Response to Intervention: Perceptions of School Staff
in a Rural School District
Tricia Jung
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Introduction

In British Columbia today, schools are faced with continuous demands and pressures when resources and time are already inadequate (Naylor, 2002). In an inclusive education system, classroom teachers are supporting a variety of exceptional students, ranging from difficult behaviour to demanding academic learning needs. There has been a continual effort to provide exceptional students with the highest quality education, and in response to traditional approaches, the Response to Interventions (RTI) framework has been developed. Response to Intervention (RTI) is a three-tiered system approach, which integrates instruction, the scientific model, formative assessment, and the psycho-educational assessment process (McIntosh et al., 2011). British Columbia teachers are being faced with the implementation of this framework in their schools. This proposal will take a look at a rural school district in Northern British Columbia in order to explore not only the perceptions of teachers, but also the school-wide staff, during the implementation of an RTI framework.

Response to Intervention is characterized by high-quality educational programming that includes universal screening procedures to identify students at risk for academic difficulties; secondary interventions consisting of a standard, evidence-based treatment protocol with monitoring for a specified duration, and a tertiary intervention that is more intensive and tailored to individual student needs (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). Fuchs (2010) refers to the blurring of special education in a new continuum of general education placements and services, including service delivery options and the role of the teacher (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). Throughout British Columbia, administrators are being encouraged to engage in the school-wide implementation of the RTI framework, so it is imperative that the voices at the school level are heard during this process.
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Statement of Problem

RTI has the potential to have a large impact on supporting at risk students. It can be a positive educational framework, which will allow for supports to be set up in inclusive classrooms. (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003) Cassidy, Ortieb, & Shettel (2011) published the findings from a survey of literacy experts who were interviewed. From this survey it was evident that there is some uncertainty about RTI, which can be in part due to the way it is implemented, and the distinctions in how researchers, administrators, and teachers define the term (Cassidy, Ortieb, & Shettel, 2011). While there are many studies reviewing the technical aspects of RTI and it’s usefulness, fewer studies have incorporated teachers’ perceptions of the efficacy of the RTI model, specifically in a rural setting. (VanDerHeyden, Witt, & Gilbertson, 2007). The problem is in the lack of case study research based on the implementation of RTI in small rural school districts concerning the perceptions of the school staff and the effectiveness of the framework. Teachers can discern if a method is appropriate for at-risk students, therefore their concerns, experiences, opinions, and voices are of great importance for educational planning. Documenting the individual voices of a school staff and their experiences can be valuable and important examples for individuals experiencing similar situations.

Research Question

Many studies have explored the technical, theoretical, and the usefulness of RTI. Less research has been conducted on the self-efficacy and perceptions of school staff during the implementation of the RTI framework. Bandura, (1994) suggests that self-efficacy as one’s belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. One’s sense of self-efficacy can play a major role in how one approaches goals,
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tasks, and challenges. A qualitative design study by nature will seek to represent
distinctive perceptions of the individual. The purpose of this study is to explore how the
implementation of the RTI framework impacts the perceptions, understandings, and
responses of the staff at Sk’aadgaa Naay Elementary School. The research questions
considered here:

“What are the perceptions of a school staff concerning the Response to Intervention
model after the first year of implementation?”

“What knowledge and skills are required to successfully implement a Response to
Intervention framework in a rural school setting?”

With this information, the administrators, educational assistants and teachers at
Sk’aadgaa Naay Elementary can work collaboratively to make changes for exceptional
students in an effective and positive manner.

Literature Review

In 2004, RTI was written into U.S. law with the reauthorization of the Individuals
with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). This framework was developed due to the
high numbers of students being identified for special education services, and the limited
resources for supporting these individuals. In Canada, two recent British Columbia
Teachers Federation surveys reported that levels of support are insufficiently coordinated
to meet student needs, access to collaboration is minimal, and they often feel unqualified
to deal with the unique challenges of individual learners (Naylor, 2002). Attempting to
support exceptional students within an inclusive classroom setting was listed as top
stressor on British Columbia teachers (Naylor, 2002). The RTI framework can
potentially align with teachers’ interests in supporting students with exceptionalities by
allowing for effective in-class supports, ongoing formative assessment, and collaboration
with colleagues (McIntosh et al., 2011). Furthermore, in British Columbia, several
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School districts have implemented RTI models with positive outcomes. Examples of schools implementing for academic supports include the British Columbia School District No. 81 in Fort Nelson (McIntosh, Ty, & Turri, 2011), and St. Paul School, a Catholic independent elementary school (McKee, Tong, & Holmes, 2009). Several other schools across British Columbia have implemented an RTI model for social behaviour known as school wide positive behaviour support (Chapman & Hofweber, 2000).

The theory supporting the RTI framework is that at-risk students can be identified earlier and provided with appropriate instruction, thus increasing the likelihood of success in the classroom (McIntosh et. al., 2011). A key feature of RTI is the ongoing evaluation of the students and the collaborative component to allow for in-class supports. Potentially, teachers are also given supports in prevention and interventions for working with the more challenging at-risk students (Waterhouse & Chapman, 2006). If we can effectively implement an RTI model in a school, the possibility of alleviating some teachers and educational assistants’ stress would be possible.

**Method**

The design of this study will be qualitative in nature. A case study will provide an analysis that will elucidate on the perspective of teachers, educational assistants, and an administrator during the implementation of an RTI model in a rural school. Case study design was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore individuals through multifaceted interventions, relationships, communities or programs (Yin, 2003) and enables the deconstruction and then subsequent reconstruction of a phenomenon (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study was chosen because the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and the context. Specifically, the case study will look at the relationship between the RTI model and the school staff perceptions of the framework. The case
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study will be descriptive in nature because of the description of an intervention or phenomenon and its real life context in which it occurs (Yin, 2003).

Participants

The staff of Sk’aadgaa Naay Elementary School in Skidegate, British Columbia will be the voluntary participants of the study. Specifically, the classroom teachers, learning assistance teacher, administrator, and educational assistants will participate in interviews, and observations. Teachers have a unique perspective of students and the effectiveness of methods used in class. Educational assistants have a different perspective often working one-to-one with a designated student. The learning resource teacher weaves the teachers, educational assistants, and students together to collaboratively create effective programs. The administrator is leading the initiatives, managing the staff, and overseeing the big picture. Together, the staff can create a powerful picture of a specific phenomenon within the school-wide setting.

Materials

Interview protocols will be required for this study. Audio recording technology will be necessary to record the interviews. Resources regarding Response to Intervention methods will be needed to ensure appropriate understanding of the framework. Note-taking materials will be necessary for observation records. The qualitative NVivo 10 software will also be required during this process.

Procedure

Initially, an informal poll will be given to the staff in order to collect information about the interest in this study. Secondly, consent for the study will be acquired from the School District 50, the Principal, and the elders in the Haida Community. Once consent has been approved by all subjects and concerned individuals, a meeting will be held in order to outline the study to the staff. The researcher will participate in staff meetings
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Regarding the implementation of RTI methods. At these times, field notes, direct-observations and documentation will occur. The interviews (Appendix A-F) will be conducted at the beginning of the year and at the end of the school year.

**Instrumentation**

Qualitative research lends itself to gather data from narratives. This interesting anthropological component to qualitative studies is completed using a variety of instruments. This study will use questionnaires, which will be developed for interviews before and after ten months of school. Notes will be taken during staff meetings, and interviews will be audio recorded to ensure exact transcription.

**Analysis**

In an effort to establish validity during this qualitative study, measures will be taken to account for credibility, dependability, and confirmability. Once the interviews have been completed, transcribed, and scripts are available; the data will go through member checking. The transcripts will be given to each participant, so they can review and suggest edits if necessary. Any changes will be made in order to strengthen the credibility of the study. Interview protocols will be created to set the tone for the interviewer and to create rapport with the interviewee.

Codes will be developed based on the research question and the data from interviews. The coded data will be organized into themes and interpreted to discover the perceptions of the school staff concerning the Response to Intervention implementation throughout the first year. NVivo 10 will be utilized because according to Creswell (2015), the program helps organize nonnumeric, unstructured data with the processes of indexing, searching, and theorizing.

Triangulation of data is utilized to ensure dependability and confirmability. The narratives will be developed based on emergent themes from the interview data. An audit
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trail will include data, recorded audio files, field notes, documents, research studies, reflexivity journals expressing biases, and records will also support and strengthen the validity within the study.

The final case study will present as a narrative, organized chronologically describing the perceptions and perspectives of the Sk’aadgaa Naay School staff during a school year of RTI implementation. The generalizations of this narrative will consider the original research question. Due to the descriptive nature of this case study, a narrative story format will be fitting for the study report.

Limitations and Delimitations

Qualitative design in this form is exploratory at the core, so unavoidably there are some limitations to this study. In general, qualitative studies cannot be transferable to other situations because it is highly individualistic. This study is a very specific case study on a small rural school in Northern British Columbia. There are limitations with the participants, and the possibility of dropping out of the study is an inevitable concern for the researcher. Honesty during the interview may be a factor in limiting accuracy as the study involves employee and employer relationships. The threat of an employer identifying an employee due to the small sample size is a possibility. Bias is inherent in researchers’ perceptions. Reflection, discussion, and cross checking with other researchers may be a beneficial way of identifying personal bias and would support the validity of the research. Researcher bias would be stated explicitly in the study. Limitations of location would be apparent due to the unique, remote, and small size of the school. The ten-month time frame may not be long enough to gather accurate perceptions of teachers, educational assistants, and the administrator. If participants drop out of the study, there is a risk of an even smaller sample size. A mixed methods design may
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provide a more detailed picture and evaluation of the RTI model and the impact on school staff.

Ethical Issues

Haida Gwaii is a special place; the beauty of the land and ocean, the active, proud culture and the uniqueness of the location cannot be denied. Currently, there are concerns with the amount of research conducted on island. I would take measures to create a dialogue with Haida elders to explain my research, goals, and plans for the study. I would explicitly discuss the benefits of the study to ensure concerns are alleviated. The school is located on reserve land, so this would be an appropriate act of respect. Another ethical issue is the concern of the identity of the participants being at risk due to the small school and community. Voluntary participants are always given a choice to participate in the study or not.

Conclusion

Qualitative Case study designs can paint lucid and first-hand scenarios about perspectives in education. Boundaries between specific phenomena and the context it is within can be brought to light. The report from this study will take the form of a chronological narrative story weaving the research question throughout. Everyone has a different perspective, experience, and perception of the world. This study would illuminate the topic of inclusive education for diverse students in a small rural school. Research inevitably creates more questions, thus the possibility of further research may arise. Action research may be a future option, which could allow for teacher-led research on specific interventions within the RTI model. All in all, qualitative case studies can provide a rich depiction of a specific phenomenon in education and beyond.
Appendix A - Teacher Implementation—Beginning of the year Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee Pseudonym:
Position of Interviewee:
Years/Months of teaching experience:

Interviewers Script:
The purpose of the study is to explore school staff perceptions of the Response of Intervention framework, the implementation, and the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement RTI methods when prescribing and implementing academic and behavior interventions of Response to Intervention in a rural school setting. You will be asked open-ended questions regarding Response to Intervention. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length. All answers given will remain strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. Are there any questions? Let’s get started.

1. What is Response to Intervention?

2. What do you foresee the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

3. What do you foresee the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

4. What do you foresee the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

5. What do you foresee the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

6. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement academic interventions?

7. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement behavioral interventions?

8. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about Response to Intervention?
Appendix B - Teacher Implementation—Year-end Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee Pseudonym:
Position of Interviewee:
Years/Months of teaching experience:

Remember, the purpose of the study is to explore school staff perceptions of the Response of Intervention framework, the implementation, and the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement RTI methods when prescribing and implementing academic and behavior interventions of Response to Intervention in a rural school setting. You will be asked open-ended questions regarding Response to Intervention. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length. All answers given will remain strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. Are there any questions? Let’s get started.

1. What is Response to Intervention?
2. What are the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?
3. What are the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?
4. What are the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?
5. What are the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?
6. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement academic interventions?
7. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement behavioral interventions?
8. What are your strengths in using Response to Intervention academics?
9. What are your strengths in using Response to Intervention for behavior?
10. What are your areas of need in using Response to Intervention for academics?
11. What are your areas of need in using Response to Intervention for behavior?
12. After using Response to intervention for over a year, what professional development do you think you need?
13. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about Response to Intervention?
The purpose of the study is to explore school staff perceptions of the Response of Intervention framework, the implementation, and the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement RTI methods when prescribing and implementing academic and behavior interventions of Response to Intervention in a rural school setting. You will be asked open-ended questions regarding Response to Intervention. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length. All answers given will remain strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. Are there any questions? Let’s get started.

1. What is Response to Intervention?

2. What do you foresee the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

3. What do you foresee the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

4. What do you foresee the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

5. What do you foresee the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

6. What support do you currently prescribe and implement for academic interventions?

7. What supports do you currently prescribe and implement for behavioral interventions

8. What do you see your role being in offering supports for students using the RTI framework?

9. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about Response to Intervention?
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Appendix D-Educational Assistant- Implementation—Year-end Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee Pseudonym:
Position of Interviewee:
Years/Months of educational assistant experience:

Remember, the purpose of the study is to explore school staff perceptions of the Response of Intervention framework, the implementation, and the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement RTI methods when prescribing and implementing academic and behavior interventions of Response to Intervention in a rural school setting. You will be asked open-ended questions regarding Response to Intervention. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length. All answers given will remain strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. Are there any questions? Let’s get started.

1. What is Response to Intervention?

2. What are the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

3. What are the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

4. What are the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

5. What are the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

6. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement academic interventions?

7. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement behavioral interventions?

8. What are your strengths in using Response to Intervention academics?

9. What are your strengths in using Response to Intervention for behavior?

10. What are your areas of need in using Response to Intervention for academics?

11. What are your areas of need in using Response to Intervention for behavior?

12. After using Response to intervention for over a year, what professional development do you think you need?

13. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about Response to Intervention?
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Appendix E - Administrator- Implementation—Beginning of the year Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date: 
Place: 
Interviewer: 
Interviewee Pseudonym: 
Position of Interviewee: 
Years/Months of teaching experience: 
Years/Months of Administration experience: 

The purpose of the study is to explore school staff perceptions of the Response of Intervention framework, the implementation, and the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement RTI methods when prescribing and implementing academic and behavior interventions of Response to Intervention in a rural school setting. You will be asked open-ended questions regarding Response to Intervention. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length. All answers given will remain strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. Are there any questions? Let’s get started.

1. What is Response to Intervention?

2. What do you foresee the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

3. What do you foresee the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

4. What do you foresee the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

5. What do you foresee the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

6. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement academic interventions?

7. What supports are currently given to prescribe and implement behavioral interventions?

8. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about Response to Intervention?
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Appendix F-Administrator Implementation—Year-end Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee Pseudonym:
Position of Interviewee:
Years/Months of teaching experience:
Years/Months of Administration experience:

Remember, the purpose of the study is to explore school staff perceptions of the Response of Intervention framework, the implementation, and the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully implement RTI methods when prescribing and implementing academic and behavior interventions of Response to Intervention in a rural school setting. You will be asked open-ended questions regarding Response to Intervention. There are no right or wrong answers. The interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes in length. All answers given will remain strictly confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. Are there any questions? Let’s get started.

1. What is Response to Intervention?

2. What are the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

3. What are the strengths of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

4. What are the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for academics?

5. What are the drawbacks of Response to Intervention when using it for behavior?

6. What school-wide supports are currently given to prescribe and implement academic interventions?

7. What school-wide supports are currently given to prescribe and implement behavioral interventions?

8. What are your strengths in supporting teachers and educational assistants in using Response to Intervention academics?

9. What are your strengths in supporting teachers and educational assistants in using Response to Intervention for behavior?

10. What are your areas of need in using Response to Intervention for academics?

11. What are your areas of need in using Response to Intervention for behavior?

12. After using RTI for over a year, what professional development do you think you need?

13. Are there any other thoughts you would like to share about Response to Intervention?
Appendix G - Thank you letter

Dear Participant:

Thank you so much for participating in the Response to Intervention: Perceptions of school staff. Response to Intervention: Perceptions of school staff in a rural school.

Your interview transcription is available for your review. Please review and send back to tjung@sd50.bc.ca

Again, thank you for your time, thoughts, and energy.

Sincerely,
Tricia Jung
REFERENCES


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