RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ITS EFFECT ON ACCESSING LITERACY SKILLS IN THE TIER 1 CLASSROOM

A thesis presented by Patricia M. Kelley

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Abstract

As students enter middle schools across the country, many of them lack the literacy skills needed to access content-area knowledge. Response to Intervention (RtI) is an intervention model that is helping students find success at the elementary level, but there are few studies and models that are appropriate for the middle-school level in helping students access literacy skills. One of the barriers that prevent middle schools from being able to use elementary RtI practices is the need for a comprehensive literacy program that will allow students to succeed in mastering the content standards. This research investigated effective ways to implement RtI in a middle-school setting while promoting the acquisition of literacy skills. Formative assessment theory informs the problem of practice by providing the lens from which RtI and literacy integration can be achieved in the middle-school setting. The overarching research question for this study was: What is the process by which a suburban, East Coast, middle school designed and implemented Tier 1 Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies in their classrooms and what perceived impact have these strategies had on improving the literacy skills and access to content-specific knowledge for students? This research question was answered using data collected and analyzed from a descriptive, single case study of one middle school in Central Massachusetts. The findings showed that RtI is necessary for students who need extra support. Teachers felt the different aspects of the professional development they received highlighting RtI and the Workshop Model was both a positive and negative experience depending on the content area. Teachers and administrators believed there were benefits of the Workshop Model. The findings also demonstrated that literacy integration benefited all students and requires collaboration among teachers. Lastly, the findings showed that RtI required commitment from both teachers and administrators.
Keywords: Response to Intervention, literacy skills and literacy integration, formative assessment, Workshop Model
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Chapter One: Introduction

Middle-school teachers have the responsibility of teaching students specific content-area curriculum: mathematics, science, social studies, reading, and language arts. All too often, middle-school students sit in these classrooms as passive participants watching the clock tick away until they can escape. For many of these students, navigating the structure of the texts in the content area, which become longer and more complex as students proceed through the grades, becomes a daunting task, and they mask their confusion by displaying disinterest and “tuning out”. Under the best of circumstances, students’ lack of background knowledge about topics and vocabulary make accessing content area subjects very difficult. For the struggling learner this task is nearly impossible (Brozo, 2011).

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized. The reauthorization emphasized the need for instructional practices which focus on preventing academic failure to be implemented in general education classes throughout the nation. This general education initiative is referred to as Response to Intervention (RtI). The RtI framework is designed to increase instructional and behavioral support through an integrated three-tiered model of instruction, assessment, and intervention. RtI is a multi-tiered approach that provides high quality, standards-based core instruction at Tier 1, and evidence-based interventions to students at increasing levels of intensity and frequency at Tiers 2 and 3 (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2011; Brozo, 2011; & Howard, 2009). Tier 3 is the most intensive for students who fail to respond to quality Tier 1 core instruction and Tier 2 supplemental intervention (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp). Through universal screening, early identification of students at risk, and continuous progressive monitoring, students are provided with appropriate data-driven learning experiences.
**Problem of Practice**

When students enter middle school without the necessary literacy skills needed to access content area subjects, they are at risk of falling behind and disengaging both emotionally and academically (Brozo, 2011). In many cases, these students are not attaining proficiency levels on either state mandated or local level benchmarks. At the middle school level, research has shown that insufficient literacy skills have a negative impact on whether students do well in content area subjects (Brozo). This is true for all middle school students, not just the students who are struggling. Upon entering the middle school, students are expected to travel from one class to another, encountering a variety of teachers who have different teaching styles and expectations. Using an RtI approach that is unique to the middle-school environment and its philosophy may allow for all teachers to implement a shared approach and understanding of Tier 1 best literacy practices and interventions. Brozo states the literacy demands placed on students is overwhelming under the best of circumstances. For striving readers, content-area teachers must share the responsibility for engaging students in content-area learning. Brozo confirms that when students lack the foundational skills and strategies they need to be successful in school, the risk of failing and dropping out of high school is exacerbated.

In order to reach the goal of increasing middle-school students’ literacy skills, high quality instruction that develops deep, conceptual knowledge by using habits of reading, writing, talking, and thinking based on the specific discipline has to be integrated throughout the day (McConachie, et al., 2006). Many content-area teachers do not possess the skills needed to differentiate their instruction based on assessment data and employ the instructional methods in their classroom that have shown to be effective in increasing students’ reading and writing proficiency levels (Brozo & Fisher, 2010). Brozo and Fisher agree that teachers’ lack of
knowledge on how to differentiate their instruction contributes to their lack of self-efficacy and motivation, which may result in students’ lack of success in their content areas.

Much of the research stated above has been derived from studies of elementary practices. The RtI structure has been proven to address academic issues at the elementary level, but there are very few, if any, RtI models that would be deemed appropriate at the middle school level (Johnson & Smith, 2008). The International Reading Association (IRA) Commission (2009) warns districts against following the same approach to implementing RtI at the middle-school level as followed by the elementary schools. The achievement disparities among students become more apparent during the middle school years (Donlevy, 2007). Brozo (2011) suggests that RtI is possible, at the middle-school level, when a comprehensive literacy program is established for all students. Brozo claims the most important tier, in the RtI process, is Tier 1. This is especially true at the middle-school level, where more attention is given to content standards than literacy acquisition. Unfortunately, the way to address students’ literacy needs continues to be a challenge for educators due to the conflicting needs of middle school students to master content area and to develop literacy skills to access the content area.

Realizing that using an elementary RtI model in the middle school is not a realistic approach, this research aims to contribute to the gap in knowledge and literature surrounding RtI at the middle-school level. Identifying the instructional and assessment strategies used by Tier 1 content-area teachers to help students increase their literacy skills is one step in helping students find success in all aspects of their schooling, making them articulate and productive citizens of the 21st Century. This case study focused on describing the process by which a suburban, East Coast, middle school designed and implemented Tier 1 RtI strategies and how teachers
integrated literacy strategies into their classrooms in order to help students access the content area.

**Significance of Research Problem**

Reading success is the foundation on which knowledge, self-esteem, and future educational opportunities are realized. Research has proven that students who do not achieve literacy skills at an early age are destined for failure both educationally and economically (Slavin, Karweit, & Wasik, 1992). Clay (2002) confirms that struggling first-grade readers will be struggling middle-school readers. Students with low literacy levels drop out of high school at higher rates than the general population. The dropout rate for this group was estimated at 31.6 percent as compared to 9.4 percent for students with no disabilities (U. S. Dept. of Education, 2007c). Other undesirable outcomes have more to do with personal and social consequences, such as low self-esteem, alienation, and antisocial behavior, including criminal activity.

The district in which the research was conducted has subgroups of students that include low-income, Title 1, special education, and English language learners. For many of these students, the achievement gap, which Murphy (2010) refers to as “patterned differences in learning and attainment outcomes between groups of students,” (p. 9) has followed them throughout their schooling and needs to be closed at the middle-school level or it will continue to widen and could result in students dropping out of high school and not finding competitive employment that will enable them to succeed in the workforce (Altieri, 2011). Altieri also argues that educators need to help students acquire literacy skills in order to apply their knowledge beyond the classroom walls. If these skills are not fluent for adolescent students, all but the most advanced students are placed at a disadvantage (Meltzer, 2001).
This research is intended to help the district understand the role literacy acquisition will have on students, families, and the community. It is crucial for the district to address the literacy needs of all its subgroups. Failing to narrow the achievement gap will leave a population of underachieving students and will make it difficult for those students to enroll in colleges or to attain employment leading to productive lives contributing to the community and society. This could also result in a strain on government assistance programs throughout the state, with more citizens needing financial assistance in order to live. By addressing literacy integration and RtI instructional strategies in the Tier 1 classroom, teachers have an opportunity to give students the tools they need to be successful in their academics. Literacy acquisition will enable students to learn how to communicate in all aspects of their lives (Meltzer, 2001). Meltzer posits that strong literacy skills are vital to adolescents “so they can understand academic content, communicate in a credible way, participate in cultural communities, and negotiate the world” (p. 1).

The No Child Let Behind Act (NCLB) mandates all students must reach Adequate Yearly Performance (AYP) targets. Although the requirements of NCLB have been waived in many states, including Massachusetts, state assessment and student progress towards proficiency is still the reality. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) verifies the relationship between reading scores and overall grade-point average (Brozo, 2011). Schools are under pressure to meet these mandates even though the possibility for students with low literacy and disabilities to meet reading benchmark scores on standardized assessment is daunting.

Although instruction in decoding and fluency is important for struggling readers at the elementary level, adolescent literacy development should focus on developing students’ comprehension skills. Brozo (2011) states that helping students become proficient learners in the content area “takes more than the efforts of the reading teacher” (p. 57). “Every adult with whom
striving readers interact during the school day shares responsibility for building positive relationships with them . . . and leavening their literacy skills” (p. 57). Ehren (2008) states that when middle-school teachers focus on proficiency in the many tenets of literacy, they are able to help middle-school students access content which helps avoid the possibility of global school failure.

**Research Central Question**

The overarching research question for this study was: *What is the process by which a suburban, East Coast, middle school designed and implemented Tier 1 Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies into their classrooms and what perceived impact have these strategies had on improving the literacy skills and access to content specific knowledge for students?*

**Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the ways in which teachers at the middle school integrated literacy and best instructional practices in the Tier 1 classroom. In order to better understand and further investigate how middle schools can better meet the literacy needs of students, this study drew on the theory of formative assessment. There is a plethora of information documenting the use of formative assessment as a way to improve students’ outcomes (Black & Wiliam, 1998, 2001, 2009; Moss & Bookhart, 2011, 2012; Tovani, 2011). Formative assessment theory is rooted in the research of seminal authors, Black and Wiliam (1998) who defined formative assessment as “all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p. 7).

Black and Wiliam (1998) maintain that teaching and learning have to be interactive and that teachers need to adjust their instruction to meet the needs of all their students. Realizing that
not all students acquire knowledge and understanding at the same time, formative assessment is critical in determining when to differentiate instruction for students (Tomlinson, 2008). Tomlinson states that, by informally assessing students, teachers can ensure the focus on student positives, not just student negatives, and are able to recognize that some students require different instruction to move forward in their learning. Tomlinson further articulates “informative assessment is not an end in itself, but the beginning of better instruction” (p. 13).

Wiliam and Black (1998) use the image of a “black box” to emphasize formative assessment as the “heart of effective teaching” and further explain that certain demands from outside sources, such as administration, parents, rules, and mandated testing are fed into the “black box” with the hope of “positive outputs such as proficient students and high test scores” (Wiliam & Black, 2001, p. 1). By using the formative assessment theory, the researcher will be able to focus on the inside of the “black box” in order to understand how formative assessment contributes to students’ acquisition of literacy skills in the Tier 1 classroom.

The studies conducted by Black and Wiliam (2001) showed that formative assessment results in significant learning gains for students. In order to be used to inform instruction, assessment needs to allow teachers to adjust their instruction and provide students with descriptive and actionable feedback. Descriptive and actionable feedback works in tandem with formative assessment. During and after instruction, teachers are able to counter any misconceptions students have and offer students explicit suggestions and learning opportunities that will enable them to achieve their learning targets. This component of the formative assessment will inform the researcher about the relationship between the teacher and the student by the response from the student to the teacher giving the feedback. The researcher
acknowledges that feedback can be difficult to give and difficult for students to hear and may not result in what the teacher intended.

Undeniably, descriptive and actionable feedback, as an aspect of formative assessment, is vital, and some teachers may need to improve the way they offer students feedback and also let students know their responsibility in providing feedback regarding the learning process to the teacher (Landrigan & Mulligan, 2013). Through classroom observations, the researcher was able to further understand the effectiveness of formative assessment.

Within the classroom setting, students work with teachers and other students with a greater expertise to develop knowledge. This practice helps students improve their metacognitive skills, which enable them to regulate their own learning. Because this is done in the social setting of a classroom, the connection between formative assessment and the socio-cultural theory is clear. Although the researcher will not rely on socio-cultural theory as the prime theoretical framework for the study, the researcher understands the importance of students being actively involved in their learning and constructing knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) has been used by formative assessment theorists to understand students’ gaps in knowledge relative to their learning target (Trumbull & Lash, 2013). The socio-cultural theory does not closely align to this research in that the focus of this research is more on the instructional practices teachers use in the classroom and less on the students’ abilities to construct knowledge.

The formative assessment theory assisted the researcher’s investigation of how literacy integration in the middle school’s content-area classrooms allow students to succeed in mastering the content standards by identifying the instructional strategies that are used in the Tier 1 classroom. This theory addresses the need for both teachers and students to take responsibility
for the learning that goes on in the classroom. It also emphasizes the importance of teachers adjusting their instruction and providing descriptive feedback in order to address students’ misconceptions during the learning time. By doing this, students are able to adjust their thinking for better understanding.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

As students enter middle schools across the country, many of them lack the literacy skills needed to access content-area knowledge. As a result, some middle-school students are falling further behind and disengaging both emotionally and academically. In many cases, these students are not attaining proficiency levels on either state mandated or local-level assessments. At the middle-school level, research has shown that insufficient literacy skills have a negative impact on whether students do well in content-area subjects. This is true for all middle-school students, not just the students who are struggling. Furthermore, when students lack the foundational skills and strategies they need to be successful in school, the risk of failing and dropping out of high school is exacerbated.

Upon entering the middle school, students are expected to travel from one class to another, encountering a variety of teachers who have different teaching styles and expectations. For striving readers, content-area teachers must share the responsibility for engaging students in content-area learning. Using an RtI approach that is unique to the middle school environment and its philosophy can provide a rationale for having all teachers implementing a shared approach and understanding of best literacy practices and interventions. However, much of the research on RtI has been derived from studies of elementary practices (Brozo, 2011). This gap in research leaves the middle-school educators perplexed as to how to implement effective RtI strategies in their classrooms.

Due to the unique needs of the adolescent student who attends middle school, the same RtI practices that are used in an elementary setting do not necessarily transfer to a middle-school setting. Students in elementary school, especially in kindergarten through grade two, focus on how to decode words and fluency: they are learning to read. Intermediate students, which include
middle-school students, are expected to be sophisticated readers and focus on content: they are reading to learn (Tovani, 2011). Tier 1 RtI strategies and interventions have been successful in improving literacy skills at the elementary level; however, there is a lack of knowledge and experience related to the use of Tier 1 interventions and strategies in the middle-school classrooms.

To inform this research, three separate bodies of literature were reviewed. The first section of this literature review investigated the history of RtI and its connection to special education. This part of the literature review also examined the complex nature of the adolescent learner who attends middle school. The second part of this literature review examined literacy in the content area highlighting strategies and obstacles that teachers encounter. Finally, the instructional components within the Workshop Model are discussed as ways in which teachers can structure their teaching in order to address students’ instructional needs.

**Response to Intervention**

**History and special education connection.** The RtI initiative emerged from the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004. For many years, constituents, including parents, educators, and policymakers, called for changes in the way students were being identified with specific learning disabilities (Wixson & Lipson, 2012). The reauthorization of IDEA emphasized the need for instructional practices which focused on preventing reading failure to be implemented in general education classes throughout the nation.

Under the new IDEA provisions, states do not have to use the once required discrepancy model (achievement in comparison to IQ) in determining eligibility for special education services. Instead of the discrepancy model, schools may use a process that determines how students respond to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation (Wixson &
Lipson, 2012). This process is known as the RtI model. RtI looks at learning disabilities from two perspectives: (a) preventing students from being labeled as having disabilities when the challenges they face in the classroom could be resolved by different or more intense instruction and (b) providing an alternative for identifying students who need “specialized instruction” (Ehren, 2013). Students who continue to have difficulties even after receiving evidence-based instruction and supplemental Tier 2 and Tier 3 services may have learning disabilities and could be tested to determine special education eligibility.

The tiers of response to intervention. The intent of RtI is to ensure that all students have the resources and instruction necessary to reach their full potential. The RtI model is designed to increase instructional support through an integrated three or four tiered model of instruction, assessment, and intervention (Brozo, 2011; Casbarro, 2008; & Howard, 2009). RtI is a multi-tiered approach that provides high quality, standards-based core instruction at Tier 1, and evidence-based interventions to students at increasing levels of intensity and frequency at Tiers 2 and 3. The state regulations require that all students are instructed appropriately in the general education environment by highly-qualified teachers. Before determining whether the student should participate in Tier 2 (supplemental) or Tier 3 (more intensive) interventions, priority must be given to improve the quality of Tier 1 (core instruction) (Brozo, 2011). Simply put, “Students get what they need, when they need it for as long as they need it” (Ehren, 2013, p. 451). Through universal screening, early identification of students at risk, and continuous progress monitoring, students are provided with appropriate data-driven learning experiences.

The instruction that all regular education students receive in their classroom is referred to as Tier 1 instruction. Tier 1 instruction should be successful with 80-90% of students (Casbarro, 2008). The assumption is that all students in the Tier 1 classroom have knowledgeable and
highly qualified teachers who differentiate their instruction based on students’ needs as determined by both formative and summative assessments. This instructional approach is both preventive and proactive. When a student begins to show inconsistencies in their academic performance, classroom teachers may request the help of the school’s problem-solving team. This team usually consists of a reading teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist, the classroom teacher, and an administrator. The team meets to determine which scientifically-valid interventions should be implemented and who will provide the intervention services (Casbarro). This part of the RtI model is known as Tier 2.

The requirement of any RtI intervention is that it is supplemental to Tier 1, scientifically valid, implemented with fidelity, and monitored for student progress (Howard, 2009). Eligible students receive Tier 2 interventions between three and five times a week for twenty to thirty minutes each session. Only 5-10% of the student population should be in need of Tier 2 interventions (Casbarro, 2008). The person providing Tier 2 intervention is usually a reading specialist or math specialist, depending on students’ needs. For students who experience problems in content areas other than reading and mathematics the lack of reading and other literacy skills are usually the contributing factors in their misconceptions (Brozo, 2011). During Tier 2 intervention sessions, students are provided with predetermined and specifically-designed interventions that target a specific need. Ideally, the classroom teacher and interventionist collaborate and share information in order to support the work done by the interventionist (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). During the six-week intervention period, the student’s progress is monitored using various assessment tools. After approximately six weeks, the team meets again to determine if the Tier 2 interventions should continue, or, if students have made significant progress, they no longer need Tier 2 intervention (Howard). The other option is to decide if
students need to receive Tier 3 intervention, which would be more individualized or administered within a much smaller size group (Casbarro, 2008; Howard, 2009).

The 1-5% of students who require Tier 3 interventions receive much more intense instruction either individually or in a small group of two to three students (Casbarro, 2008). Howard (2009) asserts that everything students receive in Tier 2 is also important to receive in Tier 3, just in higher doses. Students in Tier 3 meet with the interventionist in addition to receiving Tier 1 core instruction, and, in some cases, they continue to receive Tier 2 interventions while they receive Tier 3 interventions. Their progress is monitored on a weekly basis and possibly on a daily basis through formative assessment opportunities. At the end of a predetermined time, usually six to eight weeks, the team meets again to review the student’s progress based on the intervention data (Howard). At that time, if the student has made progress, the team discusses whether the student will continue with Tier 3 interventions or if the student is able to receive solely Tier 1 instruction, or, more appropriately, will the student receive Tier 2 interventions until he has met grade level benchmarks (Howard). If the student has not made progress in the Tier 3 setting after readjusting the instruction and delivery based on assessment data, the student may be referred for a special education evaluation to determine eligibility for a specific learning disability. Howard confirms that if a child is determined to need special education services, Tier 3 provides a safety net until the student is formally placed into special education. At that time, the tiered instructional data is part of the assessment data.

**Literacy in the Content Area**

The arrival of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governor’s Association Center, 2010) has put the need for disciplinary literacy on the front burner. Disciplinary literacy refers to the teaching of reading and writing in social studies, history,
science, and the technical subjects. The CCSS make the distinction between what was expected of content-area teachers in the past: incorporating reading and writing across the curriculum, and what is expected of teachers now: focusing on the way each discipline uses reading, writing, language, and specialized ways of thinking, problem solving, and communicating (International Reading Association Common Core State Standards Committee, 2012). Richard Vacca (2012) states:

Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives.

Biancarosa (2012) acknowledges that the texts students read in each discipline are much more distinct from one another. The International Reading Association (IRA) suggests that content-area teachers collaborate with English language arts teachers and literacy professionals to plan and implement research-based, appropriate instruction. Furthermore, the IRA recommends content-area teachers be involved in professional development that highlights literacy practices in their disciplines. Brozo (2011) agrees with the need for professional development for content-area teachers in the ways to differentiate content-area instruction for all their students in order to diminish the need for Tiers 2 and 3 supports. The IRA acknowledges that, although the CCSS require all students to achieve mastery of the standards, the CCSS do not require that all students achieve mastery through the same type and amounts of instruction (International Reading Association Common Core State Standards Committee, 2012). The CCSS recognize that students learn at varying degrees and instruction needs to be adjusted and supplemented based on assessment data.
Science and literacy. Integrating literacy and science in the science curriculum has been advocated by literacy and science educators alike. Recent studies reflect the need for science education as part of the core curriculum to include an inquiry-based pedagogy in which literacy is used to help promote students’ understanding of science concepts (Washburn & Cavagnetto, 2013). Literacy includes the language-based activities of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Even though these components of literacy are necessary in all content areas, *A Framework for K-12 Science Education* (2011) supports the argument that language is paramount in science learning. Science learning is situated in social contexts where language aids students in constructing meaning by communicating inquiries, procedures, and understandings to their peers (Washburn & Cavagnetto, 2013). Norris and Phillips (2003) claim that being scientifically literate is not just the ability to read science textbooks and understand scientific vocabulary, rather it is the ability to comprehend, interpret, analyze, and critique texts while engaging in the discourse of science.

In order for students to engage in science discourse, they need to be able to formulate their thinking. Because writing is thinking, many science teachers ask students to *power write*, which is the process of allowing students to put ideas down on paper quickly and accurately (Fisher & Frey, 2013). Fisher and Frey contend that power writes enable students to build their writing fluency and thinking fluency about a specific topic of study and share their thinking with their classmates. By writing about content first, students are able to organize their thinking, which results in better communication. It also gives teachers a way to formatively assess students’ knowledge about a given topic.

In addition to writing, students’ ability to read and comprehend science texts is also at the forefront of science educators’ concerns. Science texts are laden with complex information,
features, and vocabulary that many students, not only underperforming students, find difficult to navigate. The CCSS require teachers to support students as they closely read informational texts and this has many educators baffled. Students are expected to become the primary investigators of a text’s meaning by analyzing and unfolding all the components and meanings of the text. Because reading is considered an important aspect of science inquiry, it is vital that the science teacher knows how to help students apply their prior knowledge to support and integrate new text information (Lapp, Grant, Moss, & Johnson, 2013). Often times this requires multiple readings of the text that engages the reader in first answering pre-established, text-dependent questions, annotating the text, highlighting main ideas, and circling vocabulary words that they do not understand (Lapp et al.). Then, students are expected to read the text for a second time focusing on key vocabulary and answering more involved text-dependent questions. Additionally, students are expected to discuss the reading with a partner or small group of students. Each reading is dependent upon the prior reading and the knowledge that students attained during the close reading exercise. The final reading usually results in students demonstrating their understanding by synthesizing what they learned completing a real-world task (Lapp et al.).

The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS, 2013) Appendix M, support the importance of literacy skills in science. The NGSS and CCSS worked together to ensure that vital content demands in the NGSS were identified and connections to literacy concepts were included. Both standards acknowledge that there are specific demands in the science standards that have to be met and need to include all the components of literacy: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Students are expected to pay close attention to detail and understand and convey their understanding of diagrams and data presented in multiple ways (NGSS). The NGSS
include the literacy expectations of the CCSS and connects the CCSS to science practices, so that teachers do not have to guess how to include literacy in their science classrooms.

**Social studies and literacy.** Chris Tovani (2000) explains that students do not mechanically know how to deal with rigorous secondary textbooks just because they left elementary school. This claim is grossly apparent when students are asked to interact with their social studies textbook and other social studies reading material. The National Council of Social Studies (NCSS, 1993) states that “The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (p. 213). This is no easy task for teachers of social studies. Doty, Cameron, and Barton (2003) remind educators that, more than any other discipline, social studies aims to help students become strategic thinkers who will contribute to society by making well-informed decisions. Students need to be able to read so they can make connections to the real world. Some social studies teachers do not have the self-efficacy to teach reading in their discipline and they are also under the impression that reading should be a skill that students mastered in elementary school (Doty, Cameron, and Barton). In order to have a positive impact on student learning in the social studies classroom, teachers need to explicitly teach and model for students the ways to monitor their thinking as they navigate their social studies textbooks (Doty, Cameron, & Barton). Students need to learn the reading strategies that help them become better readers and apply the strategies that help them comprehend when they are confused reading the text (Doty, Cameron, & Barton).

Social studies teachers need to teach reading as a tool for thinking and learning. Students must be able to construct meaning from the text by interacting with the text: making connections using prior experiences and knowledge and making hypotheses (Doty, Cameron, & Barton,
2003). Students enter social studies classrooms with varying degrees of schema or prior knowledge regarding any given topic. In order for students to be on level ground with their classmates, the teacher needs to help activate students’ prior knowledge. By doing this, students understand the relevance of what they are learning and activating prior knowledge allows the teacher to link new information to what students already know.

Activating prior knowledge can be done a number of ways using pre-reading strategies. One of the ways to activate prior knowledge is for students to brainstorm what they know as a whole class, in small groups, or with a partner (Tovani, 2004). Teachers could also work with students as they preview a text and show students how to generate questions based on what they previewed. This enables students to set a purpose for reading; they want to find the answers to their questions. By understanding what students do and do not know, social studies teachers can make their instruction more purposeful and set realistic targets for their students (Altieri, 2011).

Undoubtedly, the reading and writing connection is paramount in helping students understand social studies content. In social studies, the expectation from the state is that students will write to assert and defend their claims (National Governors Association Center, 2010). This helps students demonstrate their level of knowledge and conveys what they have experienced, learned, and thought about regarding any given topic. In order to meet these requirements, students need to devote time and effort to writing throughout the year. The CCSS require middle-school students to use three different modes of writing to convey their understanding: narrative, expository, and opinion/argumentative (Altieri, 2011). In social studies, narrative writing communicates to the reader experiences using chronological sequencing. This is important when students are writing about a series of events in history. Information or expository writing is needed in order to allow students to demonstrate their knowledge of a specific topic with the
intent of giving the reader information about that topic. Lastly, opinion and argumentative writing is a mode of writing that is used to assert the student’s opinions and claims on the reader and attempts to convince the reader to change his point of view on a topic (Doty, Cameron, & Barton, 2003). Although all these modes are vital for students to experience, opinion and argumentative writing is what helps students become strategic thinkers and problem solvers which, in turn, results in helping them become well-informed decision makers who are capable of contributing positively to our democratic society (Doty, Cameron, & Barton).

Math and literacy. Reading, writing, and talking about mathematics are ways in which students make connections to other subjects and real life (Friedland & McMillen, 2010). The same strategies that pertain to reading comprehension also pertain to mathematical thinking. Tovani (2004) explains that although many teachers of math do not consider themselves good readers, they are, in fact, very good readers of math. Tovani acknowledges that math teachers just have a different process for reading texts. Reading strategies such as activating prior knowledge and building schema serve students well when they are related to mathematical concepts. The ability to monitor their own understanding and stop and ask questions is vital to students’ success in mathematics (Tovani). Teachers need to be able to stimulate their students’ awareness of their own thinking and how to monitor their thinking. By doing so, students will become better mathematical problem solvers (Hyde, 2006).

Most mathematics teachers use the word wall as a way to address literacy needs in their classrooms. Although this is a beginning, teachers need to be versed in a wide range of literacy strategies that they can employ with their students (Friedland & McMillen, 2010). According to the study designed by Friedland and McMillan, when asked what role literacy strategies played in their instruction, math teachers replied with varying comments that centered
around literacy strategies being used to help students understand, explain, and learn information. These teachers of mathematics did not mention that literacy strategies would also help students uncover what they were thinking and monitor their progress in understanding the content material. Most teachers reported using strategies such as *graphic organizers* that focus on vocabulary, *journal writing*, *concept definition mapping*, and *learning logs*. The study confirms that mathematic teachers are not completely comfortable integrating literacy strategies with their mathematics’ instruction. Friedland and McMillan further conclude that the content-area literacy workshops that teachers were given as professional development or courses they had in their pre-service experience missed the mark because they did not promote the consistent integration of literacy strategies with mathematics. Instead, the literacy strategies were used in isolation.

**Effective Instructional Practices**

**Workshop model.** Within the RtI workshop model, effective instructional practices take place (Tovani, 2011). The RtI workshop model has basically five components: anticipatory set, review of learning target, mini-lesson, practice, both guided and independent, and the debrief (M. Rulon, personal communication, October, 2011). The workshop model splits the total classroom period into chunks of time where teachers are able to assess their students and immediately address their needs (Tovani). If working in a school where the periods are fifty minutes in length, the workshop model would look similar to this (M. Rulon):

- During the five-minute anticipatory set, teachers begin the period by activating students’ prior knowledge about the concept being studied. This is also a time when teachers can motivate and engage students or review homework.
- The next five minutes of class are devoted to sharing the learning target(s) or the essential questions for the lesson.
During the ten to fifteen minute mini lesson, the teacher models and provides direct instruction for the whole class. This is the time when the teacher is recognized as the more knowledgeable other (MKO) and is able to give direct instruction to the class so students can work towards achieving the goal of the lesson (Vygotsky, 1978).

The next twenty to twenty-five minutes of class time are spent with students working. They can work independently, in groups, or in pairs. When working in pairs and groups, the teacher puts students together where at least one of the students is working at a higher level and is able to help the other students achieve the learning target of the lesson (Miller, 2011). While students are working, teachers are assessing student work. During this time, teachers confer, prompt, offer feedback, encourage, and may take small groups to provide intervention by differentiating their instruction (Miller, 2011; Tovani, 2011). Teachers provide students with the scaffolding and support they need while helping them build stamina by having them engage in critical thinking (Tovani). The teacher may also use the “catch-and-release” model with the whole class to address any confusion students have (Tovani, 2011, p. 41).

The last five minutes of the period are spent debriefing, with students reflecting on the learning that took place and whether or not they reached the learning target.

The Workshop Model allows students to practice what they have been taught while being supported by an expert: the classroom teacher. If students work for the majority of the period, the time they spend practicing adds up and eventually expands their knowledge and increases their skills (Tovani).

**Learning targets.** If educators want students to be motivated and intentional learners, then we must share with them the expectations for each lesson (Moss & Brookhart, 2012).
Students need to know what teachers want them to master, in their specific content area, on a specific day. Learning targets enable students and teachers to share the responsibility for student learning by making students aware of what they are supposed to be learning (Moss & Brookhart). Moss and Brookhart assert that lack of literacy skills, including reading and writing, should not interfere with students learning the concept, so the importance of students entering middle school with grade-level literacy skills is paramount.

Moss & Brookhart (2012) explain that the research done on learning targets discriminates between learning targets and instructional objectives. Instructional objectives are written from the teacher’s point of view and are derived from a set of content standards. A learning target is geared towards the students’ point of view and allows students to understand each lesson’s purpose. Learning targets are translated into developmentally-appropriate, student-friendly, and culturally-respectful language (Moss, Brookhart, & Long, 2011). Learning targets are introduced at the beginning of the lesson and shared throughout the lesson so students can gauge their own learning and make adjustments to their learning. Most learning targets begin with an “I can” statement or the phrase “We are learning to” that describe the lesson’s intention (Moss & Brookhart). By introducing learning targets to students, they are able to make decisions about their learning and take responsibility for the steps needed for mastery of certain content. The research done by Marzano (2003) supports the idea that students who know their learning targets significantly outscore those students who are unable to identify their learning targets.

Learning targets can be presented in different forms as long as students easily understand them (Moss, Brookhart, & Long, 2011). When the teacher introduces the lesson, she should explain how each task involved in the lesson will help students achieve the learning target. Additionally, the teacher needs to share with the students the criteria for success (Moss,
In order for students to be successful, teachers should model, with concrete examples, what success in a lesson looks like. Moss, Brookhart, and Long offer that some teachers also share the rubrics by which students’ success will be measured and allow students to examine work samples of various quality and discuss the differences in quality among the samples.

Moss & Brookhart (2012) explain that students become active learners when they are guided by learning targets. They are able to set goals for what they need to accomplish before the end of the lesson because they are monitoring and assessing their own learning. During a lesson, students are able to examine where they are in the lesson and where they need to go while choosing the most effective strategies that will help them achieve their goals. Teachers use the learning targets to inform their decisions about how and when to differentiate instruction to challenge, intervene, and engage all students (Moss & Brookhart). This system of assessing students while they are learning results in shared ownership of learning.

**Formative assessments.** There are many descriptions of what formative assessment is and what it looks like in the classroom, but the most common quoted definition comes from Black and Wiliam (1998). Black and Wiliam state that formative assessment refers to “all those activities undertaken by teachers, and by the students in assessing themselves, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p. 7). It is important to note that formative assessment, which includes descriptive and actionable feedback, takes place during the lesson while students are learning. Hattie and Timperley (2007) assert that effective feedback that is included as part of the lesson has been proven to consistently raise student achievement scores more than any other teaching behavior.
Assessing students at the end of a unit, known as summative assessment, is less useful to both teacher and student than assessments that occur during a unit of study (Black & Wiliam, 1998). If teachers wait to assess students until after completing a unit, many students have already disengaged because they are completely confused by the information they received or because they already know the information and are completely bored and unmotivated (Black & Wiliam). It is how we use the assessment data, whether formative or summative, that results in student achievement. By assessing students during the lesson, teachers are able to identify their students and differentiate for them more efficiently than if they waited. Formatively assessing students addresses all learners: students who are falling behind and students who already know the material (Tovani, 2011). Chris Tovani (2011) helps ease teachers’ fears when she states, “My hope is that teachers will recognize that many of the tools they already use, when given a slight tweak, . . . will inform instruction and improve achievement” (p. 2).

In many classrooms where assessment is used to support learning the difference between instruction and assessment is not easy to discriminate (Leahy, Lyon, Thompson, & Dylan, 2005). Everything that takes place during the lesson - such as group discussions, seatwork assignments, working on projects, handing in homework assignments, and even observing students listening with blank stares - are considered great assessments for determining how students are doing in relation to the learning target (Leahy et al, 2005). One way to think of formative assessment is to think of it as practice. Students are not held accountable, by grades, for practicing newly introduced concepts. Students need multiple attempts and ways in which to practice and monitor their learning. Some ways include exit slips or tickets to leave that teachers use at the end of class to determine students’ understanding of the day’s lesson. A quick check for understanding during class, such as thumbs up, thumbs down will also help monitor students’ learning (Leahy et al.,
2005). Basically, any work samples that students practice during the lesson, whether independently or in a group, can be used as formative assessments. Once the teacher throws these samples into the trash or the file cabinet, they are no longer formative assessments (Leahy et al., 2005).

Students are also expected to be involved in assessing their own learning and as resources to their peers (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). One way of engaging students in assessing their own learning is by providing them with descriptive and actionable feedback as part of the formative assessment cycle. Research has shown descriptive feedback to be the most successful instructional strategy to move students forward in their learning, especially when given in a clear and positive way (Black & Wiliam, 1998). When students are given descriptive and actionable feedback, they know how to reach the next step in their learning trajectory (Garrison & Ehringhaus). There have been studies done on how to deliver feedback to students. Teachers need to consider when to give feedback, how much feedback to give, and which mode (written, verbal, or demonstrative) of feedback to give to students (Garrison & Ehringhaus). Garrison and Ehringhaus suggest that teachers put themselves in the student’s place. When do you think you, as the student, would want to hear feedback? Most of us would say while we were learning the material. When thinking about how much feedback to give students, teachers should not overload students. Depending on their developmental level, teachers should give students one or two pieces of information that will help the student in achieving their target (Brookhart, 2007). Garrison and Ehringhaus also suggest it is a good idea to commend the students for the work that they have done well, up to this point, reaching the target.

When deciding on the mode of delivering feedback, teachers should think about how to achieve the best results after delivering the feedback (Brookhart, 2007). Is it better to work with
students independently or in a small group? Brookhart states that during a writing lesson, conferring with individual students on a specific writing trait that will help move them forward in their writing is advisable, but if you notice that the majority of students need help in writing conventions then it makes more sense to give whole group feedback coupled with a mini-lesson on writing conventions. In the content areas, other than English language arts and reading, teachers want to be sure that they separate the literacy component and the content. When thinking about writing in the content area, Buell (as cited in Varlas, 2012) states, “Once they’ve mastered the content, then we can come back to the writing. If you do both at the same time, you and your students are going to drown” (p. 6).

We’ve all heard the phrase work smarter-not harder and that phrase is extremely relevant when talking about providing students with feedback (Fisher & Frey, 2012). Most teachers, especially those at the secondary level who have many more students than elementary teachers, agree that it is difficult to provide individual or face-to-face feedback to their students due to the time commitment, so they rely on written feedback (Fisher & Frey). Fisher and Frey explain that, unfortunately, written feedback does not help the students understand what they have to do next, and, more than likely, students either ignore the written feedback and just accept the grade, or they dutifully correct their mistakes and never apply that knowledge to their future work. To avoid this, Fisher and Frey suggest focusing on errors rather than on mistakes. Fischer and Frey make the distinction between the two by defining mistakes as something we do because of lack of attention versus errors as something we do because a lack of knowledge.

**Literature Review Conclusion**

In order to address the academic needs of middle-school students, educators need to integrate literacy and instructional strategies that will enable students to access content-area
material in the Tier 1 classroom. At the middle-school level, students are reading to learn versus learning to read, and they need help in integrating their reading, writing, speaking, and thinking skills so they will be able to conquer the complex demands of the textbooks and other content-area material they encounter in middle school and beyond (Biancarosa, 2012). For many middle-school students, learning to read complicated middle-school texts is difficult and inhibits their ability to read to learn. It is paramount that every teacher of middle-school students has the knowledge and skills to integrate literacy strategies and skills in their content area. The strategies that teachers use, including activating prior knowledge, definition mapping, questioning, and journal writing, help students gain the skills they will need as independent learners throughout their schooling and in their college and career experiences.

When teachers give students specific learning targets, their lack of literacy skills should not impede them from reaching that target (Moss & Brookhart, 2012). Educators need to be able to diversify their instruction and expected outputs based on the literacy skills the students in their classroom possess. In addition to allowing students to read text at various reading levels and varying the length of writing for students, teachers need to give students opportunities to work with their peers to problem solve and communicate their ideas effectively. While students are working independently, in small groups, and whole class, teachers should be assessing their progress or lack thereof to see if they need to adjust and differentiate their instruction so that all students will reach the learning target (Moss & Brookhart). As part of the assessing process, teachers should give students descriptive and actionable feedback in order to move them forward in their learning which has shown to raise student achievement (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007).

Looking through the lens of the formative assessment theory, the literature supports the connection between descriptive and actionable feedback and formative assessment that happens
during the guided practice section of the Workshop Model. Formative assessment allows teachers to adjust their instruction by providing students with explicit feedback during the classroom learning time. Grant Wiggins (2012) explains that formative assessment enhances the performance and achievement of students when teachers use lots of feedback. Wiggins also makes the connection between providing students with feedback as part of the formative assessment and learning targets. He states that feedback requires students to have a goal or learning target. Once students begin the process of trying to achieve the goal, the teacher needs to provide the students with information regarding their progress in achieving the goal.
Chapter Three: Research Design

Many middle-school students lack the literacy skills needed to access content-area knowledge. Tier 1 RtI strategies and interventions have been successful in improving literacy skills at the elementary level; however, there is a lack of knowledge and experience related to the use of Tier 1 interventions and strategies in the middle-school classrooms (Brozo, 2011). Therefore, this study investigated the design and implementation of Tier 1, RtI interventions and strategies in a middle school and the perceptions of teachers and administrators as to the impact these interventions and strategies had on literacy skill acquisition, and, by extension, student access to content specific knowledge.

At the middle-school level, research has shown that insufficient literacy skills have a negative impact on whether students do well in content-area subjects (Brozo, 2011). This is true for all middle-school students, not just the students who are struggling. Upon entering the middle school, students are expected to travel from one class to another encountering a variety of teachers who have different teaching styles and expectations. Brozo states that the literacy demands placed on students is overwhelming under the best of circumstances. For striving readers, content-area teachers must share the responsibility for engaging students in content-area learning. Furthermore, when students lack the foundational skills and strategies they need to be successful in school, the risk of failing and dropping out of high school is exacerbated.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this descriptive, single case study was to describe the process by which teachers in a suburban, East Coast, middle school, which houses approximately 950 students in grades five through seven, designed and implemented Tier 1 RtI strategies into their classrooms. These strategies included helping students acquire the literacy skills necessary to find success in
all content areas. McConachie et al., (2006) assert that to develop the complex knowledge
students need in all content areas, they need opportunities to read, reason, investigate, speak, and
write about concepts within that discipline. This study also attempted to identify the perceptions
teachers had about their ability to teach literacy skills and strategies in their content area. The
process included professional development training on the Workshop Model, within the RtI
structure, for a select group of team leaders and classroom teachers and the implementation of
those skills and interventions into a sub-set of six classrooms where teachers received the
professional development, from its inception, in the district.

Research Question

The overarching research question for this study was: What is the process by which a
suburban, East Coast, middle school designed and implemented Tier 1 Response to Intervention
strategies into their classrooms and what perceived impact have these strategies had on
improving the literacy skills and access to content specific knowledge for students?

Goals

Intellectual goals. Maxwell (2005) discriminates between intellectual and practical
goals. He describes five intellectual goals that are suited to answering questions about qualitative
studies that allow the researcher and participants to gain an understanding of something. The
intellectual goals that this researcher was most interested in were the goals that seek to
understand the process that led to certain outcomes and the context in which each of the
participants acted (Maxwell, 2005). The intellectual goals of this research allowed teachers and
administrators to develop a deeper understanding of what literacy integration means in the
context of the school and individual classrooms and also comprehend the instructional practices
teachers who participated in the RtI professional development used in order to address their
students’ needs. In addition, the process in which literacy integration occurred in content area classrooms was also examined in this study. This study enabled the researcher to develop a deeper understanding of literacy integration at the middle-school level as it related to RtI, which will benefit not only teachers in the researcher’s district, but all teachers who are dealing with this problem. Also, the researcher’s findings will be shared with other professionals who have chosen to investigate RtI at the secondary level.

**Practical goals.** Maxwell (2005) explains that practical goals are focused on accomplishing a task or changing a situation. The researcher described the instructional practices Tier 1 classroom teachers used and how these teachers integrated literacy in their specific discipline areas.

**Positionality Statement**

My experiences as an elementary classroom teacher, middle-school reading specialist and language arts teacher, curriculum supervisor for English language arts and social studies, and Title I Director, have given me a complete understanding of the positive affect early acquisition of literacy skills can have on all students. As a practitioner, I noticed students entering the middle school lacked the necessary literacy skills needed to access content area subjects. As a result, some middle school students were falling further behind and disengaging both emotionally and academically. That reality left me with a greater concern for adolescent students who have not acquired the necessary literacy skills early in their schooling. In many cases, these students were not attaining proficiency levels on either state mandated or local level assessments.

Many of the adolescent students in the middle school, where I am employed, have tremendous difficulty comprehending the grade-level material presented to them by their content area teachers. The phenomenon of students at the middle-school level not having the literacy
skills needed to access content-area knowledge is something of which I have direct knowledge. Ten years ago, I was the seventh-grade Literacy Specialist at the middle school and saw first-hand the problems students had navigating their content-area textbooks. Although I spent the first semester teaching all students literacy strategies that would help them comprehend their textbooks, it was not enough to make a difference for the struggling learners. These students were falling further behind because so much of what they needed to master in the content area was dependent on the mastery of literacy skills in the content area. That reality, coupled with my belief that it is the teacher who makes a difference, not programs, textbooks, or cultural capital, created an undeniable bias for me toward the integration of literacy skills in all content areas within the framework of RtI.

As one of the curriculum supervisors who began the RtI initiative in the district seven years ago, I could not deny the bias that I brought to my research. I am a champion of the components of the RtI professional development that the district provided for teachers, especially at the middle school level. I recognized that my ultimate goal was to add to the body of literature in order to be a better teacher and to help middle-school teachers gain a better understanding of how they could incorporate literacy skills and the RtI components into their disciplines, which would ultimately make a difference in the lives of their students. Seeing where I was unable to separate myself from my biases, I needed to recognize and manage my biases so they would not corrupt the validity of my research. This was done by keeping reflective memos throughout the research process, and I also confirmed with teachers that, although I am currently the Title I Director in the district and once held a curriculum supervisor position where I was responsible for contributing to the evaluation process, I no longer hold that position and the Title I position
does not require me to evaluate teachers. Therefore, teachers should have felt comfortable with me observing them in their classrooms.

**Research Design**

The descriptive nature of this study called for a qualitative design that would tell the complete story of the RtI initiative that was implemented throughout the district in which the researcher is employed. A qualitative study was used to understand the attitudes, behaviors, and motivations people brought to a certain situation. Creswell (2009) notes, “a qualitative study is conducted in a natural setting” (p. 175). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) explain that when the researcher conducts the research in the work setting, it is referred to as backyard research. Being able to collect additional data by interviewing teachers and administrators is a critical component of qualitative research. Qualitative studies are considered emergent designs. Creswell warns that “the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data” (p. 176).

Maxwell (2005) explains that while developing a study, one of the most important decisions a researcher will make is the paradigm in which the work will be immersed. There are many different paradigms in qualitative research from which to choose, so it’s critical to choose an established paradigm that will allow the researcher to build on a “coherent and well-developed approach to the research” (Maxwell, p. 36). The researcher chose constructivism as the paradigm for this proposed study. Constructivism views knowledge as socially constructed by people who experience life and reflect on those life experiences. In order to construct knowledge one must continuously inquire, explore, assess, and be willing to change depending on the circumstances (Golafshani, 2003).
Schiro (2008) identifies constructivism as part of the learning theory and acknowledges that learning is a natural process that leads to the construction of knowledge and that individuals do not have to do anything other than interact within a stimulating environment to construct knowledge. Participants of the research encountered situations where they needed to construct meaning throughout the study. The open-ended questions and the triangulation of data allowed participants and the researcher to understand and reconcile the new information gleaned with previous ideas they held as truths.

**Research Tradition**

In order to capture all of the intricacies of the RtI initiative at the middle school, the researcher used case study as the tradition. Case studies are based on theory and the theoretical objectives (Yin, 1994). Theoretical objectives are constantly revisited in order to keep the focus of the study. When posing “how” or “why” questions, case studies are the preferred strategy (Yin). The benefit of a case study is that the researcher can extend the research that has already been addressed on a particular phenomenon. Yin (2009) asserts that there is a distinctive need for case studies when one desires to understand complex phenomena.

Yin (2009) warns that case study research can be very difficult, but by following systematic procedures and using the correct sources to collect evidence, the results of a case study will be invaluable to contributing to knowledge already present on the phenomenon being studied. When collecting data for case studies, the most popular sources used are documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2013). A good case study will use multiple sources in collecting data and not rely on a single source. The researcher relied on the expertise of Yin to understand the case study tradition
and also the works of Creswell (2009) and Maxwell (2005) to enhance the qualitative research design.

**Case Study**

This case study allowed the researcher to examine RtI in a middle-school setting where the focus was on improving students’ literacy skills in the Tier 1 classroom. The research was conducted in a suburban, East Coast, middle school, which housed approximately 950 students in grades five through seven with a total of 27% of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunch (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). Additionally, 15% of the students received reading intervention in a Tier 2 setting. The recommended percentage for students receiving Tier 2 reading intervention is between 5% and 10% (Casbarro, 2008). The data collected helped determine what instructional literacy strategies were used to help students achieve success in order to replicate those strategies in the Tier 2 intervention groups to help reading intervention students meet proficiency, so they no longer need Tier 2 services. These data also enabled teachers and administrators to identify the instructional strategies that were successful in helping students achieve their full potential and prepare them for their future in both college and the workplace, which is a goal of the CCSS (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy, 2011). Information gleaned from this case study could not only contribute to the researcher’s district, but possibly to districts throughout the country.

**Participants**

A total of six classroom teachers, from grades five through seven, were observed teaching in their classrooms. The six teachers who were observed, as well as two other teachers were interviewed. Data was collected from documents of student work gathered after the
researcher’s observations in the classrooms. These teachers were involved in the on-going professional development highlighting RtI instructional practices since its inception in 2011. Each grade level was divided into three clusters: red, white, and blue. Not all clusters at each grade level were represented because teachers who volunteered for the professional development did not embody each cluster.

A purposeful sampling was used to select teachers to participate in this qualitative study. Three fifth-grade classroom teachers, whose disciplines included reading and social studies, were purposefully selected to be part of this study. In addition to the fifth-grade classroom teachers, two sixth-grade classroom teachers, whose disciplines included science and reading, and one seventh-grade science classroom teacher were also purposefully selected for this study. Further selection included a sixth-grade special-education teacher and one English as a second language (ESL) teacher who is also the English language learner (ELL) director. These teachers were selected based on the fact that they received the original RtI professional development beginning in 2011.

In addition to teachers, administrators from the Central Office, including the superintendent of schools and the special education director, participated in this study by answering predetermined questions that focused on their perceptions as to the need for RtI professional development and how they supported the RtI initiative. Administrators from the middle school were also interviewed to comment on the perceived need for professional development in RtI and on the support they gave to the RtI initiative. Additionally, they were asked about their perceptions regarding the impact that the implementation of RtI had on improving the literacy skills of the middle-school students.
Recruitment and Access

The research was conducted at the middle school in which the researcher works as a fifth-grade language arts teacher. Permission for the research to take place at the middle school was requested from the superintendent of schools (Appendix A) and the building principal (Appendix B). The researcher sent a letter (Appendix C) in an email to the middle-school teachers who participated in the RtI professional development beginning in 2011. An informed consent form (Appendix D) was filled out by each participant in the study. Additionally, the researcher sent an email to all content-area teachers requesting them to participate in a paper survey (Appendix E). By turning the page onto the survey, teachers consented to participate in the study. The researcher assured participants that all data garnered from observations and interviews was confidential and that no individual would be linked to any specific statements in the final report.

Protection of Human Subjects

In order to provide the study participants with ethical protection, the research was conducted in an ethical manner. Merriam (2002) reminds researchers that there is a potential for ethical dilemmas to occur in qualitative research with either the collecting of data or the dissemination of data. This researcher provided all members of the study with as much ethical protection as possible. The participants of this study were purposely selected and the researcher took measures in order to provide all members with complete anonymity in the reporting of findings. All participants were notified of the intentions of the study and were required to provide written consent of their participation with the understanding that they could disengage from the study at any time without any consequence.

Participants were also given access to the findings and member checking was utilized so members of the study could verify and, if needed, clarify any misconceptions that the researcher
included in the findings. Participants were also ensured that findings would not affect their evaluations given by the district’s administration team.

**Data Collection**

The researcher used myriad sources of data for this study. One of the strengths of case study data collection is the use of various sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). Triangulation of data was employed in order to reduce the risk of bias or limitations (Maxwell, 2005). In this study, interviews with individual teachers and administrators, observations of teachers and their classrooms, documents, and results of surveys were used as data sources. Creswell (2012) asserts that in qualitative research it is important to record information on protocols that are designed by the researcher to help the researcher organize information. The researcher relied on the expertise of Creswell when creating protocols.

**Interviews.** The interview protocols (Appendices F, G, and H) reminded the researcher of the intended questions and provided a means for recording notes. The form that was designed by the researcher included instructions for the interview, the questions that were asked of the participants, and enough space to take notes of the participants’ responses (Creswell, 2012). The teachers were asked questions that reflected their opinions and experiences on integrating literacy in their classrooms within the RtI structure. Creswell suggests that the researcher memorize the specific questions and the order of the questions so as not to lose eye contact with the interviewee. The protocol also included closing comments that reminded the researcher to thank the participants for their participation and assure them that their responses would be kept confidential. This component of the protocol also served to remind the researcher to ask participants if they had any other questions or needed further clarification on any aspects of the study (Creswell). Although questions were predetermined and memorized, the researcher
followed Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) responsive interviewing methods. The researcher understood that qualitative interviewing is dynamic and interviewees’ responses would illicit new ideas for in-depth questioning and reflection, which made the interview more conversational in nature (Rubin & Rubin).

**Interviewing administrators.** Prior to interviewing and observing teachers, the researcher interviewed administrators, using the interview protocol, during the school day. The interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes. The interviews took place in the administrators’ offices. Administrators included the superintendent of schools, the special education director, the ELL director, and the principal and assistant principal of the school in which the research took place.

**Interviewing teachers.** During interview sessions, the researcher took field notes using audiotapes to ensure participants’ responses were captured correctly. Interviews were conducted at the convenience of the teachers, either during their preparation period or after school, and lasted between fifty and sixty minutes. Yin (2009) asserts that the interview is one of the most significant sources in case studies. Teachers were able to choose where they wanted the interviews to be conducted, and they all chose to be interviewed in their classrooms, except for the special education teacher who was interviewed in the researcher’s classroom. Participants were provided with the survey and interview questions prior to the interview so they could prepare and organize their responses. The participants of the study were asked to include any prior experiences they had with RtI and integrating literacy in their content area. Although the researcher had specific questions to guide the conversation during the interviews, the interviews were fluid and conversational, which allowed the participants to offer any pertinent information
they deemed necessary. The researcher was sure to include these raw data in each finding (Merriam, 2002).

**Documents.** The researcher also collected data from documents in this study. Sample documents highlighting the minutes and agendas from meetings that were held throughout the school year were utilized to provide a history of the RtI implementation. Approximately 150 students consisting of all three grade levels and all three clusters participated in this study. Samples of student work and assignments collected during classroom observations were part of the documents collected and analyzed. Creswell (2012) reminded researchers that they must be sure the documents they obtain are credible and accurate. Researchers need to be explicit with participants about the documents they wish to acquire and be certain that the documents are useful to the study. Additionally, the researcher sent a survey, *The Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Strategies* (Appendix I), to all fifty content area teachers in the building to determine how many teachers used literacy strategies in their classrooms and which specific strategies they used.

**Observations.** In addition to interviews, observations in the teachers’ natural settings [the classrooms] were utilized as data sources for this research. The researcher observed classrooms one time for fifty minutes, in a non-participatory overt setting, where the components of RtI were embedded and the integration of literacy skills were apparent. Hoepfl (1997) asserts that observation results in deeper understandings than interviews alone because observations allow the researcher to see things that the participants of the study are not cognizant of, or are uncomfortable discussing with the observer. The observation protocol (Appendix J) was employed to take field notes ensuring the researcher had an organized way for recording data that was observed during each session. The researcher used the protocol to record the chronology
of events taking place during the lessons and also record verbatim quotes of both teachers and students. The protocol allowed the researcher to describe the activities of the classroom and reflect on any themes and personal insights garnered during the observation (Creswell, 2012).

The data collected from interviewing teachers and classroom observations provided first-hand knowledge of how Tier 1 RtI instructional strategies were utilized and how literacy skills were integrated throughout the lessons.

Reflective memos. In addition to coding the data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents, the researcher also coded reflective data in the form of analytic memos and observer’s comments written as field notes. Saldaña (2013) compares analytic memos to a researcher’s “journal entries or blogs” (p. 41). These memos invited the researcher to think and write critically about the participants and the process of the study. Saldaña reminds researchers to date and title each memo to keep track of the ever-changing research. Field notes are different than analytic memos in that they are personal and subjective responses to the researcher’s observations of the participants (Saldaña).

Data Storage

All data collected was stored on the researcher’s laptop that is password protected and brought home every night or placed in a locked file cabinet located in the researcher’s classroom that is secured with a lock. The only people who had access to the data were the participants of the study and the researcher. The participants were able to review their own data that was collected from interviews and observations. It is the researcher’s understanding that all data must be kept for a pre-determined amount of time after the study is completed. At that time, the researcher will comply with the institutional requirements for data destruction.
Data Analysis

As a result of the triangulated data collection, it was vital for the researcher to code and analyze the data in organized and succinct ways. Saldaña (2013) states, “coding is only the initial step toward an even more rigorous and evocative analysis . . . for a report” (p. 8). Multiple coding cycles allowed the researcher to link ideas together in order to generate themes by categorizing data that shared some of the same properties (Saldaña). While examining data that was collected, the researcher noticed themes and took notes, but Saldaña reminds researchers that during the initial cycles, there are exciting discoveries to be made which include participants’ emotions and values. The researcher hand coded all data as outlined by Saldaña.

Maxwell (2005) warns researchers that the task of analyzing data can be very difficult and letting the field notes and transcripts go unanalyzed for long periods of time could result in the researcher feeling discouraged and the work seem insurmountable. In order to avoid the above dilemma, the researcher collected, coded, and analyzed data simultaneously in order to make adjustments along the way and to assess the concepts and themes that emerged with the collection of data (Merriam, 2002).

There were multiple coding methods utilized during both the First and Second Cycles. Saldaña (2013) explains that the First Cycle methods are done at the onset of data analysis. During this cycle, the researcher employed open coding, also known as initial coding, which allowed the researcher to reflect on the nuances of the collected data and begin to compare and contrast the data. These methods dealt primarily with logging important information about the “data and demographic characteristics of the participants” (Saldaña, p. 69). The Second Cycle, in which axial coding was used, required more critical skills, specifically synthesizing, integrating, and conceptualizing (Saldaña). During this cycle, the researcher analyzed the data compiled from
the open coding process and developed more succinct codes. Using the First and Second Cycles methods, the researcher completed two phases of data analysis.

After the First and Second Cycles of coding, the researcher used the general inductive approach to data analysis pioneered by David R. Thomas (2006) from the University of Auckland. This process has been proven to provide a less complicated way to analyze qualitative data for research studies (Thomas). There were five main features that resulted from the coding using the general inductive approach: “category label, category description, data associated with the category, links and relationships, and the model or theory in which the category was embedded” (Thomas, p. 240). The researcher scrutinized each of these features in order to understand them and used the features appropriately in the study.

**Phase 1.**

*Documents.* The *Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Strategies in the Content Area* was analyzed. Teachers’ responses to the self-assessment were analyzed using descriptive statistics in order to interpret the data in a meaningful way. Each literacy strategy was analyzed to find the mode which revealed the literacy strategies that were used most often in the content area classrooms. The ways in which content area teachers integrated literacy skills into their classrooms were compared and contrasted. Also during this phase, the researcher analyzed the documents students completed during the observation lessons, which provided a holistic view of the literacy strategies content area teachers used in their classrooms.

**Phase 2.**

*Interviews and Observations.* Data from teachers’ and administrators’ responses to interview questions and observational field notes of teachers and students in the classroom
setting were examined. The data was coded for three distinct purposes: to describe, to analyze, and to interpret (Merriam, 2009).

The descriptive purpose allowed the researcher to examine the “big picture” of the study and to begin development of categories with the intention of telling a story. This was considered the First Cycle of coding. The researcher employed open coding as a way to describe the study’s setting, participant characteristics and demographics, time frame, and other components that helped tell the story (Saldaña, 2013).

*Interviews.* For the purpose of analysis, the researcher examined more closely the details of the data collected with the intent of finding relationships between categories. The researcher read interview transcripts and also listened to the audio of the interviews multiple times. This allowed a much closer look at the data, and, using axial coding, the open codes were closely examined to find relationships among them (Merriam, 2009). The researcher planned to use Rev.com, a professional transcribing service, to maximize the quality of the interviews, but instead, the researcher used a professional transcriber, who was recommended to her and to whom she paid for services. During the interpretive phase, the researcher consolidated all the data in order to ascertain an all encompassing view of the case study (Ellinger, Watkins, & Marsick, 2005). As part of the Second Cycle coding methods, the data was reorganized and reanalyzed (Saldaña, 2013). The process of selective coding included integrating all data from the axial and open codes in order to form interrelationships among categories (Creswell, 2012).

*Observations.* The researcher read observation field notes about the behaviors of the teachers and students and began open coding the data to develop relevant categories (Merriam, 2009). After the initial open coding, the notes were examined more critically using axial coding to try to find themes and additional categories among the data. The data was reorganized and
reanalyzed in order to synthesize and consolidate the data to get a more universal view of the study.

**Trustworthiness**

The researcher took steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative case study. Merriam (2002) acknowledges that using triangulation, member checks, and conducting all aspects of the research in an ethical manner would enhance the trustworthiness of the case study. The researcher recognized the fact that there could be bias to the study based on the researcher’s personal relationship with some participants of the study. The fifth-grade teachers, including the researcher, collaborated daily in the school where the study took place. The researcher also had opinions about the RtI initiative, especially being the district facilitator of the initiative, and felt strongly about literacy being integrated in all content areas. Merriam (2009) states that explaining and clarifying the researcher’s biases prior to beginning the study would allow stakeholders to understand how these biases could affect the study.

**Limitations**

Maxwell (2005) makes the distinction between internal and external generalizability. Internal generalizability refers to conclusions within the study’s setting that can be generalized, and external generalizability or transferability refers to conclusions that can be transferred to settings outside the study’s setting. The researcher acknowledged that the RtI initiative was organic in that the district created its own structure from research-based findings from many different sources. This fact could prove to result in limitations for other districts that are interested in replicating what was reported in the case study’s findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that transferability must be reexamined in every case and can only be judged
transferable by the recipient of the proposed transfer. By providing a rich, thick, description of
the study, the researcher believed transferability could be achieved.
Chapter IV: Research Findings

This descriptive case study was conducted to investigate and describe the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions that a select group of teachers and administrators had regarding the RtI initiative and professional development they were involved in beginning in 2011. Although the suburban, East Coast district, which is responsible for educating approximately 4200 students, began the RtI initiative in 2009, it was not until 2011 that the professional development began at the elementary and middle schools. The purpose of the research was to concentrate on one of the two middle schools, which houses approximately 950 students in grades five through seven, to describe the process by which teachers designed and implemented Tier 1 RtI strategies in their classrooms. The Tier 1 RtI strategies consisted of using the components of the Workshop Model. Additionally, the study also explored how the RtI strategies helped students acquire literacy skills in the content areas and which literacy strategies and skills teachers used to help their students access their content areas. This chapter summarizes the themes that emerged from the data analysis. A total of twelve interviews, including teachers and administrators, six teacher observations, and one literacy integration survey were conducted to accomplish the objectives of the study. Documents from student work also supported the findings.

There are two sections of this chapter. The first section provides information on the study site and the history of the RtI implementation beginning in 2009 and the format of the professional development that teachers received beginning in 2011. The second section of the chapter discusses the research questions answered during the interviews with teachers and administrators, classroom observations, survey results, and student documents. The overarching research question for this study was: What is the process by which a suburban, East Coast, middle school designed and implemented Tier 1 Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies into
their classrooms and what perceived impact have these strategies had on improving the literacy skills and access to content specific knowledge for students?

Study Site

The study took place in one of the two middle schools in the district. Of the approximately 920 students who attend the middle school, 67.1% are Caucasian, 2.7% are African American, 2.0% are Asian, 1.3% are Native American, 23.7% are Hispanic, and 3.2% are Multi-Race, Non-Hispanic (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016). The school has a Title I Targeted Assistance program where 27% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch based on the federal poverty guidelines. Selected populations also include 18.6% of students with disabilities and 7.6% of students are English language learners. There are a total of seventy-seven teachers at the school, with 99.0% of them being licensed in their teaching assignment (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016).

History of RtI Implementation

As the Reading/Language Arts/Social Studies district Curriculum Supervisor in 2009, the researcher and her counterpart, the Science/Math Curriculum Supervisor, were charged with implementing RtI in the district. At that time, the plan was to create a three-year design that would begin the RtI implementation starting at the elementary level the first year, the middle school the second year, and, finally, the high school level in year three. During the first year, teachers from the three elementary schools, who represented the various student populations, including special education students and English language learners, volunteered to meet after school to evaluate the current instructional and assessment practices, examine the Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions already in place at the elementary level, and create a vision statement around RtI.
The middle school principal also attended these meetings in order to plan for RtI implementation the following school year. A district RtI team was also set up which included administrators and teachers at all levels. During that time, consultants presented an overview of RtI for the entire district during a January in-service day, and the elementary school teachers were given a tool to help determine their schools’ readiness for RtI. The tool outlined six indicators, and teachers were asked to rate each indicator’s level of implementation. The indicators that were overwhelmingly rated low were “High Quality Curriculum and Instruction at Tier 1” and “Ongoing Professional Development”. These indicators were what determined the future of the RtI implementation at all levels.

At the end of the first year of implementation, the curriculum supervisors presented an overview to middle-school teachers of what was accomplished at the elementary schools with the intent of continuing the work at the middle school the following school year. In the fall of 2010, the middle-school team met and began the plan for RtI implementation at the middle school that received Title I funding. Although the middle-school team met throughout the year to discuss and understand the components of RtI and what was already in place at the middle-school level, it was decided that a different model of RtI had to be introduced that would also allow the middle schools to focus on instructional and assessment strategies used by content-area teachers to help students increase their literacy skills. The original plan lasted less than two years before beginning the focus of RtI on Tier 1 instruction and interventions.

With the implementation of the 2011 Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy and the Common Core State Standards, which included a literacy component in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects, literacy skills were recognized by the state as being the responsibility of all content area teachers (National
Governors Association Center, 2010). Because more attention was given to content standards than literacy acquisition at the middle-school level, administration recognized that this was an enormous undertaking for content-area teachers and agreed to the RtI professional development that would focus on giving teachers the tools they needed to attain the goal of developing their students’ literacy skills within the RtI structure. Brozo (2011) states “an effective RTI program for secondary literacy means middle and high school content-area teachers must possess the skill, will, and ability to meet the reading and learning needs of each of their students” (p. 17).

In 2011, the curriculum supervisors were introduced to an educator and consultant from the southwest who was helping school districts and students find success in that area of the country. After numerous phone meetings discussing the district’s RtI goals, it was decided to hire the consultant to present professional development on RtI and the Workshop Model beginning with the elementary and middle schools.

**Format of the Professional Development**

In the spring of 2011, the curriculum supervisors sent a memo to elementary and middle school teachers who taught in Title I schools announcing the hiring of a consultant to help the schools move forward with the RtI initiative. The memo asked teachers to become involved in the professional development that would allow teachers to work with grade-level teams to plan how to use assessment results to adjust instruction, interventions, and engage students in the Tier I classroom. Teachers were told they would receive a stipend for the time involved, which included afterschool and Saturday sessions, and they would also receive Professional Development Points (PDPs). Teachers were told they would be expected to pilot RtI in their classrooms using what they learned in the professional development sessions. The goals for the teams were also outlined: understand why progress monitoring is key to the RtI process, identify
the link between progress monitoring and formative assessment, understand the components of
the Workshop Model, distinguish between assessment for learning (formative) and assessment of
learning (summative), identify student-friendly learning targets and rubrics, and, finally, provide
descriptive and actionable feedback to students.

From the initial group of twenty teachers who became involved in the professional
development, four of the teachers became lead teachers. This became the model for teachers
teaching teachers. These four lead teachers met with the consultant to be trained on the various
components of the professional development, so they could be the point person at each grade
level and corresponded with the consultant throughout the week, asking questions and planning
for the afterschool meetings. For the rest of the school year, team leaders and teachers created
professional learning communities (PLCs), with predetermined agendas, and they met after
school eight times for 1.5 hours each meeting.

At the end of the 2011 school year, the curriculum supervisors sent a memo to elementary
and middle-school teachers with the intention of recruiting more teachers to participate in the
summer RtI professional development. Another twenty teachers signed up for the professional
development and attended a week long workshop with the consultant and the other teachers who
had taken the workshop during the fall. The consultant trained the new teachers, and the team
leaders trained the teachers who were involved in the professional development during the
school year. By the end of the week, there were a total of forty teachers and additional team
leaders trained to participate in and facilitate PLCs during the 2011-2012 school year. A plan
was made to develop lab classrooms in each of the schools during the school year. The lab
classrooms provided a way for teachers in the schools to observe how the Workshop Model
worked with their peers as models. The consultant met with teachers and team leaders who
volunteered to be lab classrooms throughout the school year modeling, instructing, and observing them until they felt comfortable in having teachers in their buildings observe them. The lab classroom teachers also recorded each other using the Workshop Model and brought the videos to their PLCs to discuss and critique them. By the end of the 2012 school year, the PLCs met ten to twelve times, after school, discussing all the components of RtI.

Additional funding was received in 2012, which allowed the teachers at the non-Title I middle school to receive a full day presentation on RtI by the consultant. This resulted in more teachers expressing interest in being involved in the district RtI team and working with their teachers to use the RtI components at the Tier 1 level.

In the winter of 2012, the curriculum supervisors were notified that their jobs would be eliminated due to budget cuts. The researcher decided to transfer back to the classroom, where she would teach language arts to fifth-grade students at the Title I middle school. The researcher also continued to be the Title I Director, a position she held while being the curriculum supervisor. As the Title I Director, the researcher continued to facilitate RtI meetings at the district level in order to keep the schools communicating and planning implementation of RtI. Each of the elementary and middle schools had their own RtI teams that worked with their administrators to determine professional development opportunities for their teachers.

**Findings**

In order to investigate the research question, the researcher conducted twelve individual interviews and six classroom observations of teachers implementing RtI in the Tier 1 classroom. Additionally, literacy surveys were given to fifty content-area teachers of which 30% were returned. Student work was also collected and analyzed. Through the analysis and coding of interviews, observations, literacy surveys, and student work, themes became apparent which
developed a deeper understanding of RtI in the middle school Tier 1 classroom. The themes that emerged were, RtI is necessary for students who need extra support, the different aspects of the professional development was both a positive and negative experience, depending on the content area, the benefits of the workshop model, literacy integration benefits all students and requires collaboration among teachers, and RtI requires commitment from teachers and administrators. The findings from the interviews, observations, survey, and student documents, organized by the central research question, are reported in this section.

**RtI is Necessary for Students Who Need Extra Support**

The administrators in Central Office believed that RtI is an important intervention model and therefore included it in the District’s Strategic Plan (DSP). The need for RtI at all levels was apparent after analyzing state and local data. Results from standardized testing and state mandated testing reflected the need for both general education and special education students to receive supplemental academic support.

Administrator A noted, “The strategic plan is a driver for all of our school improvement plans. I know all levels of RtI are accounted for in all of the individual school improvement plans.” Administrator A also commented, “We realized the number of kids being pulled out of the general education classrooms to specialists was too many, and we felt that we could do a better job with the whole classroom. Aside from the compliance piece of it, we know it’s just good teaching and what we need to do.” Administrator A explained that “RtI is a work in progress” and that the district needed to allocate monies to RtI and put it on the professional development calendar to make sure enough attention continued to be paid to the RtI initiative. Administrator A also made the connection to all of the English language learners in the district and the need to intervene in the classroom because those students were not only expected to read
in English, but they also needed to make meaning. Administrator A stated, “So, there are a lot of challenges that the district has with its demographics. I think we’re on our way.” Administrator B noted that since RtI has been put into action, there have been fewer referrals to special education at the K-4 level. Administrator B stated, “We’re hoping that within the next year or two that this shows itself in the middle school . . . and that our numbers would be less because intervention would be tried a lot earlier and sooner.”

Administrators at the middle school agreed that RtI was paramount in helping students achieve the literacy skills needed in the classroom. Administrator C commented, “I think it’s important that every single area of curriculum focuses on that [literacy] along with their subject area.” Administrator D concurred stating, “I think increasing the addition of reading across the content area, writing across the content area, talking about feedback in peer group discussions where you have actual staff members sharing their knowledge, what works, what didn’t work in the classroom with peers in an assembly type program, is purposeful.”

Teachers agreed with the administrators as to the importance of RtI at the Tier 1 level. Teacher A explained, “I think RtI is important; it really makes me focus on the objective of the lesson and student outcomes.” Teacher C agreed, “I think it’s a great opportunity to work in a small group with kids that don’t get it. It also allows me to recognize the kids who do get it.” Additionally, Teacher G reflected, “I use RtI mostly with my ELL students. Some students require extensive teacher support during classroom activities and multiple opportunities for practice.”

**Professional Development was Both a Positive and Negative Experience**

The professional development teachers participated in beginning in 2011 was both a positive and negative experience, depending on the content area. The majority of teachers who
were interviewed agreed that the professional development they received around RtI Tier 1 instruction was a positive experience. All the teacher participants were involved in the initial professional development that began in the spring of 2011 and in the week-long professional development that was held in August 2011. Teachers generally described their experiences as being very helpful. Teacher A stated, “Working and talking with colleagues was a very helpful part of it [professional development].” Patsy Pouiller (2011) a school administrator who participated in a study done for *Educational Leadership* magazine offered:

Sometimes I step into a classroom and find three teachers observing because they are interested in the successful strategy they heard about in the staff room. The teacher being observed does not feel threatened because it is not part of any appraisal system; it's just one colleague sharing her know-how. Some of our teachers have become experts in different areas and share that knowledge. It's a give-and-take interaction that benefits not only teachers, but also students.

These teachers were also involved in PLCs after school, for which they were paid. During the PLCs, teachers discussed RtI articles that were given to them by the consultant and readings from the book, *Focus*, by Mike Schmoker (2011). Teacher A also described the PLCs where videotaped lessons were brought to the meetings to discuss and critique. Teacher B stated that she thought the PLCs were “wonderful” although she confessed, “We were all hesistant about taping ourselves.” Teachers A and B agreed that they enjoyed bringing student samples to the PLCs and giving each other feedback as to what they could do to help students move forward. Teacher C, who was also a lead teacher, validated the training by stating, “I thought that having someone come in from the outside that wasn’t involved in the district itself was good because you could hear about other schools plus, if you had any issues, you were getting a non-biased
Teacher C also commented that she and the consultant corresponded frequently to discuss any concerns or misconceptions teachers had when meeting as a PLC. Another lead teacher, Teacher D, stated, “We were all self-motivated, interested, and inspired. If I were asked to do it again, I would.” Teacher H stated, “This is one of the most valuable initiatives we’ve done since I’ve been here.” Teacher E concurred that it was a great experience being in the PLCs and added how helpful it was to have teachers from all content areas participating in the PLCs. She also made the point that it was easier for some content areas to implement the Workshop Model than other content areas, noting the difficulty science teachers had adhering to every component in the model.

Teacher F felt frustrated with the PLCs because she felt the Workshop Model did not relate to her subject area. Teacher F stated:

It was a foundation for what we were supposed to do, but we kept feeling like we were learning something and it didn’t quite apply, and we didn’t know how we were going to get it to apply to our setting.

Teacher F was tenacious in trying to make the Workshop Model work in her classroom. She noted that it was a major shift and it took her two years to figure out how she could do the Workshop Model in her classroom. She wanted to be sure she did not lose her lab time and other hands on learning time.

**Teachers training teachers is a worthwhile concept.** Another component of the professional development was lab classrooms. During the 2011-2012 school year, the lead teachers were trained on how to be lab classrooms for the school. The intent of the lab classrooms was to have a place where teachers, especially new teachers, could observe mentor teachers instructing a class using the Workshop Model. The four teachers who participated in the
lab classroom training met with the consultant four times in order to practice being a lab classroom teacher. The consultant met with the teachers on four separate days to review the protocols for setting up a lab classroom. On the first day, the consultant met with the lab classroom teachers to discuss the lesson. The consultant and teachers discussed the learning targets, mini-lessons, and the other components of the Workshop Model that would be highlighted during the lesson. They reviewed what to focus on during the guided practice component and debrief. The following day, the consultant modeled the lessons in the classrooms, with students present, for the lab classroom teachers. On the third day, the teachers and the consultant discussed the modeled lesson and teachers were able to ask questions to get clarifications on the lesson modeled. After that day, the teachers were to practice using the Workshop Model in their classrooms. The last day of the lab classroom training came a month later, when the consultant came back to the school and observed the teachers conducting a lesson, in their classroom, using the Workshop Model. The teachers were able to discuss the lesson with the consultant after class. Teacher C commented, “I thought this [lab classroom training] was very powerful. I took full advantage of the consultant. He was very good.”

The RtI professional development led to a *teachers teaching teachers* model. As a result of the PLCs and the lab classroom trainings, the teachers felt confident in contributing to future professional development opportunities where they were asked to co-facilitate small group sessions for the rest of the teachers at the middle school. One of the administrators at the school level spoke about how vital it was to have lead teachers in the building, “Having a core group of what I would call key communicators who are able to purposely participate and share leadership in the professional development of peers as it relates to RtI is critical.”
Benefits of Workshop Model

The Workshop Model was the structure for RtI implementation in the Tier 1 classroom at the middle school. Through the components of the Workshop Model, teachers were able to divide the fifty-minute classroom lesson into blocks of time that included an anticipatory set, learning targets, a mini-lesson, twenty-minutes of guided and independent practice, where re-teaching and intervention took place, and a five-minute debrief at the end of the lesson. Another theme that emerged after observing six classroom teachers implementing the Workshop Model is that the Workshop Model has benefits for all students. Teacher A explained,

The other thing about the Workshop Model is that it has helped me focus on all learners and not just the struggling learners because sometimes I think we forget. I know I tend to focus on struggling learners more than I do on the more advanced learners who need that enrichment piece. So, putting it all together, I think it [RtI] has helped me be more effective in my teaching.

All the teachers who were interviewed and observed agreed that there were parts of the Workshop Model that were easier to implement than others. Teacher B stated,

I feel like it [Workshop Model] made me a better teacher just being more cognizant of the components that I want to include every day in my lessons. I like the flow of it. I think it’s conducive to the students we have in front of us, ten and eleven year olds. Every day it gives them an opportunity for participation.

Alternatively, Teacher F contended, “The Workshop Model doesn’t apply to every subject matter every day. Sometimes the model looks very rigid.” She also confessed, “It was time consuming and painstaking in the beginning.” Each component of the Workshop Model will be discussed separately beginning with the anticipatory set.
**Anticipatory set.** When observing six of the eight teachers who were interviewed, the researcher noticed that each teacher spent the first five minutes of class reviewing what students had learned the day before. In order to activate prior knowledge, Teacher A asked her students to do a *quick write*, and, in their own words, define conflict. After the quick write, students shared their definitions in their group. The quick write allowed students to organize their thoughts, so they could share what they knew with their classmates. This activity also allowed students, who did not remember what they had done previously, to be prepared for the discussion. Teacher B passed out an *entrance slip* as students entered the room that asked students to choose a *right* that the government promises and write down the one that is most important to them. She reminded students that they had begun to discuss the *Bill of Rights* the week before, and also told students that if they did not know what a right was, to write that down. After a few minutes, Teacher B had students volunteer what they had written. Similarly to Teachers A and B, Teacher C used the anticipatory set to review what was previously discussed in class. Teacher C had students work in groups to find the symbolism in the song “Firework”. After five minutes, she noted the lines where the symbolism was in the song and had students check their papers and highlight the lines with symbolism. This activity enabled students to apply and transfer their knowledge of symbolism to another text that was the target for the period. Teacher F used the anticipatory set to have her students glue the target for the day, along with a *t-chart*, into their notebooks. She explained how the students were to label the t-chart in the notebooks in anticipation for the observations they would be making in class. Teacher G also had students do a quick write to review what they read the day before and to also make a prediction as to what students thought would happen in the chapter they would read next. Lastly, Teacher F reviewed the previous day’s lesson by asking specific questions and having students volunteer to answer the questions.
aloud. After the anticipatory set, the teachers called the students’ attention to the learning target that was on the board.

**Learning targets.** Learning targets are created based on content-area standards and language objectives that address English language learners in the classroom. Every teacher interviewed concurred that learning targets were essential to the Workshop Model. They agreed that learning targets kept not only students focused on the goal of the lesson but also the teachers. Teacher A commented, “It [learning target] has helped me focus on my target objective, so I can focus on the students’ specific learning outcome.” Teacher C made a point of expressing how learning targets eliminated students coming into her classroom and asking “what are we going to do today in class?” Students now come into her classroom and look at the board to see the target for the lesson. Teacher F described how she felt about learning targets, “Using the target was awesome. That helped the kids to focus.” At the beginning of the school year, Teacher F instructed students to write the target in their notebooks in order to make them accountable for knowing the target. Only information related to the target would be written in the notebook. That way, the notebook could be used as a study guide with any key concepts students needed to know written under the target. Teacher F noted that parents were also impressed with the targets because whenever the students needed to study for a test, the parents could ask them anything in their notebooks and the answer would be there under the target. Although having students write the targets in their notebooks was challenging at first, Teacher F revealed, “You don’t mind doing that kind of work if there are results. I did feel that was probably the most beneficial part of RtI.”

When the researcher observed the teachers in their classrooms, all but one of the teachers had an explicit learning target on the board. All learning targets were either written on the front
board, in an area that also displayed the learning standard, or written on sentence strips or poster board that could be saved for future use. Most learning targets began with the phrase “I can”. Depending on the grade level, teachers either read the target to the students, asked a volunteer to read the target, or simply let the students read the target on their own. Teacher B called her students’ attention to the learning target by saying, “This is what our goal is today. Everyone look this way because we want to know about the Bill of Rights and what rights we have.” The students in Teacher C’s class came into the classroom and looked at the learning target. After everyone was settled, Teacher C asked students what the target was for the period. A student raised her hand and stated, “I can point out symbols in a poem and interpret their meaning using evidence from the poem and discussing with a partner.” Teacher F, as stated earlier, had students write the target in their notebooks. On the day the researcher observed this class, many students knew exactly what to do and immediately wrote the target in their notebook before the teacher asked them to do it. Writing targets in their notebooks was an expectation with which they were very familiar. When students sat down at their desks, Teacher H said to the students, “Let’s go over the learning target for the day.” He asked for volunteers to read the two targets on the board. One girl read, “Identify and name major human skeleton bones and place them accurately on your project.” Another student read, “Describe the five major functions and ten facts of the skeletal system.” Teacher H was the only teacher who did not have “I can” preceding the target statement. Although the researcher did not question why the target was written with the verb first, the researcher believed the fact that the students were older may have been the reason Teacher H eliminated the phrase. After students understood the target for the day, the teacher spent fifteen minutes on a mini lesson teaching and modeling the expectations for the lesson.
Mini lesson. Teacher A’s statement, “My mini lessons don’t always turn out to be mini lessons” exemplifies the thinking of many of the teachers the researcher interviewed and observed. Teacher A confessed:

I assume that students have prior skills that they don’t always have, so sometimes that mini lesson takes a lot longer. In a fifty minute time block, it’s always hard to accomplish that whole class lesson [mini lesson] and then some practice together and independent practice. Sometimes it takes more than a day.

Teacher C was also aware that she spent more time on the mini lesson than she should. She acknowledged that the Workshop Model helped her to understand how much time she spent talking to students and was now more cognizant of taking less time with the mini lesson and having students practice more of what they learned during the mini lesson. Teacher G explained:

That model [workshop] provides multiple opportunities to build in certain strategies throughout the instructional period. Pre-teaching vocabulary and a variety of different strategies, may come through the mini lesson portion. If it’s writing in response to reading, the mini lesson might be about modeling or demonstrating exactly what I want the writing to look like.

During the observations, the researcher noticed that only one of the teachers did not include a mini lesson during the fifty minute block. Instead, the teacher went directly from the anticipatory set to the guided practice. In this particular classroom, the students had been engaged in reading a novel for a few days and, therefore, did not need any further instruction that day. They were able to transition from the anticipatory set, which included discussion on what was previously read, to beginning a new chapter in the novel quite smoothly.

On the other hand, the five teachers who included the mini lesson component, modeled
for their students their expectations for what students would be doing during the guided practice time. Teacher A reviewed the different types of conflict found in literature through a five-minute power point presentation. After the presentation, Teacher A passed out a worksheet with four different types of conflict and explained and modeled for the class what she wanted them to do. After the mini lesson, Teacher A informed the class, “Now, I want you to use your independent reading book to identify and explain what type of conflict is going on in your book.”

Teacher B used the time during her mini lesson to review the *Bill of Rights* and instruct her students on the additional seventeen amendments that made up the Constitution. Her mini lesson sailed right into the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model without any hesitation. She demonstrated for her students what they would be doing during their guided practice time using the document camera to highlight the additional seventeen amendments. Similarly, Teacher C set the stage for her class by reading the poem, “Caged Bird” by Maya Angelou during her mini lesson. She modeled fluency by her rate of reading, her accuracy, and her prosody. After reading the poem, she asked her students, “Do you think this poem is about birds?” Teacher C explained to her students that the author wrote the poem to highlight the oppression of African Americans during this discriminatory era in history. After her explanation, Teacher C demonstrated, using sticky notes, how to find the symbolism in the poem by analyzing each line in each stanza and finding the evidence that supported the symbolism. She placed the sticky notes on chart paper, and then had students try to find the symbolism and evidence while she guided them.

During Teacher F’s mini lesson, she informed students, “I’m going to explain what’s in your bucket today.” She explained that the students would be observing fungi and named the different types of fungi that were in their buckets on their desks. She also set up an experiment in
the front of the class in which students would observe the conditions for yeast growth. Teacher F told the students that they would revisit the experiment after ten minutes to see what was happening under different conditions. Students worked independently observing the fungi in their buckets and writing down their observations on a t-chart while Teacher F circulated around the room, which began the guided practice component of the lesson.

While observing Teacher H, the researcher noticed that the mini lesson was more of an extension of the anticipatory set. Teacher H reviewed the information from the previous day’s lesson and reviewed the skeleton system. The mini lesson component consisted of clarifying the directions for the day’s lesson and modeling the correct way to label the different parts of the skeleton system. It was interesting for the researcher to note that in all of the observations, the teachers were able to transition their students into independent and guided practice without disrupting the flow of the lesson.

Guided practice. This component of the Workshop Model was paramount to the success of RtI in the classroom. It is when teachers were able to understand their students’ strengths and weaknesses and address their misconceptions immediately. During this twenty to twenty-five minutes block of time, students practiced the learning target either independently or in a small group while teachers informally assessed what they were doing. Teacher F stated, “It [RtI] did give me informal assessments on a daily basis.” She continued to describe how the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model allowed both the teacher and the teacher assistant (TA) to determine which students were working towards reaching the learning target and which students needed to be redirected or retaught. Teacher F continued, “That was nice that the TA had a role because a lot of times they don’t have roles in what we’re doing.” During this part of the Workshop Model, Teacher F usually directed the TA to go to specific students and check to
see if they were working towards the learning target. She asked them, “If they [students] don’t have it could you reteach real quickly and see if they understand what they are being asked to do?” As teachers informally assessed students, they were able to offer descriptive and actionable feedback as to what the students needed to do to accomplish the goal of the lesson. Teacher A stated:

I try to always give them [students] descriptive feedback so they can move forward in their thinking. If they use a graphic organizer, I find that I make notes on the graphic organizers. I might ask them questions that give them ideas of what they still need to answer in order to make their answer more complete. Knowing about descriptive feedback has helped me help my students move forward, so that has been a really good, important part of that.

Teacher H agreed, “As I go around and give feedback, kids actually love it. They want to know what they’re doing right.” One of the teachers who worked with a small group of English language learners used the twenty minutes to “provide explicit feedback to my students and implement formative assessment.” Working in a co-teaching environment, she pointed out:

It wasn’t just academics; we were doing Tier 1 intervention around language and front-loading vocabulary and sentence structures and re-teaching for language as well. Tier 1 skills actually look like one-on-one tutoring while other students are working on an independent piece. It’s also differentiating for the students within the classroom. Specifically, it’s just differentiating and scaffolding the instruction and assessment in order to get them where they need to be.
Teacher B also used the guided practice component to differentiate her instruction and reach all her students. She used high interest, leveled books in her content area to encourage students to work independently. Teacher B further explained:

I tried to offer extension activities by breaking my class into groups and when students finished the first book I gave them, which was more a review of concepts they were studying in class, they could move into another book or novel. This was a way of offering an opportunity for higher level students.

All of the teachers the researcher interviewed and observed agreed that the guided practice segment of the Workshop Model was the most challenging in the beginning and on certain days it continues to be a challenge. Teacher G commented, “Some students require extensive teacher support during classroom activities and multiple opportunities for re-teaching.” Teacher B concurred with the other teachers stating:

The intervention piece is more difficult. I feel overwhelmed with the pace of my curriculum and being able to slow down to re-teach or take three days if I need three days on a target. I still feel stressed about that because I feel like I just need to keep moving forward in order to cover everything.

Teacher C articulated that, although it was difficult at first, she doesn’t find the guided practice component, where interventions and re-teaching takes place, to be a challenge anymore. She stated, “I think it’s a great opportunity to work in a small group with kids that just don’t get it.” This was evident when the researcher observed Teacher C in the classroom. During guided practice, Teacher C worked with her small group of students discussing and underlining the symbolism found in the poem they were reading. She watched students find the evidence in the poem that supported their answers and told them to talk about what they were doing. One of the
students commented, “If I keep talking, I can get my ideas out.” Teacher C encouraged the student to keep talking, so she could hear the student’s logic and guided the student as she continued to find the symbolism in the poem. The rest of the group continued working together, but they were also listening to what Teacher C was saying to the student she was helping, and, therefore, were being guided through the lesson. Teacher C also stated:

I can see in my classroom what they [students] are getting and what they’re not getting, so I can determine whether we have to practice the concept the next day as a whole class for the first ten minutes of class, or do I need to pull a few students to review while other students, who got it, work on an extension activity.

When the researcher observed Teacher F during the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model, she was walking around to the different groups in her classroom. The students were working independently making observations during their lab session. They were also answering questions in their notebooks from a sheet that was passed out earlier in the period. One confused student raised her hand and asked, “Is lichen moss?” Teacher F clarified the student’s misconception by answering, “No, moss is a very small plant, not a fungi.” At this time, she reminded the students to read the “little black box” on the form she passed out if they were having trouble answering any of the questions. Towards the end of the class, Teacher F complimented the students on the progress they made making observations and writing in their notebooks.

Teacher B also spent the twenty-five minutes of the guided practice working with the whole class to help them reach the learning target. She practiced the gradual release of responsibility by modeling what students needed to do, then she worked with the students on one example, and, finally, had students try one on their own. During this process, Teacher C
discussed the vocabulary using student friendly terms and gave examples of modern-day living to help students understand the concept. She also had students *turn & talk* to each other to facilitate understanding and also asked students to illustrate their understanding.

Both Teachers A and G used the guided practice time to observe and listen to students, working in groups, discuss what they were reading in their novels as it pertained to the learning targets. The teachers looked for evidence and details from the texts to ensure that their students understood the assignment. If students were not including text evidence, the teachers helped the students find the necessary evidence so they could continue finding evidence on their own. In each of the classrooms the researcher observed, teachers proved the importance of guided practice in the RtI Tier 1 classroom. In every classroom, teachers were able to assess their students’ understanding and give students descriptive and actionable feedback that helped them immediately so students could achieve the goal of the lesson.

**Debrief.** The final component of the Workshop Model is the five-minute debrief. Unfortunately, this is the part that is often left out due to the time constraints of a fifty-minute period. The consultant, who presented the professional development to the middle school teachers, warned them to be sure to include the debrief portion, which comes at the end of the period of the Workshop Model. He presented data that showed, without the debrief, 80% of the students would forget what they learned during the lesson. Understanding the warning they were given, most of the teachers interviewed said they try to debrief either at the end of the lesson or at the beginning of the next day’s lesson during the anticipatory set. Teacher F confessed, “The one part I always struggle with is the debrief, because we run out of time. Sometimes the debrief takes place the next morning. That was the part I felt pressure on.” This fact was evident during the observations as there were only two classrooms where the researcher saw the debrief
component of the Workshop Model. At the end of the period, Teacher C collected sticky notes with students’ examples of symbolism in order to assess if her students understood symbolism in the poem and whether they reached the day’s learning target. Teacher B collected exit slips to determine students’ understanding of the lesson’s concept as students left the classroom.

**Literacy Integration Benefits All Students and Requires Collaboration among Teachers**

Literacy integration benefits all students in all content areas and requires collaboration among teachers. Because many of the students at the middle school level do not have the literacy skills necessary to achieve proficiency in all content areas, teachers need to integrate literacy opportunities for students in their daily instruction. All teachers participating in the study integrated literacy skills in their content area one way or another during the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model. Whether students were reading, writing, listening, or speaking, there was an expectation that students were able to communicate their understanding in myriad ways.

**Literacy integration.** Most of the teachers the researcher interviewed and observed had students reading and writing during the guided practice portion of the lesson. Some students were engaged in reading novels while other students were reading informational text. One of the teachers asserted, “Because I am a reading teacher, I have literacy components in my class every day.” She also stated that she and the social studies teacher on her team collaborated to incorporate reading and writing experiences into his lessons. They made literacy integration a joint professional goal for the current school year and worked together to develop open-response questions based on what students would be reading in their social studies textbooks. The open-response questions enabled students to demonstrate their understanding of what they read by providing evidence from the text. Another teacher remarked, “Seeing where I am a reading
teacher, students are reading and writing every single day in my classroom.” She also commented that her students were applying the reading strategies they learned in her class to “attack reading in a different content, in a different book, in a whole different environment.” Teacher C remarked, “I see a carryover this year more than I’ve ever seen in the past.” Other content-area teachers shared with Teacher C that their students used the reading skills and strategies they learned in her class to help them in their other disciplines.

When Teacher B was asked about her experiences integrating literacy in her social studies classroom, she stated that it only made sense for students to be reading and writing in her class. She confirmed that integrating literacy was something she had always done in her classroom, and she saw an improvement in students’ ability to access her content area as a result of her literacy instruction. Teacher B asserted:

I don’t see how you could do it any other way. Whether it’s reading primary source documents and sort of figuring out how it makes sense to ten-year olds, reading passages from the text, or writing summaries in journals, I’ve always done it. I try to specifically use key language arts formats in our writing and also remind students of the words [their teacher] uses in the reading class. I try to take it a step further by using the same terminology.

Teacher B also commented that “I feel like kids know my focus and that I expect them to write in complete sentences, capitalize, and punctuate their sentences to show their understanding of the content.” Teacher B acknowledged that she could see a difference in the students from the beginning of the year to the end of the year in how they were able to access the social studies content.

Teacher D acknowledged that her English language development (ELD) class was all
literacy-based. She stated, “I don’t know how to actually pull that literacy away from the academics because language is so much a part of our academics.” During her time as the ELD teacher, Teacher D had many opportunities to co-teach in a social studies classroom. She gave an example of a lesson where all the students were taught the text features of the social studies textbook in order to help them navigate the text. Prior to the lesson on text features, Teacher D frontloaded the vocabulary for her students, so they would be prepared for the lesson. Students were also given leveled texts to read on the same topic students would be reading in the textbook. This enabled all students to access the information at their reading level. Additionally, Teacher D connected what the students read to their writing. She had her students do a quick write during the anticipatory set to activate prior knowledge to see what she needed to expand upon before a lesson, or she used it at the end of a lesson as a formative assessment to determine her students’ understanding of a specific concept.

Teacher D asserted:

The impact of literacy integration would show in the data. I would be surprised if the data wasn’t explicit and showing improvement in the literacy skills within the classroom. I think there is a positive impact on the implementation of Tier1 strategies. I think if used appropriately, the impact would be instruction is data driven and that teachers should be able to prove the impact within the growth of their students.

When Teacher F was interviewed, she stated that she had students keep a notebook into which they put all their targets, labs, and other pertinent information about the topic being studied. She had students put the vocabulary words in their notebooks and had them write to explain a concept using the vocabulary words. She remarked, “I would make them go back and highlight the words to make sure they had them because they have to be able to write using
science vocabulary.” There was an ongoing language objective posted on Teacher F’s board that read “Communicate through writing that utilizes science vocabulary to explain key concepts.” She said the goal was for students to write a conclusion based on details from the lab and not just say, “Oh, it worked.” Teacher F further explained:

Getting them [the students] to be detailed in their writing and being able to explain it was a struggle if they had a second language. I found those kids struggled with the science vocabulary even though we did numerous activities with the vocabulary. I found that in the beginning of the unit, I had to spend a lot of time on teaching vocabulary. Students would have to write vocabulary words in their notebooks. Then, they would make flip cards with them, so there were multiple times that students would write the vocabulary.

One teacher confessed that, although she believed that many students benefited from her teaching RtI Tier 1 strategies, some students did not see the value in the literacy strategies she taught in order to help them become better readers. She told the students, “I give you the tools, but you have to bring the effort.” She explained that it was hard to judge the impact the implementation of Tier 1 RtI strategies had on improving the literacy skills of the students in her classroom. She stated:

What is easier to judge are students who are choosing not to use them, and I do see an adverse effect. I would have to say that underlining text, imitating, just being able to answer questions, and how to interpret what a prompt is asking you to create an effective response to what you read, that kind of instruction can be valuable when it is used by students.

An administrator weighed in on the success literacy integration has had in the content
areas. She stated, “My perception of the impact of Tier 1 interventions and RtI strategies is that they have improved literacy acquisition, and we have data to prove it.”

When observing in the classrooms, the first thing the researcher noticed were the posters and anchor charts on walls, doors, and other places around the classroom. Every classroom had a word wall with vocabulary from different units. Many of the classrooms had cursive handwriting alphabet charts to aid students in forming their letters correctly when they were writing. Reading teachers had anchor charts highlighting different reading skills and strategies: problem/solution, cause and effect, compare and contrast, and main idea. They had bookcases filled with both fiction and non-fiction books. Science teachers’ charts and posters concentrated on the Periodic Table of Elements, a skeleton diagram, and the scientific method. The social studies teacher’s posters included maps, pictures of landmarks and presidents, and the Constitution and Preamble. Student work was also displayed throughout the classrooms. All these visuals promoted literacy acquisition for all students. They were resources for students and allowed them to demonstrate their understanding.

Additionally, the researcher observed that during the guided practice component of the Workshop Model, all students were involved in literacy activities: reading, writing, speaking and listening. In one of the classrooms, students were reading a novel and writing responses to what they were reading in their journals. Throughout the period, the teacher had students share their writing with the whole class. Discourse ensued focusing on the topic of the journal writing. In another class, the students were involved in reading the first ten amendments to the Constitution and illustrating their understanding of the amendments. The teacher monitored the students’ understanding by having students volunteer to explain their illustrations using the document camera. In a science class, students demonstrated their understanding of the skeletal system by
completing a graphic organizer using their science books to explain the functions of the skeletal system. Engagement in literacy-related activities was obvious in every classroom observed. Each activity gave students an opportunity to discuss what they were learning with their classmates under the skillful eye of their teacher.

**Literacy surveys.** In addition to observing and interviewing participants, the researcher gave a literacy survey (Appendix I) to fifty content-area teachers. Of the fifty surveys distributed, 30% of the surveys were returned. The survey, titled *Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Skills in the Content Area*, identified thirty-six of the most common literacy instructional strategies with which the researcher was most familiar. These strategies allowed students to demonstrate their understanding of content-area curriculum. Participants were asked to circle the content area they taught and then check, from the list, all of the literacy strategies they used at least once during the school year. Participants were also given space to include other strategies they used that were not listed on the survey. Of the fifteen surveys that were returned, all content areas were represented: reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies.

Two of the strategies, *think, pair, share* and word walls represented the mode of the data (Appendix K). These strategies were used by fourteen of the fifteen participants, which included all content areas. Think, pair, share is a process that encourages collaboration among students. The first step is for students to think about their response before articulating it to a partner. During the pair part of the process, students have an audience, even if it’s only one other person, with whom they can discuss their thoughts. This part is especially helpful for English language learners who may need some practice in using academic language. Finally, students share their ideas with the rest of the class. This strategy promotes speaking and listening, which is a skill that needs to be fostered at the middle-school level. It also encourages higher-order thinking
because students are being asked to evaluate each other’s responses (Tovani, 2004). Word walls are very popular at the elementary level but have also proven to be very successful in middle school classrooms where students need to know and have access to content specific vocabulary. Sometimes word walls are used to help students retrieve vocabulary for a writing assignment or during a class discussion and other times word walls become interactive with students adding and deleting words, depending on what they are studying. In all the classrooms the researcher observed, there were word walls evident. Teacher F commented that in her content area, “Students have to be able to use science vocabulary.” She stated she reminds students every day to use the vocabulary from the word wall in their writing. Unfortunately, the survey did not ask teachers to elaborate on their use of word walls, so the researcher was not sure of the purpose of the word walls in all of the participants’ classrooms.

The strategies that teachers identified as using the least during the school year were dialogue journals, double/triple journal entries, and concept ladders. It was interesting to note that journal writing was still practiced by half of the teachers surveyed. Concept ladders are used to help students understand a specific concept by expanding their thinking. Students start with prior knowledge and then generate questions on each rung of the ladder to set a purpose for reading. Students become critical thinkers as they ask higher-order thinking questions on each of the rungs. Although this is a great strategy to use with students, not all teachers were familiar with concept ladders and therefore would not understand the benefits of using this strategy in their content area. The other strategies were used by at least half of the teachers who participated in the survey. Additional strategies that were offered by teachers included Venn diagrams, analogies, think alouds, write arounds, 7 steps to vocabulary teaching, and vocabulary word sorts.
Collaboration among teachers. During the interviews, teachers commented on the importance of collaboration among the teachers on their teams. Teacher A remarked:

The social studies teacher is involved using the Workshop Model. He uses Tier 1 strategies, and it is helping students in language arts and reading. He has been really good about getting them [students] to respond in writing to what they have read. He is using the same format that we do: answer, evidence, explanation. He always includes that in his open or written responses. He uses the same vocabulary, the same terminology. He uses the same rubric. So, students across the board are being assessed the same way. He tries to do the same thing with giving them some descriptive feedback before they hand in the final copy. There is more reading and writing going on now.

Teacher A also commented that during reading class, the reading intervention teacher pulled students aside, either one-to-one or in a small group, to help them understand and achieve the learning target for the day. She also described a practice that she and her team began during the Academic, Social, and Emotional (ASE) period. The ASE period is a forty-five minute period that extends the homeroom period two days out of a six-day cycle. During this time, students are involved in either intervention or enrichment activities. Teacher A explained:

We actually targeted students and connected them either to an intervention or enrichment group based on common assessments so that students who were weak in their reading and math scores received extra help in reading and math. Our more advanced students received extra enrichment instruction from the science and social studies teachers by reading novels and responding to what they read through discussion and writing activities.

Teacher A further explained that she and the language arts teacher collaborated with the
science and social studies teachers to choose a novel that connected to science and social studies. The language arts teacher and Teacher A gave the content-area teachers lesson plans to use while reading the novels that highlighted specific literacy skills, especially writing and critical thinking. Teacher A maintained that working with the other teachers on her team to increase the literacy skills of the students helped raise reading scores, as evident by the end of year standardized assessment scores.

Another reading teacher, praised the social studies teacher with whom she collaborated stating, “I can tell you that my social studies teacher and I have talked a lot all year about how to modify his text.” She revealed that the social studies text is very dense and difficult for students to comprehend without breaking it down for them. She commended the social studies teacher for embracing the implementation of RtI Tier 1 strategies “whole heartedly”.

The success of literacy integration in content areas was not lost on the administrators of the school. One administrator remarked:

I see a lot of collaboration between social studies and science and the reading and ELA teachers. I see a lot of collaboration between those subject areas much more than I saw even a few years ago. I think that is great. I think that our common planning time allows for that. That’s wonderful. I see a lot of it with ELL. I see a lot of the writing and literacy piece, which is great, across all subjects.

Another school administrator asserted:

I believe the implementation of RtI and the Workshop Model has fostered collaboration between content people, especially ELA and reading, on the need for universal screening and universal progress monitoring. I think the universal screening and progress
monitoring tools have allowed us to do pre-and post-testing and, quite frankly, there has been an impact on student growth.

**RtI Requires Commitment from Teachers and Administrators**

Implementing and sustaining RtI requires commitment from both teachers and administrators. All the participants stated that, even though there are parts of the Workshop Model that are not conducive to their discipline, they were committed to implementing the Workshop Model in their classrooms in order to integrate literacy skills and strategies in their instruction to help students find success in their content areas. They also acknowledged that in order to sustain the RtI initiative, administration had to hold all teachers accountable for the implementation of RtI strategies within the Workshop Model. Some participants perceived that administrators in the building did hold teachers accountable, but some participants’ perceptions revealed that they did not think there was enough accountability and therefore RtI would “fade out” as other initiatives have in the past.

**Commitment from teachers.** One of the participants stated that she was committed to using RtI strategies in her classroom through the use of the Workshop Model because “it helps me focus on all learners and not just the struggling learners.” Another teacher stated, “It has its pros and cons.” She clarified this statement by adding, “It’s about quality versus quantity.” She confessed that she struggled in the beginning because she “was trying to hit the standards [Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Standards] and keep up with the pacing guide.” Once she realized that the targets would actually keep her on track, and she could use the guided practice time to re-teach and provide intervention for students, she was less concerned. Teacher E, who worked with a small group of students, confessed that even though she does not implement all the components of the Workshop Model, “I still do the feedback and formative assessments with
my small groups. I try to adhere to the Workshop Model in some way, shape, or form. I think it [Workshop Model] has a lot of value.”

**Commitment from administrators.** The central office administrators who were interviewed agreed that when doing their walkthroughs of classrooms throughout the district, they noticed the implementation of literacy skills within the RtI framework. One administrator stated, “I have noticed an increase in writing across the curriculum, which I think is huge. The other thing that I’ve noticed in the walkthroughs is you will see targets in classrooms with the teacher lessons more focused around the target.” She also felt that more professional development would help hone the skills of some teachers. She recognized that some teachers were more detailed in their writing of learning targets which helped students understand the goal for the lesson. Another administrator from central office offered, “I know that the principal is making this [RtI] a priority in the strategic plan and in her School Improvement Plan (SIP). It is a middle school priority. It is just good practice.”

One of the school administrators supported the RtI initiative by stating, “I think there is never enough time for professional development in this district, but we’ve tried to allocate as much as we can for RtI.” She confessed, “I think we lost our way this year because there were so many other initiatives that had to be done.” School administrators showed their commitment to RtI by attending all school and district meetings focusing on RtI. This school administrator maintained:

I think that has helped us as administrators in the whole evaluation process because we became much more familiar with RtI as well, which was really necessary for observations and evaluations. I think that’s the biggest piece for me, trying to incorporate it in the evaluation and observation process because I try to identify all those pieces for teachers.
She also stated that when she is observing teachers either formally or during a ten-minute walkthrough, she gives teachers feedback by either acknowledging they are “doing a good job” or offering “here’s an example of something you could do.” Another school administrator, showed her commitment to RtI by stating:

The only way [RtI] is going to happen is if it is written down in the strategic plan: the Workshop Model and RtI are going to be our instructional framework. I think that when that happened under the District Strategic Plan (DSP) it became very, very easy for all principals across the district to support what RtI was about and how the SIP could support that.

She credited teachers who were members of the school council for the decision to have RtI as the framework for instruction in the SIP. She explained, “A lot of that discussion happened because of having key communicators from the school . . . to speak very poignantly about what it [RtI] allowed them to do and using data to do so.” This administrator admitted:

Our program is only as good as the buy-in for the program. I think staying true to the district focus on using the Workshop Model as the instructional framework and the premise of RtI, and ensuring that when I go into any observation that I see what I’m looking for, is critical. I’m not hiding what I am looking for during the observation. I’m looking for your target objectives, it becomes very much . . . tied into the observation process.

Participants’ perceptions of administrators’ commitment. The participants of the study had varying views as to whether or not school administrators held teachers accountable for implementing the RtI strategies within the Workshop Model in their classrooms. They all agreed that posting targets was an expectation for all teachers in the building. Teacher A added, “There
are constant reminders in the weekly newsletter . . . to use the Workshop Model. I think the hardest thing is keeping new staff up to speed on things such as the Workshop Model and formative assessment.” Teacher C agreed stating, “I feel it is very important that the target be seen when the administrators walk into the classroom along with the standards posted on the wall.” Teacher B felt as though administration was looking for the components of the Workshop Model during the observation process. She remarked:

In reading my own observation reports . . . [administration] would always comment on what my targets were and different components that I was using in my classroom. I think [administration] is trying to hold us accountable for using the strategies, especially since we’ve had so much professional development . . . focused on RtI.

She did wonder, though, if all teachers received the same type of feedback in their observation reports that she received. Another participant, who now holds more of an administrator position, assumed that administration held teachers accountable for using the Workshop Model because the indicators on the rubric that administrators used in their observations and evaluations contain, basically, all the Workshop Model components. She explained, “I would say there is a difference between giving someone feedback in their evaluation or their walkthrough and actually holding them accountable. That is very different. This participant also maintained:

The need for continued PD for our new teachers is evident. It is hard to hold someone accountable for using the instructional and assessment strategies if they weren’t provided the PD if they’re new to the district. There is a lack of cohesiveness in the building . . . what is fair is not always equal, and what is equal is not always fair. You want to hold certain teachers accountable because you know they’ve had the training but not other teachers [who have not had the training].
A few of the participants felt as though there was no accountability for using the RtI strategies they learned during professional development opportunities. Teacher G commented:

There is no accountability. I think that there needs to be. Somebody needs to come in here . . . and say, “Yes, you’re doing it right” or “No, that’s not quite what was meant.” I found that surprising. Nobody came in to see if I was doing it right after they taught me how. I think that’s a necessary piece. I would guess that a lot of people aren’t using it.

Teacher F supported Teacher G’s comments, “Maybe in a request for one lesson plan, maybe in observations twice a year, but other than that is anybody being held accountable for doing it?” Teacher F felt as though there was no accountability on a day-to-day basis. Another teacher concurred stating, “I don’t know if I’d use accountability. I don’t think there is any support for continuing with the program. I don’t think we feel there is an expectation that we are doing it.” Another participant expressed her disappointment by adding, “I thought it was going to provide a solution for those students who are falling between the cracks. It has fallen by the wayside. We are back to where we were prior to having it come in as an initiative.”

Summary

The data gleaned from this study showed that not all teachers had the same experiences being involved in the professional development, especially the PLCs that took place after the initial RtI training. Science teachers found it more difficult to implement some of the Workshop Model components into their daily lessons due to time and personnel constraints. Secondly, the data showed that the majority of participants in this study were enthusiastic about RtI and believed that the components of the Workshop Model used in the Tier 1 classroom benefited both students and teachers. Learning targets were unanimously praised as keeping teachers focused on the goal of the lesson and helping students understand the expectations for the daily
lessons. Teachers and administrators agreed that the ability to work with students, who were having difficulty, during the guided practice component of the Workshop Model was also a benefit, although it was not as easy for some content-area teachers as it was for others. Additionally, teachers concurred that the RtI structure allowed them to collaborate with other teachers to integrate literacy into their content area and found that students were writing more to explain their thinking and using content-area vocabulary in their writing. Finally, all participants were committed to implementing RtI in their classrooms but some questioned the commitment from administrators to hold teachers accountable for adhering to the implementation of RtI and giving proper time for extended professional development in the various components of the Workshop Model.
Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Literacy skills and strategies are needed for all students to find success at all levels of schooling, but students at the middle school level need to be able to meet the challenges of multiple content-area classes and teachers, along with navigating and understanding complicated textbooks. When students lack the foundational skills and strategies they need to be successful in school, the risk of dropping out of high school is intensified. Using an RtI approach that is unique to the middle-school environment can enable all teachers to collaborate in implementing a shared understanding of students’ needs and of the practices and interventions that allow them to find success in the classroom. However, much of the research on RtI has been derived from studies of elementary practices (Brozo, 2011) and do not apply to the distinctive needs of the middle-school student.

Research Question and Themes

This study investigated the design and implementation of Tier 1 RtI interventions and strategies in a middle school and the perception of the impact of these interventions and strategies on literacy skills, and, by extension, student access to content-specific knowledge. The researcher conducted a qualitative case study to research the overarching question: What is the process by which a suburban, East Coast, middle school designed and implemented Tier 1 Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies into their classrooms and what perceived impact have these strategies had on improving the literacy skills and access to content specific knowledge for students? In order to address the needs of students entering the suburban, East Coast, middle school without the necessary literacy skills and strategies required to access the five different content areas, professional development was provided to a select group of teachers. The job-embedded professional development highlighted effective instructional and assessment strategies
used in the Tier 1 classroom within the structure of RtI. The researcher conducted interviews with teachers and administrators, observed teachers in their classrooms, and surveyed content area teachers regarding the literacy strategies they used in their classrooms. Additionally, the researcher collected student work to consider during the analyzing and coding of data. Significant themes emerged across all aspects of the study. The themes that emerged were: (1) RtI is necessary for students who need extra support, (2) the different aspects of the professional development was both a positive and negative experience depending on the content area, (3) there are benefits to the workshop model, (4) literacy integration benefits all students and requires collaboration among teachers, and (5) RtI requires commitment from teachers and administrators.

Through the interview and observation process, the researcher was able to answer the research question as it related to the first theme: RtI is necessary for students who need extra support. Both administrators and teachers acknowledged that the students benefited from being able to meet with teachers during the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model. During the guided practice component, teachers were able to help students improve their written and oral communication and their understanding, in a small group setting, of various content area concepts. Teachers were able to model for students who needed extra support how to navigate their textbooks and summarize complex information in order to understand what they were reading. Administrators noted that they saw an improvement in both local and state assessments and contributed this improvement to students having a better understanding of the literacy skills needed to answer content-specific questions on these assessments.

Additionally, the second theme, the different aspects of the professional development was both a positive and negative experience depending on the content area, was instrumental in
answering the research question. It was apparent when interviewing teachers that they felt the professional development showed them how to adjust their instruction in order to address both the content and literacy needs of all their students. Some teachers confessed that before the professional development they were not able to re-teach or intervene for students during class time, but after the professional development, they were able to adjust their teaching in order to help students reach the goals of the lesson. Although there were teachers who felt that there were parts of the professional development that were harder to implement than others, the majority of the teachers confirmed that the professional development was paramount in helping them understand the importance of all the components in the Workshop Model in order to improve students’ understanding of their specific content area.

The third theme, benefits of the Workshop Model, was the most significant theme in answering the research question. Both administrators and teachers perceived the structure of the Workshop Model as being an essential piece for improving students’ literacy skills and their access to content-specific knowledge. Each component of the Workshop Model: anticipatory set, lesson target, mini-lesson, guided practice, and debrief, gave teachers an opportunity to address their students’ needs and let their students know the expected outcomes of the lesson. During each of the components, teachers were able to guide their students’ understanding of their specific content area and intervene for students when necessary. Administrators commented that they observed that both teachers and students were more focused as a result of the learning target being displayed on the board and that they saw more writing and heard more content specific discourse as a result of teachers using the Workshop Model.

The fourth theme, literacy integration benefits all students and requires collaboration among teachers, was integral in answering the research question. All of the teachers who were
interviewed and observed integrated literacy in their content areas. Every teacher perceived that their students were able to understand their content area better as a result of integrating literacy skills and strategies in their daily lessons. Teachers also commented that they worked with teachers on their teams to help them integrate literacy practices so that students understood the importance of reading, writing, speaking, and listening in all areas. The survey, that 30% of the teachers completed, reflected that teachers across all content areas used some sort of literacy strategy to help students access their specific content area. Administrators confirmed that they observed students constructing knowledge through writing exercises and maintained that there was a correlation between what they observed in these classrooms and student assessment data.

Lastly, the final theme, RtI requires commitment from teachers and administrators, helped answer the research question. In order to improve students’ literacy skills and their access to content-specific knowledge, teachers and administrators had to be committed to RtI as the instructional model in the Tier 1 classroom. Teachers who participated in this study were committed to RtI and the Workshop Model. Teachers were able to provide evidence of their students’ understanding of their content area as a result of integrating literacy skills and strategies through student work samples.

**Summary of the Findings**

Not surprisingly to note was the fact that this study showed not all teachers had the same experiences being involved in the RtI professional development that began in 2011. Science teacher participants who were involved in the PLCs, after the initial training with the consultant, reported they found it more difficult to implement some of the Workshop Model components into their daily lessons due to time and personnel constraints. The majority of participants in this study were enthusiastic about RtI and believed that the components of the Workshop Model used
in the Tier 1 classroom benefited both students and teachers. Learning Targets were unanimously praised as keeping teachers focused on the goal of the lesson and helping students understand the expectations for the daily lessons. Teachers and administrators agreed that the ability to work with students to clarify misconceptions, during the guided practice component of the Workshop Model, was also a benefit, albeit not as easy for some content-area teachers as it was for others. Additionally, teachers concurred that the RtI structure allowed them to collaborate with other teachers to integrate literacy into their content area and found that students were writing more to explain their thinking and using content-area vocabulary in their writing. Finally, all participants were committed to implementing RtI in their classrooms but many questioned the commitment from administrators to hold teachers accountable for adhering to the implementation of RtI and for allocating enough time for extended professional development in the various components of the Workshop Model.

**Major Findings and Themes in Relation to the Literature**

**RtI is necessary for students who need extra support.** RtI is a process that determines whether a student’s performance improves when provided with scientifically-researched, targeted interventions by a highly qualified professional (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). The focus on standards-based, core instruction at Tier 1 is vital in assuring that 80-90% of students find success with the classroom instruction they receive (Casbarro, 2008; Howard, 2009; Brozo, 2011; Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). As predicted, participants felt that intervening at the Tier 1 level helped struggling students access grade-level material. The literature supported this finding in that it encouraged teachers to provide students with feedback. Garrison and Ehringhaus (2007) explain that by providing students with descriptive and actionable feedback, students are able to
reach the next step in their learning trajectory. As a result of Tier 1 interventions, teachers perceived fewer of their students were being referred for special education testing.

**Professional development as both a positive and negative experience.** Participants agreed that the first experience they had with the RtI professional development presented by the outside consultant was a great overview of RtI and succeeded in showing the importance of research-validated instruction at the Tier 1 level. Science teachers appreciated the fact that the consultant understood language is vital in science learning and that being literate in science does not only include the ability to read science books and understand science vocabulary, but, rather the ability to comprehend, interpret, and analyze, while engaging in the discourse of science (Norris & Phillips, 2003). That being said, the participants who taught science expressed concerns with the PLC component of the professional development that was held after school with other team members and leaders. During the PLCs, the science teachers felt anxious and overwhelmed when discussing their concerns with other members of the PLC because RtI seemed to work seamlessly in the other members’ classrooms.

Science participants noted that trying to adhere to the Workshop Model was a major shift in their instructional philosophy because it was challenging to stick to the time constraints and still cover the science standards, including hands-on lab opportunities. Science teachers have recently begun to revise their curriculum maps to include The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). This work will help teachers understand the requirements of including literacy in their content area. The literature reflects that the NGSS (2013) Appendix M support the importance of literacy skills in science. The committees for the NGSS and CCSS worked together to ensure that vital content demands in the NGSS were identified and connections to literacy concepts were included. Both standards acknowledged that there are specific demands in
the science standards that have to be met and need to include all the components of literacy. Students are expected to pay close attention to detail and understand and convey their understanding of diagrams and data presented in multiple ways (NGSS).

Every participant agreed that the professional development surrounding learning targets was worthwhile and applicable to their content area. Moss & Brookhart (2012) describe learning targets as the catalyst for student learning by making students aware of what they should know at the end of the lesson and having students and teachers share the responsibility for that learning. Learning targets enable teachers to inform their instruction by identifying students who are in need of extra support and when to differentiate their instruction (Moss & Brookhart).

Furthermore, additional literature supports the findings regarding the benefit of professional development when it is done effectively and sustainable. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) reject the “drive-by” model where the professional development is given for one day without any follow up in favor of professional development that is hands-on and contributes to teachers’ knowledge of the content. Darling-Hammond and Richardson explain the importance of districts offering professional development as part of a reform process and not in isolation. The middle school where the study took place created opportunities for teachers to meet in PLCs and also included job-embedded professional development when the consultant modeled for and observed teachers in their classrooms. Houk (2010) asserts that teachers need to be able to learn from their colleagues and share effective instructional practices by collaborating with their colleagues. By providing teachers with intensive and content-based learning opportunities with their colleagues both teaching and student learning is improved (Darling-Hammond & Richardson).
Benefits of the workshop model. In this study, teacher participants and administrators found the components of the Workshop Model to be effective in helping students access the curriculum and in aiding teachers to focus on the standards and goals of the lessons.

Anticipatory set. This component of the Workshop Model is vital in a middle school content-area classroom. Additional literature suggests that the instruction students receive in an elementary school classroom lacks the depth needed in a middle school classroom, especially in science and social studies. Because of this fact, students may enter middle school without a lot of relevant core background knowledge (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012). In this study, participants agreed that the anticipatory set provided time for students to access their background knowledge of specific topics. The findings supported the literature as to the importance of accessing students’ prior knowledge before learning new material. Neuman, Kaefer, and Pinkham (2014) explain that as students progress through their schooling there are greater demands placed on them to connect their background knowledge to the new material they are learning. Fisher, Frey, and Lapp posit that middle-school teachers need to help students develop background knowledge in order to enable them to fully engage in their learning. The literature suggests ways in which teachers can develop background knowledge for their students, including demonstrations, field trips, and guest speakers (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp). A few of the participants had students writing for five minutes as a way to access prior knowledge. Then, students were encouraged to share their writing with their group in order to help each other prepare for the lesson. Additionally, some teachers used the anticipatory set to review what was learned in class the previous day or to review homework to help students be prepared to learn new information.

Learning targets. All participants acknowledged that learning targets were essential to the Workshop Model. Participants were in agreement with what the literature reflects: Learning
targets enable students and teachers to share the responsibility for students learning by making students aware of what they are supposed to be learning (Moss & Brookhart, 2012). The researcher was able to see a learning target on the board of all but one teacher observed. The lessons of the day reflected the learning targets, and students’ progress towards achieving the targets were evident throughout the observations. Administrators were also vocal about the usefulness of learning targets and how they were able to observe learning targets on the board while conducting both informal and formal observations. They reported that both students and teachers were focused on the goal of the lesson and worked towards achieving the goal throughout the lesson.

**Mini lesson.** The mini lesson portion of the Workshop Model was evident in all but one of the classrooms the researcher observed. During the ten to fifteen minutes of the mini lesson, teachers in this study provided explicit instructions for students. They also outlined the expectations for the class during this time. Some teachers modeled for their students exactly what to do during the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model. Another teacher read a poem to the students and modeled how students were to analyze the poem independently. In each case, the findings showed the teachers were serving as the MKO in that they were using their expertise to guide and collaborate with students to achieve a higher level of understanding (Vygotsky, 1978).

**Guided practice.** During the guided practice part of the Workshop Model, teachers found that they were able to assess their students and immediately address their needs. The literature supported the effectiveness of the Workshop Model. Tovani (2011) asserts that during the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model, teachers provide students with the scaffolding and support they need while helping them build stamina. The participants in this study understood
that the ability to assess students during the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model was critical to the success of RtI. During this time, both teachers and students served as the MKO for students who needed extra support and guidance. Miller (2011) stresses the importance of grouping students together where at least one of the students is performing at a higher level and is able to guide the struggling student toward achieving the goal of the lesson. Participants agreed that formatively assessing students during the lesson allowed them to address all learners, including students who needed extra support and students who already knew the material and were ready to move on. The findings showed that teachers appreciated the fact that by assessing students during the lesson, they were able to differentiate for them more efficiently than if they waited for another time to address students’ misconceptions. As the literature suggests, assessing students at the end of a unit, known as summative assessment, is proven to be less effective for teachers and students (Tovani, 2011). However, some teachers argued that the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model was not realistic in their discipline. The focus, in the literature, was more on the positive benefits of guided practice as being a catalyst for formative assessments than the negative aspects of trying to assess students in content areas where teachers felt time spent teaching content was more important than assessing students.

**Debrief.** Although this component of the Workshop Model was considered to be extremely important in helping students remember and articulate what they learned during the lesson, the debrief was often ignored due to time constraints. This was evident in the study conducted by the researcher. By the end of the fifty minutes, only two teachers checked for understanding by either collecting sticky notes to review before the next class or by giving students exit slips that highlighted their learning for the day. In additional readings, the literature
stated that the debrief allowed students to be metacognitive and accountable about their learning (Tovani, 2011).

**Literacy integration benefits all students and requires collaboration among teachers.** In order for middle-school students to communicate their understanding of five separate disciplines, including reading, language arts, science, math, and social studies, they are required to navigate the complexities of their content-area textbooks. The ways in which they can demonstrate their understanding is through their literacy skills. The literature supported the integration of literacy in all content areas. Lapp, Grant, Moss, and Johnson (2013) focus on the literacy integration in science and confirmed that reading is an important aspect of science inquiry and that the science teacher needs to know how to help students apply their prior knowledge to support and integrate new text information.

Vacca (2012) clarifies content as being what is required to teach in certain disciplines but acknowledged literacy instruction was needed to understand how to teach the content. The goal of literacy instruction should be to help students become proficient in their comprehension skills, writing skills, and overall communication skills (Vacca).

Brozo (2011) recommends that in order to help students increase their literacy skills, content area teachers need professional development based on their specific discipline. Biancarosa (2012) agrees and acknowledges that texts and expectations in each discipline differ from one another and teachers need to participate in professional development that highlights literacy practices in their content area.

Participants agreed that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) made integrating literacy skills and strategies a priority in all their content areas. Although all teacher participants required students to read, write, and discuss specific topics to show their understanding, the
CCSS focus on students being able to become critical thinkers by problem solving and communicating using higher-level literacy skills. The International Reading Association (IRA) (2012) recommends that content-area teachers collaborate with literacy professionals to implement research-based instruction in their classrooms. The literature supported participants’ feelings that integrating literacy skills across their content area has proven to be very successful.

Not only did teachers and administrators see growth in student achievement testing, but teachers also noted students were able to communicate their understanding of concepts through thoughtful writing activities and classroom discourse. Many participants stated that collaboration among different content-area teachers on their teams was a positive experience and helped students make the connections between the different content areas. Through the interview process, it was apparent that language arts, reading, and social studies teachers collaborated consistently with each other and used the same literacy terminology and strategies in their classroom. This helped students master many of the literacy strategies and using them multiple times across multiple disciplines allowed students to become proficient in recognizing when each strategy was appropriate to use. Some teacher participants voiced a concern that the lab classrooms and PLCs that were part of the professional development did not continue after the initial year and would have been a good means of promoting teacher collaboration.

**Literacy surveys.** In order to understand how content-area teachers used literacy instructional strategies that enabled students to demonstrate their understanding of specific content areas, the researcher surveyed teachers using the *Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Skills in the Content Area*. In this study, the data from the surveys confirmed that all content areas were represented and the most used strategies included think, pair, share and word walls. These strategies were used by all disciplines: reading, language arts,
social studies, math, and science. Strategies that were used least by teachers were dialogue journals and concept ladders. The data also showed that math teachers were less inclined to use literacy instructional strategies in their teaching, although they were the primary users of word walls. Friedland & McMillen (2010) state that most mathematics teachers use the word wall as a way to address literacy needs in their classrooms. Although word walls are a beginning, teachers need to be versed in a wide range of literacy strategies that they can employ with their students (Friedland & McMillen). Alternatively, the data gleaned from the surveys showed that reading and language arts teachers were the primary users of literacy instructional strategies, which was not surprising to the researcher. Social studies teachers also used literacy instructional strategies more frequently in their classrooms than science and math teachers.

RtI requires commitment from teachers and administrators. Through the interview process, it was clear that the teachers who participated in this study were committed to having RtI work in their classrooms. Even teachers who found some components of the Workshop Model to be more challenging to implement than other components stated they understood the benefits of each component. They also agreed with the literature that many of the misconceptions students have in their content areas are a result of the students’ lack of reading and other literacy skills (Brozo, 2011), and, therefore, understood their responsibility in helping students access their content area by integrating literacy skills and strategies into their disciplines. In this study, the researcher interviewed administrators who were committed to the RtI process and understood the benefits that RtI and the Workshop Model held for all students. The administrators acknowledged that teachers needed more professional development in certain components of the Workshop Model in order to address the needs of their students in the Tier 1 classroom. This notion is supported in the literature. Brozo (2011) affirms that content-area teachers need to be
able to differentiate content-area instruction for all their students in order to diminish the need for Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports.

**Major Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework**

Through the lens of the formative assessment theory, this study described the ways in which teachers integrated literacy and the Workshop Model in the Tier 1 classroom. The formative assessment theory is rooted in the research of seminal authors Black and Wiliam (1998) who define formative assessment as “all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged” (p. 7). Shepard (2005) explains that formative assessment identifies the student’s current understanding, which allows the teacher to change the course of instruction to move the student forward in his learning. The findings showed that participants agreed that formative assessment was paramount in understanding students’ needs.

**RtI is necessary for students who need extra support.** Participants recognized that using formative assessments with their students supported both the motivation and achievement in the students. Participants concurred that although they used formative assessments for all their students, formative assessment was especially helpful when dealing with struggling students, including ELLs. Some participants commented that ELLs have special needs that need to be met along with specific regulations that need to be adhered to, so being able to assess these students informally was critical. Marinak (2009) explains that it is vital for ESL teachers to be part of the RtI team so they can provide information about ELLs regarding their first and second language acquisition.

Additionally, the findings reflected that some teachers felt RtI enabled them to understand the needs of both their struggling students and their higher-level students. One of the
teachers stated she was more effective in her teaching because she was able to focus on the
diverse learning needs of her students during the guided practice component of the Workshop
Model.

Benefits of workshop model. Formative assessment happens primarily during the guided
practice portion of the Workshop Model, but teachers stated they also used formative
assessments during the anticipatory and debrief components of the Workshop Model. Teachers
appreciated the fact that formative assessments gave them daily feedback on the progress their
students were making in their classrooms.

Anticipatory set. The findings showed that a few of the teachers used the anticipatory set
of the Workshop Model to assess students’ prior knowledge. One of the teachers used an
entrance slip to determine what students remembered from a previous lesson about the Bill of
Rights. Another teacher had students involved in a quick write to assess their understanding of
previous chapters they read in a novel. By giving the students a formative assessment during the
anticipatory set of the Workshop Model, teachers were able to adjust their instruction for
students who did not demonstrate an understanding of the subject matter or plan a re-teaching or
intervention opportunity for specific students. Although none of the teachers reviewed the
formative assessments during the time of the observation, the researcher observed that during the
mini lesson portion of the Workshop Model, teachers reviewed previous lessons with the whole
class.

Guided practice. During the guided practice component of the Workshop Model,
teachers were able to assess students’ understanding, or lack thereof, and give students
actionable feedback so they could adjust their thinking. The literature supported this practice by
acknowledging that providing students with descriptive and actionable feedback during the
lesson has shown to increase students’ achievement scores more than any other teaching behavior (Hattie, 2011).

Teachers agreed that a benefit of the guided practice component of the Workshop Model was that it allowed them to informally assess their students on a daily basis. The formative assessment theory supported that finding in that students needed to be told whether they were working towards achieving the learning target, and, if they were not, some type of intervention needed to take place. The findings also reflected that teachers used formative assessments as a way to guide students by writing notes on students’ papers or asking questions that would help move students’ thinking forward. One of the teachers commented that she wrote notes and asked questions on students’ graphic organizers to give them ideas on how they could improve their answers. Teachers felt that providing written or oral feedback to students was a way for them to differentiate their responses and address students’ specific needs. Participants relayed their beliefs that students valued formative assessment during the guided practice part of the lesson. Students looked forward to teachers’ comments on the progress they were making towards achieving the learning target of the day. Garrison and Ehringhaus (2007) explain that when students are given descriptive and actionable feedback, they know how to reach the next step in their trajectory. One of the teachers working with ELLs reported that teaching students in the Tier 1 classroom during guided practice allowed her to differentiate her instruction, which is also part of the formative assessment theory. She pointed out that sometimes her guided practice looked like one-on-one tutoring and that her goal was to differentiate and scaffold instruction and assessment for her students to get them where they needed to be.
On the other hand, some teachers found using formative assessments was difficult at times. Wiliam and Leahy (2014) maintain that implementing formative assessment techniques is more difficult than it might appear and administrators should consider how to support teachers.

**Debrief.** Another opportunity that teachers had to informally assess their students is during the debrief portion of the Workshop Model. During the observations, the researcher observed only two teachers utilizing the debrief component of the Workshop Model. The findings showed that one of the teachers collected exit slips to review after the class in order to determine students’ understanding of the lesson and prepare for the next day’s lesson. Another teacher collected sticky notes to determine if her students understood the concepts of the lesson. Both teachers stated that by collecting the formative assessments, they were able to adjust their instruction the following day and to reteach concepts or provide specific students with interventions that would address students’ misconceptions.

**Literacy integration benefits all students and requires collaboration among teachers.** The findings showed that teachers enjoyed collaborating with their teams to discuss formative assessments and to determine what type of descriptive feedback to give to students. One of the participants informed the researcher that she and another teacher on her team target students based on summative and formative assessment scores to provide either intervention or enrichment opportunities. The findings also showed that administrators at the middle school witnessed teachers collaborating and discussing formative assessments on their shared students during teachers’ common planning time. Administrators were specifically pleased with the collaboration between ESL teachers and content-area teachers.
Implications for Practice

This descriptive case study described the perceptions that a select group of teachers and administrators had regarding the RtI initiative and its impact on improving students’ literacy skills in the Tier 1 classroom. This study looked at the ways in which teachers at one middle school integrated literacy skills in their classrooms using the components of the Workshop Model within the structure of RtI. Teacher participants were interviewed, observed, and they identified literacy strategies used in their classrooms as part of the study. Administrators were interviewed about the need for RtI in the district and their perceptions of the implementation of RtI and the Workshop Model within the middle-school setting. The triangulation of data resulted in an understanding of teachers’ experiences with the RtI professional development, their feelings toward the Workshop Model and their ability to integrate literacy skills, an increase in collaboration among teachers, and their perceptions of if and how administration supports the RtI initiative. Below are recommendations to improve the effectiveness of RtI in a middle school in a district in Massachusetts:

1. There needs to be more RtI professional development for teachers and administrators.

   The professional development that was provided for all teachers by the consultant was a one-day overview of RtI and the Workshop Model. Although members of the RtI school team did provide professional development during contractual time, the professional development did not address all teachers’ concerns and was replaced by other district initiatives. Furthermore, administrators only received the one-day professional development if, in fact, they even attended the one-day professional development. Teacher participants questioned whether administration held teachers accountable for creating a classroom environment where the Workshop Model was the norm. It is
important for administrators, at all levels, to understand the components of the Workshop Model in order to address teachers’ needs and hold teachers accountable for implementing the Workshop Model in their classrooms. Additionally, team leaders were involved in job-embedded professional development where the consultant modeled the Workshop Model and also observed team leaders implementing the Workshop Model. This model was to become the infrastructure for job-embedded professional development in the district, but it has yet to come to fruition. The original intention was to create lab classrooms where other teachers could observe team leaders implementing the Workshop Model. These team leaders would become the experts in the Workshop Model and provide coaching for other teachers. This type of job-embedded professional development has proven to be more effective with teachers in helping their students move forward in their learning. Also, there should be a plan for new teachers to receive a one-day overview of RtI and the Workshop Model with the understanding that they will observe the lab classrooms and meet with the team leaders to discuss the Workshop Model throughout the year. Team leaders would then observe the new teachers to coach and support them in implementing the Workshop Model. Moreover, ongoing professional development that focuses on integrating critical thinking and high-level literacy skills and strategies in all content areas would benefit teachers who would like additional support in that area and for teachers who were identified by administration as needing support in integrating literacy skills in their instruction. Finally, teachers need to know how to differentiate their instruction for all learners. During the guided practice portion of the Workshop Model, re-teaching and intervention using differentiated instruction is vital if students are to understand the content presented. The district needs to address the issue of
teachers not knowing how to properly differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

2. In addition to the lab classrooms, the district should re-introduce PLCs focusing on RtI and the Workshop Model as a way for teachers to collaborate with each other with the intent of helping all students learn. Excluding the participants of this study none of the teachers at the middle school were involved in the PLCs. Dufour (2004) posits that every teacher involved in a PLC must work together to assure that all students learn, not just that all students are taught. To do this, RtI would need to be the focus of middle-school teachers’ common planning time at least once during a six-day cycle. All too often teachers work in silos and do not interact with each other. By being involved in a PLC, teachers would be able to discuss all aspects of RtI and learn from each other. Dufour maintains that when teachers participate in PLCs, they have access to the entire team’s talents and can reflect together on areas of concern.

3. The district would benefit from consistent vertical meetings where there is discourse between teachers of transitioning students, specifically from elementary to middle school. Discussions should investigate the literacy skills and strategies that are in place at the elementary level and how those skills and strategies align with the expectations of the middle-school classrooms where students are required to read extended, dense text and write in response to what they read.

4. Seeing where the elementary schools and the middle school, where the study took place, received the same type of professional development, conversations need to take place to determine the expected outcomes at each level. Because middle-school students encounter five different content-area teachers, unlike the elementary schools where
students encounter one teacher who teaches five subject areas, literacy integration and interventions need to happen in every content area. The system of support in Tiers 2 & 3 differs greatly between the elementary and middle school, so the middle school needs to address students’ needs in the Tier 1 classroom.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

1. Seeing where this study concentrated only on the original participants of the RtI professional development, it would behoove the district to include other teachers from both middle schools in a future study. There are many teachers at both middle schools whose students have found success in the classroom as proven by the data collected on their assessment results and growth percentiles. The study should determine if the students’ successes are related to the implementation of RtI and the Workshop Model or if there are other variables that contribute to students’ achievement. It is also recommended that this study focus on other districts, with similar demographics, to investigate how they implement RtI at their middle schools. A further study should explore the format that is used to provide teachers with professional development and the teachers’ perceptions as to the effectiveness of the professional development.

2. The results of the survey, *Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Skills in the Content Area*, indicated the literacy strategies used most often by teachers of different content areas. The survey did not provide the participants’ grade levels or allow for comments. A future study should include the option of allowing the researcher to ask additional clarifying questions regarding the use of literacy strategies in the participants’ classrooms. This additional information would be beneficial to the study because it would
aid in the understanding of why teachers used certain strategies and how those strategies were used in the classroom to promote students’ learning.

3. In this study, the concentration was on teachers, not students. It is recommended that future studies should include the exploration of student engagement and motivation in the RtI classroom. The literature suggests that involving students in creating learning targets will allow them to gauge their own learning and make necessary adjustments to their learning (Moss & Brookhart, 2012).

4. Working in tandem with recommendation #3, the district should conduct a longitudinal study to determine the affects the RtI initiative had on student achievement. This quasi-experimental design could begin with students in kindergarten and follow them through the end of middle school (eighth grade).

Limitations of the Study

This case study was limited to one of the two middle schools in one district in Massachusetts. The researcher collected and analyzed data from twelve participants of which eight were content-area teachers and two were administrators in central office and two were administrators at the middle-school site. The teachers were selected to be in this study because of their involvement in the initial professional development that was conducted in the district. The teachers who were interviewed and observed represented three of the core subject areas: reading, social studies, and science. The current ELL director was also involved in this study and answered interview questions based on her experiences as an ESL teacher, not as an administrator. Additionally, each grade level was represented, but there was only one seventh-grade teacher involved in the study. Language arts and math teachers were not interviewed or observed because they either declined participation or they were not part of the purposeful
sampling. Math and language arts teachers were asked to participate in the survey component of the study and of the 30% of surveys returned, the results reflected participation from both math and language arts teachers. There were no grade levels reported on the survey, but teachers were asked to identify their content area. Additionally, teachers were asked to check the literacy strategies they used without adding comments, and, because the survey was anonymous, there was no reciprocity for the researcher to ask follow-up questions. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all teachers or other middle schools.

Two administrators from central office and two administrators from the study site were involved in this study. They allowed the researcher to interview them and related their answers to the District Strategic Plan and the School Improvement Plan. The exclusion of other central office administrators and other administrators at the school site, due to their minimal involvement in the professional development, results in the inability of the findings to be generalized to all administrators or other middle schools.

Furthermore, the researcher is a teacher at the study site and was one of the curriculum supervisors who introduced the RtI professional development to the district. In addition to being a language arts teacher, the researcher is also the Title I Director in the district. Although the Title I Director position is part of the teachers’ contract, some teachers regard the position as an administrative position. The researcher continues to facilitate the RtI meetings that are held at both the district and middle-school levels and is also involved in the RtI ongoing professional development at the middle-school level as a presenter. The researcher is an advocate of RtI and utilizes the components of the Workshop Model in her classroom.
Conclusion

In this district in Central Massachusetts, RtI as an instructional framework integrated various components of teaching within a Workshop Model. Each component of the Workshop Model contributed to the success of student learning. Within the Workshop Model, teachers integrated literacy skills and strategies that helped hone students’ critical thinking skills making them productive citizens within the school environment and in their community.

This study offered insights into the principles of RtI and the process of providing students with standards-based instruction and interventions within the Tier 1 classroom. Additionally, this study explored and described participants’ understanding and perceptions of the RtI professional development in which they were involved and the Workshop Model. The study also allowed participants, in addition to identifying the positive effects of the RtI professional development, to discuss the negative aspects of implementing RtI in their classroom and the inconsistencies of the Workshop Model. This study investigated the ways in which teachers integrated literacy skills and strategies in the Tier 1 classroom and the effect they had on student learning. Collaboration among teachers was cited as a benefit of RtI and the need for more collaboration among teachers in a PLC format was a recommendation made by the researcher. The findings from this study also revealed that some teachers did not feel administration held all teachers accountable for implementing the Workshop Model and expressed their concern that RtI would be replaced by other district initiatives. The researcher was able to identify the limitations of the study and also made recommendations for further studies.
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Appendices

Appendix A- Superintendent Consent Letter

February 2, 2015

Re: Patricia M. Kelley

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to certify that I give Patricia Kelley, Northeastern Doctor of Education student, permission to conduct her doctoral study in the Stacy Middle School. I give permission for her to conduct her study as outlined in her doctoral thesis proposal entitled, “Response to Intervention in the Middle School and its Effect of Accessing Literacy Skills in the Tier I Classroom”, utilizing middle school teachers and principals and Central Office administrators.

If you have any questions, please contact me at rtemblay@milfordma.com.

Sincerely,

Robert Tremblay
Superintendent of Schools
Milford, Massachusetts
Appendix B – Principal Consent Letter

February 2, 2015

Re: Patricia M. Kelley

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter is to certify that I give Patricia Kelley, Northeastern Doctor of Education student, permission to conduct her doctoral study in the Stacy Middle School. I give permission for her to conduct her study as outlined in her doctoral thesis proposal entitled, “Response to Intervention in the Middle School and its Effect of Accessing Literacy Skills in the Tier I Classroom”, utilizing middle school teachers.

If you have any questions, please contact me at nangelini@milfordma.com.

Sincerely,

Nancy Angelini
Principal
Stacy Middle School
Appendix C - Teacher Recruitment E-mail

Dear Colleagues,

As some of you are aware, I am a doctoral student in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. I am writing to ask you to consider participating in my research study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the design and implementation of Tier I, RtI interventions and strategies in a middle school and the perception of the impact of these interventions and strategies on literacy skills, and by extension, student access to content specific knowledge.

I am looking for teachers who have participated in various aspects of the Response to Intervention (RtI) professional development beginning in 2011: professional development with the outside consultant, professional learning communities (PLC), and lab classrooms. To be a participant, you and your classroom would be observed during a lesson one time in which you are using the RtI instructional strategies consisting of learning targets, the workshop model, and formative assessment. In addition to the RtI instructional strategies, I would be observing how literacy skills are developed within your discipline. You would also be asked to participate in at least one interview lasting 30-60 minutes. The interviews would occur in your classroom either before or after school.

The decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate, and, even if you do decide to participate, you may stop at any time. Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use pseudonyms and will not identify you, your school, your school district, or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you are interested or have any questions about this study, please contact me at 508-596-0616 or kelley.pat@husky.neu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Pattie Kelley
Appendix D - Participant Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Kelly Conn, Ph.D., Principal Investigator and Patricia Kelley, Student Researcher

Title of Project: Response to Intervention in the Middle School and its Effect on Accessing Literacy Skills in the Tier I Classroom

Dear Educator,

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which teachers design and implement Tier I Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies and literacy skills into their classrooms. Identifying the instructional and assessment strategies used by Tier 1 content area teachers to help students increase their literacy skills will allow students to find success in all aspects of their schooling making them articulate and productive citizens of the 21st Century. This research will contribute to filling in the gap in knowledge and literature surrounding RtI at the middle school level.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview session and also let the researcher observe you using the RtI instructional strategies consisting of learning targets, the workshop model, and formative assessment. In addition to the RtI instructional strategies, the researcher will observe how literacy skills are developed within your discipline.

Interviews will be conducted at the convenience of your schedule before or after school and will last for no more than fifty minutes. You will be able to choose where you would like the interview to be conducted and also be provided with the interview questions prior to the interview so you can prepare and organize your responses. During the interview, you will be asked questions that reflect your opinions and experiences on integrating literacy in your classroom within the RtI structure. The researcher will take field notes using audiotape to ensure your responses are captured accurately.

There is a potential risk that you may be uncomfortable stating your beliefs and opinions during the interview session or that you may fear being observed thinking that the results from the observation could be used in your evaluation. Information gleaned from any components of the study will not affect your evaluation.
There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help you in understanding how teachers are implementing Response to Intervention in their classrooms, within the workshop model, and how teachers address the need for students to acquire the literacy skills needed to access specific content areas. Additionally, the results of the research will support the Milford Public Schools Strategic Plan in that it will help align the elementary and middle schools as they move forward with the Response to Intervention initiative.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use pseudonyms and will not identify you, the school, the school district, or any individual as being affiliated with this project. All data garnered from observations and interviews will be confidential and you will not be linked to any specific statements in the final report. The researcher will insure confidentiality by using a coding system to collect data obtained from each participant. All data collected will be stored on the researcher’s laptop, that is password protected and brought home every night or in a locked file cabinet located in the researcher’s classroom that is secured with a lock. The only people who will have access to the data will be you and the researcher. You will be able to review your own data that was collected from interviews and observations.

The decision to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate, and, even if you do decide to participate, you may stop at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions during the interview process. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, it will not affect your relationship with the school, and you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee of the X School District or Northeastern University.

If you have any questions about this study, please email me at kelley.pat@husky.neu.edu. You may also email the Principal Investigator, Dr. Kelly Conn at k.conn@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

This study has been explained to me. I have read the letter and have been given a copy of this letter.

____________________________________________   ____ ______________
Signature of person agreeing to take part      Date

____________________________________________
Printed name of person above
By signing below I indicate that the participant has read and, to the best of my knowledge, understands the details contained in this document and has been given a copy.

____________________________________________   ____ ______________
Signature of person who explained the study to the participant above and obtained consent   Date

_____________________________________________
Printed name of person above

Thank you for your time.
Respectfully,

Pattie Kelley
Ed.D. Student
Northeastern University
Appendix E- Participant Informed Consent Form for Paper Survey

Northeastern University, Department of: College of Professional Studies

Name of Investigator(s): Kelly Conn, Ph.D., Principal Investigator and Patricia Kelley, Student Researcher

Title of Project: Response to Intervention in the Middle School and its Effect on Accessing Literacy Skills in the Tier I Classroom

Dear Educator,

We would like to invite you to participate in a paper survey. The survey is part of a research study whose purpose is to investigate the ways in which teachers design and implement Tier I Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies and literacy skills into their classrooms. Identifying the instructional and assessment strategies used by Tier 1 content area teachers to help students increase their literacy skills will allow students to find success in all aspects of their schooling making them articulate and productive citizens of the 21st Century. This research will contribute to filling in the gap in knowledge and literature surrounding RtI at the middle school level. This survey should take about five minutes to complete.

We are asking you to participate in this study because you are a content area teacher, at the middle school level, and we would like to find out which literacy strategies are used most often in your content area.

The decision to participate in this research project is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate, and, even if you do decide to participate in the survey, you may stop at any time.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort to you for taking part in this study.

There will be no direct benefit to you for participating in the study. However, the information learned from this study may help you in understanding how teachers are implementing Response to Intervention in their classrooms, within the workshop model, and how teachers address the need for students to acquire the literacy skills needed to access specific content areas. Additionally, the results of the research will support the Milford Public Schools Strategic Plan in that it will help align the elementary and middle schools as they move forward with the Response to Intervention initiative.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being affiliated with this project.

If you have any questions about this study, please email me at kelley.pat@husky.neu.edu. You may also email the Principal Investigator, Dr. Kelly Conn at k.conn@neu.edu.
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

By turning the page, onto the survey, you are indicating that you consent to participate in this study. Please make a copy of this consent form for your records.

Thank you for your time.

Pattie Kelley
Appendix F – Teacher Interview Protocol and Questions

Teacher Interview

Interview Protocol:

- Interviews will be conducted and transcribed by Patricia Kelley, Northeastern student in College of Professional Studies.
- Interviews will be taped and later transcribed to provide the most accuracy.
- Interviews will be held in the participant’s classroom, either before or after school or during a preparation period if the teacher prefers.
- Interviews will last 30-60 minutes and will occur one time. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled if necessary for clarification purposes.

Primary Interview Questions:

Introductory Questions:

- Describe your experience using Response to Intervention (RtI) in the classroom.
- Describe your experience integrating literacy in your content area.

Questions:

- What was the process by which you received training for the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies?
- How would you describe your experience participating in the professional development?
- How do you integrate Tier 1 skills and interventions in your classroom?
- In what ways do administrators hold teachers, at Stacy Middle School, accountable for using the instructional and assessment strategies, learned during
the professional development and during their Professional Learning Communities (PLC)?

- What perceived impact has the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the literacy skills of the students in your classroom?
- How do you perceive the impact of the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the access of subject specific content for students?

Concluding Questions:

- Is there anything else you would like to include?
- Do you need any further clarification about the study in which you are participating?

Interviewer Reminders:

- Thank participants for their time.
- Assure participants that their responses will be kept confidential.
- Remind participants that they can review their responses to the interview questions at any time.
Appendix G– Team Leader Interview Protocol and Questions

Team Leader Interview

Interview Protocol:

- Interviews will be conducted and transcribed by Patricia Kelley, Northeastern student in College of Professional Studies.
- Interviews will be taped and later transcribed to provide the most accuracy.
- Interviews will be held in the participant’s classroom, either before or after school or during a preparation period if the teacher prefers.
- Interviews will last 30-60 minutes and will occur one time. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled if necessary for clarification purposes.

Primary Interview Questions:

Introductory Questions:

- Describe your experience using Response to Intervention (RtI) in the classroom.
- Describe your experience integrating literacy in your content area.

Questions:

- What was the process by which you received training for the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies?
- How would you describe your experience participating in and facilitating the professional development?
- How would you describe the implementation of Tier 1 skills and interventions in your classroom?
• What do Tier 1, RtI skills and interventions look like when implemented with fidelity in classrooms?

• How do you perceive the impact of the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the literacy skills of the students?

• How do you perceive the impact of the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the access of subject specific content for students?

Concluding Questions:

• Is there anything else you would like to include?

• Do you need any further clarification about the study in which you are participating?

Interviewer Reminders:

• Thank participants for their time.

• Assure participants that their responses will be kept confidential.

• Remind participants that they can review their responses to the interview questions at any time.
Appendix H – Administrator Interview Protocol and Questions

Administrator Interview

Interview Protocol:

- Interviews will be conducted and transcribed by Patricia Kelley, Northeastern student in College of Professional Studies.
- Interviews will be taped and later transcribed to provide the most accuracy.
- Interviews will be held in the participant’s office, either before or after school or during the interviewer’s preparation period if all parties are agreeable.
- Interviews will last 30-60 minutes and will occur one time. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled if necessary for clarification purposes.

Primary Interview Questions:

Superintendent and Special Education Director:

- In what ways did the Superintendent of the suburban, east coast district, and other members of the Central Office, determine that professional development in RtI was to be included in the District Strategic Plan?
- In what ways did administrators, in Central Office, support the need for professional development training for RtI team leaders and classroom teachers?
- How do administrators, in Central Office, perceive the impact of the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the literacy skills of the students?
- How do administrators, in Central Office, perceive the impact of the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the access of subject specific content for students?
Principal and Assistant Principal at Stacy Middle School:

- How did administrators at Stacy Middle School perceive the need for professional development in RtI as a way to help students access the literacy skills needed in every content area?
- In what ways did the principal of Stacy Middle School and members of the School Council determine that the implementation of Response to Intervention would be included in the School Improvement Plan (SIP)?
- In what ways did administrators, at Stacy Middle School, support the need for professional development training for RtI team leaders and classroom teachers?
- In what ways do administrators, at Stacy Middle School, hold teachers accountable for using the instructional and assessment strategies, learned during the professional development and during their Professional Learning Communities (PLC)?
- How do administrators perceive the impact of the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the literacy skills of the students?
- How do administrators perceive the impact of the implementation of Tier 1, RtI, strategies had on improving the access of subject specific content for students?

Concluding Questions:

- Is there anything else you would like to include?
- Do you need any further clarification about the study in which you are participating?

Interviewer Reminders:

- Thank participants for their time.
- Assure participants that their responses will be kept confidential.
• Remind participants that they can review their responses to the interview questions at any time.
Appendix I- Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Skills in the Content Area

Please circle content area you teach: Reading, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Math

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Strategies</th>
<th>Check if used at least once during the school year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-2-1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha Boxes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anticipation Guide</td>
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<td>Building Schema Activity</td>
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<td>Cloze Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept Definition Map</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept Ladder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dialogue Journals</td>
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<td>Double/Triple Journal Entries</td>
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<td>Fact Pyramids</td>
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<td>Frayer Model</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guided Reading Strategies Chart</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inquiry Charts (I-Chart)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactive Reading Guides</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal Writing</td>
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<tr>
<td>KWL</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Logs</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>List, Group, Label</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Fiction Feature Finder</td>
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<tr>
<td>QAR (Question-Answer-Relationship)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quick Writes</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reciprocal Teaching</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Road Map</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semantic Mapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story Impressions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SQRQCQ (Survey, Question, Read, Question, Compute, Question)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWBS- (Somebody, Wanted, But, So)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think, Pair, Share</td>
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<td>Verbal and Visual Word Association</td>
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<td>Word Splash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word Wall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other strategies not listed:</td>
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Source: Friedland, McMillen, & del Prado Hill, 2010
Appendix J- Observation Protocol

Observational Fieldnotes
Setting:
Observer:
Role of Observer:
Date & Time:
Length of Observation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Description of Classroom (Anchor charts, posters, student work, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anticipatory Set (5 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Target (5 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mini Lesson (10 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guided Practice (25 minutes)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Debrief (5 minutes)</td>
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</table>
### Appendix K- Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Skills Results

#### Table 1. Teacher Self-Assessment Tool for Integrating Literacy Skills in the Content Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Strategies</th>
<th>Number of participants self-reporting that they have used this strategy at least once during the school year.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Alpha Boxes</td>
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<td>Anticipation Guide</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Building Schema Activity</td>
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<td>Cloze Activity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concept Definition Map</td>
<td>5</td>
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