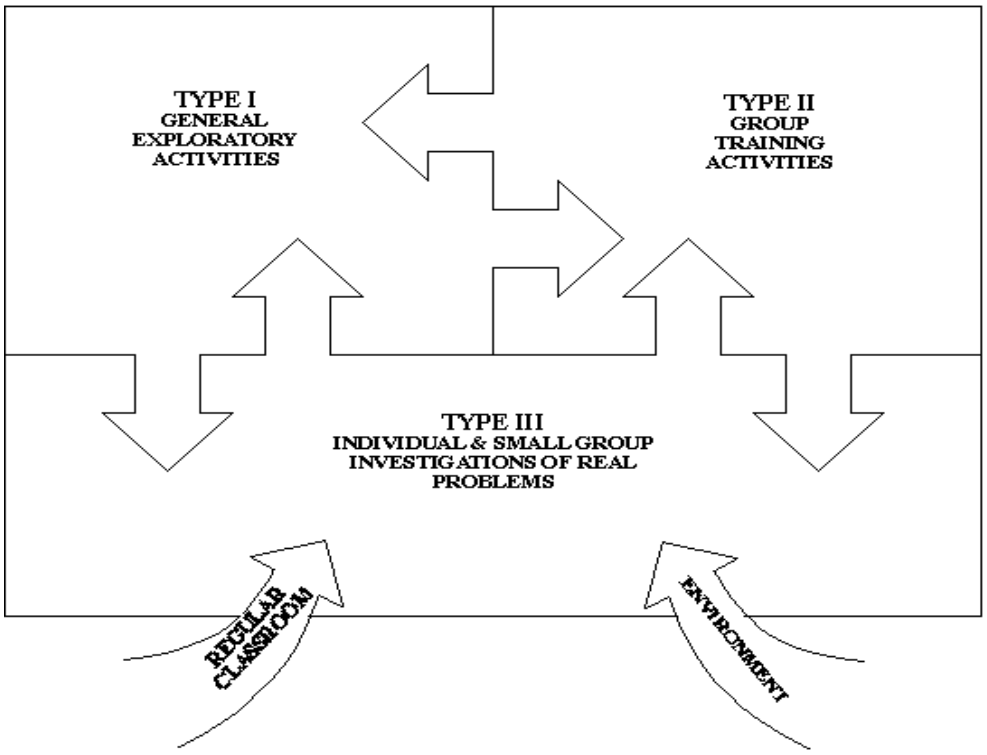
The third provision, curricular services, is broken down into content modifications and product modifications. This addresses the last two areas of differentiation, content and product. GT and general education teachers need to differentiate the content for students based on ability level. Some of this can be addressed with the first provision of

instructional management services, but does not always work out to simply change the setting. Changing the setting does not automatically imply the content will be differentiated, which needs to be addressed individually. Finally, allowing creativity and choice in demonstrating what has been learned is referred to by product modifications. Creative minds need the opportunity to apply newfound knowledge in abstract or atypical methods.

Although programming options should be specific and differentiated to each student's identified needs and areas of ability, many schools provide the same type of GT programming for all identified students. GT programming can take many different forms including (but not limited to) enrichment, content acceleration, grade level acceleration, content extensions, interest-based projects, affective development, and leadership development. The foundation for all of these options is differentiation, which is the foundation for the RtI model.

In an attempt to align programming with definitions and provide opportunities and structure for differentiation for GT students, many professionals in the field have created models for GT programming. Renzulli developed the School Wide Enrichment Model with the understanding that most students spent the entire day in general education classrooms without being pulled out for gifted education services. This model is based on a three type system in which the Type I and Type II activities can occur with all students in the general education classroom (see figure 1) (Renzulli, 1997).

Figure 1. School Wide Enrichment Model



(Renzulli, 1997)

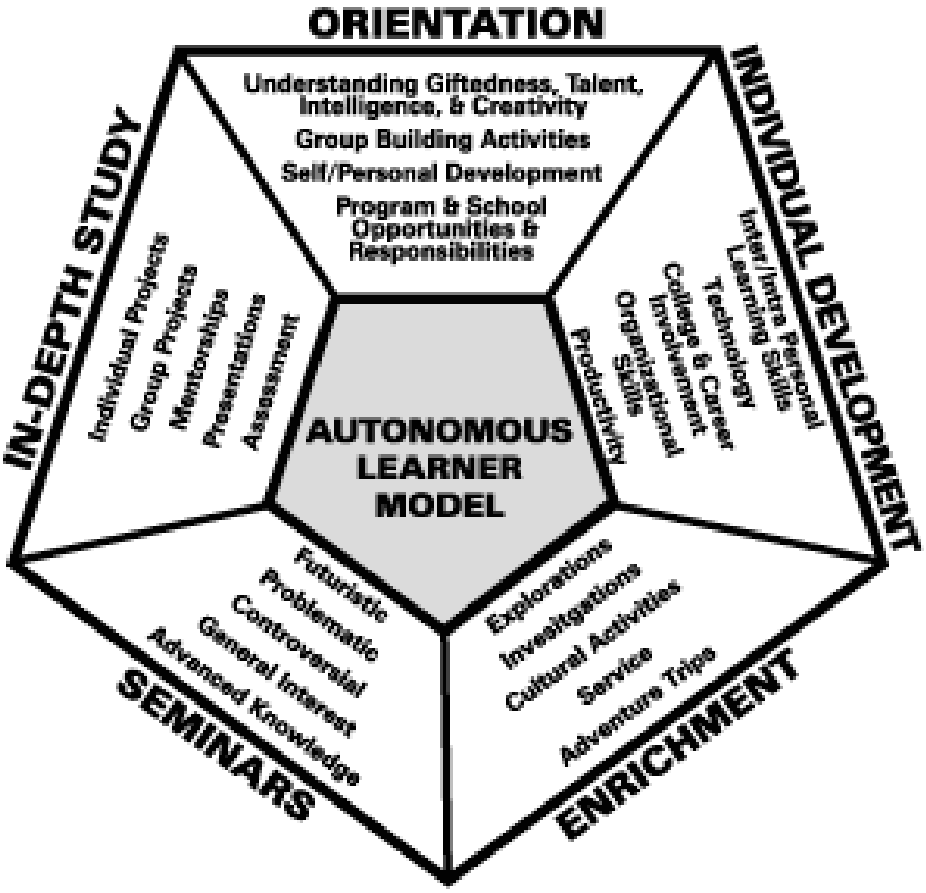
These activities are individual explorations and group training activities. The Type III enrichment is an individual or small group investigation in which students take on real-world problems to understand and attempt to solve. Because much of this experience in the School Wide Enrichment Model often happens in the general education classroom, a large amount of curriculum compacting and differentiation must take place. Students need to be given the time to work on their individual and group projects and compacting the curriculum can often provide the time needed without compromising classroom content. This model shares many common principles with the RTI model, breaking down levels of explorations and investigations for students at different ability levels. This model is very learner driven and helps strengthen higher order thinking

skills, but does not put the same emphasis on the social and emotional needs of gifted learners as other models, such as the Autonomous Learner Model.

Betts and Kercher (1999) developed the Autonomous Learner Model (ALM) around Betts' and Neiharts profiles of the gifted and talented. The ALM is a model in which the teacher takes on the role of a facilitator and the child moves from a student to a learner as they progress together through five dimensions (see figure 2).

The first dimension is orientation, where the teacher and student become familiar with each other and the student begins to understand giftedness and his or her own unique abilities. The second dimension is affective development that Betts refers to as Individual Development. The third dimension is enrichment. In this dimension, students participate in explorations and investigations on topics of interest. These topics may be pursued in greater detail in the fifth step. The fourth dimension is the seminar. Seminars can be futuristic, problematic, controversial, general interest, or advanced knowledge. The seminars develop higher order thinking skills and allow for the opportunity to present knowledge to peers that a student has researched. The fifth dimension is the ultimate goal of the ALM, the in-depth study.

Figure 2. Autonomous Learner Model



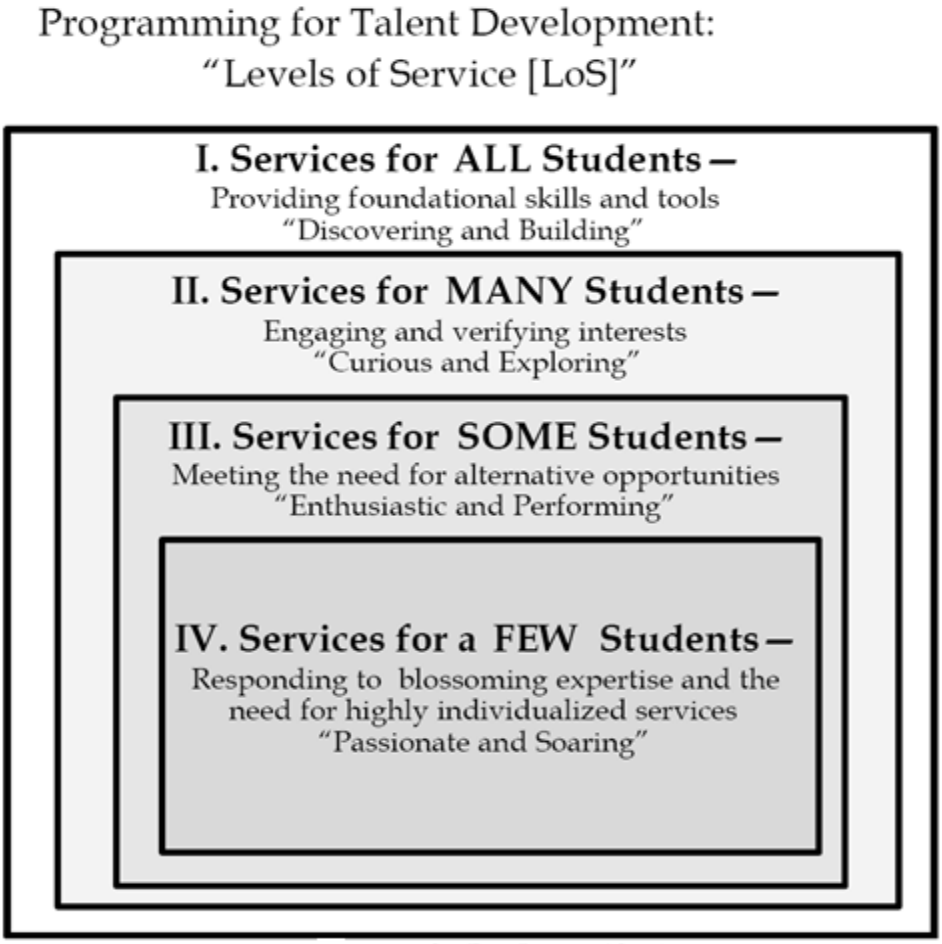
(Betts & Kercher, 1999)

The in-depth study is a long term project in which the student is given the opportunity to pursue an area of passion. This may have been an area they have done an exploration or investigation on and are ready to take it to the next level. All students should work toward doing an in-depth study, but it should never be pushed. The passion involved in doing the study is essential to completion of a meaningful product (Betts & Neihart, 1999).

Donald Treffinger (1986) developed the Self-Directed Learning model as a means to nurture the growth of creativity in young students. His model is designed as a continuum of services with four different levels. The outside level (displayed in a box) is

for all students (see figure 3, p. 18). At this level, all students get to take advantage of the curriculum options. The second level is for many students. The next level is for some students, and the inner level is for few students. This model is surprisingly similar to the Response to Intervention model that is becoming widely popular in special education.

Figure 3. Levels of Service



(Treffinger, 1980)

The continuum of services allows teachers to differentiate and target instruction to the students that really need and would benefit from such focused intervention. Although it seems like this model would be used specifically for content and curriculum differentiation, it is evenly divided between cognitive and affective support. Treffinger

(1980) outlines support on both the cognitive and affective aspects for three different levels of students, much like RTI. It could have easily been Treffinger's model that has been adapted into the RTI model schools know and use today.

Response to Intervention

Foundations

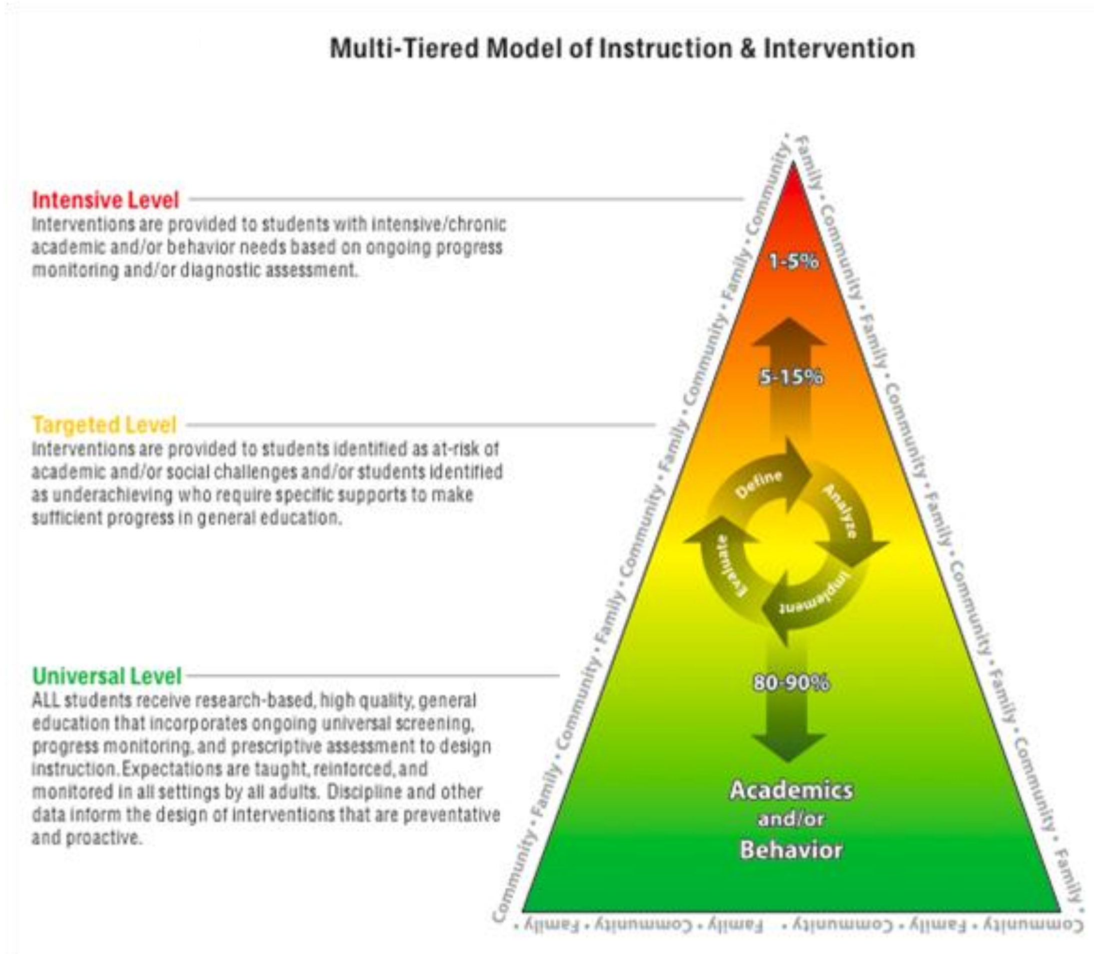
Response to Intervention started to impact schools after the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). NCLB was intended to help all students achieve their academic potential in addition to holding schools accountable for making adequate growth each year in student progress. Schools would now be measured by how students scored on achievement tests given a minimum of once each year. These assessments are often referred to as "high stakes tests" because of the massive amount of pressure on teachers and schools to perform. If students did not perform well enough as a whole, the school would then not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). After three years of not making AYP, a school may lose funding or even get taken over and turned into a charter school. The main goal of NCLB and monitoring AYP was to have all students reach grade-level proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics by the year 2014.

With emphasis placed on proficiency levels in high stakes testing, schools immediately began to look at low achieving students. A major problem with students with learning disabilities is that they were not being identified until their achievement fell to a level of qualification. Teachers needed a method of early identification in order to address the needs of struggling learners and still achieve AYP. In 2004, the federal government reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, then renamed as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). IDEIA

(2004) did not mandate the use of RtI for identification of students with learning disabilities, rather it opened the door for the model to be used and allowed districts and schools to not use the controversial discrepancy model.

RtI is a multi-tiered model designed to help teachers identify student needs within a classroom, establish appropriate interventions on a continuum to meet identified needs, and monitor progress of students with interventions in place (CDE, 2008; Elliott, 2008; Murawski, Hughes, & Claire, 2009; Samuels, 2008a). The general design is that all students receive instruction at the universal level, approximately 80-90% of students will be successful at this universal level without additional interventions. Small groups of students will need targeted interventions to address specific problems or holes in learning. Approximately 5-15% of students will need this targeted level of support. The top of the pyramid represents the most intensive support for 1-5% of students, typically those who receive special education programming. The original model was divided into three clear areas of intervention need, however this state has taken the dividing lines out of the pyramid to represent the fluidity of the model (see figure 4). The fluidity of the model, shown by the problem solving process arrows in the middle of the pyramid, is due to students moving from less intensive interventions to more intensive interventions and instruction, or from more intensive interventions to less intensive interventions as their needs change (CDE, 2008). Through this model, teachers have a framework for identifying need, using interventions, and monitoring student progress. The model by itself does not provide enough support and foundation for teachers to implement RtI, so state and district level administrators have established additional tools, resources, and guidelines to assist in implementation.

Figure 4. Colorado Department of Education Response to Intervention Model



(CDE, 2008)

Six Components of Response to Intervention

Since the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, teachers have been scrambling to figure out how to use RtI effectively and efficiently in their schools in order to properly identify and instruct struggling learners. With the mandates of NCLB hanging over the heads of educators, the need for early intervention and advancement of skills was greater than ever. States individually addressed how RtI should be implemented. The Colorado Department of Education has

set forth guidelines and resources to assist educators in implementing the model to ensure consistency and fidelity throughout the state. CDE established six components of RtI for educators to follow when implementing the model. The six components set by CDE are not a suggestion to help districts with implementation, rather they are six necessary parts, and without these all in place RtI will likely fail (CDE, 2008).

Leadership. Leadership is crucial in implementing RtI. State, district, and building level leadership all need to be effective so that the model is consistent throughout all educators. State level administrators need to set forth guidelines for implementation, provide resources to districts, and allow for training opportunities to ensure uniformity throughout the state. District level administrators need to be in communication with building level principals for specific action plans and implementation procedures. Districts should provide trainings specific to the demographics they work with to address the specific needs of the location. Building level administration needs to allow for time for the problem solving teams to meet, resources for interventions, and a collaborative process for implementation. RtI is not a model that a few people within a school can implement independently of everyone else, the entire faculty needs to understand and buy in to the methods. Each individual teacher can and should also take a leadership role in RtI. Students need advocates, teachers need intervention ideas, and a collaborative process is not a top-down model in which the principal dictates to the teachers. With teachers as leaders, following the guidelines and procedures set by the building, district, and state, RtI has the leadership to be implemented successfully (CDE, 2008).

Problem-Solving. The problem-solving component is in reference to the problem-solving method of early identification of needs and introduction of meaningful interventions to address those needs. The classroom teachers, specialists, parents, and administrators meet to identify the current need, brainstorm ideas for interventions, and establish how the said interventions will be monitored for effectiveness. The problem-solving method is the key component to RtI. As the model is set up as a collaborative process, the general education or special education teachers are no longer left to discover the solution to a problem on their own. Groups of teachers form the problem-solving team in an effort of providing the best quality interventions that have a high probability of success (CDE, 2008).

Curriculum and Instruction. Curriculum and instruction refers to the high-quality, research based curricula and instructional strategies teachers incorporate into their daily lessons at the universal (Tier I) level. It also refers to the more explicit instruction of students not progressing as expected in the targeted (Tier II) and intensive (Tier III) levels. CDE has a list of seven questions for teachers to use when identifying appropriate curriculum. The questions are as follows:

- Is curriculum evidence-based and sufficient?
- How do we document evidence and what constitutes evidence (both quantitative and qualitative)?
- Is the curriculum aligned to the standards?
- How will the Core curriculum identify needs and how will they be addressed?

- How will the effectiveness of the Core curriculum be monitored and adapted over time?
- For which students is the Core curriculum sufficient and not sufficient and why?
- What specific supplemental and intensive curricula are needed (does the Core curriculum need to be changed)?

Teachers and administrators should use these guiding questions when identifying and selecting appropriate curriculum for each class (CDE, 2008).

Assessment and Monitoring. When implementing research based interventions, it is easy for teachers to assume students will make progress and the interventions will be effective. It is necessary, however, to monitor the effectiveness of the interventions so that more appropriate tools may be used if needed. Assessment and monitoring has two parts. Assessment is in reference to the data collected that illuminates the need for the problem solving team. Informal and formal assessments are collected to identify a need of a student in one of the three main academic areas. This process is completed prior to the student being referred to the problem-solving team. After the problem-solving team identifies the need and implements an appropriate intervention (or series of interventions), it becomes necessary to monitor the effectiveness of the program. Teachers need to continuously collect data (both formal and informal) to evaluate the progress of the student. If the intervention is being effective, teachers can choose to continue on the same course or modify the intervention at that time. If it is not being effective after a reasonable amount of time, teachers can change the interventions and modify instruction based on the collected data for progress monitoring (CDE, 2008).

Positive School Climate. As stated previously, RtI is a collaborative school-wide model in which all faculty and all students are active participants. Establishing a positive school climate within a building is one of the six necessary components of RtI so that teachers are supportive of other teachers in the problem-solving process, students are supportive of other students in need of interventions, and the school works together as a whole to integrate services for everyone that meet all needs of students in the building. This process is set up through creating a caring school community, teaching appropriate behavior and social problem-solving skills, implementing Positive Behavior Support (PBS), and providing rigorous academic instruction (CDE, 2008).

Family and Community. As with the positive school climate, it is necessary to have family and community involvement for the RtI process as well. Parents need to take an active role in identifying academic and behavioral needs so teachers have all information about support at home. If the family is knowledgeable, understanding, and supportive of the RtI process, interventions can be implemented both at school and at home, thus increasing the opportunity for success. Also, by incorporating family input, the student and parents begin to feel a sense of shared ownership and responsibility with the process as a whole, making the collaborative efforts between the team members easier. The Colorado RtI model represents the family and community support on the diagram by surrounding the entire pyramid with the words, "Family, Community."

Response to Intervention in Special Education

RtI originated in special education as a means of identifying students with specific learning disabilities and effectively ending the use of the discrepancy model (Butler, 2009; Cummings et al., 2008; Elliott, 2008; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982;

McCaster et al., 2001; Mellard, 2004; Murawski, Hughes, & Claire, 2009; Samuels, 2008). The discrepancy model was the previous standard method of identification for SLD criteria, set by IDEA (1997). When using the discrepancy model, school psychologists and special education teachers would test a student who they were concerned about in both cognitive and academic achievement areas. The results of the two types of tests would be compared to discover if there was a significant difference between the expected levels of achievement and actual levels of performance. If the cognitive scores show average to above average ability (100 or greater), and the achievement scores represented below average ability (below 85, but depended on exact IQ), the student would qualify for special education services under an SLD label. This model went through much criticism; however, as setting a cut-off score for identification seemed arbitrary. All standardized tests have a margin of error, meaning the exact score falls within a small range of scores rather than being one number specifically. If a student scored an 85 and did not qualify for services, but and 84 would have qualified him or her; the one point difference is within the margin of error and is statistically insignificant. Therefore, the discrepancy model did not prove to be the most effective in identifying students with learning disabilities because of the scoring inconsistencies.

With emphasis on achievement of all students and pressure coming from NCLB to have all students at grade level proficiency, identifying and instructing struggling learners was no longer just the job of the special education teachers. Schools began to focus on differentiation and addressing all students' needs within the classroom. This idea of differentiation and cooperative teaching with the special education teachers lead nicely into an RtI framework for the entire population.

Learning Disability Identification. For special education students and identifying students with Learning Disabilities, RtI is relatively straightforward. Teachers begin by teaching their normal lessons in the general education framework. With this type of instruction, the vast majority of students will learn and understand the content (approximately 80-90%). The teacher then starts to identify small groups of students who are struggling to master the skills and concepts being taught. Once identified as a possible need, the teacher collects data to support his or her claim about the students. Data should be collected in the form of work samples, tests and quizzes, standardized tests, and group work. Once the teacher has enough data for the RtI team to have an accurate picture of the student, the teacher introduces the team to the student at an RtI team meeting. The RtI team then evaluates the collected data for validity and assesses if there is actually a need with the student. If a need is identified, the team attempts to operationally define that need in an effort to make it useful and workable.

The RtI team then discusses possible research-based interventions to address the defined need. The team informs all other teachers working with the student of the plan and how to monitor progress of the area in question. After a period of about six weeks, the RtI team reconvenes to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention based on the data collected by the student's teachers. If the intervention has shown to be effective, the RtI team should conclude to continue the intervention as the student is making progress, or stop the intervention because the student has demonstrated necessary skills to be successful in the general education environment. If the intervention is not effective, the team should conclude to try a different (possibly more intensive) intervention to address the defined need. As interventions get more specific and intensive to assist the student in

his or her education, the need for special education services becomes an issue. Once the student is receiving interventions typically only established by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the student would possibly qualify for special education services (Aaron, Joshi, Gooden, Bentum, 2008; Allington & Walmsley, 2008; Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; CDE, 2008; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010).

The process of using RtI instead of the discrepancy model initiates early intervention. The discrepancy model was often referred to as the "wait to fail" model because students had to show a large gap in understanding before they would qualify for special education services. This gap could take up to several years to be large enough for teachers to become worried about it and end up testing for a disability. With RtI, students who are not achieving at the level of their peers should be getting interventions almost immediately, so the gap in achievement is addressed and will hopefully not grow (Batsche, Elliott, Graden, Grimes, Kovaleski, Prasse, et. al.2005).

Behavioral Needs. The next biggest area being addressed with RtI is behavioral needs. RtI works very similarly with behavioral needs as it does with SLD identification. Most students in a general education class will understand and follow behavioral expectations without any additional support. Some students in the class will need more targeted support to assist them in following directions and not causing disruptions. Few students will need intensive interventions for behavioral needs. These students may not be in control of their emotions or actions to a level that might warrant behavior plans or even an IEP. The same RtI process should exist with this population, however; as these student's needs should be identified early and interventions should be put in place to address the needs (CDE, 2008; Fairbanks et al., 2007; Hawken, Vincent, & Schumann,

2008; Stewart et al., 2007). In most schools that are implementing RtI, SLD identification and behavioral needs are the two areas being addressed. RtI is for all students, however, so other student needs are being ignored.

Response to Intervention in Gifted and Talented Education

Many schools have been applying principles foundational in the RtI model for several decades through high quality instruction and differentiation. As stated previously, the Colorado Department of Education set the following "Big Ideas" for schools to consider in regards to GT programming: Programming is linked to identification, is systematic, occurs along a set of continuums, encompasses a variety of services, is monitored and documented in a structured process, and the results of programming services, options, and strategies link to student achievement and program evaluation for accountability. Key components to a quality GT program include a variety of instructional and learning opportunities and differentiation for content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 1999). All high quality educational practices require research-based instructional techniques, and they respond to the needs of the students in terms of higher level thinking skills, enrichment, or advancement in content. However, most teachers have not received training that illuminated some of these similarities, thus many still believe RtI is a special education model.

Although the original intent of the RtI model was to incorporate needs-based differentiation and interventions for all students, in most schools across the country GT programs are not benefitting from the use of the model. Some states and even specific districts identify the usefulness of RtI for GT students, but with limited resources and training, few schools are actually implementing it efficiently. The majority of current

research and publications about RtI in GT programs is for advocacy and training rather than implementation. The goal of educators at this point is to push for the use of the model in their schools rather than making sure it is done correctly. Many teachers view RtI as simply a model for identifying students as SLD, others view it only as deficit-based. This deficit can be perceived in academics, behavior, or possibly even ELL (Rinaldi, 2008). Where the difference lies when attempting to apply the model to GT programs is in the wording of the model. RtI is widely known as the "problem-solving model" (CDE, 2008). This language automatically provides the users with a preconception that all issues being identified are "problems" which implies deficits. However, what if the concern being identified by the RtI team was not a problem, but a need? Needs for GT students could be that they are underachieving, need behavioral interventions, need social and emotional support or counseling, or numerous other problems (Hughes et al., 2009; Rollins et al., 2009). Needs for GT students could also be the need for enrichment, acceleration, passion-based learning, higher order thinking skills, performing and visual arts, and many others.

There are many reasons why RtI is not explored fully for GT students and programs. Teachers already feel overwhelmed having to differentiate for at-risk and struggling learners. Teachers do not have the resources for interventions for GT students in their classrooms. With emphasis placed on achievement, it is "more important" to focus on the underachieving and non-proficient rather than students who are already beyond grade level. Perhaps the biggest road block to implementing RtI for GT students and programs is that teachers do not view the model as a need-based model for differentiation, but a problem-based model designed to close the achievement gap. This

frame of reference needs to change before RtI can begin to work for GT students. Some GT students are benefitting from RtI type programming due to twice exceptionality. Twice exceptional students can be a wonderful example for how to use the RtI for all students, as teachers need to differentiate for both special education and gifted education needs (Pereles, Omdal, & Baldwin, 2009; McCoach et al, 2001).

Paradigm Shift. A paradigm shift refers to a dramatic change in methodology, practice, thinking, and planning. In reference to RtI, a paradigm shift is needed to change the current methodology of teachers in implementing the model as a deficit based model into a needs based model. With a current frame of mind being that RtI is simply for the struggling or at-risk learner, students with GT needs will not benefit from the proper differentiated instruction they deserve under this framework. The original intent of RtI was to address all specific needs of all learners in a data driven differentiation process. Only a small percentage of students are benefiting from the current program. A paradigm shift could change the current methods of identification and programming for all students, providing a data-driven differentiated process from which all students could benefit. Not until this paradigm shift occurs in the educational system will RtI be able to be implemented fully for 100% of students.

Teachers of GT students have the ability to initiate such a change in their schools. Currently, many GTteachers and coordinators make the decisions about identification and programming for GT students in their respective schools. By making the change from identifying students for GT programming with a “body of evidence” and moving towards a tiered level of instruction and support, GT teachers can influence the perception of the teachers they work with on a daily basis. Teachers will continue to use collected data to

make decisions about appropriate range of interventions so that the interventions are targeted to student needs. By implementing RtI in a school, the GT teacher will need support from the general education teachers. It is likely that the general education teachers will already be familiar with the model through use with other populations of students, such as special education. The GT teacher can have a positive impact on these teachers to encourage the use of the RtI model for all students for the sake of consistency throughout the school as the overall RtI process should not change based on demographics. If all students' needs are identified and addressed through a tiered system, the true systemic change of education is not far behind. This approach is a "bottom-up" change rather than a "top-down" type of change that typically comes through legislation or state mandates. Individual schools and districts will need to show what can be effective for the system as a whole to adopt the RtI model.

Conclusion

Chapter II reviewed the laws, regulations, and guidelines for RtI in public schools as well as current research-based practices for implementation. RtI originated after NCLB put pressure on schools to increase achievement and close the achievement gaps between struggling learners and general population. IDEIA (2004) was the legislation that allowed the use of an RtI type instructional model as a model for identification for students labeled as LD. RtI is effectively replacing the discrepancy model in most states for identification and is moving into the mainstream classroom. Since RtI is relatively new in educational systems, the processes for implementation are still evolving. Pressure from federal legislation and high stakes testing have had an impact on how RtI is used in schools, but to truly implement RtI as intended will require a shift in perception among

professionals. The use of the simple three tiered model can be extremely beneficial for all students if teachers simply change frame of reference from a problem based model to a need based model.

Chapter III will explain the methodology behind the qualitative research inquiry used to identify and evaluate teachers' needs when implementing RtI for GT students.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This research project utilized a combination of individual interviews and a focus group to investigate the necessary components of an RtI model when used for GT programs in addition to how teachers and administrators can advocate for desired components to help ensure success of the model in their schools. This research used a qualitative approach with a grounded theory perspective to investigate the experiences and recommendations of professionals in the field of gifted and talented education in regards to their use of the RtI model. A grounded theory perspective was used to develop a theory about the components, trainings, and mindsets necessary to implement the model successfully.

This study, as other studies generating grounded theory, follows a constructivist approach. Charmaz (2005, 2006) "advocates for a social constructivist perspective that includes emphasizing diverse local worlds, multiple realities, and the complexities of particular worlds, views, and actions" (Creswell, 2007, p. 65).

> The constructivist approach… lies squarely within the interpretive approach to qualitative research with flexible guidelines, a focus on theory developed that depends on the researcher's view, learning about the experience within embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships, and making visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity (Creswell, 2007, p. 65).

The researcher acted as an interpretivist to develop meaning and theory from data gathered from participants. Theories derived from the data will be able to be traced back through commonalities among responses. The constructivist grounded theory approach

in this study was appropriate for the development of a theory explaining a shifting paradigm among educators when implementing the RtI model for all students, which can be evaluated for effectiveness in later research.

Qualitative Research

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study due to the complex nature of the phenomena in question and the need for extensive evaluation of detailed responses by participants. "Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Creswell (2007, p.15) also states, "good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and , at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry." The participants in this study have all experienced the trials and tribulations associated with implementing a complex model for a subset of the general population in schools. The experiences and meaning derived from these experiences are the crucial components to developing theory from the participants. Using the grounded theory perspective, the purpose of this study was to develop new theories about current phenomena rather than to test old theories. The new theories, grounded in the experiences and perceptions of teachers and administrators in the field of Gifted and Talented education, attempt to explain a shifting paradigm among educators when implementing the RtI model for all students.

Qualitative research has evolved with ever-changing definitions due to interpretations of what should be included as qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln have published several definitions of qualitative research, their latest in their Handbook of Qualitative Research (2005). Their most current definition is as follows:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3)

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) also describe characteristics of good qualitative research. The researcher identified these characteristics and adhered to them in this study. The characterists are as follows:

- Qualitative design is holistic. It looks at that larger picture, the whole picture, and begins whit a search for understanding of the whole.
- Qualitative design looks at relationships within a system or culture.
- Qualitative design refers to the personal, face-to-face, and immediate.
- Qualitative design demands the researcher stay in the setting over time.
- Qualitative design is focused on understanding a given social setting, not necessarily on making predictions about that setting.
- Qualitative design demands time in analysis equal to the time in the field.
- Qualitative design demands that the researcher develop a model of what occurred in the social setting.
- Qualitative design requires the researcher to become the research instrument. This means the researcher must have the ability to observe behavior and must sharpen the skills necessary for observation and face-to-face interview.
- Qualitative design incorporates informed consent decisions and is responsive to ethical concerns.
- Qualitative design incorporates room for description of the role of the researcher as well as description of the researcher's own biases and ideological preference.
- Qualitative design requires ongoing analysis of data (p.212)

This study was designed to look at the broad picture of GT identification and programming by conducting face-to-face interviews with practitioners in the field. Multiple interviews along with a focus group were conducted to provide rich description of the social setting and phenomena of RtI so that the researcher could analyze and develp theories out of the participants responses.

Interviewing

The researcher selected interviewing as the primary method of data collection for this study due to the extensive and detailed responses associated with this type of interaction. An individual interview is designed with the researcher and one participant where the researcher "asked open ended questions, wanted to listen to the participants being studied and shaped the questions after we 'explored,' and we refrain from assuming the role of the expert researcher with the 'best' questions" (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). Data collection initiated with individual interviews, seeking the experiences and wisdom of 8-12 GT teachers and administrators. The purpose of the interviews was to describe the phenomena of implementing RtI through the teachers' perspectives. The second step in data collection was focus groups. The focus group was used to elaborate on the ideas and themes present in the individual interviews. Due to geographical limitations, it was not possible for some participants to take part in the focus group. The researcher considered conducting multiple focus groups in order for all participants to be able to attend, but achieved saturation in data after one. All interviews and focus group sessions were recorded digitally on a hand held device in order to be reflected on and transcribed at a later date by the researcher.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are group interviews that are used in an attempt to gain more information based on the interaction between group members. Creswell (2007) states:

> focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information (Krueger, 1994; Morgan, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

This researcher's goal in utilizing focus groups was to gather the best information from the participants' experiences. Once experienced teachers gathered together to discuss an area about which they are passionate, the discussion led to much more descriptive information than individual interviews alone. For purposes of this study, a focus group was defined as having two or more participants.

Grounded Theory

In an attempt to understand the components necessary to implement RtI in a GT program, the researcher used a grounded theory approach to develop a holistic understanding of the process and needs. Grounded theory is:

> the process of developing a theory, not testing a theory. Researchers might begin with a tentative theory they want to modify or no theory at all with the intent of 'grounding' the study in views of participants. In either case, an inductive model of theory development is at work here, and the process is one of generating or discovering a theory grounded in views from participants in the field (Creswell, 2007, p. 239).

Creswell (2007) identified two different types of grounded theory studies: The "systematic procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and the constructivist approach of Charmaz (2005, 2006)." The systematic procedures, the researcher "seeks to systematically develop a theory that explains process, action, or interaction on a topic" (Creswell, 2007, p. 64).

The constructivist approach is the second type of grounded theory research according to Creswell.

> The constructivist approach… lies squarely within the interpretive approach to qualitative research with flexible guidelines, a focus on theory developed that depends on the researcher's view, learning about the experience within embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships, and making visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity (Creswell, 2007, p. 65).

This study theoretically used a combination of the two types of grounded theory research in that the construction of meaning out of the experiences, attitudes, and views of participants will be used to develop a theory that explains the process and action associated with the implementation of the RtI model for GT students. The developed theory attempted to identify the needs associated with implementing RtI in GT programs. GT teachers and administrators can then use the theory to facilitate the implementation of the model effectively.

Participant Selection

This study sought the experiences, attitudes, and needs of GT teachers when attempting to implement the RtI model. In order to collect accurate and meaningful data, participants needed to meet several criteria to be part of the study. The following criteria were used: (a) the participant is either a teacher or administrator in gifted and talented education; (b) the participant has been in the field of GT for a minimum of three years; (c) the participant has been viewed by experts in the field as successful in GT program implementation; and (d) experts in the field of gifted and talented education, including university professors with knowledge of programming, validated the criteria for participant selection for the study.

Expert sampling was used to generate a list of possible participants for this study. Expert sampling is a method of purposeful sampling in which the sample is identified by professionals with demonstrated competency in the field. The experts were be able to provide a group of possible participants to the researcher that in their professional opinion would have the knowledge and experience to be valuable to the study. Purposeful sampling is a process in which the researcher "selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Expert sampling in this case meant that the researcher enlisted the help of professionals in the field of Gifted and Talented education to assist with collecting a purposeful sample. A list of possible participants was generated by two professors of gifted and talented education at the University of Northern Colorado. These professors maintain contact with teachers and administrators throughout the state by means of professional organizations and participation in their graduate programs. The professors have a solid understanding of exemplary teachers throughout Colorado and the curricula and programs they employ. Possible participants have shown representative skills to the expert professors in the following areas of Gifted and Talented education through participation in graduate work in the education of Gifted and Talented students: nature and needs, identification, social and emotional needs, and curriculum and instruction.

After receiving the list of possible participants for the study with contact information, the researcher attempted to email and/or call every possible participant. During the initial conversation, the researcher informed the possible participants of the major aspects of the study and invited each one to be a participant. At no time should the

participants have felt they were obligated to participate in the study. Each participant had the opportunity to decline the offer and not participate in the interview or focus group process. Participants were also instructed on the purpose of the study, interview dates and times, focus group dates and times, and information they would receive via postal mail or email, depending on participant convenience. Each participant, once he or she chose to participate in the study, received detailed information about the study, informed consent forms, an informational packet about RtI to establish foundational knowledge of the model, and contact information for the researcher to schedule interviews. During the initial phone call and in the packet of information mailed to each participant was information regarding confidentiality procedures for the study. At no time will the information they shared be able to be traced back to them as pseudonyms were used in the report writing process in an attempt to maintain anonymity.

Participants in the study were determined eligible if and only if they expressed willingness to participate in the study over the phone (or via email) and return the signed consent form from the initial packet; and if the experts who provided the initial list of possible participants agree with the researcher that the willing participants meet the criteria for the study.

Participants and Setting

The researcher began with a list of 20 names of exemplary teachers and administrators of gifted and talented education throughout a Western mountain state. Due to geographic, time, and resource needs, the expected participation in the study was 8 to 12 participants. The study involved 8 participants for the individual interviews, 4 of which participated in the focus group.

The setting for the interviews varied depending on what was convenient for the participant. The researcher attempted to make the interviews and focus groups as convenient as possible for everyone involved, so several of the interviews took place at the participants' schools.

Data Collection

According to Creswell (2007), "interviews play a central role in the data collection in a grounded theory study" (p. 131). Individual interviews were used as the primary source of data collection for this grounded theory study. A secondary source of data collection was the focus group. The researcher based the grounded theory not only on the information being presented by the participants, but the interaction between them in the focus groups. The interview process consisted of three stages for this study. The first stage was to develop and pilot a set of interview questions to later be used on the individual interviews. Creswell (2007) suggests to refine the questions through a series of pilot interviews before the actual research individual interviews take place. The second stage of the interview process was the individual interviews. Each interview was designed to last between 45 and 75 minutes, depending on participant responses. The questions were derived from the pilot questions used in the first stage. Each participant in the study responded to the series of set questions designed by the researcher; however, the questions may have been modified in order to obtain accurate and rich information from each participant. Throughout the interview process, the researcher acted as the interviewer. All interviews were recorded in order to transcribe all conversations. The data collected in the interviews were analyzed with the intent of developing a *thick description*. Creswell (2007) refers to Denzin (1989) for a definition of a thick

description. A thick description "presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships… evokes emotionality and self-feelings… The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (Denzin, 1989, p. 3 from Creswell, 2007, p. 194).

Individual Interviews

As the primary source of data collection, the intent of the individual interview was to provide a structure for responses from the participants, but to allow flexibility through open ended questions. An individual interview was designed with the researcher and one participant where the researcher "asked open ended questions, wanted to listen to the participants being studied and shaped the questions after we 'explored,' and we refrain from assuming the role of the expert researcher with the 'best' questions" (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). The individual interviews followed a semi-structured format in which the researcher used a set of questions as a guide, but did not necessary ask only this set of questions. Depending on participant responses, the researcher asked additional questions to clarify or expand an answer. Although all interviews were intended to last between 45 and 75 minutes, the ultimate length of the interview depended on the participants' responses. All interviews were conducted in private in an attempt to protect participant confidentiality, but the location of the interviews varied depending on availability and location of participants. All interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed later by the researcher.

The primary research questions were as follows:

Q1 How do schools and districts currently identify students for GT programming and how does that relate to the RtI model?

Q2 What do GT teachers need to effectively implement RtI for GT students?

Q3 What can teachers and administrators do to advocate for the use of RtI in their school and make implementation successful?

The following series of questions was created to examine the experiences, attitudes, and needs of GT teachers implementing programming in relation to RtI.

1. Please describe your school's GT program.
2. Please describe how students in your school are identified for GT services.
3. How was the program (both identification and service delivery) developed?
4. How long has your current GT program been implemented?
5. How do you define RtI?
6. Does your school utilize the RtI model for GT students?
7. How closely do you feel your school's program is related to the RtI model?
8. Do other populations of students benefit from RtI services in your school (Special Education, ELL, etc.)?
9. How would you describe your philosophy on using RtI?
10. What trainings or professional development have you received about RtI?
11. What trainings has your staff received about RtI?
12. Do you feel like you and your staff are adequately trained in the RtI model for use in GT programs? If no, please describe what you believe is needed. If yes, please describe what has been effective.

13. What have you or your administration provided to help staff with implementation?
14. What resources are available to teachers in your building to help with implementation?
15. How would you describe the comfort level of your staff in implementing RtI for GT students?
16. If you have been implementing RtI for GT students at your school, how do you feel about the process?
17. What could your staff use more of to implement RtI successfully? (ie. Resources, trainings, support, time, etc.)
18. Do you feel like RtI has been successful and beneficial at your school for GT students? Is it implemented with other populations more successfully?

Focus Group

The secondary source of information gathering for this research project utilized a focus group.

> "Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information" (Creswell, 2007, p. 133).

A focus group was chosen by the researcher for this study to expand on the answers provided in the individual interviews. The discussion amongst professionals most often provides more rich information than individual interviews alone. Creswell (2007) cautions researchers using focus groups in which one individual dominates the discussion. All participants in the focus groups had the opportunity to respond and

discuss all questions and be a part of the data collection process. The following series of topics was developed for the focus group discussion, with more questions added based on the responses given in the individual interviews.

1. Please share your name, position, and district in which you work.
2. How did you feel about the interview responses stating the need for more time for implementation of RtI with GT students?
3. What do you feel like is needing in terms of training in your district?
4. Is the necessary training different for a variety of stakeholders, or should everyone receive the same training?
5. Awareness of RtI and GT students was a common theme in the interviews, how do you feel about advocacy to build that awareness among other professionals?
6. How do you feel the documentation process could be improved for RtI with GT students, or with all students, to make it more streamlined and effective?
7. How would identification change with the process of RtI? Do you think this will be a benefit to the GT community?
8. What questions do you have for other districts in regards to GT programming and RtI?
9. What other comments or concerns would you like to share about RtI and GT?

Memo Writing

Memo writing, or memoing, is "a process in which the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory throughout the process of open, axial, and selective coding" (Creswell, 2007, p. 67). Memos, or field notes, include notes by the researcher during data collection, minutes from meetings, and thoughts and ideas about emerging

theories. Memo writing provides the researcher a record of the interview experiences from which to draw reference and develop themes. The direct information from the memos reinforced the information in the transcriptions. Memo writing was used in this study during the data collection and analysis phases to provide a timeline and progression of coding and emerging theories. The field notes were also used to triangulate data from the individual interviews and focus groups.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in grounded theory research is a process in which data is coded, grouped, and simplified in an effort to derive meaning from the data as a whole. The researcher deconstructed the data from each individual interview and focus group responses to establish trends, overarching concepts, and main ideas that are prevalent throughout the data. This process provided greater meaning to the phenomena in question. "In qualitative research, this is typically accomplished through the use of observation, conservation, and interview" (Prilik, 2007, p. 120).

Open Coding

Open coding is the first level of data analysis. In open coding, the researcher attempted to decipher the major categories of information. For this study, the researcher began with the transcribed individual interviews and focus groups. Each transcription was read individually, going line by line, writing descriptive words in the margins. The words represented meaning or concepts that were close to the actual words of the participants. The researcher went through the same process with the transcription from the focus group discussion. In this process, it was important for the researcher to be open to new categories rather than attempting to force data into existing categories. As the

researcher progressed through the transcribed interview, the number of categories increased as the amount of data increases. Each category was checked against others in an attempt to organize and summarize the data. Categories eventually were refined, collapsed, and eventually supported the emerging themes. Each line, sentence, or phrase was coded for major ideas or concepts before moving on to more precise coding, referred to as "axial coding." Open coding ended when data collection was complete.

Axial Coding

Axial coding is a process in which the researcher identified a category from open coding upon which to focus. This main category is then referred to as the "core phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007). Much like the coding of the entire transcription in open coding, in axial coding, the researcher primarily looked at the sections of the transcription referring to the core phenomenon and attempted to break it down further into more precise detail. Rather than examining the raw data line-by-line, the researcher examined the categories from the open coding line-by-line to look for clusters of information. Several categories became identified out of the core phenomenon, such as casual conditions, strategies, contextual and intervening conditions, and consequences. Casual conditions are the factors that caused the phenomenon. Strategies are actions taken in response to the core phenomenon. Contextual and intervening conditions are broad and specific situational factors that influence the strategies. Consequences are the outcomes from using the strategies (Creswell, 2007; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). The themes from the core phenomenon became the basis for the development of the main theory.

Selective Coding

The final step in the coding process is called "selective coding." In selective coding, the researcher developed hypotheses that helped relate the categories within the model. The researcher also attempted to tell a story or visualize the relationship between categories in a way that can be portrayed accurately and effectively to the reader. Narrative statements, visual pictures, or a series of hypotheses or propositions may be used to articulate this relationship (Creswell, 2007; Creswell & Brown, 1992; Morrow & Smith, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This step in the coding process illuminated the theory to be derived from the original data. The theory derived from the original data helped to explain the phenomena of implementing RtI in GT programs and illuminate teachers' needs for implementation.

Limitations

There were several potential limitations to this study that could have impacted the credibility of the results. The limitations included: (a) the representation of findings in this study in relation to what is shared by participants and what actually occurred in participants' districts; (b) the ability to apply the findings of the study to other schools and districts; (c) bias of the researcher in terms of applying RtI for GT students and as a school-wide model for differentiation; (d) the ability for future researchers to apply the same methodology in data collection and analysis in an attempt to replicate the study, and (e) the availability for participants in the individual interviews to participate in the focus groups. The researcher made specific considerations in the research design for each item listed to reduce the impact of the limitations.

The researcher is a doctoral learner in Special Education with an emphasis in Gifted Education at the University of Northern Colorado. Prior to the doctoral degree, the researcher earned a Bachelor's degree in Music Education and a Master's degree in Special Education (Generalist). The researcher works 85% as a high school special education teacher at a charter school, and 15% as the elementary GT teacher and director. Through experiences as an educator and learner, the researcher has come to believe the benefits and possibilities for all students through the use of an RtI model are too great to not consider. The researcher realized that with this study he may have had preconceived notions of success and possible outcomes, and that this bias could have had an impact on how questions are asked of participants. It was the responsibility of the researcher to bracket these ideas and perceptions in order to gather the most meaningful information from the participants. Only when the researcher can set aside feelings and experiences as much as possible can one "take a fresh perspective on the phenomena being examined" (Creswell, 2007, p.59)

Credibility

Patton (1990) views credibility as determined by the integrity, validity, and accuracy of the findings, the experience and qualifications of the researcher, and the assumptions that underlie the study. The researcher ensured integrity, validity, and accuracy through a detailed methodology of data collection and analysis. This methodology was closely examined and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Northern Colorado. Approval to proceed with the study was granted by the IRB on 12/31/2010 (see appendix B, p.132).

The individual interviews and focus groups provided rich text data for the researcher to then code by using open, axial, and selective coding. Through this process, the researcher ensured the information and theories derived from the data were a true representation of the participants information. This information was combined with the field notes from the interviews and focus groups for triangulation purposes.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent to which results of the study can be applied to other demographics, or have significance in other contexts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004). The goal of the researcher was to provide a detailed description of the participants in addition to the data and theories derived from the data, so that the reader can make a determination to the degree in which this study is transferable to his or her specific situation. Through a detailed description of the participants and their district programming, readers can decide if the results of the study are applicable to their situation by identifying commonalities between the study and oneself. It is not the job of the researcher to apply the results of the study to different demographics and situations, rather it is the job of the reader to make their own generalizations and assumptions about transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research refers to the level of objectivity in the research study (Creswell, 2007). Although it is impossible to eliminate all potential bias from a research study, it was the job of the researcher to employ methods of reducing researcher and participant bias. The researcher in this study validated the accuracy of the literature review, methodology, and findings with references from applicable literature in

the field. Individual interviews, focus groups, and field notes from all sessions were used to triangulate the data. The researcher also utilized expert research professors to review the data and conduct an external audit of the findings. The purpose of the audit was to review interview and focus group transcripts, coding, and theories to ensure accuracy of the entire research process.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to the extent in which the results of the study represent the data. Multiple sources of data collection were used along with a coding procedure designed to establish possible themes and theories throughout the research in an effort to ascertain dependability in the study. Along with assessing the confirmability and validity of the research process, the professors who performed the external audit verified the consistency of the results in relation to the raw data.

Summary

Chapter III outlines the qualitative research design selected for this research study. A grounded theory approach was selected to establish theories about GT programming options in relation to RtI, and what GT teachers need to implement RtI effectively in their programs. Individual interviews and focus groups were used to collect data, which in turn was coded in a three step process of open, axial, and selective coding. Upon completion of the study, two expert researchers conducted an external audit to examine the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability of the study.

Chapter IV provides a rich thick description of the participants and their interview responses so that readers may draw conclusions about the transferability and transferability of the study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In Chapter IV, the researcher presents the purpose of the study, methods for data collection and analysis, results from individual interviews and focus groups, and identified themes.

The individual interviews and focus group information provided insight into the views of professionals in the field of gifted and talented education on the use of the Response to Intervention model with GT students. Information from the interviewees which then was formed into common themes provided additional knowledge and background for schools that wish to implement the RtI model with GT students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify current practices of identification and programming in gifted and talented (GT) programs and if those procedures align with the RtI model. Currently in most GT programs, identification relies on a "body of evidence" that documents above average ability in several areas. Some schools are still using an intelligence test cutoff score, whereas others are now using the Response to Intervention (RtI) model. The RtI model came out of special education legislation; so many schools are only implementing the model for special education and struggling learners. However, RtI at the core is a school-wide model for differentiation and identification of needs of students, both of high and low ability. Through individual interviews and focus groups of teachers and coordinators of GT programs, the researcher hoped to illuminate differences

in identification and programming procedures throughout a mid-western state and then provided suggestions for adopting the RtI model in GT programs. Through a more unified approach in a school by using the RtI model for identifying needs of all students, teachers will be more equipped and prepared for the procedures as they will be consistent for every student in the building. This research will provide insight into how this is a possibility.

Data Collection and Analysis

A series of eight interviews were conducted with professionals in the field of gifted and talented education. Participants were selected by researcher through expert sampling procedures in which two experts in the field identified knowledgeable and successful professionals that could provide insight into GT programs and the use of the RtI model. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes. The researcher conducted each interview in a semi-structured format in which a set of questions was used as a guide, but additional questions were added for clarification and to expand on previous answers. All interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed for analysis prior to the focus group. The focus group was utilized to further expand on themes and ideas that were present during individual interviews. Discussion between participants would lead to a more in-depth foundation of the common ideas. Initial open coding revealed several possible themes that were approached in the focus group.

The focus group included four of the eight interview participants. Due to the intensive work schedules and additional responsibilities of teachers, it was difficult to get more of the participants to be available for the focus group. The interviews and focus group, however, did achieve saturation and the researcher did not identify a need to

pursue additional data collection. The focus group was also recorded digitally and transcribed for analysis. The researcher examined all transcriptions and field notes in open, axial, and selective coding in an effort to discover the five major themes to be discussed later. The next section will present a short profile of each of the participants and an overview of their responses. All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Interviews

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is a Middle School GT teacher in a large district. Her official title is "Coordinator of Gifted and Talented and Advanced Learning/Teacher." She holds a Master's Degree in Gifted and Talented education in addition to administrative licensure. Elizabeth teaches an advanced 8th grade science class and a GT affective needs class which she combined with an independent study class for all middle school grades. Elizabeth spends the majority of her time collaborating with teachers who teach advanced classes, doing "lunch bunch" groups and other small group meetings with students who struggle organizationally, socially, and academically. She also works with parents in doing monthly meetings to touch base and see what they think is needed. During the interview, Elizabeth stated she does not feel her school has a GT program, rather pieces of a GT program that have the potential to grow. Her school is relatively new and she is new to this position, so she is in the process of developing a program from the ground up. Her school began a few years ago using the Parallel Curriculum Model, which teachers and administrators thought would assist in differentiating for gifted learners. Elizabeth did not see this as an effective model and the differentiation did not get off the ground.

The majority of Elizabeth's identified GT students are identified at the elementary feeder school before they arrive in her building. She stated she does not do much new identification in her school; rather she follows the ALP that comes with the student and expanding on that to fit all of their needs. Within that identification process, she said that it depends on which feeder school they come from. Some schools identify students in 3rd grade, others not until 5th grade. The variance in procedure makes it difficult on Elizabeth because some students are established in a GT program environment and some are just recently identified when they come to her. The identification procedures are all based on the same concept of collecting a body of evidence, but the methods within each school are not consistent. The body of evidence is a portfolio of evidence collected by teachers to represent advanced skills and abilities in a variety of areas. Cognitive ability, academic achievement, creativity, and leadership are common areas of interest in the body of evidence as these areas are aligned with state definitions of GT students.

When asked about RtI, Elizabeth stated "it's a mess in my building, but from a personal understanding it's the idea of multi-tierd interventions and the flexibility of having those interventions to be able to grow all kids without having them fall through the cracks in a quick manner. That's the piece that really frustrates me in my building. In my building, RtI equals SPED, which RtI does not equal SPED in my mind. In fact, isn't that the whole reason RtI is there?" Elizabeth seemed to grasp the holistic view of RtI in applying a systematic approach to tiered interventions with all students in need, regardless of what that need may be. Throughout the interview, she exhibited an overwhelming sense of frustration with the concept of RtI. Elizabeth voiced that her frustrations were coming out of the lack of understanding of what RtI is, how teachers

can use that framework to help all students, and how teachers are currently getting caught up in little details and paperwork that they are not able to see the big picture. When asked how her school utilizes RtI, she said "if they (students) are underachieving or underperforming. Do I have GT students that end up in all tiers? Yes, but it's a punitive and punishment based on a lack of… compliance rather than performance." She was frustrated that many times when GT students were receiving RtI services, it was for behavioral deficit reasons rather that academic performance advancement.

In regard to training and professional development, Elizabeth said "the majority of my understanding of RtI has come from a personal interest and professional drive in researching on my own." Her actual training has been extremely limited and more geared to the special education or deficit based model rather than approaching RtI for all students. She also stated that her staff has received similar trainings in that they were very brief and focused primarily on remediation and deficits. She also stated that the "lackluster trainings may have something to do with little to no support coming from our administration." She believes strongly that in order for teachers to buy into this type of model and really make it successful in a school, there has to be a large amount of top-down leadership from their building administration. Right now, she says, RtI is not a priority in their school. She believes it would take someone externally to come into their school to first train the administration to build the awareness and knowledge before it could ever really be brought to the staff in a successful way. Elizabeth also felt like there are so many other aspects to teaching going on right now that without RtI being encouraged and viewed as a priority, teachers are not going to find the time to pursue such a framework. According to Elizabeth and experiences in her building, she believes

that the progression of RtI needs to begin with administrative understanding and support, then training for the staff in both RtI and needs of gifted and talented students, and finally time and resources to implement effectively. These steps, in that order, are crucial to the success of RtI in her building.

Jennifer

Jennifer is the Director of Education Programming and Services for a large school district. The main aspect of her job is Response to Intervention, but she also oversees Gifted and Talented, English as a Second Language, Reading Recovery Intervention, and Early Childhood Education. Jennifer received a Master's Degree in Gifted and Talented Education and is working on a doctoral degree in Educational Administration with an emphasis in Gifted and Talented Education. There are 76 regular district schools and 8 charter schools in the district. Jennifer describes the GT program in her district as a full continuum. Some schools have a GT facilitator and some have an RtI Interventionist who supports the needs of learners on both ends of the spectrum. Although the look of the GT programs may be different at varying schools, the overall identification and paperwork is consistent throughout the district. The GT program is largely centered on the most intensive piece that they refer to as the Discovery program, which is a self-contained magnet program that is located regionally throughout the district. It is a self-contained all-day everyday program for grades 2 through 6. In the middle school, they have Discovery Language Arts and Discovery Mathematics to help meet the needs of the gifted learners. These classes are advanced by two years. The program looks very different at different sites according to Jennifer, "some schools do it very well, and some schools don't do very much." This district also uses a body of evidence to identify

students for GT services. Most schools in the district identify students at the end of second grade or beginning of third grade through universal screening processes, very similar to many districts in this particular state.

When asked about RtI, Jennifer stated how she "loves the state definition of RtI because it incorporates and connects general, compensatory, gifted, and special education." Jennifer seemed to have a solid understanding of not only how RtI was developed and is currently being used, but also the potential to grow the use of the model and implement it for all students. Given that knowledge, she understands that it is a long process to incorporate such an involved method successfully throughout a district. She stated that "some schools in the district are using the model for GT students, and it is getting to be more and more all the time." What is interesting about Jennifer is that because she is in charge of both RtI and GT for the district, it is easier for her to help staff see the connection between the two when she does trainings. She said she is getting asked more and more to come out to schools and explain gifted programming in the context of RtI. She said, "That's something they can hang their hats on." The majority of teachers in this district have an understanding of what RtI is and how to use it for the struggling learner. By using similar language and context for talking about GT programming, Jennifer said "it is like a light bulb goes on in their head because they haven't thought about it in that way prior." Even with that, she said many teachers still view RtI as a deficit model and should be used only for struggling learners in an attempt to apply the best interventions for remediation.

Although Jennifer is widely considered to be an expert on RtI and the leader of the process for her large district, she claims she has received little to no formal training

on RtI, either in reference to special education or gifted and talented education. She has been to a few professional developments, and now leads similar trainings for her staff, but the majority of her knowledge has come from self-investigation. Jennifer believes that more training would be beneficial for the teachers in her districts, but "the teachers and building principals are on such an overload" it is hard to find the right moments to provide that opportunity for them. She also said that "in order for such a model to work, it needs to be supported by the building level administration." RtI has to be a priority with the principal for it to be set up for success in the building.

In addition to training and support in RtI, Jennifer stressed the importance of having training for staff in identifying characteristics of gifted learners and the background of what GT students may need in the classroom. She believes that staff need that foundation in GT prior to implementing RtI for GT students so they know more of what these students need and how to identify that need. She has already started to develop a "GT 101" staff development that she intends on weaving RtI into so that staff develops that common vocabulary and knowledge behind the process. Jennifer also stated that this process is a little easier for her in this district because people see her as the GT administrator as well as the RtI administrator.

Jennifer would say the necessary pieces to implement RtI for GT students begins with awareness for all teachers that RtI is not simply deficit based. From awareness, the need becomes support from building level administration, training in characteristics and needs of gifted learners, and finally training in RtI and putting it all together in one cohesive process. She also believes time is an issue, but when administrators choose to make RtI a priority, suddenly people make the time and adjust accordingly.

Rachel

Rachel is the Coordinator for Gifted and Talented Education for a medium school district. There are 31 schools in this district which include 20 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, 5 high schools, and one K-8 charter school. Rachel holds both a Master's and a Doctorate in Gifted and Talented Education. Rachel has been with this district for only a few years and states that they are in the middle of a transition from their previous GT program to a more academically based program. The previous program primarily focused on enrichment activities which were chosen by the GT teacher and aligned with the interest of that teacher. The focus of this district in the last few years has been to change the programming to more of an academically based program with the addition of programs such as Junior Great Books M Cubed (M3) and the William and Mary Language Arts Program. These programs are primarily used at the elementary school level, and according to Rachel, the secondary schools are not implementing best practice. Rachel believes it is going to take parent support and advocacy to bring the best practices from the elementary schools into the middle schools and then onto the high schools.

Students in this district are identified using a body of evidence that aligns with the state definition of giftedness. They use a matrix to identify strong and moderate indicators in a variety of areas that describe the learner. Much like other schools, they use universal screening procedures in addition to other formal and informal measures to gather enough information to identify students for GT services.

Rachel seemed comfortable in her knowledge about RtI as she feels she is trying

to implement it for all students, specifically GT students. She is on the RtI team for the district and supports training and implementation in all schools. Although she states that GT students are more recognized as being a part of RtI, in actual practice she states that RtI is still "mainly focused on struggling learners." She believes that the different program options that are being implemented align very well with the RtI model, but in terms of identification she feels bound by the state. Several years ago she was told by the State Director of Gifted and Talented Education to use the body of evidence to support identification procedures, not RtI. Since that time she has stayed true to that statement and not followed up to see if recommendations from the state have changed with the ever-evolving process of RtI. Rachel was often referring to a program such as Junior Great Books as an intervention, in that "the only interventions we have for teachers are Junior Great Books and M3, if you don't like those then you are kind of stuck." She also gave an example how a remedial curriculum for 5th graders might be used for advanced third graders. She stated "this works well for the advanced third graders because it might be 4th grade content that is more explicitly taught." However, this is still a program, not an intervention as typically defined in terms of the RtI model.

Rachel, repeatedly through the interview, stressed the importance of helping teachers in becoming familiar with and providing high quality differentiation at the universal tier one level. "I like it (RtI) for the focus on good universal instruction in the classroom. Keeping in mind that good instruction means differentiating." She believes that only when high quality differentiation is going on for students of varying needs in the classroom could teachers possibly know what is needed for additional interventions. In addition to that, sometimes schools do not have the resources or time to add pull-out

intervention groups or additional classes, so differentiation in the general education classroom is a necessity.

Rachel has had a little experience with RtI training in the form of an outside consulting company when she was with another district. She referred to it as "a two day 'this is what RtI is' kind of thing." Since then she has not received additional training, but has put on training for the staff in her district by virtue of her being on the RtI team. As with Jennifer, being seen as the GT administrator for the district in addition to being involved with RtI helps Rachel to bridge the gap between GT and RtI for many teachers. Other than the relatively short trainings the district RtI team has provided for staff, she could not identify other training they to which they have had access. At this point, Rachel does not feel the staff in the district is adequately trained in using the RtI model for GT students. She feels more training is needed on how to use data appropriately. Around the time of the interview, she was already in the process of setting up and participating in Data Dialogue trainings for teachers to help with this problem.

Rachel repeatedly stressed the importance of high quality differentiation at the tier one level. She also believed that teachers need more training in using RtI for GT students as well as more of a foundation for what GT students' needs may be. Rachel also wanted to make sure that administrators allow time for collaboration and consultation among professionals. She felt like teachers have so much going on already that sending them out on their own with this new extremely large task and limited training would not be successful. Professionals need time to dialogue with others to investigate what is working or not and how to work together for the benefit of all students.

Jackie

Jackie is the Coordinator for Gifted and Talented Education in a medium sized school district. There are 24 schools in this district including 14 elementary, 2 K-8, 4 middle, and 4 high schools that Jackie oversees gifted programming for. Jackie holds a Master's degree in Gifted and Talented Education. When asked to describe the GT program in her district, Jackie began by describing it in terms of teacher Full Time Equivalency (FTE). For all 24 schools, there are 10 FTE allotted for GT services, which includes Jackie as a full time coordinator. There are two full time GT teachers for the high schools with caseloads of 500+ students. She began by stating FTE to describe the district in order to show the discrepancy between how many students they are serving (or needing to serve) and what limited resources they have. "I think it's important to mention the GT teachers because when we look at programming it's dependent on teachers" she said. The funding for GT and FTE was cut from previous years to what it is now. Jackie describes the GT program in the district as very prescribed and says they have an RtI type model in the elementary schools in regards to the reading program. Students who qualify for GT services in literacy get to have the William and Mary curriculum with the GT facilitator. Although she referred to this differentiation many times in the interview as matching the RtI model very closely, her only reasoning for this was because they were getting different curriculum than other students. Jackie had numerous specific examples of different programming options they have implemented for different students, attempting to show a similarity with the RtI model. However, throughout these varying options were not related to the RtI model in the general format and are more associated with best practices in gifted education. For example, Jackie

stated that 316 students are taking an online Education Program for Gifted Youth (EPGY) course through Stanford, which is a great opportunity for students to access more complicated curriculum with limited resources. She often referred to this type of option or intervention as RtI. The program is growing and changing every year, Jackie said. Previously the GT teachers in the district were only advanced literacy teachers and the only part of the GT program was literacy. That has changed in the last year so that GT facilitators can do more advancement and enrichment beyond literacy, reach out to kids to make social and emotional growth, and provide more opportunities for their individual schools.

Identification procedures, as Jackie stated, were similar to in the first several interviews and again consistent with the state definition and guidelines. They use multiple measures to collect a body of evidence, mostly trying to show ability above the 95th percentile, and looking for strong indicators in a variety of areas. As with the previous interviews, there is nothing related to an RtI process for identification happening in this district. Jackie seemed to understand the foundations of RtI, but purely viewed the model from a programming standpoint of grouping kids according to ability level. Her initial statement about RtI was "it's basically differentiation, just a new name for it." Jackie stated that she had previously had trainings with an outside agency regarding RtI, and even had multiple people to come into the district and provide trainings on RtI and GT. This training, although specific to using RtI for GT students and probably beneficial, was only just an offering and not a requirement. She said that all the GT teachers attended, but it did not sound like many, if any, general education teachers participated in those trainings. However, she also stated that "most are adequately

trained in the RtI model for GT students. They are specialists with endorsements. They are always looking for other kinds of things. The frustration is how can we apply thi with our current structure in our district?" Jackie's main concerns were not regarding training, but time. She was concerned about implementing such a complicated model with the current structure and limited resources in the district. They also have been running into problems with their district in implementing different curriculum options for advanced learners that haven't been approved by the director of curriculum and instruction. As a side note to that, we discussed how the teachers are limited by the principals, and the principals are limited by the policies and curriculum provided by the district level administrators. The resistance to change and implement RtI for GT students is not actually an issue the teachers or principals can even address until the priorities of district administration change themselves.

Jackie viewed time as the number one necessary component to successful implementation. Beyond that, time will not make a large difference if the teachers do not have the support of the administration, both in their building and district. "In terms of overall district training, I think it's more important for principals and coaches. Teachers are too busy just doing their regular curriculum pieces" she said. Once the support is there, Jackie said that teachers need to be given the time to collaborate, plan, and implement interventions in a less restricted manner.

Mary

Mary is a GT facilitator in two middle schools in a medium-sized district. At one of her schools she works with another GT facilitator (Ann). Mary holds a Master's degree in Gifted and Talented Education. They make a determination primarily on

incoming 6th graders on if they should be involved in an advanced language arts curriculum (William and Mary Language Arts Program) that is taught by Ann. The majority of the middle school program has focused in the past on language arts, but Mary also spends a large amount of time in the general education classroom working with other teachers to provide opportunities for advanced learners. Mary has also started a program for parents that addresses the social and emotional needs of gifted children. Other aspects of her program include a historical recreation group known as Chautauqua. The Chautauqua group is where students have the opportunity to research historical figures and recreate them through an activity, skit, dance, etc. Students also have opportunities to take advanced classes, especially in math. Mary developed the curriculum at this middle school based on the Autonomous Learner Model (Betts & Kercher, 1999), but the program has slowly gone away from parts of the ALM over time due to district restrictions and a loss of funding. "Unfortunately because of the pressure to increase CSAP scores and to look at standardized testing and all the other testing we had to do, the last couple years we had to trim back on the ALM part of it" she said.

Most of Mary's students are identified prior to coming to her in middle school. Their students are identified using the same body of evidence as in previous interviews, examining different areas of strength at or above the 95th percentile. Although most of the identified GT students enter middle school already identified and with an Advanced Learning Plan (ALP), Mary said her teachers are "very good about coming to her and suggesting when other students are exhibiting traits of a gifted learner." The difference between what is going on and an RtI model for identification is that when these teachers bring a suggestion to Mary, she takes that student into consideration for advanced classes

rather than working with the teacher to differentiate and document within the general education classroom.

In terms of RtI, Mary sees the model through two different lenses. She mostly understands RtI based on what she has experienced with a couple of her students going through the RtI process for remediation or behavioral needs. She sees this very formalized process as extremely intensive and time consuming. On the other hand, she also realizes that many of the things her and Ann do on a daily basis relate very closely with the intent of RtI. "I also feel like what Ann and I do all the time is RtI because we are always looking at what our kids need, the type of intervention they need. When we write the ALP, that is RtI. What does the kid need? What can we provide within the framework we are given and what can we do to help them? I think the differentiation in the classroom… is RtI. I don't know if you would say informal, but it's not all the tiers, it's not filling out all the forms and that kind of thing." They always look at the specific needs of students and do what they can to improve and enhance their learning opportunities. They do not, however, collaborate as much with other teachers, have a problem-solving team to help make decisions about students, keep documentation of progress after interventions, or use the successful and failed interventions as a guide for future programming options. What Mary is currently doing that relates to the RtI model is currently considered best practice in GT, but the formalized and collaborative nature of RtI is not being adhered to. She said she "had not even thought about what they were doing as related to RtI until the invitation for this interview and Ann made the connection that the processes are very similar." When I brought up using RtI for all students, Mary seemed overwhelmed, stating that "the process would be very intense and would add

undue stress to her teachers." She did not realize that the more structured intensive interventions would only be for a small portion of students, so once that was explained she thought the idea was much more manageable.

When asked about training, Mary spoke of short PD trainings two days per week that they are required to attend. Obviously not all are about RtI, but according to Mary a big focus in the last year has been RtI and many other topics have been addressed in connection with RtI. However, she also made it very clear that those trainings are "almost purely addressing struggling learners rather than advanced learners." She added that just addressing struggling learners makes teachers overwhelmed and adding more would be too much.

Mary emphatically spoke of the need for time as the number one priority when adding anything to teachers' responsibilities at this point. Obviously the district and school are not putting priority on using RtI for GT purposes, and if they did there might be more time available to teachers to collaborate and adequately problem-solve. Until priorities change and teachers have more time to do what is necessary, Mary feels it is completely unrealistic to add another responsibility to their already busy jobs.

Ann

Ann works with Mary in the same middle school in addition to working part time at a separate middle school in the district as a GT facilitator and advanced Language Arts teacher. Ann holds a Master's degree in Gifted and Talented Education in addition to an Educational Specialist Degree in Educational Leadership. Ann described her program as "based on the ALM, but also having lost a lot of time this year towards GT programming." Students identified in language arts participate in her advanced language

arts classes, which at this time are overloaded. Students who are identified in math have the opportunity to take advanced math classes. Ann also provides materials to teachers for acceleration and differentiation. She includes an affective component to her curriculum both in the language arts classes she teachers and the advisement time she has with other GT students.

When asked to describe RtI, Ann had a holistic view of what RtI is, but then referenced in her district RtI is for remedial or behavioral issues. In actuality, she states, "it's for whatever needs the kids have, even acceleration or advancement." She did not think the RtI model is being used currently at her school, but she has been using strategies from it for years. Identifying students' needs and applying some sort of intervention has always been the method of operation in her school. She felt her school was doing a good job of aligning other services with the RtI model in terms of struggling learners or students with behavioral concerns, but not at all for enrichment or advancement. Ann also spoke of how closely the ALP relates to the RtI model, in that it is individualized for each student and is often set up in a tiered approach.

Ann, like Mary, referred to the weekly professional development trainings they have for staff and that many of them relate to the RtI model be it directly or indirectly. She also said that because of her schedule and going between two different schools, she often missed the professional development. Ann stated that she has not received much training at all on RtI, and what she has received has been in relation to struggling learners. She said, "I think as a staff it's been a while since we have had training in differentiation or some of those basic strategies that would fit into an RtI model to provide services for those kids. None of us have really had training on RtI for GT kids or

how to incorporate this with a gifted learner." When asked what she felt was needed, Ann replied that information about GT students as a whole would be a better place to start than with RtI. She feels like her staff has a good understanding of how RtI works, but might not have as good of an understanding of GT students and how they would fit in with that type of model. She voiced her opinion to have a type of "nature and needs" course for teachers to help them identify GT characteristics and know what types of differentiation strategies they may try in their classrooms. Much like Mary, Ann was very hesitant to require teachers to do one more thing when they are already feeling overwhelmed and overworked. It seemed like the staff in their building was largely caught up in the process of everything and adding an additional component would be enough to tip the scales in an unhealthy direction.

Ann realized that a "simple way to bridge the gap between what the teachers know about RtI and how to implement the same concept with GT students might be to start using common vocabulary when they are doing their everyday jobs." This is not a process that at this point could be jumped into without some preparation. If Ann could ease her staff into the mindset by using the same vocabulary, it would make the overall transition easier when the right time comes. Ann's largest concern was time for teachers. Time to collaborate, plan, investigate, and learn about the RtI model and how it works with a different population of students is crucial. "Time. I just truly feel that people are overwhelmed and pushed past the point of having one more thing to do. And I know that's not in our control, but I think if they had the time to think about it and process it and we have the time to give them information and training, I really think our staff would be open to trying it and seeing what we could do with it. I'm afraid that's what the

response would be." She likes the idea overall of implementing RtI for all students, but throwing another requirement at teachers right now is unrealistic in her mind.

Kelly

Kelly is the Gifted and Talented Curriculum Facilitator for a medium-large school district. Kelly holds a Master's degree in Educational Administration and is earning a Master's degree in Gifted and Talented Education. Kelly's oversees the GT programming in the district's 49 schools. This district supports site-based autonomy in many forms, so as Kelly stated, "there are 49 schools and 49 different programs." Kelly describes the variety of the programs as a full range, from purely enrichment to a replacement math curriculum. They also have RtI, intervention, and enrichment time built into the schedule, so many schools are trying to adapt and figure out the best use of that time. In the upper grades, some schools are focusing more on in-depth study types of activities where others are focusing more on strict academic options, such as Advanced Placement or acceleration. Funding for each schools' GT program is based on their own budgets. Most schools have a .2 FTE to coordinate the GT program, but some of the upper level schools simply assign the duty to an existing staff member such as a counselor.

Students in this district are identified for GT services very similarly to other districts previously mentioned. The same body of evidence is used with similar universal screening processes in elementary grades. Their process is a little different in that specific achievement scores are examined first and then if the student has high enough scores on that assessment the teacher investigates further information. This is the second year that this identification procedure has been in place and was established in order to

help teachers, both general and gifted education. Of the 49 GT site coordinators in the district, 2 have a Master's degree or endorsement in gifted and talented education. Kelly sees this as a huge problem and is trying to encourage as many as possible to go to school and earn their endorsement. She is also providing opportunities for them to learn within the district and acquire the skills necessary for working with advanced learners. Being that the majority of GT site coordinators in the district are becoming familiar with GT students as a whole, applying the RtI model for identification procedures is not happening.

Kelly seemed very comfortable with RtI and speaks about it as if she uses the terminology every day. She spoke of doing parent presentations about ALP's and how RtI language is intertwined within their ALP document. They have even made a change to have all support documents, IEP's, ALP's, ILP's, etc., coming out of the same technology. This district is using the same computer program to create support documents regardless of identified area of need. This process helps teachers and parents to see the process is all on the same continuum of services, regardless of the child's need. Kelly also referred to the district using the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model, in that they are already collaborating in that fashion and that it lends itself nicely to the RtI model. The same process of gathering evidence, meeting as a team, discussing the next steps, providing intervention, and re-evaluating is what you end up with for the RtI model. Kelly describes RtI as a "framework, not a program, not prescribed, it's flexible."

Regarding training, Kelly's district had an outside agency come in to her district and train groups of 4 teachers from every school. The training was 6 full days and

incorporated a lot of RtI and PLC combined. However, the majority of this training was focused on RtI for struggling learners. As for the remainder of the teachers, the 4 participants who received the 6 day intensive training were to report back to their schools and provide training for their staff on what they had learned. Kelly could not speak as to how successful this training was.

Kelly views many things going on in her district as a success, but with a large amount of work to be done as well. Kelly does not believe anything can be successful with RtI and GT until she has adequately trained GT staff. "For gifted I feel like nothing grand is going to happen until people are endorsed or have a masters in gifted. It's a huge focus on my part making sure people know that's an option. Until they have that background, nothing is going to make sense. In writing ALP's, which should be part of RtI, people struggle with writing ALP's, but what do we expect from someone who doesn't really know gifted kids." She would like to see 100% of her site coordinators earn a Master's or endorsement in Gifted and Talented Education, and she sees this as the first step to success. After that, Kelly thinks that it is a matter of awareness for general education teachers that the process of RtI is the same for whatever the needs are of the students, remediation, behavior, or advancement.

Amber

Amber is an elementary school GT teacher in a medium school district. Amber holds a Master's in Gifted and Talented Education. Amber works with about 70-80 students on a daily basis doing pull-out groups, providing resources to general education teachers, and facilitating social and emotional development. Amber stated that the FTE for the GT position in her school and across her district has decreased dramatically and

the resources for the remaining teachers have as well. Amber uses pieces of a variety of programs, including the ALM.

When asked about RtI and how she would define it, Amber could not give a clear answer. She politely stated that in terms of RtI, she is not the expert in the building and if was asked what it is, she would refer the question to one of the special education teachers because they are the ones who "do RtI." I then gave Amber a reminder of what RtI is from a fundamental whole-school perspective. Amber stated that she had never heard it explained to her in that way, but that it made perfect sense. This explanation seemed to remind her of previous information and training she had received, but was obviously confused throughout the interview. Amber repeatedly referred to RtI as a tangible document such as an IEP or ALP. She said several times "I don't have any students on an RtI right now." She also made reference to the fact that the reason she does not have any students "on an RtI" is that she does not have any twice exceptional students. This comment indicated that her understanding of RtI is still that it is a deficit and remediation type of model.

Amber obviously did not feel like she or her staff was adequately trained in RtI at a fundamental level. She agreed that much work needed to be done to adopt this model for GT students as the staff in her building purely see it as a special education initiative. Amber did provide some insight into what would make RtI successful in her school, that being administrative support. She referenced several items of focus this year from new technology to a book they are studying that is taking priority in professional development sessions. She said that if the administration wanted to implement RtI for all students, they would just need to make it a priority. Amber feels like her staff would be receptive

to the idea and willing to adopt the model, but the administrative support needs to come first. "I think probably support from the GT coordinator would be the first step. I think if someone wanted to implement RtI for GT students in our district, going to her would be the first step, then having her discuss those ideas with the principal. But it is something I could probably do as well. It could take a while to have him see it as his priority." After the administrative support, Amber viewed a large amount of training and professional development as the next step, both in terms of GT basics and RtI foundations. Without those two components, teachers are left guessing at what they really need to do.

Focus Group

The researcher made contact with each of the interview participants to come back together and participate in a focus group. Unfortunately due to the busy schedules of educational professionals, only four of the participants were able to attend. Of the participants, two were GT teachers and two were GT administrators. By comparing the responses from the interviews, focus group, and researcher memos, I was able to identify five common themes and have adequate triangulation of data. Rachel, Jackie, Mary, and Ann were the participants in the focus group. The four participants and I met at a central location, in a classroom at a local university. I began by outlining the interview responses and general feelings of the interviewees as a whole, then I explained the direction for the focus group would be to talk about possible themes that were present in the interviews. The structure of the conversation followed these major topics: Time for collaboration and implementation, advocacy and awareness, training and professional development, documentation, and identification. Identification was not regularly discussed in any of the interviews, as most of the participants did not directly correlate

using the RtI model as a method of identification. I wanted to investigate their thoughts and opinions about how it could be used not only for programming as most interviewees discussed, but also how RtI could be a useful tool in the identification of gifted and talented students.

After the introduction, I introduced one of the possible themes as being the need for more time. According to the interviews, teachers feel stressed, overwhelmed, and adding a new large component to their jobs would be too much for them to handle efficiently and effectively. The focus group participants agreed with this and reiterated their sentiments from the interview. One participant took the need for time in context of FTE for GT personnel, another interpreted the question as needing more time for general education teachers. One of the participants wanted to make it very clear that "it was not a matter of willingness to adopt this model, it was more the matter of a lack of time for teachers." That lack of time comes from a lack of priority from administration. At the current time, many schools and districts are putting their priority on low achieving students in an effort to raise state testing scores for school accountability reports. It is still a widespread perception that GT students will be just fine and the school is better suited to apply their limited resources in the direction of low achieving students rather than on GT students who are probably already succeeding and simply needing to be challenged. The group agreed that the issue of time would not change until administrative priorities change, and that those priorities would not change without a level of awareness and training for all administrators on what GT students look like and need.

I posed the question that if schools' FTE does not increase, their class sizes do not decrease, and teachers are left in the same position they are now; how could teachers (general education and gifted education alike) make a difference for all students by incorporating the RtI model. The initial response from several participants was to use more cluster grouping. "Grouping, cluster grouping. I think it is definitely a strategy that has to be utilized, but then again it falls back onto philosophical beliefs." Cluster grouping is the process of combining similar ability children in different groups to provide learning opportunities for them to learn at the appropriate ability level. The participants also made it very clear that cluster grouping, when done correctly, is not tracking like many teachers view it to be. "Well and people don't understand how cluster grouping is different from tracking, she keeps calling it tracking, and I have to explain that it is different, there are differences there." The groups are not final and keep students stuck with a particular group, they are fluid and should evolve with student needs. This conversation lead into a conversation about awareness of GT students and RtI.

The focus group participants were in agreement that the focus in schools right now is geared highly towards low achieving and struggling learners. "I think that's maybe a place that needs to be started, that RtI doesn't have to just be remediation for behaviors and academics, we need to look at the full spectrum of RtI for teachers. I think maybe our coaches and administrators need to look at that too. I don't know if anything I have ever heard from 'J' is ever on the growth side." There was definitely a sense of frustration in the group when discussing priorities of schools and districts as many of them feel left behind and unimportant. The awareness enters into schools by making building and district level administration aware of some of the concerns, possibilities, and

benefits of introducing interventions for advanced learners as well as struggling learners. "Because 99% of what we do in our district is for the low end of kids, I really don't feel like there is a focus, we do the least we have to, to say that we have GT. I hope we're shifting. I have seen that if it's good for the low end of kids we'll make that change, regardless of how it will impact our GT kids. So I don't think there is a focus on those kids at all. Very little focus." In the state the focus group participants work in, the accountability for teachers is no longer just measured on academic performance of a satisfactory level. All students are now measured on their overall achievement in addition to how much progress they have made from the previous year. GT teachers need to use this to their advantage in that schools can benefit greatly from having advancement and acceleration options available to their learners in need so they the district can continue to show adequate growth.

Currently, the most useful tool at the disposal of the GT teacher is the ALP. According to several participants, the ALP they are using aligns perfectly with the RtI model in a tiered instructional approach. The only problem with the whole process just being tied to the ALP is that general education teachers are still simply bringing a referral name to the GT facilitator and leaving their responsibilities at the door. To truly adopt the RtI model, those teachers would need to be involved in the process of planning and implementing interventions for their student, albeit with the help of the GT facilitator.

The focus group discussed a possible way to begin to bridge that gap would be to start using common language. When a teacher brings in a referral of a student, rather than taking the name and saying "thanks, we'll see what we can do," the teacher will respond more in the fashion of, "thanks, I will bring this to the RtI team at our next

meeting so we can plan her interventions accordingly." The participants thought this was a relatively simple way to bridge the gap.

The next piece of introducing RtI was in the documentation. By having teachers fill out the same referral form they would for a struggling learner, they are automatically connecting the two processes in their minds and seeing that RtI is for all types of learners. The focus group had an issue with this concept. They thought that teachers like the fact that they can identify a possible need with an advanced learner and simply bring them to the GT teacher to have the need addressed. By introducing more paperwork and a documentation process, they felt like teachers would be less likely to take the time to fill it out, thus leaving the students' needs unaddressed. To move past this notion of a lack of importance with GT students, the participants agreed that teachers need more training.

The majority of the conversation regarding training and professional development was not actually about RtI, it was about giftedness. In almost every interview and then again in the focus group, the participants were quite clear that staff members in their schools need more training and education on gifted and talented students. Several participants spoke of doing an introduction to GT or foundations type of class for their staff at one time. Then, due to time constraints and varying priorities, have not done such a presentation for several years. Their other concern with training was that there is such high turnover in staff, and there are always brand new teachers fresh out of college. With brand new teachers, it is often hard to just get them to know the curriculum and teach what they need to teach, much less to add something to their plate like GT. The only way to combat this problem, as identified with the focus group, is to make these methods of intervention and types of conversation common practice. "So is it just a matter of using

RtI terminology when we are implementing these interventions, if they hear it enough with what we are doing, and it's not extra all the time, it's a shift to a more formal RtI process, or incorporating it more. We are already doing a lot of the things, it's just tying the terminology." If it is the culture of the school to be aware and acknowledging of gifted characteristics and skills, there is a higher likelihood that appropriate education will take place. During this conversation and throughout the entire meeting, the focus group would continually come back to the concept of administrative support. In order to build the climate of differentiation within a school, the priorities of administration must be aligned with the goal.

Through the interviews, I identified a common theme not because of how much it was discussed, rather how little it was discussed. Extremely significant components to the RtI model are documentation and using that documentation to guide identification. The term "identification" can be taken in two contexts; identification of the appropriate intervention and identification of gifted and talented students. This major topic was glossed over by most participants if addressed at all in the interviews, so I wanted to pose the question to the focus group. I asked these four participants how things might look if the same process, paperwork, and computer program was used for all students receiving an intervention associated with RtI, be it remedial, behavior, ELL, advancement, etc. Initially the group was confused and did not understand the question. After the question was clarified, it seemed the group thought this was an unrealistic idea that did not have much of a benefit. I explained that the idea behind making all the paperwork consistent is to eventually make the process more simplified and streamlined for teachers, rather than having a different process or procedure depending on the students' needs. The focus

group did not seem to see it this way. The thought of completing more paperwork and documentation was obviously overwhelming to the participants. They wanted to see the benefit and to be open minded, but thoughts of large class sizes, dozens of students with needs, and differentiating for everyone is already a large task. Implementing a system of documentation that initially just seems like more work did not show an advantage to teachers. One participant brought up the topic of high quality differentiation and instruction at the tier one level. This is really the first step in RtI, and until quality differentiating is happening in the classroom, it would be nearly impossible to identify what students actually need. The other participants agreed, and stated how differentiation within their schools looks completely different based on the teacher. This lead the group back to the previous conversation about proper training in differentiation, GT services, and RtI as a whole. Training is vital to success of any program. When a school wants to implement a model that could be widely considered as a paradigm shift in education, it is crucial that the model is supported with continuous and in-depth training for everyone involved.

Although the focus group provided some more insight into how teachers are thinking and feeling about implementing RtI for GT students, the overall tone of the meeting was negative. Leaving the focus group, I had the impression that the participants almost felt attacked, or like they were not doing their jobs. I believe this feeling comes from a long history of large and unrealistic expectations of teachers without the needed support from administration. We basically had a conversation about how they felt and understood the process, but several of the participants seemed defensive. This defensive nature I don't believe was created within the focus group, but within the culture of their

schools on an everyday basis. Teachers are not feeling supported in what they do already, so of course if we ask them to do something else they are going to be hesitant. RtI, as mentioned previously, can be seen as a paradigm shift in education. It can change the whole climate and culture of a school into a more collaborate and supportive framework for teachers. This process begins with administration and ends with students, but the teachers are key to successful implementation.

Out of the focus groups and interviews emerged the five major themes to be discussed in the next section. The themes are: Awareness, support, professional development, time, and high quality tier one differentiation.

Common Themes

The interviews, focus group, and researcher memos helped the researcher establish five common themes regarding the implementation of RtI with gifted and talented students. The themes are as follows: 1. Awareness of GT students, intervention options, and how that can be addressed and intertwined with the RtI model; 2. support from building and district level administration in the implementation of RtI; 3. continuous and comprehensive professional development in implementing RtI for all students; 4. time allotted for teachers to collaborate, plan, investigate interventions, and document progress of all students; and 5. the need for high quality differentiated instruction at the tier one universal level. These themes are presented in an order of importance as derived from the interviews and focus group; however, the themes and necessary components are cyclical and every component is crucial to the successful implementation of RtI.

Theme 1: Awareness of Gifted and Talented students and Response to Intervention

In the last several years as more schools have adopted the RtI model to assist in the identification and intervention of struggling learners, the focus of training and awareness has been just that, on struggling learners. This level of awareness is completely justified as the foundation of RtI was derived from special education law, IDEIA (2004). It was a natural progression that teachers associate RtI with a special education mandate and students involved in the RtI process would be struggling learners that may eventually be identified for special education services. The focus, however, has shifted. Schools began to adopt the RtI model for struggling learners, then students with behavioral needs, and very quickly teachers began to see that the same model could be used for all students regardless of their identified area of need. Advanced students with a need for more complex and challenging material could also fit into the framework of RtI and teachers could apply interventions with these students in the same fashion as a struggling learner. Several participants said they often talk to general education teachers about GT in the context of RtI, and it is like a light bulb goes on in their head. Often the teachers respond with a comment like, "I never thought about it that way before, but you're right, it should work the same way for these students." Many schools are simply dealing with a lack of exposure or awareness on the part of the teachers. According to the participants, administrators need to have the right background and training to help their teachers become aware of the entire scope of RtI and how to use it with all students. Administrators are not simply going to happen onto this training and knowledge without some guidance.

Teachers and other professionals need to advocate for the use of RtI with all students, be it within their own district or not. Several participants stated that for administrators to buy in to the model and see the value in applying RTI with all students, the impetus for change would have to come from an external source. Professionals in the field of GT and RtI need to become advocates and educate administrators and teachers on the importance of high quality differentiated instruction through a tiered approach. Only with the knowledge and buy-in of administration will the teachers get the support they need to implement RtI effectively.

Theme 2: Multi-level Support

After a level of awareness is established among teachers, the foundational knowledge they possess is not going to progress within a school without the support of administration. The participants felt that administrative support is going to need to come from district personnel as well as building principals and assistant principals. District level administrators need to invest time and resources into developing a streamlined system of approach to how RtI can be implemented for all students within a district. The problem of teacher mobility and transiency can be reduced by having more consistent processes in all schools within a district. Building administrators need to invest in quality professional development for teachers. Quality professional development that is supported by the administration comes across as an exciting opportunity for teachers to help students, not just another item that a law or mandate is requiring teachers to do.

There was an overwhelming impression during the interviews and focus groups that principals and other administrators are not putting and emphasis on RtI other than because they are required to use it for struggling learners. Given that impression, it is

extremely unlikely that the majority of teachers are going to take it upon themselves to implement more than required just because it is in the best interest of students. Teachers feel overwhelmed, as many of the participants stated, and they will not typically add another dimension to their job that requires a great deal of time and commitment if it is not supported by the school as a whole. Aside from administration, teachers need to be supportive of one another as well. RtI is often seen as a systematic change in which everyone in the building needs to be involved and have buy-in. RtI is very much a team approach and relies heavily on collaborative processes, with some team members supporting the process and others not, it might leave teachers feeling disenfranchised with the system.

The impression I got from several of the GT teachers in interviews is that they are seen as almost an outside department where students go to get challenged. These teachers already do not feel supported in what they do, and the support needed for implementing a complicated model such as RtI is extensive. The main method identified by the participants in creating a collaborative and supportive school environment is through high quality and purposeful professional development.

Theme 3: Professional Development in Gifted and Talented Education and Response to Intervention

One of the most surprising aspects of the interviews and focus group discussions came in reference to professional development. I had assumed prior to the interviews that a very common comment of the participants was going to be they did not have enough training and knowledge about RtI to make the model successful. Although this is true, it was not the most important aspect of professional development according to

almost every participant. How they viewed the problem was more foundational than lacking the knowledge of RtI; the teachers in their building are lacking the knowledge of GT students. The participants believe it is necessary to provide a better foundation for their teachers on what characteristics of gifted students are, how those characteristics manifest in the classroom, how to differentiate for those needs, and how that whole process should be a collaborative effort rather than just falling on the shoulders of the GT teacher. They believe that only when the general education teachers have the knowledge of GT students can they begin to incorporate RtI into that framework of understanding as well. Several participants stated they currently, or have previously, presented a short class addressing the characteristics and needs of GT students for the staff at their respective schools. Often this time to introduce or refresh concepts such as GT identification and needs (such as enrichment, advancement, and affective development) are reduced to make room for another item that administration deems more important at the time. Once again, we see the cyclical nature of the identified themes in that a school needs all five areas to truly be successful.

The second area of professional development that was discussed among all the participants was how to approach RtI. Taken from an awareness standpoint initially, where teachers begin to use common vocabulary and experiences to draw upon; teachers will begin to make the connection to RtI in terms of GT students. This process, however, can only take place according to the participants after teachers have a solid understanding of GT students. From there, intensive, continuous, and comprehensive professional development needs to take place. A concern of the participants, particularly in the focus group, was teacher transiency or mobility. Gone are the days of working in one job in

one school for an entire career. Teachers move and change schools for a variety of reasons and schools need to have the ability to adapt to new staff every year. Professional development then needs to take on a new look. The focus group participants believed that RtI needs to be something addressed to the staff every year, throughout the year, and not just on staff-inservice days. RtI vocabulary and context should be used every day within a school, in a variety of context. The nature of using RtI is that it is so inclusive that when it is adopted fully, it changes the entire culture of the school. With proper training and usage, RtI is no longer a model to help struggling learners, but a paradigm and framework for an entire school. Although some participants are fully aware and supportive of this concept, others are still seeing RtI anywhere from a plan teachers put students on that have a need to a model for differentiation. These teachers have not received relevant training that can bring about the systemic change associated with RtI. As with any change in a school, the biggest struggle for teachers is going to be the reallocation of time. As I learned in the interviews, time is possibly the number one concern for teachers.

Theme 4: Time for Collaboration and Implementation

Although the most common comment and concern in both interviews and the focus group is time, I have it listed as the fourth theme due to other factors that need to occur prior to the allocation of time. Without an awareness of bringing RtI and GT together, support from administration, and training on how to utilize RtI effectively and efficiently, providing teachers with time to implement the model is not going to greatly change the way teachers operate. Although these other items likely need to come first, it was the consensus of the participants that teachers' time is greatly valuable and limited,

to change said time would be vital in implementing a comprehensive model. Several teachers in the interviews were almost dismissive from the beginning stating that "we just don't have time for it; there is no way we could ask our teachers to do anything more right now." In some ways, this statement holds an element of truth. In the district one teacher was referring to, the district administration has even told teachers they "don't have time to go through RtI with all the struggling learners, so pick the one or two out of your class that really need it." This statement was not made in the context of GT, but remediation and struggling learners. If this district cannot find the time to support the needs of their struggling learners, obviously they are not going to find the time to support advanced learners at all. This is the main reason that the participants and I agreed that time, although a crucial element for success, has to come after awareness and support from administration.

In reference to time, when asked what they feel would help to make RtI successful in the classroom one of the participants stated that paraprofessional support for GT services could help tremendously. The participants stated that special education paraprofessionals assist students and teachers in the class with differentiation on a daily basis, theoretically the process should be no different in gifted education.

In one of the interviews with a coordinator of GT services, the participant stated that the awareness is coming, the support from administration is largely there, and the professional development is happening; however, the time for teachers to successfully implement RtI is still lacking. Several teachers equated this to the priorities of the state and federal laws. Currently there are very few requirements on gifted and talented education from the state and federal level.

In addition to that, there is extremely little funding compared to a similarly sized population of students in special education. Several participants in the focus group agreed that until GT is federally mandated and supported financially, incorporating RtI for all students may not be as possible as we would like.

The participants agreed that the main way to increase the opportunities for RtI and GT was through a mandate, and the only way to get a mandate was to build awareness on a much higher level than their individual schools. Teachers and administrators need to become advocates for high quality instruction through the RtI model and take their advocacy to state and national levels. According to the participants, advocacy might be the most effective way of creating awareness and eventually additional time and support for teachers in the classroom. After all other elements take place; the participants stated the final step in getting RtI off the ground in a school would be to ensure high quality differentiation for all learners is taking place at the tier one level.

Theme 5: High Quality Tier One Differentiation

Several participants made it explicitly clear that tier one instruction is not simply "doing what you have always done and seeing who is not successful or is needing more." Quality tier one instruction depends on a significant level of differentiation. It is the nature of RtI that a significant degree of differentiation occurs within the classroom to assist the teacher in identifying a possible need in a learner. The participants agreed that especially if RtI is being used to aide in the identification process, investigation the effects of differentiation within the classroom is a necessary component.

Although differentiation was only mentioned in a few of the interviews, it seemed that the participants who had a better grasp on the overall concept and implementation of

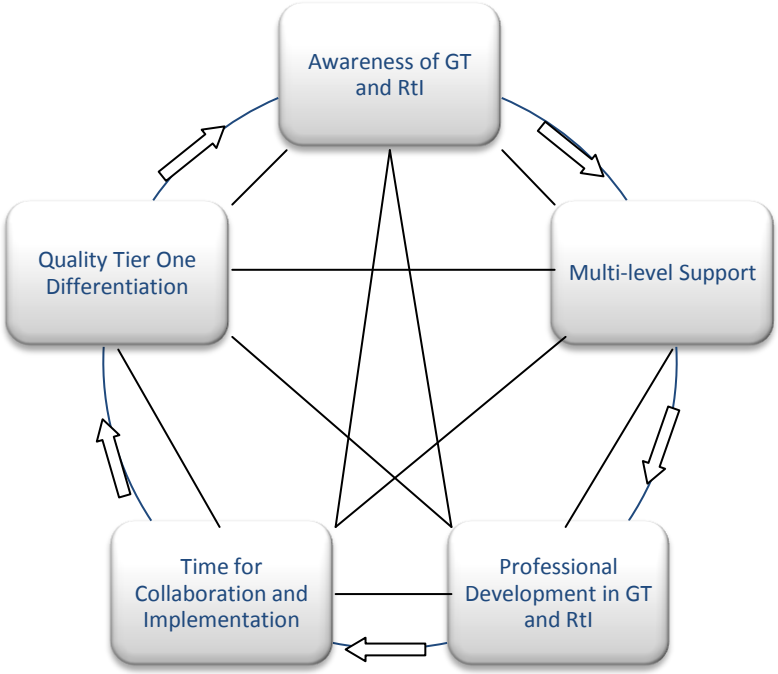
RtI were the ones that referenced differentiation as a key component. These participants stressed that fundamentally, RtI and differentiation are extremely intertwined and quality differentiation is the foundation for a successful RtI model. Taken from a broad point of view, they are in fact speaking in terms of the model as a whole in that students are receiving the intervention that fits their need, regardless of tier intensity. From a more fundamental point of view, differentiation at the tier one level will provide extremely useful and necessary information for other teachers when needing to introduce more intensive interventions for students based on the successful or failed differentiation in the general education classroom. This is from the participants' point of view, however, another aspect of RtI that will require substantial and continual training for most teachers.

Although some teachers instinctively differentiate for struggling and advanced learners in their classrooms, the majority of teachers will likely need assistance with that process. One participant in the focus group mentioned how teachers even think they are differentiating when they really are not. Similarly, differentiation in one classroom can look vastly different from the same process with a different teacher. One participant stated, "If I go hear that JB is differentiating in his classroom, I know good things are happening. Another teacher could tell me they are differentiating the same curriculum and it will look completely different and not be as effective." According to the participants, general education teachers will need extensive training on how to make differentiation consistent among teachers so a transition to a more intensive intervention will be more consistent. They also agreed that the opportunity for specialists in a school, such as a GT teacher, should be trained to be utilized by general education teachers to assist with the process of differentiating.

Summary

As previously stated, the five themes identified throughout the interviews, focus group, and memos are very much intertwined. Each of these necessary components for successful implementation are crucial, but cannot stand alone. Although a clear order of importance emerged throughout the data collection process, all components are equally important and are interrelated. The directionality of the model is represented by the arrows (see figure 5, p. 95). The process begins at the top of the model with awareness and proceeds clockwise.

Figure 5. Necessary Components Diagram



The participants helped establish an order for the themes, stating that a level of *awareness* needs to come first. The cross bars within the center of the model indicate how each of the five components are related and each one depends on the other four. Teachers and administrators alike need to become familiar with a more holistic view of

RtI and how students with advanced needs also fit into this framework. Once teachers and administrators are aware of the comprehensive nature of RtI, *support* from both district and building level administration is the next key component. Without the support of administration, teachers will not establish the buy-in to make RtI successful. Administrators then need to establish a series of comprehensive and continuous *professional development* for all teachers. RtI in nature is a school-wide model in which all teachers are involved in the process. Given the transiency of teachers, it is important to keep training for RtI throughout each school year and over many years so that it eventually becomes engrained in the culture of the school. *Time* was a major concern for teachers to implement RtI successfully. The participants did not believe that they, nor general education teachers, had the time to differentiate, document, and progress monitor on the level that is required with RtI. This feeling is quite justified and needs to be accounted for in the structure of a school. The final theme identified by the researcher through the participants' responses is the need for high *quality differentiation* at the tier one universal level. The participants believed that teachers currently are not able to effectively differentiate in their classrooms for all abilities and need assistance with the process. The participants agreed that to accurately identify the need for a more intensive intervention, quality differentiating in the general education classroom is a mandatory first step.

All five identified themes are extremely important aspects to the implementation of RtI for all students. However, the cyclical nature of these makes it much more complicated if not impossible if one of the theme elements is absent. In the next chapter I will describe the processes involved for addressing the themes, implications of this research, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V:

DISCUSSION

In Chapter V, the researcher address the three main research questions, presents recommendations for implementing the five identified themes in order to make RtI successful for GT students, discuss the implications of this research, and provides suggestions for future research. This chapter will summarize what is needed for successful implementation of RtI in GT programs as derived from this research.

Research Questions

The following three main research questions guided this study:

Q1 How do schools and districts currently identify students for GT programming and how does that relate to the RtI model?

Q2 What do GT teachers need to effectively implement RtI for GT students?

Q3 What can teachers and administrators do to advocate for the use of RtI in their school and make implementation successful?

Question 1

It became clear throughout the course of the interviews that the schools in this research are using a body of evidence to identify students for gifted and talented programs. The identification process is usually based on the state definition of gifted and talented and includes multiple measures in a variety of areas. The body of evidence is used to discourage the use of simply using one test score with a cut-off point that includes or excludes advanced students from additional programming options. The body of evidence usually includes measures of cognitive ability, academic performance,

creativity, in-class work, and will also include recommendations from teachers, parents, and other peers. Several strong indicators in multiple areas are typically what GT teachers look for when making a determination about identification for GT programming. Once students are identified for GT services, the most common GT programming in this state are structured on advanced content in language arts (LA) and mathematics. Consistently throughout the interviews, regardless of how the different programs were developed and structured, the most common aspects of the programs were LA and math. Some programs also included science, affective components, and additional projects; but they were not the main focus of the GT programs.

Most of the participants were quick to describe how many aspects of their programs related to the RtI model. Several represented a variety of group structures in a specific area such as LA and described it as "the perfect RtI model" in that area. Regarding programming options, many schools are attempting to have a variety of instructional levels and groupings that are based on students' needs. That type of tiered instructional support aligns with the RtI model in many ways. However, in many cases the tiered instruction is derived directly out of a specific curriculum rather than actually differentiating and providing interventions for this population of students. Several participants also stated that the nature of the Advanced Learning Plans they were using implied the tiered instructional approach associated with RtI, so by nature of following the ALP, they were inherently doing RtI as well.

In terms of programming options for GT students, there are a variety of instructional approaches happening in schools that relate very closely to the RtI model. Teachers are attempting to implement different levels of instruction and intervention as

they see fit for advanced students. The main difference discovered between how the participants described their programs and the RtI model is in terms of documentation and use of data. Many of the decisions to place a student in an accelerated or advanced class are based on teacher recommendation from the general education classroom. If students need more challenge than they are receiving in the general education classroom offers, often a referral to the GT specialist in the building is enough for a student to be transferred into a more challenging environment. With RtI, a more inclusive process of data collection in the general education class and documentation of attempted interventions would precede the referral to the GT specialist. In addition to the changes in the general education classroom, once the students are identified and placed in the GT program for advanced classes or other programming options, a more intensive series of data collection would ensue to make sure the students are making adequate progress and responding to the interventions. These are the two features of RtI that are not currently happening in the GT programming options in the schools represented in this research.

Programming is only half of the puzzle and only addresses half of the first research question. To get to programming options, students first need to be identified as a student with advanced learning needs. As stated previously, this is commonly done with a body of evidence to show a variety of advanced skills and abilities. However, this process of collecting a body of evidence does not resemble the comprehensive nature of the RtI model. When using RtI, the "body of evidence" that is collected is not the scores from a series of standardized tests, rather documentation from teachers of student performance in the universal tier one level and attempted interventions. The attempted interventions will be documented for progress and will either show they were successful

or unsuccessful. However, to provide more information in terms of making an accurate identification of a student with GT needs, the other assessment data could likely be included in a body of evidence in addition to the progress monitoring of attempted interventions. This concept was difficult for many of the participants to grasp. In terms of RtI, they typically thought of programming options rather than identification procedures. In the focus group discussion when this type of identification procedure was brought up, it required a great deal of explanation from the researcher to help the participants understand how it would work and what benefits it would have. The concept of using RtI for the identification and programming of GT students was simply not in the schema for the majority of participants.

Question 2

The second research question is the crux of this research study. The main topic to be addressed by collecting information from the interviews was investigating what teachers need to implement RtI successfully for GT students. The researcher identified five common themes throughout the interviews, focus group, and memos that illuminated possibilities for making RtI a successful model for GT students. The themes are as follows: 1. Awareness of GT students, intervention options, and how that can be addressed and intertwined with the RtI model; 2. support from building and district level administration in the implementation of RtI; 3. continuous and comprehensive professional development in implementing RtI for all students; 4. time allotted for teachers to collaborate, plan, investigate interventions, and document progress of all students; and 5. the need for high quality differentiated instruction at the tier one universal level. As stated previously, these themes are presented in an order of

importance as derived from the interviews and focus group; however, the themes and necessary components are cyclical and every component is crucial to the successful implementation of RtI. The participant responses from which these themes were derived were presented in Chapter IV. The Grounded Theory section will provide suggestions for how to put the identified themes into practice.

Question 3

The intent behind the third research question was to provide insight into how teachers and administrators in the field of gifted and talented education could advocate for and encourage the use of the RtI model for GT students. The overwhelming response from participants was that they did not know how to make this a reality. The participants seemed to know that in order for priorities to change within a district so that administrators adopt the RtI model for all students, it would take a shift in thinking brought by a level of awareness and education. The problem with the participants seemed to be in the responsibilities of professionals in who would provide that awareness to the necessary leaders in education. Aside from a couple of participants, most of them had the perception that someone will come along to promote a change in practice for gifted and talented education, and then a shift will be made for schools to adopt the RtI model for identification and programming. As professionals with the mindset that RtI is a valuable model for all students in how teachers can provide the highest quality education and address all needs, it is our obligation to lobby for its' use.

Advocating for a systemic change in education for many professionals may seem like a daunting and pointless task as actually making widespread change is extremely difficult. Stakeholders need to recognize their sphere of influence so the most impact can

be made. Teachers do not need to be going to state level administrators attempting to make a change in policy directly from the top. This type of lobbying will likely be met with discouraging results. It is the job of the teacher to inform his or her principal on the merits of RtI for GT programs so they in turn can proceed to the next level and advocate to district level administrators. The same process of building awareness and education surrounding RtI is necessary regardless of who is being introduced to the information. It is possible that districts in themselves can institute a systemic change and support the RtI model in all their schools. However, it may be possible that state policies dictate district decisions and then those district personnel need to advocate with state level stakeholders for a more widespread change. This type of advocacy is not specific to RtI. Any systemic change in policy or procedure is not brought about by angry protest to people beyond our level of influence. Change is simply allowed by educating the stakeholders with whom one might have the ability to influence. Teachers need to recognize their ability to make a change in their schools and not sit idly by until the change happens to them.

Grounded Theory

As stated in Chapter III, the researcher used a grounded theory approach to develop a holistic understanding of the process and needs associated with implementing the Response to Intervention model with Gifted and Talented students. Grounded theory is:

> the process of developing a theory, not testing a theory. Researchers might begin with a tentative theory they want to modify or no theory at all with the intent of 'grounding' the study in views of participants. In either case, an inductive model of theory development is at work here, and the process is one of generating or discovering a theory grounded in views from participants in the field (Creswell, 2007, p. 239).

Through the process of open, axial, and selective coding, the researcher identified the five major themes presented in Chapter IV. The themes were derived directly from the participant responses and memos, both from the individual interviews and the focus group discussion and are the framework for the theory derived from this study. The main question to be answered with this research is, "What do teachers need to implement RtI successfully for GT students?" The identified themes work in a cyclical nature to provide a possible answer to this question (See figure 5, p. 94).

The grounded theory derived from this study is as follows: *Teachers need awareness of GT students' unique characteristics and needs and how those needs can be addressed with the RtI model; support from building, district, and state level administration for the RtI process; comprehensive and on-going professional development regarding RtI and GT students; time for teachers to plan, collaborate, identify interventions, and implement interventions with fidelity; and the need for high quality differentiated instruction at the tier one universal level.* The next section will provide an analysis of each theme and present recommendations for what is needed to put each one into practice within a school setting.

Theme 1: Awareness of Gifted and Talented students and Response to Intervention

The first identified theme is awareness of education professionals in how RtI can be used for all students. It is implied throughout this study that if RtI is being used for GT students, it is likely being used for all students, which is the overall goal of a school-wide model such as this. The change in process from using RtI as method for identifying students with a Specific Learning Disability to identifying a student need, applying an intervention, and documenting progress will not come easily. This is a widespread

change or paradigm shift that at the fundamental level begins with awareness. It is clear that many teachers have identified the benefit in RtI and its use for more than struggling learners. Although many teachers have identified this need, it does not mean that districts or states have made implementation a priority, or even an option. Teachers need to become advocates for methods they believe in, such as using RtI. Teachers need to build a level of awareness with their principals, principals need to do the same with district level administration, and those administrators need to carry that awareness to the state level.

At the teacher level, building awareness can also occur by using RtI specific language in the context of GT students. Many teachers are already familiar with RtI for use with struggling learners or to identify students with a Specific Learning Disability. GT teachers can use this to their advantage by using the existing schema of teachers as a framework in which to build upon. When general education teachers discover the similarities between using RtI for struggling learners and for advanced learners, the transition will be much easier. It is important to remember that general education teachers are possibly going to be the most affected by using RtI for all students, so making the process as streamlined and consistent is extremely important.

In addition to individual teachers encouraging change on their own, specific stakeholders with more training, background, education, or experience need to take leadership roles at local and state levels to encourage better educational practices. Not all professionals in education are going to find themselves in this position, but the ones that do need to step up and be leaders for the entire field. Gifted and Talented education often goes without a voice, or at least a very under-noticed voice, at the district and state levels

of education. Professors, researchers, and state leaders have to make additional time in supporting the use of an instructional model that could revolutionize GT programming and identification. Presenting at state and national conferences within and outside the field of GT, attending district and state policy meetings, and providing materials to stakeholders are just a few ways that experts in the field can truly have an impact and change in GT programming. Advocacy is the first major component in making a systemic change in education, and professionals need not be afraid to do just that.

Theme 2: Multi-level Support

Creating awareness among professionals in education is a necessary first step, but awareness will not solely lead to implementation. Administration, after becoming aware of the uses of RtI for more than struggling learners, needs to show support for the model by investing time and resources into proper implementation. It is evident that teachers are going to emphasize aspects of their job that administration deems as priorities. RtI is currently seen as a priority mainly in the realm of special education and struggling learners. Administrators, both building and district level, need to take their level of awareness and develop support for using RtI in a more inclusive manner. To be supportive of RtI for all students, administrators need to fully understand the benefits involved. The level of understanding cycles back to awareness mentioned in the first theme. If administrators understand the benefits for all students, they have a much higher likelihood of supporting teachers and other professionals in using the model in a more widespread fashion. However, if administrators are not supportive of RtI and do not place emphasis on it for their staff, the possibility of making it successful in a school is extremely unlikely.

Not only do administrators need to philosophically be supportive of the process of implementing the model, but they need to actively show their support for it and for teachers. Administrators need to implement a series of high quality and purposeful professional development to help train teachers on how to use RtI with different populations. They need to create time for collaboration, consultation, and problem solving processes necessary to making RtI successful within a school. Administrators will also need to ensure their school system and schedule is conducive to the collaborative aspects required by RtI.

Finally, the administration will need to continuously foster an environment within the school that promotes the use of RtI through innovative and high quality instruction, differentiation, and collaborative problem solving. Only when building and district level administration supports their staff in this way will RtI have a possibility for success when applied for all students. Quite possibly the most influential change a principal can bring about for his or her staff is through quality professional development.

Theme 3: Professional Development in Gifted and Talented Education and Response to Intervention

Once necessary stakeholders in education are providing necessary support for the RtI model; systematic, comprehensive, and ongoing professional development is the next step to ensure quality implementation. Professional development and appropriate training for professionals at all levels is a crucial component. The participants identified two major parts to professional development: Training in the characteristics of giftedness of children and youth as well as training in the RtI model for use with all students.

Training teachers to be aware of GT students needs to come prior to training about how to use RtI with that population. Teachers need to understand the characteristics, behaviors, abilities, and needs associated with gifted students and how all these things may manifest in a general education classroom. It would be impossible to apply an appropriate intervention for a GT student in a general education classroom without the prior knowledge and background as to what GT students actually are. This training may come from the building GT specialist, district GT administrator, or an outside professional. The training needed in each school will be different as the experiences of teachers within each school are going to vary greatly. The main item for administrators to consider is that teachers need training regarding GT students in some form or fashion.

This professional development cannot happen once or simply over the course of a few days. Important information needs to be addressed with teachers multiple times and re-addressed throughout school years to compensate for teacher turnover and other problems. The same need for systematic professional development of GT foundations holds true for the foundations and applications of RtI for all students.

Once teachers are aware of the characteristics of GT students and how to properly identify their needs in the classroom, teachers need to be trained on how to appropriately use the RtI model for this population. Training, as with professional development about GT students, needs to be comprehensive and continuous across school years. RtI is not something that can be addressed once, or even over the course of a year, with the expectation that teachers understand how to do it appropriately and effectively.

Ongoing comprehensive training is vital to combat problems such as teacher transiency, changing priorities in professional development, and curriculum changes within a school.

Many teachers will begin with a foundational knowledge as RtI is used with struggling learners. Professional development needs to use this knowledge to the advantage of teachers and build on it to create a new framework to build off of. However, existing knowledge of RtI may not easily be changed. It is the common perception among many teachers that RtI is still *only* for struggling learners or that it is *only* for special education purposes. Training in RtI needs to reset the framework from which teachers view the model in that it is no longer a deficit based model for remediation, rather a model of identifying student needs and applying intervention based on data.

This shift in thinking will not only change how teachers view the RtI model, but will inherently institute a paradigm shift in how education is approached as a whole. A more collaborative and inclusive process with the interest of providing the highest quality instruction in addressing student needs seems like a far away possibility in most schools. However, through the adoption of the RtI model for all students and proper professional development, the highest quality instruction will not only be seen as possible, but the new expectation for all teachers. Many teachers will need to change the way they view the nature of public education as they know it to prepare for this paradigm shift.

Theme 4: Time for Collaboration and Implementation

Of the five identified themes, the participants overwhelmingly expressed their concern for more time more than anything else. Additional time was put into several contexts by the participants. Time could mean time for collaboration, applying

interventions, training, team teaching, progress monitoring, and a variety of other scenarios. The overall idea from the participants is that it is unrealistic to expect teachers to add one more, and extremely large, aspect to their everyday responsibilities. Part of this problem is addressed through a shift in priorities among administration, both at the building and district levels. When administrators show their priorities in implementing RtI, they will need to create additional time for teachers through schedule changes, support staff, or simply eliminating other responsibilities. The reallocation and redesigning of resources and FTE will be a crucial component of RtI when implemented on a school-wide level.

The process of implementing RtI for all students can certainly be viewed as a paradigm shift in education. This paradigm shift will include changes in how teachers and administrators alike function on a daily basis. Teachers will be involved in more team-teaching, collaborative problem solving, and consultation with horizontal and vertical teams. Administrators will have more leadership within the building to oversee daily functions of RtI, but will play a large role in program and structural decisions. These processes are not able to happen without a large amount of restructuring in the educational system as a whole.

Currently, many teachers function daily in their own classrooms without relying much on support from other staff members. In a change of structure, there will be more emphasis on a collaborative climate in education. As no additional time is going to be added to a school day, some other items of importance will likely be restructured or just discontinued.

The processes for identifying students with remediation, advanced, behavioral, or language needs should be restructured to have one streamlined process instead of four completely different ones.

Documenting plans for each of these areas and monitoring progress should no longer be done with four different formats, but the same system of approach to simplify the process for all teachers involved. Although school districts across the nation are experiencing budgetary struggles, the need for additional support staff to implement interventions and provide time for collaborative problem solving is greater than ever. Schools may need to emphasize the need for such support staff and restructure some positions such as reading specialists, paraprofessionals, and instructional coaches to make implementation a real possibility.

The concern of time for teachers to implement a comprehensive and complex model such as RtI is valid. The need for more time will likely not come from additional support through state or federal funding, but the reallocation of resources and restructuring of certain positions. By restructuring some teaching positions within a school, an emphasis will also be placed the type and quality of instruction happening daily in the general education classroom. Only when teachers are differentiating appropriately in the classroom can one identify the need for additional interventions with a specialist.

Theme 5: High Quality Tier One Differentiation

The foundation for a tiered instructional support begins in the general education classroom with high quality differentiation at the tier one level. Differentiation should include all students, of all abilities, and should be purposeful to fit their needs. Needs

should be defined as any different or exceptional trait that influences learning. Needs are not simply negative, but could also be a need for enrichment, advancement, acceleration, leadership training, and so on. This of course is paired with the opposite side of needs being deficits and teachers needing to modify curriculum and instruction to improve student achievement or behavior to meet proficiency standards. All variances in ability and adjustment to the classroom should be identified as a need for differentiation. Many teachers are overwhelmed by this thought of differentiating for every student in their classroom. The first thing teachers need to consider is for a class of 25 students, according to the RtI model, 15 to 20 of those students are going to function within normal range and thrive on the quality instruction being delivered. A few of the students will need remediation in at least one area and one to two students will need intensive help and they will likely work with a specialist. The same holds true for students with advanced needs. A few students will likely need additional instruction beyond the level typically being taught in the class, and one or two might need advancement that may require acceleration to a higher level of instruction. What high quality general education teachers need to do in their classroom is provide the best instructional activities possible for their learners and differentiate for those few in their class in which they believe there might be a need.

Differentiation can take on many forms, but may include trying a different instructional technique, modality, or option for demonstrating learned information. Within that framework, the general education teacher may begin to see a need that he or she is unable to address in the classroom without support. The next level of differentiation may be to include an instructional aide or specialist to come into the

classroom and work with a small group of students that have a similar need. If the small group instruction and intervention is unsuccessful, the teacher, instructional aide, and specialist will meet to discuss the next level or different intervention that should be attempted. That process all begins with high quality instruction at the tier one level. If teachers are not providing a high level of instruction in the general education classroom, the information to base a more intensive intervention on will not be valid. Teachers need to be able to show what has been successful or not within their framework so that additional measures can be taken to address the students' needs.

All five of the identified themes are extremely important to the success of implementing the RtI model for all students, specifically those who are gifted and talented. It is important to remember how these five themes relate to each other is cyclical in nature and each of the themes is dependent on the other four. These recommendations should be taken as a whole rather than as individual pieces that can be added one at a time. Although presented with a clear order, all five are necessary for successful implementation of RtI for GT students.

Implications

There is limited research at this time regarding what teachers need to implement the RtI model effectively and efficiently for advanced learners. This research revealed the following implications for implementing RtI for all students, specifically those with advanced learning needs.

First, there is not a unified system of approach for identifying and serving GT students. It is largely shown that many schools and districts are using a body of evidence type of identification in which measures from several different indicators are compared

and used to make a determination about eligibility for GT programs. Once identified, the GT programs often do not have the resources or information to meet students' needs. This system of approach is vastly different than the RtI model currently being adopted by many schools to address the needs of struggling learners. The same approach could be used to meet the needs of all learners and help create a more unified and streamlined approach for general education teachers. This process will likely not create more work when implemented effectively, but will allow teachers to accurately identify and address students' needs.

Second, teachers do not feel they have the time or support to change anything about their daily teaching lives. Many teachers feel constrained in what they are able to do in their classrooms and without support from building and district level administration, the process is unlikely to change. A systemic change in perception, or paradigm shift, will be necessary to not only provide the necessary level of administrative support, but to allow teachers the necessary tools to ensure appropriate implementation of RtI. The collaborative nature of RtI lends itself well to a school environment that is supported by administration and where all staff is knowledgeable about the process.

Third, the process of implementing such a comprehensive and complex model is not going to be accomplished quickly. From training of all staff members to appropriate interventions being applied for the entire range of students' needs, successful implementation of the RtI model could take years. Even after the model is being implemented effectively and efficiently, continuous training to modify and adapt as needs change will be crucial. RtI can be considered a framework for teachers to consider or model their instructional strategies off of, it is intended to change and adapt to the needs

of the school and teachers. It is likely that no two schools will look exactly the same in how they implement RtI, but the overall philosophy behind the model will remain consistent.

Within the scope of these findings, the researcher suggests that schools build awareness of the RtI model in the context of an entire student population. This awareness will likely come through a paradigm shift in schools and be the foundation for a systemic change. Within that change, it is crucial for staff to be flexible as RtI is a framework for understanding and adapting to student needs. The five elements identified by the participants as necessary components to implementing RtI effectively need to be addressed within each school. Although these components may look differently in each school, the intent behind the model should be the same.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study analyzed the interviews of eight professionals from a singular western state. Future research in the implementation of RtI with GT students should be taken in several directions. Suggestions for areas of future research are as follows: 1. Expand the demographics included in this study to involve general education teachers, principals, other district level administrators, and state level policy makers; 2. investigate each of the identified themes in detail to further explain how teachers can apply that foundation; and 3. pilot the information from this study in a district with the suggested components and investigate the effectiveness of RtI.

The participants in this study were limited to GT professionals in a singular western state. Teachers and administrators of gifted and talented education were selected because of their knowledge and foundation in working with advanced learners. To

expand on the information they presented and needs they identified, general education teachers, principals, other district level administrators, and state level policy makers should be included to examine how RtI can be implemented in schools from a more comprehensive and holistic point of view. The nature of what I believe RtI can be is all-inclusive and everyone in the education process will be involved. This study takes a preliminary look specifically at GT professionals. Future research should include more stakeholders for an overall examination of the process.

The identified themes presented in this study simply form a foundation from which teachers can work. Future research should investigate each of the identified themes in depth to see what can be done to actually build awareness and support, establish high quality professional development, create more time for teachers, and ensure quality differentiation in all classrooms for all students. Future research should be done to investigate other possible needs for teachers when implementing RtI and how those needs may be addressed.

Although the presented information and identified themes may provide a framework for teachers and schools for implementing RtI, actually implementing the model may prove to be very different. The recommendations presented in this study need to be piloted in a school or district and examined for their effectiveness. Other crucial components may emerge and teachers' needs may change throughout the process. Additional research in actually implementing RtI for all students will help illuminate more directly what teachers need to be successful with this model.

Conclusion

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology to investigate the experiences, attitudes, and opinions of eight professionals in the field of gifted and talented education in relation to implementing the RtI model for GT students. Through individual interviews and a focus group, five themes emerged regarding what teachers need to implement RtI effectively for GT students. The five themes are: 1.) Awareness of GT students, intervention options, and how that can be addressed and intertwined with the RtI model; 2.) support from building and district level administration in the implementation of RtI; 3.) continuous and comprehensive professional development in implementing RtI for all students; 4.) time allotted for teachers to collaborate, plan, investigate interventions, and document progress of all students; and 5.) the need for high quality differentiated instruction at the tier one universal level. By using these five recommendations, teachers and administrators will have a framework to use when implementing RtI for GT students. This information cannot be generalized as it is derived from the specific experiences and opinions of eight professionals. It should be used simply as a guide when investigating the uses of RtI in GT programs. This research demonstrated the need for a more consistent process of identifying and addressing all students' needs, regardless of what those needs may be. Additional research should be conducted to further investigate how RtI can be implemented in a school-wide all-inclusive manner to meet the needs of all learners.

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Response to Intervention: Teachers' Needs for Implementation in Gifted and Talented Programs

Researcher: Stephen Seedorf

Research Advisor: Dr. Stuart Omdal, Dr. George Betts

Advisor e-mail: Stuart.omdal@unco.edu , George.betts@unco.edu

As a doctoral student at UNC, I am researching how schools in Colorado are identifying students for gifted and talented programs, and how programs are structured after identification. The purpose of this study is to illuminate how closely identification and programming procedures align with the Response to Intervention model and identify teachers' needs for implementing RtI in their schools for GT programs. You have been selected as a possible participant for this study under the suggestion of George Betts and/or Stuart Omdal. If you decide to participate, I will be conducting individual interviews with each participant to gather information about your school's identification and programming for GT students. After the interviews, all participants will have the opportunity to participate in a focus group with other GT teachers and administrators. Participation in the focus group is encouraged but not required for the study.

During the interview, you will be asked to provide some information about yourself as a professional. Some questions will include how long you have been in gifted education, level of education, and program information for your district. Your responses will be anonymous. Only the researcher and advisor will examine individual responses. Each interview will last between 45 minutes and 1 hour and will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. If additional information is needed for clarification, the researcher may contact you to set up an additional interview. Focus groups are intended to last between 1 and 2 hours depending on participant discussions. All focus groups will be arranged to be at a central location for the participants. Results of the study will be presented primarily in group form (e.g., themes and commonalities among responses) and all original paperwork and recordings will be stored in a personal file of the researcher which only the researcher will have access to in order to maintain confidentiality. If there is accidental disclosure of the data, there are no foreseeable risks as the information is neither harmful to the participants or others.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. Participants will only be identifying their program information in relation to the RtI model in an attempt to improve identification and programming for GT students across the state.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop the survey at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please contact the researcher (Stephen Seedorf) if you would like to set up an interview and participate in this research. All interviews will be scheduled individually with the researcher and will be based on the convenience of the participant. If the participant and researcher are unable to set up a face-to-face interview, an internet based video conference system may be used (such as Skype). By contacting the researcher to set up an interview, you will give us permission for your participation. You may keep this form for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall , University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of NORTHERN COLORADO
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

December 1, 2010

TO: Megan Babkes Stellino
School of Sport and Exercise Science

FROM: The Office of Sponsored Programs

RE: Exempt Review of *Response to Intervention: Teacher's Needs for Implementation in Gifted and Talented Programs,* submitted by Stephen Seedorf (Research Advisor: Stuart Omdal and George Betts)

The above proposal is being submitted to you for exemption review. When approved, return the proposal to Sherry May in the Office of Sponsored Programs.

I recommend approval.

Signature of Co-Chair 12/21/10 Date

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is exempt from further review.

IT IS THE ADVISOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO NOTIFY THE STUDENT OF THIS STATUS.

Comments:
email invite script
waiver consent for OSP info
re confidentiality?

25 Kepner Hall ~ Campus Box #143
Greeley, Colorado 80639
Ph: 970.351.1907 ~ Fax: 970.351.1934