How a Grade One English Teacher Implements Reading Instruction in her Classroom

Using Response to Intervention

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores how a grade one English Language Arts teacher in an elementary school in the greater Montreal area implemented reading instruction and intervention within a Response to Intervention (RtI) approach. An essential component of RtI is evidence-based instruction required to ensure that all children develop foundational reading skills. Another component of RtI includes early reading intervention for students not attaining those early skills, which is critical to closing the gap before more significant reading challenges occur (NRP, 2000). Reading gaps are small in the early elementary grades. However, if left unaddressed, they continue to grow until they begin to interfere with students' success in all content areas (AECF, 2010). The focus of this study was to examine practical examples of RtI, with a focus on reading practices, and how to implement them within the classroom. The methodology used in this study followed a qualitative design, exploring the implementation of the RtI model in a grade one classroom. The overarching research question was: How does an English teacher in the Greater Montreal area implement the Response to Intervention model with her grade-one students? The sub-questions that were explored to answer the overarching question were: 1) what practices does she implement to help readers and 2) what is the teacher's definition of a successful RtI model? I conducted a thematic analysis of interviews and observations, identifying four themes. These themes provided valuable insights leading to an increased understanding of the RtI approach and the importance of early evidence-based reading instruction and intervention.

Résumé

Cette étude qualitative explore la façon dont un enseignant d'anglais de première année dans une école primaire de la région métropolitaine de Montréal a mis en œuvre l'enseignement de la lecture et l'intervention dans le cadre d'une approche de Réponse à l'Intervention (RàI). Une composante essentielle de la RàI est l'enseignement fondé sur des données probantes, nécessaire pour s'assurer que tous les enfants acquièrent des compétences fondamentales en lecture. Une autre composante de la RàI comprend l'intervention précoce en lecture pour les élèves qui n'atteignent pas ces compétences de base, ce qui est essentiel pour combler l'écart avant que des problèmes de lecture plus importants ne surviennent (NRP, 2000). Les écarts de lecture sont faibles dans les premières années du primaire. Cependant, si elles ne sont pas comblées, elles continuent à croître jusqu'à ce qu'elles commencent à entraver la réussite des élèves dans toutes les matières (AECF, 2010). L'objectif de cette étude était d'examiner des exemples pratiques de RàI, en mettant l'accent sur les pratiques de lecture, et sur la manière de les mettre en œuvre dans la salle de classe. La méthodologie utilisée dans cette étude a suivi un modèle qualitatif, explorant la mise en œuvre du modèle RàI dans une classe de première année. La question principale de la recherche était la suivante : Comment une enseignante d'anglais de la région métropolitaine de Montréal met-elle en œuvre le modèle de réponse à l'intervention avec ses élèves de première année ? Les sous-questions qui ont été explorées pour répondre à la question principale étaient les suivantes : 1) quelles pratiques met-elle en œuvre pour aider les lecteurs et 2) comment l'enseignante définit-elle un modèle RàI réussi ? J'ai procédé à une analyse thématique des entretiens et des observations, qui a permis d'identifier quatre thèmes. Ces thèmes ont fourni des informations utiles qui ont permis de mieux comprendre l'approche RàI et l'importance d'un enseignement et d'une intervention précoces en matière de lecture, fondés sur des données probantes.

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Contribution of Authors

The primary author of this thesis is Adam Gazith. Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber supported and edited the writing of this thesis. The data was collected and analyzed by the primary author, Adam Gazith.

List of Tables and Figure

Chapter One: Introduction

In this chapter, I highlight the significance of evidence-based reading interventions in developing students' reading skills. One research question and two sub-questions related to reading instruction formed the foundation of the observations and interviews. The overarching research question guiding this study was: How does an English teacher in the Greater Montreal area implement the Response to Intervention model with her grade-one students? The sub-questions that were explored to answer the overarching question include 1) What practices does she implement to help readers and 2) What is the teacher's definition of a successful RtI model? I position myself as the researcher, providing background information about my experiences, first as a teaching assistant and then as a classroom teacher. I explain my passion for the RtI approach and evidence-based instruction that emerged from my experiences. Response to Intervention (RtI) is a tiered, multilevel system that provides evidence-based teaching to support students at different levels of need. Tier 1 involves effective classroom instruction for all students, Tier 2 provides small group instruction for students not at grade level, and Tier 3 offers intense, individual instruction for those who do not respond to Tier 2.

Positioning Myself in the Study

In 2015, I began working as an assistant teacher at a private elementary school in Montreal. At the same time, I was a student obtaining a specialization in Early Childhood and Elementary Education at Concordia University. My experience in the classroom provided additional insight and exposure to struggling readers and different teacher interventions to support these students. In addition to the required Concordia school internships, I benefitted from my classroom exposure at a school in the early stages of RtI implementation. I worked in many

elementary grades and subject areas, gaining diverse experience in reading instruction and interventions. My responsibilities included working in Grade One with an English Language Arts teacher with over twenty years of experience. I also worked in many other grades and subject areas as needed by the school.

After graduating from Concordia University, I was hired as an English Language Arts teacher in Grade Five at the same private elementary school where I worked as an assistant teacher. I had just graduated with a four-year degree in teaching and thus wanted to ensure that I was implementing the evidence-based teaching pedagogy I had learned about in my university courses. Evidence-based teaching refers to teaching practices that are grounded in empirical evidence. I was passionate about ensuring student mastery in all disciplines and had learned that evidence-based instruction within an RtI approach was essential to student success. I saw firsthand the positive impact an effective RtI model can have on all students, specifically struggling readers.

When I began to work as a teacher, I was introduced to the RtI model as it was slowly implemented schoolwide. I observed the Universal Screening of students to assess if they acquired the foundational reading skills. Similarly, I witnessed resource teachers provide them with the support required to develop reading proficiency. I saw colleagues implement strategies such as the Repeated Reading approach (Vaughn, 2002) to build reading fluency and Shrink the Paragraph (Vaughn, 2002) to enhance comprehension. As a new teacher in the school, I was excited to begin implementing these evidence-based strategies. Therefore, this study focused on

how a grade one teacher implements RtI in her classroom, which emerged from my nascent classroom experience, after witnessing the broad range of reading abilities in various classrooms.

Reading Intervention and Response to Intervention

One of the most important elements of RtI is using a tiered, multilevel system that supports students at different levels of need. The multilevel system encourages educators to help students at varying levels, ensuring they receive the support they require to succeed. Evidence-based teaching is another fundamental tenet of RtI built upon a three-tiered support model Tier 1 is practical, evidence-based classroom instruction to all students. Tier 1 assumes that students within the whole classroom setting are receiving instruction that is both effective and evidence-based. Tier 2 supports students who are not functioning at grade level and therefore, are at risk of falling further behind. Students requiring Tier 2 instruction are removed from the classroom and given small group instruction in the target area where they need improvement. Finally, Tier 3 is for students who do not respond to Tier 2 interventions and who show a significant gap between their performance and grade-level expectations (Robinson & Hutchinson, 2016). RtI incorporates effective, evidence-based classroom teaching practices or "instructional approaches shown by high-quality research to result reliably in generally improved student outcomes" (Cook et al., 2012, p. 493). Hutchinson and Robinson (2016) state that in a classroom that follows evidence-based teaching and incorporates the essential elements of RtI, 80% of the students should reach grade-level expectations without requiring additional Tier 2 or Tier 3 support. Fifteen percent will require small group instruction in Tier 2, and five percent will require intense, individual instruction in Tier 3. However, it is important to note that all students receive Tier 1 instruction (Robinson & Hutchinson, 2016). For the effective implementation of RtI, several additional

components must be incorporated, such as collaborative problem-solving, data-based decision-making, and quality instruction.

Collaborative problem-solving involves a team of educators working together to identify at-risk students and provides them with the required support. Data-based decision-making involves using data to guide decisions at all levels. Quality instruction involves providing high-quality, evidence-based instruction to all students at all levels. Students must be evaluated and screened. With proper data, school personnel can make informed, data-driven decisions and provide solutions to support students where needed. Research on RtI has shown that when implemented by a schoolwide intervention model, most students will reach grade-level expectations before graduating (Bessette, 2020).

Data collection is crucial for providing early intervention support. Early intervention depends on early screening using curriculum-based measures, such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). The DIBELS website describes "a set of procedures and measures for assessing the acquisition of literacy skills" (n.a, 2022). DIBELS is a tool used to evaluate students' foundational literacy skills and is especially helpful because it indicates potential areas of difficulty. Educators use DIBELS to collect data, help inform instruction, and plan necessary interventions. The universal screening is designed to be quick and repeated three times a year, at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. DIBELS offers 20 different forms for each measure, which take at least one minute to administer. Additionally, two to four benchmark measure assessments are available. All assessments and additional information about the

DIBELS assessments are free to download at dibels.uoregon.edu (Good et al., 2002). If an educator wants the data management system, there is a charge.

In addition to DIBELS, there are many other assessments available. Universal Screening is an essential aspect of RtI that aims to screen all students to ascertain if they are mastering grade-level reading skills (Vaughn, 2002). RtI also aims to identify students below grade level and provide them with the support required to reach grade-level expectations. Ongoing progress monitoring, conducted on students assessed as not meeting grade-level skills, is an essential component of this model because it is used to identify whether the interventions for these struggling students are effective.

The Big Five elements of Literacy, which include phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, form the foundational skills for reading success (NRP, 2000). Phonemic awareness involves manipulating individual phonemes, or sounds, in words. For example, a child would have mastered phonemic awareness if they can identify the three sounds in the word dog as, /d/, /o/, /g/. Phonics is understanding the relationship between sounds and letters and how they form words. For example, children need to be able to read the word *dog* by mastering the letter sounds that make up the word. Fluency is the ability to read with speed, accuracy, and expression so that children can focus on the meaning of what they read rather than struggling to decode the words. Vocabulary refers to the words readers understand, enabling them to know what they read. Finally, comprehension is the ability to understand written text (National Reading Panel, 2000). The screening tools mentioned above, such as DIBELS (DIBELS, n.d) assess students' foundational skills like phonemic awareness and fluency, enabling educators to provide immediate support for students who are at risk.

As mentioned above, students who are at risk and require individual, explicit, instruction are removed during whole-classroom instruction. Explicit instruction involves teaching a specific skill or concept. During explicit instruction, the teacher breaks tasks, concepts, or skills into smaller steps and models each step for the student. The teacher then provides guided practice, where the students practice the skill with support and feedback before allowing them to be more independent as they gain mastery (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to examine how an English Language Arts educator at an independent elementary school in the Greater Montreal area implements the Response to Intervention approach in a Grade One classroom. The goal was to provide a contextualized understanding of the components needed to implement the RtI model. I believed that a contextualized understanding of how one teacher implements the RtI model in an elementary school would help to support other educators and give them a real-life example of how to apply RtI in their classroom. The study examined the evidence-based practices implemented by the teacher through classroom observations and explored the rationale behind the use of these practices. Also, I believed the interviews with the Grade One teacher would provide other educators with a clearly explained rationale behind using these practices. The overarching question for this study was:

How does an English teacher in the Greater Montreal area implement the Response to Intervention model with her grade-one students? The sub-questions included:

1. What practices does she implement to support struggling readers?

2. What is the teacher's definition of success?

Summary

This chapter described how I became interested in RtI and explained that RtI is a three-tiered model that aims to identify at-risk students and provide them with early intervention. The RtI model emphasizes the importance of evidence-based teaching practices in the classroom and the use of data collection to inform and implement interventions. Also, it introduced DIBELS, a tool for screening students' literacy skills. The effective implementation of RtI requires collaborative problem-solving, data-based decision-making, and evidence-based instruction. I shared my observations of RtI implementation in the independent school where I work. I explained that this study aimed to examine how an English Language Arts educator implements RtI in a grade-one classroom, providing a framework and practical examples for other educators.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on literature related to the research topic. I begin with the importance of the literature review in qualitative research as well as the literature on the value of early intervention in reading and its impact on supporting early literacy. I review research examining the difference between early reading achievement and future success and the literature on the emergence of RtI, focusing on its contribution to supporting struggling readers. Finally, I review the literature on effective and evidence-based teaching practices. Effective evidence-based instruction is one of the most essential elements of the RtI approach. Therefore, I examine evidence-based instructional approaches that are successful approaches for teaching reading instruction. After reviewing the evidence-based instructional practices, I focus on evidence-based strategies, specifically for reading instruction. I include the research conducted by the National Reading Panel (NRP, 2000) established by the U.S. Congress. The panel comprised 14 people, including scientists in reading research, representatives from colleges, educational administrators, and parents (NRP, 2000). Next, I focus more specifically on struggling readers. Finally, I review the research examining evidence-based steps to implement the RtI approach effectively.

A literature review is essential for preparing to conduct research because it situates the study within the existing knowledge and identifies gaps and opportunities for further research. Also, it provides a theoretical framework to support the research and identify relevant theories and concepts for understanding the study (Boot et al., 2016). Additionally, the review brings to light research questions that previous studies still need to answer and the most suitable research methods to answer the research questions (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005). Finally, a literature

review can help ensure the research quality by providing a basis for critically assessing the research methods and findings (Baxter & Jack, 2018).

The Importance of Early Intervention in Reading

The literature suggests that early identification and intervention are essential to help students struggling with reading. If interventions are not implemented and students do not receive the support they require, gaps in reading achievement continue to grow. Therefore, educators and schools who wish to support their students must implement an intervention approach to support the needs of their students.

Research in reading instruction substantiates the association between reading achievement in grade one and future academic success. Future academic success specifically refers to reading skills and how to encourage students to be life-long readers. Juel (1998) conducted a longitudinal study following 54 first and fourth-grade students. The study found that children who were poor readers in grade one were much more likely to remain poor in the ensuing years. The reading development of the bottom quartile of children, consisting of 29 children, was analyzed. The mean score of the 29 students on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) was K6, meaning they were at a level equivalent to the middle of kindergarten. Of these 29 children, 24 remained in the school by the end of the fourth grade. All but three of the 24 remaining students were poor readers in fourth grade, reading at least six months below grade level. The same children had a mean score of 3.5, a level equating to the middle of grade three. Juel's study (1988) found that "the probability a child would remain a poor reader at the end of the fourth grade if the child was a poor reader at the end of first grade, was 0.88; the probability

that a child would become a poor reader in fourth grade if he or she had at least average reading skills in first grade was 0.12" (Juel, 1988, p. 450). Juel's longitudinal study (1988) found that children reading competently by the end of first grade continued to excel in these areas in the following years. Similarly, children who struggled with reading by the end of the first grade struggled throughout elementary and high school (Juel, 1988). The study indicated that early intervention is crucial in ensuring successful literacy development. Research has shown that early intervention can be highly effective in improving reading achievement and preventing reading difficulties from becoming more severe. However, this study does not show how early intervention should be implemented to ensure successful literacy skills.

A study by Torgensen et al. (2001) found that early reading intervention in first grade was associated with significant gains in reading achievement and language skills over time, specifically for students who were at risk. Torgensen et al., posit that difficulties with reading in grade one continue to spiral downward if they are not addressed and almost always lead to difficulties in grade four and beyond. Torgensen provides empirical evidence that early intervention can help prevent reading difficulties among young children. Early intervention is essential to ensure that children at risk for future reading difficulties receive the support they require to succeed. Additionally, Torgenson highlights the ubiquity of reading difficulties in the United States. Torgensen explains that 20% of children in the U.S. struggle with reading, a figure that is even higher among low socioeconomic families. These authors suggest the importance of early intervention for students struggling with reading achievement. However, once again, the study lacks practical examples of what effective early intervention looks like in a first-grade classroom. (Torgensen et al., 2001).

Similarly, reading difficulties affect many other areas, such as poor overall academic performance and low self-esteem, which continue to impact students long after graduation. Torgensen et al. (2001) suggest that evidence-based instructional practices focused on the Big Five of reading, including phonemic awareness training, phonics instruction, and fluency-building lessons, are crucial to early intervention. Students must receive intervention as early as possible, making them more likely to become proficient readers (Torgensen, 2004). Another critical aspect of early intervention programs is assessment. Screening and progress monitoring are essential for identifying students who are at risk for reading difficulties. Similarly, assessments and progress monitoring can help tailor the instruction to the needs of each student. Torgensen explains that reliable, valid, and appropriate assessments must be selected. What this study does not do is provide ways of doing this. I would argue that my study provides a practical example of how to conduct early intervention.

Stanovich and Cunningham (1992) state the importance of early intervention as well. They introduce "The Mathew Effect" in reading, (Stanovich & Cunningham) a term coined from the Gospel of Mathew chapter (25:29). This phenomenon refers to people who have an advantage in one area, for example, reading, who tend to continue gaining the advantage over time. This means students who are strong readers tend to enjoy reading; therefore, they read more, further improving their skills, which makes them enjoy reading even more, making them more inclined to read, and so the cycle continues. The same is true of children who have trouble with reading and tend to fall further behind if no intervention is implemented. Stanovich and Cunningham (1992) explain that students who are strong readers in grade one continue to improve their reading and reading comprehension throughout the elementary school years. More

recent research by Vellutino et al. (2004) followed 1,000 children from first through fourth grade. Their research found that early identification and intervention for reading difficulties in first grade was related to significant improvement in reading achievement and fewer difficulties over time.

Students with reading difficulties struggle to meet grade-level expectations, and the gap grows larger because their progress is not commensurate with growing grade-level expectations. Vellutino et al (2004), found that early reading ability was strongly correlated with reading ability in later years, and students who struggled with reading in grade one fell further behind. Stanovich and Cunningham (1992) suggest that children reading below grade level should receive immediate intervention and additional support to help close the gap between them and their peers.

Snowling and Hulme (2012) expand on the importance of early intervention in reading as a key to preventing the Mathew Effect. They found early intervention activities in small groups, or one-on-one instruction, helped students reach grade-level expectations. They explain that reading requires a wide range of skills, including decoding, fluency, and comprehension. They argue that difficulties in any of these areas can cause problems in reading; therefore, intervention must be designed and tailored to each student's needs. For example, interventions targeting specific decoding skills are more effective than general classroom instruction. These authors also explain that early intervention can be particularly important for students from low socioeconomic families, preventing them from falling further behind and helping them close the gap to reach grade-level expectations (Snowling & Hulme, 2012). Early intervention is especially important for students from low socioeconomic families because they are more likely to enter school with

gaps in reading (Blanchard, 2023). By providing students with targeted intervention and support, educators can help close the reading gaps and ensure students have equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of socioeconomic status.

The traditional model of identifying and supporting students with learning challenges was based on the "wait to fail" model (Robinson & Hutchinson, 2016). Students struggling academically needed to show a two-year gap between their performance and grade-level expectations (Robinson & Hutchinson, 2016). Students were also required to show a discrepancy between their IQ and academic performance. Specifically, the foundation for this faulty construct came from research conducted on the Isle of Wight by Maughan, Rutter and Yule (2020). According to Maughan et al. (2020), one could not expect a child with a below-average IQ to reach grade-level expectations. Therefore, educators would only expect them to reach minimal academic mastery. In 2004, in the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) proclaimed that the IQ performance discrepancy was invalid (Beaujean et al., 2018 because many students with learning disabilities may not show significant discrepancies between their IQ scores and their academic achievement. Additionally, students could not be labeled as learning disabled if their education was not evidence-based. The "wait-to-fail model" and the lack of adequate support provided for at-risk students led to the need for an alternative model of support, eventually leading to the promulgation of the RtI model. This study focuses on examining how a grade 1 teacher implements the RtI model in her classroom

Many teachers, administrators, policymakers, and school leaders were left looking for a more reliable identification process and intervention approach to support students struggling with

reading as well as students with learning disabilities (Fuchs et al., 2015). In 2000, RtI gained

widespread attention in the United States. RtI provides a solution and an alternative to traditional

approaches. The three tiers of the RtI model (mentioned in Chapter One) guarantee that all

students will receive instruction that is proven by science to be effective, implemented within a

system that provides multiple levels of support and service. (Fuchs et al., 2015). RtI ensures

students receive evidence-based instruction and that the chance of becoming a struggling reader

is reduced because instruction is evidence-based (Fuchs et al., 2015).

Similarly, Fuchs et al. (2015) suggest that RtI is regarded as a more reliable identification

method. Evidence-based practices and instruction which are part of the RtI approach serve a dual

purpose of simultaneously supporting students below grade-level expectations and identifying

students with learning difficulties. Fuchs et al. (2011) explain that instruction is the test stimulus,

and the student's level or rate of performance is her response. Students labeled "responsive" to

Tier 1, or the core instruction, continue receiving evidence-based practices in the classroom.

Students not responding to whole classroom instruction are moved to Tier 2 small group

instruction. Students not responding in Tier 2 move to Tier 3, individual and more intense

instruction. Students' responsiveness to the RtI approach, specifically Tier 3, can help determine

whether the student may have a learning disability and require further assessment. Fuchs et al.

(2015) acknowledge the limitations of using RtI in identifying students with learning difficulties.

One criticism is that if instructional practices that are not evidence-based are implemented, they

cannot be used to determine the student's progress. Similarly, Fuchs et al. (2015) explain that it

might take about eight to ten weeks with targeted intervention within a tier to begin to see

progress. Therefore, identifying students may take multiple weeks to assess if the intervention is effective.

The Effectiveness of Response to Intervention

Response to intervention has emerged as an effective approach to support at-risk or struggling readers. This section will review the literature on RtI's effectiveness in helping students with difficulties, especially concerning reading.

Al-Ozinat (2021) cites many studies researching the effectiveness of the RtI model. Calendar (2007) completed a study investigating the effectiveness of implementing the RtI model and compared it to more traditional models. The students' results were examined before and after implementation. The study involved 1400 grade three students selected from 150 schools. The students were divided into two separate groups. One group received a reading intervention program following the RtI model and the second group received a reading program based on the traditional school curriculum. The research showed that the students in the first group, who received instruction based on the RtI model, outperformed the second group, who received a traditional school curriculum, in reading achievement.

Al-Ozinat (2021) cites another study by Peterson et al. in 2007. This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the RtI approach. The study included 556 eighth-grade participants and followed them from 1999 to 2003. The results, using a mixed-method approach, showed that students improved at an average and constant rate of 1% each year between 1999 and 2003. Furthermore, 98% of teachers reported that RtI provided an effective learning environment for

all students. The teachers were satisfied with the program's effectiveness in improving student performance.

Al-Ansari (2009) researched the effectiveness of the RtI approach, specifically examining the developments of word recognition, an essential component of phonics. A total of 100 fourth and fifth-grade students were randomly selected and evaluated. To evaluate the students, a combination of standardized tests and classroom assessments was employed. These assessments measured students' word recognition skills before and after the implementation of the RtI approach. The results showed that an RtI approach managed to reduce the percentage of students with learning difficulties by 66.66%. Similarly, the performance of 20 students improved. The research showed that student improvement continued for students in the school employing the RtI model, indicating its effectiveness.

Another important study by Hite and McGahey (2015) examined whether students' test scores in Georgia were positively influenced by implementing the RtI model. The study included a sample of students from multiple schools across Georgia, with a control group of students who did not receive RtI support and an experimental group who did. The results were evaluated using the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT). Hite and McGahey (2015) hypothesized that students following the RtI model would perform better on the standardized CRCT test than students not receiving RtI support. The data showed that students supported through the RtI model scored 20.84 points higher in mathematics and 14.72 points higher in reading than those the RtI model did not support. Similarly, 100% of the students in RtI model schools and classrooms met grade-level standards for reading, and 37.5% exceeded these

standards. 87.5% of students met standards in mathematics and 12.5% exceeded mathematical standards. Hite and McGahey's (2015) research also showed that 12.5% of students who previously did not meet standards on the CRCT in mathematics improved by an average of 11.25 points. Students' perceptions and attitudes toward their academic abilities were also polled before and after the study. The study's results confirmed the researchers' hypothesis that "the students performed better on state-mandated tests after receiving explicit instruction designed by the RtI program. Likewise, students' perceptions of themselves and their academic abilities increased due to their improved problem-solving abilities" (Hite & McGahey, 2015, p. 38).

Finally, Lipka and Siegel (2010) conducted a longitudinal study that followed kindergarten students to grade nine. The students participating in the study attended 30 different schools within a school district in Canada. The longitudinal study included 622 students, 530 who spoke English at home as their primary language, and 92 students learning English as a second language. All 622 participants, regardless of their proficiency in English, received the same English language classroom instruction. The participants also included a wide range of socioeconomic status and linguistic backgrounds. Undergraduate and graduate students were trained to administer assessments to each child individually. Three basic reading tests were administered throughout the longitudinal study. The researchers collected data following students with a standard deviation of one standard deviation or more below the mean and students below the 25th percentile. The researchers noticed very few differences between the progress of English students and English second language students.

The results of the longitudinal study showed that 119, or 22.5%, of English first language students were reading below the 25th percentile in kindergarten. In grade seven, only nine, or 1.7%, of all English first language students were reading below the 25th percentile. Similarly, 28, or 30.4%, of all English second language participants were reading below the 25th percentile. In grade seven, only four, or 4.3%, English second language students were reading below the 25th percentile. Lipka and Siegel (2010) also examined the correlation between socioeconomic status and reading skills. They report that the socioeconomic levels of each school were relatively similar. Their research suggests a strong correlation between socioeconomic level and literacy skills, citing a correlation of 0.60, like previous literature on the subject. They found that groups with low socioeconomic status, in both the English first language and English second language groups, improved the most due to schooling. Similarly, cases of dyslexia decreased as students were subject to reading programs such as RtI.

This relates to RtI as the findings demonstrate how the RtI model can significantly improve students' academic performance and perceptions, particularly for those initially struggling, thereby supporting the overall effectiveness of the RtI approach.

This section clearly outlines the effectiveness of the RtI model. RtI is an effective model in ensuring at-risk students are provided with early intervention to ensure they reach grade-level expectations. However, once again, absent from the literature is a clear and practical example of what an effective intervention model looks like.

Leadership

A study conducted by Leithwood et al. (2004) explained the correlation between school leadership and student achievement. The research analyzed various school and educational systems across the world. The study suggested that effective school leadership significantly contributes to improved student achievement. Schools with effective leaders had higher levels of student achievement compared to schools with ineffective leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004). Effective leaders created a school culture that promoted academic excellence, provided high-quality instruction, and fostered a sense of community and belonging among the students and staff (Leithwood et al., 2004). They suggest the importance of leadership in implementing an effective RtI model.

Evidence-Based Instruction

In the previous section, I discussed the literature on the effectiveness of RtI. All the quantitative data suggests that RtI is an effective approach in identifying and supporting students with learning difficulties, especially in reading. Therefore, after establishing that RtI is an effective approach and an appropriate model to support students, the next step is to examine how to implement this model.

An important study conducted by Al-Zayat in 2006 identified and diagnosed students with learning difficulties. The study found that many students with low achievement were misdiagnosed with learning difficulties. The study included 504 students in third and fourth-grade schools in Egypt. Of all the participants, 60%, previously diagnosed with learning disabilities, responded to early intervention in Tier 1 and remained in the classroom. The

research suggests that 60% of the students were misdiagnosed as having learning difficulties simply due to low academic achievement. However, they responded effectively when the RtI model was implemented properly, and the students received evidence-based teaching practices and instruction. The findings exhibit the importance of effective, evidence-based practices in the classroom.

Tier 1 of the RtI model is classroom instruction based on effective and evidence-based practices. As mentioned above, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, passed in 2004, stated that students could not be labeled as learning disabled if their education was not evidence-based. Tier 1 must begin with effective evidence-based practices in the classroom to ensure the full potential and effectiveness of the RtI approach in identifying and supporting students with learning difficulties. Therefore, this section will examine literature and research on evidence-based practices in reading instruction.

Foorman and Torgesen (2001) provide an overview of effective classroom reading instruction. Research on successful teaching in the classroom has been shifting in the past 30 years. In the 1960s and the 1970s, success in reading was based on the effects of reading on the student's achievement and performance. In the 1980s, research on effective reading instruction centred on the relationship between process and product. This refers to the connection between the instructional methods used to teach reading, the process, the student outcomes, and the product or results. In the 1990s, research focused on teachers' best practices. The whole language approach to reading emerged as a prominent method during the 1980s and 1990s. This approach emphasized the importance of context and meaning in reading instruction, focusing on

the integration of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Instead of teaching phonics and decoding skills in isolation, the whole language approach encouraged students to engage with authentic texts and literature, promoting a love for reading through exposure to rich and meaningful language experiences. Proponents of this method believed that reading should be a natural and enjoyable activity, akin to learning to speak, where understanding and comprehension are prioritized over rote memorization of phonetic rules (McNaughton & Williams, 2009). The approach suggested that language learning should be holistic and contextual, fostering a deep connection with the text and its meaning (Liu, 2017). Finally, research today focuses on implementing empirical research and evidence-based practices

Five Components of Evidence-Based Teaching

Brown-Chisdey and Steege (2010) identify five components for effective, evidence-based teaching: 1) content, 2) delivery, 3) pace, 4) responses, and 5) assessment.

1) Content

Content refers to what is being learned. The content of what is being learned can vary from class to class. However, two identified teaching concepts have been proven to be effective. The first is to ensure the content is related to the overall curriculum. Research suggests that teaching is more effective when the lesson is connected to the larger curriculum. This means that teaching is more effective when different subjects are connected. The second evidence-based instructional practice concerning content is the order in which it is taught. Studies show that when educators teach concepts in a logical order, it is easier for students to master the content. Building on previous content and continuing to follow a logical order has proven to be an effective instructional approach (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

2) Delivery

The second aspect of effective, evidence-based instruction is how content is delivered and presented to the students. The first effective delivery method is direct and explicit instruction. This is described as providing students with specific instructions, rules, procedures, and details required for a lesson. The second effective delivery method is providing students with practice opportunities. The authors (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010) provide an example of multiplication facts. Studies suggest that students are more successful in learning multiplication facts if they have ample opportunities to practice. The third effective delivery method is providing students with continuous exposure to the content. Using the same example of multiplication facts, students should have access to multiplication fact cards or other materials in the classroom while practicing the concepts.

3) Pace

The third component of effective teaching is pace. Pace refers to the speed at which lessons are introduced and taught. The first effective practice related to pace is massed practice. This involves a lesson in which all activities relate to one learning outcome. For example, having students learn, repeat, and review a concept until it is mastered. The second effective practice related to pace is judicious review. This involves allowing students to recall previously introduced information consistently and regularly (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

4) Response

The fourth component of effective teaching is response. Response relates to the importance of the interactions between students and educators. Educators must praise students when they respond correctly, and the teacher should validate and reinforce students throughout the learning process. Research shows that if teachers reinforce student responses, they are more

likely to repeat those responses in the future. Conversely, when students answer incorrectly, educators must provide corrective feedback (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

5) Assessment

After response, relating to the interactions between students and educators, the final component of effective teaching practices is summative and formative assessments. Formative assessments occur regularly and typically take the form of curriculum-based assessments of students' foundational skills or assessments that evaluate student mastery of the curriculum. For example, if students are learning phonics and sound-letter associations, students would be assessed on that skill. The aim of formative assessment is for the teacher and students to know if the students are reaching their learning goals. Educators should constantly assess their students. The data should be collected so that teachers can immediately understand which students do not understand the lesson and have not mastered the learning targets for that lesson. Teachers should respond accordingly by reteaching those skills to the target students.

Summative assessment is also an important aspect of effective teaching. Summative assessments allow educators to determine whether significant, often end-of-unit learning goals have been achieved. Summative assessments are essential for effective instruction because they enable educators to respond accordingly. Various studies have suggested that the earlier RtI is implemented, the more effective it is and the less it will cost (NCRTI, n.d.). Formative and summative assessments provide information and data so the educator can understand which students need additional support, which students need reinforcement, and when the students are ready to move on to the next topic.

Classroom Management

Emmer and Sobarnie (2014) discuss the importance of classroom management and its correlation to academic achievement. They argue that a positive classroom environment can promote positive student behaviour which in turn, leads to academic achievement. Conversely, a negative environment can lead to disruptive behaviour and poor academic performance. They offer many strategies for creating a positive classroom environment, such as setting clear expectations and rules, using positive reinforcement, and building strong relationships with the students. Emmer and Sobarnie suggest that effective classroom management can help prevent disruptive behaviour in class and lead to improved academic performance. Classroom management is important because it enhances the effectiveness of evidence-based teaching and reading instruction.

Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

As mentioned earlier in this review, in the late 1990s, the United States Congress commissioned a select group of experts to form a reading panel to research how children learn to read. In 2000, The National Reading Panel (NRP) published evidence-based practices on reading instruction. The NRP provides research and empirical evidence on five key components of reading instruction: 1) phonemic awareness, 2) phonics instruction, 3) vocabulary, 4) fluency, and 5) comprehension (NRP, 2000).

1) Phonemic Awareness

The NRP explains that phonemes are the smallest sound units in a spoken language. English has 44 phonemes, meaning there are 44 sounds in English (Roach, 2009). Phonemes are combined to form words. Important elements of phonemic awareness include the ability to process, segment, blend, and delete phonemes in a word and identify the phonemes. For

example, a child with phonemic awareness can identify that the word dog has three phonemes: /d/ /o/ /g/. The NRP provides seven evidence-based practices that help phonemic awareness: 1) Phoneme isolation is recognizing individual sounds in words, for example, asking a child to tell you the first sound in the word, dog, is /d/. 2) Phoneme identity requires students to recognize common phonemes in different words, such as mom and mop, start with the same sound, and 3) phoneme categorization requires students to identify phonemes that do not belong in a given sequence. For example, in the word "cat," the phonemes /c/, /æ/, and /t/ belong to the "c," "a," and "t" sounds respectively. However, if the phoneme /s/ is added to the beginning, it would not belong because it changes the word to "scat." 4) Phoneme blending requires students to blend a word. For example, using the phonemes /d/, /o/, /g/ and stretching out the sounds to form the word dog. 5) Phoneme segmentation requires students to break a word into its phonemes by counting the number of phonemes in the word. For example, the word "dog" has three phonemes, /d/, /o/, /g/. 6) Phoneme manipulation refers to replacing a phoneme in a word with another one, such as replacing the *d* in dog to an *f* to form the word fog. Finally, 7) phoneme deletion requires students to delete a phoneme from the presented word. For example, dog without the *d* makes "og." The NRP reviewed hundreds of research studies to identify the most effective literacy practices to ensure students become proficient readers. The NRP (2000) explains that phonemic awareness "is thought to contribute to helping children learn to read because the structure of the English writing system is alphabetic" (Samson, 2023, p. 39). The NRP cites 52 articles in which the researchers compared one group of students taught phonemic awareness with a control group, students who received regular classroom instruction. Each group's reading ability was compared after receiving either the phonemic awareness instruction or regular classroom instruction without a focus on this critical skill. The studies showed that

students who received phonemic awareness teaching showed higher reading ability than the

control group, who received standard reading instruction, and did not receive phonemic

instruction. On average, the students who received phonemic awareness instruction read a

standard deviation higher than the control group. The NRP explains that teaching phonemic

awareness is most effective through explicit instruction, which refers to teaching students each

step in the process, one step at a time, and following a guided practice approach of modelling the

strategy and then gradually giving over responsibility without teacher support until students have

mastered the skill (NRP, 2000). Similarly, teachers should teach one or two types of phonemes

instead of multiple types at a time. Phonemic awareness should also be taught in small groups,

and instruction should be provided to each student, or at least, teachers should make sure that

each student is mastering this critical skill by allowing individual students to respond to prompts

rather than choral responses to prompts, as suggested by Torgesen and Mathes (1998). When all

students are asked to respond to the prompt simultaneously, it is difficult for the teacher to

ensure that each student is mastering the skill (NRP, 2000). Teachers should also explicitly show

students the relationship between phonemic awareness, reading, and writing. Finally, instruction

should only last for a short period. Research (NRP, 2000) suggests that phonemic awareness

instruction should last at most 25 minutes at a time.

2) Phonics Instruction:

Phonics instruction is the second essential component of evidence-based reading

instruction. Phonics instruction teaches students the alphabetic system, the relationship between

letters and sounds, spelling patterns, and how to apply these skills to read. Effective phonics

instruction must be explicit and aim to connect letters to sounds and vice versa. This includes

teaching students how to decode words by connecting specific letters or graphemes to their

corresponding phonemes. In the case of graphemes such as "ph," explicit phonics instruction

involves teaching students that specific letter combinations represent certain phonemes. For example, "ph" is commonly associated with the /f/ phoneme. By explicitly teaching the correspondence between these graphemes and phonemes, students can learn to decode words accurately. Students use this knowledge to read texts with controlled vocabulary. After explicitly teaching students this relationship, teachers should provide them with predictable texts or words made up of letter sounds the students have already mastered to ensure they are decoding previously learned letter-sound combinations. The NRP reports that "findings supported the conclusion that systematic phonics instruction makes a more significant contribution to children's growth in reading than alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction" (NRP, 2000, p.92). They also compared three different types of phonics programs: 1) synthetic phonics, which teaches students to connect letters and phonemes and blend the sounds to form recognizable words; larger-unit phonics and miscellaneous phonics programs; 2) larger-unit phonics programs, which focus on blending larger parts of words as well as smaller phonemes, and 3) miscellaneous phonics programs which focus on larger aspects of words. The research did not show any significant differences in the three approaches. However, by a slight margin, synthetic phonics was shown to be the most effective approach, and miscellaneous phonics was shown to be the least effective approach. Research also indicates that phonics instruction was most effective when taught early. Phonics instruction introduced in kindergarten and grade one has been proven more effective than phonics instruction implemented after grade one. (NRP, 2000).

Phonics instruction introduced between second and sixth grade showed a mean effect size of d = 0.27. Finally, the NRP (2000) compared one-on-one, small-group, and whole-classroom

instruction. Although the research did not show significant differences, one-on-one instruction was proven to be the most effective by a slight margin, and whole-classroom instruction was the least effective by a small margin. Research suggests that phonics instruction "produces gains in reading and spelling not only in the early grades, but also in the later grades, and among children having difficulty learning to read" (NRP, 2000, p. 122).

3) Fluency

The third component of reading instruction identified by the NRP (2000) is fluency. Fluency is the ability to read a text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression. The NRP states that reading fluency is an essential aspect of reading that is often neglected. This is important because fluency is one of the foundational elements of early literacy. The NRP also explains that focusing on reading fluency is important because students, at least in the United States, are not reading at grade-level expectations. The NRP cited a study that found a direct correlation between fluency and reading comprehension. Students who do not read fluently struggle to understand the meaning of what they are reading because too much mental energy is devoted to reading the words, leaving limited mental energy on the meaning of the text (NRP, 2000).

The NRP explains that students who do not read fluently will continue to have difficulty and require more effort to read, regardless of their IQ (NRP, 2000). Repeated oral reading has been proven to help improve reading fluency and reading achievement. Similarly, the NRP found no research supporting the idea that silent reading improves reading ability. In addition, fluency should be assessed regularly to ensure students are reading at grade level. One such assessment is the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), where students read grade-level texts out loud. The words read accurately are calculated and compared to grade-level expectations. Students are expected to answer basic comprehension questions to ensure they are not solely focused on reading as fast

as possible. The research shows that the difference between poor and good readers is their total reading time. The NRP cites research conducted by Allington (1984) that showed poor readers read as little as 16 words per week, and strong readers read as many as 1933 words in the same amount of time.

Additionally, the NRP (2000) cites Nagy and Anderson (1984), whose research suggested that good readers read ten times more words than poor readers throughout a school year. Another study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), found that good readers read an average of 1.8 million words per year, while poor readers only read about 200,000 words per year (NAEP, 2004). The research reaffirms Stanovich's (1986) theory of the "Mathew Effect" in reading mentioned above, claiming poor readers continue to digress, and strong readers continue to improve, widening the gap between the two groups. The NRP explains that previous instructional approaches for improving fluency focused on round-robin reading. Round-robin reading is the more traditional approach where each student reads a small passage as their turn arises. However, round-robin reading has been criticized for many reasons. Most importantly, there has been no evidence suggesting round-robin reading improves reading fluency or reading achievement. The NRP references many studies, evaluating the efficacy of more effective instructional practices concerning fluency. The studies suggest that repeated reading, neurological impress, radio reading, and paired reading are most effective. Repeated reading refers to reading the same text many times until they can read it fluently, with speed, accuracy, and expression. Neurological impress refers to creating mental images of words and phrases to remember them. Radio reading refers to listening and following along to a text out loud and then reading that same text out loud. Finally, paired reading refers to reading together in pairs. One person reads out loud, and the other follows silently, and then the roles are switched.

These strategies require students to read the same text multiple times. These practices also encourage students to read aloud and increase daily reading. Finally, many suggested practices include feedback to guide and improve the reader's fluency. The NRP references 14 studies that looked at the impact of these strategies on reading fluency. These studies indicated that reading with feedback or guidance was the most effective practice compared to reading alone. An additional 16 studies suggest poor readers benefit more from the abovementioned effective practices. However, the NRP asserts that fluency is essential for the development of students, and all students, good and poor readers alike, should continue to develop fluency with texts at their level. Faulkner and Levy (1999) explain that good and poor readers benefit from evidence-based fluency practices, which improve different aspects of reading. Essential to note is that students must first master decoding before practicing fluency to avoid students visually memorizing words that they have not yet learned to decode. While students with good visual memories may be able to memorize the range of words they encounter in the early grades, as more extensive reading is required in the higher grades, it becomes an impossible task to rely on memorization.

4) Vocabulary

Vocabulary is another aspect included in *The Big Five of Reading*. The importance of vocabulary in reading achievement is attributed to work completed by David (1942), who provides evidence that reading comprehension involves essential skills such as vocabulary and reasoning (NRP, 2000). The NRP report identifies five effective methods of vocabulary instruction. First, explicit instruction is an effective strategy to teach vocabulary, referring to giving students definitions of words to learn. Second, teachers also need to expose students to many words through opportunities to read multiple texts. The third effective method is teaching vocabulary by presenting students with various representations of the word, including the

traditional definition and examples of how the word can be used within a sentence. The fourth method emphasizes vocabulary practice to make reading automatic. Finally, the fifth method refers to the association method, which encourages students to make connections and use what they know about vocabulary to identify vocabulary they don't know (NRP, 2000).

The NRP's (2000) findings emphasize the importance of selecting age and level-appropriate strategies to achieve the best results. The results also suggest that computer vocabulary and technology instruction are more effective than traditional methods and that vocabulary instruction directly correlates to improvement in reading comprehension. Although this method is new, the NRP references multiple studies reporting its effectiveness. Computer technology can be used in addition to direct vocabulary instruction. Similarly, computers can provide students with access to varying texts and media. Online access to vocabulary definitions combines the two.

Researchers (2007) have shown that vocabulary can be learned as a passive or secondary goal while students read or listen to reading. Consistent exposure to vocabulary instruction is essential to improve vocabulary development, and the best improvements are made when activities are consistent over long periods and include activities outside the classroom. For example, consistently practicing and learning new words over a period, both in class and outside of class. Pre-instruction was also an essential component of vocabulary development and reading comprehension. The compiled research findings suggest the need for direct instruction and as much exposure as possible to different vocabulary words (Beck & McKeown, 2007). The vocabulary words taught should be words the students consider useful in other contexts. The vocabulary taught in class should be content-specific to prepare students for content classes such as history, geography, and mathematics. Restructuring texts, for example, replacing more

difficult words with simpler vocabulary words, has been proven to be the most effective strategy in supporting students at risk or having difficulty with vocabulary.

Similarly, vocabulary instruction is most effective when it is engaging and authentic. However, the NRP explains that vocabulary development must occur while students complete other tasks, separate from explicit instruction. This means students should learn new words naturally while participating in authentic activities rather than directly teaching new vocabulary words.

5) Comprehension

The fifth and final element of reading identified by the NRP is comprehension. The NRP explains that reading comprehension is the primary goal of reading instruction. Reading comprehension is essential to academic success and to becoming a lifelong learner (NRP, 2000). The report identifies three themes related to reading comprehension. First, the NRP explains that reading comprehension is a cognitive process that involves complex skills that cannot be separated from vocabulary learning and explicit instruction. Second, active reading strategies are essential to reading comprehension development. Third, teachers play a crucial role in developing reading comprehension by explicitly teaching comprehension strategies.

The NRP (2000) analyzed 203 studies on reading comprehension instruction. Sixteen strategies were identified, and 168 students showed empirical evidence that they improved in reading comprehension. There are many essential elements required to ensure that students become proficient in comprehension. Comprehension monitoring involves teaching students to be aware of their understanding while they read a text and what to do when they do not understand it. Cooperative learning also supports comprehension and involves students working

together as they apply reading comprehension strategies. Graphic organizers help students represent ideas in each text, such as comparisons, differences, and sequences. Story structure helps students answer questions like who, what, where, when, why, and other aspects of a text. Questioning and answering teaches students to answer questions with direct feedback from the teacher. Question generation teaches students to ask themselves questions and make predictions while they read. Summarizing encourages students to identify and write the main ideas of a text and assign meaning to it. Finally, multiple-strategy teaching teaches the students to use many strategies with teacher support (NRP, 2000).

The reading comprehension strategies identified as most effective help students recall, answer, generate questions, and summarize texts. The NRP presents evidence that effective reading comprehension strategies improve scores on standardized comprehension tests. Explicit teaching of effective reading comprehension strategies provides students with opportunities to practice and learn the strategies while simultaneously improving their reading comprehension as they practice the strategy. The empirical evidence reviewed by the NRP suggests that explicitly teaching reading comprehension strategies leads to increased retention and understanding of new texts and general improvements in comprehension (NRP, 2000). The preparation of teachers is an essential aspect of ensuring the effectiveness of teaching reading comprehension strategies. The results compiled by the NRP suggest that teaching specific strategies can improve students' reading comprehension. The report cites four studies that suggest teaching teachers how to instruct effective reading comprehension strategies leads to students' improvement in reading comprehension.

The NRP referenced a study conducted by Brown, Pressley, Van Meter, and Shudder (1996). The researchers developed a strategy instruction program, Students Achieving Independent Learning (SAIL). As part of the instructional approach, strategies are directly taught to students as the teacher's model, coach, and scaffold their instruction. The program emphasizes collaboration between the teacher and students. The study provides empirical evidence that directly teaching specific strategies improves student reading comprehension. In the study, five teachers had at least three years of implementing the SAIL approach. The five SAIL teachers were compared to another five teachers with more experience teaching but without training or experience implementing SAIL. Strategies taught in the SAIL approach included the following: 1) previewing, where students scan the text, including headings, subheadings, and graphics; 2) predicting, which involves students using prior knowledge to predict the information they expect in the text; 3) visualizing, which involves creating mental pictures of the text; 4) clarifying is when students use clues in the text and ask for clarification to understand it; 5) questioning is when students create questions to enhance critical thinking; 6) summarizing which involves reading a section of the text and summarizing the main ideas; 7) evaluating refers to students analyzing the text to identify the author's purpose and, 8) making connections refers to students connecting the text with their personal experiences, other texts and the world around them. Students use monitoring to evaluate their understanding and adjust reading strategies accordingly (Brown et al. 1997). The study participants included second-grade students reading below grade level at the beginning of the study. The results showed that students receiving instruction from the SAIL approach did better on story recall and literal recall of story context and were more analytical in their recall. Also, students who received instruction from the SAIL teachers used more strategies independently and achieved higher test scores on comprehension, word skills,

and the Stanford Achievement Test. Throughout the study, students who received instruction from the SAIL-prepared teachers showed greater improvement and outperformed the other group on subtests and post-tests (NRP, 2000, p.333).

Reading Instruction for Students with Learning Difficulties

The previous section discussed the importance of evidence-based practices in the classroom. As mentioned above, students cannot be diagnosed with learning difficulties if they do not receive evidence-based instructional practices. According to the RtI approach, students who do not respond to the evidence-based practices within the classroom can be placed in Tier 2 and provided with small group instruction. A major tenet of RtI is evidence-based instructional practices. Therefore, examining evidence-based practices to teach students with learning challenges is heavily related to the RtI approach and applies to Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 of RtI. This section will examine evidence-based practices to teach students with learning challenges who need support reaching benchmark goals.

In their article, Rupley, Blair, and Nichols (2009) suggest ways to effectively instruct students with learning difficulties. The article begins by introducing research that reinforces the important role of teachers in ensuring student success. Similarly, the research shows that effective teaching includes direct teaching, which needs to be explicit and systematic. Rupley, Blair and Nichols (2009) define explicit and direct teaching "as imparting new information to students through meaningful teacher-student interactions and teacher guidance of student learning" (Rupley et al, 2009, p.126). The teacher provides clear and structured instructions, models the desired skills or knowledge, and guides the student through the practice. Direct and

explicit instruction are even more important when teaching students with learning difficulties how to read. The authors explain that "Struggling readers are more likely to learn essential reading skills and strategies if the direct or explicit model of instruction is part of the teacher's repertoire of teaching methods" (Rupley et al., 2009, p. 125). Direct instruction is even more important when teaching the five main components of reading discussed in the previous section: phonemic awareness, phonics instructions, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. The article introduces work by Rosenshine and Stevens (1995), who identified six effective, evidence-based practices. The six recommended instructional approaches include reviewing and checking previous work, presenting new material, providing guided practice, giving corrective feedback, providing time for independent practice, and providing weekly and monthly reviews (Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009).

Rupley, Blair and Nichols (2009) distinguish between two learning outcomes: skills and cognitive strategies. Both are required for reading and require different levels of explicit and direct instruction. For example, skills must be specific and automatic and require lower-level cognitive processing. Teacher instruction involving the acquisition of skills must be highly structured. Teachers must teach students essential skills like decoding and analyzing a text and certain reading comprehension strategies, such as summarizing the text, analyzing story structure, and generating questions, to become successful readers.

Conversely, cognitive strategies are less specific and intentional and require higher cognitive processing. Teaching cognitive processes does not need to follow a step-by-step procedure. However, the teacher needs to explain and model what they expect from their students. To become successful readers, teachers must teach students essential cognitive

strategies like predicting, summarizing, critically reflecting, and responding to a text (Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009). These authors assert that students having difficulty reading must master the five major components of reading; phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, to become proficient in reading. If teachers use direct and explicit instruction, their students are more likely to learn (Rupley, Blair & Nichols, 2009).

A study conducted by Juel and Minden-Cupp (2000) examined which instructional practices aid students who enter grade one with low reading achievement in phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge. These researchers suggest four evidence-based strategies for reading instruction for students with learning difficulties. The first strategy is a traditional phonics program where students treat each phoneme as a unit and attempt to blend the sounds. Juel and Minden-Cupp give the practice example of reading the word hat. The teacher should write the word hat and sound out each phoneme, /h/, /a/, /t/. After sounding out each phoneme, make the blending motion to sound out *ha* and, eventually, *hat*. The second strategy is identifying unknown words. For this strategy, students are given imported words printed on cards and posted in the classroom. Students are then taught to break down unfamiliar words into the onset and rime and compare them to the known words on the word wall. The onset refers to a syllable's initial consonant sound or sounds before the vowel. The rime refers to the vowel sound and any consonant sounds that follow it in a syllable. Juel and Minden-Cupp (2000) give the example of "hat." If the students do not recognize the word, they can search the word wall and potentially find the word cat. They can then use their knowledge of the phonemes in the word cat and apply it to read a new word. For this strategy to be most effective, keywords must be explicitly introduced, and each phoneme needs to be broken down and analyzed (Juel & Minden-Cupp, 1999).

Research conducted by Denton et al. (2013) studied the impact of specific interventions on students with reading difficulties. The researchers explain that individualized instruction requires a highly analytical and scientific approach. Teachers need to assess their students' proficiency to identify if they require additional support to reach grade-level expectations. Teachers should adjust the different aspects of instruction, including time, content, materials, and activities. Adjusting time refers to how much time is spent on each activity. Content refers to which reading domain is being addressed. Students should be assessed, and specific areas of difficulty should be identified. For example, additional support should be provided if a student struggles with phonemic awareness. Adjusting materials involves providing additional tools like writing words on paper or teaching the student to use pictograph alphabets that offer visual cues for each letter sound. Finally, activities should also be differentiated depending on each student's requirements. As mentioned above, students may require varying levels of direct or explicit instruction depending on the needs of the students and the content being taught. Denton et al. (2013) explain that individualized instruction provides flexibility for instructing students and meeting their needs. The researchers cite evidence that reading improves among kindergarten, grade one, and grade three students when instruction is individualized. Specifically, additional decoding, phonemic awareness, comprehension, and vocabulary activities have proven especially effective. To appropriately address and support students with reading difficulty, it is important to assess their specific area of need so teachers can provide additional support in that area. For example, if a student knows most of the letter sounds but is expected to know all of them, the educator can support them and teach them letter sounds during small group instruction.

In their study, Denton et al. researched the effects of an intervention program that takes a strategic and analytical approach. Throughout the study, teachers provided additional support in word reading, fluency, text reading, reading comprehension, and daily writing. It is important to note that the teachers involved in the study had a plan outlining the intervention's duration, the planned activities, and the objectives. The instructional activities selected for the intervention program were based on empirical evidence backed by data (Denton, et al. 2013). The results indicated that students receiving the intervention had greater gains than those not receiving the intervention on every reading assessment, such as word reading, phonemic decoding, fluency, and reading comprehension. The students receiving individualized instruction also improved in oral reading, phonemic decoding, and fluency. The study results suggest that an organized, strategic, and analytical intervention program effectively supports students with reading difficulty.

Antoniou and Souvignier (2007) explain that 80% of students diagnosed with learning disabilities demonstrate difficulties in reading. Similarly, approximately 38% of students with learning difficulties quit school (Calhoon, 2005). The main difficulty students diagnosed with learning disabilities face in reading is selecting and using effective strategies, which are essential reading components (Souvignier & Antoniou, 2007). Teachers must use small steps to support students with difficulty and provide guided practice. After providing guided practice, teachers should allow time for lots of individual practice and modeling with reinforcements and corrective feedback (Souvignier & Antoniou, 2007).

How to Implement Response to Intervention

The previous sections highlighted the importance of early reading interventions, the emergence and effectiveness of RtI, and evidence-based reading instruction for whole classroom instruction and students with learning difficulties. This section will review how to implement a response to intervention, providing clear steps. Brown-Chisdey and Steege (2010) clearly outline ten steps to implement an effective RtI approach.

1) Implementing Evidence-Based Practices Within the Whole Classroom.

As mentioned above, the authors of the Education Act of 2004 stated that students should only be identified with a learning difficulty if they receive effective, evidence-based instruction within the classroom. Students in Tier 1 of the RtI model receive instruction that follows empirical data. Brown-Chisdey and Steege (2010) explain that people may assume all educational materials have been researched and proven to be effective. However, that is not the case. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the classroom educator, the department coordinator, and the principal to verify and select practices and materials that have been empirically proven effective. In their book, Brown-Chisdey and Steege state that Tier 1 is the most important in the RtI model. Research suggests that 80% of students should be successful with whole-classroom instruction. If fewer than 80% of students succeed within a classroom, the authors suggest improving whole-classroom instruction (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010). The authors suggest that classroom educators and schools invest in professional development expert consultation and conduct research to ensure that the materials and practices being implemented are data-driven. Educators, department coordinators, principals, and all relevant personnel should be given background information in educational psychology that could be applied to a large group of students. Similarly, the authors suggest an introductory course to research methods so they can

conduct their research on effective evidence-based practices. After providing them with the necessary tools, educators can conduct research and find empirical data investigating effective evidence-based practices. Instructional practices need to be constantly reviewed and analyzed. The authors provide an example of an elementary educator implementing a lesson teaching the letter *b*. After completing the lesson, the educator examines the process using a checklist. The checklist refers to a series of items or criteria the educator can evaluate to assess the lesson. The specific items on the checklist can vary and should include instructional strategies, content, student engagement, differentiation, assessment, and more. Checklists should be used to evaluate the integrity and effectiveness of each lesson, ensuring students in Tier 1 receive evidence-based practices.

Minden-Cupp, Shumaker, and Deshler (2016) investigated the effects of "Just-in-time" intervention on the reading outcomes of first graders who were identified as at risk for reading difficulties. The control group received traditional classroom instruction while the experimental group received just-in-time intervention. The teachers providing just-in-time intervention observed students during reading activities and provided immediate feedback and support based on individual needs. The teachers provided additional instruction and opportunities to practice the specific skills that they were struggling with. The result of the study showed that the students who received just-in-time intervention had significant improvements in their reading accuracy compared to the control group. The control group that received just-in-time intervention also showed significant improvements in phonemic awareness and decoding skills. The results suggest that just-in-time intervention can be an effective approach for addressing the specific needs of students who are at risk for reading difficulties (Minden-Cupp, Shumaker & Deshler,

2016). This study underscores the importance of timely, individualized support within the RtI framework, highlighting how just-in-time interventions align with the core principles of RtI to address the specific needs of at-risk students and improve their reading outcomes.

2) Triannual Universal Screening for All Students

After implementing effective, evidence-based instructional practices within the classroom, the second step is to complete triannual universal screening on all students: in the fall, winter, and spring. There are many universal screening resources, however, the authors explain that universal screening tools must be standardized, valid, and reliable. They suggest various empirically-based tools, such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Once students are universally screened, the data must be managed effectively. The authors explain that most schools implementing the RtI approach enter the data into a computer. The NCRTI (n.d.) explains that a computerized system allows the data to be collected, stored, and analyzed efficiently. It allows educators to track and monitor student progress more efficiently, allowing them to make data-driven decisions.

3) Identify Students at Risk

Once data has been collected, it is important to identify students at risk, and according to the authors, there are two ways to do this. Criterion-based standards are based on a goal that has been proven to predict future outcomes of success, for example, a score of 40 or higher in oral reading fluency on a DIBELS assessment for a grade one student predicts future success. Therefore, all students reading above 40 words are not at risk for future reading difficulties and will not need targeted intervention from the classroom or resource teacher. The other method of identifying students at risk is using normative data, which includes standards or benchmarks set by many students of the same grade locally or nationally. For example, second-grade students

reading above 110 words per minute in the fall are in the 90th percentile. Students reading below 31 words per minute in the fall are in the 25th percentile, and students reading below 15 words per minute are in the 10th percentile. Although there are no set standards for determining which students need to be reviewed further, the authors suggest reviewing students below the 25th percentile.

4) Evidence-Based Small Group Instruction

After identifying at-risk students, the RtI model aims to provide students with additional support, initially within the classroom. The teacher can provide at-level students with independent work while they work with these at-risk students on a specific target skill such as phonemic awareness. However, after a short period, usually two months, if significant improvement is not noted, students would need additional Tier 2 support. The groups should be at most six students, and the focus should be again on targeted skills identified as risk areas according to the date. Similar evidence-based strategies and instructional approaches in Tier 1 can also be applied in Tier 2. However, as mentioned above, Tier 2 instruction should be adapted to the specific skills or cognitive strategies.

5) Progress Monitoring

Providing evidence-based small group instruction in Tier 2 is a foundational step of RtI. However, each student requires additional support in small groups for different lengths of time. The authors suggest keeping students in Tier 2 until three data points based on progress monitoring have been collected, although many will require more time. Progress monitoring should be done at least once every two weeks. The authors clearly explain that even if students are given effective, evidence-based small-group practices during Tier 2 intervention, the only

way to ascertain if the gap is being closed is through progress monitoring (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

6) Data-Based Instructional Decision-Making

Once an appropriate amount of progress monitoring data has been collected, data needs to be analyzed. If the data suggest the student is improving, and thus the gap between their skill level and the grade level expectation is decreasing, the student will remain in Tier 2 and continue to receive small-group instruction until the student is no longer at risk (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010). Once the student has achieved grade-level expectations for six data points, educators can make an informed, data-based decision on whether to reduce intervention or discontinue it completely.

7) Increase Intensity, Duration, and Frequency of Instruction

If students do not respond to the intervention and sufficient progress is not made, strategies must be adjusted or changed altogether. Research shows that students who do not respond to Tier 2 will likely respond to further intervention (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010). However, increased intensity is required. For example, this can refer to increasing evidence-based instructional practices or reducing the group size to provide more attention to the student. The authors introduce the concept of responsive education. With proper data collection, educators can respond to the student's needs and adjust the instruction's intensity, duration, or frequency to fit their needs (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

8) Review, Revise, or Discontinue Small-Group Instruction

As mentioned, if the student is not responding to Tier 2 interventions and adjustments, they are moved to Tier 3. As part of the RtI model, Tier 3 intervention is individualized, and the intensity of support is increased (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

9) Comprehensive Education

If students are not responding to the interventions put in place by the educator, they should be referred for an evaluation. The authors explain that the intensity is the only difference between Tier 2 and Tier 3. The evidence-based instructional methods would likely remain the same between Tier 2 and Tier 3. However, Tier 3 instruction may sometimes replace whole classroom instruction if the student gap is large, requiring intensive intervention. For example, if a student in grade six is not yet decoding, he would likely require intensive intervention during the day that may need to replace core English instruction. It is essential to continue monitoring progress and collecting data for a referral or special education evaluation (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

10) Special Education Eligibility

If, after conducting an evaluation, the student is eligible to receive special education services, the educators responsible for the student's intervention will develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP). All the data collected throughout each tier of the RtI model should be used to identify the student's specific area of difficulty. The data collected through progress monitoring and benchmark assessments can provide more in-depth information and help educators create an effective Individualized Education Plan (Brown-Chisdey & Steege, 2010).

Summary

This chapter discussed the literature surrounding the importance of qualitative research, early reading interventions, the relationship between early literacy and future academic success, the emergence of RtI, and evidence-based teaching practices. The chapter begins by highlighting the important role of literature reviews in identifying research gaps. The chapter then discusses the importance of early intervention in reading, citing studies that demonstrate the benefits of early literacy intervention and the consequences of ignoring early reading difficulties. The chapter reviews the development and effectiveness of RtI in addressing the needs of struggling readers, emphasizing the importance of providing evidence-based instruction and intervention tailored to the needs of the students. The chapter reviews many studies that suggest the positive impact evidence-based teaching strategies and interventions can have on reading achievement, specifically for at-risk students. The chapter also discusses the importance of leadership and its impact on student achievement. Finally, the chapter outlines the steps for implementing an effective RtI model, by employing evidence-based practices in the classroom, and making data-driven decisions. The chapter suggests the importance of early intervention, effective evidence-based instruction practices, and the effectiveness of the RtI model. However, absent from the overall literature is a practical example of what all these elements look like in the classroom.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of Chapter Three is to describe the methodology and methods used to collect, manage, analyze, and interpret the data collected from classroom observations, interviews, reflective memos, and the collection of relevant documents. This chapter presents the research questions, research design, the data collection process, how the data were managed, and how the data were analyzed. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing the ethical considerations of the research and ways to enhance the rigor and credibility of the study.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this study was: How does an English teacher in the Greater Montreal area implement the Response to Intervention model with her grade-one students? The sub-questions that were explored to answer the overarching question were:

1) What practices does she implement to help readers?

2) What is the teacher's definition of a successful RtI model?

Research Design

I used a qualitative design to complement the existing body of quantitative research on Response to Intervention (RtI) and its benefits. While quantitative studies highlight the effectiveness of RtI, especially for students with learning and behavioural difficulties, they often overlook the critical, contextual elements that qualitative research can uncover. A review of the literature, including works by Torgensen et al. (2001), underscores the significance of RtI in aiding these students. Yet, there is a need for more qualitative studies that offer specific, actionable examples of <u>how</u> to implement RtI effectively. Such studies should provide detailed

case studies of classroom practices, explore the challenges and successes of RtI implementation, and offer insights from interviews with educators about their experiences and strategies. Additionally, observational research that provides a comprehensive understanding of the day-to-day implementation of RtI in diverse educational settings can further refine and improve RtI practices across different contexts.This study aims to fill this gap by providing educators with practical insights into applying RtI in a real classroom setting, ensuring they have the necessary information to adapt, incorporate, and implement relevant RtI strategies effectively in their contexts.

The following section describes the methods used for collecting data. It explains how participants were selected and how data was gathered, including classroom observations, interviews, reflective memos, and the collecting of relevant documents.

Participant Selection

I used Patton's (2002) purposeful sampling to select the main participant, an elementary school teacher who has been teaching for over 20 years. The criteria used to select an appropriate participant were that the teacher had to be: An elementary school teacher with over 20 years of teaching experience and at least 5 years of experience implementing RtI.

The rationale for these criteria was as follows. Their long-term perspective would provide valuable insight into effective practices such as those of RtI. Similarly, teachers with more than twenty years of experience would have encountered a wide range of student needs and learning styles. Teachers with at least five years of experience implementing RtI would have had sufficient time to implement, refine, and observe the outcomes of the RtI model. This level of experience is important to understand the practical challenges and successes of RtI.

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The research question focused on how a grade one elementary school teacher implemented RtI in her classroom. The research objective was to provide educators with a practical framework for effective implementation. By selecting an educator with over 20 years of teaching experience and at least five years of experience implementing RtI, the likelihood of identifying best practices, highlighting areas of improvement, and informing future implementation efforts was increased. These criteria ensured the selection of a participant with the qualifications, experience, and expertise to meaningfully contribute to the research, thereby ensuring the relevance of the findings.

I identified potential participants through conversations with the school principal and English director, from which I created a list of three teachers. After careful consideration, the grade one teacher met the necessary criteria and verbally accepted to participate in the study. Furthermore, an added reason for selecting this teacher was because grade one is a foundational year for reading acquisition and, therefore, is one of the most critical years to ensure the effective implementation of the RtI model (Al Ozinat, 2021). The pseudonym Ms. A. was approved by the participant and is used throughout the presentation of this study.

The following paragraph provides a brief introduction to Ms. A. The information was collected from the first interview. Ms. A. is the grade one English Language Arts teacher at an independent school in the Greater Montreal Area. Independent Quebec Schools refer to autonomous not-for-profit organizations that are managed by a board of directors, usually comprised of alumni, parents, and community members. ("Quebec Independent and Private Schools | FEEP," n.d.). Most independent schools in Quebec receive government subsidies,

which make up 60% of the amount paid per student for educational services only. Unlike public schools, independent schools do not receive additional funding for a student with specific difficulties, nor do they receive money from school taxes, and they must provide their own buildings and school furniture. The government subsidies represent 40% of the total cost of putting a student through an independent school (Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur, 2016). Ms. A. has more than twenty years of teaching experience. At the beginning of her career, Ms. A. taught primarily in the older grades, specifically grade six. More recently, she has been teaching grade one for over five years. She explained that transitioning from a grade six teacher to a grade one teacher was a matter of circumstances. A job was available in grade one, and she accepted it. She indicated that, although different, she has been enjoying teaching in the younger grades. She has been implementing RtI in her classroom for the past six years. During the interview, she explained her initial impression of RtI and how her approach has developed over the six years. In the year of this study, Ms. A. was teaching English Language Arts in both grade two and grade one.

During an introductory meeting, I explained the purpose and procedure of the study to Ms. A. and that it would include interviews and classroom observations. After verbally accepting to participate in the study, we agreed that her grade one class was the best option for classroom observations. The rationale for the selection was based on the importance of grade one in establishing foundational literacy skills, scheduling needs, and availability, as well as the varied reading levels of the students in that class. I believed the varied reading levels would help to provide rich data.

I also approached other educators in the school to participate. Since they were not to be primary participants, from hereon I call them "contributors": the school Principal, the English Director, the Resource Teacher, Ms. Olivia, and the classroom assistant, Ms. Emily, both pseudonyms. When I met with each of them, I explained that I wanted to interview them to get different perspectives on RtI, which would help confirm or disconfirm the data that was emerging from my interviews with Ms. A. and my observations in her classroom. I emphasized that my reason for speaking with them was not about evaluating the work of Ms. A.

Data Collection

I had four different sources of data for this study. The data included audiotapes of three interviews with Ms. A., additional individual interviews with the other contributors mentioned above, classroom observations, reflective memos, and the collection of relevant documents. I analyzed the data collected from interviews with Ms. A. and the field notes from the classroom observations (see below). The data collected from interviews with the other contributors and the collection of relevant documents were all used to confirm or disconfirm the study's findings. Finally, the reflective memos helped me make sense of the data while maintaining awareness of my preconceived notions and biases. A more detailed description of the sources of the data and the methods employed for analysis is provided below.

Interview Data

The first data source included a three-part interview process with the primary participant, Ms. A. The first of these was used to understand her background, thought processes and reasoning behind the methods she implemented in the classroom, specifically regarding RtI. The interview process followed Seidman's three-part interview approach (Seidman, 2013). Seidman

explains that a three-part interview must contextualize the participant's behaviour. A one-time snapshot interview needs more context and is unlikely to explore any real meaning of specific behaviours (Seidman, 2006). Seidman (1998) explains that the purpose of an interview is to explore and understand human experience and the meaning attached to the experience. Seidman's three-part interview model is important because it helps to limit the potential bias that might result from only one interview, and as a result, makes the study more credible and robust.

As mentioned earlier, before the interviews, I contacted Ms. A. in person and asked if she would participate. I explained the purpose of the study and reiterated that participation was completely voluntary. Similarly, I explained that she could withdraw her participation during the research process without providing any reasons or resulting consequences. From the beginning of the research process, Ms. A. was very open and willing to participate in the study. I delivered the consent form before beginning the research process, giving her time to read it and answer any questions she had about the study. For example, Ms. A. had a few questions about the scheduling of interviews. She wanted to make sure the interviews could fit her schedule and that she would not have to arrive at school early or stay late specifically for the interview. After I explained the interviews would be scheduled at her convenience and we explored potential interview times, she signed the consent form and returned it to me. Ms. Emily, Ms. A.'s classroom assistant, Ms. Olivia, the Resource Teacher, and the two additional contributors were approached at the beginning of the research process as well, and they quickly signed and returned the consent forms. Scheduling interviews with each of the three additional contributors was quite easy as they all worked in the same building as Ms. A.

The first interview occurred at the beginning of the research process, on December 4, 2023, and examined the participant's background and contextual experiences which I described above. The second interview occurred halfway through the research process, on December 20, 2023, and focused on the specific details of the participants' instructional methods and classroom activities used in RtI. Finally, the third interview occurred at the end of the research process, on January 15, 2023, and focused on the participant's reflections and the meaning of her experiences (Seidman, 2013).

I began my first interview by building a rapport with Ms. A. (Seidman, 2013, p.10). I had prepared the interview protocol in advance. All the questions were open-ended, and I avoided asking leading questions. Seidman explains that open-ended questions help the participant understand the type of information the researcher seeks and provides the opportunity and freedom to take the discussion in different directions as it evolves. Leading questions do the opposite and can hinder the participant's voice, imposing certain expectations (Seidman, 2013). I followed my open-ended interview protocol which allowed me to be more attentive during the interview and focus on the participant and her responses rather than taking notes.

The first interview took place in Ms. A.'s grade one classroom and lasted approximately 29 minutes. The classroom was a good place to conduct the interviews because it was familiar, quiet, and private. I began by thanking the participant for her time, reiterating that participation was voluntary and that she could withdraw her consent at any time without any consequences. Then I explored Ms. A.'s educational journey and focused on why she had become an early elementary educator. I explored how her path changed from teaching the higher grades, five and

six, to teaching the earlier grades, one and two. Also, we discussed Ms. A.'s introduction to the RtI model and her initial beliefs and perspectives on this reading intervention model. This information became very valuable in the data analysis as her dedication and commitment to effective education influenced her practice. The first interview also helped me prepare questions for the second interview. I concluded the first interview by thanking Ms. A. for her time and scheduled a time for the second interview.

The second interview also took place in Ms. A.'s classroom and lasted approximately 38 minutes. Again, I prepared an open-ended interview protocol. The questions were designed to explore Ms. A.'s approach to reading instruction and her experiences implementing the RtI model in her classroom. At this point, Ms. A. and I were comfortable with each other. I had begun conducting in-class observations; therefore, I asked more specific questions about the practices she was implementing in her classroom. This information became extremely valuable as she provided insights into the intentional practices she was using and provided an explanation of and reasoning for why she was doing what she did. She indicated why she made certain decisions and implemented certain activities and her rationale for the approaches she was using.

The third and final interview took place in Ms. A.'s classroom and lasted about 27 minutes. The purpose of the third interview was to encourage Ms. A., to reflect on the meaning of her experiences (Seidman, 2013, p.11). An open-ended interview protocol again was prepared before the interview, including questions clarifying and elaborating on necessary topics. At this point, I had concluded the classroom observations, and certain themes had started to emerge. Therefore, I asked questions exploring Ms. A.'s thought processes. For example, classroom

management emerged as a theme in my classroom observations. Therefore, I asked Ms. A. specific questions about her classroom management strategies to gain deeper insight. She A. mentioned various factors like consistency, certain contextual factors, and the importance of teacher-student relationships. This elaboration contributed greatly to my understanding of the data during the process of analysis.

The second set of interviews was conducted with three additional contributors the school Principal, the English Director, and the Resource Teacher, Ms. Olivia (see below). The Principal has been at the school for over twenty years, the last five as Principal. The English Director has taught grade one for over 25 years and has been the English Director for the past five years. The Resource Teacher, Ms. Olivia, has been at the school for the past eight years, and has more than five years of experience completing universal screening assessments as well as Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention. Finally, Ms. Emily, Ms. A.'s classroom assistant has been working at the school for four years, mainly in grade one and Grade Two.

At the beginning of the research process, I had a conversation with the resource teacher, and we decided to use the pseudonym, Ms. Olivia, for her name in the research. Ms. Olivia works in collaboration with Ms. A. and sometimes supports Ms. A. in the classroom. Ms. Olivia often takes students out of the classroom to work in small groups. These interviews were conducted between the second and third interviews with Ms. A. and lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes each. These interviews provided additional perspectives on the implementation of the RtI model and sought to confirm or disconfirm some of the data being collected. The data collected from the additional interviews proved very valuable and contributed to my

understanding of the data collected from interviews with Ms. A. and my classroom observations. The interviews with these contributors also contributed to the data analysis. For example, Ms. A. expressed a schoolwide commitment to the RtI model during the interviews. The schoolwide commitment to the RtI model was confirmed during classroom observations, specifically by the evident support provided by the English Coordinator. As will be shown below, I confirmed these findings by reading through the interviews conducted with the additional stakeholders and seeing the leadership's commitment to the RtI model.

Classroom Observations

The second source of data used in this research was classroom observations. Classroom observations were a crucial component of the study, providing a firsthand and practical understanding of how Ms. A. implemented RtI in her grade one classroom. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), classroom observations are a rich data source as they allow researchers to capture the context and nuances of teaching practices in real-time. The observations took an hour each Monday morning over eight weeks. I asked Ms. A. to send home a consent form to the parents and guardians of the students in the class who were observed. The consent form explained the purpose and procedures of the study. Ms. A. included the consent form in the weekly homework. Therefore, all the parents and guardians promptly returned the consent forms the following week. One parent sent me an email asking for clarification on whether their child was being observed as the focus of the study. I reiterated that the purpose and focus of the research were not the students but rather their educator, Ms. A., and the practices she implemented in the class. The parent responded quickly, returning the signed consent form.
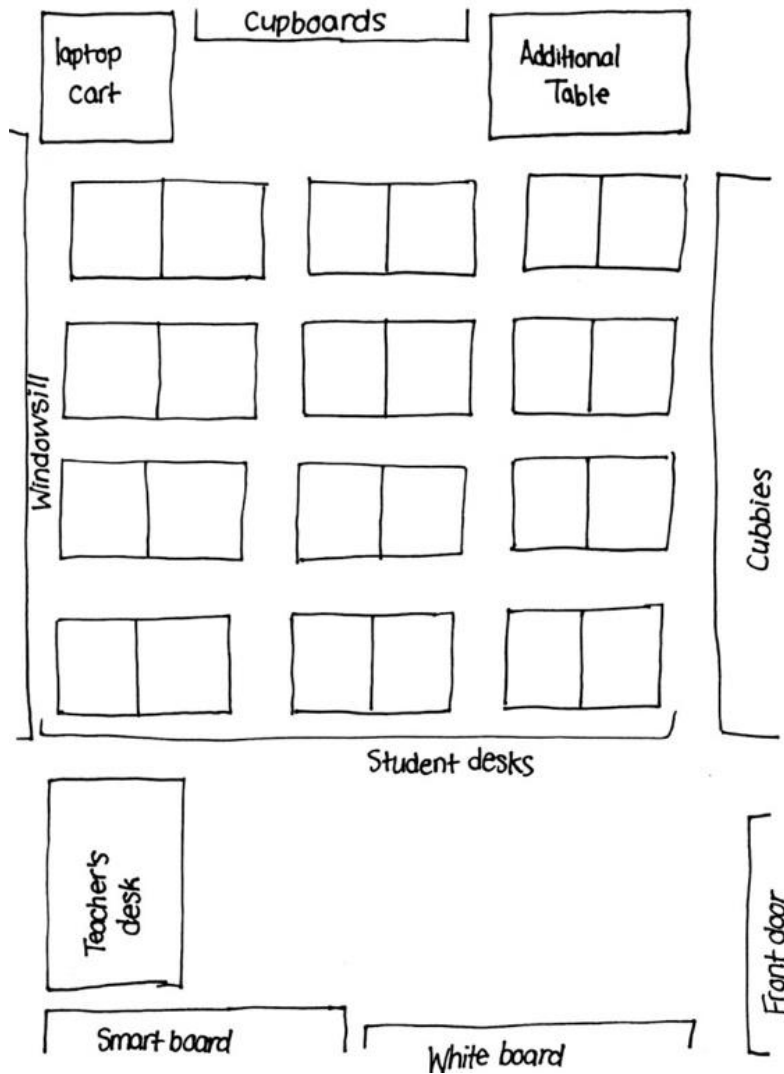
The classroom observations followed Creswell's (2007) research design. Creswell explains that observations in a specific setting are essential to mitigate deception or bias. Creswell suggests following several steps for effective observations. The role I assumed as the researcher for the duration of the observation period was that of the complete observer. Creswell explains that the role of the observer can adapt throughout the observation period but suggests beginning as a complete observer (Creswell, 2007). I remained a complete observer throughout the entire study because I did not want to be involved and risk influencing the classroom. Throughout my periods of observation, I dated, and documented carefully and in as much detail as possible descriptive field notes of what was transpiring in the classroom. I recorded any musings or questions that arose as I observed and bracketed these to separate them from the descriptive notes to help me return to any thoughts I had in real time that might be forgotten later. The field notes were highly detailed and recorded events and activities The field notes also included frequent timestamps, which were extremely valuable during the data analysis procedure. The timestamps allowed me to analyze when specific activities occurred and how long certain activities lasted. As Creswell suggests, I began my first observation by having Ms. A. introduce me to the students. I remained friendly throughout the process, and responded if asked a direct question if it would not interfere with what was transpiring at the time, but I avoided initiating any interactions (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, Creswell suggests including sketches, descriptions, and diagrams to provide further detail, (Creswell, 2007). Figure 1 is a sample of the sketch that I drew, following Creswell's suggestions. The sketch helped me while I was writing my reflective memos discussed below. Similarly, the sketch helped during the close reading of data providing a robust contextual understanding and a detailed visual that contributed to my analysis. Likewise, Table 1 shows a sample of field notes completed on December 4,

2023, following Creswell's suggestions, demonstrating my attention to detailed description and

tracking of time and keeping separate my musings and reflective thoughts in real time.

Figure 1

Sample of Classroom Sketch

Table 1

Sample of Field Notes from December 4, 2023

Time	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
10:03	Ms. A, still standing at the front of the class, waits patiently for the students to quiet down. After about a minute, the students slowly stopped talking as they noticed Ms. A. waiting.	Ms. A. acknowledged the noise level and waited for the class to quiet before beginning the lesson.
10:03	Ms. A. calls out individual students who are quietly waiting for the lesson to begin.	Ms. A. provides positive reinforcement.
10:04	Ms. A. introduces an auditory activity and reminds the students not to erase their whiteboards	Ms. A. continues to set clear guidelines for the activity.
10:04	Ms. A. begins the activity. She says the /o/ sound, and students know they have to write the letter corresponding to that sound on their whiteboard.	Ms. A. actively monitors students' progress and offers guidance to ensure their understanding and accuracy in phoneme identification.
10:05	All students immediately begin writing on their whiteboard.	Ms. A. has introduced a clear routine and has completed the same activities many times. - Clear expectations
10:05	Ms. A. continues the activity, by saying the sound /w/.	
10:06	Ms. A. walks around the class with her computer. She addresses individual students' participation and provides corrective feedback to other students.	Ms. A. provides in-class support. Ms. A. also worked on phonics skills during her lesson. Evidence-based instruction?

Reflective Memos

The third source of data used in the research was reflective memos. Throughout the

research process, I regularly and consistently reflected on various aspects of the study and how it

unfolded by writing reflective memos. I continually questioned my assumptions and biases.

These memos were used to add trustworthiness to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After each classroom observation and interview, I wrote a reflective memo to monitor any preconceptions and expectations I had about an effective RtI model. During the data analysis, the reflective memos enabled me to maintain awareness of my biases. This was especially important because I had previous experience and background knowledge about RtI and did not want to impose these on the data. Similarly, writing reflective memos immediately after each classroom observation allowed me to gain a comprehensive understanding of Ms. A.'s teaching by juxtaposing these with my field notes and interview data. Figure 2 is an example of a reflective memo completed after a classroom observation.

Figure 2

Reflective Memo from Monday, November 20, 2023

One of the first things I noticed was that Ms. A. communicated effectively with the students. She gave clear instructions on what the students should do, and they responded appropriately. She managed the class effectively, even when some students drifted off-task.

This was a clear contrast to some previous lessons, where the noise level in the classroom was a problem. I noticed that not all students were fully engaged in the activity when the noise level was loud, and Ms. A. did not begin the lesson setting clear expectations. Even when Ms. A. tried to address these issues, it was too late. When she took the time to begin the class with clear expectations, ensuring the students were quiet and prepared, the students seemed more engaged for the entire lesson duration.

Another thing I noticed was that Ms. A. used different technique during her lessons. For example, she clearly and slowly enunciated each sound. She also counted each phoneme in a word on her finger. I also noticed she regularly used positive reinforcement, praising students for following instructions so that those actions would be repeated.

Finally, Ms. Emily and Ms. Olivia's (pseudonyms)impact on the class was evident. They worked effectively, supporting the students who needed more help in class. They worked one-on-one with the students who were having trouble with the activity. The ability to help students in the class allowed them to quickly catch up and prevent them from falling behind. After Ms. Emily and Ms. Olivia provided immediate support or clarifications, the students were able to continue following along with the classroom activity.

This observation was an insightful experience. I learned the impact effective communication and clear expectations can have on the class, affecting student engagement and focus. Ms. A.'s assistant and the resource teacher were extremely important. They addressed students' difficulties in class, quickly supporting them so they would stay caught up and could continue participating in the lesson. This likely prevented a small misunderstanding from developing into a larger issue, requiring more intense Tier2 intervention." [Monday, November 20, 2023]

The reflective memo above was especially valuable as I began noticing the importance of classroom management as it related to Ms. A.'s classroom instruction, as well as the importance of immediate support in class. Both observations, addressed in the reflective memo, eventually contributed to emerging themes during the data analysis.
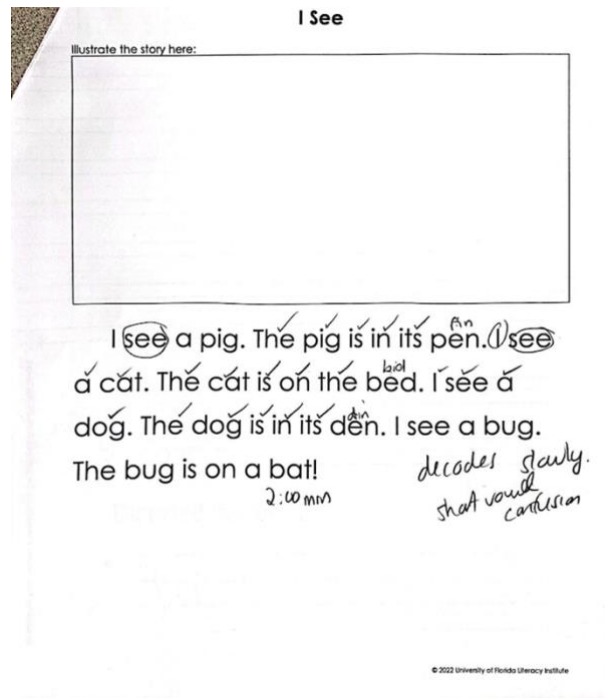
Relevant Documents

The final data source included collecting and examining relevant documents provided by Ms. A., such as the students' work and teachers' worksheets. It is important to note that all nominal information, and all personal identifying information was removed by Ms. A. before I examined any documents. This means that all relevant documents provided by Ms. A. were thoroughly anonymized to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the students. Ms. A. ensured that no names, or any other details that could potentially identify the students were present in these documents. By removing all personal identified, I adhered to ethical standards and protected the integrity of the students' personal information. This approach aligned with best practices in research, ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines and maintaining the trust and confidentiality of all participants. Some of the students' work covered in the data included decoding worksheets and progress monitoring worksheets. Similarly, the Universal Screening documents were examined to understand how RtI was implemented. The various forms of data were essential to fully understand the practices that are most effective in properly implementing the RtI model. Collecting relevant documents proved extremely valuable during the data analysis procedure. For example, through interviews and classroom observations, I incorrectly believed Ms. A. was solely collecting informal progress monitoring. Official data collection and progress monitoring are essential to an effective RtI model. After accessing relevant documents, it became clear to me that Ms. A. was collecting data and conducting official progress monitoring. Figure 3 is one of the relevant documents collected, an example of the progress monitoring conducted by Ms. A. Figure 3 reviews vowel-consonant (VC) and consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words. In Figure 3, Ms. A. includes notes on the page, indicating that the student decodes slowly and

has difficulty with the short vowel sound. Reading VC and CVC words are foundational literacy skills, as they are some of the most common patterns in English Phonics.

Figure 3

VC and CVC Progress Monitoring

Accessing relevant documents like specific progress monitoring sheets provided valuable insights into how Ms. A. implements the RtI model in her classroom. In this specific example, as shown in Figure 3, I gained a better understanding and complete picture of how progress monitoring was conducted in Ms. A.'s class.

Data Management

A critical step in maintaining participant confidentiality was removing all names from the collected data. Participants were assigned pseudonyms, and a master list was created to correlate these pseudonyms with the types of data and information collected which were stored separately. This ensured participants' identities were protected. Consent forms and any documents linking participants to their real names were also stored separately from the research data to secure

further confidentiality. All physical data were kept in a locked cabinet in a secure place in my home and on my password protected computer and kept in a locked and secure place to which only I had access. The collected data was managed following Creswell's (2007) suggestions. The data was stored on the computer, and all the saved data containing the participants' information and the recordings were separated and kept under lock and key.

The data collected during the research process was organized according to type. Specifically, the interviews with Ms. A. and the contributors, classroom observations, the reflective memos, and relevant documents were separated. All the data was stored using standard and uniform file names for each group with the date. This helped maintain confidentiality and facilitated storage, organization, and data retrieval.

All the collected data was backed up, and I tracked any changes made throughout the research process. I consistently, took all the nominal information from the recorded data and transcribed the interviews verbatim using an abbreviated notational system to include non-verbal communication wherever possible such as pauses, silences, laughter, etcetera. I numbered all the lines in the transcripts to enable easy retrieval. Any inaccuracy was counteracted by closely listening to each interview and reading each transcription multiple times, correcting errors. Classroom observation notes were re-read, and reflective memos were written immediately after each observation. This helped me become familiar with the data and make the data as complete as possible. Similarly, after each observation, I went through my field notes adding any details that were fresh in my mind and transcribing the cryptic notes into full sentences. I ensured enough storage was available to transcribe and record all three interviews, including additional

interviews with the contributors. I developed a master list of all the collected data, with a list

identifying the types of data and information collected. Finally, as per Creswell's suggestion, I

created a matrix as a visual means to facilitate identifying and locating specific data (Creswell,

2007).

Data Analysis

I used a thematic analysis approach known as the Constant Comparison Approach (CCA)

to organize and make sense of the collected data. The thematic analysis facilitated the

identification of prevalent patterns and themes, enabling a comprehensive and flexible data

analysis. Although not a linear process, the data analysis is presented linearly to ensure clarity

and transparency of the process.

The data collected from the interviews and classroom observations underwent a

comprehensive and systematic analysis to gain a deep understanding. The analysis process

involved 1) close readings and the unitizing of the interviews with Ms. A. and the observational

fieldnotes 2) placing these units of data into categories and assigning code names, 3) collapsing

and expanding the categories until saturation was reached and 4) finding relationships among the

categories to collapse categories into larger conceptual themes. These steps were applied to

ensure a thorough and detailed data analysis, provide meaningful insights and grasp an

understanding of the research topic as different themes emerged.

1. Close Reading and Unit Separation

To begin the analysis, the transcripts of the interviews and the classroom observation

notes were thoroughly read to gain a comprehensive understanding of the content. The close

reading process involved multiple readings to identify key ideas, concepts, and patterns within

the data. Units of analysis were identified by separating the data into meaningful sections. For

example, three units emerged in the field notes of a classroom observation completed on

November 27, 2023: Reviewing the Letter U, Phonemic Awareness Activities, Classroom

Management, and Individual Support. Table 2 shows a sample of the initial segregating of data

units and their code names.

Table 2

Sample of Data Units & Codes Names

Data unit	Code name
10:01: Ms. A. announces that they will be reviewing the letter U and accidentally makes a rhyme. She repeated the rhyme, "We are going to review the letter U." 10:03: Ms. A. reviews the word "game" and the sound /u/. 10:05: Ms. A. continues with the review, and students call out answers and ask questions	Reviewing the Letter U
10:08: Ms. A. announces that they will begin a phonemic awareness activity and posts a slide on the board 10:09: Ms. A. starts reading words phoneme by phoneme, and students respond with the correct sounds 10:10: Ms. A. transitions to visual drills, and students call out the sounds as she posts letters on the board. 10:11: Ms. A. puts a word on the board and discusses the phonemes of each letter. 10:12: Ms. A. changes the slide to an auditory drill, and students ask questions about a mark on the page 10:20: Ms. A. introduces a new game called "Switcheroo."	Phonemic Awareness Activities
10:13: Ms. A. continues with the auditory drill activity, and students respond to sounds while some students walk around and talk to each other. 10:17: Ms. A. asks one student to stop talking and takes away another student's whiteboard. 10:18: Ms. A. continues the activity, and some students write quietly while others are talking. 10:19: Two students complain that it is too loud, and the teacher sings a song to encourage them to erase their whiteboards	Classroom Management
10:17: Ms. Olivia walks around the class, supporting students who need additional attention and are struggling with the phonemes. 10:18: Ms. Olivia sits beside one student, asking her to sound out the letter. 10:18 the student slowly sounds out each phoneme in the word. When the student made a mistake, Ms. Olivia emphasized the phoneme.	Individual Support

2. Clustering

Once the units of data were identified, the next step was to group them into clusters based on similarities and shared characteristics. This clustering process involved organizing the units into meaningful groups that reflected common patterns and concepts. After conducting multiple data readings, I identified a cluster of teaching strategies that exhibited similarities. This cluster included phonics skills, phonological awareness activities, and Ms. A.'s utilization of the UFLI program. Table 3 shows the cluster of Ms. A's teaching strategies.

Table 3

Sample of Clusters

Cluster	Data
UFLI Program Phonics Instruction Phonological Awareness Sound/Image correspondence Phonemic Awareness Sight Words Explicit Teaching Sounding out Words Phoneme by Phoneme Integrating Vocabulary into the Lesson Teaching Materials Reading Instruction Practices Breaking Down Phonemes Sound Manipulation Decoding	- Ms. A. displays the lesson "Lesson 38a Short a" on the board. - Ms. A. switches to words with the sound /i/ - Students read the word "itch" - Ms. A. switches to the sound /o/ and displays the image of an octopus. - Ms. A. announced the word "flag" and asked students to write the word on their whiteboards. - Ms. A. sounds out each phoneme in the word /f/ /l/ /a/ /g/ as she counts them on her fingers. - Ms. A. explicitly teaches skills. - Ms. A. sounds out words phoneme by phoneme so students can identify and eventually manipulate sounds. - Ms. A. integrates vocabulary into her lessons. - The teaching materials Ms. A. uses are essential to her lessons. - Ms. A. uses a variety of reading instruction practices, from the UFLI program to centers, to interactive activities. - Ms. A. teaches students to manipulate sounds.

3. Categorization

Once clusters were formed, I organized them into categories using words and terms employed by the research participants to keep the work grounded in the meanings of the participants. The categorization provided a structured framework for analyzing and interpreting the data, allowing for easier comparison and exploration of key concepts. By grouping related clusters, I aimed to establish connections and relationships between different categories. Table 4 shows how the cluster in Table 3 was developed into categories.

Table 4

Sample of Categories

Category	Description	Examples from Ms. A's Instruction
Teaching Phonological and Phonemic Awareness	Activities focused on recognizing and manipulating sounds in spoken language.	- Sound/Image Correspondence with the image of an octopus. - Breaking down phonemes, e.g., /f/ /l/ /a/ /g/. - Sound manipulation by teaching students to manipulate sounds.
Teaching Phonics Instruction	Teaching the relationship between sounds and their spelling in a systematic, explicit way.	- Sounding out words phoneme by phoneme. - Decoding exercises with words like "itch" and "flag".
Sight Words and Vocabulary	Enhancing vocabulary knowledge and the ability to recognize words by sight.	- Integrating vocabulary into lessons, such as the word "flag". - (Sight Words are implied to be part of instruction but not explicitly mentioned).
Explicit Teaching Methods	Direct instruction strategies that make the learning process clear and straightforward.	- Explicitly teaching skills and breaking down phonemes. - Using essential teaching materials in lessons.
General Reading Instruction Practices	Varied techniques and activities are used to teach reading, emphasizing engagement, and understanding.	- Employing a variety of practices, from UFLI lessons to interactive activities. - Focus on sound manipulation and phonics exercises.

Five descriptive categories for the cluster in Table 4 emerged: 1) teaching phonological and phonemic awareness, 2) teaching phonics instruction, 3) sight words and vocabulary, 4) explicit teaching methods, and 5) general reading instruction practices.

I ensured the maintenance of the perspective of Ms. A. by using the words and terms she employed. As mentioned, this approach helped to ensure that the categorization process accurately reflected her views and experiences. For example, Ms. A. regularly referred to sight words. Similarly, she regularly referred to the importance of explicit teaching methods.

4. Collapsing and Expanding the data

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, I collapsed and expanded the data in an accordion-like fashion. I continued this process until saturation—I could no longer find movement in the categories.

For example, I expanded categories to illuminate the nuances in the examples of reading instruction, focusing on phonics and phonological awareness skills, and moved these into a broader category designated as, "Reading Instruction." Also, I collapsed some of the categories by focusing on Ms. A.'s use of specific strategies and lessons. For example, Ms. A. regularly implemented auditory activities, asking students to identify letters of sounds. The categories were collapsed and labeled "Letter-Sound Correspondence." An example of the accordion-like collapsing and expanding of the categories is shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Sample of Collapsing and Expanding of the categories

Category	Expand	Collapse

Reading Instruction	UFLI Program
	- Program that follows evidence-based reading instruction
	- Focused on improving literacy and students' reading skills.
	- Targeted instruction on phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
	- The UFLI program helps readers, especially struggling readers, improve their reading skills.
	Phonics Instruction
	- Ms. A. implements phonics instruction, focusing on teaching the relationship between sounds and letters to improve reading accuracy and decoding.
	- Ms. A. implemented Letter-sound correspondence.
	- Evidence-based reading instruction
	Phonological Awareness
	- Ms. A's Phonological awareness activities to recognize and manipulate sounds.
	- Ms. A's switcheroo game encourages students to manipulate phonemes.
		1. UFLI Program
		   ○ An evidence-based reading instruction program focused on improving literacy and students' reading skills. It provides targeted instruction on phonics, phonological awareness, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The program helps readers, especially struggling readers, improve their reading skills.
		2. Phonics Instruction
		   ○ Ms. A. implements phonics instruction, teaching the relationship between sounds and letters to improve reading accuracy and decoding. This includes letter-sound correspondence activities.
		3. Phonological Awareness:
		   ○ Ms. A. incorporates phonological awareness activities to help students recognize and manipulate sounds. This includes the switcheroo game to encourage phoneme manipulation.
		4. Sound Image Correspondence:
		   ○ The Tier 2 Intervention uses Itchy's Alphabet to assist students in identifying sounds and their corresponding written representations.
		5. Sight Words:
		   ○ Ms. A. uses the UFLI Program to teach sight words, including frequently used words with irregular spelling. Learning sight words improves fluency and enhances reading development.
		6. Explicit Teaching:
		   ○ Ms. A.'s teaching approach involves direct and structured instruction of specific reading skills. She provides clear explanations, models reading skills, and offers step-by-step, explicit instruction

The accordion-like approach provided flexibility in the depth of analysis, allowing for a balanced overview of the data and a detailed examination of specific aspects. It ensured the analysis was comprehensive, capturing the breadth of the research findings and delving into specific details that enriched the understanding of key concepts.

5. Conceptualization

Finally, conceptualizing was a crucial step in the data analysis process involving establishing relationships among categories and merging these into larger conceptual themes. This process aimed to uncover deeper insights and meaning within the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of how Ms. A. went about using RtI in her classroom.

To begin the conceptualization process, I carefully examined the relationships and connections among the categories identified during the earlier stages of analysis. By analyzing how the categories related, I sought to uncover broad, conceptual themes to understand how what Ms. A. did in her classroom functioned holistically in the teaching of reading using RtI. This analysis allowed me to identify commonalities, differences, and interdependencies between the categories, which helped develop larger conceptual themes. Table 5 shows how sub-categories were developed into categories and then eventually conceptualized into broader themes. During the conceptualization step, I moved from descriptive categories to larger, conceptual themes. I began with concrete categories such as "Transitioning," "Focusing students," and "Managing students." These were specific, observable actions and strategies employed by Ms. A. in the classroom. They represented practical aspects of her teaching and classroom management. To move from the descriptive categories to a conceptual theme, I engaged in a process of identifying

the underlying dimensions that connect categories, using the rules of inclusion. For example, the actions of transitioning students into class, focusing them, and managing their behaviour, are not isolated strategies. Rather they collectively aim at creating an optimal learning environment where students can engage in the learning process. The recognition of their shared purpose allowed me to conceptualize the broader theme: "Routinizing." The "routinizing" was critical in getting the students ready for what was to follow. The conceptualization step allowed me to see in a holistic way how RtI functioned in Ms. A.'s classroom. An example of how sub-categories and categories that were developed into larger, conceptual themes can be seen in Table 6.

Table 6

Sample of Conceptualization

Categories	Rule of Inclusion	Theme
Transitioning Focusing students Managing students	Refers to student transition into class, focusing students and managing their behaviour.	Routinizing
Teaching phonics Teaching phonological awareness Teaching skills explicitly	Refers to explicitly teaching phonological awareness and phonics skills.	Establishing foundational literacy skills
Supporting students in class Providing immediate intervention Targeting areas of weakness	Refers to supporting students in class, providing immediate intervention, and targeting areas of weakness.	Intervening in the classroom
Examining data Identifying student's needs Providing additional targeted and small group support	Refers to examining data, identifying student needs, and providing additional targeted and small-group support	Closing Student Reading Gaps

In this methodology section, I have outlined the approach used in the study to explore the research question; how a grade one English teacher implements the reading intervention model, RtI in her classroom. The chapter details the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, data management, and analysis processes. The chapter reviews the participant selection and data collection. The data were collected through various means to ensure a rich, multi-faceted understanding of the research topic. Finally, the data analysis used a

thematic approach to identify patterns and conceptual themes that emerged from the collected data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were an important part of the study from the beginning to its completion. I applied to the Research Ethics Board of McGill University, and permission to conduct the study was granted. Informed consent was obtained from all participants who were interviewed as well as from the parents and guardians of the children to ensure they understood the study's purpose and role. As mentioned earlier, to ensure confidentiality, all nominal information was removed from data and participants were assigned pseudonyms from the outset to maintain confidentiality. Furthermore, the participants were consistently reminded that participation in the study was voluntary, and that they had the right to always withdraw consent without providing a reason and without any consequences. However, throughout the study, no participants chose to withdraw. I used many methods to ensure the study was conducted ethically. However, research ethics are not confined to the formal consent process required by the Research Ethics Board, rather they entail an ethical stance throughout a study. I remained conscious about the ethical dimensions of the study throughout and was attentive to any indications that I needed to explain my actions, respond to any questions as they arose, and reiterate my attention to confidentiality and openness about my process. I maintained a relational stance throughout.

Enhancing Credibility

Qualitative research is judged by its overall credibility. This section outlines the multifaceted approach I adopted to enhance the credibility and robustness of my study. The strategies include the length of time spent in the field, the use of multiple forms of data to corroborate findings, the writing of reflective memos, and ensuring transparency throughout the research process.

The duration of time I spent in the field was essential to enhancing the credibility of the study. In this research, I spent eight weeks devoted to fieldwork. This duration allowed for an in-depth understanding of the research context and allowed me to develop a relationship and trust with the research participants. I believe that the eight weeks spent in the field contributed to the depth and accuracy of the collected data.

Furthermore, to enhance the credibility of the study, I employed a triangulation of data sources, including classroom observation, interviews with the research participant and other contributors, reflective memos, and the collection of relevant documents. The multiple sources of data allowed for the corroboration of information across different data types and sources, further enhancing the robustness of the work. For example, insights gained from classroom observations were corroborated with perspectives shared during interviews, ensuring an accurate interpretation of the data.

The use of reflective memos also played an essential role in maintaining the credibility of the research process. Throughout the fieldwork, I wrote reflective memos to avoid imposing my

biases and assumptions on the data which would have influenced the research process and therefore, the results.

Finally, transparency in research is another essential aspect for maintaining credibility and making my work persuasive. I maintained complete transparency with the research participants throughout the duration of the study. Furthermore, the methodology section in this chapter very clearly and carefully outlines all my steps in the research process,

Summary

In this section, I described the process I followed to complete the research. The chapter begins with a brief introduction, restating the overarching research questions and sub-questions. I also explained the research design in detail, including participant selection, data sources, data collection procedures, data management, data analysis, ethical considerations and the methods I employed to enhance the credibility of the study.

Chapter Four: Results

Overarching Question:

The results of the study responded to the overarching question: How does an English teacher in the Greater Montreal area implement the Response to Intervention model with her grade-one students?

Sub-question One:

To answer the overarching question, the first sub-question examined: What practices does Ms. A. implement to support struggling readers? Struggling readers are defined as students who are reading below grade level. The independent school where the study was conducted utilizes DIBELS benchmark scores to identify struggling students reading below grade level. As described in Chapter, DIBELS benchmark assessments evaluate fluency skills in grade one, letter naming fluency, phonemic segmentation fluency, nonsense word fluency, word reading fluency, and oral reading fluency. The five scores are compiled to provide a composite score. Struggling readers are identified as students with some risk, requiring strategic support, or at-risk, requiring intensive support. For example, at the beginning of the year in grade one, the benchmark composite score is between 335 to 369. Students with a composite score below 335 are struggling readers, identified as moderately at risk or at risk (DIBELS, 2020).

The four themes that emerged from the data analysis that illuminate the practices implemented by Ms. A. to support struggling readers include 1) routinizing, 2) establishing foundational literacy skills, 3) intervening in the classroom, and 4) closing student reading gaps.

Theme 1: Routinizing

Routinizing refers to how Ms. A. helped students transition into class to help students focus and to manage their behaviour. Classroom observations and interviews shed light on the relationship between classroom management and evidence-based practices in the context of reading instruction. Establishing routines and effective classroom management are essential for creating a conducive learning environment. When Ms. A. created a calm and quiet learning environment during reading instruction, students focused on the activity. Alternatively, when the class was loud and less focused, many students were observed to be distracted, missing out on the instructional activities.

The routines enabled the students' transitions into class. Importantly, Ms. A.'s methods of focusing and managing student behaviour were consistent. Ms. A. took the time to ensure a smooth transition and create a quiet and calm environment. This improved attention and as a result, I would suggest learning during the lesson. An example of transitioning and managing behaviour was observed during one of the classroom observations. Before beginning the lesson, Ms. A. closed the lights and waited patiently for quiet. Most of the students immediately quieted down, understanding what this meant due to the routines previously established. Another example of Ms. A.'s routinizing included consistently repeating and setting clear expectations and instructions. For instance, Ms. A. explicitly explained how to use the whiteboards—told them that they had to use the letter formation taught in class and that the students should remain focused throughout the entire activity and not draw on the whiteboard. These clear guidelines and instructions were observed multiple times throughout numerous observations. After providing clear instructions and guidelines, the students remained focused and on task during the

lesson. The students followed the instructions and wrote the letters correctly, and all but two remained on task. These were the same two students who consistently had difficulty focusing on the classroom instruction and needed a few additional prompts provided by their teacher. Ms. A. quickly reminded them of the rules, and they immediately regained focus.

Evidence-based teaching practices are critical to students' development of proficient reading. However, if the teacher does not take the time to ensure effective classroom management, evidence-based teaching cannot occur. Ms. A.'s ability to routinize her classroom management practices was essential to the success of her students. The students knew what to expect from the lessons and activities because Ms. A. was consistent. During observations, students seemed to be able to focus on lessons and acquire the necessary skills to become proficient readers.

Theme 2: Establishing foundational literacy skills

In exploring the practices implemented by Ms. A., another theme that emerged was the emphasis she puts on foundational literacy skills, particularly the Big 5 of reading. Ms. A.'s commitment to teaching foundational literacy skills was essential for implementing an effective RtI model, specifically within Tier 1. Ms. A.'s practices and emphasis on foundational literacy skills are supported by the literature. Brown-Chisdery and Steege (2010) state that Tier 1forms the foundational tier of RtI. However, my interviews with Ms. A. and classroom observations provided a closer look at how she translates foundational literacy skill principles into practice which is not explored in the largely quantitative research on RtI. Ms. A. highlighted phonics throughout her teaching. The data revealed how she teaches students the alphabetic system, the relationship between letters and sounds, spelling patterns, and how to apply these skills to their reading. For example, the NRP (2000) explains that evidence-based phonics instruction must

include explicitly teaching the relationship between letters and sounds. Specifically, they posit that "findings supported the conclusion that systematic phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than alternative programs providing unsystematic or no phonics instruction" (NRP, 2000, p.89). Synthetic phonics, which teaches students to connect letters and phonemes and blend the sounds to form recognizable words, was the most effective approach to phonics instruction. During observations, Ms. A. consistently implemented many evidence-based instructional methods, including synthetic phonics activities.

Ms. A.'s commitment to using research-based practices was evident in her instructional methodology. She used the evidence-based UFLI program (2009), which focuses on explicit instruction to teach foundational literacy skills (Lane et al., 2009). I regularly observed Ms. A. instructing students to write words like "CUT" on their whiteboards. They had already learned to map these three sounds onto the letter correspondence in previously explicitly taught lessons. As she told them to write the word, she sounded it out phoneme by phoneme. She repeated the phoneme, /k/, /u/, /t/. She counted each phoneme on her fingers as she sounded out the word. She announced to the students, /k/, raising one finger, /u/ raising her second finger, and /t/ raising her third finger. The visual they saw as she raised her fingers helped to reinforce the number of letters needed. The students wrote the word, associating the letters to the phonemes they just heard. She then asked the students to raise their whiteboard when they were done to verify that they had identified the correct letters associated with each phoneme. She continued the synthetic phonics instruction by asking the students to change one letter and write the word "CUP." Once again, she broke down the new word into phonemes, /C/, /U/, and /P/. Very notable in Ms. A.'s classroom was how she continued to imbed phonemic awareness in her phonics instruction, evidenced by this and similar instructional strategies.

Ms. A. walked around the classroom as she was teaching and provided affirmation to students who wrote the required word correctly and stopped to help students who made errors. She praised students for identifying the correct phoneme and completing the activity. Ms. A. also made sure to praise all students for the effort they put forth in their work. Students who required additional support received the assistant teacher's reminders and one-on-one support in the class. During interviews, Ms. A. regularly referred to her teaching assistant, Ms. Emily, and the important role she plays in implementing the RtI model.

Ms. A. also incorporated evidence-based vocabulary instruction during the lessons to emphasize foundational literacy skills. As the research suggests, vocabulary instruction is more effective when integrated into other activities. Vocabulary should be passive and secondary. Ms. A. regularly integrated vocabulary instruction as a secondary objective during her lessons and activities. For example, during one phonics instruction activity, she asked the students to write the word "SOB." The primary objective of the lesson was to review the /o/ phoneme. However, as she introduced the word and counted the phonemes, she incorporated vocabulary by giving the students the definition and an example of the word sob. Ms. A. asked the students to write the word sob and gave them the definition, "to cry" (Observation, December 4, 2023, Ms. A.). Ms. A. consistently provided definitions and examples of unfamiliar words to the students, even though the primary objective of the lessons was focused on other foundational literacy skills. These types of evidence-based activities, supported by research, were consistently observed during classroom observations, and discussed during interviews.

Theme 3: Intervening in the Classroom

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis, which I coded as "intervening in the classroom," refers to how Ms. A. supported students in class and provided immediate intervention targeting areas of weakness. The in-class intervention involved providing timely and targeted support to at-risk students, who were struggling in Tier 1. I believe her ability to provide in-class intervention for these students helped to limit the number of students who would require additional support. For many students it appeared that only slight adjustments or further explanations were needed to put them back on track for proficient reading, ensuring only those most at-risk students received Tier 2 or Tier 3 instruction. For example, Ms. A. explained in one of our interviews.

> The students were identified initially, even some from kindergarten that were already flagged, then at the beginning of the year they did the DIBELS testing. Then we did our own core phonics assessment. So, at the beginning of the year, we had a sense of who might need the extra support in class (Interview, December 20, 2023).

Intervention in the classroom was more effective due to the additional support that Ms. A. received. During my classroom observations, the classroom assistant, Ms. Emily, was always present, actively engaged with the students, providing individualized support. She walked around the classroom during reading activities and guided students who were having difficulty. The collaboration between Ms. A. and Ms. Emily seemed to improve the impact of Ms. A.'s evidence-based teaching practices because she was there to intervene and provide individual attention to support students who required more help without interrupting the flow of Ms. A.'s lesson.

During one observation on November 27, 2023, Ms. Emily provided in-class intervention, and one-on-one support to a student. Ms. A. was teaching a phonics lesson, asking them about the sound of the letter /i/. Ms. A. and Ms. Emily noticed that one of the students had difficulty with the sound. Ms. Emily quietly approached the student, as other students continued with the activity, and provided individual guidance and support. She helped clarify and reinforce the targeted phonics skills. After quickly providing in-class intervention and targeted instruction, the student continued participating in the activity.

> Ms. A. walks around the room as students are writing. Ms. A. is saying the sound /i/. Ms. Emily notices a student having trouble and walks over to help them. Ms. Emily asks them, what makes the /i/ sound? (Observation, November 27, 2023)

My interviews with Ms. A. illuminated how in-class intervention was an intentional practice. Ms. A. and Ms. Emily had identified four or five students who were at risk in their reading development. The Universal Screening conducted with all students three times per year was essential as it enabled Ms. A. and Ms. Emily to identify the students who were not at grade level in their early reading skills. The ongoing progress monitoring conducted in class helped to ascertain if these in-class interventions were effective or if students needed additional intervention. During in-class activities, Ms. A. and Ms. Emily stayed physically close to the at-risk students and provided them with additional in-class intervention. Ms. A. explained during interviews that while she walks around the class, ensuring all students are mastering the required skills, she pays close attention to these at-risk students. She explained that the in-class interventions often consist of targeted phonics interventions. For example, she accounted for one instance where she needed to walk over to a student at risk and prompt him to count the

phonemes in the word during a synthetic phonics activity. In an excerpt from the data during an observation,

> Ms. A. says, 'erase the *s* and change the word to *runt*.' Ms. A. counts the sounds. She
> notices a student having difficulty and points to his whiteboard, counting the phonemes
> beside him, /r/, /u/, /n/, /t/ (Observation, December 4, 2023).

In-class intervention occurred during all lessons. My analysis suggests that this allowed Ms. A. and Ms. Emily to limit the number of students requiring Tier 2 intervention. Ms. Emily regularly walked around the classroom, assisting, and guiding individual students in need. This allowed her to identify immediate challenges or misunderstandings and provide interventions. Furthermore, during interviews, Ms. A. corroborated this by underscoring the importance of Ms. Emily's presence in class.

> Here I have an assistant, and I have resource help, but in other schools, I had no assistant
> and no resource help. So, it's very hard to address that because they needed so much
> more attention (Interview, December 4, 2023).

Ms. Emily's importance was further corroborated during interviews with the English Coordinator who explained that she prioritized additional support in grade one, and therefore, Ms. Emily was rarely taken out of grade one. Although it is common for assistants to be taken out of class to substitute in other grades, the English Coordinator realized the importance of in-class intervention in grade one. Therefore, she ensured Ms. Emily was always available. The emphasis and commitment to additional support in grade one by the school leadership was further corroborated by Ms. A. during the interviews in the following excerpt.

> Well, the English coordinator is great, and she taught grade one for many years, so she
> has a lot of resources. So sometimes I can just say to her, I need something for these five

students who are not ready for the homework, and she has a lot of things to give me, so

that's very helpful. She also makes sure I always have an assistant in the class and the

resource teacher is available for me. She provides a lot of opportunity for professional

development and an investment to implement the program properly

(Interview, December 20, 2023).

Ms. A. acknowledged how difficult it would be to implement an effective RtI model

without the support she receives in class. She explained that Ms. Emily's in-class intervention

support allows her to focus on evidence-based instructional teaching practices for the entire class

while simultaneously meeting the needs of all students.

Theme 4: Closing Student Reading Gaps

The fourth theme that emerged from the data analysis, which I named "closing student

reading gaps," referred to how students' reading data were examined to identify student needs

and provide additional targeted and small group support. During interviews and classroom

observations, it became clear that Ms. A. effectively implemented Tier 1 practices of the RtI

model by implementing evidence-based teaching strategies and using the data to identify

students who needed additional support. Ms. A. and Ms. Emily provided in-class intervention to

support students in Tier 1. Ms. Olivia, the resource teacher, introduced in Chapter Three, also

provided in-class support during lessons, like the in-class support Ms. Emily provided.

Ostensibly, this limited the number of students who required additional support in Tier 2.

Research has shown that while 80% of students should reach grade level expectations in Tier 1,

20% of students will require additional support in Tier 2 or 3. I would argue that Ms. Olivia's

support facilitated the immediate implementation of Tier 2 targeted intervention strategies and

was crucial for supporting struggling readers in this class and helping to close student reading gaps.

One specific example of targeted intervention to help close student reading gaps was observed when Ms. Olivia conducted a small-group, Tier 2 intervention with two students, who were assigned the pseudonyms Lilly and Mia. Lilly and Mia (pseudonyms) were identified through the data collected by Ms. A. as below grade level during Universal Screening, as seen in Appendix A. The phoneme segmentation fluency benchmark for grade one is 40. Lilly identified 17 phonemes correctly, 23 below grade level. Mia scored 42, slightly above grade level. Although Mia was slightly above grade level, progress monitoring completed by Ms. A. identified specific areas where she required additional support to close the gap. The benchmark for nonsense word fluency is 27. Lilly scored 8, and Mia scored 14. Finally, the benchmark for whole words read is 1. Lilly scored 0, and Mia scored 2. Ms. Olivia and Ms. A. collaborated to provide support in the classroom. Ms. A. revealed during interviews that through progress monitoring over a few weeks, she and Ms. Olivia decided that Lilly and Mia required additional support in Tier 2 small-group instruction to close the reading gap. During interviews, Ms. A. explained the collaboration between her and Ms. Olivia.

> I meet with the resource teacher regularly, and we email regularly. She always knows what we're doing in the class, and she really knows the students she works with. For example, sometimes she says I'm not going to take so, and so, because what I'm working on today, they've mastered so they can stay in class, so I am going to work with so and so and work on another specific skill (Interview, December 20, 2023).

Ms. Olivia worked with the two students, Lilly, and Mia, in a small group outside the classroom. The intervention involved using stickers and corresponding pictures with different vowels. By engaging in more intensive and explicit activities, such as associating vowel sounds with pictures, the students could work on targeted skills like phonemic awareness and phonics skills. For example, the sticker with the short vowel phoneme /e/ had the letter "e" written on it, along with a picture of an egg. This allowed Ms. Emily to point to the picture and ask the student to identify the starting sound in the word egg, /e/. Examples such as this were regular occurrences during these small-group interventions.

Ms. Olivia's support in small group instruction provided intervention and guidance in helping Lilly and Mia identify and differentiate between vowel sounds. For example, when Mia initially confused the sounds of /i/ and /e/, Ms. Emily encouraged her to sound out each phoneme and corrected her when needed. Ms. Olivia pointed to the picture of the /e/ sound and asked Mia what the picture was. Mia responded, "Egg." Ms. Olivia asked Mia to pay special attention to the starting sound of the word egg, emphasizing the /e/ phoneme. This personalized attention and explicit instruction allowed Mia to better understand vowel sounds. Furthermore, Ms. Olivia's explicit instruction aligned with the research on effective Tier 2 instruction to close reading gaps.

In addition to reviewing key phonemic awareness skills, Ms. Olivia provided direct instruction on phonics skills during the small group instruction session. She guided students in blending individual sounds to form words and emphasized the importance of accurate spelling. For example, when Mia struggled to spell "cat," Ms. Olivia highlighted the correct letters and asked her to repeat the word. Mia recorded each phoneme: /k/, /a/, and /t/. The explicit

instruction and individualized feedback helped Mia to correct her errors and improve her phonics skills.

Additionally, using decodable texts during targeted intervention sessions provided struggling readers with appropriate reading materials matching their reading abilities. Mia, for example, read a book titled "TUBS" with the support of Ms. Olivia. Mia struggled to read the title, so Ms. Olivia used her finger to guide her, allowing her to track the words accurately and break them down into individual phonemes. According to Snowling and Hulme (2012), early intervention in reading is crucial for students to reach grade-level expectations. Their research highlights the significance of targeting specific skills, like phonological awareness, in these interventions. They also explain that a deficit in one of these areas can lead to reading difficulties. Additionally, Snowling and Hulme (2012) found that early intervention activities, like those conducted by Ms. Olivia, have been effective in helping students who are reading below grade level. The interventions implemented by Ms. Olivia, in collaboration with Ms. A., targeted key skills that Mia and Lilly had not yet mastered.

The targeted intervention strategies implemented by Ms. Olivia, in collaboration with Ms. A., demonstrated the value of Tier 2 interventions in supporting struggling readers and closing the reading gaps. Students like Mia and Lilly received additional support to improve their reading skills with personalized attention, explicit instruction, and appropriate reading materials. These targeted interventions addressed specific areas of difficulty and fostered confidence and motivation, as evidenced by Mia's celebratory response when she successfully blended sounds to form words. During interviews, Ms. A. explained that through progress monitoring, she had already noticed improvements in Mia and Lilly's reading ability.

In conclusion, implementing Tier 2 targeted intervention strategies proved valuable support for struggling readers and provided them with the help they required to succeed. The observations, interviews, and data highlighted the impact these interventions had on students' phonemic awareness, phonics skills, and vocabulary, three essential skills for early literacy to close reading gaps.

Sub-question Two:

The second sub-question that contributed to answering the overarching questions was: What is the teacher's definition of student success? Although not conceptualized into an overarching theme, it became clear that Ms. A.'s vision of success was an important part of her practice, integral to her implementation of the RtI model. It became apparent that the way she looked at success for her students was another way she augmented the implementation of an effective RtI model. During the interviews Ms. A. explained that she had two definitions of success, a short-term vision of success and a long-term vision of success. Ms. A's short-term definition of success, simply stated, is progress. As Ms. A. stated in one of the interviews,

> The smaller part of success is, for me, the progress. If there is no progress, then I guess
> we are not successful and we need to figure out a different intervention (Interview,
> January 15, 2023).

Her short-term definition of success enhanced her implementation of the RtI model by constantly monitoring progress. Progress monitoring is an essential tenet of the RtI model. By defining short-term success as progress, Ms. A. ensured the interventions, either in class or in Tier 2 or Tier 3 contexts, were effective. If in-class interventions were implemented and progress monitoring did not show improvements, it indicated the student required more intense intervention in Tier 2. Furthermore, if progress monitoring did not show improvements for

students receiving Tier 2 intervention, it indicated the student probably required more individualized and intensive intervention in Tier 3.

Ms. A.'s long-term and overarching goal was for students to no longer need Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention. She explained that her global vision of success is for 100% of her students to reach grade-level expectations by the end of the school year. This goal and her vision of success affirmed her commitment to the RtI model. Ms. A.'s long-term goal and image of success are perfectly aligned with the RtI model, to identify students requiring support, provide them with the necessary interventions, monitor their progress, and support them in reaching grade-level expectations.

Summary

In this section, I described the findings of the study, addressing how an English teacher in the Greater Montreal area implements the Response to Intervention (RtI) model with her grade-one students. The chapter begins by restating the research question and examining the practices Ms. A. uses to support struggling readers. Four key themes emerged: Routinizing, which involves establishing consistent classroom routines to create a focused learning environment; Establishing Foundational Literacy Skills, which emphasizes phonics and evidence-based practices; Intervening in the Classroom, which includes providing immediate, targeted support to address specific weaknesses; and Closing Student Reading Gaps, which involves utilizing data-driven, small-group interventions in collaboration with resource teacher Ms. Olivia. The chapter also discussed Ms. A.'s definition of success, which includes short-term progress monitoring and the long-term goal of all students reaching grade-level expectations by the end of the school year.

Chapter Five: Interpretations, Implications and Conclusions

In this study, I explored How does an English teacher in the Greater Montreal area implement the Response to Intervention model with her grade-one students? The introduction in Chapter One of this thesis establishes my position as the researcher within the context of the study. The literature review in Chapter Two provides a comprehensive background on the emergence and effectiveness of RtI and establishes the importance of early intervention in reading to support literacy development. The literature review also highlights the lack of qualitative research examining the practical implementation of RtI in classrooms, which this study aimed to fill.

The methodology section explains the qualitative design of this study, including participant selection, data collection, data management and data analysis. This approach allowed for an in-depth and transparent exploration of Ms. A.'s practices related to the implementation of RtI. The primary participant, an experienced grade one English teacher, provided a valuable perspective on how RtI is integrated into her classroom.

The results revealed four key themes: routinizing, establishing foundational literacy skills, intervening in the classroom, and closing student reading gaps. These themes answer the overarching research question about how Ms. A. implements the RtI model in her classroom. To effectively implement the RtI model, Ms. A. establishes structured routines that facilitate learning and allow her to establish foundational literacy skills. Ms. A. intervenes in the classroom to support students who are at risk and limit the number of students requiring more intense support. Finally, Ms. A. closes reading gaps to ensure all students reach grade-level

expectations. Furthermore, Ms. A.'s short-term and long-term definition of success reflect her commitment to supporting students' literacy development and the objectives of the RtI model.

Interpretation

The interpretation of the study's results provide insight into the implementation of the RtI model. As mentioned above my results of the study produced four themes— routinizing, establishing foundational literacy skills, intervening in the classroom, and closing student reading gaps, highlight the practical application of RtI. The study results provide a real example of how to implement RtI in the classroom.

Routinizing refers to the importance of structure and routines in the classroom. Classroom management is not a traditional tenant of RtI and therefore rarely considered. However, the study results suggest the importance of classroom management and its impact on an effective RtI model. Ms. A.'s ability to establish routines fosters an effective learning environment and increases student engagement. This finding is further supported by the literature that emphasizes classroom management as a foundation of effective teaching, although often absent from the literature related to RtI. The study's findings suggest that routinizing the class procedures can limit the amount of time spent on classroom management issues and maximize effective teaching, therefore, maximizing the effectiveness of the RtI model.

The second theme, establishing foundational literacy skills, is essential to the effective implementation of the RtI model. Ms. A.'s commitment to and focus on the 'Big Five' of reading instruction, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension, reinforces her commitment to evidence-based instruction. Teachers often overlook the importance of sound, evidence-based instruction. Furthermore, teachers are often overwhelmed by the number of

students requiring additional support outside the classroom. However, research suggests that if the teacher follows evidence-based practices, 80% of students will reach grade-level expectations (Robinson & Hutchinson, 2016). Ms. A.'s commitment to establishing foundational literacy skills set a strong base for an effective RtI model, ensuring students received evidence-based instruction in the classroom and were not mistakenly identified as at-risk. For example, in 2006, Al-Zayat found that, out of 504 students, 60% of students who were previously diagnosed with learning difficulties responded to Tier 1 intervention in the classroom. This suggests that 60% of students were misdiagnosed simply due to low academic achievement because they were not receiving effective, evidence-based instruction (Al-Zayat, 2006). Ms. A.'s commitment to establishing foundational literacy skills ensured her students would not be mistakenly identified as at-risk, and that likely 80% of her students would probably reach grade level expectations in Tier 1 which takes place in the classroom rather than being removed from it.

The third theme, intervening in the classroom, is essential to limit the number of students who will require Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention. Ms. A. and Ms. Emily, the classroom assistant, ensured each student received the support they required in class. It is important to note that Ms. A. did not provide in-class support based on random criteria. Rather, Ms. A. identified the at-risk students, and ensured they received the support they required in class. By completing the Universal Screening assessment and conducting regular progress monitoring, Ms. A. identified which students were struggling and with which concepts. This allowed Ms. A. to support the students in the classroom. Ms. A.'s interventions in the classroom, during this study, helped to limit the number of students who would require Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention.

Even with effective classroom management, evidence-based teaching practices, and in-class support, research suggests that 20% of students will still require further intervention. The fourth theme, closing student reading gaps, exhibits the overall goal of RtI, ensuring all students reach grade-level expectations. Ms. A. regularly completed progress monitoring assessments and ensured she was making data-driven decisions, identifying student needs, and providing them with the support they required. Ms. A. regularly communicated and collaborated with Ms. Olivia, the resource teacher, to target specific skills. By providing students with additional support, Ms. A. and Ms. Olivia worked together to close student reading gaps.

Although it did not emerge as a theme, Ms. A.'s short-term and long-term goals added to the effectiveness of the RtI model and reflected her commitment. Ms. A. understands that students will progress at their own pace and that it may take time to reach grade-level expectations. Therefore, her short-term goal was to ensure students are progressing. Ms. A. demonstrated this commitment to conducting regular progress monitoring to ensure she could identify student progress. If students are not progressing it means the intervention is not effective, and therefore, must be adapted. If students are progressing, it suggests the interventions are effective and that the students are on their way to achieving Ms. A.'s long-term vision of success, which was to reach grade-level expectations.

Each of the themes that emerged from the data analysis are not particularly novel and have been researched extensively but are rarely considered in relation to RtI. There is an abundance of research on the correlation between classroom management and the impact of effective teaching (Gordon, 2001). Establishing foundational literacy skills, intervening in the classroom, and closing student reading gaps have also been researched at length. However, this

study exemplifies how these aspects work in unison, to create a holistic approach to the RtI model. Ms. A. combines each of these practices to establish the effective implementation of the RtI model and ensure all students are receiving the support they require so they can eventually read at grade level while demonstrating positive and success-oriented expectations which no doubt made a contribution to the learning that took place.

Limitations

This study provides valuable insights into implementing the RtI model in a grade one classroom. However, there are some limitations to consider. The study took place over one semester and did not explore the long-term effects of the practices observed. Similarly, I could not verify the impact of Tier 3 interventions because no students were receiving these at the time. Fuchs et al. (2015) explain that each RtI tier often takes between eight to ten weeks and sometimes even longer. The study occurred over eight weeks; therefore, no students had been identified as requiring additional Tier 3 intervention. However, Ms. A. completed regular progress monitoring assessments and explained that the Tier 2 interventions were working, and students were exhibiting substantial progress.

Similarly, the research looked at Ms. A.'s teaching in isolation, solely focused on RtI and other literacy activities. I did not observe any other aspects of her teaching, which could have changed my interpretation. However, the focus on literacy activities provided an in-depth understanding of how she implements the RtI model, and I believe contributed to the overall credibility and robustness of the study.

Finally, it is important to consider that the interviews and observations conducted throughout the research provide a snapshot of one specific classroom and do not represent the practices and experiences in all RtI settings. For example, schools may have different budgets, personnel, and resource access. The study was conducted at an independent school with a specific and unique context. It became apparent that the leadership in the school helped Ms. A. in terms of personnel and resource access because they understood the importance of early literacy. What was happening in this grade one classroom might not be possible in other school settings, but I believe this study describes in sufficient detail how Ms. A. implemented the RtI model and should be helpful to other RtI teachers, or teachers looking for evidence-based literacy practices such as those in RtI. The findings highlight effective practices as outlined in the themes that emerged in the study that, when done in concert, are effective and should be explored in other contexts. The RtI approach described in Ms. A.'s classroom should provide teachers, administrators, and policymakers with an effective way to support students in all contexts and reduce the strain on the educational system. This study should serve as an example that can be adapted and adjusted to explore in other contexts to support all students, especially those struggling with reading.

Implications

Each emergent theme in this study provides a separate practical example and strategy essential to the effective implementation of the RtI model. Importantly, it became apparent that when taken together the four themes provide a holistic approach which made Ms. A.'s teaching so effective. Furthermore, her attitude about success, both short and long-term no doubt fuel her holistic use of these strategies which provide such important support for students.

Teachers can benefit from the findings of this study because it provides, evidence-based classroom management strategies that can directly improve student engagement, participation and therefore, academic achievement. Ms. A. established consistent routines in her classroom. By routinizing her classroom, Ms. A. reduced the amount of time she must spend on classroom management, increasing student engagement, and the effectiveness of her instruction. As mentioned above, the connection between effective classroom management and effective instruction is not novel. However, classroom management is rarely considered in an effective RtI model. Therefore, this study suggests that teachers should make sure to routinize their classroom management and procedures, ensuring students remain focused and engaged, so evidence-based teaching instruction can be as effective as possible.

This study illuminates the importance of evidence-based practices and establishing foundational literacy skills during the most essential time for a child's reading development. Unfortunately, there still exists the belief that there are multiple ways to teach students to read. Similarly, phonics instruction, recognized by most as essential to reading proficiency, is sometimes viewed as only one option among others. For example, some educational policymakers use balanced literacy programs incorporating phonics and other means, such as the cueing system. The cueing system teaches students to use hints, such as looking at the visual configuration of the word, rather than depending purely on decoding the word. This study provides an example of how Ms. A. taught students to read, using a strictly evidence-based approach to establish foundational literacy skills. It underscores the importance of using evidence-based teaching practices, focused on establishing foundational literacy. Many educators, administrators and policymakers may feel RtI is untenable due to the number of students requiring additional intervention, putting a strain on the resource department. However,

by establishing foundational literacy skills and following evidence-based teaching practices, educators can limit the number of students who will require additional intervention and therefore, limit the strain placed on the resource department.

The study findings emphasize the importance of providing immediate, in-class, support for students at risk of falling behind. Teachers may assume that at-risk students will immediately require Tier 2 or Tier 3 intervention. However, by addressing and targeting skills in the classroom and providing individualized attention, teachers can ensure students stay caught up, which will limit the number of students requiring small-group intervention. Ms. A. explained that she regularly monitored the progress of all students during in-class activities. She made sure to pay special attention to the students at risk of falling behind. Many educators argue that they do not have the time to intervene for each student in class. However, Ms. A.'s in-class interventions often came as informal and quick reminders, like reminding the student to count the phonemes in each word. In-class intervention is important to prevent small difficulties from developing into larger issues. It is important to acknowledge that interventions can take the form of informal and quick reminders by conducting regular progress monitoring assessments and simply paying close attention to students at risk.

The study findings highlight the importance of closing the reading gaps in small groups during Tier 2 intervention. Collaboration between the classroom teacher and the resource department is essential to effectively implement the RtI model. Collaborative problem-solving and regular communication between Ms. A. and Ms. Olivia, the resource teacher, facilitated the identification and intervention of at-risk students. Ms. Olivia conducted Universal Screening to identify at-risk students and shared the information with Ms. A. The collaboration allowed for

data-driven decisions, progress monitoring, and identifying students who required further intervention in Tier 2. After identifying the students reading below grade level, Ms. A., Ms. Emily, and Ms. Olivia provided in-class support. For students who did not respond to the in-class support, Ms. Olivia provided small-group instruction to target specific skills. Teachers, administrators, and policymakers must ensure they are constantly conducting universal screening and progress monitoring assessments. This will allow them to make data-driven decisions, targeting specific skills, and support students who are at-risk helping them to close the reading gaps.

Teachers should also remember to keep short-term and long-term goals and avoid discouragement. Simply stated, the short-term goal of an effective RtI model is progress. If students are not progressing, teachers must adapt their teaching instruction or intervention methods because they are not working. If students are progressing, then they are on their way to the long-term goal of the RtI model, reaching grade-level expectations. Short-term and long-term visions of success, such as those of Ms. A. also encourage teachers to complete regular progress monitoring assessments, making data-driven, collaborative, decisions.

This study also offers implications for further research. The study was conducted in an independent school with a specific and unique context. Although the RtI approach offers a universal model that can be applied to many contexts, future research should examine the long-term effects of implementing the RtI model and evaluate the long-term impact. Similarly, future research should evaluate the impact of Tier 3 interventions and explore the effectiveness of RtI in different educational contexts.

Finally, it is important to note, the themes that emerged from this study did not occur in isolation. Literature suggests that classroom management leads to enhanced student engagement

and effective instruction. Evidence-based teaching practices and establishing foundational literacy skills are proven to foster literacy skills. Research suggests that in-class support can reduce the number of students who will require additional support and that interventions can help close students' reading gaps. However, what this study revealed, and what is truly novel, is the practical example of how Ms. A. implements these strategies in unison. Ms. A. implements a holistic approach that combines these aspects to implement an effective RtI model. Teachers must strive to take these separate aspects and implement them together to maximize the effectiveness of the RtI model and support all students.

Conclusion

The study examined how a grade one English teacher implements the reading intervention model, RtI, in her classroom. The results provide valuable insights into strategies for the effective implementation of the RtI model and supporting early literacy. The qualitative analysis focused on the practices of an experienced teacher, Ms. A., in the Greater Montreal area. The data collected included classroom observations, interviews with Ms. A., the writing of reflective memos, interviews with additional school personnel, and the collection of relevant documents. The data analysis and results of the study revealed four themes: routinizing, establishing foundational literacy skills, intervening in the classroom, and closing student reading gaps. Ms. A.'s individual strategies, and how they work together, a practical example of an effective RtI model. The study's findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach, as all themes work in unison to enhance the effectiveness of the RtI model. By providing a practical example of Ms. A's strategies, this research aims to contribute to the existing research on RtI. However, this study emphasizes the practical application of the RtI model and what it looks like

in a real classroom. The study also encourages future research to explore the long-term impacts of RtI and how the model can be applied across diverse educational contexts. Overall, the study suggests the importance of routinizing, establishing foundational literacy skills, providing in-class support, closing reading gaps, and establishing a vision of success. However, these themes must work in unison and combine to provide a holistic approach. By implementing these strategies, teachers can implement an effective RtI model and support student literacy, ensuring all students receive the support they need.

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Appendix A

DIBELS Universal Screening

Beginning of the school year			
Letter Naming Fluency	Phoneme Segmentation Fluency	Nonsence Words (Total Correct Letter Sounds)	Whole Words Read
31	26	43	11
25	80	31	8
25	40	40	7
45	69	31	10
15	52	6	0
25	12	10	2
47	70	113	39
30	56	81	20
52	72	33	5
26	11	5	1
45	13	15	3
19	22	6	0
17	43	14	2
38	79	37	10
23	60	20	6
41	60	75	20
9	11	10	1
14	68	6	1
26	7	7	0
33	26	11	2
14	30	17	3
45	45	31	7
16	17	8	0
26	70	14	1
92	80	133	40
at benchmark	Benchmark:40	Benchmark: 27	Benchmark: 1

Appendix B

Progress Monitoring - Real Word Fluency

Real Word Fluency

rag	tin	gum	yet	pot
win	gas	tan	met	run
mat	fad	rip	lot	hop
van	sip	tin	men	mop
his	mop	dig	jug	peg
sin	rap	gas	tip	big
dot	sad	hop	ten	mad
cap	bud	bag	jet	pin
zip	vet	lot	fin	cat
wet	bus	pad	van	hop

Daily Scores:

Mon ____	Tues____	Wed____	Thurs___	Fri ____

Melissa Moran 2015

Appendix C

Progress Monitoring - CORE Phonics Survey - Record Form

SKILLS SUMARY

DATE Administered	1	2	3	4	5	6
Alphabet Skills and Letter Sounds						
a. Letter Recognition – uppercase (/26)						
b. Letter Recognition – lowercase (/26)						
A. Letter names – uppercase (/26)						
B. Letter names – lowercase (/26)						
C. Consonant sounds (/23)	15					
D. Long vowel sounds (/5)	5					
D. Short vowel sounds (/5)	2					
Reading and Decoding Skills						
E. Short vowels in CVC words (/15)						
F. Short vowels and consonant blends (/15)						
G. Short vowels, digraphs, and –tch trigraph (/15)						
H. R-controlled vowels (/15)						
I. Long vowel Spellings (/15)						
J. Variant vowels (/15)						
K. Low frequency vowel and consonant spellings (/15)						
L. Multisyllabic words (/24)						

Appendix D

Progress Monitoring - Ufli Spelling Assessment
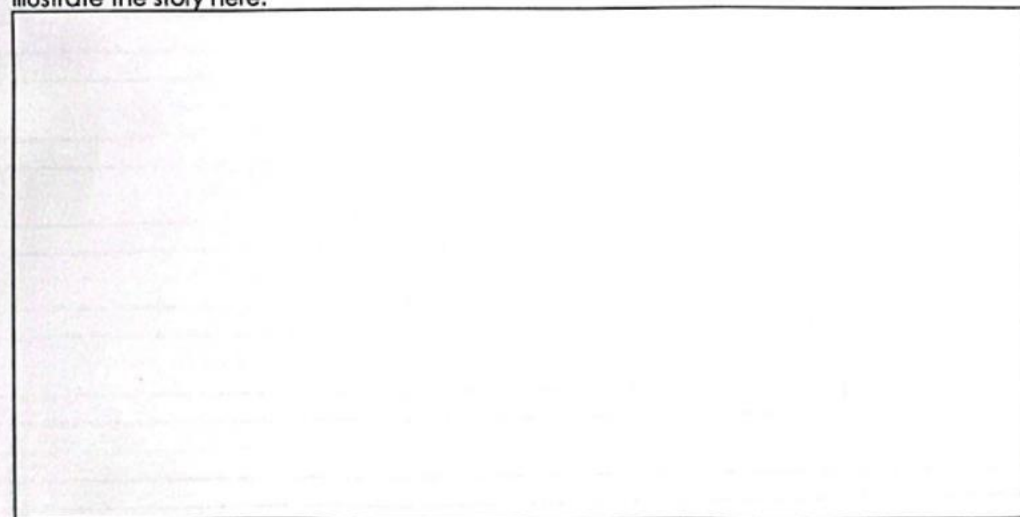
Appendix E

Progress Monitoring - VS & CVC practice

I See

Illustrate the story here:

I see a pig. The pig is in its pen. I see a cat. The cat is on the bed. I see a dog. The dog is in its den. I see a bug. The bug is on a bat!

2:00 mm

*decodes slowly.
short vowel confusion*

Appendix F

Participant Consent Form

McGill

*Department of
Integrated Studies in
Education*

Participant Consent Form

Researchers: Adam Gazith, McGill University, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, 514-690-1422. adam.gazith@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, 514-398-2252, lynn.butlerkisber@mcgill.ca

Title of Project: Implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) in a Grade One Classroom: A Qualitative Exploration of Evidence-Based Practices for Reading Intervention.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to research how a grade one teacher implements the reading intervention program, Response to Intervention. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how a grade one teacher helps students become better readers.

Study Procedures*:* The study's procedure includes the observation of a grade-one teacher's classroom practices while implementing the reading program, Response to Intervention (RtI). The teacher will also participate in three interviews to gain further insight. The classroom observations will be conducted over an eight-week period to observe the teacher's instructional practices and strategies. The observations will take place once a week for half an hour each week. Additionally, other relevant contributors such as school the school principal, English Director, resource teacher and select students will also be interviews. However, these interviews will not be analyzed and only used to confirm or disconfirm the study's findings. Finally, relevant documents will also be collected to provide insight into the curriculum, resources and strategies used in the classroom.

Voluntary Participation*:* Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the choice whether you want your child to take part in this study or not. Your decision will not affect you or your child's relationship with the school, the educator, the researcher, or anyone else involved in the study. If decide that your child can participate in this study, you can withdraw your child's consent at any point without providing a reason. If you choose to remove your child's consent, you or your child will not face any negative consequences. Similarly, if you decide to withdraw your child's consent, any data or information that was previously collected will be destroyed unless you give permission to keep it.

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated potential physical risks involved in this study. However, engaging in this study may lead to slight emotional discomfort. It is important to understand that the potential risks are extremely minimal. The study involved classroom observations, which may cause slight emotional discomfort. However, please understand that I will prioritize the child's welfare and comfort. Prior to beginning the classroom observations, the purpose of the study, and for my observations in the class, will be clearly explained to the students, in a manner they can understand. I will ask open ended questions to ensure the students understand the purpose and maintain open communication. Similarly, during interviews, the students will understand that they can skip any questions that may make them uncomfortable. The confidentially of your child's information will be strictly followed and upheld. All the collected data will be anonymized, and any personal identifiers will be removed. As always, you have the right to withdraw your child from the study at any point without facing any consequences. If you or your child have any concerns, I remain available. I am committed to the safety and comfort of your child and all participants involved in this study.

Potential Benefits: Your child's participation and involvement in this study offers valuable potential benefits to their learning and the educational community. By participating in this study, your child's teacher can gain important insight into effective teaching practices which can positively impact your child's educations, as well as the educations of those who follow. The study's focus, Response to Intervention, aims to improve early identification, intervention, and support

in reading. Your child's participation can greatly contribute to improving educational practices leading to improved student's learning and achievement.

Confidentiality: The privacy and confidentiality of your child is extremely valued and will be protected. If you consent to allow your child to participate in the study, your child will be interviewed and observed. Therefore, your child's information cannot be anonymous. However, your child's information will remain confidential. This means that your child's identity, and responses will be kept private, and securely stored in an encrypted, password protected OneDrive folder on a secure, password-protected computer. The researcher will be the only one with access to these recording. Your child's interviews are not being conducted for the purpose of analysis but rather to confirm or disconfirm the studies findings. Similarly, the interviews' purpose is to add to the credibility of the study. Therefore, the interviews will not be disseminated publicly. Pseudonyms will be assigned, and the information will be anonymized. All personal identifiers will be removed to ensure privacy and confidentiality. It is important to note that, considering the population involved in the research and the nature of the study, there are reasonably foreseeable disclosure requirements. This pertains to the duty of the researcher to disclose abuse or neglect of minors. The study involves observations and interactions with children. Therefore, it is important to protect the participants' safety and well-being. If any evidence or suspicion of abuse or neglect of minors is observed or disclosed during the research process, the researcher has a moral and ethical obligation to act. This may include reporting the incident to the relevant authorities or child protective services. The research will handle any potential situation with sensitivity and maintain the confidentiality of the child and other involved parties as much as possible, while respecting legal requirements. As the primary researcher, I am committed to the well-being and best interest of the children and priories the children's best interest in all actions.

Dissemination of Results: The results of the research and the study will be disseminated in a thesis document. The written thesis document will be written and the primary form of dissemination.

Questions: If you have any questions, concerns or require any clarifications about the project, please contact the primary researcher, Adam Gazith.

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca citing REB file number 23-03-023

For written consent
Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your (your child's) information. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature:_____Date: _____

Appendix G

Participant Consent Form

*Department of
Integrated Studies in
Education*

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

Researchers: Adam Gazith, McGill University, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, 514-690-1422. adam.gazith@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, 514-398-2252, lynn.butlerkisber@mcgill.ca

Title of Project: Implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) in a Grade One Classroom: A Qualitative Exploration of Evidence-Based Practices for Reading Intervention.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to research how a grade one teacher implements the reading intervention program, Response to Intervention. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of how a grade one teacher helps students become better readers.

Study Procedures*:* The study's procedure includes the observation of your child's grade-one teacher's classroom practices while implementing the reading program, Response to Intervention (RtI). I will also ask your child some questions during regular class time to gain further insight. The classroom observations will be conducted over an eight-week period to observe the teacher's instructional practices and strategies. I will begin the observation by having the classroom teacher introduce me to the students. I will remain friendly throughout the process. The purpose of the classroom observation is to observe the teacher's instructional practices and not the students. The observations will take place once a week for approximately half an hour each week. Please note that no names of students will be collected during the class observations.

Voluntary Participation: Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. You, as the parent/guardian, have the choice whether you want your child to take part in this study or not. Your decision will not affect your child's relationship with the school, the educator, the researcher, or anyone else involved in the study. If you choose to allow your child to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any point without providing a reason. If you choose to remove your consent, your child will not face any negative consequences. Similarly, you may ask to have the data related to your child destroyed entirely up to the point of first publication. Once your child's data has been combined for publication, it may not be possible to destroy it in its entirety. We can only withdraw your child's dataset from further analysis and from use in future publications.

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated risks to your child's participation in this study. Your child does not have to answer any questions they don't want to and can stop participating at any time.

Potential Benefits: Participating in this research will provide valuable potential benefits. By allowing your child to share their experiences and perspectives on Response to Intervention practices, they greatly contribute to the progress of the educational community. There are no expected direct benefits to your child's participation. It is hoped that the information obtained from this study will contribute to a better understanding of how to help students become better readers.

Confidentiality: Your child's privacy and confidentiality are extremely valued and will be protected. If you consent to your child's participation in the study, they will be interviewed and recorded. Therefore, your child's information cannot be anonymous. However, their information will remain confidential. This means that their identity and responses will be kept private and securely stored in an encrypted, password-protected OneDrive folder on a secure, password-protected computer. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings. The interviews are being conducted for the sole purpose of analysis and will not be disseminated publicly. Pseudonyms will be assigned, and

the information will be anonymized. All personal identifiers will be removed to ensure privacy and confidentiality. After the first publication, all personal identifiers will be destroyed. It is important to note that, considering the population involved in the research and the nature of the study, there are reasonably foreseeable disclosure requirements. This pertains to the duty of the researcher to disclose abuse or neglect of minors. The study involves observations and interactions with children. Therefore, it is important to protect the participants' safety and well-being. If any evidence or suspicion of abuse or neglect of minors is observed or disclosed during the research process, the researcher has a moral and ethical obligation to act. This may include reporting the incident to the relevant authorities or child protective services. The research will handle any potential situation with sensitivity and maintain the confidentiality of the child and other involved parties as much as possible, while respecting legal requirements. As the primary researcher, I am committed to the well-being and best interest of the children and prioritize the children's best interest in all actions.

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For written consent

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to your child's participation in this study. Agreeing to your child's participation in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your child's information. A copy of this consent form will be given to you, and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name (child): (please print) _____

Parent/Guardian Name: (please print) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature:_____Date: _____