TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A TIERED MODEL OF INSTRUCTION TO RAISE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN SECOND GRADE CLASSROOMS: A FORMATIVE PROGRAM EVALUATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this research study was to determine program effectiveness and how the implementation of a tiered model of instruction (RtI) impacted student achievement in second grade classrooms. It was the intent of the researcher of this qualitative study to determine if the teachers’ perceptions of the new assessment systems provided them with data rich information to make instructional decisions based on the student data collected from DIBELS, MAP, and CASE21. The researcher also investigated whether the data collected from the assessment systems, in conjunction with professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development, improved student achievement in literacy for second grade students.

The goal of this research was to determine reading program effectiveness and how to make improvements in order to increase reading achievement, while reducing the number of students referred for special education testing at the elementary school level.

The site of this study was in a large, urban school district in the Southeastern United States with both regular and special education students. The participants in this study were a purposeful sample. The participants were four second grade classroom teachers, one Response to Intervention coach, one school counselor, and one special education teacher. There were three student data sources (DIBELS, MAP, CASE21), one survey (PET-R), and a focus group interview (the primary data set) as part of the data collection and analysis process. The two questions which were investigated in this study were:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student achievement?
2. What do teachers perceive to be the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team throughout the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?

Four key findings emerged from the collection and analysis of the data sets:

1. Professional development training is needed for the different tiers of instruction within the RtI model.

2. Professional development training is needed for the purpose of intervention team.

3. Teachers need to use the data collected from the universal screening tools to identify struggling students in literacy.

4. Support from the school district and site administrators are vital to the implementation of initiatives at a study site.
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“Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

– Theodore Roosevelt
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Many teachers are held accountable for what their students know and are able to demonstrate on summative, end of year assessments. These assessments assess specific standards in reading and mathematics in third through eighth grades, and one year in high school. Because of the accountability movement that was initiated through the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001, also known in the field of education as The No Child Left Behind Act, 2001 (NCLB), teachers are now held accountable for ensuring that their students are making at least one year’s growth in reading and mathematics. NCLB and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) require teachers to utilize and implement research and evidence based instructional practices when delivering lessons to their students.

Born out of the accountability movement and IDEIA (2004) is Response to Intervention (RtI), a multi-tiered approach to instruction, which is currently driving the movement for teachers to focus on how they are delivering their core instruction in reading and mathematics. Many schools in the United States are beginning to adopt the Response to Intervention model for teaching and learning as a way to address the achievement gap and to reduce the number of students in special education. Response to Intervention also provides teachers with assessment tools to monitor student progress and improve classroom instruction.

State legislatures are beginning to adopt assessment measures which will allow teachers to monitor student progress and improve classroom instruction. The Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, has advocated for, “top-quality assessments and to create data systems that track students from the cradle to college” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p.33). The state of
North Carolina is one such state which has adopted DIBELSNext/Reading 3D as the statewide, research based and validated assessment system to monitor student progress and improve classroom instruction.

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELSNext) are assessments which measure basic early literacy skills in the areas of Letter Naming Fluency (LNF), First Sound Fluency (FSF), Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF), DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF), as well as text comprehension assessments which measure fluency, written communication, and word recognition skills (TRC). These assessments are aligned to the five literacy components for student success and reading development as outlined in the National Reading Panel (NRP) (2000). The five major components are phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

The state legislature in North Carolina passed the Read to Achieve initiative in 2012 which mandated the utilization of the DIBELSNext/Reading 3D assessments for all students in kindergarten through third grade. The goal of Read to Achieve legislation is to identify the students who are in need of reading intervention at an early age/grade so they are able to succeed at a proficient level at fourth grade and beyond. Proficiency as defined by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2009) is the level at which a student, “should be able to demonstrate an overall understanding of the text, providing inferential as well as literal information” (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p.8) and, “be able to extend the ideas in the text by making inferences, drawing conclusions, and making connections to their own experiences. The connections between the text and what the student infers should be clear” (p. 8).

According to NAEP scores in 2009, the number of students nationally who scored below the proficient level in reading was 68% (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 44). The state of
North Carolina is ranked twenty-ninth out of fifty states with the number of fourth grade students scoring below proficiency at 68%. This means that only 32% of students tested in the fourth grade across the state of North Carolina were deemed proficient in the area of reading. Even more alarming was the discrepancy between the number of African-American students and white students who were below proficiency in reading. While there were 56% of white students below level in reading, there were 86% of African-American students below proficiency in reading (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 45).

It has been five years since the release of the NAEP (2009) data and while there has been some measureable increase of NAEP scores over the last decade and a half, the achievement gap continues to widen between racial groups. Moreover, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010), “A major cause of retention is failure to master the knowledge and content needed to progress on time—and that, in a great many cases, is the result of not being able to read proficiently as early as fourth grade” (p.8). This statement supports the state of North Carolina’s Read to Achieve (2012) initiative in recognizing the need to tend to the literacy skills of students in kindergarten through third grades so that the children in the fourth grade can read at a proficient level, for the achievement gap to decrease, and for fewer students to be referred for special education services. The Read to Achieve initiative will be addressed through the implementation of a tiered response to instruction, progress monitoring, and intervention services for identified students as indicated on the DIBELSNext/Reading 3D assessment platform.

Response to Intervention is significant to the problem of practice because its goal is to reduce the number of students in special education and to close the achievement gap before it occurs. The implementation of Response to Intervention as a multi-tiered instructional model is the problem at the elementary study site. Because the primary purpose of Response to
Intervention is to avoid exceptional children labeling and to address the academic and behavioral needs of both special education and regular education students through a systematic, multi-tiered approach to instruction, it is necessary for teachers to ensure that RtI is being implemented with fidelity and monitored for effectiveness.

**Research Problem**

The specific problem studied was how teachers perceived the implementation of a tiered model of instruction at the elementary study site and if this new initiative had an impact on student achievement in reading and reduced the amount of students referred for special education services. This new initiative had been in place at the study site for one school year, approximately ten months.

**Justification of the Research Problem and Deficiencies in the Evidence**

The research which was explored to support the need for this qualitative study was based on the findings of Barnhardt (2009), Curtis-Whipple (2011), and Pelletier (2011). Curtis-Whipple’s (2011) findings from her research on literacy and differentiation determined that further research should be conducted on the importance of using data to inform curriculum decisions. The data collected from Collaborative Assessment Solutions for Educators in the 21st Century (CASE21), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) was the basis for making informed decisions surrounding curriculum and professional learning community conversations at the study site. Curtis-Whipple (2011) stated, “Teachers can no longer make important decisions based on ‘feelings’ and ‘hunches.’ For any literacy initiative to meet the needs of diverse learners it is imperative to have a solid assessment system that is valid and reliable” (p. 140).
The intent of the researcher of this qualitative study was to determine how the teachers’ perceived the implementation of new assessment systems to make instructional decisions for their children from various assessment collections throughout the school year. The researcher also investigated whether the data collected from the assessment systems, in conjunction with professional learning communities (PLCs) and professional development, improved student achievement in literacy for second grade students. Curtis-Whipple (2011) suggested for further research to be conducted as to how professional learning communities can be incorporated into the school day and how this time can be utilized to, “empower educators to see the benefits of communication and collaboration” (p. 141).

A similar study reviewed for this qualitative study was Pelletier (2011) and her research on meeting the needs of all learners through the implementation of a literacy block with primary students. Pelletier’s research findings were based on the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) and the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Evaluating Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs (PET-R); however, the assessment systems used in her research were not reported out by the instructional needs of the child, as will be provided in this study by the reports from Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) and Collaborative Assessments Solutions for Educators in the 21st Century (CASE21) assessments. These two data points were relevant to this study based on the information gained from beginning of the year to end of year benchmark results. Both MAP and CASE21 were predictive assessments. The report on student performance identified which students made academic gains in reading throughout the school year.

It was also the researcher’s intent to build upon similar existing formative program evaluation studies of both Curtis-Whipple (2011) and Pelletier (2011) to determine if the two
The aforementioned assessment systems improved academic growth in second grade students at the study site. The results of the assessment systems will either support or negate the efforts of the Response to Intervention model at the study site and if these two assessment systems help identify students who are not progressing towards grade level goals.

The final piece of research which was used to build this qualitative study was based on the findings of Barnhardt (2009). Barnhardt suggested that further research needed to be conducted on the relationship, “between RtI and special education referral and eligibility rates” (p. 208). Barnhardt’s work examined principal perceptions about the change process involving the implementation of the RtI process but not the perceptions of the teachers. The researcher’s findings in this qualitative study adds to Barnhardt’s body of research to complete a picture of how both leaders and teachers perceive the implementation process of the RtI model of instruction.

**Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

The audiences who will benefit from the findings of this formative program evaluation study are classroom teachers, support staff (paraprofessionals), coaches in literacy/mathematics, administrators, central office staff, program funders, school counselors, and special education teachers. As more and more states adopt an intervention model to support students in need of additional instruction in academics and/or additional support with behavior, the aforementioned professionals will need to understand how teachers perceive the implementation of the Response to Intervention model and how the information and professional development received directly impacts teaching and learning.

The findings of this study will provide the district with valuable information concerning how teachers perceive the implementation of the Response to Intervention model and the impact
this initiative had on student achievement in an elementary school setting. The findings of this study will assist the central office staff when in the 2014-2015 school year, over 100 elementary schools will be mandated to implement the Response to Intervention model in the school district in which this study took place. Furthermore, the findings from this study will benefit other districts concerning the implementation of initiatives and how to transition teachers through the implementation process.

**Significance of the Research Problem**

Response to Interventions purpose is to avoid Exceptional Children labeling and address the academic and behavioral needs of both special education and regular education students through a systematic, multi-tiered approach to instruction. Response to Intervention is significant to the problem of practice because its goal is to reduce the number of students in special education and to close the achievement gap before it occurs.

The multi-tiered framework known as RtI allows teachers to collect data concerning how well students respond to instruction and if further supplemental intensive support is needed. If students fail to respond to interventions, they may need intensive intervention support or may have a learning disability or another disability that may require further evaluation.

Lyon & Fletcher (2004) had argued that by identifying students at an early age and utilizing systematic and explicit reading programs teachers may reduce the number of students who demonstrate problems in reading. Through effective implementation of RtI teachers will be able to intervene early, further reducing the number of students referred for special education.

If the RtI model is implemented with fidelity and teachers utilize the multi-tiered approach to teaching and intervention support, RtI will, “contribute to the process of disability identification by reducing the inappropriate identification of students who might appear to have a
disability because of inappropriate or insufficient instruction” (NCRI, 2010, p. 7). Both Tilly (2003) and O'Connor (2003) found that if RtI methods were used over a period of time, the total number of students referred for special education was reduced, and the academic outcomes of students identified as at risk were improved.

The No Child Left Behind Act, 2001, required at least one year’s growth in reading and mathematics for all students in third through eighth grades, and one year in high school. The most recent data (2011-2012) from the elementary study site, showed 40.4% of students with disabilities demonstrated grade level proficiency on the summative end of year assessment in reading, further widening the achievement gap between general education students and students with disabilities. The number of students identified as special education students at the school study site represented 19.8% of the student population, whereas the total number of identified special education students for the 2011-2012 school year for the entire state was 13%; which represented 192,261 students. The 6.8% difference of identified students between the school and state level highlighted a need for a tiered model of instruction at the study site.

The need for a tiered model of instruction in the elementary school was significant at this time because teachers and students in the state of North Carolina are now held accountable for on grade level reading performance at the end of third grade for all regular education students. If students are not on grade level in reading as indicated by their achievement level on the state end of grade test, they will be retained (Read to Achieve, 2012).

The purpose of the North Carolina Read to Achieve House Bill (2012) is:

(a) To ensure that (i) difficulty with reading development is identified as early as possible; (ii) students receive appropriate instructional and support services to address difficulty with reading development and to remediate reading deficiencies; and (iii)
each student and his or her parent or guardian be continuously informed of the student’s academic needs and progress.

(b) In addition to the purposes listed in subsection (a) of this section, the purpose of this Part is to determine that progression from one grade level to another be based, in part, upon proficiency in reading. (p. 1)

The adoption of benchmark and progress monitoring assessments to assess basic literacy skills begins in kindergarten. The assessments are administered to determine reading readiness and acquisition of literacy skills as determined by benchmark assessments for each grade level. These assessments are vital to student achievement, because these assessments indicate areas of deficiency in literacy and provide teachers with student data in order to provide additional support for identified students in the areas of Letter Naming Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, Nonsense Word Fluency, First Sound Fluency, Daze, DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency and Reading Comprehension. All of the assessments in DIBELS measure basic early literacy skills, except for the letter naming fluency assessment.

The First Sound Fluency (FSF) assessment is, “a direct measure of a student’s fluency in identifying the initial sounds in words” (Good and Kaminski, 2012, p. 39). According to Yopp (1998), “the ability to isolate the first sound in a word is an important phonemic skill that is highly related to reading acquisition and reading achievement” (Good and Kaminski, 2012, p. 39). The Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) assessment measures the student’s ability to identify letters which are arranged in random order. According to Adams (1990), “fluency in naming letters is a strong and robust predictor of later reading achievement” (as cited in Good and Kaminski, 2012, p. 48). The Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) assessment measures phonemic awareness. This assessment, “assesses the student’s fluency in segmenting a spoken
word into its component parts or sound segments” (Good and Kaminski, 2012, p. 55). The Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) assessment measures alphabetic principle and basic phonics. It assesses the student’s ability to blend letter sounds into, “phonetically regular make-believe words (nonsense or pseudo words)” (Good and Kaminski, 2012, p. 66). The nonsense word fluency assessment is a good indicator of alphabetical principle because, “pseudo words have no lexical entry, [and thus] pseudo-word reading provides a relatively pure assessment of students’ ability to apply grapheme-phoneme knowledge in decoding” (Rathvon, 2004, p. 138). The DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) assessment measures, “advanced phonics and word attack skills, accurate and fluent reading and connected text, and reading comprehension” (Good and Kaminski, 2012, p. 79).

The DAZE assessment is the DIBELS version of a maze assessment. A maze assessment measures reading comprehension in students. “DAZE assesses the student’s ability to construct meaning from text using word recognition skills, background information and prior knowledge, familiarity with linguistic properties such as syntax and morphology, and reasoning skills” (Good and Kaminski, 2012, p. 100). The DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) assessment measures a student’s, ”advanced phonics and word attack skills, accurate and fluent reading of connected text, and reading comprehension” (Good and Kaminski, 2012, p.79).

The need to strengthen these areas of literacy with identified students and with the implementation of a Response to Intervention model, will allow students the opportunity to use their early literacy skills in later grades. This is essential when students make the transition from learning to read, to reading to learn (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010). This transition takes place between the third and fourth grades. Research has shown that students who struggle with this transition are still struggling with reading in the ninth grade (Francis, 1996; Shaywitz,
Escobar, Shaywitz, Fletcher, & Makuch, 1992). Identifying and targeting students who are struggling prior to the fourth grade can be served through early intervention programs.

Early intervention is key when increasing reading achievement, closing the achievement gap, and decreasing the number of student referred for special education services. Early intervention is typically in the form of prepackaged programs that are systematic and explicit in their type of teaching. These programs are primarily targeted for students in grades kindergarten through third grade when learning how to read is the main focus of literacy instruction and acquisition. While early intervention programs are targeted to the primary grades and are not as successful with upper elementary students, these programs still may provide a support system for upper grade students when struggling students are continuing to acquire and improve on current grade level literacy skills (Lesnick, 2006).

The implementation of a tiered model of instruction in kindergarten through third grade allowed teachers to support struggling readers with early intervention programs, utilized research based and validated benchmark and progress monitoring assessments to measure grade level proficiency on grade level expectations, all while closing the achievement gap, increasing reading achievement, and reducing the number of students referred for special education services.

The need for a tiered model of instruction not only supports the general education students but also provides multi-level support for students with identified disabilities. According to the Data Accountability Center, the number of students identified with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) has declined by 12.4% since 2004 since the inception and implementation of a Response to Intervention model (RTI Action Network, 2011). This decline in the SLD
identification rate is noteworthy for the study site considering the total number of students identified as SLD was 19.8%, 6.8% higher than the state as a whole.

The number of students identified as SLD at the study site may be part of an over-identification of students in the special education system. Over-identification or disproportionate placement is a group of students, particularly a minority group, who are significantly larger in number than other racial/ethnic groups. The causes of overidentification can be attributed to lack of quality instruction utilizing core curriculum, too many interventions for struggling students, inconsistent knowledge of the purpose and implementation of curriculum, assessment, or instructional strategy, poorly structured intervention services for struggling learners, inconsistency in the referral process, limited information about intervention strategies, limited knowledge about assessment, and preconceived notions about the ability of poor and racial/ethnic students and their readiness for school, and/or the perception that special education can fix struggling students (Fergus, 2010).

Prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention at the study site, students were referred for intervention services without moving through the tiers of the Response to Intervention model. At the primary tier, differentiation was not taking place and interventions for students not mastering content was not being delivered and progress monitoring was not being conducted consistently. The result was that several students were brought to the intervention team (ITeam) at the study site where interventions were put in place for a minimum of twenty days with progress monitoring required once a week. After four to six weeks of intervention services by the classroom teacher, the student’s case was brought back to the intervention team in order for a determination of either continuing the interventions because of student progress or a referral for exceptional children testing.
Of the thirty-one cases referred to the intervention team, twenty-five were referred for exceptional children testing. Sixteen of the twenty-five cases qualified for exceptional children services (64%). This meant that nine (36%) of the students who were sent on for exceptional children services did not qualify. The need for a tiered model of instruction at the study site is vital, not only for those students who needed the extra support which special education services could provide, but also for those students who did not qualify for services. These students need more focused instruction with a stronger support at the primary tier of the Response to Intervention model.

The school study site has identified almost 20% of the school population as needing special education services; however, when reviewing the number of students who were referred for exceptional children testing during the same 2011-2012 school year, 36% of the students referred did not qualify for exceptional children services. This indicates that these children did not receive developmentally appropriate support through differentiation or through the assistance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). With data such as this, it was essential for the researcher of this qualitative study to examine the effectiveness of the tiered model of instruction and its impact on student achievement during the 2012-2013 school year.

The implementation of a Response to Intervention model at the study site will address the number of students identified as SLD by tightening up core instruction at the tier I level, provide ongoing benchmark and progress monitoring assessments to identify students with literacy deficiencies in the areas of basic early literacy skills, provide early intervention program support to identified students, create a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) detailing intervention support and student data from assessments, and if needed, move to tertiary support of the intervention team for further acute intervention support.
If moving through the multi-tiers of instruction is not effective and the student is not responding to the appropriate interventions, then a referral for special education testing may be necessary. Implementation of the Response of Intervention model will reduce the number of students for special education services, increase reading achievement, and close the achievement gap at the study site, and at the state and national levels.

**Positionality Statement**

Being in the role of a literacy facilitator and one of the lead change agents at the elementary school study site, may have allowed for some bias in this study. While I made every effort to be objective with the collection and analysis of data, it was possible that my experiences and relationships with those involved in the implementation of the initiatives shaped the way I analyzed and interpreted the data. Even though I was entrenched in the day to day lives of the participants in this formative program evaluation, I leaned on my own personal and professional integrity to guide me through the study. I made every effort to collect and report on the data which demonstrated the true reality of the site participants. Being a qualitative researcher allowed me to, “put slices of reality together” (Denizen & Lincoln, 2003, p. 7) to tell the story of the participants in this study. It was my job as a qualitative researcher to ensure that my own personal experiences and subjectivity did not hinder the data reported on in this study. It must be noted that the researcher at the study site was not an evaluator for any teacher in this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical lens which was the foundation for this formative program evaluation was the socio-cultural theory (Lev Vygotsky, 1934/1978). The researcher grounded the study through the lens of organizational change theory (Michael Fullan, 2009). Vygotsky's socio-
cultural theory focuses on students' need to work within their zone of proximal development (ZPD) and to be provided with scaffolded instruction in order to further their development (Tracey & Morrow, 2006). Fullan's change theory focuses on the ability of teachers to be a part of the change process with the goal of continuous improvement within the school.

The primary theory which guided this study was the socio-cultural theory by Lev Vygotsky (1934/1978). The two major components of this theory are the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and a more knowledgeable other (MKO). The ZPD falls under the socio-culturalist view that, “culture defines what knowledge and skills children need to acquire and gives them the tools such as language, technology, and strategies for functioning in that culture” (Miller, 2002, p. 368).

The socio-cultural theory has three major themes (Scott & Palincsar, 2009). The first theme identified in this theory is an interdependence between individual and social processes in learning and development. These processes can be traced back to an individual's interactions with others, including his/her interactions with a more knowledgeable other (MKO). Vygotsky was also interested in the individual's contribution to the interaction, as well as how the culture and society shaped that interaction.

The second theme of the socio-cultural theory is development cannot be separated from its social context. The development and social interactions of children vary based on tools, such as language, technology, and strategies provided to them by their culture (Miller, 2002). Tools assist with knowledge acquisition and then are, "internalized to aid in future independent problem solving activity" (Scott & Palincsar, 2009, p. 2). It is through these tools that children view and interpret their world.
The third theme is learning can lead to development. The development of children can be achieved through the skills and knowledge of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). It is through the assistance of a more skilled peer or teacher which allows children to accomplish a difficult task and be successful within a specified zone of learning. Vygotsky called this process of learning, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and is accomplished through socially and culturally constructed activities that support learning and human development.

One component of the socio-cultural theory that supports student learning and human development is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1934/1978) noted that, "a well-known and empirically established fact is that learning should be matched in some manner with the child's developmental level" (p. 85). This developmental level is a child's ZPD. ZPD not only focuses on human development, but also on the relationship between a child’s development and instruction in a cultural setting (classroom). The Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD, is defined as:

- The distance between a child’s actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.

(Vygotsky, 1934/1978, p. 86)

The ZPD is a range based on the child’s developmental readiness. The human development and use of tools to solve problems is tied to the cognitive development of a child and is directly related to how a child will tackle a skill or problem (Johnson & Keier, 2010). The focus is not on the specific skill, but rather the ability of the child to use developmentally appropriate tools to address the skill, either as an individual or with a more skilled peer. Vygotsky (1934/1978) believed that, "learning and development are interrelated from the child's
very first day of life" (p. 84). Vygotsky focused on how children interacted with others while completing activities in a cultural setting. The cultural setting that guided this study was in second grade classrooms.

The theoretical lens of Lev Vygotsky and the socio-cultural theory is vital to the role which teachers play in the instruction of their students. The major components of the ZPD and MKO are essential to the growth and instructional needs of children. A professional learning community as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998) is, “an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone” (pp. xi-xii). The teachers’ collaboration through professional learning communities allowed for collaborative dialogue to take place concerning the topics of instruction, data, and planning in literacy.

Collaborative dialogue and professional learning communities are two components of organization change. The lens of organization change by Michael Fullan (2009) assisted the researcher in addressing the implementation of the tiered model of instruction at the study site and its impact on student achievement through the use of professional learning communities and data-driven decision making.

In order for schools to move forward, change must happen. Fullan (2009) said that change is not temporary, but lasting. In order to have lasting change, leadership must come from within the school. Staff members must be able to dig in to their learning and “learn deeply in context” (p. 16). This context is through active engagement, reflection, and the ability to “be change agents in collaboration with others” (p. 16).

The forces for change are provided through eight drivers as described by Fullan, Cuttress & Kilcher (2009). Before drivers can be in place to drive change, the change agents must
understand change knowledge. Change knowledge is the, “understanding and insight about the process of change and the key drivers that make for successful change in practice” (p. 9).

There are eight key drivers that make for successful change (Fullan, Cuttress & Kilcher, 2009, pp. 54-58). The first driver is engaging people’s moral purposes. To engage in people's moral purpose is to understand the reason for change. The change in this study was to have teachers understand that there must be a commitment to raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap by paying special attention to students who were the most disadvantaged. The second driver is building capacity. Building capacity within the school was essential if the initiatives were to move forward. Teachers need new resources, knowledge, skills, and competencies in order to create a, "new shared identity and motivation to work together for a greater good" (p.55). The third driver is understanding the change process. To understand the change process means teachers will have to establish a culture for continuous improvement.

Fullan’s fourth driver develops cultures for learning. Developing cultures for learning is driven by, "the necessity and power of professional learning communities" (DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour, 2005). A professional learning community as defined by DuFour and Eaker (1998) is, “an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone” (pp. xi-xii). The power of PLCs allows teachers in the school to learn from one another and together as a team, acquire new skills and knowledge needed for continuous improvement. The fifth driver is developing cultures of evaluation. Teachers must develop a culture of evaluation by participating in ongoing assessments for learning. It was through the culture of evaluation that the second grade PLC analyzed their formative data to determine instructional changes needed to raise student achievement in the area of reading.
Fullan’s sixth driver focuses on leadership for change. Leadership for change is vital to the continuous improvement process. One of the second grade teachers was a member of the Balanced Literacy Team and received professional development from the Teachers College at Columbia University. Building this type of capacity within the school was one area in which focusing on leadership for change took place.

The seventh driver is fostering coherence making. The focus on coherence making is when the PLC gets together to focus on how, "strategies for effective learning interconnect" (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005, p. 57). The eighth, and final driver, is cultivating tri-level development. Tri-level development is the understanding that in order for change to take place, individuals and systems must be changed simultaneously.

For this study, the researcher focused on drivers four, five, and six. These drivers focused on developing a culture of learning (driver four), developing a culture of student performance (drive five), and developing leadership for change (driver six).

Taylor, Raphael, and Au (2010) have stated that in order for organizational change to take place, “teachers need support for individual change in providing effective reading instruction that attends to the students’ individual and collective learning needs and reading abilities” (in Taylor, 2011, p. 81). Both organizational and individual changes were developed through Fullan’s drivers, with the ultimate goal of meeting the needs of all learners through a tiered approach to balanced literacy instruction.

The literature reviewed for this study, as well as the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1934/1978) and the organizational lens of Michael Fullan (2009) supported the research questions to be answered in this formative program evaluation.
Research Questions

The primary question which guided the research was:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?

This research question was directly related to the theoretical lens of Lev Vygotsky’s (1934/1978) socio-cultural theory, specifically the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is the zone in which children can be successful with the assistance of a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) (Vygotsky, 1934/1978).

The second research question which helped to guide this study was:

2. What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?

This research question was directly tied to Fullan's (2009) change theory and how teachers utilized three of the eight key drivers to tend to the literacy needs of their students. The teachers needed to understand the change process as it related to new data systems (Reading3D/ DIBELS, CASE21, MAP) and utilize Fullan’s drivers to make informed decisions about student achievement in literacy.

The lenses of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and Fullan's change theory supported both teachers and students through the implementation of a tiered model of literacy instruction, using the RtI model as a guide.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

The achievement gap between the highest performing students and the lowest performing students has been and continues to be a problem in the United States (Alber-Morgan, 2010). The achievement gap refers to the discrepancy of performance between high and low achieving students, and is associated with disability, cultural diversity, ethnic diversity, and income level (Casserly, 2006).

The No Child Left Behind Act, 2001 (NCLB) was enacted to ensure that there was academic improvement for all students, especially those that were deemed to be disadvantaged (Alber-Morgan, 2010). The North Central Regional Laboratory (2005) had determined that through consecutive years of effective teachers teaching disadvantaged children, the achievement gap between the highest and lowest performers in reading closes. Craig et. al (2005) had determined that, “effective teachers in diverse classrooms create a climate of high expectations, maximize instructional time, differentiate instruction, conduct purposeful assessments, align curriculum with standards, and collaborate with other teachers to plan instruction” (Alber-Morgan, 2010, p. 3)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), national reading scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) have shown very little change over time. “Only about one third of all fourth and eighth graders scored at or above proficient in reading; furthermore, only 13 percent to 17 percent of African American and Hispanic fourth and eighth graders scored at or above proficient” (Alber-Morgan, 2010, p. 25). With statistics such as these, it is essential that teachers begin to implement the RtI tiered model of instruction, with a focus on differentiation, so that the achievement gap between the nation’s most struggling
readers and those who are at or above grade level does not continue to widen (Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000; Badian, 2000; Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Schatschneider, & Mehta, 1998; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998; Clay, 1972).

The literature examined in this chapter had connections to the following themes: Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (1934/1978) and his work with the zone of proximal development (ZPD), more knowledgeable other (MKO), and Response to Intervention. Professional learning communities examined through the lens of Fullan's change theory was also the focus of the literature in this chapter.

The purpose of examining literature based on the work of Vygotsky (1934/1978) and Fullan (2009) was to support the need for a tiered response to instruction to support all learners through effective reading instruction, with the goal of closing the achievement gap in reading and reducing the number of students referred for special education services.

**Literature Review**

The number of students being identified as special needs students has gradually increased in the state of North Carolina by almost 5,000 (+2.6%) students since 2010 (ChildFind, 2013). In 2010, there were 187,291 students identified as requiring special education services. In 2011, there were 189,168 students identified and in the year 2012, there were 192,261 students identified as requiring special educations services. What this number doesn’t tell was the number of students who were referred for special education testing, but did not qualify due to lack of appropriate interventions and data to support the need for special education testing. Therefore, schools in North Carolina began to adopt the Response to Intervention model as a way to address the achievement gap and to decrease the number of referrals for special education services.
Response to Intervention

According to the Council for Exceptional Children (2007), the implementation of a comprehensive RtI model, “may reduce the number of students referred for special education, promote effective early intervention, provide diagnostic information to consider in the identification of a disability, and/or may reduce the impact of a disability on a child’s academic progress” (p. 2). The National Center on Response to Intervention (2010) defined RtI as:

Response to Intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems. With RtI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities. (p.2)

The RtI model is intended to reduce the number of exceptional children referrals and to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a general education setting. The RtI model addresses the academic and behavioral needs of both special education and regular education students through a systematic, multi-tiered approach to instruction. Decisions on how to improve student outcomes are based on data from universal screenings and progress monitoring data.

There are three tiers in the RtI model (Gersten et al, 2009). Tier I includes instruction using a high-quality core curriculum, universal screening (beginning, middle and end of year), and on-going progress monitoring of struggling students is conducted frequently. Differentiated instruction takes place for students at their instructional levels in this tier. Tier 2 is for those students who are not responding to the core instruction at Tier I and more intensive instruction is
provided for those students who continue to struggle. Tier 3 includes daily intensive instruction and is delivered in a one-to-one setting.

Response to Intervention is in place to provide tertiary support to identified learners before, "formal evaluation to determine special education eligibility becomes necessary" (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009, p. 31). If a child has progressed through the RtI tiered levels of instruction, has not responded to the prescribed interventions, and is performing significantly lower than his/her peers, a learning disability may be evident (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2009); however, the work of Bradley, Danielson, and Doolittle (2005) suggested that a child’s response to intervention, “is the most promising method of alternate identification” (p. 485) and the effectiveness of the intervention should be analyzed through a problem solving model and progress monitoring. A teacher can determine if the frequency and intensity of the intervention is appropriate based on how the student is responding to the instruction (Bradley, Danielson, & Hallahan, 2002).

Tier I

The instruction taking place at tier I is delivered through evidence based, high-quality, widely published core curriculum in which every student has adequate access (Al Otaiba, Kosanovich-Grek, Torgensen, Hassler, & Wahl, 2005). Instruction with the core reading program is provided to students in a whole group setting and is delivered by the classroom teacher.

Utilizing a core reading program ensures that teachers are delivering instruction that is evidence based and addresses identified objectives for that grade level. Even though an evidence based, high-quality core reading program is being utilized at this initial tier, teachers may need to provide supplemental activities and lessons to meet the needs of students who may have reading
difficulties (Stein, Johnson, & Gutlohn, 1999); however, Foorman, Francis, Fletcher, Mehta, and Schatschneider (1998) had concluded that through quality reading instruction, most students who are at risk of reading difficulties are able to read at average reading levels at this initial tier of classroom instruction. The students who are having reading difficulties are able to be successful at this tier through differentiated instruction.

**Tier II**

Interventions at this tier may be provided by the classroom teacher, a reading specialist, or a trained paraprofessional who delivers instruction in a small-group setting. Instruction may take place in the classroom or outside the classroom setting. Studies have shown that if a paraprofessional has been well-trained and well-supported, interventions can be effective at this tier without the direct instruction of a certified, classroom teacher (Grek, Mathes, & Torgensen, 2003; Vadas, Sanders, & Peyton, 2006; Vadas, Sanders & Tudor, 2007).

Studies conducted by Iversen, Tunmer, & Chapman (2005) and Vaughn et al., (2003) found that interventions provided at the second tier were most effective when delivered to a group of two to three students. Interventions should be provided to students three to five times per week for twenty to forty minutes, “for a reasonable amount of time before providing more intensive daily tier 3 interventions” (Gersten et al., 2008, p. 26). A reasonable amount of time for interventions at this level was twenty weeks for students with reading difficulties and disabilities. Wanzek and Vaughn (2007) found through analyzing reading intervention studies that students who were provided small-group interventions for a reasonable amount of time benefitted from the interventions at this tier.

At this secondary level of intervention, teachers may use a problem-solving model to determine the appropriate interventions for a child requiring additional support (Batsche et al.,
One such problem-solving model that is used is the TIPS Model (Teacher Initiated Problem Solving Model). When using the TIPS model, the teacher in collaboration with the intervention team will identify the student’s problem, create an academic goal, implement an appropriate intervention to address the student centered problem, and then conduct frequent progress monitoring student performance in order to determine the effectiveness of the intervention and the student’s response to instruction.

Once the student has received intervention support from the classroom teacher, reading specialist, or trained paraprofessional for a period of time, the intervention plan is evaluated to determine whether to continue, change, or discontinue the plan (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005). If after providing daily interventions the student is not responding to the instruction based on progress monitoring results, the intensity and frequency of the intervention plan may need to be adjusted and consideration for tertiary support may be considered. By providing high-quality intervention support at this level of the RtI process, “holds considerable promise for reducing reading difficulties” (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008, p. 67) with students.

The work of Fuchs, Fuchs, and Vaughn (2008) had demonstrated that at the secondary level of response to intervention, “the majority of students who are provided secondary intervention made adequate progress after 50-100 sessions of intervention” (p. 63). Fuchs, Fuchs, and Vaughn (2008) went on to note that fewer than 10% of all students at the secondary intervention level made, “little or substantial progress” (p. 63). Studies conducted by Kamps & Greenwood (2005) had directly linked the quality of classroom instruction at tier I to the number of students needing secondary intervention support (Vaughn & Denton, 2008). Students not making progress will progress to the tertiary level of intervention support.
**Tier III**

Interventions at this level are recommended to be provided by well-qualified teachers (Gersten et al., 2008). At this level of support, interventions should be provided in a one-to-one setting, although Denton et al., (2006) conducted studies in which students with reading difficulties or disabilities had been successful in very small groups. With fidelity, intensive interventions at this level could reduce the total amount of students referred for special education by 75% (Fuchs, Stecker, & Fuchs, 2008).

This final, tertiary tier is where special education students are referred for testing based on lack of response to interventions on the previous two tiers. RtI studies examined by Fuchs, Stecker, and Fuchs (2008) determined that about 6%-8% of the general population will proceed through the special education process with possible identification of specific learning disabilities (SLD). The development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is developed at this third level of intervention and is created with measurable goals that can be achieved by the student in one year’s time (Fuchs, Stecker, & Fuchs, 2008).

**Progress Monitoring and Universal Screening**

The RtI model of instruction is based on frequent assessments of students in order to determine the type and intensity of multi-tiered instruction. The assessments used to identify students who are at risk are universal screenings and progress monitoring tools. Universal screening is typically the first assessment administered at the beginning, middle, and end of a school year. This assessment is used to identify students who are not academically proficient for their grade level.

According to the National Center for the Response to Intervention (NCRTI) (2010) universal screening tools, "must be reliable, valid, and demonstrate diagnostic accuracy for
predicting which students will develop learning or behavioral difficulties" (p. 6). After the universal screenings are administered, the data team analyzes the data from the screenings to determine which students are in need of intervention support, beginning at the initial tier of the response to intervention framework. The NCRTI has determined that at the school, grade, and classroom level, "screening and progress monitoring data can be aggregated and used to compare and contrast the adequacy of the core curriculum as well as the effectiveness of different instructional and behavioral strategies for various groups of students within the school" (2010, p. 8).

When a student is identified as needing additional support, early interventions are put in place to address the specific learner’s problem. Early intervention is defined as programs that encourage literacy instruction that is developmentally appropriate (Morrow, 2012). When early intervention programs are in place, children can increase their achievement levels in reading; which prevents them from falling behind their peers, further perpetuating the achievement gap (O’Connor, Harty, & Fulmer, 2005; Slavin & Madden, 1990; Stanovich, 1986).

The second type of assessment used in the RtI model is progress monitoring. According to the NCRTI (2010), progress monitoring is used to, "assess students' performance over time, to quantify students’ rates of improvement or responsiveness to instruction, to evaluate instructional effectiveness, and for students who are least responsive to effective instruction, to formulate effective individualized programs" (2010, p. 7). Furthermore, Coleman and Hughes (2009) noted that progress monitoring is about monitoring, “mastery of specific learning objectives and to inform instruction" (Coleman & Hughes, 2009, p.16) while also monitoring how well students are progressing toward, "expected and actual rates of learning" (NCRTI, 2010, p. 8).
The use of dynamic assessments is critical to delivering timely classroom instruction and interventions for students in need. Fuchs (2003) identified three primary reasons for planning and implementing progress monitoring. The first identified reason for implementing progress monitoring is because progress monitoring is closely aligned to the instruction in the classroom. The progress monitoring tool is based on what has been taught. Secondly, students are monitored at various intervals depending on their difficulty with learning. The final reason is about the progress monitoring tool itself. Fuchs (2003) stated, "progress monitoring tools must be of high quality in order to adequately identify students' response to intervention" (p. 66).

Unlike universal screenings which are administered one to three times per year, progress monitoring tools are utilized over an extended period of time with data points being collected weekly or bi-monthly. Shinn, Good, and Stein (2007) recommend collecting seven to ten data points while Christ and Silberglitt (2007) recommend six to nine data points. Data points are pieces of data that are collected on a specific skill over a period of time. It is suggested by the NCRTI that data points are collected weekly in order to determine if the intervention is working.

Once progress monitoring takes place and the data is collected, the teachers analyze the data, adjust instruction, select new materials, and/or increase the intensity/frequency of intervention support. DIBELS and MAP assessments were used at the study site as universal screenings and progress monitoring tools.

**What Are DIBELS Assessments?**

The University of Oregon defines the DIBELS assessments as:

The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) are a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of early literacy skills from kindergarten through sixth grade. They are designed to be short (one minute) fluency measures used
to regularly monitor the development of early literacy and early reading skills. DIBELS were developed to measure recognized and empirically validated skills related to reading outcomes. Each measure has been thoroughly researched and demonstrated to be reliable and valid indicators of early literacy development and predictive of later reading proficiency to aid in the early identification of students who are not progressing as expected. When used as recommended, the results can be used to evaluate individual student development as well as provide grade-level feedback toward validated instructional objectives (https://reading.uoregon.edu).

**DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency Assessment**

The DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) assessment as defined by the University of Oregon is:

A standardized, individually administered test of the alphabetic principle letter-sound correspondence in which letters represent their most common sounds and of the ability to blend letters into words in which letters represent their most common sounds.

(Kaminski & Good, 1996) (https://dibels.uoregon.edu, retrieved on January 19, 2014)

**DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (with Retell) Assessment**

The University of Oregon defines the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Assessment (DORF) as:

DORF is a standardized set of passages and administration procedures designed to (a) identify children who may need additional instructional support, and (b) monitor progress toward instructional goals. The passages are calibrated for each grade level. Student performance is measured by having students read a passage aloud for one minute. Words omitted, substituted, and hesitations of more than three seconds are scored as errors.
Words self-corrected within three seconds are scored as accurate. The number of correct words per minute is the oral reading fluency score. DIBELS ORF includes both benchmark passages to be used as screening assessments across the school year, as well as 20 alternate forms for monitoring progress.

There was also a retell fluency (RTF) component with the 6th edition of DIBELS DORF which was new to the second grade team at the study site. The University of Oregon defines retell fluency (RTF) as:

A comprehension check for the ORF assessment. In general, oral reading fluency provides one of the best measures of reading competence, including comprehension, for children in first through third grades. The purpose of the RTF measure is to (a) prevent inadvertently learning or practicing a misrule, (b) identify children whose comprehension is not consistent with their fluency, (c) provide an explicit linkage to the core components in the National Reading Panel Report (2000) and increase the face validity of the ORF.

**What is MAP?**

MAP is an adaptive assessment tool which allows students to answer questions in the content areas of reading and mathematics. The MAP adaptive assessment provides more challenging questions to students when they answer questions correctly, or provides a simpler question if the question is answered incorrectly. The goal of the adaptive MAP assessment is to provide the teacher with detailed information about what students already know and what they
are ready to learn. The areas assessed are based on the Common Core State Standards in reading. Reading Literature, Reading Information, Language, and Foundational Skills are the areas assessed in order for a RIT score to be assigned to a student.

MAP RIT scores are norm referenced tests and are based on grade level data, in grades Kindergarten through eleventh grade, in which at least 20,000 students are tested per grade. Over 5.1 million students from over 13,000 schools and in more than 2,700 school districts have taken the MAP assessments (NWEA, 2011). From the 5.1 million students, the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), the creators of the MAP assessment, randomly selected/sampled test records in order to develop growth norms which represented academic performance by typical school age children in Kindergarten through eleventh grades (NWEA, 2011).

Normative scores allowed the second grade teachers, support staff, and administrative team at the study site to compare how their students were performing in reading compared to other schools in the district, state, and country. The MAP assessment also provided information for teachers on where to focus their instruction and individualize learning opportunities based on each child’s assigned RIT score.

The staff at the study site defined the RIT score as ready for instruction today. The RIT score was similar to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development (ZPD). Both the ZPD and the RIT is the area of learning in which the student is most successful with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). According to NWEA (2011), the beginning of the year mean RIT score for a second grader was 175.9. The middle of the year mean RIT score for a second grader was 183.6. The end of the year mean RIT score for a second grader was 189.6.
CASE21

CASE21 assessments had multiple levels of text and question complexity. All questions were assigned a level of one, two, or three according to the complexity of each question. These three levels were aligned with higher order thinking skills and within the depths of knowledge (DOK) spectrum of complexity. The verbs aligned with the DOK (Webb, 2005) were:

Level I (Recall): arrange, calculate, define, draw, identify, list, label, illustrate, measure, memorize, who, what when, where, why, repeat, state, recall, recite, tell tabulate, recognize, use name, report, use, quote, match

Level II (Skill/Concept): Infer, categorize, collect and display, identify patterns, organize, construct, modify, predict, interpret, distinguish, use context clues, make observations, summarize, show, graph, classify, separate, cause/effect, estimate, compare, relate

Level III (Strategic Thinking): Revise, assess, develop a logical argument, apprise, construct, use concepts to solve non-routine problems, critique, compare, explain phenomena in terms of concepts, formulate, investigate, draw conclusions, hypothesize, differentiate, cite evidence

Level IV (Extended Thinking): Not utilized on multiple choice tests for CASE21

The implementation of a response to intervention framework allowed the teachers and an intervention team to determine if students were responding to the core instruction in the classroom, in this case, reading instruction. If more than twenty percent of a classroom was not responding to the teachers' instruction, it was not a student learning issue; it was an instructional issue of the core. The teachers must revisit and determine if the most effective reading practices were in place in order for their students to respond to their instruction.
It is essential in the primary grades of elementary school (grades kindergarten through third grade) that when teaching students to read, high quality reading instruction is provided to all children to reduce the achievement gap and increase reading achievement across the grade levels.

**National Reading Panel**

The impact of high-quality reading instruction was the centralized focus of the Congressional Charge in 1997 when Congress asked the director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and the Secretary of Education to determine the effectiveness of research based practices in teaching children to read (National Reading Panel, 2000). The panel of experts was charged with, “identifying effective instructional reading approaches and determining their readiness for application in the classroom” (NRP, 2000, p. 1-3).

Studies that met several prescribed criteria were reviewed by the National Reading Panel (2000). The studies had to address achievement utilizing more than one skill in reading and with a large population of students, address the effectiveness of an approach to reading instruction, and have been reviewed by scholars in the field of education. The studies reviewed were focused on kindergarten through third grade and were related to reading success. The panel concluded that there were five topics to be reported on as they were necessary in understanding reading development in children. These five topics were phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

In order for teachers across the grade level to understand the best type of reading instruction for their students and how to increase student achievement through data driven decision making, teachers must begin to move away from working in isolation to that of a
collaborative culture in a professional learning community. The collaborative culture of professional learning communities was achieved at the study site through the lens of organizational change (Fullan, 2009).

One of Fullan's (2008) secrets of change is the ability for teachers to connect with their peers for a purpose. Fullan (2008) said, "purposeful peer interaction within the school is crucial. Student learning and achievement increases substantially when teachers work in learning communities supported by school leaders who focus on improvement" (p. 8). Professional learning communities are essential to increasing student achievement, closing the achievement gap, and providing on-going support to all members of the PLC, with the ultimate goal of focusing on school improvement.

**Professional Learning Communities**

Over the last two decades, education has begun to move from independent teaching and learning to that of a professional learning community as a means to improve student achievement and school improvement. Professional learning communities have been established in schools to “raise the bar” and “close the gap” of student learning and achievement (Fullan, 2005, p. 209). The ultimate goal of PLCs is to focus on student learning. Staff members involved in PLCs are committed to student learning and the understanding that all students can learn.

In order for teachers to increase academic achievement and raise student achievement, teachers must carefully plan instruction by collaborating with their peers through Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). A professional learning community as defined by Dufour and Eaker (1998) is, “an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone” (pp. xi-xii).
DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2006) talked about the underlying principles of PLCs in their book *Learning by Doing*:

The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student. When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators within the organization embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it. (p.3)

The need for change in both practice and assumptions about student achievement is what has led to the movement of professional learning communities to a more collaborative approach to teaching and learning. DuFour et al., (2004) determined that in order for this shift in thinking to take place, professional learning communities must be developed within schools in order for schools to be transformed and change to take place.

A professional learning community cannot be sustainable unless, “various people inside and outside the school and the school system […] understand its purpose, believe in it, and support the classroom practices associated with it” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 79).

According to DuFour and Eaker (1998), members of a PLC share six common characteristics. These six characteristics are shared mission, vision, and values; contribution to the collective inquiry of the school improvement process; working in collaborative teams; action oriented and experimentation; continuous improvement efforts; and results oriented (pp. 25-29).

The first characteristic is when members of a PLC have a shared mission (purpose), vision (clear direction), values (collective commitments), and goals (indicators, timelines, and targets) (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 1998, 2006). When members of the PLC have a collective understanding of the purpose for the school, they are able to move forward in the same direction
as a learning community. PLC members are, "guided by a clear and compelling vision of what their schools and district must become to help all students learn" (as cited in Fullan, 2009, p. 89).

The second common characteristic of a PLC is working within a collaborative culture with a focus on learning. The collaborative culture of a PLC is the cornerstone of a school. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (1998, 2008) ascertained that PLCs are, "collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals- goals linked for the purpose of learning for all... (as cited in Fullan, 2009, p. 89). Simply working in a collaborative team will not guarantee improved achievement for students. Rather, for improved achievement to take place, PLCs must, "work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve results for their students, team, and their school" (p. 90).

The third common characteristic is the collective inquiry into best practices and understanding the current reality of the instructional needs/readiness of students. Members of a PLC must be able to question if the instructional practices that are being implemented within the school are determined to be best practices and an understanding of where their students are academically. When PLC members can hold honest conversations and inquire about the type of instructional practices that are being utilized within the school, then according to DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (1998) “educators in the PLC have an acute sense of curiosity and openness to new possibilities” (as cited in Fullan, 2009, p. 90).

The fourth common characteristic of a PLC is that members are action oriented and learn by doing. When members arrive at a consensus about the current reality of their school and the type of best practices that are needed in order to raise student achievement, members take action in order to make change occur. Learning by doing is the action step of this fourth commonality of a PLC.
The fifth common characteristic is a commitment by members of the PLC to continuous improvement. Every member of the PLC gathers evidence of student learning through assessments. The members analyze the data and determine what action must be taken in order to address students’ weaknesses with learning objectives. Once the weaknesses are identified, the members of the PLC begin implementing strategies and differentiated activities for students in need. After a period of time, the members of the PLC analyze the impact of instruction and strategies implemented and to determine effectiveness. After the analysis of information has taken place, the members of the PLC utilized this knowledge as the next step in the improvement process.

The sixth and final common characteristic is results orientation. Results are centered on learning, collaboration, and inquiry. Results are based on evidence and data, not intentions. Senge (1996) determined, “the rationale for any strategy for building a learning organization revolves around the premise that such organizations will produce dramatically improved results” (p. 44).

Moving from Isolation towards Collaboration

The premise of a professional learning community is to work, “interdependently to achieve common goals” (DuFour et al., 2004, p. 3). To work interdependently within a team means that one cannot function without the support of the whole. This statement is solidified by DuFour and Eaker (1998) who state, “in a professional learning community, educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone” (pp. xi-xii).

Working together as a collaborative team to increase student achievement and literacy instruction were the goals of the Chicago Public Schools (ARDDP, 2008). In order to build
capacity, as mentioned in driver two of the organization change theory, one must acknowledge that working with a team is substantially stronger than working in isolation. Research by Greenwood and Maheady (2001) indicated that when teachers work in isolation, “they rarely change instructional practices, thereby widening the research to practice gap” (Dearman, Alber, 2005, p. 636; Greenwood & Maheady, 2001). Therefore, the commitment to teaming and collaboration must be supported by site administration and team members in order for conversations to take place about, “what works according to research [collaborative inquiry]” (Dearman & Alber, 2005, p. 636).

This commitment to teaming and collaboration was evident in Dearman and Alber’s (2005) use of reflective study teams. The use of reflective study teams, “fosters the commitment necessary to achieve and sustain change in the classroom” (p. 637). It was through these study teams that the teachers recognized the need to change their practice and assumptions about how best to reach/teach students. The study teams determined that, "planning instruction collaboratively rather than in isolation, reduces the workload" and that, "when teachers actively engage in reflective conversations with team members, their students show promising gains in reading" (p. 638) and student engagement (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Bryk et al., 1999; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993).

The ultimate goal when Dearman and Alber built the study teams was to make sure that there was a collective mission and that all conversations were centered around how to "improve teaching and learning" (p. 639). Teachers no longer want to feel, “fragmented” but rather they want to, “feel like they are working together as a team” (Peck, 2010, p. 400). When teachers work together, they are enhancing their professional growth, which in turn leads to measureable growth in student achievement (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Fullan, 1993; Mitchell & Sackney,
Hughes et al. (2006) states that, “students learn when teachers learn together with one another” (p. 8); however, it should be noted that Marks and Louis (1999) determined that when schools restructured their organization to reflect a collaborative environment, there was no substantial change in issues relating to teaching and learning.

The majority of the literature reviewed for this theme supported teacher collaboration and criticized teachers working in isolation as a means to increase student achievement and professional growth amongst teachers (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Cowan & Hord, 1999; Crowther, Hann, McMAster, & Ferguson, 2000; Hipp et al., 2003; Huffman & Hipp, 2001; Mitchell & Sackney, 2006; Scribner, Hager, & Warne, 2002; Stoll et al., 2006).

One such way in which teachers can use collaborative time to talk about student achievement is by digging in to their classroom/grade level data and determining as a team, which students are responding to their instruction. During this collaborative time, teachers can hold collaborative conversations about how their fellow team members are being successful in delivering effective instruction to their students. This use of collaboration is directly connected to drivers four, five, and six in Michael Fullan’s (2009) organizational lens theory.

Data-Based Decision Making

Stiggins (2004) said that data based instructional decisions should not be solely based on the informed decisions of teacher, site leaders, or even policy makers, but rather the individuals who had provided the data- the students themselves. Students are also an important part of the decision making process. When students are included in collaborative conversations with their teachers about instruction, the students are more engaged and willing to put forth effort to reach their instructional goals and to improve academic achievement.
This effort and buy in from students is essential in receiving accurate data to help inform decisions that will promote school improvement. Teachers use data to aid instruction, provide differentiated learning opportunities for their students, and to have crucial conversations/dialogue with their colleagues. If the data is skewed by the students because of lack of buy in, then reform efforts and teaching and learning may be stalled.

 Teachers had to mine for data, that is, they had to analyze their student data in order to identify relationships and patterns within their classroom and grade level. The purpose for data mining is to put evidence in the hands of the right people in order for decisions to be made in the best interest of students. Putting evidence in the hand of the right people is essential to school improvement and student achievement.

 One way to put evidence (based on results, not intentions) in the hands of the right people is to have the school leadership team disaggregate the data, help to facilitate conversations and dialogue amongst learning communities within the school, and to help teachers and students make informed decisions to aid the school improvement process. Research has shown that when teachers collaborate with other members of the PLC and reflect upon the reading data, there was a substantial change in reading instruction that can lead to significant gains in reading achievement (Reutzel et al., 2008; Ronka, Lachat, Slaughter, & Meltzer, 2009).

 These crucial conversations about data, student achievement, and the school improvement process help the professional learning communities to commit to continuous improvement by:

 Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning, developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning, implementing those strategies and ideas, analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective
and what was not, and applying new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement. (DuFour et al., 2006, pp. 4-5)

Evidence can be gathered from state assessments, anecdotal records, summative and formative assessments, student work, and rubrics. Once evidence is received, members of the professional learning community review the results in order to identify what is working and what is not. They also seek out students that are in additional need of support to master concepts (DuFour et al., 2006). Team members also seek out strategies of teachers whose students demonstrate mastery on tested skills/objectives. Through evidence, teachers are able to, “discover strengths and weaknesses in their individual teaching in order to learn from one another” (p. 5). DuFour et al., also contend that frequent common assessments are, “one of the most powerful tools in the PLC arsenal” (p. 5).

Schmoker's (2006) work with professional learning communities was focused on learning (by both the adult and the student). Schmoker (2006) said that learning will take place through team meetings, evaluation of student work, reviewing curriculum, and by understanding the need for change. Schmoker (2006) also went on to say that if teachers and community stakeholders do not understand the compelling reasons (based on evidence and research) that change must take place then, "we are only pretending to be serious about improvement" (p. 134).

Furthermore, Schmoker (2006) believed that when teachers work in collaborative teams, "students will have the benefit of educators who work collaboratively to seek out and refine practices that have the most positive impact on student achievement" (p. 135).

Through PLCs, teachers must collaborate with their teams to identify the problem, inquire about why the problem exists, develop a plan/intervention to address the problem, analyze the assessment results to see if the plan/intervention worked, and then to determine the
next steps in instruction (Education Evolving, 2005). Bottoms (1998) had conducted over a
decade of research and determined that when a PLC collaborated to make decisions for children
who were not responding to instruction, evidence had shown that student achievement was raised
when PLCs insisted that students receive extra instruction wherever difficulty is had in student
learning (in DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004).

According to Burns, Appleton, and Stehouwer (2005), "compelling evidence shows that
Response to Intervention can successfully engage a school's staff in a collective process to
provide every child with the additional time to learn at high levels" (as cited in Buffum, Mattos,
& Weber, 2012, p. 1). This collective process is through PLCs and by examining the needs of
students from data collected through universal screeners and progress monitoring tools.
Teachers use PLCs and data from screeners and progress monitoring tools to, “provide the best
and most appropriate response to the students’ needs” (NASDSE, 2005).

Professional Development

“Not only is the development of school learning communities essential to improving
teaching quality and student achievement, but investing in high-quality on-site professional
development is critical as well” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006, p. 77). DuFour & Eaker (1998)
support the idea of quality staff development by stating:

In the right school context, learning is so deeply embedded in the daily work of
educators that it is difficult to distinguish between where the work ends and the
learning begins. Teachers are engaging in a powerful form of staff development each
time they work together to develop curriculum and assessment strategies; engage in
the ongoing cycle of inquiry, reflection, dialogue, action, analysis, and adjustments
in order to improve results; and give one another feedback as they practice new skills.
Creating this context of job-embedded learning offers the most promising strategy for effective staff development. (p. 273)

The idea of effective on-site professional development was further supported by Kotter (1995, as cited in DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Kotter (1995) wrote, “because we spend so many of our waking hours at work, most of our development takes place–or doesn’t take place–on the job” (p. 272). It is on-site professional development that helps to foster professional growth, teamwork, trust, and empowerment. The National Staff Development Council, United States Department of Education, and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education have developed standards for effective professional development. One standard supports job embedded, on-site professional development. The aforementioned organizations suggested that effective professional development should, “be so deeply embedded in daily work that it is difficult to determine where the work ends and the staff development begins” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 275).

It is through on-site professional development that inquiry, reflection, collaboration, and coaching can take place so that teachers can contribute as a team to the on-site school improvement efforts. Steckel’s (2009) research on professional development in an urban school also supported the notion of on-site collaboration and development for teachers. Steckel (2009) stated that “opportunities for collaboration will improve instructional practices and student achievement across academic content areas” (p. 14). These opportunities were evident through the support of a literacy coach.

Support was one common theme that emerged in the existing literature. Teachers want to make sure that they are supported in their endeavors by coaches, colleagues, and administrators. Furthermore, the teachers validated the need for support by having someone come into the room
and model techniques, “that would likely produce positive student outcomes” (p. 19). Teachers need to believe that there are people on site to help them, not to be, “challenged or embarrassed in front of their peers” (p. 19).

Professional development should be directly related to the needs of the staff, curriculum used, state standards, and assessments used to evaluate effectiveness of instruction (American Educational Research Association, 2005; Garet et al., 2001). When teachers attend professional development sessions, those sessions must be able to provide teachers with strategies and new learnings that can be directly applied to their classroom. Kelleher (2003) stated, “research has shown unequivocally that professional development is most effective when it is embedded in teachers’ work” (p. 754). An experimental study conducted by Carpenter, Fennema, Peterson, Chiang, and Loef (1989) with first grade teachers in the area of mathematics found that when the teachers received professional development in mathematics and strategies for problem solving alongside their peers; their instruction, modeling, and questions being asked of students was far more complex than their peers who worked in isolation. In another yearlong study conducted by Cobb (1991) with kindergarten and first grade teachers, found that ongoing professional development in the area of literacy had a positive impact on student achievement when students were assessed on word reading, spelling, and comprehension (first grade). Furthermore, studies conducted by Borko and Putnam (1995) and Parsad, Lewis, Farris, and Greene (2001) suggested that the more time teachers spend in professional development, the more likely they are to change their instructional practices.

Studies conducted by Bryk, Lee and Holland (1993) and Louis and Marks (1998) suggested that the more time teachers spend collaborating within their PLC, the more likely they were to participate in professional development opportunities. However, the American
Educational Research Association (2005) found that even though professional development is essential, “more time does not equal success” (p. 4). The professional development sessions attended by teachers must focus on the needs of the teachers, curriculum, standards, and assessments in order for new learnings to be internalized and applied in their classroom.

The ultimate goal of effective professional development is to, “empower teachers with the reflective, problem-solving skills required to accomplish the difficult goals of initiating and sustaining meaningful change” (Steckel, 2009, p. 22) and is, “explicitly aimed at increasing student achievement” (American Educational Research Association, 2005, p.1).

The theme of professional development supported collaboration within the context of professional learning communities as well as having the support and time built in to the master schedule by the leaders of the school. Having built in time for teachers to collaborate, inquire, analyze data, and to receive professional development during the school day is critical for continuous school improvement to occur.

**Summary of Literature**

The theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1934/1978) and his work with the socio-cultural theory was an essential component to increasing reading achievement and closing the achievement gap. Utilization of professional learning communities, under the lens of Fullan's (2009) organizational change theory are critical if schools are serious about school improvement and increased student achievement. The literature surrounding Vygotsky and Fullan supported the research questions of this qualitative research study and the utilization of a tiered framework of instruction as a means to decrease the number of students referred for special education services and to increase student achievement in reading.
The literature reviewed for this study supported the need for teachers to examine their educational practice and to determine if their students were responding to key content which was taught. It was essential for teachers to take into account the developmental readiness of each individual child, as suggested by Vygotsky (1934/1978) and his socio-cultural theory. It was meeting the needs of students at their developmental/instructional level which garnered the best results.

According to the reviewed literature, teachers who utilized differentiated instruction to support individual student needs and scaffolded instruction in order for mastery of key content to occur were considered to be best practices in education. Teachers who collaborated in professional learning communities were able to examine if instruction was effective, if best practices were in place by analyzing student data, and determining if students are responding to instruction. These were all major components of the response to intervention framework.

Finally, the overall theme of the literature reviewed was doing whatever it takes to raise student achievement and to close the achievement gap. It was through the lens of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and Fullan's change theory to determine if this happened.

The solution to any type of change in education is to have buy-in from all stakeholders. Without buy-in, change will not happen. Teachers may continue to refer students to the intervention team for additional multi-tiered support, which will allow the students the opportunity to have both academic and behavioral success. Teachers may continue to work in isolation, even though the research clearly states that working in isolation is counterproductive to the improvement process. Unless the school leadership team has a clear vision and mission for the change process at their school, mediocrity will continue to be the standard for all students, and the most disadvantaged, under-served students will continue to perform well below their
peers, further perpetuating the achievement gap and increasing the number of students referred for special education services.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Historical Background

Prior to the implementation of Response to Intervention at the study site, students were referred for intervention services without moving through the tiers of the Response to Intervention model of instruction. At the primary tier, differentiation was not taking place and interventions for students not mastering content was not being delivered and progress monitoring was not being conducted consistently. The result was that several students were brought to the intervention team at the study site where interventions were put in place for a minimum of twenty days with progress monitoring required once a week. After four to six weeks of intervention services by the classroom teacher, the student’s case was brought back to the intervention team for a determination of either continuing the interventions because of student progress or a referral for exceptional children testing.

Of the thirty-one cases referred to the intervention team, twenty-five were referred for exceptional children testing. Sixteen of the twenty-five cases qualified for exceptional children services (64%). This meant that nine (36%) of the students who were sent on for exceptional children services did not qualify. The need for a tiered model of instruction at the study site was vital, not only for those students who needed the extra support which special education services would provide, but also for those students who did not qualify for services. These students needed more focused instruction with a stronger support at the primary tier of the Response to Intervention model.

The school study site had identified almost 20% of the school population as needing special education services; however, when the researcher reviewed the number of students who were referred for exceptional children testing during the same 2011-2012 school year, 36% of
the students referred did not qualify for exceptional children services. This indicated that these children did not receive developmentally appropriate support through differentiation or through the assistance of an MKO. With data such as this, it was essential for the researcher of this study to examine the effectiveness of the tiered model of instruction and its impact on student achievement for the 2012-2013 school year.

In the district of the elementary study site, teachers were required to differentiate instruction for students at the tier I level if content was not mastered. Once differentiation had occurred for a period of time, an alternate assessment was provided to the students to reassess for mastery of differentiated content. Once the assessment was scored and analyzed, the teacher had to decide if a personalized education plan was necessary for students.

According to North Carolina House Bill 950 sections 7A.1(b) and 7A.1(d) in the Read to Achieve Program and State Bill 724, section 4, students should be identified for academic risk beginning in kindergarten. Identification can be in the form of observation, assessments, grades, reading levels, etc. Identification should occur before the results from the state end of grade tests for a grade level are received. At the study site, the teacher had until the end of the first quarter of instruction, or nine weeks of instructional time to determine if a personal education plan (PEP) was needed for any student who was at risk, was not performing at grade level, and needed further focused instructional support. “Focused instructional supports and services, reading interventions, and accelerated activities should include evidence-based practices that meet the needs of students and may include coaching, mentoring, tutoring, summer school, Saturday school, and extended days” (Read to Achieve, 2012, p. 1). The PEP was created in conjunction with the student’s parents and a copy of the PEP was provided to the parents at the initial development meeting.
The PEP document outlined the area(s) of need, a hypothesis regarding why the student was struggling, data to support the hypothesis, intervention(s) to be implemented, frequency/duration of intervention(s), and a section for the teacher to note the type of progress monitoring tool used to measure progress towards area of need. Once a PEP was put in place, it could be revised based on additional areas of need until the student’s report card or assessment(s) reflected academic proficiency on grade level standards and expectations.

For students who were on a PEP and needed additional support, it was provided in addition to their core instruction in literacy. Students received the intervention support four days a week for forty-five minutes. DIBELS was the assessment tool used for progress monitoring. Students who had severe reading deficiencies, as indicated through grades, observations, reading levels, and/or state tests were progress monitored more frequently (every five to ten days); whereas, students with moderate reading difficulties were monitored less frequently (every ten to twenty days). Students who were considered to be at grade level in reading were monitored three to four times a year, at which time the teacher determined if additional support was needed based on the increased complexity of grade level instruction.

If a child was not making progress towards grade level goals and expectations and was on a PEP, then movement to the third tier of the Response to Intervention model was required. The third tier of the Response to Intervention model occurred when a referral for additional interventions was provided and a new plan of support were generated for the student. The intervention team at the study site consisted of the school counselor, Response to Intervention coach, school psychologist, literacy and math facilitator, school administrator, parents of student, and classroom teacher. Interventions at this level are, “evidence based strategies frequently used to remediate reading deficiencies and include, but are not limited to, individual instruction,
tutoring, or mentoring that target specific reading skills and abilities” (Read to Achieve, 2012, p. 2).

If after four to six weeks of interventions and the collection of weekly progress monitoring data points in the identified area of need, the student was not making academic progress, the intervention team would decide if the interventions needed to be adjusted by either changing the interventions altogether or increasing the frequency/duration of the intervention which was provided.

If the collective decision of the team was to continue with intervention support, the team would revisit the student’s intervention case after another four to six weeks of intensive instruction and collection of addition progress monitoring data. If the team decided that the student was not making progress towards grade level goals and intervention support was not helping the student, then a referral was made to the exceptional children’s department. It was at this point that the exceptional children’s team reviewed the documentation from the intervention team and decided if the correct protocol was followed and determined if substantial intervention support was provided to the student at the first two tiers of the Response to Intervention model. If so, an initial meeting was requested with the student’s parents to request permission for special education testing. If not, the student’s information was sent back to the intervention team with feedback on what components of intervention support were missing from the student’s case.

Because of the high number of students referred for special education testing and not qualifying for services, there was a need to examine the first two tiers of instruction at the elementary study site to determine if the response to intervention model was being implemented with fidelity.
Methodology

The methodology which was used in this study was under the applied social sciences umbrella, with a focus on qualitative methods and procedures. The questions answered were:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?
2. How do teachers perceive the implementation of professional learning communities and its impact on student performance?

Utilizing a qualitative methodology was the best approach for this study because qualitative methods, "tell the program's story by capturing and communicating the participants' stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 10). The qualitative methodology, rooted in a Constructivist/Interpretivist paradigm, was critical to the research question because qualitative methodologies allowed for researcher to focus on the perceptions of the participants and their experiences at the study site, and the way they make sense of their lives (Merriam, 1988).

The role of the researcher in this study was to interpret the research as it related to the experiences and perceptions of the participants. The researcher was closely connected to the participants at the elementary setting, and has had a long standing collegial relationship with the participants involved. Because of the close experiences and connections to the participants, the researcher had to fully disclose all biases and personal issues while undergoing the qualitative process (Locke et al., 2007). The researchers’ experience with central office, outside consultants (Teachers College at Columbia University), and educational background shaped perceptions about the implementation of Response to Intervention, including the implementation of balanced literacy and professional learning communities with the second grade team.
The researcher had direct knowledge about the process and expectations which were required of teachers utilizing a tiered response to instruction. The researcher supported the teachers with differentiated activities, assessments to measure mastery of content knowledge, and provided teachers and support staff with academic interventions, if needed.

The role of the researcher at the study site was as a literacy facilitator. The literacy facilitator at the elementary study site served as the primary communicator of the balanced literacy initiative. This included monthly committee meetings and professional development opportunities, centered on the components of balanced literacy. The literacy facilitator was also the primary communicator with the staff developers at the Teachers College at Columbia University. The literacy facilitator collaborated with the staff developers to provide forty hours of ongoing professional development surrounding the work of literacy and writing at the study site.

**Research Tradition**

The research tradition which was selected for the study was a formative program evaluation which served the purpose in determining if improvements were needed in a specific program and to determine program strengths and weaknesses (Patton, 2002). By utilizing the formative program evaluation as a tool to determine improvement, the researcher was able to recommend improvements in program implementation so that schools are able to improve what they are doing as a means to increase student achievement and close the achievement gap in reading. The researcher chose this research tradition because according to Patton (2002):

Formative evaluations, in contrast to summative ones, serve the purpose of improving a specific program, policy, group of staff (in a personnel evaluation), or product.

Formative evaluations aim at forming (shaping) the thing being studied. No attempt is
made in a formative evaluation to generalize findings beyond the setting in which the evaluation takes place. (p.220)

The rationale for utilizing this research tradition was based on the purpose and role of evaluation in determining program improvement and how the findings from this formative program evaluation will assist central office personnel in future rollout of multiple initiatives to over 100 schools in the 2014-2015 school year.

**Research Design**

The research design which was employed during this study was qualitative. The qualitative research design best aligned with the research tradition of a formative program evaluation because the design allowed for, “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2009, p. 4). Qualitative research design involves, “emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009, p.9).

The researcher of this study followed the research design of qualitative research (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002) which allowed the researcher to use the theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1934/1978) and Fullan (2008; 2009) as an, “advocacy perspective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how the data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change” (Creswell, 2009, p. 62).

**Participants**

The participants who were selected for this formative program evaluation were a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002). When a researcher purposefully selects participants at a site it
helps, “the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Creswell, 2009, p. 178).

The researcher utilized the four aspects of site and participant sampling as a guideline in the data collection process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The four aspects were setting, actors, events, and process (as cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 178).

Setting

The setting was at an elementary school in the Southeastern part of the United States. The elementary school was in the suburbs of a large urban city and housed students in grades Pre-K through fifth grade with an approximate student population of 636. The student demographics were 50.5% African-American, 32.2% White, 6% Hispanic, 5.2% Asian, and 6.1% of the students were designated as Other. 53.8% of the student population was identified as economically disadvantaged. The average teacher to student ratio was 1:18 (School Progress Report, 2011). The program evaluated at the elementary study site was Response to Intervention (RtI).

Events

The focus of this study was centered on the experiences and perceptions of second grade teachers as they reflected on the implementation of a tiered response to instruction as a means to increase student achievement and to reduce the number of students referred for special education services.

Actors

The participants involved were purposefully sampled. The participants were four second grade teachers, one Response to Intervention coach, one school counselor, and one special education teacher. The actors selected were all teachers in second grade because of their
interactions as a Professional Learning Community, their use of data to inform decision making, as well as the new Read to Achieve House Bill 950/S.L. 2012-142 Section 7A which impacted their second grade students in literacy achievement and placement in third grade.

The North Carolina state goal for the Read to Achieve House Bill (2012) is:

To ensure that every student read at or above grade level by the end of third grade and continue progress in reading proficiency so that he or she can read, comprehend, integrate, and apply complex texts needed for secondary education and career success.

(p.1)

The Response to Intervention coach was selected because of the professional development, assessment information, and academic/behavior monitoring which took place with the second grade teachers. The school counselor was selected to participate in this study based on her role in the building as the lead chairperson for the school-wide intervention team, professional development with the second grade teachers, and one who monitored academic/behavior plans for students in the second grade. Both the Response to Intervention coach and the school counselor were members of the school’s RtI leadership team. The final actor who was selected was a special education teacher who worked with identified students in second grade. The special education teacher was responsible for testing students who moved through the tiered model of instruction without academic success and created an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), if needed.

Process

The second grade teachers, in conjunction with support staff, were purposefully selected based on their history of not working as a collaborative PLC, lack of assessment data to determine if students were acquiring and mastering key content, and the inability of students to
demonstrate their knowledge on formative comprehension assessments because a comprehensive assessment was not available for this grade level.

This grade level was required to work with new curriculum units that supported the new Common Core State Standards (2012) and the school's balanced literacy initiative, with on-going professional development and support from the Teachers College at Columbia University. This grade level had to utilize a tiered approach to instruction and follow a problem solving model prior to the referral of a child to the intervention team. This was also the first year in which this grade level assessed their students using a comprehensive literacy assessment and an adaptive assessment to determine their students' readiness level for instructional learning.

**Recruitment and Access**

The teachers were asked to participate in the study without compensation. The participants understood that their participation in the study was strictly voluntary and that they could opt out of the study at any time. The teachers also understood that their input and dialogue with the researcher would not be reflected in their performance evaluations. The researcher at the study site was not an evaluator for any teacher in this study. The focus group interview which was conducted by the researcher took place after school, so that scheduled planning time was preserved for PLC conversations.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

In order to protect the identity of the participants in the study, pseudonyms were used. The name of the school and district were also protected by creating a pseudonym. When requesting permission to gain access to participants at the study site, the researcher had to identify the gatekeepers and seek permission to conduct research at their site (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Stake, 1995, Barnhardt, 2009). The researcher requested
permission from the principal at the study site in order for data collection to take place. Using the Unsigned Consent Document (Appendix B, Template 3), as provided by the IRB at Northeastern University, the researcher provided a detailed explanation in writing, via the consent document, concerning the role of the participants in the study during an initial meeting. Once the researcher had provided the detailed information about the participants' role in the study, the researcher provided a consent form requesting the teachers and support staff at the elementary study site to participate in the research study. As part of the consent process, the researcher provided each participant with the research goals, research questions, and how the study would be conducted.

**Initial Meeting**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for the research to move forward in December 2013. Once approval was received, the researcher met with potential participants to discuss the research goals and their roles as participants. They were provided with an informed consent document and an invitation letter for their review. If they chose to participate, they received the PET-R survey to complete (classroom teachers only) and were asked to return the survey within seven days. One teacher chose to complete the survey online, while the other three teachers chose to complete the survey on paper. The participants were asked to answer the PET-R survey based on their experience and perception of the reading program from the 2012-2013 school year. The results from the survey were collected, coded, pseudonyms assigned to maintain anonymity, and saved/stored for analysis. The focus group interview date was provided to the teachers in advance and all participants were able to attend.
Data Collection and Procedures

The collection of data contained multiple data sources. The data sources which were used in this qualitative study were student data set from Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), and Collaborative Assessment Solutions for Educators in the 21st Century (CASE21), survey responses through the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Evaluating Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs- Revised (PET-R), and an interview conducted in a focus group setting.

Collecting data sets which aligned to the qualitative research design of a formative program evaluation included a focus group interview, survey, and student data. The three data sets collected by the researcher were also utilized by Curtis-Whipple (2011) and Pelletier (2011) and their work with similar studies utilizing the program evaluation research tradition.

The first data set collected was from the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Evaluating Effective Schoolwide Programs-Revised (PET-R). The second data set collected was student data from the 2012-2013 school year. The final set of data which was collected for the study was from the focus group interview. The focus groups questions were driven by the first two data sets. The primary data set in this study was the focus group interview because the questions which were asked were generated from student data and survey results. The focus group interview responses told the story and drove the findings in this study.

The first set of data collected which drove the focus group questions were the survey results from the Planning and Evaluation Tool for Evaluating Effective Schoolwide Programs-Revised (PET-R). The responses from this survey provided the researcher with participants’ perceptions towards the implementation of the Response to Intervention model. The results from
this survey drove the focus group questions and the results from each individual survey were shared with the participants prior to the focus group interview.

The second data set collected for this study was student data. The student data was reviewed (MAP, CASE21, and DIBELS) by each individual teacher then together as a PLC. The participants had access to beginning of the year data and end of year data to assist in the review of strengths and weaknesses, as an individual teacher and as a team. The researcher reviewed the data as a whole to determine strengths and weaknesses and identified any areas of concern in reading instruction and student achievement.

The focus group interview was the final data set collected for this formative program evaluation. A focus group interview, “is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic” (Patton, 2002, p. 385). By allowing the participants to answer interview questions in a small group they were able to build on their peers’ responses and to hear differing viewpoints on a topic in a, “non-threatening environment” (Krueger, 1994, p. 6).

There were several reasons why a focus group interview was advantageous for this formative program evaluation. Conducting a focus group interview was cost effective (Krueger, 1994). There was no cost incurred to the researcher by conducting the focus interview. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), “Interactions among participants enhance data quality. Participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weeds out false or extreme views” (Patton, 2002, p. 386). One final reason for conducting a focus group interview was due to the non-threatening environment in which the participants were able to respond to the researcher’s questions. This type of setting can be much more pleasant than a one-to-one setting.

The data collected from the focus group interview, “is typically more specific, meaningful, and animated than what can be obtained from individually filled out consumer
questionnaires and surveys” (Patton, 2002, p. 388). By having the focus group as the third data set collected, the researcher was able to utilize the data collected from the preceding data sets to create the questions for the focus group interview.

These data sets allowed the researcher to formulate interview questions relating to student data and PET-R survey results concerning the teachers’ perceptions on reading achievement and the intervention process at the study site.

**Student Data**

The student data collected from DIBELS, MAP, and CASE21 assessments helped the researcher identify strengths and weaknesses in reading instruction and student achievement, as well as identifying any areas of concern with individual and grade level data.

The three student data sources were necessary to collect for this formative program review evaluation because the teachers were required to administer MAP, CASE21, and DIBELS assessments to all second grade students at three benchmark periods throughout the school year. The teachers conducted ongoing analysis of all three data sources to gain a better understanding about the reading achievement of a student throughout the course of a school year.

The second grade teachers were required to use the MAP assessment as a universal screener as part of the RtI process at the study site. The 2012-2013 school year was the first school year in which the MAP assessment was administered to second grade students. The MAP assessment in reading for both primary and upper elementary students was an adaptive assessment which allowed the students to answer questions at their independent reading levels. The questions become more or less challenging based on the student’s response to the question/passage. The teachers were able to utilize the student’s Rausch Unit (RIT) to personalize reading instruction. This score is a three digit number and is determined based by
the student’s performance on each of the reading assessments. If a child was intensive on the DIBELS assessments, the student’s RIT score most often identified a student’s reading achievement at a grade level lower than second grade.

The teachers used the data collected from the MAP assessment to identify the RIT score for each child and then were asked to utilize the information contained within the DesCartes: A Continuum of Learning (COL) chart to differentiate instruction for their students. The DesCartes COL chart provided essential skills needed for each student to be successful at each ten point RIT range. The information contained within the DesCartes COL chart was a tool which teachers could use to fine tune their instructional groups in reading. Teachers were able to use the RIT scores of their students to form guided reading groups, which supported Vygotsky’s (1924/1978) zone of proximal development through differentiated instruction with a more knowledgeable other, in this case the classroom teacher.

At the end of the second and third benchmark period, the teachers analyzed student data from the MAP assessments to determine if student growth was evident in reading. The analysis of the data took place through the second grade professional learning community. The minimum reading growth goal for each child was at least one year.

The DIBELS measurements were assessments which measured basic early literacy skills and are predictive of future reading success (National Reading Panel, 2000; Adams, 1990; Rathvon, 2004). The DIBELS assessments were mandated for all second grade students by the district. Students were identified as intensive, strategic, or benchmark as indicated by their reading performance on the basic early literacy skills assessments.

The DIBELS assessments had been administered in previous school years at the study site and were a familiar assessment tool for the second grade teachers. The only difference with
the DIBELS assessments in the 2012-2013 school year from previous years was the addition of
the retell in the DORF subtest, the change in reporting in the NWF subtest, and the device used
to conduct the DIBELS assessments. The DIBELS test results were the only results of the three
student data sets which were able to be accessed by the classroom teacher. The MAP and
CASE21 results were provided to the teacher through the administrative team. The teachers
were able to access individual student and class data from DIBELS as soon as their device had
been synchronized.

The teachers utilized the DIBELS data to provide intervention support for students who
were showing deficits in basic early literacy skills as determined by their performance on the
second grade DIBELS assessments. DIBELS assessments were the progress monitoring tool of
choice for the second grade teachers due to its accessibility and the timeliness in which an
assessment can be administered. The second grade teachers used a student’s DIBELS data
history when bringing a student to the intervention team for further intervention support.
DIBELS data played an important role in intervention support and identification of students with
reading difficulties for second grade teachers at the study site.

Both the DIBELS and MAP assessments allowed the teachers to personalize and
differentiate instruction based on student data through the basic early literacy skills assessments
and the adaptive MAP assessment. These assessments helped provide the teacher with a broader
picture of reading achievement in their students. The MAP data was broken down by strands in
the Common Core State Standards for reading and language, whereas the DIBELS assessment
data was broken down by specific early literacy skills. MAP and DIBELS fell under the
theoretical lens of Lev Vygotsky (1934/1978) and his zone of proximal development (ZPD) and
more knowledgeable other (MKO)
The CASE21 assessments were required, comprehensive benchmark assessments which were aligned to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) for reading and language. The 2012-2013 school year was the first school year in which the CASE21 assessments were administered to second grade students; whereas, the CASE21 assessments had been administered in grades three through five for the previous two years. The need for this assessment in second grade was for instructional grouping purposes and to gain a better understanding of where the second graders were in reading acquisition before entering third grade.

Third grade is the first year in which the state of North Carolina requires an end of grade test to measure academic achievement in the areas of math and literacy. The CASE21 assessment assisted the teachers in determining who was achieving at grade level in reading, as the reporting of the assessment mirrored the achievement levels and rigor of the North Carolina end of grade test.

The teachers were able to form instructional groups and provided reteaching opportunities for children who did not achieve benchmark status on the CASE21 assessment. Teachers were able to determine which students had to be retaught and provided additional support in reading based on the reporting features, including an item analysis for each student. The student data was analyzed within the second grade professional learning community. The PLC provided the teachers with the opportunity to hold collaborative conversations about student reading achievement, the need for additional reading support for students, and if additional professional development in reading was needed.

The three data sets were all interrelated and helped provide the teacher with a holistic picture of a student’s achievement in reading. The DIBELS data, particularly the DORF assessment helped the teacher determine if the fluency rate of a student impacted their reading
achievement on the MAP and CASE21 assessments. If a student was a non-fluent reader, their performance on a comprehensive grade level reading assessment was compromised. If a student was determined to be intensive or strategic on early literacy skills on DIBELS assessments, teachers inferred that these students would have difficulty achieving grade level status on the MAP and CASE21 assessments. CASE21 data was a reading comprehension test. Reading comprehension was also measured in both the MAP and DIBELS assessments; however, the CASE21 assessment was the only assessment which provided an item analysis for each child for the entire test.

The teachers reviewed the student data as individuals and as a team to determine effective practices in literacy. The three data sources collected from the study site were critical to understanding the teachers’ perceptions of Response to Intervention because all three data sources were new to this grade level and all three were administered during the same beginning, middle, and end of year assessment window. Data mining through professional learning communities (PLCs) fell under Michael Fullan’s (2009) organizational change theory and teacher collaboration to improve student achievement.

These data sources informed the formative program evaluation and the primary data set by highlighting the reading achievement of second grade students. The data collected from these assessments and the PET-R survey, which contributed to the teachers’ perceptions concerning the effectives of the program, were the driving force in the development of the researcher’s questions for the focus group interview. The research sought to discover through a formative program evaluation review if the participants perceived the implementation of the Response to Intervention model as a means to reduce the number of students referred for special education services, to increase academic achievement in reading, and to close the achievement gap.
Because all three assessments were predictive of future reading success, it was imperative that the data collected from the second grade students was analyzed to determine if the implementation was effective at the study site and what improvements should be made for program effectiveness.

**DIBELS Next**

Student data was collected from DIBELS for this study. The DIBELS data set was important to the study because the second grade teachers had to administer the tests using a new tool (iPad) and administered updated versions of the DIBELS assessments which were scored differently than in previous years. The DIBELS assessments were administered within the same benchmark windows as MAP testing.

The DIBELS benchmark assessments in second grade were administered at three intervals during the school year: beginning of year, middle of year, and end of year.

**Administration of DIBELS Assessments**

All five teachers had been trained on the administration of the 6th edition of DIBELS assessments at the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year and how to analyze the data for instructional decisions/grouping of students. DIBELS 6th edition was new to the teachers and administering the assessments utilizing an iPad was also new. While the assessments themselves did not change, the benchmark for each individual assessment did increase from previous years. The teachers felt very comfortable with the administration and data analysis from the DIBELS assessments.

Before the teacher had administered the NWF assessment, she presented the student with two nonsense words for practice. The two words presented to the student were *sog* and *mip*. The
teacher asked the student to read the nonsense word and if he/she did not know how to read the nonsense word, he/she was asked to say all the sounds that he/she knew. The student was then asked to put their finger under the first word and to read each word from left to right. The teacher reminded the student once again, to say the all the sounds he/she knew if he/she was not able to read the nonsense word.

The student was to read as many nonsense words as he/she could for one minute. While the student was reading the word or the sounds he/she knew, the teacher was using the iPad to mark if the whole word was read or if individual sounds were said. The teacher could also mark if sounds were missed or said incorrectly by tapping on the letter in the nonsense word.

The alphabetic principle is one of the major components of reading as determined by the National Reading Panel (2000) and is a prerequisite to word identification. The Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) assessment assesses the alphabetic principle. The NWF assessment was a benchmark assessment given to second grade students at the beginning of the school year. If a student had not achieved benchmark status at the beginning of the school year, the student was then progress monitored on the NWF assessment until benchmark status was achieved.

The student was presented with three grade level reading passages for each benchmark period. The student had one minute to read each passage. While the student was reading the passage, the teacher was recording any miscues, insertions, or omissions of words in the passage. Once the minute had ended, the teacher asked the student to retell the passage which was just read. The teacher counted the number of words in the retell for each passage by tapping on the iPad to denote each word said by the student.
Scoring of DIBELS Assessments

The DIBELS NWF total score was calculated after the one minute mark had been reached. A NWF score was assigned to the student based on the number of whole words read and the number of correct letter sounds identified. The beginning of grade expectation for second grade students was 54 correct letter sounds and 13 whole words read.

The computer platform system calculated accuracy of student’s reading, words read correct, the number of words that the student said in the retell, the quality of the retell, and also identified miscues for analysis to be completed by the teacher after completion of each DORF passage. If the student was not at grade level and had not achieved benchmark status on the DORF assessment at each benchmark period, the student was then progress monitored on the DORF assessment until benchmark status was achieved. The end of grade expectation for oral reading fluency was 90 words read per minute.

There were three tiers which identified students’ progress towards benchmark goals. The three tiers were intensive, strategic, and benchmark. Figure 3.1 shows the cut off points and benchmark goals for students in second grade all on DIBELS subtests.

Table 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Score Level</th>
<th>Likely Need for Support</th>
<th>Beginning of Year</th>
<th>Middle of Year</th>
<th>End of Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Composite Score</td>
<td>At or Above Benchmark</td>
<td>Likely to Need Core Support</td>
<td>141+</td>
<td>190+</td>
<td>238+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Benchmark</td>
<td>Likely to Need Strategic Support</td>
<td>109-140</td>
<td>145-189</td>
<td>180-237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well Below Benchmark</td>
<td>Likely to</td>
<td>0-108</td>
<td>0-144</td>
<td>0-179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicator</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>At or Above Benchmark</td>
<td>Below Benchmark</td>
<td>Well Below Benchmark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWF-CLS</td>
<td></td>
<td>Likely to Need Core Support</td>
<td>Likely to Need Strategic Support</td>
<td>Likely to need Intensive Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54+</td>
<td>35-53</td>
<td>0-34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWF-WWR</td>
<td></td>
<td>Likely to Need Core Support</td>
<td>Likely to Need Strategic Support</td>
<td>Likely to need Intensive Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13+</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DORF Words</td>
<td></td>
<td>Likely to Need Core Support</td>
<td>Likely to Need Strategic Support</td>
<td>Likely to need Intensive Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correct</td>
<td></td>
<td>52+ 72+ 87+</td>
<td>37-51 55-71 65-86</td>
<td>0-36 0-54 0-64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DORF Accuracy</td>
<td>Retell and Quality of Response</td>
<td>Likely to Need Core Support</td>
<td>Likely to Need Strategic Support</td>
<td>Likely to Need Intensive Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above Benchmark</td>
<td>90%+</td>
<td>96%+</td>
<td>97%+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Benchmark</td>
<td>81%-89%</td>
<td>91%-95%</td>
<td>93%-96%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Below Benchmark</td>
<td>0%-80%</td>
<td>0%-90%</td>
<td>0%-92%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above Benchmark</td>
<td>16+</td>
<td>21+</td>
<td>27+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Benchmark</td>
<td>8-15</td>
<td>13-20</td>
<td>18-26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Below Benchmark</td>
<td>0-7</td>
<td>0-12</td>
<td>0-17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above Benchmark</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td>2+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Benchmark</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010, p. 7 Appendix A*

When a student fell below the cut point on a DIBELS sub test (Table 3.1), the teacher addressed the reading skill deficit through additional instruction and support and then progress
monitored the student in the below benchmark subtest areas. Progress monitoring took place every ten instructional days for students identified as intensive and every twenty instructional days for students identified as strategic on benchmark assessments. Every child in the second grade was administered the DIBELS assessments by their second grade teacher using an iPad or similar device.

The following table identifies each subtest in DIBELS and then also identifies what each subtest measures.

Table 3.2

*DIBELS Assessments and Measures*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Assessment (SubTest)</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS First Sound Fluency (FSF)</td>
<td>The assessor says words, and the student says the first sound for each word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)</td>
<td>The student is presented with a sheet of letters and asked to name the letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Phoneme Segmentation Fluency</td>
<td>The assessor says words, and the student says the individual sounds for each word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</td>
<td>The student is presented with a list of VC and CVC nonsense words (e.g., sig, rav, ov) and asked to read the words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF)</td>
<td>The student is presented with a reading passage and asked to read aloud. The student is then asked to retell what he/she just read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Daze</td>
<td>The student is presented with a reading passage where some words are replaced by a multiple choice box that includes the original word and two distractors. The student reads the passage silently and selects the word in each box that best fits the meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Literacy Diagnostic: Text
Reading and Comprehension
- Print Concepts
- Reading Behaviors
- Oral Comprehension
- Written Comprehension

The student is able to comprehend while reading connected text accurately and fluently.

Early Literacy Diagnostic: Word Recognition
The student is able to read high frequency words with accuracy and fluency.

Retrieved from:
https://www.mclasshome.com/wgenhelp/DN3DR/tablet/Reading_3D/Assessment_Scoring/Assessment_and_Scoring.htm Appendix B

Both the DIBELS DORF and retell fluency assessments were aligned with the major components of reading, as cited by the National Reading Panel (2000) as a way to address reading fluency and accuracy (DORF) and comprehension of text (RTF).

CASE21

CASE21 Administration

CASE21 assessments were administered by the second grade teachers to their homeroom students three times during the 2012-2013 school year. Each assessment was administered at the end of the first, second, and third quarter of the school year. The first assessment had thirty assessment items. The genres assessed were fiction, poetry, science, and technology. The second assessment had thirty assessment items and assessed the genres of fiction, poetry, science, and social studies. The final assessment had forty assessment items. The final assessment was a comprehensive assessment which assessed the genres of fiction, poetry, science, social studies, and technology. Nonfiction/Informational passages were not assessed on any of the three administration rounds.
At each of the three benchmarking periods, there were ten assessment questions assigned a DOK level one, thirteen assessment questions assigned a DOK level of two, and seven assessment questions assigned a DOK level of three. Based on student performance on each test question, there was an average score provided to the teacher for each DOK level of questioning. These scores ranged from the lowest DOK score of 1.9 to the highest score of 3.4, out of a total of four possible points.

The second student data set collected was from CASE 21. The data collected was from the beginning and end of the 2012-2013 school year. This data collection was important because the CASE 21 assessment in the second grade was aligned to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012), which were newly adopted and implemented at the study site, and was a new comprehension assessment for the grade level. This assessment was comprehensive and reading achievement was determined on a scale of one to four, which was how the state of North Carolina reported student achievement levels on end of year testing reports. The data collected showed if student achievement in reading took place over the course of the school year due to professional development and data mining through the grade level professional learning community. Table 3.3 details the collection points and measures on the CASE21 assessment.

Table 3.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Results</td>
<td>Students projected achievement level on end of grade test, percentage correct, and suggested letter grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of Knowledge</td>
<td>Students ability to engage with content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core State Standards Strand Results</td>
<td>Students ability to answer questions aligned to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C

MAP

The third set of student data collected were the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment. MAP was a normative assessment which was both adaptive and predictive. The MAP assessment was administered to students in second grade during the fall, winter, and spring.

Administration of MAP

The second grade students at the study site took the MAP assessment three times during the 2012-2013 school year. The testing window was predetermined by the office of accountability at the district office. There was a fall, winter, and spring testing window for the administration of the MAP assessments. The MAP assessments were taken during the students’ special area time of computer lab. The computer lab teacher monitored the students while the MAP assessments were taking place. The reading assessments took approximately fifty minutes to complete. The students took two weeks of their special area time in the computer lab to complete the MAP assessments. Each student was assigned a computer where they were to complete their MAP assessment. Once they were finished with the MAP assessment, their RIT score was populated on the computer screen, signaling that the testing session was complete.

The MAP assessment in reading measured student performance on the Common Core State Standards in Reading (both Informational and Literature), Language, and Foundational
Skills (including Vocabulary). Students were provided with a RIT score in Reading Literature, Reading Information, Language, and Foundational Skills (Vocabulary). Once the RIT scores were determined in all the aforementioned categories, an overall RIT score was determined after each of the three assessment periods.

The information from this normative assessment allowed the teacher to determine the grade level skills acquired and mastered by their students, as well as which skills were needed to be further developed with the assistance and guided support of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). Table 3.4 highlights the data collected and measurements on the MAP universal screening tool.

The student data collected was from the beginning, middle, and end of the 2012-2013 school year. The data collected from the MAP assessment was important to this study because the MAP assessment was a mandated universal screener for Response to Intervention schools and the 2012-2013 school year was the first year in which the assessment was administered in second grade. The MAP assessment windows for benchmark testing coincided with DIBELS testing for the second grade teachers.

Table 3.4

**MAP Assessment and Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Map for Primary Grades (K-2)</td>
<td>Basic early literacy skills aligned to the Common Core State Standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAP –Common Core (2-5)</td>
<td>Literacy skills aligned to the Common Core State Standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix D
The Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Collaborative Assessment Solutions for Educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (CASE2), and Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) were the second data set in this formative program evaluation study.

**Teacher Survey**

The final data set collected for this study was from the PET-R. The PET-R was provided for each second grade teacher and the survey results were collected in order to determine the teachers’ perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the Response to Intervention model. The PET-R was an evaluation tool which was organized into seven categories (Table 3.5):


Table 3.5

---

**PET-R Survey and Description of Each Component**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of PET-R</th>
<th>Description of Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals, Objectives, Priorities</td>
<td>Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored to research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teachers of reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Programs and Materials</td>
<td>The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructional Time
A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively

Differentiated Instruction/Grouping/Scheduling
Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning

Administration/Organization/Communication
Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices

Professional Development
Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction

Note. Adapted from Kame’enui and Simmons, 2003, pp. 4-11 Appendix E

There were seven sections (evaluation criteria) in this survey which utilized a rating scale of zero to two for each of the goals and objectives in the evaluation criteria. The rating of zero meant that implementation was not in place. The rating of a one meant that the implementation was partially in place and the rating of a two meant that implementation was fully in place. The data collected from the PET-R survey drove the questions which were asked of the participants during the focus group interview, which was the primary data set in this study, and contributed to the teachers’ perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the program. The results from the PET-R survey identified the strengths and weaknesses for program improvement.

In the PET-R Survey, the evaluation criterion Goals/Objectives/Priorities, Assessment, Instructional Programs and Materials, Instructional Time, and Differentiated Instruction/Grouping were all related to the first research question and the theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1934/1978) in this formative program evaluation review: How do teachers perceive
the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance? The RtI model was designed to match students to their zone of proximal development (ZPD) through assessments, such as DIBELS and MAP. Teachers, more capable peers, or instructional support staff helped with instruction as a more knowledgeable other (MKO) provided additional instructional support through differentiated learning opportunities. This type of support was at the primary tier of the RtI model.

The last two evaluation criterion, Administration/Organization/Communication and Professional Development, in the PET-R survey were related to the second research question in this formative program evaluation review and the theoretical lens of Michael Fullan (2009): What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of a professional learning community? These two evaluation criteria were essential components in this formative program evaluation review as it highlighted how teachers perceived their collaboration through professional learning communities, professional development in reading, and if data mining with colleagues improved student achievement in reading.

During the data collection and analysis process, the researcher coded the survey results by assigning each teacher a code (participant 1, P1; participant 2, P2, etc). After each teacher had been assigned a code, the researcher categorized each of the evaluation criteria by section (Goals/Objectives/Priorities [GOP], Assessment [ASSMT] Instructional Programs and Materials [IPM], Instructional Time [IT]; Differentiation/Grouping/Scheduling [DGS], Administration/Organization/Communication [AOC], Professional Development [PD]) and then by the total score for each evaluation criterion. Once each of the participant’s scores had been calculated for each of the seven sections in the PET-R, an overall score for the survey was
calculated to determine program effectiveness based on the teachers’ perceptions as demonstrated through their responses on the PET-R survey.

The results from student assessments and the PET-R teacher survey helped the researcher formulate questions based on emerging themes from the student data and PET-R survey results. The emerging themes allowed the researcher to remain focused on the second grade teachers’ perceptions concerning the effectiveness of program implementation, including strengths and weaknesses, during the focus group interview. All three data sets provided the teacher with a unique lens to view the reading achievement of a student from basic early literacy skills, such as non-sense word fluency and oral retell, to reading comprehension on passages across multiple genres.

The student data set and the PET-R survey were important components to this study because these contributed to the teachers’ perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the implementation of the Response to Intervention model and the impact it had on student achievement in reading, closing the achievement gap, and reducing the number of students referred for special education services. Table 3.6 refers to the essential components of the study and how the data collected related to the research questions and from which participants at the study site.

Table 3.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question and Data Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Question</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PET-R Survey

2. What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?

Focus Group Interview (Primary Data Set)

Second Grade Classroom Teachers (4 total)

Appendix F

Focus Group Interview

A focus group interview was conducted in a face-to-face format. There were five second grade teachers, a Response to Intervention coach, the school counselor, and the second grade resource teacher invited to attend the focus group interview in order to gain insight into the participants' perceptions about the initiatives being implemented at the study site.

The participants were provided a secure location in the back room of the Media Center which provided an environment for the participants to answer the interview questions openly. The researcher explained that the interview would be recorded using an audio cassette tape recording device. The researcher asked the participants open ended questions which were intended to, "elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 181). The interview with the purposefully sampled participants lasted approximately sixty minutes.

Data Storage and Analysis

The data collected from the participants was entered in a computer software program called MAXQDA 11. MAXQDA 11 assisted the researcher in looking for patterns and relationships, identifying texts with the similar themes/codes, and assisted the researcher with analysis of the data (Lewins & Silver, 2007; Creswell, 2009; Kuckartz, 2007). Utilizing a qualitative computer software program was more efficient than hand coding (Creswell, 2009).
The data collected and the transcriptions from the focus group interview were stored electronically and the researcher was the only person with access. The print and digital copies from the three data sets were stored in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher will destroy all digital and print copies of data collected after three years of publication of the dissertation.

**Coding Data**

The researcher utilized Saldaña’s (2013) work with coding of qualitative data to assist with the coding process. Saldaña (2013) defined coding as a, “word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Coding took place both during and after collection of data, because as Huberman and Miles (1994) said, “coding is analysis” (p. 56).

Saldaña (2013) had identified two different coding cycles. The first coding cycle included seven different subcategories which allowed for simple and direct coding of initial data. The second coding cycle was much more difficult because this was where the analysis and theory building took place. It was important to select the appropriate coding method for each of the two cycles. Patton (2002) stated, “because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique” (p. 433). Saldaña said that there was no, “best way to code qualitative data” (p. 61). Because the main research question driving this qualitative study was about the perceptions of teachers, Saldaña suggested using, “Descriptive, Process, Initial, Versus, Evaluation, Dramaturgical, Domain and Taxonomic, Causation, and/or Pattern Coding, plus Themeing the Data” (p. 61).

The researcher in this study utilized in vivo coding and descriptive coding for the first cycle coding process. In vivo coding (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) allowed the researcher to, “use
the direct language of the participants as codes rather than researcher-generated words and phrases” (p. 61). This type of coding was aligned with a program evaluation research tradition because it allowed the researcher to code the data based on the perceptions of the teachers from the PET-R survey instrument and the responses from the participants from the focus group interview.

Descriptive coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2003, 2013; Wolcott, 1994) was utilized as the primary method due to the multiple data sets collected and analyzed. The coding designs chosen were reflective of the methodological needs of the researcher’s study. Descriptive coding was described as summarizing, “in a word or short phrase- most often as a noun- the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 88). Tesch (1990) wanted qualitative researchers to ensure that the descriptive codes being used were, “identifications of the topic, not abbreviations of the content. The topic is what is talked or written about. The content is the substance of the message” (p. 119). According to Wolcott (1994), descriptive coding was, “essential groundwork for second cycle coding and further analysis and interpretation” (p. 55).

Once the first round of coding had taken place, the researcher reviewed the codes to look for patterns or similar themes to emerge from the data sets. In vivo coding during the first coding cycle allowed the researcher to code responses based on the participants’ actual language. The researcher coded first cycle using short phrases, nouns, or verbs. The researcher was listening and looking for key terms/words which were associated with Lev Vygotsky and Michael Fullan, the two theorists whose work drove this study.

The researcher did pay special attention to terms/phrases associated with Vygotsky (1934/1978) including RIT score, ZPD, guided reading groups, MKO, instructional groups, data,
leveled readers, Fountas and Pinnell, Reading A-Z, STAR, AR, RtI, intensive reading model, PEPs, intervention team, time, documentation, support, assistants, and workshop. Special attention was also paid to terms/phrases associated with Fullan (2009) including PLCs, Teachers College, collaboration, team planning, professional development, student data, and Common Core State Standards. The researcher began to develop interview questions based on the emerging themes from this first round of coding and then refined/modified the interview questions based on the second cycle coding process.

The second cycle coding process included axial coding (Boeije, 2010; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The purpose of axial coding according to Boeije (2010) was, “to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones…[and to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected” (p. 109). Axial coding was appropriate for this study due to the multiple data sources being utilized to collect data for this qualitative study.

The researcher utilized Saldaña (2013) and Curtis-Whipple’s (2011) coding techniques when creating codes from research questions and emerging themes. When coding the data based on the triangulation of the data sets, the researcher utilized a letter, number, and an abbreviation which assisted the researcher in analyzing the information collected from the data sets.

The first coding assignment was a letter (Q) which corresponded to the word question. The second part of the code was a number which corresponded to the research question. Q1 referred to research question 1 and Q2 referred to research question number 2. The next coding sequence referred to the themes which emerged from the data collected under the umbrella of each research question. Q1-1 referred to research question 1, theme 1. Q2-2 referred to research
question 2, theme 2. The letters following the theme number were related to phrases related to the theme. Q1-4EIP (Early Intervention Programs) referred to question1, theme 4 (Interventions).

The research questions, related themes, and codes associated with each research question were compiled into a chart as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Curtis-Whipple (2011).

Table 3.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Focus Group Questions</th>
<th>Themes Which May Emerge</th>
<th>Code Which May Be Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance? (Related to Vygotsky)</td>
<td>1. How do you feel about the Response to Intervention Framework? 2. How do you feel about incorporating small group instruction into your instructional day? 3. What are the benefits of having guided reading groups? What are some negatives about having guided reading groups? 4. What do you think are the benefits to utilizing Response to Intervention? 5. What are the</td>
<td>1. Instructional Groups 2. Data 3. Assessments 4. Interventions 5. Student Achievement 6. Personalized Education Plans 7. Guided Reading Groups</td>
<td>Q1-1IG (Instructional Groups) Q1-2SD (Student Data) Q1-3BPMA (Benchmark, Progress Monitoring Assessments) Q1-4EIP (Early Intervention Programs) Q1-5STA (Student Achievement in Reading) Q1-6PEP (Personalized Education Plans) Q1-7GRG (Guided Reading Groups)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
limitations with implementing the Response to Intervention Framework?

1. What is your opinion about your Professional Learning Community in regards to literacy and response to intervention?

2. What is your opinion about the professional development that you received this year?

3. How do you feel your collaboration with the grade level PLC contributed to student achievement in reading?

4. Did the professional development that you received, assist you in implementing Response to Intervention at all three tiers?

5. Did the professional development you receive impact your teaching and student achievement in

1. Communication
2. Time
3. Student Data
4. Collaboration
5. Relationships
6. Content Knowledge
7. Professional Development

Q2-1GLC (Grade Level Communication)
Q2-2TM (Time Management)
Q2-3SD (Student Data)
Q2-4GLP (Grade Level Planning)
Q2-5PLCR (Professional Learning Community Relationships)
Q2-6KOC (Knowledge of Content and Common Core State Standards)
Q2-7GLPD (Grade Level Professional Development)
6. How do you feel about the multiple initiatives implemented this year impact your teaching and student learning/achievement in reading?

Adapted from Curtis-Whipple, 2011, pp. 61-62 Appendix G

The researcher created a diagram to bring the codes to life. Strauss (1987) suggested the diagramming process to begin with, “a phrase of single code, perhaps even a hunch about what was important in the analysis at that point in time [with] arrows and boxes showing connections of temporal progression” (p. 179). The ultimate goal through diagramming and analysis of second cycle coding was to, “achieve saturation- when no new information seems to emerge during coding, that is, when no new properties, dimensions, conditions, actions/interactions, or consequences are seen in the data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 136). Figure 3.7 depicts an example of a diagram which was used in the second coding cycle as suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

Figure 3.8 Second Coding Cycle for Saturation of Data

![Diagram](image)

Figure 3.8 Diagram shows how new codes should be applied to previously coded data. Taylor, C. & Gibbs, G. R. (2010). *How and what to code.* Retrieved from www.onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_QDA/how_what_to_code.php
It was through the second cycle coding method in which the researcher examined the first cycle codes to determine emerging themes. Instructional groups, data assessments, interventions, student achievement in reading, personalized education plans (PEPs) and guided reading groups were some examples of emerging themes for research question 1: How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?

Communication, time, student data, collaboration, and professional development were some examples of emerging themes for research question 2: What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working in a collaborative team through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

The researcher triangulated the data to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the data collected from the research participants. According to Patton (2002), “triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods” (p. 247) and these methods can utilize data sets that are both qualitative and quantitative.

There were four methods of triangulation that have been identified by Denzin (1978b). The first type of triangulation was data triangulation which allowed the researcher to use various types of data in a study. The second type of triangulation, as identified by Denzin was investigator triangulation. The third type of triangulation was theory triangulation. Theory triangulation allowed the researcher to use multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data. The final type of triangulation as identified by Denzin was methodological triangulation. Methodological triangulation allowed the researcher to use multiple methods to study a single problem or program (Patton, 2002, p. 247). The method of triangulation utilized in this study was data triangulation. By triangulating multiple data sources and utilizing multiple methods to
ensure trustworthiness allowed the researcher to test for consistency in the data collected (Patton, 2002).

The data sets triangulated and analyzed were from the PET-R survey, student data, and the focus group interview. The primary data set which drove the data analysis in this formative program evaluation was the focus group interview. The triangulation of these data sets allowed the researcher to, “capture and report multiple perspectives rather than seek a singular truth” (Patton, 2002, p. 546). Through the use of triangulation, the researcher was able to collect data rich information and allowed the researcher to draw conclusions based on the data sets collected (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006, Maxwell, 2005). Furthermore, through triangulation the researcher was able to identify similar themes which emerged from the data sets.

Validation of data sets was visible through the identification of common themes, for continuity and discontinuity of survey results including the focus group interview, as well as from the student data.

Triangulation of data sources allowed the researcher in this qualitative study to, “increase the accuracy and credibility of findings” (Patton, 2002, p. 93; 1999b) as well as, “whether or not the research findings represent a credible conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from the participants’ original data” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296).

In conjunction with triangulating data, the researcher was able to utilize member checking as an additional measure to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative study. Member checking allowed the participants of the study to have access to the information collected to ensure the accuracy of transcripts and findings from the study (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The participants had the opportunity to correct any inaccuracies or incorrect information and report any changes to the researcher,
including reviewing their comments on the transcription from the focus group interview. Upon completion of the study, the participants received the evaluation results electronically and had one week to report any inaccuracies or incorrect information to the researcher.

Through qualitative inquiry, it was possible that there was a threat of reactivity by the participants. Reactivity is when the participants react to the researcher’s presence by responding to the questions in a way which is favorable to the researcher (Maxwell, 2005). The threat of reactivity by the participants was addressed in the research design phase of the study (Maxwell, 2005; Barnhardt, 2009). It was not entirely possible to eliminate participants’ reactivity to the researcher’s presence; however, it was possible to use the information from the participants’ responses during the focus group interview to ask further open-ended questions to gain insight into their perspectives (Maxwell, 2005). The researcher was aware of reactivity by the participants and asked further questions to gain a true insight into their perceptions and thoughts.

Finally, it must be noted that this qualitative program evaluation was based on the doctoral theses of Curtis-Whipple (2011) and Pelletier (2011), both of whom were former doctoral students at Northeastern University. The findings from both Curtis-Whipple and Pelletier were the baseline for the research in this doctoral thesis. Both Curtis-Whipple (2011) and Pelletier (2011) found that DIBELS assessment data was not enough to determine if student achievement was taking place in reading. They both felt that additional standardized assessments were needed in order to paint a better picture of student achievement in reading and that the assessment systems must be valid and reliable. It was also determined that progress monitoring, as part of the RtI process, must be conducted consistently and shared with colleagues. Pelletier (2011) also determined through her research findings that the reading achievement of advanced learners is not evident when only using DIBELS assessments.
The student data sets in this study, including the MAP and CASE21 assessments, will add to Curtis-Whipple (2011) and Pelletier’s (2011) body of literature surrounding student achievement in reading through the implementation of professional learning communities and the Response to Intervention model.
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

Introduction

The teachers and administrative team at the elementary school study site have become more transparent in how they look at student data to make instructional decisions for their students. It all began in the 2012-2013 school year when the study site began implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) and balanced literacy. With these new models came new assessment systems and resources. Teachers had been provided with more time than previous years to plan with their grade level professional learning community and to dig in to their data.

As the 2012-2013 school year progressed, teachers became overwhelmed with the implementation of RtI and balanced literacy. The teachers relied on the assessments and reports with which they were most familiar, specifically the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA) and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), to create flexible groups in reading. The second grade teachers were not embracing the information contained within the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), which is a universal screening tool to identify students who need intervention support.

MAP is a universal screening tool and is a component of Response to Intervention at the tier I level. Tier I includes instruction using a high-quality core curriculum, universal screening (beginning, middle and end of year), and on-going progress monitoring of struggling students is conducted frequently. Differentiated instruction takes place for students at their instructional levels in this tier.

The common core state standards (CCSS) within MAP literacy assessment measures the students’ performance in the areas of foundational skills, vocabulary, reading information, and reading literature. The data collected from MAP assists the second grade PLC in identifying the
lowest performing students within the grade level and in each second grade class. The MAP data also provides teachers with developmentally appropriate skills needed in order for their students to meet expected growth by the end of the school year.

MAP is a nationally norm referenced test and compares students in each grade level to their age and grade equivalent peers. Because the teachers had not been formally trained on how to use the MAP data to drive their instruction, this would become the focus for professional development and ongoing support for the 2013-2014 school year.

Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, each professional learning community in the school was provided professional development by the administrative team on how to read the MAP reports and which reports would be most beneficial. The teachers and school principal also began to conference with students on how to set a MAP goal and the steps that the students and teacher would take for students to meet the end of year goal. Parents were sent letters about MAP and what they could do to help their child meet/exceed the MAP goal. Communication among the school, parent, and teacher about MAP data was something new which was implemented for the 2013-2014 school year.

In addition to the grade level training which was conducted by the trained personnel at the study site, every teacher within the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year, had been sent to MAP training by Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), the creator of MAP. Teachers returned from the meetings with a clearer understanding of how to utilize the MAP data and what it meant for instruction and student achievement. The teachers presented newly learned information, communicated any misconceptions, and answered any questions about MAP within their PLC. The teachers were analyzing and utilizing MAP data to identify struggling students,
created problem statements and goals for their PLC, and determined if students were making progress and achieving at an equal rate as their age equivalent peers.

Another change which began in the 2013-2014 school year was meeting and holding collaborative conversations about struggling students during PLC time. Teachers began to bring students of concern to their grade level PLC and sought out support and resources from their fellow PLC members to intervene with the students of concern. At the PLC meeting, a plan was developed by the team for each student of concern, with interventions and progress monitoring tools put in place. The referring teacher would then collect data for four weeks, with one data point collected per week. After four weeks, the referring teacher will reported back to the PLC to determine if the student had made academic progress or to determine if continued intervention support was needed.

The intervention supports put in place for the 2013-2014 school year were now part of a PLC collaborative process, instead of in previous years when teachers worked in isolation to complete intervention plans.

This type of PLC collaboration was different than previous years. Before the 2013-2014 school year, support staff and teachers from different grade levels met to discuss students of concern before school. The group of teachers was never the same and some of the teachers had no idea how to provide intervention support to students whom they had not taught. At the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year, the decision was made by the administrative team that each grade level PLC would meet as a team to collaborate about students of concern within their grade level. The goal was to strengthen the grade level PLC and to build capacity to support RtI at the study site.
What the administrative team learned throughout the course of the 2012-2013 implementation year was that teachers needed ongoing professional development about how to use the MAP assessment to drive instruction and to raise student achievement. Teachers also needed further professional development training in how to differentiate their core instruction at the tier 1 level. Teachers at each grade level needed to discuss struggling students during PLC meetings instead of talking about their weekly lesson plans. Finally, teachers needed to understand how the MAP universal screening tool could be utilized to assist teachers with small group instruction, identify struggling students in literacy, assist teachers with skill specific activities individualized for students, and to determine if students were making growth compared to their age equivalent peers.

Background

The researcher examined the teachers’ perceptions of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student achievement in second grade classrooms at an elementary school during the 2012-2013 school year. This elementary school was purposefully selected due to its first year of implementation of multiple initiatives, including Response to Intervention, Balanced Literacy, including three new assessment systems, Reading3D/DIBELS, CASE21, and MAP during the 2012-2013 school year. During the 2012-2013 school year, there were 106 second grade students and five second grade teachers. There was one special education teacher who helped support one inclusive second grade classroom. The elementary study site also had one full-time school counselor and one part-time Response to Intervention Coach who was assigned to the school because of the implementation of Response to Intervention.

Three second grade teachers received on-going professional development in balanced literacy from the Teachers College at Columbia University during the implementation year and
the school counselor received on-going professional development provided by the school district on the MAP assessment platform. The Response to Intervention coach provided professional development training to the second grade team in differentiation and how to read/utilize MAP data to form instruction for second grade students.

The participants who were selected to participate in this formative program evaluation were a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002). When a researcher purposefully selects participants at a site it helps, “the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). All five second grade teachers, the school counselor, Response to Intervention coach, and the special education teacher were invited to participate in the study. Four of the five classroom teachers participated in both the PET-R survey and the focus group interview. One second grade teacher was not able to participate in the study due to family obligations and could not commit to the time it would take to complete the survey or to participate in the focus group interview during after-school hours. The school counselor, Response to Intervention coach, and the special education teacher also took part in the focus group interview.

Research Questions

The primary question to guide the formative program evaluation was:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?

The second research question to guide the formative program evaluation was:

2. What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?
**Data Collection**

The collection of data began with retrieving data from three different data platforms. The first student data source, DIBELS, was retrieved on January 13, 2014 (https://mclasshome.com). The second student data source, CASE21, was retrieved on January 13, 2014 (https://case21.sharefile.com). The final student data source retrieved was MAP data and it was retrieved on January 14, 2014 (https://cms-admin.mapnwea.org). The PET-R survey was collected from the four classroom teachers on January 13, 2014. The researcher created folders for each of the three student data sources and assigned a pseudonym to each PET-R survey when it was collected from the classroom teacher. Once all three student data sources and the PET-R survey were collected from the participants, the analysis of the data sets began.

**Data Analysis**

There were three student data sets which were analyzed for this study. They were DIBELS, MAP, and CASE21. The student data set was the first data set analyzed by the researcher. The second set of data which was analyzed was the PET-R survey data. The third data set analyzed was the focus group interview data. The focus group interview was conducted as a semi-structured, open-ended interview. The interview was audio-taped with notes taken, and then was transcribed and coded by the researcher.

**DIBELS**

**Results from DIBELS Assessments**

Figures 4.1 - 4.3 depict the second grade teacher’s classroom data on the NWF and DORF assessments. An overall benchmark percentage for all DIBELS assessments for second grade is also displayed.
Teacher one had a beginning of the year (BOY) classroom average of 81% on the NWF assessment, identifying the correct letter sounds (CLS) and 86% of the whole words read (WWR) correctly. Teacher two had a BOY classroom average of 75% on the NWF assessment, identifying the CLS and 75% of the WWR correctly. Teacher three had a BOY classroom average of 79% on the NWF assessment, identifying the CLS and 70% of the WWR correctly. Teacher four had a BOY classroom average of 70% on the NWF assessment, identifying the CLS and 56% of the WWR correctly. Teacher five had a BOY classroom average of 86% on the NWF assessment, identifying the CLS and 59% of the WWR correctly.

The highest percentage of CLS in second grade was 86% and the lowest was 70%. The highest percentage of WWR was 86% and the lowest was 59%. The average, or mean score for the CLS at the beginning of the year was 78.2%. The average, or mean score for the WWR at the beginning of the year was 69.2%. The overall percentage of students who were at grade level on the NWF assessment at the beginning of the school year for second grade was 73.7%.
Overall, the students were stronger in their identification of letter sounds than the ability to read a whole word.

Teacher one on the beginning of the year (BOY) assessment on the DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF) had a classroom percentage of 90% of students performing at grade level on the DORF assessment. The middle of the year (MOY) classroom percentage of students on grade level was 74%. The end of year (EOY) classroom percentage of students on grade level was 74%. There was a decrease in students performing at grade level as the year progressed and as the grade level expectations for the DORF assessment increased.

Teacher two on the BOY assessment on the DORF assessment had a classroom percentage of 88% of students performing at grade level on the DORF assessment. The MOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was also 88%. The EOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was 81%. There was a decrease in students performing at grade level as the year progressed and as the grade level expectations for the DORF assessment increased.
Teacher three on the BOY assessment on the DORF assessment had a classroom percentage of 83% of students performing at grade level on the DORF assessment. The MOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was also 91%. The EOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was 82%. Teacher three increased the percentage of students performing at grade level on the DORF from the BOY assessment to the MOY assessment; however, from the MOY assessment period to the EOY assessment, the number of students who performed at grade level had decreased.

Teacher four on the BOY assessment on the DORF assessment had a classroom percentage of 92% of students performing at grade level on the DORF assessment. The MOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was 82%. The EOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was also 82%. There was a decrease in students performing at grade level as the year progressed and as the grade level expectations for the DORF assessment increased.

Teacher five on the BOY assessment on the DORF assessment had a classroom percentage of 81% of students performing at grade level on the DORF assessment. The MOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was 74%. The EOY classroom percentage of students on grade level was 63%. There was a decrease in students performing at grade level as the year progressed and as the grade level expectations for the DORF assessment increased.

All second grade classrooms had a decrease in the percentage of students at grade level from the BOY assessment to the EOY assessment. The percentage of students at grade level on the DORF assessment at the BOY in second grade was 86.8%. The percentage of students at grade level on the DORF assessment at the MOY in second grade was 81.8%. The percentage of students at grade level on the DORF assessment at the EOY in second grade was 76.4%.
According to the DIBELS assessment platform, teacher one had 90% of the class at grade level at the beginning of the year (BOY). At the middle of the year (MOY), teacher one had 88% of the classroom at grade level. At the end of the year (EOY), teacher one had 100% of the classroom at grade level.

According to the DIBELS assessment platform, teacher two had 88% of the class at grade level at the BOY. At the MOY, teacher two had 88% of the classroom at grade level. At the EOY, teacher two had 86% of the classroom at grade level.

According to the DIBELS assessment platform, teacher three had 96% of the class at grade level at the BOY. At the MOY, teacher three had 95% of the classroom at grade level. At the EOY, teacher three had 100% of the classroom at grade level.
According to the DIBELS assessment platform, teacher four had 83% of the class at grade level at the BOY. At the MOY, teacher four had 92% of the classroom at grade level. At the EOY, teacher four had 92% of the classroom at grade level.

According to the DIBELS assessment platform, teacher five had 86% of the class at grade level at the BOY. At the MOY, teacher five had 87% of the classroom at grade level. At the EOY, teacher five had 82% of the classroom at grade level.

The average composite score for second grade on the BOY DIBELS was 88.6%. The average composite score for second grade on the MOY DIBELS was 90%. The average composite score for second grade on the EOY DIBELS was 92%. The second grade teachers increased their composite score 3.4% from BOY to EOY.

While the data showed that 92% of the students in second grade were at grade level on the DIBELS assessments (NWF, DORF), the data does not depict accurate data of student performance. For example, teacher one had 81% of the class at grade level on CLS and 86% on grade level for WWR on the NWF assessment. 90% of teacher one’s students were at grade level on the DORF at the BOY, 74% were on grade level on the DORF at both the MOY and EOY. The overall classroom average for students on grade level on both the DORF and the NWF is 80.3%; however, the data system which calculates student percentages indicated that teacher one has 100% of the classroom at grade level. This gives a false perception to the classroom teacher if he/she was only looking at the overall composite score for the classroom. If the teacher were to dig deeper into the data, he/she would discover that there were indeed students who were not at grade level and needed continued progress monitoring support in the areas of NWF and/or DORF.
CASE21

CASE21 Background Information at Study Site

CASE21 assessments were new to the second grade team during the 2012-2013 school year. CASE21 assessments were comprehensive reading assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) and were similar to the end of grade tests for students in grades three through five. The principal at the elementary school study site had previously utilized the CASE21 assessments in grades three through five as a predictor for reading achievement and student growth on the state end of grade tests (EOGs).

Beginning in the 2008-2009 school year, the state of North Carolina no longer required students in grade three to take a pre-EOG test. The pre-EOG test was an assessment administered to third grade students at the beginning of each school year to determine student growth in reading. Because third grade students no longer had a comprehensive assessment at the beginning of the school year to determine their proficiency in reading, the principal decided to purchase the CASE21 assessments for second graders so that the third grade teachers and administrative staff could have a year’s worth of comprehensive reading data on each child before they reach third grade. This data was important to have as the state of North Carolina had just enacted the Read to Achieve Law in July of 2012 and impacted the second grade students whose data was collected for this study.

Scoring and Reporting of CASE21 Assessments

The CASE21 assessments were varied in length. The first round of CASE21 assessments had twenty-two questions with four passages. The second round of CASE21 assessments had four passages with twenty-two questions. The final round of CASE21 assessments had five passages with twenty-nine questions. Each passage was on a specific genre with multiple-choice
answer questions assigned to each passage. On each of the three benchmark assessment, there were also eight multiple choice written language questions which the students had to answer.

There were three reporting features on each benchmark assessment which correlated to a 100% grading scale. The average percentage correct, average suggested mark, and the projected proficiency correct. The average percentage correct was the average, or mean, percentage for the assessment. The projected proficiency correct was the average, or mean, percentage of students who were projected to be at grade level for second grade. The average suggested mark was the percentage and letter grade which could be assigned to a student based on his/her performance on the CASE21 assessment. The second grade team did not assign a suggested mark or letter grade to their students. The second grade teachers used the CASE21 assessments as an instructional tool to inform their teaching and student groupings. A grade level average was also calculated for the average percentage correct, projected percentage proficient, and the average suggested marks.

The next set of scoring features on the CASE21 benchmark assessments were the depths of knowledge scores (DOK). The DOK grade level average increased from the first testing administration to the last. The students in second grade consistently scored higher on the level one and level two DOK questions on the first and second testing administration. On the final administration of the CASE21 assessment, the students in second grade increased their average performance score on level three DOK questions from the first administration to the last CASE21 testing administration. These scores were based out of four total points and were correlated to the end of grade proficiency standards in grades three through five as decided by the state of North Carolina. According to the Department of Public Instruction in the State of North Carolina (1999), the indicators for levels of grade level proficiency are:
Level I: Students performing at this level do not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful at the next grade level. (NCDPI, 1999, p.1)

Level II: Students performing at this level demonstrate inconsistent mastery of knowledge and skills that are fundamental in this subject area and that are minimally sufficient to be successful at the next grade level. (NCDPI, 1999, p.1)

Level III: Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate mastery of grade level subject matter and skills are well prepared for the next grade level. (NCDPI, 1999, p.1)

Level IV: Students performing at this level of consistency perform in a superior manner clearly beyond that required to be proficient at grade level work. (NCDPI, 1999, p.1)


Another set of scoring features on the CASE21 assessment were the Common Core State Standards for second grade. The three domains assessed on each of the three benchmark assessments were reading literature standards (RL), reading information standards (RI), and language (L) standards. There were ten questions correlating to the RL standards on each of the three benchmark assessments. There were twelve questions correlating to the RI standards on each of the three benchmark assessments. There were also eight questions correlating to the L standards on each of the three benchmark assessments.

Each of the three Common Core State Standards assessed were provided an average score out of four. This score was based on the total number of questions for each Common Core State Standard assessed. The lowest average score for the RL standard was a 2.6 and the highest average score for the RL standard was a 3.0. The lowest score for the RI standard was a 2.0 and
the highest average score for the RI standard was a 3.4. A grade level average was also calculated for each RL, RI, and L standard for each benchmark assessment.

Appendix H represents the data collected from the first, second, and third round of CASE21 assessments.

**Utilization of CASE21 Assessments for Classroom Instruction**

The CASE21 benchmark assessments were not used as a grade, even though there was a suggested letter grade for each student. Instead, the second grade teachers used the information from the assessments as an instructional tool. The information gained from the CASE21 assessments helped the teachers identify weaknesses in teaching and student learning. The teachers created flexible groups based on student performance from each benchmark assessment. These flexible groups were created to allow for differentiation of instruction and to target specific students who did not master tested Common Core State Standards in reading.

**MAP**

**Reporting of MAP Assessments**

Each of the five second grade teachers’ classes at the elementary study site took the MAP assessments in the fall, winter, and spring of the 2012-2013 school year. Student performance was broken up into low average, average, and high-average to high. The low to low average category was determined by students who had performed below the 40th percentile. Average performance was determined by students who performed between the 41st and 60th percentile. The high average to high category was determined by students who had performed between the 61st and 100th percentile.

Figures 4.4 - 4.6 represents each of the three assessment periods reflecting the three scoring categories of low to low average, average, and high to high average for each of the five
second grade teachers from the fall, winter, and spring assessment periods from the 2012-2013 school year. Figure 4.7 represents the overall performance of the grade level on the fall, winter, and spring MAP administration during the 2012-2013 school year.

![Figure 4.4. Overall Performance on the Fall MAP Universal Screening](image)

Teacher one had 34% of the class who performed at the low to low average category. There were 13%, or 3 students, who had performed at the average category, and 54%, or 13 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the fall administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher one’s class for the fall MAP administration was 181. This mean RIT score for reading was 5.1 points higher than the national norm for beginning of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher two had 59% of the class who performed at the low to low average category. There were 9%, or 2 students, who had performed at the average category, and 32%, or 7 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the fall administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher two’s class for the fall MAP administration was 168. This mean RIT score for reading is 7.9 points lower than the national norm for beginning of the year mean in second grade.
Teacher three had 39% of the class who performed at the low to low average category. There were 9%, or 2 students, who had performed at the average category, and 52%, or 12 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the fall administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher three’s class for the fall MAP administration was 181. This mean RIT score for reading was 5.1 points higher than the national norm for beginning of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher four had 57% of the class who performed at the low to low average category. There were 26%, or 6 students, who had performed at the average category, and 18%, or 4 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the fall administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher four’s class for the fall MAP administration was 169. This mean RIT score for reading was 6.9 points lower than the national norm for beginning of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher five had 48% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 19%, or 4 students, who had performed at the average category, and 33%, or 7 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the fall administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher five’s class for the fall MAP administration was 173. This mean RIT score for reading is 2.9 points lower than the national norm for beginning of the year mean in second grade.

The mean beginning of the year RIT for the fall MAP administration in second grade was 175. This was .9 points lower than the national norm mean RIT score for students in second grade at the beginning of the school year (175.9). The data also showed that there was a large population of students (47%) at the second grade level who had scored within the low to low
average category on the fall administration of the MAP assessment for the 2012-2013 school year.

Teacher one had 26% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 9%, or 2 students, who had performed at the average category, and 65%, or 15 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the winter administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher one’s class for the winter MAP administration was 190. This mean RIT score for reading increased from 180 to 190 from the fall to winter MAP administration and was 6.4 points higher than the national norm for middle of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher two had 30% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 17%, or 4 students, who had performed at the average category, and 52%, or 12 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the winter administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher two’s class for the winter MAP administration was 188. This mean RIT score for reading increased from 168 to 188 from the fall to winter MAP administration.
administration and was 4.4 points higher than the national norm for middle of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher three had 30% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 9%, or 2 students, who had performed at the average category, and 60%, or 14 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the winter administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher three’s class for the winter MAP administration was 188. This mean RIT score for reading increased from 181 to 188 from the winter to winter MAP administration and was 4.4 points higher than the national norm for middle of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher four had 35% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 17%, or 4 students, who had performed at the average category, and 47%, or 11 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the winter administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher four’s class for the winter MAP administration was 187. This mean RIT score for reading increased from 169 to 187 from the fall to winter MAP administration and was 3.4 points higher than the national norm for middle of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher five had 50% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 18%, or 4 students, who had performed at the average category, and 32%, or 7 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the winter administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher five’s class for the winter MAP administration was 180. This mean RIT score for reading increased from 173 to 180 from the fall to winter MAP administration and was 3.6 points lower than the national norm for middle of the year mean in second grade.
The mean middle of the year RIT for the winter MAP administration in second grade was 186. This was 2.4 points higher than the national norm mean RIT score for students in second grade at the middle of the school year (183.6). The data also showed that the percentage of students at the second grade level who scored within the low to low average category decreased from the fall (47%) to the winter administration (35%) and the number of students who performed at the high to high average category increased from the fall (37%) to winter (51%) MAP administration during the 2012-2013 school year.

![Figure 4.6: Overall Performance on the Spring MAP Universal Screening](image)

Teacher one had 43% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 14%, or 3 students, who had performed at the average category, and 43%, or 9 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the spring administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher one’s class for the spring MAP administration was 190.
This mean RIT score for reading was .4 points higher than the national norm for the end of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher two had 50% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 9%, or 2 students, who had performed at the average category, and 41%, or 9 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the spring administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher two’s class for the spring MAP administration was 187. This mean RIT score for reading was 2.6 points lower than the national norm for the end of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher three had 28% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 23%, or 5 students, who had performed at the average category, and 50%, or 11 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the spring administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher three’s class for the spring MAP administration was 194. This mean RIT score for reading was 4.4 points higher than the national norm for the end of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher four had 47% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 26%, or 6 students, who had performed at the average category, and 26%, or 6 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the spring administration of the MAP assessment. The mean RIT for teacher four’s class for the spring MAP administration was 188. This mean RIT score for reading was 1.6 points lower than the national norm for the end of the year mean in second grade.

Teacher five had 39% of the class who had performed at the low to low average category. There were 30%, or 7 students, who had performed at the average category, and 31%, or 7 students, who had performed at the high to high average on the spring administration of the MAP
assessment. The mean RIT for teacher five’s class for the spring MAP administration was 189. This mean RIT score for reading was .6 points lower than the national norm for the end of the year mean in second grade.

The mean end of the year RIT for the spring MAP administration in second grade at the study site was 188. This was 1.6 points lower than the national norm mean RIT score for students in second grade at the end of the school year (189.6).

The data also showed that the percentage of students at the second grade level who had scored within the low to low average category increased from the winter (35%) to spring (41%) administration. The number of students who had performed at the average category had increased from the winter (14%) to spring (21%) administration, and the number of students who had performed at the high to high average category had decreased from the winter (51%) to spring (37%) MAP administration during the 2012-2013 school year.

In the fall of 2012, the percentage of second grade students at the study site who were at/or above the norm grade level mean RIT (175.9) for second grade was 47% (53 students).
There were 111 students who had taken the beginning of the year MAP assessment. The mean RIT score for second grade on the fall MAP assessment was 175. The district grade level mean RIT score was 177.3. The second grade students had performed 2.3 points lower than the mean RIT for other second graders in the school district. There were 49 students who had scored at or above the district grade level mean RIT.

In the winter of 2012, the percentage of second grade who were at/or above the norm grade level mean RIT (183.6) for second grade was 58% (66 students). There were 114 students who had taken the middle of the year MAP assessment. The mean RIT score for second grade on the winter MAP assessment was 186. The district grade level mean RIT score was 184.4. The second grade students had performed 1.6 points higher than the mean RIT for other second graders in the school district. There were 62 students who had scored at or above the district grade level mean RIT. The mean grade level RIT score in the fall was 175 and had increased to a mean RIT score of 186 in the winter. This was an increase of 11 points in mean RIT scores.

In the spring of 2013, the percentage of second grade students who were at/or above the norm grade level mean RIT (189.6) for second grade was 46% (51 students). There were 111 students who had taken the middle of the year MAP assessment. The mean RIT score for second grade on the spring MAP assessment was 188. The district grade level mean RIT score was 189.1. The second grade students had performed 1.1 points lower than the mean RIT for other second graders in the school district. There were 51 students who had scored at or above the district grade level mean RIT. The mean grade level RIT score in the winter was 186 and had increased to a mean RIT score of 188 in the spring. This was an increase of 2 points in mean RIT scores from winter to spring. The overall mean RIT score growth from fall to spring for the second grade students at the study site was 13 points.
Connecting Student Data Sets to Research Questions

The DIBELS assessments directly aligned to the first research question in this formative program evaluation: How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?

The DIBELS reports for each classroom teacher identified the students who were well below (intensive), below (strategic), or at/above benchmark on each of the grade level assessments. Teachers were able to target students based on their level of need as determined by their performance on each of the subtests in DIBELS.

At the elementary study site, students who were considered to be well-below, received an additional 60 minutes of intervention support with an intensive reading teacher. If a child was below level on the DIBELS assessment, then he/she received an additional 30 minutes of intervention support with an intensive reading teacher. This support was provided to the student five days a week during the school-wide intervention time. The additional intensive support was provided to the student in addition to their core balanced literacy instruction provided by the classroom teacher.

The CASE21 assessment also directly aligned with the first research question: How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance? The CASE21 report for each classroom teacher identified the students who were below grade level expectation if they received a 2- or lower in the areas of depth of knowledge (DOK), Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature, Reading Information, and Language, and on each set of genre passages for each benchmarking period. Teachers were able to target students based on their performance by skill, standard, or depth of knowledge. Flexible
groups were formed to assist with skill deficits and to increase students’ reading comprehension and reading achievement on grade level passages/assessments.

The second research question was also related to the CASE21 assessment: What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of a Professional Learning Community?

When the second grade teachers received their CASE21 report for each benchmarking period, they sat side by side their grade level peers and determined how their students performed on the overall assessment. They then had conversations about how effective their instruction was based on their students’ performance on the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) and each genre assessed. The teachers shared teaching strategies which were used to address the standards and how their students responded to the instruction. The second grade teachers created activities together as a team to increase reading comprehension and student achievement across the grade level.

The MAP universal screening assessment directly aligned with the first research question: How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?

Teachers at the study site were able to analyze the data and determine if students were low average, average, or hi-average to high on each of the three benchmark windows. Teachers were also able to see how their students compared to their age equivalent peers and form instructional groups by students’ RIT scores.

**Connecting Student Data Sets to Theoretical Framework**

The main theorist that supports the use of CASE21 to support instructional decisions within the tiered model of instruction is Vygotsky (1934/1978). The two main components of
Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory focuses on the use of students’ work within their zone of proximal development (ZPD) and with a more knowledgeable other (MKO). In this case, the students who were in need of additional reading support were placed in a guided reading or skills based group and worked with the classroom teacher on specific reading skills/strategies to improve reading comprehension and reading achievement on grade level passages/assessments.

The second theoretical lens which supports the CASE21 assessment is Fullan’s (2009) change theory. The second grade teachers began utilizing the CASE21 assessments during the 2012-2013 school year, and had never before been exposed to comprehension assessments which were aligned to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) or had predicted proficiency on end of grade level tests for their students. Using the CASE21 assessments to make informed instructional decisions about student achievement in literacy were new to the second grade team. CASE21 assessments had changed how the second grade teachers planned for instruction for their students.

Fullan’s (2009) change drivers four and five were essential to improving student and reading achievement in the second grade classrooms at the elementary study site. Driver four is developing a culture of learning. The PLC in second grade helped the teachers to learn from one another and together as a team, acquire new skills and knowledge needed for continuous school improvement. Driver five is developing a culture of evaluation. Through the second grade PLC, the teachers analyzed their CASE21 data to determine instructional strategies and changes needed in order to raise student achievement in the area of reading.

The MAP report for each classroom teacher identified the students who were low to low-average, average, and high-average to high on each of the three MAP assessments. Teachers were able to target students based on their level of need as determined by their RIT score. The
DesCartes Continuum of Learning provided teachers with skills specific to each RIT level. The
skills were developmentally appropriate for the student as determined by his/her performance on
the MAP assessment. The DesCartes Continuum of Learning is similar to Vygotsky’s ZPD in
which they both are centered on the belief that students work best and can grow academically
when they are presented with developmentally appropriate work and can be assisted with the
help of an MKO.

**Connecting Student Data Sets to Interview Data**

During the focus group interview, there were two questions which mentioned assessment
systems. DIBELS was brought up by two focus interview participants. Participant 1 had
mentioned that DIBELS was the most beneficial and useful assessment tool for her last year.
She said that she didn’t feel as comfortable with the other assessment systems, CASE21 and
MAP, as they were new and unfamiliar to her. Participant 1 said:

DIBELS was the primary tool which I used to help me. Being new to the MAP testing
system, I didn't really know how to use it. This year, I feel like I have a better handle on
it as opposed to last year. I was not comfortable with MAP last year.

Participant 2 had mentioned that she felt that the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA)
was the most useful for her last year. She mentioned that the DRA allowed her to find
independent and guided reading groups for her students. Participant 2 had utilized the DIBELS
assessments to progress monitor and to find their levels for the beginning, middle, and end of
year for NWF and DORF, but did not use DIBELS for instructional grouping. She had
mentioned that the DIBELS assessments were not as useful to her because with the DRA
assessments, the books and passages were leveled not like in DIBELS where all the progress
monitoring and benchmark assessments are at grade level. She liked the data collected from DRA versus the data collected from the DORF because:

You could tell in the DRA which students were being more fluent or not and it helps you with fluency and DRA also has the comprehension component as well. Because the books are leveled it allows you to see where the students fall and you can also find other students that have the same needs and that allows you to help inform similar groups.

Overall, there were no defining comments from the focus group interview participants if DIBELS improved reading achievement in their classrooms. Based on the interview participants’ comments, they felt most comfortable with the DIBELS assessments.

During the focus group interview, assessments were brought up in two questions. Several participants mentioned CASE21 and the formulation of flexible groups and the impact that the assessments had on student performance on end of grade tests. The consensus from the group was that the CASE21 assessments allowed them to identify students based on mastery of skills, using the data to formulate groups, comprehensive assessments which aligned to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) and end of grade proficiency, and how they were similar to the end of grade tests in the upper grades. Overall, the participants who talked about the CASE21 assessments felt that the three benchmarks helped them to formulate their instructional groups and identify which reading skills to target based on the item analysis report from each benchmark period. The teachers could identify and target specific Common Core State Standards missed by students and target those standards through differentiated instructional activities. The teachers felt that the CASE21 assessments were a beneficial assessment tool for their classroom.
There were two questions during the focus group interview about assessments and during those questions, MAP was mentioned. Participants 1 and 2 did not feel comfortable with MAP. Participant 1 felt that she didn’t really know how to use the information on the MAP reports. She said:

I have to say that the amount of information was pretty overwhelming, the amount of documentation and printing that was done on each individual student, was 20 some odd pages per student. That in itself, was very overwhelming. The amount of information that it would present can be overwhelming. I feel like this year there is so much great information; however, last year it was just like, oh my goodness, here is one more thing that I have to do. And to top it off, it would take weeks and weeks and weeks of time to collect the data.

Participant 3 was very involved with the MAP administration and felt that the information which the teachers received was overwhelming. She also felt that the amount of data collected from each assessment window was very overwhelming. The comments from the participants in the focus group interview demonstrated that they were unsure on how to utilize the MAP data as it was a new assessment and that they needed more professional development on how to read and utilize the data to make informed decisions about their students’ progress between assessment windows.

**PET-R Survey**

The PET-R survey was used in this formative program evaluation to determine reading program effectiveness in second grade classrooms. The survey was asked to be returned to the researcher within seven days of receiving the document; however, due to the initial meeting
being held just prior to the winter break in December of 2013, the participants returned the survey the day they returned to school after the holiday break had ended.

**Design of PET-R Survey**

The survey consisted of seven categories related to reading program effectiveness and was scored using a rating scale from zero to two. There were opportunities within the survey for participants to cite evidence to support ratings within each of the seven categories.

**Categories in PET-R Survey**

The seven categories within the survey were:

I. **Goals/Objectives/Priorities:** Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored to research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teacher of reading. (PET-R, 2004, p. 4)

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_rform_user.pdf, retrieved on January 17, 2014)

II. **Assessment:** Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways. (PET-R, 2003, p. 5)

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_rform_user.pdf, retrieved on January 17, 2014)

III. **Instructional Programs and Materials:** The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners. (Pet-R, 2003, p. 7)

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_rform_user.pdf, retrieved on January 17, 2014)
IV. Instructional Time: A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively. (PET-R, 2003, p. 8)

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_rform_user.pdf, retrieved on January 17, 2014)

V. Differentiation/Grouping/Scheduling: Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning. (PET-R, 2003, p. 9)

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_rform_user.pdf, retrieved on January 17, 2014)

VI. Administration/Organization/Communication: Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices. (PET-R, 2003, p. 10)

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_rform_user.pdf, retrieved on January 17, 2014)

VII. Professional Development: Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction. (PET-R, 2003, p. 11)

(https://dibels.uoregon.edu/docs/pet_rform_user.pdf, retrieved on January 17, 2014)

Scoring of PET-R Survey

The survey had seven categories with various amounts of questions per category. Each statement within the category was awarded a value of:

0- Not in Place
1- Partially in Place
2- Fully in Place
Each category had a maximum point value allowed and when tallied and divided by points awarded, provided the researcher with a percentage (out of 100) for each specific category. Once all seven categories were calculated, an overall percentage was provided for each survey completed. The researcher calculated the overall percentage for each participant, as well as, for the entire grade level in this formative program evaluation study.

**Reporting of PET-R Participant Ratings**

Four classroom teachers completed the PET-R survey. Each of the seven sections was calculated and data displayed in charts to represent the average (mean) score for each participant in each section of the survey. The overall mean score for each section was also noted. The final chart represents the overall mean score for each participant, and also includes the mean score for the entire PET-R survey. The PET-R survey results represent the perceptions of the second grade teachers in regards to the implementation of balanced literacy at the study site.

**Goals/Objectives/Priorities**

The following figure highlights the teachers’ perceptions of *Goals, Objectives, and Priorities* in the first category of the PET-R survey:
The first category of the PET-R survey, *Goals, Objectives, and Priorities* has a maximum point value of 14. The participants’ scores ranged from 9 to 14. The mean score for all participants in the first category of the PET-R survey was 11. The participants overall perception of implementation for *Goals, Objectives, and Priorities* for the first category of the PET-R survey ranged from 64% to 100%. The overall percentage score for the first category was 76%.

**Assessment**

The following figure 4.9 highlights the teachers’ perceptions of *Assessment* in the second category of the PET-R survey.
The second category of the PET-R survey, Assessment has a maximum point value of 20. The participants’ scores ranged from 14 to 20. The mean score for all participants in the second category of the PET-R survey was 16%. The participants overall perception of implementation for Assessment in the second category of the PET-R survey ranged from 70% to 100%. The overall percentage score for the second category was 81%.

Instructional Practices and Materials

The following figure highlights the teachers’ perceptions of Instructional Practices and Materials in the third category of the PET-R survey:
The third category of the PET-R survey, *Instructional Practices and Materials* has a maximum point value of 22. The participants’ scores ranged from 13 to 21. The mean score for all participants in the third category of the PET-R survey was 18. The participants overall perception of implementation for *Instructional Practices and Materials* in the third category of the PET-R survey ranged from 59%-95%. The overall percentage score for the third category was 83%.

**Instructional Time**

Figure 4.11 highlights the teachers’ perceptions of *Instructional Time* in the fourth category of the PET-R survey:
The fourth category of the PET-R survey, *Instructional Time* has a maximum point value of 14. The participants’ scores ranged from 6 to 14. The mean score for all participants in the fourth category of the PET-R survey was 9%. The participants overall perception of implementation for *Instructional Time* in the fourth category of the PET-R survey ranged from 42%-100%. The overall percentage score for the fourth category was 67%.

**Differentiated Instruction/Grouping**

The following figure 4.12, highlights the teachers’ perceptions of *Differentiated Instruction and Grouping* in the fifth category of the PET-R survey:
The fifth category of the PET-R survey, *Differentiated Instruction and Grouping* has a maximum point value of 10. The participants’ scores ranged from 5 to 10. The mean score for all participants in the fifth category of the PET-R survey was 6. The participants overall perception of implementation for *Differentiated Instruction and Grouping* in the fifth category of the PET-R survey ranged from 50%-100%. The overall percentage score for the fifth category was 62%.

**Administration, Organization, and Communication**

Figure 4.13 highlights the teachers’ perceptions of *Administration, Organization, and Communication* in the sixth category of the PET-R survey:
The sixth category of the PET-R survey, *Administration, Organization, and Communication* has a maximum point value of 12. The participants’ scores ranged from 9 to 11. The mean score for all participants in the sixth category of the PET-R survey was 10. The participants overall perception of implementation for *Administration, Organization, and Communication* in the sixth category of the PET-R survey ranged from 75%-91%. The overall percentage score for the sixth category was 85%.

**Professional Development**

The following figure highlights the teachers’ perceptions of *Professional Development* in the seventh category of the PET-R survey:
The seventh category of the PET-R survey, *Professional Development* has a maximum point value of 8. The participants’ scores ranged from 6 to 8. The mean score for all participants in the seventh category of the PET-R survey was 6. The participants overall perception of implementation for *Professional Development* in the seventh category of the PET-R survey ranged from 75%-87%. The overall percentage score for the seventh category was 81%.

**Overall Percentage Scores for PET-R Survey**

Figure 4.15 represents the overall percentage rating for the PET-R survey. The breakdown of the survey was by category then with the total percentage calculated from all four participants. The overall average for the entire PET-R survey was 78%. The lowest percentage rating was in the category of *Differentiated Instruction, Grouping, and Scheduling* with an average score of 62%. The second category which was rated below the average for the PET-R survey was the *Instructional Time* category with a rating of 64%. The two highest rated categories were *Goals, Objectives, and Priorities and Instructional Programs and Materials*. Both of these categories were rated at 86% implementation.
Connecting PET-R to Research Question and Theoretical Framework

The first category of the PET-R, *Goals, Objectives, and Priorities* was directly tied to the first research question in this formative program evaluation study. The teachers’ perceptions of the reading goals, objectives, and priorities were important to student achievement and the implementation of balanced literacy at the elementary study site. This is due to the implementation of balanced literacy and the expectations that student achievement and reading achievement will increase due to the balanced literacy practices and resources which were put in place for all second grade teachers and students. This included new teaching resources and unit guides, leveled libraries, new assessment platforms, and on-going professional development on all new initiatives which were put in place during the 2012-2013 school year. Vygtosky’s focus on a child’s ZPD and work with an MKO was the cornerstone of the balanced literacy framework and was articulated in the goals, objectives, and priorities throughout the school district and at the elementary study site.
The second category of the PET-R, *Assessment*, was directly tied to the first and second research question in this formative program evaluation study. The teachers’ perceptions of assessment was important to student achievement and the implementation of balanced literacy at the study site because assessments were the instructional tools used to create flexible groups, guided reading/skills groups, and intervention support groups.

Assessment was directly tied to Vygotsky’s focus on students’ ZPD and work with an MKO in order to increase reading achievement in second grade classrooms. The use of assessment tools as universal screenings and to progress monitor student growth were essential in determining if an increase in student learning/achievement was taking place in second grade classrooms. DIBELS, MAP, and CASE21 were the assessment tools utilized in the 2012-2013 school year to assist teachers in determining student performance and assisted teachers in making informed decisions about instruction tied to the developmental readiness of their students.

Assessments were an integral component to the implementation of a PLC. The second grade teachers utilized PLC time to analyze data in order to make instructional adjustments and decisions about progress in reading for their students. DIBELS data was the most commonly used assessment to drive instructional decisions with the second grade teachers.

The third category of the PET-R, *Instructional Practices and Materials*, was directly tied to the first research question in this formative program evaluation study. The teachers’ perceptions of the instructional practices and materials were important to student achievement and the implementation of balanced literacy at the elementary school. The teachers’ perception of the core reading program aligned with Vygotsky’s ZPD and work with an MKO. The DesCartes Continuum of Learning supported differentiation and developmental appropriate skills to increase reading achievement in students. Leveled readers and students’ just right book
baggies were foundational elements to the balanced literacy framework and the reader’s workshop model. The systematic and explicit intervention programs supported the students needing tier II and tier III intervention support. All the instructional practice and materials aligned with the tiered Response to Instruction model and meeting the needs of diverse learners.

The fourth category of the PET-R, *Instructional Time*, was directly tied to the first and second research question in this formative program evaluation study. Instructional time was important to the implementation of a tiered response to instruction because it relied on the premise that students would receive additional intervention support above and beyond the amount of time provided to students during their core instruction at the tier I level. Perceived instructional time by the second grade teachers was important because this was the time when students were grouped flexibly and were working within their ZPD and with the assistance of an MKO.

Instructional time was also important to the implementation of PLCs because teachers were asked by the school principal to answer three questions about student achievement during each PLC planning: What is it that you want students to know/learn? How do you know if they know/learned it? What will you do if they don’t? The perceived instructional time for each second grade teacher was important because it was the amount of time dedicated to whole group and small group instruction, as well as, intervention support for tier II and III students.

The fifth category of the PET-R, *Differentiated Instruction and Grouping*, was directly tied to the first research question in this formative program evaluation study. The teachers’ perceptions of the differentiated instruction and grouping were important to student achievement and the implementation of balanced literacy at the elementary school. Teachers’ perception of their ability to differentiate instruction and grouping was tied to Vygotsky’s focus on students’
ZPD and their work with an MKO. Differentiated instruction and grouping has gained momentum in the last decade with the implementation of Response to Intervention. Differentiation is not a strategy or a method to teaching, rather differentiation is a way of thinking about how to deliver instruction to students who are at different levels of learning within the same classroom.

Tomlinson (1999) said that differentiation is, "a way of thinking about teaching and learning that advocates beginning where individuals are rather than with a prescribed plan of action, which ignores student readiness, interest, and learning profile" (p. 108). Tomlinson (2001) identified seven key elements of a differentiated classroom. The first and second elements of a differentiated classroom are for teachers to recognize that the their students' background experience, types of learning modalities, and support systems vary and are directly tied to the students' need for scaffolding at various points in the learning process. The third and fourth element in a differentiated classroom are aimed at the teacher assuming the responsibility for ensuring that the students master important content and designing lesson plans which connect the students with key content. The fifth element in a differentiated classroom is for teachers to understand the nature of the student and the content which they teach. The sixth element is for teachers to be flexible in their teaching and understanding that based on the first element of a differentiated classroom, students will have variances with their learning. The seventh and final element in a differentiated classroom is for teachers to consistently question themselves about their students' needs and how instructionally through key content, those needs can be met.

Teachers who utilize differentiated instructional practices understand that all students in the classroom will be successful, because the teacher has taken into account the learning modalities of his/her students when planning instruction. Tomlinson (1999) called this, "students
of their students” (p. 2). In order for teachers to decide on the best possible instruction for their students, they must understand the instructional needs of their individual students. Teachers using differentiation in their classrooms understand that children do not fit into a mold. Students are recognized as individuals and are provided learning opportunities and activities at their instructional level.

The sixth category of the PET-R, *Administration, Organization, and Communication* was directly tied to the second research question in this formative program evaluation study. The teachers’ perceptions of administration, organization, and communication were important to student achievement and the implementation of balanced literacy at the elementary school. The second grade team had administrative staff as members of their PLC. The second grade PLC used their PLC time to ensure that communication about reading instruction, balanced literacy, assessments, communication with parents, and implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) were implemented with fidelity and understood by all team members. The fourth driver from Fullan’s (2009) change theory supported the ongoing communication through the second grade PLC. Ongoing communication during PLC time was a way for the team to learn from one another and to acquire new skills and knowledge from PLC members to move towards school improvement.

The seventh category of the PET-R, *Professional Development*, was directly tied to the second research question in this formative program evaluation study. The teachers’ perceptions of professional development were important to student achievement and the implementation of balanced literacy at the elementary school because it was essential to the success of the implementation of the multiple initiatives which were implemented during the 2012-2013 school year. The second grade PLC was provided with twice weekly planning time, as well as all day
quarterly planning days in which substitutes were fully funded by the school district. PLC planning was specifically designated as time for the teachers to create reading lessons, to receive Teachers College professional development, on-going response to intervention support, analysis of student data, and to map out their units of study.

**Connecting the PET-R to Interview Data**

The collected data from the PET-R helped to formulate questions for the focus group interview. The questions asked of the participants during the focus group interview were aligned with the categories on the PET-R. During the focus group interview, the participants mentioned the all the categories of the PET-R at some point in the interview, with multiple comments made pertaining to the categories of *Goals, Objectives, Priorities, Assessment, Instructional Practices and Materials, Instructional Time, Differentiated Instruction and Groupings, Administration, Organization, and Communication, and Professional Development*. The teachers’ perceptions about the reading program and implementation of a tired response to instruction at the elementary study site were key in developing the focus group questions for this formative program evaluation.

**Summary of PET-R**

The survey results from the PET-R indicated that there were perceived strengths and weaknesses with reading instruction by the second grade team of teachers. This was evident by analyzing the data from figure 4.15. There were five categories in which the second grade teachers perceived to be strengths in regards to reading instruction at their grade level (above the overall mean score [76%] for the PET-R survey): *Goals, Objectives, and Priorities; Assessment; Instructional Programs and Materials; Administration, Organization, and Communication; and Professional Development*. 
The highest scoring category and perceived as a strength by the second grade teachers was in the area of Administration, Organization, and Communication. The components of this category were, “Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices” (PET-R, 2003, p. 10). This category was aligned to the theoretical lens of Michal Fullan’s (2009) change theory, specifically focusing on driver six, developing leadership for change. The highest teacher rating for this category was 91% and the lowest rating was 75%. This category may be rated the highest due to the amount of professional development and resources provided by the school district, including the amount of time in which the teachers had to plan for balanced literacy implementation. A balanced literacy committee was created to communicate the balanced literacy initiative with monthly professional development conducted by members of the balanced literacy team.

The second category in which the teachers perceived as a strength was Instructional Programs and Resources. The components of this category, “have documented efficacy, are drawn from research based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners” (Pet-R, 2003, p. 7). This may have been perceived to be a strength by the second grade teachers because of the amount of resources provided to the teachers from the school district.

Each second grade teacher was provided with their own balanced literacy materials, including a grade level set of 1,500 leveled readers to support independent reading during reader’s workshop. The second grade teachers received their own iPad for administering the DIBELS assessments, which was provided by the school district.
This category was aligned to the theoretical lens of Michal Fullan’s (2009) change theory, specifically focusing on drivers four and five, which are developing a culture of learning (driver four) and developing a culture of school change (driver five).

The category perceived to be a weakness as indicated in figure 4.15 was Differentiated Instruction and Groupings. Differentiated Instruction and Grouping is defined as instruction which, “optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning” (PET-R, 2003, p. 9). The average mean score for this category was 62%, the lowest scored category on the entire PET-R survey. This category was 14% lower than the overall mean score for the PET-R survey.

This category aligned with the primary theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1934/1978) in this formative program evaluation study. Vygotsky’s focus on the ZPD and work with an MKO were key components when providing differentiation and flexible grouping of students to second grade students at the study site.

The perceived weakness of the teachers in this category may be due to the number of initiatives and multiple resources which were asked of the teachers to utilize to meet the diverse needs of their classroom students. During the focus group interview, two of the participants mentioned the number of initiatives being implemented at one time and the confusion as to what resources to use, and how to utilize those resources with students effectively. Participant 3 said:

As a classroom teacher, there is always something new being implemented. Put RtI aside and all the things that we keep changing/implementing from year to year. Last year, we introduced balanced literacy and it was a whole new shift in how we were teaching. A lot
of us were just trying to stay afloat, trying to figure that all out…It is not just RtI but RtI and all the other programs that are implemented at the same time.

Because there was a shift in teaching with balanced literacy, which was far different than the previous scripted basal program in years’ past, the teachers had to meet the individual needs of students through just right book baggies, individualized conferencing, guided reading groups/skills groups, and using the data from MAP, CASE21, and DIBELS to differentiate learning opportunities for all their students, not just for those students who were not at grade level, but also those students who required enrichment opportunities.

**Focus Group Interview**

The focus group interview participants met with the researcher, afterschool in the Media Center, in January of 2014 to answer questions pertaining to the implementation of a tiered response to instruction and the impact that it had on student achievement in second grade classrooms.

There were multiple data sets used to assist the researcher in developing focus group interview questions. The primary data set was the focus group interview which was informed by the student data set (DIBELS, CASE21, and MAP) and the PET-R survey completed by the classroom teachers. Both the student data set and the data collected from the PET-R survey were used to create focus group questions and for the researcher to understand the participants’ perceptions of the implementation of a tiered response to instruction to raise student achievement in second grade classrooms.

Figure 4.16 shows how the focus group questions related to the primary and secondary data sets. The roman numerals under the PET-R data set refers to the category to which it was assigned in the survey.
Table 4.16

Focus Group Interview and Related Data Sets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group Question</th>
<th>PET-R Category</th>
<th>DIBELS</th>
<th>CASE21</th>
<th>MAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do you feel about the Response to Intervention framework?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe: Does the personnel involved with the framework help or hinder the intervention process?</td>
<td></td>
<td>DORF</td>
<td></td>
<td>RIT Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How do you feel about incorporating small group instruction into your instructional day?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DORF</td>
<td>DOK</td>
<td>RIT Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe: Do the assessment systems (CASE21, DIBELS/TRC, MAP) assist you with instructional decisions? How?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probe: What do you feel are the most useful assessments in place to help students achieve and to assist you with teaching and planning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How do you feel about the assessment systems which are currently in place to assist you with instruction and student achievement in your classroom?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DORF</td>
<td>DOK</td>
<td>RIT Score</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Genre Passages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What do you think are the benefits to utilizing response to intervention?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DORF</td>
<td>DOK</td>
<td>RIT Score</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Genre Passages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Tier</td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>What is your opinion about your professional learning community in regards to literacy and response to intervention?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>What is your opinion about the professional development that you received in regards to reading instruction and response to intervention?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>How do you feel your collaboration with the grade level professional learning community contributed to student achievement in reading?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Did the professional development that you received, assist you in implementing response to intervention at all three tiers?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probe: Do you feel as though you referred students for intervention team more frequently, less frequently, or the same because of the implementation to response to intervention framework?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Did the professional development you received impact your teaching and student achievement in reading?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>How do you feel about multiple initiatives being implemented in one school year to increase student achievement and teaching?</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Probe: What would be</td>
<td>I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII</td>
<td>NWF</td>
<td>DORF</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CCSS</td>
<td>DOK</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
recommendations to other sites implementing a tiered response to instruction?

**Probe:** What would make that transition better?

*Adapted from Curtis-Whipple, 2011, pp. 111-113*

NWF:  Nonsense Word Fluency  
DORF:  DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency  
CCSS:  Common Core State Standards  
DOK:  Depths of Knowledge  
RIT Score:  Ready for Instruction Today  
I:  Goals/Objectives/Priorities  
II:  Assessment  
III:  Instructional Programs and Materials  
IV:  Instructional Time  
V:  Differentiation/Grouping/Scheduling  
VI:  Administration/Organization/Communication  
VII:  Professional Development

**Protocols**

The principal agreed to allow the researcher to use the school’s Media Center for up to ninety minutes. The principal notified the staff that the Media Center would be closed to all staff members while the researcher conducted the focus group interview. The participants were told that there would be approximately ten questions asked of them and that follow up probes may be asked if responses needed to be further clarified or expanded. The participants were also aware of the two primary research questions as they were stated prior to the first focus group interview question being asked of the participants. The participants were reminded that the interview was voluntary and that they could answer as many or as few questions as they wanted. They were also told that they could ask or add to any of the questions as the focus group interview drew to a close.

At the completion of the interview, the researcher informed the participants that once the interview was transcribed, the transcription would be sent via email for review of accuracy of
participant responses. They were asked to review the transcription for any inaccuracies. If they would like to add or restate their responses in order to make their thoughts more clear, they were asked to make the edits and then return their transcription to the researcher. One participant returned the transcript with corrected grammatical errors in her comments and made two of her thoughts more clear.

Once the analysis of all data sets were analyzed and recorded, the participants received a copy of the triangulated data electronically. The participants were once again able to review the data collected from DIBELS, MAP, CASE21, PET-R, and focus group interview data and had the opportunity to add or provide comments to the data sets presented in this research study. The participants did not make any changes to the reported on data sets for this formative program evaluation.

Focus Group Interview Results

Coding of Focus Group Interview Transcription

The researcher of this formative program evaluation study utilized the MAXQDA 11 qualitative software program for coding. The MAXQDA 11 qualitative software system did not allow for numerical coding, which the researcher had previously aligned to each of the two research questions (Table 3.8), instead the researcher entered simple in-vivo codes throughout the transcript from the focus group interview. The following in-vivo codes, as part of the first cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2013), were entered into the MAXDQA 11 software system:

Table 4.16

*In-Vivo Codes and Coding Key*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-Vivo Code</th>
<th>Coding Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>GLP</td>
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<td>Process</td>
<td>PROC</td>
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<td>Paperwork</td>
<td>PWK</td>
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<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
<td>PLC</td>
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<td>Balanced Literacy</td>
<td>BL</td>
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<td>Resources</td>
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<td>Implementation</td>
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<td>Training</td>
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<td>Schedule</td>
<td>SCH</td>
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<td>Groups</td>
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<td>Levels</td>
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<td>Skills</td>
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<td>Assistants</td>
<td>ASST</td>
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<td>Differentiation</td>
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<td>Interventions</td>
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<td>Diagnostic Reading Assessment</td>
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<td>Measures of Academic Progress</td>
<td>MAP</td>
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<td>Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy</td>
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<td>Skills</td>
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<td>Collaborative Assessment Solutions for</td>
<td>CASE21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educators in the 21st Century</td>
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<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>PD</td>
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<td>Positive Behavior Intervention Support</td>
<td>PBIS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>COM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Disability</td>
<td>LD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td>FEEL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.17

*Summary of Transcription Coding Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>Intervention Team</td>
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*Adapted from Curtis-Whipple, 2011, pp. 116-117*
Upon review of the first cycle coding process, the researcher condensed the codes even further. A second cycle, axial coding process (Saldaña, 2013) began by combining codes which were similar. The purpose of axial coding according to Boeije (2010) is, “to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones…[and to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected” (p. 109). Once codes were reduced and eliminated, the researcher began to look for emerging themes within the codes. The following figure 4.18 represents the reduction of codes identifying the themes which emerged after the second cycle coding process (Saldaña, 2013). The emerging themes which emerged received the most frequency of codes. The first three thematic codes to emerge were aligned with the first research question in this formative program evaluation study. The last two themes were aligned to the second research question.

Table 4.18

*Summary of Thematic Reduction of Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original Code</th>
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<td>Data Collection and Assessments</td>
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<td>DRA</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>CCSS</td>
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<td>CASE21</td>
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<td>MAP</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIBELS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tiers</td>
<td>Intervention Support</td>
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<td>Process</td>
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Focus Group Interview Themes and Results

Five themes emerged from the second cycle coding process of the focus group interview transcription. The five themes are Instructional Groups, Data Collection and Assessments, Intervention Support, Balanced Literacy, and Professional Development. The focus group interview provided the researcher with qualitative data on teacher perceptions about the implementation of a tiered response to instruction and PLCs.

Instructional Groups

The first emerging theme of instructional grouping was one of the major themes which aligned to both the theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1934/1978) and the first research question in this formative program evaluation study. Instructional grouping and differentiation was also one of the categories in the PET-R survey and was the lowest scoring category in the survey.

Prior to the implementation of balanced literacy, students had been grouped by instructional reading levels as determined by the Diagnostic Reading Assessment. The
Diagnostic Reading Assessment was an assessment administered to students to determine their instructional reading level based on their performance on leveled reader assessments. The assessments included fluency, retell, and comprehension. The implementation of balanced literacy and grouping students according to their instructional reading level was familiar to the second grade teachers at the study site.

The second grade teachers were each assigned an assistant for a minimum of forty-five minutes per day. The focus group participants talked about how they utilized instructional assistants and pulled small groups for instruction. Participant 5 stated:

We had assistants, and that did help a little bit with pulling reading groups, but then I was always rushing through my groups and thinking I have to hurry up to get to this group, then the next group and then conferencing, and the word work. I felt like there was sufficient time in the schedule, but always felt very rushed and worried about getting to everybody and doing everything I had to do.

Participant 2 felt that her instructional groups ran better prior to the implementation of balanced literacy and Response to Intervention, because the mandated assessments seemed to impact her instructional groups as she felt as though she was assessing/progress monitoring daily.

Last year, I felt that my groups ran better because we didn't have the mandated assessments that we have this year that seem to be daily. So, I would meet with my four groups and one group had one person. This one student was severely below grade level. I would meet with a group and my assistant would meet with a group each day and the child that was by herself, was met with three times a week. I would meet with my EC Resource teacher to get assistance with interventions and she was very helpful and my
assistant who is highly skilled would pull her and I would get with her on the third day and she would get the lesson plans that I had created for that child and the other groups.

Small group instruction was sometimes impacted by the instructional assistants not reporting to the second grade teachers’ classroom because they were sometimes pulled to cover classes or substitute in other teachers’ classrooms. Participant 1 mentioned what happened to her groups when her instructional assistant was pulled to cover another classroom. She stated:

I did have my assistant who worked very well with her groups and sometimes when another teacher was absent she would be pulled to cover another teacher's class. Her groups may not get pulled because of needs in another classroom.

In the PET-R survey, under the category of Differentiated Instruction/Grouping, four of the five teachers rated this category as the lowest category on the survey; however, the researcher of this formative program evaluation found it interesting that differentiation only occurred one time during the focus group interview. Levels were mentioned and how levels of readers were determined, but the actual differentiated learning opportunities was not mentioned, only that small groups were created based on assessment data.

**Data Collection and Assessments**

Data collection was the second theme to emerge from the coding of the focus group interview transcription. The focus group participants mentioned how they utilized the data collected from various assessment systems to form small groups and drive their classroom instruction.

Participant 1 felt most comfortable with the DIBELS assessments, not as much with MAP. She also felt as though the CASE21 assessments were beneficial tool because, “they were broken down into which groups were partial mastery, mastery, non-mastery of skills and I was
able to use that information to formulate my groups and help teach students during my small
group instructional time.”

Participant 2 utilized the DRA to assist with instruction and the formulation of small
groups. She collected fluency data when listening to students read a leveled reader. She liked
the DRA because it had a comprehension component as well. She said, “because the books are
leveled, they allow you to see where the students fall and you can also find other students that
have the same needs and that allows you to help in forming similar groups.” Participant 5 agreed
with Participant 2 in regards to DRA data collection to drive instruction and formulate groups.
She felt that the data collected from DRA, “felt very accurate.” She liked to utilize the data
collected from assessments because it helped her with mastering tested skills.

Participant 3 mentioned that DIBELS and CASE21 data drove the intervention process
when it came to documentation and identifying student progress on assessments. This may be in
part due to the use of DIBELS for several years as well as CASE21 being utilized in the upper
grades. These assessments systems were far more familiar to the second grade team than MAP,
the universal screening tool required of all students at the study site. Only two focus group
participants mentioned MAP in the focus group interview. While it was mentioned, both
Participant 1 and 3 did not feel comfortable with the assessment. Participant 1 said, “Being new
to the MAP testing system, I didn't really know how to use it. This year, I feel like I have a
better handle on it as opposed to last year. I was not comfortable with MAP last year.”
Participant 3, along with the other focus group participants, had received training on the data
collected from the MAP assessment. She stated:

That the amount of information was pretty overwhelming, the amount of documentation
and printing that was done on each individual student was 20 some odd pages per
student…very overwhelming. The amount of information that it would present can be overwhelming. I feel like this year there is so much great information, however last year it was just like oh my goodness, here is one more thing that I have to do and it would take weeks and weeks and weeks of time to collect the data.

The participants mentioned multiple assessments utilized during the implementation year of the tiered response to instruction. They mentioned the use of DIBELS, DRA, MAP, and CASE21. Participant 1 relied heavily on both DIBELS and CASE21 to form instructional groups and to drive instruction, while both Participant 5 and 2 relied on DRA and CASE21.

The common assessment utilized to collect data and drive instructional groupings and teaching was CASE21. MAP, while administered three times a year, was not mentioned as a data source for the second grade teachers, even though the reporting features on the MAP assessment automatically groups students by their RIT score and by their percentage on the Common Core State Standards (2012). The lack of acknowledgement of the universal screening tool may indicate that the teachers felt most comfortable with familiar assessments (DRA, DIBELS, CASE21) or they needed more professional development on how to read the reports and collect the data from the MAP assessments to identify struggling students in reading. It should be noted that on the PET-R survey, the category of Assessment was 5% higher than the overall mean score on the PET-R survey. This indicated that the second grade teachers and participants in the focus group interview perceived assessments and the data collected from each assessment to be an important component to the implementation of a tiered response to instruction and student achievement in second grade classrooms.
**Intervention Support**

Throughout the focus group interview, a third theme emerged from the coding of transcription of the focus group interview. The focus group participants’ perceptions about the intervention process at the study site brought up several underlying themes, which fall under the emerging theme of interventions. The participants mentioned tiers, intervention team, PEPs, the labels of learning disabled and learning disability, paperwork, and student progress. When the researcher asked about interventions and RtI, Participant 5 stated:

RtI, I think, a lot of it makes sense because of the tiers and we know where our students are. It helps us to make sure that we document the progress of their progress as they go and that it helps with the intervention process and identifying the students who are in need of extra support like EC.

Participant 2 mentioned how incorporating intervention time into her daily schedule directly impacted those students who were not part of the intervention process. She said:

It is very difficult to conduct interventions with a whole group because that is pointless, whereas, you are needed to meet with the individual child, so how do you not only manipulate your schedule and time, but also the students you aren't working with, aren't doing busy work. There are issues with scheduling and trying to make sure that the students who you are working with and those that you aren't, that you aren't giving them busy work while you are trying to work with small groups.

Participant 4 felt as though the tiered model of instruction and intervention support was effective because it is the same triangle as the PBIS model and the elementary study site had been using the PBIS model for almost a decade. She brought to light the issue of moving
students through the tiers of intervention and what should be the focus for classroom teachers.

She stated:

The perception of RtI school-wide needs to be one that is focused on intervening with the student, not a direct path to evaluation. So, as a grade level, we need to focus on intervening with this student that is below grade level, we need to think about sending them to ITeam even if we don't suspect them having a learning disability, but sending them to the intervention team because they are below grade level, not because you think they have a learning disability. And I think that is important to keep in mind when we are talking about moving kids through the tiers or to the next tier.

Participants 3 and 5 felt that after listening to Participant 4 speak about the purpose of the school-wide RtI model, that they had a shift in their perceptions about the Intervention process. Participant 2 had this to say:

The point that Participant 4 brought up was very interesting and I don't know that I necessarily looked at it like this before. Like this child needs to be tested instead of this child just needs interventions for assistance to move along through the school year. So I think it is an interesting, obviously accurate perception that I had not thought about before. I guess I was always thinking, that there was something wrong with the student, and that they must have a learning disability, instead of maybe just interventions to help them to be successful in school.

Participant 4 added to Participant 2’s thought by saying:

There may be teachers that are still thinking that this student may just be low across the board, that they are just a struggling reader, that is who they are, they were tested before in the past and they did not qualify, so that is just the way that it is. Those students can
still get interventions, they still need the interventions. Some students need to go to tier 2
and even stay in tier 3 as long as they are still making progress but the interventions need
to stay.

Participant 5 felt the clarification is needed about the purpose of ITeam. She said:
This was an eye-opener to me, that if they are below grade level we put them through the
intervention team. I really did not know that if they are below grade level that we should
put them through intervention team. My thought was like it was said before; if we think a
child has a learning disability then we put them through the intervention team.

The researcher noticed a common theme of communication about the intervention team
process at the study site. The participants understood where to find intervention team
documentation and commented that the students’ documentation could be found in the
cumulative folder. The school counselor placed intervention team documentation in a gold
folder and labeled the outside of the folder with the student’s name and dates of the intervention
process. Inside the folder is progress monitoring data, the intervention plan, dates of
implementation, the student’s strengths and weaknesses as a learner, signature pages of
intervention team members, and parent information.

The teachers’ perception of the purpose of the intervention team was a focus of the
administrative team for the 2013-2014 school year. This focus was based on the intervention
team data from the 2012-2013 school year as the number of student referrals from the second
grade teachers for ITeam was zero. The researcher had determined that with zero students
referred for intervention support as part of the RtI model, the second grade teachers needed
further professional development on the tiered response to instruction and support for struggling
learners.
With that being said, Participant 6 felt as though the intervention process at the study site was on the right track. This may be in part due to the administration team focusing being on the purpose of the intervention team since the end of the 2012-2013 school year. She said:

I have the advantage of seeing how the intervention team functions at this school compared to other schools in the district. This school has a very strong intervention team/process in place. The adults share in the responsibility and wrap around the kids and everyone is very present and concerned about struggling students here.

Participant 6’s comment about adults sharing in the responsibility of struggling students supported how the second grade PLC in the 2013-2014 school year is collaborating and sharing ideas on how to support struggling students in literacy and increasing academic achievement in second grade classrooms.

When the researcher was reviewing data from the 2012-2013 school year on the number of referrals sent to the intervention team (ITeam) from the second grade teachers, there were zero cases sent through for intervention support. Even though students were placed on a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) for tier 2 support within the classroom, students were not sent to the ITeam for further intervention support or for special education testing. This data was supported by the comments made by the participants during the focus group interview. Some participants seemed to think that the purpose of ITeam was to identify students as learning disabled, not necessarily as needing continued intervention support beyond the PEP for each student.

The last two emerging themes of balanced literacy and professional development from the focus group interview transcription aligned with the second research question in this formative program evaluation study.
**Balanced Literacy**

Throughout the focus group interview, balanced literacy was a major factor in the implementation process at the study site.

In the winter of 2011, the literacy facilitator and the site principal were asked by the school district if they wanted to be phased in to the balanced literacy initiative being brought to the school district for the 2012-2013 school year. The options, as provided by the district, were phase I implementation, phase II implementation, and phase III implementation.

Phase I implementation meant that the core reading program (which was in place at the school) was effective and no further resources were needed. Phase II implementation meant that schools would need some support with their core reading program and that some resources with balanced literacy would be provided. Phase III implementation meant that a new core program would be in place for the 2012-2013 school year, along with professional development, professional libraries, and an abundance of resources to support the balanced literacy initiative.

Both the site principal and literacy facilitator opted to be members of the phase III balanced literacy initiative. The elementary study site and twenty-two other schools opted for the phase III support. This was less than 25% of the elementary schools in the district who opted to move forward with the balanced literacy initiative. With the implementation of balanced literacy, also came the implementation of the Response to Intervention.

The teachers talked about the resources they had to utilize with balanced literacy, the feeling of support from the administrative team, and the assistance of their PLC with planning for instruction.
Balanced literacy, as Participant 2 said, “was a whole new shift in how we were teaching.” Then adding RtI was, “confusing, maybe I didn’t have enough training and I think also practice in implementing it.”

There were many resources provided to the second grade team at the elementary school. These resources were in the form of balanced literacy planning (PLC time), professional development, personnel, professional literature, and assessment systems. The participants talked about the impact of resources on the implementation process at the study site.

Participant 2 felt as though she didn’t have a good feel for the use of all the resources being provided. She said for her, it was about, “being comfortable with them so we can reach multiple students.” Participant 1 mentioned having to find her own resources because the scripted core program had been removed from the grade level. She said that she had to, “locate books to teach skills to meet the Common Core State Standards.”

The focus group participants talked about their perceptions of the implementation of PLCs and the impact on student achievement. Participant 5 thought that the PLC functioned well, especially during their balanced literacy planning days. These were days which were fully funded by the district for phase III schools. Substitutes were provided for teachers to plan balanced literacy units of study with their PLC. These days took place at the study site with one day in each quarter of the school year reserved for PLC balanced literacy time. She thought that:

Our PLC worked really well on our planning days. I think that's when we were really successful. We were able to plan a whole quarter through, and without my teammates doing their part, the whole quarter would not have been planned. I ultimately think that those days helped our students because we had weeks and weeks of plans and we knew where we were going from the start.
Participant 1 agreed in saying that the balanced literacy planning days provided her, “with a roadmap of where we have been and where we were going.” Participant 2 also commented on how useful the amount of PLC time was to student achievement in second grade classrooms. She stated:

We were able to look at the skills that our kids needed in both areas of fiction and nonfiction. We were able to identify things that we had already covered so we weren’t wasting our time, so that definitely impacted student achievement. And because we have that time and we were able to dig deep, I feel that we were only able to impact students in a positive way.

Participant 5 commented about the benefits of planning as a PLC. She stated that, “I really believe that planning as a team is extremely beneficial. It absolutely was. Because I was able to hear ideas that Participant 2 was doing or hear about what everybody else was doing in their classrooms.”

Two participants in the focus group interview mentioned that they had not been part of the balanced literacy planning time nor received balanced literacy training. Participant 6 felt like if she had the same balanced literacy training as others in the grade level, she would’ve been able to, “help assimilate and show how balanced literacy fits into RtI.” Participant 2 did not know that Participant 6 had not received balanced literacy training and felt that if Participant 6 had had the training, it would’ve directly impacted their PLC in a positive way. She stated:

If Participant 6 had had that training, then when we collaborated, we could identify specific students. For example we could say, this student may have these specific problems within literacy, I need concrete specific examples of what I need to do for this child as tier 2 or tier 3 interventions.
Participants 1, 5 and 7 all mentioned how their PLC time with another phase III school had impacted their teaching. Participant 1 enjoyed going to the partner phase III school to see balanced literacy implemented in another second grade teacher’s classroom. She found this to be very helpful. Participant 7 liked being able to have examples of how to implement balanced literacy and then bring those examples back to her own classroom. Participant 5 had some, “aha” moments when visiting the partner phase III school.

The focus group participants felt supported by their administrative team. Participant 5 mentioned how the administrative team allowed the teachers to make mistakes and time to learn. She stated:

I really think our admin team was supportive and understanding that we weren’t getting it all done correctly at first. They seemed to be OK with it ‘taking all year’ for us to understand how to do everything. I felt like we were given permission to mess up and we were encouraged to take baby steps while learning all these initiatives.

When it came down to the implementation of balanced literacy and RtI, the participants mostly felt that it boiled down to time and professional development. Professional development is the final emerging theme in this formative program evaluation study.

**Professional Development**

Professional development was a major theme to emerge in the coding process of the focus group interview transcriptions. Professional development and training were both mentioned in both the implementation of balanced literacy and Response to Intervention. The study site had a balanced literacy team who received professional development from the Teachers College at Columbia University in the summer of 2012. The professional development continued throughout the school year with a partner phase III school. A staff developer from
Columbia would come to the district five times during the 2012-2013 school year for a total of forty professional development hours. The study site also created a balanced literacy committee which met once a month for an hour to discuss balanced literacy and how to communicate the initiative to the staff at the study site. Throughout the 2012-2013 school year, the literacy facilitator at the school received ongoing balanced literacy information and resources from the district at her monthly facilitator meetings. This information was immediately communicated to the grade level PLC and to the balanced literacy committee.

The professional development received through balanced literacy was mentioned more frequently than the professional development mentioned through Response to Intervention. The focus group participants seemed to be more informed about each initiative depending on their role in the school. Those participants who were directly involved with the Response to Intervention side of things, did not receive the professional development with balanced literacy, and the participants who were involved with balanced literacy seemed to not have as much professional development or knowledge about Response to Intervention. The split in the amount of training and professional development was evident in the perceptions of the focus group participants during the interview.

When the participants were asked if they felt like they had enough professional development to move students through the tiers of instruction, some participants felt like they needed more training and time to implement RtI. Participant 5 felt like she needed more meaningful professional development with RtI, when there would be more time to digest the information, because she says that all she can remember is that there was training on RtI and what she walked away with was the definition of RtI, not the process of a tiered response to
instruction. She mentioned that professional development needs to be on-going, not just a one-time session. She said, “Regular meetings and LOTS of support are critical.”

Participant 1 felt as though she needed to know more about the student documentation process of RtI and what is needed to present to the intervention team as the academic strengths and weaknesses for the referred student. She didn’t want to walk in to the intervention team meeting with incorrect documentation and have to wait another four weeks to have the correct data to support the need for more intensive intervention support at the tier III level.

Participant 3 suggested, “Focusing on what it means to have a strong core instruction, including differentiation,” as a way to start communication about documentation beginning at the tier I level of RtI. This is an interesting comment as the Response to Intervention Coach and one of her colleagues held two separate professional development sessions with the teachers addressing core instruction at the school, including the need to differentiate learning for students. This was something that was not brought up by the classroom teachers in the PET-R survey but was mentioned by a few of the focus group participants during the interview.

Differentiation and tier 1 were only brought up one time according the MAXQDA 11 qualitative software system. This is interesting as the underlying premise of balanced literacy and Response to Intervention is that differentiation takes place at the core level of instruction; however, it should be noted that the lack of frequency of differentiation at the tier 1 level being mentioned aligned with the PET-R category of Differentiated Instruction/Groupings. The perceived percentage of implementation for this category was given an overall mean score of 62%, the lowest perceived score out of the entire PET-R survey.

The overall perception by the focus group participants was that implementing the Response to Intervention model of instruction along with balanced literacy and new assessment
systems were overwhelming. Even though the professional development received by the Teachers College and the quarterly planning days provided by the school district was deemed extremely beneficial by the teachers, Participant 4’s perception was that in order for initiatives to be implemented properly, “adequate preparation time, and frequent check-ins to give and receive feedback are vital to teacher success when multiple initiatives are implemented in one school year.” Participant 6 recommended taking, “baby steps and trying something new at one grade level or with a few teachers first.” Participant 3 recommends starting at the bottom tier of the RtI pyramid and working through each tier.

So much emphasis was put on the implementation of balanced literacy during the 2012-2013 school year that the communication and process of RtI was pushed to the side. Participant 6 summed up the importance of RtI and its impact on student achievement in second grade classrooms. She said, “Once we accept the urgency of our failure to meet the needs of large groups of kids, and that providing tiered support is the best way to serve kids, we will increase student achievement.”

**Triangulation of Data Sets and Key Findings**

There were three student data sets, one survey instrument, and a focus group interview transcription collected and analyzed to understand teachers’ perceptions of a tiered model of instruction to increase student achievement in second grade classrooms.

Upon completion of data collection and analysis, it is apparent that the teachers had a strong knowledge base about the use of assessment systems to raise student achievement in second grade classrooms. They understood how to use the data from familiar assessment systems to drive their instruction and to create small groups. The most familiar assessment, DIBELS, was the least utilized to drive instruction and flexible groups in second grade
classrooms. The data sets which were utilized most frequently were CASE21 and DRA. These two assessments focused on reading comprehension, one of the major components from the findings in the National Reading Panel (2000). The MAP universal screening tool was not mentioned by the participants as an assessment system utilized to drive instruction or to identify students needing additional intervention support.

Assessment was the first major theme to emerge from research question one and was the second category on the PET-R survey. Assessment had implementation results of 81%, a percentage which was higher than the mean score for the entire PET-R survey. This indicated that the teachers believed that the implementation of assessment systems was utilized frequently to collect data and monitor student progress on grade level standards.

The second theme to emerge from the data collected was Instructional Groupings. Differentiated Instruction/Groupings was category five on the PET-R survey and was perceived to be the lowest category for implementation with a mean implementation score of 62%. The low percentage of implementation on the PET-R survey was also supported by the lack of frequency of differentiation being brought up during the focus group interview. This indicated that the teachers may not have fully understood the tiered model of instruction and what instruction looks like at each of the three tiers of RtI.

The third theme to emerge from the data collected was Intervention Support. Intervention Support fell under category three in the PET-R survey and was perceived to be the highest of the implemented categories for program implementation. This category received a mean implementation score of 86%. This indicated that the teachers felt as though they had an understanding of what RtI meant, that there was a core program in place, and that interventions were needed for struggling readers. Intervention support was provided through PEPs, small
group instruction, and extra support from instructional assistants. The participants had a handle on the implementation of balanced literacy but could not figure out how to implement the RtI model within their instructional day. It was apparent from the transcription of the focus group interview that the participants were confused about when intervention support should take place.

The first theme to emerge which aligned to the second research question was the implementation of Balanced Literacy. Balanced Literacy fell under the first category of the PET-R survey, Goals/Objectives/Priorities. The teachers perceived the implementation of the balanced literacy framework as the highest score on the PET-R survey with an implementation score of 86%. This high implementation score and the frequency of balanced literacy mentioned in the transcription of the focus group interview indicated that the teachers believed that balanced literacy and the resources provided for the initiative helped the team to function as a PLC, a perceived strength in this study.

The second theme to emerge from the data collection was Professional Development. Professional Development was the seventh category on the PET-R survey and received an implementation score of 81%. The researcher believed that because the PET-R survey was about the implementation of a reading program, the teachers did not connect the initial tier of RtI and the professional development that they received as part of this category. The participants mentioned the need for further training with the RtI framework eleven times, a perceived weakness in this study. What this indicated is that the teachers had a strong grasp on balanced literacy implementation and could hold collaborative conversations within their PLC, but a weakness may be the inability to hold the same quality conversations about RtI in their PLC due to the lack of training.
Four key findings emerged from the triangulation of the data sets in this formative program evaluation study. All four key findings will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

1. Professional development training is needed for the different tiers of instruction within the RtI model.
2. Professional development training is needed for the purpose of intervention team.
3. Teachers need to use the data collected from the universal screening tools to identify struggling students in literacy.
4. Support from the school district and site administrators are vital to the implementation of initiatives at a study site.

Summary

There were several patterns which emerged from the analysis of the student data, survey data, and interview data. These patterns were ongoing professional development, the utilization of universal screenings to identify struggling students in literacy, and the support of administration when implementing new initiatives. Discussion of patterns in data, the researcher’s findings, and implications will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

Introduction

The final chapter of this formative program evaluation study will review the researcher’s key findings from the previous chapter. The researcher will also connect findings to the theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1934/1979) and Fullan (2009). Implications of findings for literature, the educational community, and educational practice will also be the topic of discussion in this chapter.

The purpose of this formative program evaluation was to determine how teachers perceived the implementation of a tiered model of instruction at the elementary study site and if this new initiative had an impact on student achievement while reducing the number of students referred for special education services. The student data sets collected were DIBELS, MAP, and CASE21. Data was also collected from the PET-R survey and the focus group interview. All the data collected helped the researcher to determine if the teachers’ perceptions of a tiered response to instruction impacted student achievement in second classrooms and to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?
2. What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?

Emerging Themes

There were five themes which emerged from the collected data, as well as four key findings. The five themes were Assessment, Instructional Groups, Intervention Support, Balanced Literacy, and Professional Development.
Findings

Assessment, Instructional Groups, and Intervention Support fell under the first research question in this study, with assessment as one of the four key findings in this study.

Theme 1: Assessment

Assessments at the study site were in the form of universal screenings and formative and summative assessments. Both MAP and DIBELS assessments were universal screenings utilized during three benchmark periods during the 2012-2013 school year. CASE21 was a summative assessment administered for the first time to second grade students during that same year. DRA were running records used as a formative tool to form flexible groups and had been the primary assessment tool used to determine independent and instructional reading levels with second grade students prior to the implementation year.

The teachers in the second grade had just been trained on the Common Core State Standards Initiatives (2012) and were administering assessments based on the new standards and newly adopted curriculum. MAP was the universal screening tool mandated by the school district to utilize as part of the RtI model. The CASE21 assessments provided the participants with comparative data on how well each student performed compared to their peers, class, and grade level.

It was mentioned in the focus group interview that the participants felt very overwhelmed with the number of assessments implemented during the 2012-2013 school year and felt that they relied most heavily on the assessment systems with which they were most comfortable. MAP was not an assessment system with which the second grade teachers felt most comfortable. The teachers felt most comfortable with the DIBELS assessments, but relied most heavily on the CASE21 assessments and DRA running records to drive their instruction and student groups.
Finding 1: Teachers must utilize universal screening tools to assist with flexible grouping and differentiated instruction.

Finding 2: Teachers must utilize universal screening tools to assist with the identification of struggling students in literacy.

These two findings were grounded in the work of Fullan (2009) and his work with professional learning communities. Teachers can collaborate within their PLC to identify strengths and weaknesses of students within their grade level and classroom in the area of literacy. Teachers can then create a plan of action to meet the needs of their students through differentiated learning opportunities via the support of an MKO and the students’ ZPD (Vygotsky, 1934/1978).

**Theme 2: Instructional Groupings**

Instructional Groups was the second theme to emerge from the collected and analyzed data at the study site. The elementary study site had an intensive reading teacher who pulled students daily for tier 2 and tier 3 intervention support. The intensive and strategic reading groups were flexible and students were able to move in and out of the groups based on data collected from progress monitoring. Intensive and strategic reading groups took place during reader’s workshop and were in a separate setting within the elementary school.

Student groupings were focused on guided reading groups and skills groups. An assistant was provided to each second grade teacher during reader’s workshop, but was often pulled to cover other classes if needed. During the focus group interview the participants had stated that they felt as though they were not very effective in meeting the needs of their students through instructional groups during the implementation year. It was also stated in the focus group interview that the teachers felt as though they were just rotating through the groups just to meet
the requirement of meeting with small instructional groups every day. If assistants were pulled, more often than not, instructional groups did not take place. The only instructional groups which received reliable small group instruction were those students who were determined to be intensive or strategic and received daily intervention support from the intensive reading teacher.

Finding 3: On-going professional development is needed for the different tiers of instruction within the RtI model, including professional development for instructional staff that supports literacy instruction within the school.

This finding was grounded in the work of both Vygotsky (1934/1978) and Fullan (2009) in the areas of differentiation and professional learning communities. Support personnel at the study site had provided two professional development sessions on differentiation at the tier I level of the RtI model; however, it was the lowest perceived category on the PET-R survey. The data collected from the survey supported this finding.

The perception from the teachers was that both teachers and support staff must receive on-going training on how to differentiate for their students. This would help to ensure that all staff members who were responsible for the delivery of literacy instruction had the training and support needed to implement the core reading program and increase student achievement.

Theme 3: Intervention Support

Intervention Support was the third theme to emerge in this study. Intervention support at the elementary study site had been provided prior to the implementation year, through intensive and strategic reading groups as provided by an intensive reading teacher. The teachers also had access to on site intervention team members who consisted of the school counselor, school psychologist, speech therapist, special education teacher, and a math and literacy facilitator. These on site intervention team members helped the teachers’ problem solve students’ academic
and behavior issues. During the implementation year, the elementary study site had access to a part-time Response to Intervention coach who assisted the staff members with the intervention process.

Throughout the course of the 2012-2013 school year, the RtI coach provided behavioral and academic support to teachers and staff members on the three tiers of the RtI model. It began with understanding how to differentiate instruction at the initial, tier I level. This support was during a PLC meeting at the beginning of the school year, with a follow up support meeting during a regular staff meeting during the second semester of the school year. It was at this second meeting that an additional RtI coach was brought in to support the study site with differentiation at the tier I level.

Throughout the focus group interview, comments by the participants were not focused on differentiation, but rather on the need for further on-going professional development and support on how to use the universal screening, MAP, to identify struggling students. The data collected from the 2012-2013 school year showed that zero students were referred to the intervention team with concerns in reading or further intervention support at the tier 3 level.

Finding 4: On-going professional development training is needed for the purpose of intervention team.

This finding was grounded in the work of both Vygtosky (1934/1978/) and Fullan (2009). Teachers and support staff must be knowledgeable about the intervention process at all three tiers of the RtI model. If there is to be an increase in reading achievement, teachers and support staff must understand how to support their most dependent readers at each level of the RtI model. It must be a priority for the RtI coach and intervention team members to make certain that all staff
members understand the role of the intervention process at the school and its impact on student achievement.

**Theme 4: Balanced Literacy**

Balanced literacy was the fourth theme to emerge from this study. The implementation of balanced literacy was the primary reason why RtI was implemented at the study site. With the implementation of balanced literacy, also came the implementation of the Response to Intervention model, as mandated by the school district.

Throughout the focus group interview, comments made by the participants focused on how much they valued the support provided by the district, administrative staff, and staff developers from Teachers College with the implementation of balanced literacy. The evidence of support through administration, organization, and communication, instructional programs and materials, and goals, objectives and priorities of balanced literacy were evident based on the perceptions of the teachers in the PET-R survey where these three categories were perceived to be implemented with the highest fidelity. The last theme of professional development was tied to balanced literacy and had one finding to support both emerging themes.

**Theme 5: Professional Development**

The last theme to emerge from this study was professional development. The data collected from the PET-R and the comments provided by the participants in the focus group interview supported professional development throughout the school year to support new initiatives. The teachers received balanced literacy planning days, professional development in the summer prior to the implementation year, and also received ongoing support from the staff developers at Teachers College. With the ongoing professional development, the teachers perceived this theme to be a strength at the study site.
Finding 5: Support from the district and site administration is vital to the success of implementation of initiatives at the study site.

Support from the school and district is vital when implementing change in any curriculum or program. This last finding is grounded in the work of Fullan’s (2009) change theory and the work of Barnhardt (2009). Both researchers implied that the support of administration throughout the cycle of change is critical to school improvement and program success. The school district in which this study is situated, valued balanced literacy and early reading achievement. The Superintendant secured 1.3 million dollars in professional development money for teachers and support staff to receive training in balanced literacy prior to the start of the 2014-2015 school year. The district also secured classroom libraries for every classroom in grades K-5 and professional resources for every teacher to support balanced literacy instruction. The goal for securing training and resources was to ensure that teachers had the proper tools in place to implement balanced literacy and to make sure all students are at grade level by the end of third grade.

**Implications of Findings**

The implications of the finding will be grounded in the theoretical framework of both Vygotsky and Fullan, existing literature, future research in the area studied, and how the study relates to educational practices.

**Implications of Findings Grounded in the Theoretical Framework of Vygotsky and Fullan**

The socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1934/1978) assisted the researcher in this study. The socio-cultural theory has three major themes (Scott & Palincsar, 2009). The first theme identified in this theory is interdependence between individual and social processes in
learning and development. The second theme of the theory is development cannot be separated from its social context. The third theme is learning can lead to development.

The development of children can be achieved through the skills and knowledge of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). It is the assistance of a more skilled peer or teacher which allows children to accomplish a difficult task and be successful in a specified zone of learning. Vygotsky called this process of learning the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and it is accomplished through socially and culturally constructed activities that support learning and human development. It was the socio-cultural theory and Vygotsky’s work with the ZPD and an MKO which provided the researcher with a lens to examine the collected data for this study.

When the second grade teachers were creating flexible reading groups based on students’ MAP scores and DRA levels, student groupings were based on what students were able to accomplish with the support of an MKO and within their ZPD. The flexible groups were based on the instructional levels of students and what they could accomplish academically with the support of a teacher or support personnel in order to increase their achievement in reading. The information and data collected by the teacher from both the universal screenings and formative assessments also identified which students continued to struggle with reading with the additional support of an MKO and intervention support at the tier II level.

There are two implications of findings for this theoretical lens. The first is the need for teachers to utilize data collected by universal screenings and formative assessments to identify struggling students in literacy. The second implication is the importance of referring students to the intervention team for additional support beyond the tier I and II level of instruction.

The participants in this study understood that the MAP universal screening tool was part of the RtI model at the core instruction level but did not understand how to read the reports or
how to use the data collected from the reports to identify struggling students compared to their
typical aged peers. The teachers perceived the DIBELS subtests in the areas of nonsense word
fluency (NWF) and DIBELS oral reading fluency (DORF) and the DRA running record
assessment to be strong assessments to identify struggling readers. While both the DIBELS and
the DRA assessments helped to identify specific skill deficits in reading and drive the flexible
groups, the assessments did not capture the reading achievement of a child and how that
performance would translate to achievement on an end-of-grade test.

The second implication is for further professional development concerning the purpose of
the intervention team and moving students through the RtI model as part of the intervention
process. The participants understood the framework of the RtI model but did not understand the
specifics at each tier or how to move students through the tiers. The participants made this
evident in their focus group interview responses when they talked about the intervention team as
a means to get a child identified for special education services, not as a continued, more intensive
intervention process.

Fullan’s (2009) work with professional learning communities and the theory of change
was a powerful component of this study. Fullan’s organizational change is based on eight key
drivers. For this study, the researcher focused on drivers four, five, and six. These drivers
focused on developing a culture of learning (driver four), developing a culture of student
performance (driver five), and developing leadership for change (driver six). These three drivers
help cultivate a professional learning community within the second grade team.

The participants stated several times in their focus group interview how the time spent in
their PLC mining for data, digging into their curriculum, and creating lessons created a positive
culture of learning and was perceived to increase student achievement in second grade
classrooms. While the number of student referrals declined from the previous year, it is not clear if the decline of referrals was due to the implementation of RtI and time created for PLC planning or due to the lack of purpose of the intervention team process. The data collected from the PET-R survey, DIBELS, and MAP suggests that the successful implementation of balanced literacy and PLC time contributed to the increase in student achievement and reduction of referrals for special education services.

One finding from the study supported the need for ongoing professional development concerning the different tiers of instruction within the RtI model, specifically at the primary tier of instruction with a focus on differentiation. The need for differentiation at the primary tier of the RtI model was also noted in the work of Pelletier (2011).

During this formative program evaluation study, the researcher recorded one mention of differentiation during the focus group interview. The lack of occurrences of differentiation was alarming as differentiation is at the primary tier of the RtI model of instruction and drives the intervention process at the other two tiers. The teachers’ perception of differentiated instructional groupings was the lowest perceived category in the PET-R survey and received the fewest occurrences during the focus group interview. This is an area in which the administrative team, support personnel, and RtI coach must provide ongoing professional development so that teachers are able to utilize the resources and tools provided within the universal screenings to support differentiated instruction at the core level and to increase student achievement in reading.

The work of Vygotsky (1934/1978) and Fullan (2009) allowed the researcher to look through the lens of zone of proximal development (ZPD), a more knowledgeable other (MKO), and professional learning communities to gain an understanding of teachers’ perceptions of the
implementation process of RtI and its impact on student achievement in second grade classrooms.

The lenses of Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory and Fullan's change theory supported both teachers and students through the implementation of a tiered model of literacy instruction using the RtI model as a guide.

**Implications of Findings for Literature**

Supporting struggling readers in the primary grades is crucial in order to have successful readers in the upper grades of elementary school. Providing high quality, systematic intervention support is one key finding which supports the existing literature for effective intervention support. Another key finding which supports the existing literature on student achievement in reading is the implementation and support of professional learning communities.

According to the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) at grades 4 and 8 (2013), reading scores have remained stagnant at grade 4 since 2007 (NAEP, 2013). Furthermore, students who performed at the 10th percentile in reading have remained stagnant since 2011 and have only increased by four points since 1992 (NAEP, 2013). Students who performed at the 25th percentile in reading have also remained stagnant since 2011 with a six point increase since 1992. These two groups of students need intervention support through a tiered response of instruction with ongoing progress monitoring in order to increase student achievement in reading. While providing intervention support at fourth grade is important, early intervention support at the primary level is vital for reading success.

The National Research Council (Snow et al., 1998) concluded that, “the single most efficient way to prevent reading difficulties from developing was to ensure that every child received appropriate high-quality reading instruction in grades K-3” (Torgesen, 2004, p. 2). Juel
(1998) determined through a longitudinal study that confirmed, “there is an almost a 90% chance that a child who is a poor reader at the end of grade 1 will be a poor reader at grade 4” (as cited in Strickland, 2002, p. 70). Teachers and support staff must determine the most effective way to intervene with struggling students as soon as possible, while ensuring that students receive their core instruction alongside their peers, as provided by the classroom teacher.

The structure and programs provided for intervention support are important to the success of struggling students in reading. The existing research on prevention and intervention supports the RtI model of instruction (Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Duffy-Hester, 1999; Pikulski, 1994; Snow et al., 1998; Strickland, 1998a, 1998b; Wasik, 1998) with the nature of instruction through intervention programs, school and classroom organization regarding teacher to student ratio and location of intervention support for struggling students. Documentation and monitoring for student learning is another component of the RtI model which is supported in existing research (Allington & Walmsley, 1995; Duffy-Hester, 1999; Pikulski, 1994; Snow et al., 1998; Strickland, 1998a, 1998b; Wasik, 1998). Progress monitoring and responding to the students’ needs can be measured, collected, and analyzed through the use of, “running records, rubrics, checklists, personal conferences, and observational notes” (Strickland, 2002, p. 80). These types of assessments, including the universal screening tools, DIBELS and MAP, were utilized by the participants at the study site as part of the implementation of balanced literacy and RtI.

The second finding is in support of professional learning communities. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (1998) states, “The most promising strategy for sustained substantive school improvement is developing the ability for school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (p. xi). The existing literature on professional learning communities (PLCs) supported the perceptions of the teachers at the study site and how important the roles of PLCs
are to increased student achievement (DuFour, 2004; Berry et al., 2005; Bolam et al., 2005; Hollins et al., 2004; Louis & Marks, 1998; Phillips, 2003; Strahan, 2003; Supovitz, 2002; Supovitz & Christman, 2003). PLCs at the study site were in the form of a second grade level team and an intervention team.

The second grade PLC was dependent on all team members collaborating to improve reading and achievement across the grade level (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004; Dunne, Nave, & Lewis, 2000; Englert & Tarrant, 2004; Louis & marks, 1998; Strahan, 2003; Berry et al., 2005). When teachers shift from working in isolation to collaboration within a PLC, the change in teacher culture can lead to, “a positive impact on teaching practice and morale as a result of participation in collaborative activities (Vescio et al., 2008).

Professional learning community time was spent with the second grade teachers focused on balanced literacy, data mining, and lesson planning. Supovitz (2002) and Supovitz and Christman, (2003) determined through their research that, “there is evidence to suggest that those communities that did engage in structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions and that investigated the relationships between instructional practices and student work produce significant gains in student learning” (p. 5). Not only does an effective PLC focus on instructional decisions, but also focuses on data driven dialogue. Data driven dialogue during PLC collaborative time is another indicator of increased student achievement (Berry et al, 2005; Hollins et al., 2004; Strahan, 2003).

The classroom teachers were the experts on their children. They were aware of student needs, deficits, and strengths. They made a commitment to the implementation of RtI and balanced literacy to improve reading achievement in their classrooms by functioning as a coherent PLC.
The overall goal when implementing a tiered response to instruction is to make certain that teachers are meeting the needs of their students through differentiated and tiered level academic support (Tomlinson, 2001; Brimijoin, Tomlinson, 2003; Moon, 2005;). Differentiated learning is supported through the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky (1934/1978) and his work with an MKO and a student’s ZPD. Differentiation is not a strategy or a method to teaching, rather differentiation is a way of thinking about how to deliver instruction to students who are at different levels of learning within the same classroom. Differentiation has gained momentum in the last decade with the implementation of Response to Intervention (RtI). Tomlinson (1999) said that differentiation is, "a way of thinking about teaching and learning that advocates beginning where individuals are rather than with a prescribed plan of action, which ignores student readiness, interest, and learning profile" (p. 108).

Differentiated learning and intervention support opportunities must be developed and implemented through the ongoing data analysis by the classroom teacher and within the grade level PLC. The data-based decision making process within the grade level PLC (Fullan, 2009) will give teachers the tools needed to provide early intervention support in reading so that the number of students who are referred for special education services decreases and reading achievement increases in second grade classrooms.

**Implications of Findings for Research**

The researcher has concluded that there is still research that needs to be conducted in the areas of assessment, professional development, RtI, and leadership support. The first implication for research is determining which assessment systems are most beneficial for teachers to identify struggling students in reading.
The participants at the study site administered multiple assessments throughout the school year which measured multiple skills and standards in literacy; however, the participants relied heavily on the assessment systems with which they were most familiar and comfortable, not necessarily the ones that determined at-risk students.

The universal screening assessments, MAP and DIBELS, assesses the five reading skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and reading comprehension) as outlined by the National Reading Panel (2000); however, how the data is displayed and reported from these screenings is different. How the teachers analyze and utilize the data collected from both screenings needs to be addressed with further professional development. Grade level PLCs must also determine the overall effectiveness of similar assessments being administered to children during the same assessment window.

Further work needs to be conducted concerning identifying which assessment systems are most beneficial for identifying at-risk students and how, over time, the data collected from students may be analyzed and utilized to increase reading achievement.

The second finding for research is the impact that professional development has on staff involved with the implementation of newly launched initiatives, specifically the training received by support personnel and an administrative team. Not all of the participants at the study site were trained on the components of balanced literacy, nor did they all receive training from the staff developers at Teachers College. Also, not all of the support personnel received professional development training concerning how to utilize the reporting features on the MAP universal screening tool to identify struggling students. Strickland (2002) mentioned in her previous work the importance of professional development with all involved personnel in the intervention process for it to be a success.
The challenge of professional development does not simply begin at the school level, but should begin at the collegiate level with pre-service teachers and educational personnel who may be involved with the RtI process (Shemoff, Kratochwill, & Stoibler, 2003; Kratochwill & Shemoff, 2004; White, Kumpke, & Kratochwill, 2007). The role of professional development, “focuses on all students on the knowledge, skills and attitudes required of teachers, administrators and other school employees so all students can learn and perform at high levels” (Sparks & Richardson, 1997, p. 3). Further research needs be conducted on the sustainability of an initiative once the initial professional development has been provided, such as looking at the types of professional development perceived by the teachers to be most effective to sustain a program and to increase productivity in a PLC.

The third finding for research is communication on the purpose of the intervention process at a school. Teachers need to communicate the tiered response to instruction to parents and what instruction and intervention looks like in a school. Most communication at the study site about the RtI process was communicated via the school counselor, not the classroom teacher. Most, if not all, communication from the parents of students moving through the tiers of intervention support were referred to the school counselor for information about student intervention support and questions. Further research should be conducted on how teachers perceive the intervention process as it relates to academic achievement, communication with parents, interventions, assessments, and observations to be effective with increased achievement in reading.

At the study site, all intervention team meetings were attended by the entire grade level PLC, school counselor, school psychologist, math and literacy facilitator, school administrator,
and the parents of the referred student. Some parents mentioned to the school counselor that the number of unfamiliar faces at their child’s meeting was overwhelming.

Further research needs to be conducted concerning how parents perceive the RtI model of instruction and its impact on their student’s achievement in reading.

The last finding for further research is the impact that the school leadership team has on the change process. Because RtI is a school improvement initiative, creating a culture of change on how the implementation and sustainability of the initiative is carried out is a must. In order for schools to move forward, change must happen. Fullan (2009) says that change is not temporary, but lasting. In order to have lasting change, leadership must come from within the school. Staff members must be able to dig in and “learn deeply in context” (p. 16). This context is through active engagement, reflection, and the ability to “be change agents in collaboration with others” (p. 16). Further research needs explore how the culture of RtI changes the perceptions of instruction and student achievement at a school and how the principal views the change process and its sustainability over time.

Conclusion

The role of RtI in schools is fairly new. Kame’enui (2007) thought that having a discussion about RtI was both, “timely and premature” (as cited in Barnhardt, 2009, p. 209). However, just two short years after Kame’enui’s comment, NAEP scores in 2009 confirmed that 68% of fourth grade students nationally scored below the proficient level in reading (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010, p. 44). North Carolina was ranked twenty-ninth of fifty states in the number of fourth grade students scoring below proficiency at 68%. This meant that only 32% of students tested in the fourth grade across the state of North Carolina were deemed proficient in the area of reading. Additionally, according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2010), “A major
cause of retention is failure to master the knowledge and content needed to progress on time and that, in a great many cases, is the result of not being able to read proficiently as early as fourth grade” (p.8).

This statement supports the state of North Carolina’s Read to Achieve (2012) initiative in recognizing the need to tend to the literacy skills of students in kindergarten through third grades so that children in the fourth grade can read at a proficient level, for the achievement gap to decrease, and for fewer students to be referred for special education services.

Six core principles associated with the RtI model of instruction are aligned with the theoretical lens of Vygotsky (1934/1978) and his work with the socio-cultural theory in which children learn in social contexts through assistance with an MKO and within their instructional ZPD and Fullan’s (2009) organizational change theory. These six RtI core principles are (Jackson, Pretti-Frontczak, Harjusola-Webb, Grisham-Brown, & Romani, 2009, pp. 425-426):

1. Many tiers are used to ensure maximum support for each child.
2. Instruction is implemented with high quality.
3. Core curriculum that is used is research-based.
4. A data collection system consisting of both formative and summative sources of information is employed.
5. Procedures are identified for the selection and revision of instructional practices.
6. Measures are used to monitor the fidelity of the implementation.

Furthermore, these six core principles support the goals of RtI which were evaluated through the PET-R survey at the study site. The implementation of RtI and strengthening the core instruction at tier I provided teachers with a sound instructional base to begin moving towards increasing student achievement in second grade classrooms.

The purpose of this study was to determine how teachers perceived the implementation of RtI and its impact on student achievement in second grade classrooms. With the timeliness of response to intervention (RtI) and the mandated legislation of Read to Achieve in the state of
North Carolina; teachers, support personnel, and school leadership teams must begin to evaluate the effectiveness and the role that RtI has in student achievement and special education services.

Through the implementation of balanced literacy and RtI, the participants at the study site felt due to the strong support from both the district and the school, they were able to increase student achievement in reading and reduce the number of referrals for special education services. Professional learning community time was preserved. Funding was provided for professional development in both balanced literacy, and RtI. Resources were provided by the district and school leadership team to assist with successful implementation of both balanced literacy and RtI.

It is the hope of this researcher that because of this work, other school districts will look at the successful impact having proper assessment systems and support for teachers have on improving student achievement in reading, so that by the time that a child gets to fourth grade, it isn’t too late to remediate and intervene with students.
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Appendix A

Second Grade Benchmark Goals and Cut Points for Risk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Score Level</th>
<th>Likely Need for Support</th>
<th>Beginning of Year</th>
<th>Middle of Year</th>
<th>End of Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Composite Score</td>
<td>At or Above Benchmark</td>
<td>Likely to Need Core Support</td>
<td>141+</td>
<td>190+</td>
<td>238+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Benchmark</td>
<td>Likely to Need Strategic Support</td>
<td>109-140</td>
<td>145-189</td>
<td>180-237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well Below Benchmark</td>
<td>Likely to need Intensive Support</td>
<td>0-108</td>
<td>0-144</td>
<td>0-179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NWF-CLS</td>
<td>At or Above Benchmark</td>
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<td><strong>DORF Words</strong></td>
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<td>0-54</td>
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<td><strong>DORF Accuracy</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td>0%-92%</td>
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<td><strong>Retell</strong></td>
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<td>0-12</td>
<td>0-17</td>
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<td>Retell and Quality of Response</td>
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<td>Well Below Benchmark</td>
<td>Likely to need Intensive Support</td>
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*Dynamic Measurement Group, Inc., 2010, p. 7*
### Appendix B

**DIBELS Assessments and Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIBELS Assessment (SubTest)</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS First Sound Fluency (FSF)</td>
<td>The assessor says words, and the student says the first sound for each word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Letter Naming Fluency (LNF)</td>
<td>The student is presented with a sheet of letters and asked to name the letters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Phoneme Segmentation Fluency</td>
<td>The assessor says words, and the student says the individual sounds for each word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF)</td>
<td>The student is presented with a list of VC and CVC nonsense words (e.g., sig, rav, ov) and asked to read the words.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency (DORF)</td>
<td>The student is presented with a reading passage and asked to read aloud. The student is then asked to retell what he/she just read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIBELS Daze</td>
<td>The student is presented with a reading passage where some words are replaced by a multiple choice box that includes the original word and two distractors. The student reads the passage silently and selects the word in each box that best fits the meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Early Literacy Diagnostic: Text Reading and Comprehension**

- **Print Concepts**
- **Reading Behaviors**
- **Oral Comprehension**
- **Written Comprehension**

The student is able to comprehend while reading connected text accurately and fluently.

**Early Literacy Diagnostic: Word Recognition**

The student is able to read high frequency words with accuracy and fluency.
Amplify Education, (2013,) Retrieved from:
https://www.mclasshome.com/wgenhelp/DN3DR/tablet/Reading_3D/Assessment_Scoring/Assessment_and_Scoring.htm
### Appendix C

**CASE 21 Assessment and Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Results</td>
<td>Students projected achievement level on end of grade test, percentage correct, and suggested letter grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depth of Knowledge</td>
<td>Students ability to engage with content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core State Standards Strand Results</td>
<td>Students ability to answer questions aligned to Reading Literature, Reading Information, and Language strands of the Common Core State Standards for Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genre Results</td>
<td>Students ability to answer questions which fall under Fiction, NonFiction/Informational Text, Poetry, Science, Social Studies, and Technology/Consumer Text genres</td>
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## Appendix D

### MAP Assessment and Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Measure</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Map for Primary Grades (K-2)</td>
<td>Basic early literacy skills aligned to the Common Core State Standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAP –Common Core (2-5)</td>
<td>Literacy skills aligned to the Common Core State Standards</td>
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Appendix E

**PET-R Survey and Description of Each Component**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of PET-R</th>
<th>Description of Component</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goals, Objectives, Priorities</td>
<td>Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored to research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teachers of reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Programs and Materials</td>
<td>The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Time</td>
<td>A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction/Grouping/Scheduling</td>
<td>Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration/Organization/Communication</td>
<td>Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from Kame’enui and Simmons, 2003, pp. 4-11*
Appendix F

Research Question and Data Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance</td>
<td>Assessment Results (DIBELS, MAP, CASE21)</td>
<td>Second Grade Classroom Teachers (5 classroom teachers, one special education teacher, one school counselor, one reading intervention teacher, one intervention coach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Group Interview</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Group Interview (Primary Data Set)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PET-R Survey</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities?</td>
<td>Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>Second Grade Classroom Teachers (5 total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Group Interview (Primary Data Set)</td>
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</table>
## Research Questions, Possible Focus Group Questions, Related Themes, and Codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Possible Focus Group Questions</th>
<th>Themes Which May Emerge</th>
<th>Code Which May Be Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance? (Related to Vygotsky)</td>
<td>1. How do you feel about the Response to Intervention Framework?  2. How do you feel about incorporating small group instruction into your instructional day?  3. What are the benefits of having guided reading groups? What are some negatives about having guided reading groups?  4. What do you think are the benefits to utilizing Response to Intervention?  5. What are the limitations with implementing the Response to Intervention Framework?</td>
<td>1. Instructional Groups  2. Data  3. Assessments  4. Interventions  5. Student Achievement  6. Personalized Education Plans  7. Guided Reading Groups</td>
<td>Q1-1IG (Instructional Groups)  Q1-2SD (Student Data)  Q1-3BPMA (Benchmark, Progress Monitoring Assessments)  Q1-4EIP (Early Intervention Programs)  Q1-5STA (Student Achievement in Reading)  Q1-6PEP (Personalized Education Plans)  Q1-7GRG (Guided Reading Groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative</td>
<td>1. What is your opinion about your Professional Learning Community in regards to literacy</td>
<td>1. Communication  2. Time  3. Student Data  4. Collaboration  5. Relationships  6. Content</td>
<td>Q2-1GLC (Grade Level)  Q2-2TM (Time Management)  Q2-3SD (Student Data)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. What is your opinion about the professional development that you received this year?

3. How do you feel your collaboration with the grade level PLC contributed to student achievement in reading?

4. Did the professional development that you received assist you in implementing Response to Intervention at all three tiers?

5. Did the professional development you receive impact your teaching and student achievement in reading?

6. How do you feel about the multiple initiatives implemented this year impact your teaching and student learning/achievement in reading?

7. Knowledge Professional Development

Adapted from Curtis-Whipple, 2011, pp. 61-62
Appendix H

A variety of genres were assessed at each of the three assessment periods. On the first round of CASE21, fiction (6 questions), poetry (6 questions), science (6 questions), and technology (6 questions) passages were assessed. On the second round of CASE21, fiction (6 questions), poetry (6 questions), science (6 questions), and social studies (6 questions) were assessed. On the final round of CASE21, fiction (8 questions), poetry (7 questions), science (6 questions), social studies (6 questions), and technology (5 questions) were assessed.

Second Grade 1st Administration of CASE21 Reading Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>AVG Perc</th>
<th>PROJ Perc</th>
<th>AVG Sugg</th>
<th>DOK 1</th>
<th>DOK 2</th>
<th>DOK 3</th>
<th>RI 1</th>
<th>RI 2</th>
<th>L 1</th>
<th>Fiction N=6</th>
<th>Poetry N=6</th>
<th>Science N=6</th>
<th>Tech N=6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>81-C</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
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<th>DOK 2 N=13</th>
<th>DOK 3 N=7</th>
<th>RL N=10</th>
<th>RI N=12</th>
<th>L N=8</th>
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<th>Science N=6</th>
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### Second Grade 3rd Administration of CASE21 Reading Test

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<th>RL N=10</th>
<th>RI N=12</th>
<th>L N=8</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix I

Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs - Revised (PET-R)

Edward J. Kame'enui, Ph.D.
Deborah C. Simmons, Ph.D.

IDEA
Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement
College of Education
University of Oregon

Revised May, 2003


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This form is a fillable PDF document. You must have Adobe Reader (available for free from Adobe’s website: http://www.adobe.com/) in order to complete this form electronically (the form can also be printed and completed by hand).

To complete the form:
1) Select the Hand tool.
2) Position the pointer inside a form field, and click. The I-beam pointer (or cursor symbol) allows you to type text and the Pointing Finger icon lets you select a button, check box, radio button, or an item from a list.
3) After entering text or making a selection, do any of the following:
   • Press Tab to accept the form field change and go to the next field.
   • Press Enter (Windows) or Return (Mac OS) to accept the form field change and deselect the current fields. In a multi-line text form field, pressing Enter or Return creates a paragraph return in the same field. You can use Enter on the keypad to accept the change.
   • Press Esc to reject the form field change and deselect the current form field.
4) Once you have filled in the appropriate form fields, do one of the following:
   • Choose File > Save As, and rename the file to save the form with the data you entered.
   • Print the Form.

IMPORTANT DIRECTIONS FOR SCORING:

Each item has a value of 0, 1, or 2 to indicate the level of implementation (see below). Please note that some items are designated with a factor, (e.g., x 2). Items with this designation are considered more important in the overall reading program. Fill in the blank with your item rating score using the 0 to 2 scale.

If you are completing this form electronically, the correct overall item score (i.e., the level of implementation rating multiplied by the appropriate factor) will be automatically calculated within the form. In addition, the total point value and percent of implementation will be automatically calculated for each section, and for the totals on page 12.

If you are completing this form by hand, you will need to calculate the item scores, totals, and percent of implementation for each section yourself, using the directions on the next page.

In the right-hand column of the table, document evidence available to support your rating for each item:

Levels of implementation Description

0 = Not in place
1 = Partially in place
2 = Fully in place

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Planning and Evaluation Tool for
Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs - Revised

School: _______________________________  Date: _____________

Position (check one):  Current Grade(s) Taught (if applicable):
_________________  Kindergarten
Teacher  First
Paraprofessional/Educational Assistant  Second
Grade Level Team  Third

Years of Teaching Experience: __________  Years at Present School: __________

Directions

Based on your knowledge of your school's reading program (e.g., goals, materials, allocated time), please use the following evaluation criteria to rate your reading program's implementation.

Each item has a value of 0, 1, or 2 to indicate the level of implementation (see below). Please note that some items are designated with a factor, (e.g., x 2). Items with this designation are considered more important in the overall reading program. Fill in the blank with your item rating score using the 0 to 2 scale, then multiply your item rating by the indicated factor. Put the total score in the “Total Item Score” blank below the item.

In the right-hand column of the table, document evidence available to support your rating for each item.

Levels of Implementation Description

0 = Not in place
1 = Partially in place
2 = Fully in place

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# Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

## Internal/External Auditing Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Goals, Objectives, Priorities</strong> – Goals for reading achievement are clearly defined, anchored to research, prioritized in terms of importance to student learning, commonly understood by users, and consistently employed as instructional guides by all teachers of reading. Goals and Objectives:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. are clearly defined and quantifiable at each grade level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. are articulated across grade levels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. are prioritized and dedicated to the essential elements (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) in reading. <strong>The score for this item should be multiplied by 2.</strong> Total Item Score: 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. guide instructional and curricular decisions (e.g., time allocations, curriculum program adoptions). <strong>The score for this item should be multiplied by 2.</strong> Total Item Score: 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. are commonly understood and consistently used by teachers and administrators within and between grades to evaluate and communicate student learning and improve practice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0 / 14 Total Points = 0 % Implementation

---

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## EVALUATION CRITERIA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. Assessment</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruments and procedures for assessing reading achievement are clearly specified, measure essential skills, provide reliable and valid information about student performance, and inform instruction in important, meaningful, and maintainable ways.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A schoolwide assessment system and database are established and maintained for documenting student performance and monitoring progress. The score for this item should be multiplied by 2. Total Item Score: 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Measures assess student performance on prioritized goals and objectives.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Measures are technically adequate (i.e., have high reliability and validity) as documented by research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. All users receive training and follow-up on measurement administration, scoring, and data interpretation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. At the beginning of the year, screening measures identify students’ level of performance and are used to determine instructional needs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Progress monitoring measures are administered formatively throughout the year to document and monitor student reading performance (i.e., quarterly for all students; every 4 weeks for students at risk).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. **Assessment** continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Student performance data are analyzed and summarized in meaningful formats and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>routinely used by grade-level teams to evaluate and adjust instruction. The score</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for this item should be multiplied by: 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Item Score: 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The building has a &quot;resident&quot; expert or experts to maintain the assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>system and ensure measures are collected reliably, data are scored and entered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accurately, and feedback is provided in a timely fashion.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0 / 20 Total Points - % Implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION CRITERIA</td>
<td>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Instructional Programs and Materials - The instructional programs and materials have documented efficacy, are drawn from research-based findings and practices, align with state standards and benchmarks, and support the full range of learners.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A comprehensive or core reading program with documented research-based efficacy is adopted for use school wide. The score for this item should be multiplied by: 3</td>
<td>Total Item Score: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The instructional program and materials provide explicit and systematic instruction on critical reading priorities (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). The score for this item should be multiplied by: 2</td>
<td>Total Item Score: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The instructional materials and program align with and support state standards/scientifically based practices and provide sufficient instruction in essential elements to allow the majority of students to reach learning goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Supplemental and intervention programs of documented efficacy are in place to support students who do not benefit adequately from the core program. The score for this item should be multiplied by: 2</td>
<td>Total Item Score: 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Programs and materials are implemented with a high level of fidelity. The score for this item should be multiplied by: 3</td>
<td>Total Item Score: 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
0 & 22 & 0 \\
\end{array}
\]
\[
\text{Total Points} = \frac{0}{22} \times 100 \% \text{ Implementation}
\]
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IV. Instructional Time - A sufficient amount of time is allocated for instruction and the time allocated is used effectively.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A schoolwide plan is established to allocate sufficient reading time and coordinate resources to ensure optimal use of time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reading time is prioritized and protected from interruption. The score for this item should be multiplied by: 2 Total Item Score: 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Instructional time is allocated to skills and practices most highly correlated with reading success (i.e., essential elements of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students in grades K-3 receive a minimum of 30 minutes of small-group teacher-directed reading instruction daily. The score for this item should be multiplied by: 2 Total Item Score: 0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Additional instructional time is allocated to students who fail to make adequate reading progress.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0 / 14 Total Points = 0 % Implementation
### V. Differentiated Instruction/Grouping/Scheduling

Instruction optimizes learning for all students by tailoring instruction to meet current levels of knowledge and prerequisite skills and organizing instruction to enhance student learning.

1. Student performance is used to determine the level of instructional materials and to select research-based instructional programs.

2. Instruction is provided in flexible homogeneous groups to maximize student performance and opportunities to respond.

3. For children who require additional and substantial instructional support, tutoring (1-1) or small group instruction (< 6) is used to support teacher-directed large group or whole class instruction.

4. Group size, instructional time, and instructional programs are determined by and adjusted according to learner performance (i.e., students with greatest needs are in groups that allow more frequent monitoring and opportunities to respond and receive feedback).

5. Cross-class and cross-grade grouping is used when appropriate to maximize learning opportunities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
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</table>

Total Points = \( \frac{0}{10} \) Implementation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VI. Administration/Organization/Communication - Strong instructional leadership maintains a focus on high-quality instruction, organizes and allocates resources to support reading, and establishes mechanisms to communicate reading progress and practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Administrators or the leadership team are knowledgeable of state standards, priority reading skills and strategies, assessment measures and practices, and instructional programs and materials.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Administrators or the leadership team work with staff to create a coherent plan for reading instruction and implement practices to attain school reading goals.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Administrators or the leadership team maximize and protect instructional time and organize resources and personnel to support reading instruction, practice, and assessment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Grade-level teams are established and supported to analyze reading performance and plan instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Concurrent instruction (e.g., Title, special education) is coordinated with and complementary to general education reading instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. A communication plan for reporting and sharing student performance with teachers, parents, and school, district, and state administrators is in place.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0 / 12 Total Points = 0 % Implementation
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EVALUATION CRITERIA</th>
<th>DOCUMENTATION OF EVIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VII. <strong>Professional Development</strong> - Adequate and ongoing professional development is determined and available to support reading instruction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Teachers and instructional staff have thorough understanding and working knowledge of grade-level instructional/reading priorities and effective practices.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ongoing professional development is established to support teachers and instructional staff in the assessment and instruction of reading priorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Time is systematically allocated for educators to analyze, plan, and refine instruction.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Professional development efforts are explicitly linked to practices and programs that have been shown to be effective through documented research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 0 | 8 | Total Points = \( \frac{8}{8} \times 100 \) % Implementation |

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# Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

## Individual Summary Score

**Directions:** Return to each element (e.g., goals; assessment) and total the scores at the bottom of the respective page. Transfer each element's number to the designated space below. Sum the total scores to compute your overall evaluation of the schoolwide reading program. The total possible value is 100 points. The total score can be used to evaluate the overall quality of the school's reading program.

Evaluate each element to determine the respective quality of implementation. For example, a score of 11 in Goals/Objectives/Priorities means that in your estimation the school is implementing approximately 80% of the items in that element.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Goals/Objectives/Priorities</td>
<td>0 / 14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Assessment</td>
<td>0 / 20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Instructional Practices and Materials</td>
<td>0 / 22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Instructional Time</td>
<td>0 / 14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Differentiated Instruction/Grouping</td>
<td>0 / 10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Administration/Organization/Communication</td>
<td>0 / 12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Professional Development</td>
<td>0 / 8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Score</strong></td>
<td>0 / 100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

**School Summary Score**

**Calculating Average Schoolwide Element Scores:** Enter each individual's score by element on the following table. Sum down each column and divide by the number of participants to achieve an average school score for each element.

Calculate the proportion of total points for each element by dividing the average element score by the total possible points. This will provide the percentage of total points earned for each element.

**Calculating Average Schoolwide Overall Scores:** Enter the total scores of each individual in the designated space. Sum down the Total column and divide by the number of participants to achieve an average overall score for the school.
# Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

## Average Schoolwide Overall Scores

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</tbody>
</table>

**Number of Participants:**

Points Possible:

- Goals: 14
- Assessment: 20
- Instr. Plan.: 22
- Instr. Time: 14
- Smiling: 10
- Admin.: 12
- Prof. Dev.: 8
- TOTAL: 100

Percentage of Total Points:

- Goals: 0%
- Assessment: 0%
- Instr. Plan.: 0%
- Instr. Time: 0%
- Smiling: 0%
- Admin.: 0%
- Prof. Dev.: 0%
- TOTAL: 0%

*NOTE: In order to have the mean and overall percentages automatically calculated, you must enter the number of participants in the indicated field.

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Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

Narrative Summary

1. Based on the schoolwide summary scores for each element and the average total schoolwide score, identify the areas of strength. Strengths may be based on elements or on specific items within elements.

2. List each element and specific items within each element that are in need of further development.
### Planning and Evaluation Tool for Effective Schoolwide Reading Programs

#### Reading Action Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of School, District</th>
<th>City, State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Reading Goals and Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal/Priority #1</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal/Priority #2</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When:</td>
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Appendix J

Study Title: Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of a Tiered Response to Intervention to Raise Student Achievement in Second Grade Classroom: A Formative Program Evaluation Study

Dear __________________________,

My name is Vicki Douvikas. I am a Doctoral student in the College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Curriculum and Instruction, and I would like to invite you to participate.

I am studying teachers’ perceptions on program implementation in second grade classrooms. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a survey about reading instruction in your second grade classroom and then at a later date, participate in a question and answer session for approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. The question and answer session will be in a group setting in a secure location at your school. Specifically, you will be asked questions about reading instruction, professional learning communities, and the Response to Intervention framework. The question and answer session will be audio taped so that I may accurately reflect on what is discussed. I will be the sole person who will transcribe and analyze your responses. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, it will be stored and locked in a safe with your Signed consent document for three years.

If you feel uncomfortable answering any questions in this study, you have the option to not answer any question you do not wish to. Although you probably will not benefit directly from participating in this study, I hope that others in the educational community in general will benefit from the study’s findings about teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of response to intervention and its impact on student achievement.

Participation is confidential. So, please do not write your name or other identifying information on any of the study materials. Study information will be kept in a secure, locked location for three years. This includes all your comments from the PET-R survey and from the question and answer session, along with your Signed consent document.

Others in the group will hear what you have to say, and it is possible that they could tell someone else. Because we will be talking in a group, I cannot promise that what you say will remain completely private, but I will ask you and all other group members respect the privacy of everyone in the group.

Taking part in this study is optional. You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide to not answer any question in which you are uncomfortable answering. Your participation
in this study and your responses in the survey and focus group will not impact your performance evaluation.

I will be more than happy to answer any questions you have about this study. You may contact me via telephone: (980) 343-6948 or Douvikas.v@husky.neu.edu or my advisor, Dr. Margaret Dougherty at m.dougherty@neu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Nan Regina at Northeastern University, Human Subject Research Protection, 360 Huntington Avenue, 960 RP, Boston, MA 02115 or via telephone: (617) 373-4588 or via email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish. For a list of questions to consider asking before volunteering to participate as a research subject, please visit the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services Office for Human Research Protections public outreach web site.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please sign the attached consent form and return in to Vicki Douvikas.

With Kind Regards,

Vicki L. Douvikas
112 Farm Springs Dr  
Mount Holly, NC 28120  

November 27, 2013  

Jeffrey Ruppenthal  
7905 Pleasant Grove Rd.  
Charlotte, NC 28216  

Dear Mr. Jeffrey Ruppenthal:  

I am writing to request your permission to recruit staff members at Mountain Island Elementary for my doctoral dissertation. I propose to explore teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of a tiered response to instruction and student achievement in second grade classrooms.  

This is a formative evaluation and the potential participants will be asked to complete an online survey, as well as, being asked several questions about the implementation process at your school. I am requesting your permission to recruit eight to ten staff members who meet the criteria of either being a second grade teacher and/or support staff who are a part of the implementation process at your school. In addition to requesting access to your staff, I am also requesting permission to utilize a secure location in your building to meet with potential recruits. I will need the space for approximately ninety minutes.  

I have enclosed a copy of my IRB application as well as my letter of invitation and signed consent form for this research. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this letter or my research, please contact me at Douvikas.v@husky.neu.edu or at 702-301-0390. You may also contact my advisor, who is also the Principal Investigator for this study, Dr. Margaret Dougherty at m.dougherty@neu.edu.  

Sincerely,  

Vicki Douvikas  
Ed.D. Candidate  

[Signature]  
[Principle, Mountain Island School]  
12-2-13
Appendix L

"Thank you for coming today and volunteering to take part in this question and answer session about implementation of a tiered response to instruction and student achievement in second grade classrooms. I have brought you together so that I can learn from you and your feelings about multiple initiatives being implemented last year and their impact on student achievement. This is an open forum for you to tell me about your experience and the impact that the implementation had on reading instruction, your professional learning community, and Response to Intervention. I want to know how well the implementation went, or even how bad."

"This question and answer session will allow you to be as honest as possible so that when others review this study, they can alter their implementation of initiatives based on your perceptions and your students' achievement. I will ask you to reference your experience from last year. You can even point to how things have changed this year as way to tell your story."

"I am going to audio tape this session so that I can study what you have said, but it goes no farther than this group. I will be the sole person to analyze and transcribe your comments and what you have to say will have no impact on your performance evaluation. Anything that you say will be held in strict confidence."

"When you have something to say, please state your name each time. When I listen to the audio tape to analyze your comments, I will not be able to see who is speaking, so saying your name allows me to relate comments back to the person who said them. Please remember that a pseudonym will be used in this study, so that no comments can be traced back to you. If
you choose to not answer a question, that is perfectly fine. Please remember that you can answer any question with which you feel comfortable."

"If you don't have any questions, we can begin. I expect for this question and answer session to take approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. When I ask a question, please feel free to jump in, but please remember to state your name before answering any question."

1. **How do teachers perceive the implementation of a tiered model of instruction and its impact on student performance?**

The question and answer questions which will be used to address the first research question are:

1. How do you feel about the Response to Intervention framework?
   
   PROBE: What is your role within the framework?
   PROBE: Who are the other personnel involved with the framework?
   PROBE: Does the personnel help or hinder the intervention process?

2. How do you feel about incorporating small group instruction into your instructional day?

3. How do you feel about the assessments systems which are currently in place to assist you with instruction and student achievement in your classroom?
   
   PROBE: Do these assessment systems (CASE21, DIBELS/TRC, MAP) assist you with instructional decisions? How?
   PROBE: What do you feel are the most useful assessments in place to help students achieve and to assist you with teaching and planning?

4. What do you think are the benefits to utilizing Response to Intervention?

2. **What do teachers perceive as the strengths and limitations of working as a collaborative team through the implementation of professional learning communities?**

The question and answer questions which will be used to address the second research question are:

1. What is your opinion about your professional learning community in regards to literacy and response to intervention?
PROBE: Why type of collaboration took place during your professional learning community?

2. What is your opinion about the professional development that you received in regards to reading instruction and response to intervention?

3. How do you feel your collaboration with the grade level professional learning community contributed to student achievement in reading?

PROBE: Describe how the impact, if any, the professional learning community had on student achievement.

4. Did the professional development that you received, assist you in implementing Response to Intervention at all three tiers?

PROBE: Do you feel as though you referred students for Intervention Team more frequently, less frequently, or the same because of the implementation of the Response to Intervention framework?

5. Did the professional development you received impact your teaching and student achievement in reading?

PROBE: How would you describe your professional development from the Teachers College and its impact on reading instruction in your classroom?

6. How do you feel about multiple initiatives being implemented in one school year to increase student achievement and your teaching?

PROBE: What would be your recommendations to other sites implementing the tiered response to instruction?

PROBE: What would make the transition better?

"Thank you so much for your comments and thoughtful answers. I anticipate having your comments ready for your review in about one month. It will be at that time that you will have the opportunity to edit anything that may have been misinterpreted by myself, the researcher of this study. I will provide you with a specific editing window in order for you to read over this section of the research."
"Again, thank you so much for your time. Have a wonderful evening!"