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This research focused on struggling adolescent readers on Tier 2 or Tier 3 of Response to Intervention (RTI). The setting for this study was a rural 6-8 middle school in the southeastern United States. Seven sixth grade struggling readers on Tier 2 or Tier 3 of RTI who were enrolled in the reading remediation class scheduled during one of the students' elective periods participated in the study. Data sources included observations, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts such as progress reports, work samples, and RTI notes and progress monitoring data. Cross-case data analysis focused on the perceptions the participants had of their reading abilities and the instruction they were receiving.

Findings revealed that struggling adolescent readers (a) had identified themselves as struggling readers, (b) wanted to become better readers, and (c) trusted their teachers to foster their literacy growth. However, the current implementation of the problem-solving model of RTI at this level did not promote positive reading identities for these students or their proficiency in reading.

PERCEPTIONS OF STRUGGLING ADOLESCENT READERS ON
TIER 2 OR TIER 3 OF RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Response to Intervention (RTI) has become an important framework that is intended to use students' levels of performance to make instructional decisions about interventions which match struggling students' needs (Batsche, Elliott, Graden, Grimes, Kovalski, Prasse, Reschly, Schrag, & Tilley, 2006). In order to understand the importance of this framework, a look at the historical context, which prompted this current practice, is beneficial.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson established the Elementary and Secondary Act of Education. This act provided funding (Title I) for children in poverty to ensure they were successful in reading. In 1970, this funding was allocated specifically for the hiring of reading teachers for small, pull-out groups (Morris, 2009). In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was signed into law, coining the term "specific learning disability." A student could be identified with a learning disability if there was a discrepancy between the student's IQ and his/her performance ability that could not be explained by sensory impairments or economic disadvantages (Johnston, 2011). Thus, for the past fifty years, policy efforts have been made and continue to be made in public education to ensure the acquisition of reading skills for all students such as through the Reading First Initiative (<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst>).

The Discrepancy Formula

Over time, the use of the discrepancy formula between IQ and ability in labeling students as “learning disabled” has warranted concerns about its effectiveness. These concerns include (a) not taking into account the influence of a student’s cultural and socioeconomic background, (b) performance of limited literacy skills appearing normal in relation to a low IQ, (c) the wait-to-fail-approach in order to identify a discrepancy, (d) a lack of instructional guidance, and (e) lack of prediction as to how the student might respond to an intervention (Johnston, 2011). In 1976-1977, approximately 2% of students were identified with a learning disability using this formula; however, by 1999-2000, the number had risen to 6%. This increase raised additional concerns about the inconsistency of using different tests and computing discrepancies (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In 1997, the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Secretary of Education were asked by Congress to create a National Reading Panel (NRP) to investigate the research base and best approaches for assisting a young child’s early reading development (National Reading Panel Report, 2000). The National Reading Panel was comprised of 14 people, including reading researchers, administrators, teachers, and parents. From its investigation, the NRP concluded there were five requirements (pillars) needed for optimal reading success (a) phonemic awareness, (b) phonics instruction, (c) reading fluency, (d) vocabulary knowledge, and (e) comprehension (NRPR, 2000).

When the United States Government passed The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states were held to more accountability, especially in assisting their youngest

struggling readers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Three years later, the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 allowed, for the first time, up to 15% of federal money ear-marked for Special Education to be spent on intervention/remedial programs for struggling students who were not yet identified with a disability. Additionally, although this Act did not do away with the discrepancy formula, states were allowed to use the Response to Intervention (RTI) approach to identify students with learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Overview of Response to Intervention Approach

An alternative to the discrepancy formula (Hughes & Dexter, 2011) and establishing protocols in the elementary setting, RTI has been viewed as a preventative model, eliminating the over-labeling of minority students and the practice of waiting for students to fail before intervening with appropriate instruction (Johnston, 2011; Wixson, Lipson, & Johnston, 2010). Viewed as a strategy for improving instruction that relies heavily on assessment data, RTI requires teachers to look at the use of research-based interventions and fidelity of instruction before assuming there is a learning difficulty with individual students (Wixson et al., 2010). There are two models of RTI: standard protocol and problem-solving (Johnston, 2011).

Standard Protocol Model of RTI

Within the standard protocol model, the standardization of interventions and progress monitoring are stressed. Teachers are expected to implement research-based instruction with fidelity, use curriculum-based assessments (CBMs) regularly, and conclude if the student needs more intense instruction (Johnston, 2011). This model is

most commonly set up in three tiers. In Tier 1, all students in the regular classroom receive explicit, sound instruction. Using curriculum-based measurements, students are screened to assess their academic progress. If there are children who seem to be falling behind, they are recommended for Tier 2 interventions. This intervention involves 20-40 minutes of additional research-based reading instruction in a small, homogeneous group setting on a daily basis for a minimum of ten and possibly up to thirty weeks. Students' progress is continually monitored using probes such as AIMSweb Oral Reading Fluency and Maze CBM assessments (Shinn & Shinn, 2002) to determine if they are responding to the intervention (the additional instruction). Based upon the assessment results, if students show responsiveness to the instruction, they may stay in Tier 2 for continued intense instruction or move back to Tier 1. However, if students do not show improvement in reading, they will either stay in Tier 2 for a while longer or be referred to Tier 3. In Tier 3, students should receive individualized, direct, systematic instruction. If students are non-responsive with the Tier 3 intervention, they are typically referred for placement into Special Education (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008). Concerns with this model include (a) the use of standardized interventions with all students, (b) assumptions that materials rather than the teacher will make the difference, and (c) students being viewed as the problem if they are not responsive (Johnston, 2011).

Problem-Solving Model of RTI

Although both models of RTI are similar in regard to the use of research-based classroom instruction, progress monitoring to drive instructional decisions, and use of research-based interventions in tiers (IDEA Partnership, 2007), the problem-solving

model of RTI is more collaborative. Here, there is much more flexibility making decisions about the selection of interventions by an RTI team, rather than individual teachers, and to evaluate and implement appropriate instruction for each individual student (IDEA Partnership, 2007; Wixson et al., 2010). The school-based RTI team meets regularly to discuss students who are experiencing reading difficulty, determine the source of the difficulty, develop an intervention plan that is aligned with the individual needs of the students, and evaluate the students' responses to their interventions over time (IDEA Partnership, 2007). However, because of this model's flexibility in procedures and the lack of well-defined criteria for making instructional decisions, the problem-solving model is more susceptible to misapplication, sometimes causing unreliable effects (www.rtinetwork.org).

Statement of The Problem

Response to Intervention was originally viewed as a preventative model for students in elementary school (Johnston, 2011; Wixson et al., 2010). However, many students are now entering middle school still in Tier 2 or Tier 3 of RTI and are receiving remedial instruction similar to what they received in elementary school because how RTI should be implemented in secondary schools is still being debated (Goetze, Laster, & Ehren, 2010). This study examines struggling RTI adolescent readers' perceptions of their reading abilities and the instruction they are receiving.

According to Guthrie and Davis (2003), struggling adolescent readers often lack self-confidence or self-efficacy in their reading ability. Because they may not feel respected or comfortable in school, they tend to avoid reading altogether in order to

protect themselves from embarrassment. Additionally, struggling adolescent readers may purposefully avoid peer relationships, as they may feel socially marginalized. All of these characteristics lead to their disengagement with literacy practices, which continue to exacerbate the reading problems (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Therefore, how should educators address struggling adolescent readers' needs?

As a veteran sixth grade language arts teacher who worked in a school district using the problem-solving model of RTI for four years, I witnessed the transition for students receiving RTI services in the elementary setting become quite frustrated with their Tier 2 and Tier 3 remedial reading setting at the middle school level. Students have complained about specific instructional practices such as reading a low-level text with a small group, completing test prep worksheets, or working through reading exercises on the computer. Additionally, within the middle school setting, most students have four core academic teachers and three elective teachers during the school day, whereas within the elementary setting, students are assigned to one teacher all day long, enabling the flexibility to plan his/her students' instructional day with minimal disruption. The only time for students to receive reading intervention instruction is during either the enrichment time (formerly known as advisor-advisee time within the Middle School Philosophy) or in place of an elective class. Either way, students are clearly aware of who is going to what class, which can be embarrassing for the struggling students. To understand the effect of RTI on struggling adolescent readers in the middle grades, it would be beneficial to talk with them to get their perceptions about being in a remedial reading intervention program since this phenomenon has not been well studied at the

middle school level. RTI studies at both the elementary and middle school levels reveal how struggling readers can remain in RTI much longer than what the framework was initially designed for.

Intervention for Elementary Students

At the elementary level, there is considerable evidence demonstrating that students who do not acquire early reading skills as beginning readers will continue to struggle later on (Denton, 2012). Carney and Stiefel (2008) conducted a longitudinal study with Tier 2 elementary students using the problem-solving model of RTI. At the end of 3.5 years, 11 of their 28 academic participants had shown progress and moved out of Tier 2 to Tier 1. However, eight were still receiving Tier 2 interventions, four had moved up to Tier 3 and were receiving support from special education, and five had moved to another school. Because the problem-solving model allows for flexibility of intervention choice and duration, an RTI team can decide to continue Tier 2 interventions indefinitely, even though the model was originally designed for a tier to last no more than 50 days (Kovaleski, Gickling, Morrow, & Swank, 1999). For students who are slow-responders yet deemed not eligible for special education services by an RTI team, the longevity of receiving Tier 2 interventions is disconcerting because it would appear that students have not received instruction that would help close their gaps with reading acquisition (Carney & Stiefel, 2008). This concern is especially important as students move beyond the elementary school years because these students continue to receive remedial instruction yet may not make the necessary literacy growth to become proficient.

Intervention for Middle School Students

Research has shown struggling middle school students who receive intensive, individualized after-school tutoring can make strong gains in their reading ability (Morris, Ervin, & Conrad, 1996; Morris & Gaffney, 2011). Students participating in instructional-level guided readings, instructional-level word studies, writing activities, repeated readings, and independent readings have shown significant progress (Morris et al., 1996; Morris & Gaffney, 2011). However, when middle schools are required to develop in-school RTI remedial programs to meet the instructional needs of their students, they are faced with the challenges of time and staffing. Frequently, the only time to provide such instruction is during one of the students' elective classes.

Additionally, there is ongoing debate as to what intervention at this level should look like (Donalson & Halsey, 2007; Goetze et al., 2010). There has been little empirical research conducted on RTI in middle schools and, therefore, little evidence that the RTI approaches used in elementary schools will work at this level (Brozo, 2011; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010). Brozo (2011) argues that RTI in middle school be renamed "responsive literacy instruction" (p. 103) and be "guided by principles that honor adolescent identity as well as the complexities of literacy learning in secondary school" (p. 104).

Research Goal and Possible Contribution

The goal for my research was to explore the perceptions of struggling adolescent readers receiving Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions in a middle school setting with respect to themselves as readers and the instruction they received. By comparing the readers'

experiences in their remedial setting and their experiences in the regular language arts classroom setting, I hoped to gain insight into how these struggling readers understood these two experiences and how they understood the influence of these experiences on their literacy learning. This study has the potential to encourage school districts to re-evaluate the interventions they are currently using for middle school students on a reading RTI tier.

Understanding Readers and Their Perspectives

Hall (2010) conducted a multiple-case study that looked directly at how three struggling adolescent readers interacted with the reading demands within their content classrooms and how their teachers interacted with them. She found that two students would rather prevent others from identifying them as poor readers than to engage in the classroom reading tasks. They made a choice to remain silent and work alone in order to avoid embarrassment. In January, the third student began to volunteer and participate in class but only so that she could continue to hide her lack of reading competence from her parents. By participating in class, she was able to complete her homework and never had to discuss it with her parents. Within these settings, these “students’ opportunities to develop as readers were marginalized by both themselves and their teachers” (p. 1821). These findings suggest the need to understand students’ perceptions about their reading abilities and assist them in developing more positive reading identities.

When students enter a classroom for the first time at the age of four or five, no two students’ reading competencies are the same. Some enter with basic sight word knowledge while others cannot identify the letters of the alphabet. As time progresses,

what Stanovich (1986) termed as the “Matthew effect” with reading acquisition occurs. This effect is based upon the principle that the gap tends to widen between students, whereby the rich get richer (those with needed skills for reading proficiency progress) and the poor get poorer (those who lack needed skills for reading proficiency fall further behind) (Stanovich, 1986). By fourth grade, students are expected to read independently in order to gain knowledge of curricular content. If students perceive themselves as lacking in reading ability, they may avoid reading altogether. This low self-efficacy will only exacerbate the problem (Biancarosa, 2012). Wigfield and Eccles (1994) explained that, as struggling readers move through elementary school, they become more realistic about their capabilities, and their self-competency beliefs tend to decrease. As these same students move into middle school, factors such as biological and social changes tend to magnify the intensity of their low perceptions of themselves as readers. The less personal classroom setting with teachers, who are primarily focused on their academic content, makes this transition quite difficult for these students. Additionally, the increased amount of whole group tasks and openly public evaluation of student achievement contribute to the magnification of their low self-efficacies (Wigfield & Eccles, 1994).

Because The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 called for all students to test on grade level by 2014, the RTI initiative was adopted across the country in an effort to provide interventions for struggling readers. Knowing that children enter school with various abilities, it makes sense that interventions should be put into place in an effort to close these early achievement gaps. However, what happens when children do not

respond quickly to these early interventions? As they move through the tiers of RTI, they may eventually be referred to testing for a learning disability. On the other hand, if they show some response to the intervention, they could potentially remain on Tier 2 or Tier 3 of RTI, receiving some small group reading instruction indefinitely. It is within this landscape that I situate my investigation of Tier 2 and Tier 3 struggling adolescent students' understandings of themselves as readers and of the literacy instruction they are receiving within a reading remedial class and within their regular language arts classroom. Through observations, interviews, and artifacts, I studied how these personal experiences and social environment shaped their perceptions about literacy.

My research addressed the following questions:

- What influences students' understanding of themselves as readers and their reading instruction?
 - How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI describe their abilities and needs as readers?
 - How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI believe their reading needs are being met?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study will draw upon the following areas: research-based best practices that foster adolescents' literacy growth, characteristics of struggling readers, and Response to Intervention practices at the middle school level. Research-based practices in adolescent literacy include (a) active learning environments with direct literacy instruction, including content-area strategies and discipline-specific strategies; (b) student engagement within a respectful environment with high expectations, including opportunities to make connections and have choice; and (c) student engagement with texts for a variety of purposes, including inquiry learning and opportunities for collaborative discourse (Sturtevant, Boyd, Brozo, Hinchman, Moore, & Alvermann, 2006). How struggling adolescent students describe their instruction compared to research-based practices may shed light on why they have not reached on-grade-level reading proficiency. Response to Intervention was originally designed as a preventative model (Fuchs et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to investigate how RTI is being implemented at the middle school level and if students receiving remediation are making literacy growth.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory of learning emphasizes individuals' active engagement in constructing new knowledge and understanding through participation with others in activities and experiences. Within this framework, "knowledge is not passively acquired, but is actively and socially constructed as learners process and internalize it" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). This approach provides a framework in which to understand struggling adolescent readers since literacy experiences in the classroom shape students' identities as readers (Triplett, 2004). Participating in a social environment, individuals learn the norms of that environment and develop identities in relation to these norms (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Using this social constructivist theory, I want to learn how students have constructed their understandings of themselves as readers from their prior experiences and interactions within the social environment of school. Using Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory of learning, I noted how research-based literacy practices for adolescents meet student needs.

Considerations from Research-Based Literacy Practices for Adolescents

When considering the struggling adolescent reader and how to best provide remedial instruction, we must also consider what research says about evidence-based practices. Sturtevant et al. (2006) drew conclusions about literacy research through the

“collaboration of 14 adolescent literacy scholars who worked together over 4 years” (p. xiii), during which they reviewed prior research and “made observations in 28 settings” (p. xiv). Their research offers eight guiding principles to use in designing effective literacy instruction for adolescents. Using these principles, I have identified three overarching themes as necessary for the instruction of literacy for all adolescents including struggling readers (a) active learning environments with direct literacy instruction, (b) student engagement within a respectful environment with high expectations, and (c) student engagement with texts for a variety of purposes.

Active Learning Environments with Direct Literacy Instruction

According to Vygotsky (1986), as students’ cognitive abilities develop, they are able to create concepts. Spontaneous concepts are those that come from children’s experience with everyday life, and scientific concepts come from a highly specialized activity such as formal classroom instruction. Within his study of scientific concepts, Vygotsky observed that determining whether a child could progress in concept formation was dependent upon an adult helping him/her. He referred to this phenomenon as “the zone of proximal development” (p. xxv). Vygotsky (1978) defined this zone as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Finally, in regard to concept formations, Vygotsky (1986) said that, although the skills needed to form concepts began in childhood, the “intellectual functions that in a specific

combination form the psychological basis of the process of concept formation ripen, take shape, and develop only at puberty” (p. 106).

As an adolescent is faced with more complex tasks, these tasks enable his ability to develop conceptual thinking, which subsequently enables him/her to problem solve (Vygotsky, 1986). In this way, teachers can assess at what level of cognitive development a child is at, provide proper scaffolding within instruction, and foster the child’s development of cognitive abilities (Miller, 2011). In order to meet the demands of text complexity and to “build strong content knowledge” (Applebee, 2013, p. 26), teachers must scaffold their instruction in an effort to best meet students’ zones of proximal development. Previous research has demonstrated that scaffolding instruction promotes positive growth with all students. Meeting an adolescent struggling reader at his/her zone of proximal development and scaffolding instruction of content-area and discipline-specific literacy strategies offers much promise to fostering his/her literacy development (Applebee, 2013).

Scaffolding instruction. Sturtevant et al. (2006) studied a seventh grade environmental science teacher who used scaffolding to successfully construct an interdisciplinary unit on wetlands with the art teacher. Ms. Fleener taught 125 students, heterogeneously grouped, including 12 learning-disabled and 10 English-as-a-Second Language students. Because the school was located near the Atlantic coast, she used her students’ background knowledge of the shore area to plan her instruction of wetlands, a topic required by her state’s curriculum standards. The unit began with a field trip to their local marine science museum. To prepare for this visit, Ms. Fleener used the K-W-

L strategy and had students complete the K (what students know) and the W (what students want to know) about wetlands. In art class, Mr. Berger had a local photographer come in to share some pictures of her work with “marsh animals, birds, and landscapes” (p. 22) in order to pique student interest and continue tapping into their background knowledge for the unit. During the visit to the museum, students were expected to complete the L (what students had learned) column of their K-W-L chart. After the visit to the museum, Ms. Fleener had students reference their K-W-L chart and share what they had learned on the trip. This type of scaffolding clearly provides students the opportunity to access their background knowledge on a topic and build from there.

Sturtevant et al. (2006) also studied Mr. G’s ninth-grade math lesson on linear equations. He used the comparison of water consumption and the costs on his water bill to guide this instruction. Mr. G used four types of scaffolding within this particular lesson. First, he began with explicit modeling through a mini-lesson where he thought aloud the process of plotting a slope as he constructed it on the board. Next, because he was constantly reflective and adjusted his instruction to support students’ understandings, Mr. G used direct explanations and re-explanations. For example, he interjected with a small group as they were trying to construct a formula with, “Water, that’s gonna be our consumption, and we can say consumption, but we want the units, so we have to clarify things. We can’t just say consumption, but gallons, or cubic feet, of consumption” (p. 69). Then, by encouraging students to participate in the discussion with him and one another, he posed questions like “So, I’m using 3,000 cubic feet at \$11.09, what do I pay?” (p. 71). Finally, by providing immediate feedback, Mr. G continually verified their

understandings or clarified their misunderstandings. An example of such feedback was when he said, “Right. And just to reiterate, it’s a linear equation in two variables, but that’s a very good question because often students want to say...” (p. 70). By noting the positive reinforcement comments above, this example demonstrates how scaffolding instruction throughout a lesson can foster students’ understandings of complex things.

Role of content-area literacy strategies. Additionally, studies demonstrated the need for strategy instruction in order for adolescent learners to meet the demands of content standards (Alvermann, Fitzgerald, & Simpson, 2006; Pressley & Harris, 2006). Alvermann et al. (2006) completed a comprehensive review of 13 literacy studies conducted between January, 1996 and February, 2004 for grades 6-12. Their findings revealed that scaffolding instruction via strategies such as Reciprocal Teaching (student-guided discussions via summarizing, questioning, clarifying, and predicting), PALS (guided partner reading with retell, summarizing of paragraphs, and making predictions) and Concept Anchoring Routine (where students are cued, given a chance to redo, and then review) were beneficial to all students including those with reading disabilities. Additionally, from their review of 13 studies, Alvermann et al. (2006) concluded that “adolescents’ comprehension of content area reading materials was enhanced when teachers overtly and systematically taught them strategies that required organizing, integrating, and reflecting on informational and/or narrative texts” (p. 440).

Pressley and Harris (2006) also reviewed the literature of K-12 reading research and discussed the importance of strategy instruction. Evidence was provided that strategy instruction is extremely beneficial for most students in the areas of reading,

writing, foreign language learning, and mathematical problem-solving. Based upon the research cited, “children can learn effective strategies when they are taught them, with clear benefits in learning and memory” (p. 270). In the area of reading, word recognition (phonics instruction, alphabetic knowledge, phonemic awareness, and fluency) and processing text (comprehension) strategies are instrumental in supporting a child’s reading development. Additionally, Pressley and Harris (2006) concluded the Cognitive Strategies Instruction in Writing program (use of specific writing strategies with audience and purpose in mind) has proven to help children with learning disabilities as well as with average abilities to develop their writing skills. In the area of foreign language learning, successful students use memory strategies as well as keyword association strategies. For mathematical problem-solving, the use of strategies that support reflection and using prior knowledge of previously worked problems increase students’ mathematical abilities.

Research acknowledges the importance of the role for content-area literacy strategies to foster students’ literacy growth (Alvermann et al., 2006; Pressley & Harris, 2006). Additionally, Faggella-Luby, Graner, Deshler, and Drew (2012) stress the importance of building these foundational strategy skills for struggling students before these students can be expected to use discipline-specific literacy strategies in secondary schools.

Role of discipline-specific literacy strategies. Where content-area literacy strategies offer techniques that a student might use in order to access and make sense of a text, discipline-specific literacy strategies focus on “the unique tools that the experts in a

discipline use to engage in the work of that discipline” (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012, p. 8). Today, literacy skills are complex, discipline-specific approaches fundamental to accessing communication or ways of knowing and doing within a specific discipline (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

By conducting “think aloud” readings with accomplished professionals in various disciplines, Shanahan and Shanahan (2008) found discipline-specific ways of thinking and knowing reified in the text and text reading/interpretation of disciplinary material. Scientists were interested in transforming language to other systems of representation, such as formulas, diagrams, charts and models, and in moving recursively between text and visual representations. Chemists generally trusted sources as “true,” but critically analyzed experimental design, procedures, conditions, and outcomes. Historians, on the other hand, emphasized consideration of authors, sources, author bias, credibility, and multiple interpretations of events, as well as critical analysis of primary sources and their varied interpretations. Shanahan and Shanahan (2012) proposed that using discipline-specific strategies would guide students “to go beyond a superficial understanding and to grasp deeper and more sophisticated ideas” (p. 15).

Similarly, Russell (2002) proposed that students entering disciplinary communities must learn both the “facts” of the content area and the “essential rhetorical structures: specialized lines of argument, vocabulary, and organizational conventions, the tacit understandings about what must be stated and what assumed – in short, the culture of the discipline that gives meaning to the ‘facts’” (p. 18). Likewise, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (2010) state the need for

...an appreciation of the norms and conventions of each discipline, such as the kinds of evidence used in history and science; an understanding of domain-specific words and phrases; an attention to precise details; and the capacity to evaluate intricate arguments, synthesize complex information, and follow detailed descriptions of events and concepts. (p. 60)

In order to meet the demands of CCSS and access academic texts, then, all ability-level students must be taught discipline-specific literacy strategies.

Student Engagement within a Respectful Environment with High Expectations

Maintaining the interest and engagement of struggling adolescent readers can be challenging. Vygotsky also believed that “individuals and cultural communities mutually create each other” (Miller, 2011, p.171). Therefore, the interactive learning experiences students have are very important, and a culturally responsive framework of learning seeks to support the educational achievement for all students. Within this framework, a classroom community is established that identifies and uses the cultural strengths that each individual student brings to the classroom (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007). It is through this type of framework that the CCSS expectation to “come to understand other perspectives and cultures” (Applebee, 2013, p. 26) can be met. By utilizing struggling adolescent readers’ cultural data sets, enabling them the power of choice in the selection of texts, and providing texts that enable them to make powerful connections, teachers can foster students’ literacy development (Sturtevant et al., 2006).

Utilizing cultural data sets/funds of knowledge. Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, and Moll (2011) defined the attainment of “funds of knowledge” in reference to the skills and knowledge an individual has developed and needs to function within his/her cultural community. These funds of knowledge may be converted into social or cultural

capital (resources acquired through immersion in cultural practices) that the individual may bring to another community such as a school. However, some marginalized groups' cultural capital may not be valued within dominant White school settings. Lee (2007) added that, from the basic understanding of who students are, a set of "cultural data sets" (p. 35) may be used to enable students to connect with a topic familiar to them, while, at the same time, being taught an academic task.

Lee (2007) provided an example of valuing students' cultures within her Cultural Modeling Project at Fairgate High School, an underachieving urban high school. All of the students at this high school were African-American, with a majority from low-income families and a majority who were low-achieving. Within the African-American English vernacular used in their cultural community, the practice known as signifying (speaking in insults) was often used. In order to begin her instruction of canonical literature, Lee chose Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*. Within this text, Pauline, who works for a white family, tries not to be Black; however, "no matter how hard the Black woman tries to straighten her hair, the dark edges of nappy will always push themselves forward" (p. 23). Lee determined that Morrison's commentary is a form of signifying. As students realized that signifying was not just a practice within their cultural speech but also used in language play within written texts, they began to transfer their attention to language play used within canonical texts. Thus, by using the cultural capital of her students, Lee was able to connect literature to their everyday lives and language and engage them within the classroom community.

Alvermann (2001) also discussed the importance of culture within adolescents' lives. She argued, "adolescents' contacts with adult family members and with adults in community institutions such as schools, libraries, youth organizations, and churches contribute to the shaping of both worlds" (p. 678). In her study, teacher, Minerva Salazar, was able to use local resources to provide cultural and curricular connections for her diverse classroom of students (19 Mexican Americans, 1 Filipino American, 1 African American, and 1 Anglo). By bringing in guest speakers from the community, taking local field trips, and providing opportunities to respond to diverse texts, she "noted a heightened awareness of positive reading identities among several of the Mexican American students" (p. 682).

Finally, Fairbanks and Ariail (2006) used "Bourdieu's theories of social and cultural capital" (p. 312) when they studied the "positional identities in relation to literacy and schooling" (p. 319) of three girls over the course of three years. Through this multiple-case study, Isabel (light-skinned Latina), Melanie (African-American), and Jessica (dark-skinned Latina) offered insightful perspectives that demonstrated how each girl's cultural capital constructed their positional identities in school. Each of the girls had very different social, family, and literacy resources to draw from, and these resources contributed to each girl's experiences in school. Isabel was viewed positively by her teachers and was placed in an Honors class in the seventh grade. On the other hand, Melanie's "sixth grade teacher was unaware that Melanie's language was consistent with African American Vernacular" (p. 321), and "considered referring her for special education services" (p. 321). This teacher's response stands in direct contrast with what

Lee (2007) described as a need for teachers to know their students' cultures. Melanie was assigned to additional special reading classes during seventh and eighth grades where there was an emphasis placed on skill instruction. Although Jessica did not have strong social networks to support her at school or at home, she was viewed as an average student and enjoyed writing about life experiences and preferred doing projects. However, she was often bored and did not see English as important. Jessica sought attention from the teacher for assistance with her work but often got into trouble for using inappropriate language. Even though Jessica made A's and B's and passed the state's seventh grade reading proficiency test, she was placed into a remedial class with no explanation. Because all of these girls brought different social and cultural capital to the school setting and behaved in ways that had been shaped by that capital, the institution of school ascribed specific identities to them. Thus, these assigned identities influenced these girls' experiences with learning opportunities in school.

Enabling the power of choice. Through the *Write for Your Life Project*, Fairbanks (2000) demonstrated that, when adolescents have choice and make connections with their learning opportunities, they will not only feel a sense of belonging within their own classroom community but also to the community outside the learning environment. After beginning the year with personal narratives and stories related to themes of adolescents coming of age, sixth-grade students were given the opportunity to complete a research project based upon their personal interests. Students chose topics such as divorce, drug use, gangs, and homelessness. Through their inquiry into these topics, they not only used standard research resources but visited local agencies for additional

information on their topic as well. Additionally, students interviewed “parents, their peers, counselors, and family friends to learn about their topics” (p. 45). By stepping outside the classroom and engaging in conversations with members of the local community, students established a sense of belonging within these settings. Significant positive reactions resulted from participation in this project. “Paul, a more reluctant reader and writer, reminded us that he had written three pages for his report, the most he had ever written for school” (p. 46). Additionally, “several bilingual students also noted increases in their reading and writing abilities” (p. 47).

Casey (2008) also demonstrated that, by engaging struggling adolescent readers within literature circles, their motivation increased. Within a classroom of 19 seventh-grade students, six were identified as at risk. Students were placed into literature circles with a text selection based upon their interests. Because these students were reading texts that were personal to them, they appeared more willing to participate. A major component of these literature circles was to engage in dialogue with one another about the text, and students readily participated because they were discussing a topic that was important to them. Thus, the teacher helped her students’ engagement within the classroom community by establishing an environment that fostered interest in what her students deemed pertinent to their lives.

Finally, Sturtevant et al. (2006) studied Ms. Joseph’s 12th grade history class. She created an assignment entitled *The Birthday Project*. Ms. Joseph introduced the unit by discussing how “historians learn much about history by studying the lives of everyday people” (p. 83). Therefore, the project would involve “learning about the everyday

experiences, traditions, and beliefs of ordinary people, and what society was like during your birth year” (p. 83). Although this project was not one that students were able to choose, it was one that connected to them as individuals and made learning personal. However, since students could not possibly research every aspect of a year, the students were allowed to choose their focus of the study: historical, mathematical, musical, artistic, sports, and economic events. Jamal exclaimed, ‘Music! Now that’s more like it!’ (p. 84). Choice was also extended in the way students decided to prepare their final projects. Such choices included written narrative, radio script, video, essay for a magazine, scrapbook, PowerPoint presentation, and dvd mini-documentary. Sabina chose to create an iMovie documentary. She included categories such as “Fashions” [and] “TV Shows” (p. 91). Her final thoughts on the project included: “The world was shaped by many influential people and events that identify the world as it is today” (p. 92). Allowing room for personal choice fostered student interest and ownership of this project.

Making connections. Lenters (2006) provided insight on how important it is for teachers to help struggling adolescent readers have a purpose for reading. In order to do so, it is vital to select themes related to adolescence and allow opportunities for student choice. Heron-Hruby, Hagood, & Alvermann (2008) demonstrated that adolescents are in conflict with school settings over the use of pop culture texts. Some teachers do not appreciate, accept, or understand the importance of how such texts can be used to connect their students to motivation and learning. Heron-Hruby, Wood, & Mraz (2008) referred to such texts as multiliteracies that adolescents use in their daily lives. They define

multiliteracies as that which “extends beyond traditional textbook and trade book learning to include interactions with video, the Internet, popular music, and even modes of dress” (p. 259). Because of the diverse cultures represented within today’s youths, this research emphasizes finding ways for students to connect those literacies important to them and the school culture.

Alvermann (2001) also shared how important it is to provide students with literacy experiences using things they are interested in and want to read. She discussed how “schools actively arrange for some adolescents to take up, or inhabit, the position of struggling reader” (p. 683). For many of these students, it is easier to simply avoid reading. She provided the example of Grady, an African American ninth grade student who was reading on the fifth grade level. During an after school media club, 30 adolescents took part in various media literacy practices. The students often engaged with such media as magazines, music CDs, and video games. Grady, on the other hand, often sat alone, avoiding participation with the other students. He often played a Metal Gear video game and soon became bored with it. Instead, he requested a Pokemon game because “you have to take care of the characters, not kill them” (p. 686). Once Pokemon was purchased for him, Grady regularly referred to the cheat books he read for this game in order to be more successful. Thus, once connected to something he enjoyed and had a purpose for reading, Grady became more engaged in literacy learning.

Finally, Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, and McCormick (2010) conducted seven case studies at a Reading Clinic in Baltimore, Maryland with struggling adolescent readers. Although all of the students struggled with comprehension in their regular

classroom settings, they were successful at understanding what they read via computer. For example, Tamika reportedly spent five hours each day on the computer, updating her website, responding to e-mails, and playing games. Karl spent three hours a day on the computer, responding to e-mails, participating in MySpace, and reading the news. Kathy used the computer to communicate with a pen-pal. For these three students, interactions on the computer motivated them to stay engaged and practice their reading skills. Sam shared that he enjoyed reading, “When I like the book and it’s about what I like...like basketball” (p. 641). Leon said he responded best “when his interests were considered in selecting reading materials” (p. 642), and Andrew loved to discuss sports and enjoyed reading more when he was able to choose what he read. Additionally, choice drove the motivation to read for these three students. The final student, Stacy, was an avid reader but needed help with using reading strategies in order to build her comprehension skills. Therefore, for six of these seven students, being able to make some type of connection to the text either by the use of their 21st Century technological skill or by interests, was significant for motivating them to read.

Klingner and Edwards (2006) have pointed out the importance of looking into classrooms to see if adequate, culturally responsive instruction is taking place before we assume that students are struggling due to their own cognitive deficits. The studies reviewed here illustrate that social and cultural resources are critical to the cognitive development of children and, in order to create a culturally responsive middle school classroom, it is imperative for teachers to know their students and demonstrate appreciation for, value, and acceptance of the cultural strengths they bring into the

classroom community. By using these strengths, the school culture may support and meet the academic needs of individual students more effectively (Lee, 2007).

Student Engagement with Texts for a Variety of Purposes

Finally, Vygotsky saw language and thought as playing a dual role, as “a psychological tool that helps to form other mental functions” (Vygotsky, 1986, p. xxx). Initially independent of one another, thought and language work together when a child participates in social interaction. This interaction aids in the acquisition of language skills, which, in turn, fosters cognitive development (Vygotsky, 1986). Engaging in classroom discourse where many perspectives are shared enables the child to draw his/her own interpretations of texts (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003). Through the use of labor (social interaction) and psychological tools, “children’s interactions with others in social settings and the culture’s ‘psychological tools’ such as language used in these interactions shape children’s thinking” (Miller, 2011, p. 168). Engaging in academic conversations and inquiry learning are significant means by which students learn and develop as readers and writers. Acknowledging the value of language and thought within an adolescent’s literacy development by promoting social engagement with texts would clearly meet the CCSS goals to “comprehend as well as critique [and] value evidence” (Applebee, 2013, p. 26). Additionally, through inquiry learning with peers, the CCSS goals to “use technology and digital media strategically and appropriately” (Applebee, 2013, p. 26) can also be met. By providing struggling adolescent readers the opportunities to engage and construct meaning via inquiry learning and collaborative discourse, their literacy skills have the potential to develop.

Inquiry learning. Developing students' interest in inquiry learning requires scaffolding instruction, providing choice, and connecting to students' lives as well (Fairbanks, 2000; Sturtevant et al., 2006). For example, within the *Write for Your Life Project* (Fairbanks, 2000), after much investigation through reading and writing narratives and classroom discussions, students were able to choose their topic of inquiry. Having this choice, they were engaged with the project and sought information to build their understanding of something very personal to them. Additionally, in Sturtevant et al.'s study (2006), Ms. Joseph's *Birthday Project* provided students with a topic meaningful to them and allowed them to have choice in the focus of inquiry and the creation of how they were going to share it with the class.

Sturtevant et al.'s (2006) study of Mr. Perry's biology class also demonstrated the importance of providing students the opportunity for inquiry learning with a variety of texts. He began with a mini-lesson called "Population Ecology and Fluctuations" (p. 44). After he discussed "cycles of birth, physical development and maturity, reproduction, and death" (p. 45), he moved the discussion to communities of organisms and why populations might fluctuate. Mr. Perry then asked his students to partner and find evidence "of population fluctuation among various organisms" (p. 45). In order to do this, he provided them with a number of print and non-print texts such as: science texts, literature, the *Smithsonian Magazine*, the Internet, and WebQuests to choose from. As students collaborated, Mr. Perry circulated, offering assistance as needed. Students were engaged and appeared to be successfully acquiring the knowledge Mr. Perry had planned for.

Power of talk. Peer-led discussion groups are often successful at “decentering the teacher’s authority and encouraging students to explore their own questions about the literature” (Wade & Moje, 2000, p. 618). When developing instruction that fosters collaborative discourse, providing choice and making connections to students’ lives are equally important. Faircloth (2009) conducted a study on belonging with 83 ninth grade students. Students participated in classroom reading assignments that enabled students to make connections to their own lives. For example, with their study of *The Odyssey*, students wrote about their own challenges in life and how they had dealt with them. Additionally, during their study of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, students engaged in journal writing activities about the topic of racism and how it affected them. Participating in discussions on topics that were of interest to them was particularly engaging. In this study, one student commented, “The thing about this English class that has interested me the most is really sharing our opinions” (p. 337). Others shared: “I like how we can express our feelings and we can even be wrong!” “I like how we can tell about ourselves.” and “I like how we can show who we are.” (p. 337). Faircloth (2009) found that, when adolescents feel a sense of belonging within their school community, they are more engaged and motivated to participate. Finally, Greenleaf and Hinchman (2009) provided an example of a ninth-grade student named Terrance, who struggled with school literacy tasks and avoided reading whenever possible. By providing him with interest-driven texts and a collaborative environment in which to discuss texts, he became engaged and began to ask more questions about the meaning of the text.

These studies underscore the significance of providing struggling adolescent readers with opportunities of inquiry and collaborative talk to become more engaged and feel more efficacious about their abilities. When fostering the literacy development of adolescent readers, it is important to provide instruction that aligns with research-based practices. This includes instruction that is (a) active and direct, (b) engaging with high expectations, and (c) engaging for a variety of purposes (Sturtevant et al., 2006).

Students who Struggle with Reading

Adolescent students of all reading abilities can benefit from evidence-based practices. Struggling readers, however, need additional support. Guthrie and Davis (2003) define struggling readers as those who are disengaged from reading activities. Intrinsic motivation for reading declines for all students between grades four and seven and even more so for struggling readers who have learned they are struggling from their teachers and their prior interactions and experiences (Guthrie & Davis, 2003). Three of the five essential requirements (pillars) cited in *The National Reading Panel Report* (2000) needed for optimal success with literacy for young adolescents are (a) vocabulary, (b) reading fluency, and (c) reading comprehension. In order to understand why adolescents perceive their abilities as readers like they do, it is beneficial to explore the ways in which their early reading experiences may have helped shaped their identities as readers in the areas of vocabulary, reading fluency, and reading comprehension.

Vocabulary

As children enter kindergarten, there are marked differences in their language and vocabulary use. Children will fall anywhere along the continuum between advanced

(75% - a year ahead) and delayed (25% - a year behind) (Biemiller, 1999). Over time, this gap tends to widen (Biemiller, 1999). Although it is not clear to what extent, there is a relationship between vocabulary knowledge (how to pronounce the words and understand their meanings) and reading proficiency (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). As they get older, students should be taught the strategies to help them determine the meanings of unknown words within the context of their individual reading. This practice allows students to develop an understanding of the many facets of word meaning and relationships among words. Research conducted on teaching vocabulary in context revealed that students “were able to respond more quickly to word meanings in a timed task, and they showed better comprehension of stories containing the target words” (Beck et al., 2002, p. 78).

Reading Fluency

“Fluency combines accuracy, automaticity, and oral reading prosody, which, taken together, facilitates the reader’s construction of meaning” (Kuhn, Schwanenflugel, Meisinger, Levy, & Rasinski, 2010, p. 240). In 1974, Laberge and Samuels created a reading model that focused on the concept of automaticity or automatic word recognition. As children begin to store sight words in their memory, their recognition of these words becomes automatic. This automaticity of sight words is considered as a possible key to assisting effective reading. Likewise, Perfetti’s (1985) verbal efficiency theory states that words are recognized and “associated with familiar concepts represented in the reader’s memory” (p. 4), which refers to having “lexical access” (p. 4). Increased word recognition frees up one’s mental capacity in order to construct meaning from a text or

foster comprehension. Especially for younger students, both automaticity theory and verbal efficiency theory predict success with comprehension.

For older students, however, prosody is a better predictor of comprehension (Basaran, 2013; Veenendaal, Groen, & Verhoeven, 2015). Prosody is reading with “appropriate expression or intonation coupled with phrasing that allows for the maintenance of meaning” (Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 233). Carver (2000) argues that fluent readers have the ability to “read text orally (aloud) with correct accuracy of pronunciation and with appropriate expression which suggests that they are understanding the thoughts represented by the words they are saying aloud” (p. 5). Although this practice is generally a good predictor that comprehension is taking place, there are always exceptions to the rule and being a fluent reader does not always have a direct correlation to having good reading comprehension (Rashotte & Torgeson, 1985).

Reading Comprehension

Reading comprehension is the skill of constructing meaning from text (Perfetti, 1985). Once decoding is mastered, word recognition becomes automatic, and children begin to read, they may have trouble with textual inferences (Perfetti, 1985). As a result, in order to construct meaning from text, strategies to use before, during, and after reading should be taught (Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991). Such reading strategies include (a) making predictions, (b) questioning the text, (c) making connections to the text, and (d) summarizing (Alvermann et al., 2006; Palinscar & Brown, 1984; Paris et al., 1991; Perfetti, 1985; Pressley & Harris, 2006). In several studies, modeling these reading strategies and providing feedback improved students’ comprehension (Biancarosa &

Snow, 2004; Pressley & Block, 2002; Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996; Harmon, Keehn, & Kenney, 2004; Vaughn, Klingner, Swanson, Boardman, Roberts, Mohammed, & Stillman-Spisak, 2011). Once teachers modeled strategies for students and gave them the opportunity to practice them with feedback, students tended to use the strategies taught when reading independently (Dole et al., 1996; Harmon et al., 2004).

In order for struggling readers to become proficient readers, they must gain the skills needed to do so. These skills include vocabulary use, reading fluency, and reading comprehension. Having an understanding of how to break apart words or determine their meanings using textual content directly affects reading proficiency (Beck et al., 2002). Increasing vocabulary knowledge fosters automaticity (Laberge & Samuels, 1974) and verbal efficiency (Perfetti, 1985), which allows for more successful fluent reading and the construction of meaning while reading. Once students begin to read with understanding, strategies to use before, during, and after reading will assist them in drawing inferences from the texts. Therefore, all three of these pillars of reading are needed in order for older students to optimize their reading proficiency.

Students' Perceptions of Themselves as Readers

Understanding students' perceptions of themselves as readers has led me to the research on reading identity and self-efficacy, both of which draw on the work of Vygotsky. Within the social setting of school, children construct their reading identities based upon how they perceive themselves as readers within the norms of this social setting (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Drawing from their past and present experiences, these identities are either supported or changed (Alsup, 2005).

Reading Identity

Reading identity refers to how capable students believe they are with the skill of comprehending, how important reading is to them, and their understandings of what a good reader is (Hall, 2012). Literacy experiences in school over time help shape students' reading identities (Hall, 2012; Hall, 2016; Rubin, 2007). According to Rubin (2007), "schooling is a constitutive process through which students come to understand the world and define their places within it" (p. 220). Horn (2006) argues that "discourses, practices, and interactions provide important tools for identity formation" (p. 6). Often, reading identities are assigned to students by teachers based upon their test scores, reading levels, or how well students are viewed with the engagement of texts (Hall, 2012). Poor readers often withdraw, choosing not to participate in classroom literacy discourse activities, and are assigned to a reading remediation class, whereas good readers are more likely to participate in literacy discussions, often dominating these discussions (Hall, 2012; Hall, 2016).

Because schools set the norms for what defines a good reader, it is imperative that teachers understand reading identities, assist students with finding their voices, and engage in meaningful literacy instruction (Hall, 2012). Hall's (2012) study with eighth grade students revealed that struggling readers wanted more challenging texts in school, to learn how to comprehend texts, to learn more vocabulary, and more time to read. By engaging students in a unit on identity and connecting reading instruction with assignments, the teacher in this study "was able to bridge students' beliefs about what they needed help on with what she needed to teach" (Hall, 2012, p. 372). This

partnership in learning caused students' attitudes about reading to shift and they rewrote their reading identities (Hall, 2012). Likewise, Knoester (2009) found that adolescent students on or near grade level enjoyed talking about texts they had a connection to. Because struggling students are often in conflict with their primary discourse and learning the secondary academic discourse in schools, they need a setting where they are "welcomed into the dominant Discourses valued in schools and literacies and given opportunities to succeed, as each step from a more comfortable primary Discourse may be risking rejection and failure" (Knoester, 2009, p. 683). The most resistant student in this study, John, enjoyed reading when he was in a small group with four other students and the EC teacher. However, in a large group, John was often near the social center of the class and acted as a class clown, avoiding appropriate engagement. Knoester (2009) argues that teachers should use thematic units that are relevant to students' lives in order to foster their reading identity development and appropriately engage them in middle school literacy activities.

Skerrett and Bomer's (2011) study of an urban ninth-grade reading classroom revealed that students participated in many out-of-school literacy practices beyond traditional book-length texts. Most had a MySpace page and used the Internet frequently. Many also were associated with gangs, participating in graffiti, as well as the keeping of "notebooks, scrapbooks, and journals; the reading of novels, comics, and other extended literary texts; reading to inform significant activity...; intense commitment to literacy that bounds popular music; and a pervasive practice of cell-phone texting" (Skerrett & Bomer, 2011, p. 1264). The teacher used this knowledge of her students' out-of-school

literacy practices and connected these practices with the general curriculum. Although this type of instruction was confusing at times for the teacher and her students, the students developed understanding of literary concepts and analysis skills. Similarly, Francois's (2013) study of urban students revealed that students viewed literacy as a way of relating to their peers, adults, and textual characters. In this study, teachers made an effort to get to know them as individuals with distinct interests and to use those interests to create a bridge to instruction. They read texts that their students were interested in reading and designed lessons that integrated students' interests with literature.

Becnel and Moeller (2005) found that "rural young adults have reading preferences, behaviors, and desires that are distinct from their urban counterparts" (p. 299). The teens in their study preferred print over digital reading content, disliked assigned readings in school, and shared they had little opportunity for social interaction with literacy-related topics although some would have liked such an opportunity. However, similar to urban students, when speaking of their favorite book, they named popular young adult titles and conveyed strong emotional connections to the characters within these texts.

Because children's reading identities are generally constructed in school settings, Robinson and Stock (1990) posit that it is the teacher's judgments and ratings placed on students that affect students' perceptions of their abilities within the classroom. They offer their experience with a twelfth-grade student, Gilberto Sanchez, as an example. The data shared clearly demonstrated that Gilberto's literacy skills were fostered and improved through discourse and constructive feedback. Opening dialogue with the

student, the researchers created a space where “every voice was to be heard, attended to, and respected” (p. 290). They observed,

The nature of our interactions with our students in our classrooms, the receptiveness of our reactions to our students’ texts, the character of the texts we will or will not compose for our students’ responsive understanding will constitute a politics of literacy. (p. 284)

Robinson and Stock (1990) concluded that teachers are obligated to provide appropriate feedback to their students’ responses in order to create spaces for literacy instruction to take place and students’ skills to improve.

Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Robinson and Stock’s conclusion also aligns with ways to increase students’ self-efficacies (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory explains human functioning as a “triadic reciprocal causation” (p. 14) where “internal personal factors in the form of cognitive, affective, and biological events, behavioral patterns, and environmental influences all operate as interacting determinants that influence one another bidirectionally” (pp. 14-15). Schunk et al. (2008) describe this theory in the following way: “individuals act based on their thoughts, goals, beliefs, and values” (p. 122) within their social environment.

A major component of this theory is self-efficacy. In fact, Bandura (2001) said “perceived self-efficacy occupies a pivotal role in the causal structure of social cognitive theory because efficacy beliefs affect adaptation and change not only in their own right, but through their impact on other determinants” (p. 10). Miller (2011) defines self-

efficacy as “people’s perceptions of their competence in dealing with their environment and exercising influence over events that affect their lives” (p. 243).

Children in school develop knowledge about their self-efficacies by way of four sources of information (a) prior performances, (b) vicarious experiences, (c) verbal persuasion, and (d) physiological symptoms (Miller, 2011; Schunk et al., 2008). The higher one’s self-efficacy, the more he/she will learn and achieve (Schunk et al., 2008).

According to Schunk et al. (2008), assisting students with setting a goal and providing them with feedback as to their progress towards that goal influences motivation and self-efficacy. When given effective feedback, it is important that students also be guided as how to effectively make attributions, such as effort, persistence, ability, or correct strategy use, for their success or non-success. As students gain an understanding of how well they are doing, what is attributing to their learning outcomes, and why they should continue to put forth effort, they will experience success and move toward self-regulated learning. “At this level, learners initiate use of strategies, incorporate adjustments based on features of situations, and are motivated by goals and self-efficacy” (Schunk et al., 2008, p. 158). Clearly, the ultimate goal for any struggling reader is to build his/her self-efficacy in such a way that he/she will use taught strategies when presented with independent reading tasks.

An example of Schunk et al.’s (2008) suggestions are supported in a study by Schunk and Rice (1991). Thirty fifth graders were taught comprehension strategies that aided in finding the main ideas of texts. These students were already receiving remedial instruction because they scored 20% or lower on the SRA Achievement Series Level D

Test (McGraw-Hill). Students were randomly placed into one of three treatment groups (a) product goal, (b) process goal, or (c) process goal plus progress feedback. During the first session, for all students, a five-step strategy to aid in determining the main idea of the text was modeled by the teacher; however, after that, each group received different guidance/feedback. Over the course of 15 days for 35 minutes each day, students received their designated treatment instruction. At the end of the study, all students demonstrated an increase in self-efficacy. Thus, it was concluded that if students believe they have learned a strategy to use they will be more efficacious.

Additionally, Wigfield and Eccles (1994) have argued that, as struggling readers move through elementary school, they become more realistic in their capabilities, and their self-competency beliefs decrease. As these same students move into middle school, other factors such as biological and social changes tend to magnify the intensity of their low self-efficacies. Persistent difficulties with reading have not only academic consequences but also have a significant effect on how students see themselves as students and readers. Donalson and Halsey (2007), for example, conducted a case study of an eighth-grade, Title I remedial reading class. There were eight students (four females and four males, two Hispanics and six Caucasians) within the class who “displayed learned helplessness, lack of motivation, and low self-efficacy” (p. 221). The students had chosen their elective courses in April of the previous school year. However, because of their “below average” (p. 223) scores on the previous school year’s criterion reference exam, they were taken out of a chosen elective class and placed into the reading remediation class three weeks into the new school year. By using a learning style survey,

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995), interview sessions, and participant observation, Donalson and Halsey discovered that these young students' perceptions about their reading remediation class were negative or neutral. When asked his feelings about being placed into this class, Felix shared, "I didn't like it; no one even talked to me. It would have been nice to tell me" (p. 228). Jimmy's response was "It made me feel dumb" and "(His eyes filled with tears)" (p. 226). When asked which elective he was pulled from, Jimmy said, "Art. I really like drawing. I'm really into art" (p. 226). Donalson and Halsey contend, "Although most would not argue that these students need reading intervention, the system in place is detrimental to their self-efficacy and their future success" (p. 228).

Reviewing the research on reading identity and self-efficacy provides insight as to why struggling readers perceive their reading abilities the way they do. Similar to best practices, these studies emphasize that students must be presented with content that is accessible and appealing in order to engage the adolescent student and opportunities to engage in literacy communities. Students not only need to be able to understand the content they are reading but also be able to participate in discourse with others about the content. The research also indicates it is evident that teachers have the power to construct literacy instruction relevant to their struggling students' interests and foster the re-writing of their reading identities from struggling to successful. However, adolescent students who are deemed struggling readers are often placed in RTI remedial settings, which focus on skill-based instruction that repeats what students were offered at the elementary level.

Response to Intervention and Adolescent Students

According to Fuchs et al. (2010), by middle school, reading deficits are well defined and, due to low motivation and poor self-confidence, adolescent students tend to be unresponsive to interventions similar to those at the elementary level. There has been little research conducted on the implementation of RTI in secondary schools (Prewett, Mellard, Deschler, Allen, Alexander, & Stern, 2012). Additionally, the academic schedule at the middle school level does not allow for many options to provide such interventions. Consequently, it is ever more important at this level to decrease the academic deficits and move students down the RTI tiers in a timely manner.

Research Findings on RTI

Although limited, it is important to review studies on RTI at the middle school level in order to understand why adolescent students have the perceptions they do about their reading instruction. Studies where middle schools have implemented RTI programs similar to elementary schools have found mixed to small results (Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Graves, Brandon, Duesbery, McIntosh, & Pyle, 2011; Pyle & Vaughn, 2012; Vaughn, Cirino, Wanzek, Wexler, Fletcher, Denton, Barth, Romain, & Francis, 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Even though these studies reported mixed to small results, Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) concluded that there is no research demonstrating that standardized assessments can substantiate that students in grade six or higher profit from explicit reading and vocabulary instruction. To make matters worse, Craig and Sarlo (2012) noted that “30% to 75% of students enrolled in reading intervention courses received either an F or a D for their final grade” (p. 64) at several low-performing schools

in Florida. The following three groups of RTI studies which address specific interventions for students indicate those who receive additional instruction in remedial reading classes experience little literacy growth at this age.

Vaughn et al. (2010) conducted a study of 1867 6-8 students in seven schools from three districts. Schools were from urban, rural, and suburban areas. Using the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, students were considered struggling if they scored below the 20th percentile. The students in this study were classified as: 1/3 struggling with decoding, fluency, and comprehension; 1/3 struggling with fluency and comprehension; and less than 1/5 struggling with comprehension. In Tier 1, research-based strategies to build academic and core vocabulary and background knowledge were deemed necessary. Integrating comprehension strategies across the content areas was equally important. In order for teachers to be able to do this, professional development on instructional practices to enhance vocabulary and comprehension was provided. There were two separate studies within this study. Each study had three groups of students in it and were classified as (a) typical readers, Tier 1, meeting expectations on grade level within the classroom; (b) struggling readers, Tier 2, assigned to the research treatment class for 50 minutes each day with focus on word understanding and comprehension; and (c) student reader comparisons, who were provided additional support through tutorials and after-school programs. The students in the Tier 2 intervention were provided with an elective class of 50 minutes each day for an entire school year with a trained reading specialist. Phase I consisted of 25 lessons for 7-8 weeks on word study, *Reading Excellence: Word Attack & Rate Development Strategies*

(*REWARDS Intermediate* (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2005a), vocabulary, and comprehension. Phase II lasted for 17-18 weeks and focused on vocabulary and comprehension. Word study and vocabulary were continuously reviewed.

Reading Excellence: Word Attack & Rate Development Strategies (REWARDS) Plus Social Studies (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2005b) was used three days each week while novels were used two days each week. Phase III focused on vocabulary, comprehension, and independent application of skills and strategies for 8-10 weeks. Tier 2 students demonstrated gains in decoding, fluency, and comprehension ($d=.16$) over the Tier 1 students. Tier 2 students who were classified as non-responders were given an additional year of individualized instruction as Tier 3 students. At the end of that year, there were statistically significant gains found in the area of comprehension for Tier 3 students but not in skills such as word reading, word attack, or fluency (Pyle & Vaughn, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). The researchers from these studies acknowledge that the gains made here may not be transferrable because the study involved significant training, supervision, and feedback to the teachers providing the intervention instruction. They do argue, however,

that older students who are exposed to continuous research-based interventions within content area texts will continue to build academic vocabulary that will benefit content learning broadly as well as acquire word reading and comprehension strategies necessary for future success in school and the work place. (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012, p. 13)

Providing vocabulary and comprehension strategy instruction within content area classes, remediation classes for students reading at least two grade levels below grade-

level focused on vocabulary and comprehension, and individualized instruction for students with persistent reading difficulties, Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) believe students can improve their literacy abilities.

Next, Fagella-Luby and Wardell (2011) studied 86 fifth/sixth grade at-risk students at an urban middle school. The student population included 68% on free/reduced lunches and 30.8% ELL. Materials used were high-interest/low vocabulary. There were three conditions: SS, TP, and SSR each lasting 30 minutes for two/three days/week for 18 weeks. The SS included: story-structure routine (questions, analysis, and writing a five sentence summary), no cooperative learning, less corrective feedback, and more time on teacher description and modeling of self-questioning. The TP included: mini-lessons on active reading, vocabulary, guided reading with literature circles, and journal writing. The SSR included only sustained silent reading. The measures used were AIMSweb Maze (Shinn & Shinn, 2002), Strategy-Use Test, and the *Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test* (MacGinitie, MacGinitie, Maria, & Dreyer, 2002). Results were mixed; however, the SS and TP conditions rated higher than SSR.

Finally, Graves et al.'s (2011) participants in their study included 109 sixth graders, some with learning disabilities, in an urban, inner-city middle school. The school population was 100% on free/reduced price lunches and 90% were ELL. All students were below or far below expected reading proficiency skills based upon the results of their fifth grade state test. Students were randomly assigned to treatment or control groups. Students met for reading remediation in homogeneous groups of three for three hours/week over a period of ten weeks. They used *Corrective Reading*

(Engelmann, Meyer, Carnine, Becker, Eisele, & Johnson, 1999) for word attack skills, *Reading Excellence: Word Attack & Rate Development Strategies (REWARDS) Intermediate* (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2005a) to increase fluency, *Read Naturally* (www.readnaturally.com) to increase fluency through repeated readings and daybooks for reading comprehension and vocabulary. Curriculum based measurements were used to test oral reading fluency and maze reading comprehension. They reported that their “most important and substantive findings are significant differences between treatment and control on speed and accuracy while reading text ($d=.62$) and on reading comprehension ($d=.40$)” (p. 657). However, there were no differences between groups with vocabulary or MAZE comprehension.

The limited empirical research available on RTI interventions at the middle school level focuses on schools using specific skills-based instruction (similar to the elementary setting). Overall, results from these studies have indicated that it is difficult to substantiate significant outcomes from these interventions (Fagella-Luby & Wardell, 2011; Graves et al., 2011; Pyle & Vaughn, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012), and the interventions do not seem to focus on the actual needs of adolescents.

Challenges with Implementation

Johnson and Smith (2008) and Prewett et al. (2012) have demonstrated the complexities of implementing RTI in secondary school settings. Johnson and Smith (2008) conducted a study at Cheyenne Mountain Junior High School during the 2006-2007 school year. This school chose to use the problem-solving model of RTI. As

previously discussed, in this model, school teams collect and analyze individual student data and develop plans for intervention. They realized that with the implementation of this model of RTI, there was a need for (a) creating a “bank” of interventions to pull from, (b) professional development on differentiated instruction and use of curriculum-based measurements (CBMs) for the staff, (c) improved communication with parents, and (d) review and adoption of progress monitoring tools.

Additionally, Prewett et al. (2012) reported that RTI calls for (a) universal screening, (b) progress monitoring, (c) data-based instructional decision making, (d) tiered levels of support, and (e) fidelity with implementation. At the secondary level, there are logistical issues in providing the interventions required by RTI. One problem is scheduling, and another is the simultaneous demand to improve skills while learning content knowledge. Prewett and colleagues conducted a multiphase study with middle schools. Phase I of the study included 82 schools, which they determined had begun implementation of an RTI program. Phase II included 65 of those schools in order to learn how these schools screened students, progress-monitored, and provided tiered instructional interventions with fidelity checking. Phase III included 52 of the schools and provided evidence of practicing RTI interventions with fidelity checking. Phase IV included 28 of these schools and required that schools provide quantitative evidence of student outcome data from RTI. Phase V required site visits and only included 17 of the original 82 schools. The overall findings from this study included the following: (a) the main goal for all of these schools was to close the achievement gaps in reading and math by providing remediation; (b) these middle schools implemented RTI using the general

framework that elementary schools use; and (c) in order for teachers to be successful in implementing Tier 1 strategies within their classrooms, they must receive continuous RTI-focused professional development in a setting where the administrator organizes the school-wide framework.

These studies represent the multiple challenges of implementing RTI at the secondary level. They include locating intervention resources and progress-monitoring tools, time to provide remedial instruction, selection of remedial instruction, and a need for professional development for teachers.

Different Perspectives on RTI

The challenges in implementing RTI at the middle school level and the limited success of targeted interventions have prompted other researchers to offer alternative views about how to implement RTI for adolescent students. Brozo (2010) argues that because research on RTI within secondary schools has not found positive results and because adolescents must possess the skills needed to attend to more difficult content-specific texts, administrators and teachers should carefully consider whether or not RTI is even feasible at this level. Instead, Brozo (2011) prefers the term “responsive instruction” (p. 52) when discussing the best ways to help struggling adolescent readers. He stresses the following fundamental considerations when fostering adolescents’ literacy development: (a) “don’t allow RTI to define the secondary school reading program” (p. 138) – instead, educators should consider identities and motivation for these youth; (b) “don’t fixate on foundational reading skills for adolescents” (p. 139) – instead, consider instruction that fosters the development of complex thinking, reading, and

writing skills needed for accessing various disciplines; (c) “don’t become paralyzed by evidence-based practice if it isn’t working” (p. 139) – instead, be willing to be responsive to the needs of individual students; (d) “honor youth literacies” (p. 140) – build on students’ strengths using their beyond-school competencies with media; and (e) “channel resources into pd for general education disciplinary teachers so that prevention gets the lion’s share of attention” (p. 141).

Similarly, Klingner and Edwards (2006) stress the importance of providing culturally responsive literacy instruction within RTI. They shared three fundamental considerations for school personnel when implementing literacy interventions: (a) have a firm understanding of students’ communicative styles, (b) take into account community practices and build on the communities’ funds of knowledge, and (c) provide parents with assistance to help their children acquire cultural capital.

Finally, Ehren, Deshler, and Graner (2010) examined whether the Content Literacy Continuum (CLC) from the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning might work well with RTI. The CLC framework was “designed as a school-wide approach to address the content literacy needs of students in middle, junior, and senior high schools” (p. 316) that addressed all three levels of RTI. At level 1, content teachers use tools such as graphic organizers, outlines, and guided discussions to foster mastery learning for all students. At level 2, content teachers embed strategy instruction within their teaching. At level 3, individual students receive more intensive strategy instruction to develop their independent use of taught strategies. However, for levels 4 and 5 of the CLC, individual students receive targeted instruction such as decoding and

fluency. Where RTI has three levels of interventions, the CLC, with five levels, would be more complex to implement. It would also require a great deal of content teachers who would be responsible for implementing the first three levels on their own.

Implementation of this program might be problematic if the content teachers are not knowledgeable about how to implement strategy instruction for their content or how to progress monitor to determine if students are responsive to the intervention or not.

Due to the limitations of empirical research on RTI at the middle school level, many researchers have concluded that it may be best for schools to adopt a school-wide emphasis on content-literacy instruction (Brozo, 2010; Brozo, 2011; Ehren et al., 2010; Kingner & Edwards, 2006). These ideas are important to consider since research on RTI at the secondary level has not provided significant positive results. In order to foster the literacy growth of struggling adolescents, many of these researchers' suggestions align with best practices and ways to construct positive reading identities and self-efficacies by (a) considering adolescents' identities, interests, and funds of knowledge and (b) providing instruction that fosters complex thinking, reading, and writing.

Conclusion

This review of the literature focuses on research-based best practices that foster adolescents' literacy growth, struggling adolescent readers, and Response to Intervention practices in middle school. Evidenced-based practices in adolescent literacy include (a) active learning environments with direct literacy instruction, including content-area strategies and discipline-specific strategies; (b) student engagement within a respectful environment with high expectations, including opportunities to make connections and

have choice; and (c) student engagement with texts for a variety of purposes, including inquiry learning and opportunities for collaborative discourse (Sturtevant et al., 2006). *The National Reading Panel Report (2000)* states that young adolescents need proficiency with (a) vocabulary, (b) reading fluency, and (c) reading comprehension to experience success with literacy. However, struggling readers have typically fallen behind in these areas early in their literacy lives and have difficulty catching up (Stanovich, 1986). To close the gap with their reading abilities, middle schools tend to continue the same RTI programs begun in elementary schools. Research conducted on RTI at this level has concluded (a) little positive results with literacy growth (Faggella-Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Graves et al., 2011; Pyle & Vaughn, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012) and (b) implementation struggles such as ensuring fidelity of instruction, providing teachers with appropriate professional development, and appropriate choice of progress monitoring tools (Johnson & Smith, 2008; Prewett et al., 2012). For these reasons, several researchers have concluded that RTI at this level needs to be re-evaluated (Brozo, 2010; Brozo, 2011; Ehren et al., 2010; Kingner & Edwards, 2006).

This study aims to understand students in a middle school RTI remedial program and their sense of themselves as readers and their understanding of the instruction they are receiving. Brozo (2011) argues, “the perspectives most directly affected by, but least often consulted about educational practice, are students” (p. 55). He continues that it would be beneficial to use students as resources and to get their input on how teachers can be more responsive to their needs in an RTI program. By asking students to share

their perceptions about their reading abilities and instruction, this research fills a gap in the literature specifically attuned to student voices. The implications from this study may spark debate about how to best help these struggling adolescent readers gain the skills needed to reach grade-level reading proficiency.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Merriam (2009) defines qualitative case study research as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). A qualitative researcher might choose to conduct a case study when seeking to find meaning and understanding of a specific phenomenon. Because of the uniqueness of the case, case study researchers seek to understand the case through investigation of the phenomenon via observations, interviews, and relevant artifacts (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Merriam, 2009). “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, I chose to use this method to look at the meanings individual students were constructing of themselves as readers and of their instructional settings (Donalson & Halsey, 2007). Donalson and Halsey (2007) conducted a multiple-case study of eight struggling adolescent readers within a Title I remedial reading setting. Through participant observations and semi-structured interviews, the researchers gained rich thick data that captured the participants’ feelings about being in a middle school Title I class. Similarly, this type of methodology provided me the opportunity to explore struggling adolescent readers’ perceptions of their reading abilities and instruction.

The study began with consent and included observations, semi-structured interviews, and examination of student artifacts. I gathered thick, rich data that provides

valuable insight into these participants' perceptions about their reading identities (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Through cross-case analysis, I generated insights drawn from the responses they shared with me. The contribution this research makes to our body of knowledge of adolescent literacy is how the participants assumed the role of struggling readers over time. Its implications may reveal the benefit of using students as resources when planning instruction that fosters their literacy growth and move them out of RTI.

Research Questions

My research questions for this study were:

- What influences students' understanding of themselves as readers and their reading instruction?
 - How do students in middle-level RTI describe their abilities and needs as readers?
 - How do students in middle-level RTI believe their reading needs are being met?

Research Site

I chose a rural 6-8 middle school in the Southeast for this study because of my knowledge of the school district's Response to Intervention (RTI) framework. At the time of this study, the student population was 550 with 68% White, 17% Hispanic, 8% Black and 5% Asian. This school had shown steady improvements in its overall reading proficiency scores from spring of 2008 through spring of 2012, moving from 56.8% to 79.6%. (Data from the spring of 2013 was not used since this was a re-norming year for the state's reading tests, and a new test structure during a re-norming year typically

causes scores to be lower than in previous years). Fifty-one percent of the teachers had been teaching for ten or more years, 25% percent held advanced degrees, and nine were Nationally Board Certified.

RTI Implementation at The Research Site

At the elementary schools within this school district, there were a total of 50-60 different reading interventions being used. Based upon the school's leadership, climate, and demographics, schools chose their own interventions and how they were being implemented. For example, some schools choose to use an extra thirty-minute reading acceleration time where students were ability grouped and received either a focused intervention or enrichment, whereas other schools did not provide this time and used a collaborative model with the reading teachers coming into the classrooms during their 90-minute literacy block. Second, there were inconsistencies with progress-monitoring methods and how data were being used across the district. Some schools used MCLASS (Amplify Education) while others used AimsWeb (Pearson Education, Inc.) or Easy CBM (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt).

If students were assigned to an RTI tier at the end of fifth grade, they were automatically placed in either a remediation class during an elective period or the enrichment time (formerly known as advisor/advisee time under the middle school concept) in sixth grade. The remediation teacher monitored students' progression with reading skills such as reading fluency and comprehension using SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) or AimsWeb (Pearson Education, Inc.).

Meet the Participants

I conducted a pilot case study during the fall of 2013 that influenced my procedures for this study. Because sixth grade is a transitional year for students as they move from one teacher in elementary school to several content area teachers in middle school, I chose to conduct this study with selected sixth graders and followed them through seventh grade. I used purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009) when selecting the participants. “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). I began by establishing my criteria for who should be included in the study. All students who were in either Tier 2 or Tier 3 of Response to Intervention for reading and were enrolled in a reading remediation class in the fall of 2013 were invited to participate in this study. Eight students returned the permission forms and were interviewed during the 2013-2014 school year. Interviews continued throughout the 2014-2015 school year and summer of 2015; however, one participant moved and could no longer participate. Pseudonyms have been used to protect all participants’ identities. The seven remaining participants were Isaac, Mia, Daniel, Olivia, Allison, Natalie, and James. Because RTI is designed to be fluid based on individual student’s needs, some tier levels changed throughout the year. Additionally, within the reading remediation elective class, students were grouped into three different levels/classes based upon prior performance and teacher recommendations. Table 1 summarizes the seven participants’ tiers and remediation services receiving at the beginning of the 2013 school year:

Table 1. Student Participants

| Student | Tier Reading | Reading Services | Reading Level Class | Tier Math | Math Services |
|---------|--------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------|--|
| Isaac | 2 | Elective Period | Low | N/A | Advisor/ Advisee Period |
| Natalie | 2 | Elective Period | High | 2 | Advisor/ Advisee Period |
| Olivia | 2 | Elective Period | Low | 2 | Elective Period |
| Mia | 3 | Elective Period | Low | 3 | Elective Period & Advisor/Advisee Period |
| Allison | 2 | Elective Period | Middle | 2 | Advisor/ Advisee Period |
| Daniel | 2 | Elective | Middle | N/A | None |
| James | 2 | Elective Period | High | N/A | Advisor/ Advisee Period |

In the following paragraphs, I provide an overview of the participants’ experiences as struggling adolescent readers.

Isaac

Isaac is a Hispanic male who entered kindergarten as an English learner.

Indicating Isaac’s need to increase his word knowledge, early notes to his parents stated that they should “continue to work with him on recognizing letters and sounds” and

“needs to practice rhyming words.” Isaac continued to struggle, receiving below grade level scores in communication skills through fourth grade where there was a notation of “struggles with non-fiction texts.” At this time, he was placed in Tier 2 of RTI. Even though he passed the state’s end-of-year assessments in both fourth and fifth grades and maintained above average scores in reading in fifth grade, Isaac remained in Tier 2 as he entered middle school. Throughout my observations, Isaac appeared to be a polite and respectful young man who showed no signs of discipline problems in the classroom. Instead, he was an enthusiastic student who eagerly participated in class discussions. Isaac spoke frequently of wanting to get better grades in school. When asked, “When you mention that you want good grades, where is that motivation coming from?” he responded, “My parents. They’re saying, because they didn’t go to school and all that, they want me to have a better job than them and all that and have a better future.” Although Isaac never shared what his dream job would be, it was clear to me by his responses that he associated hard work in school with obtaining a good future.

Mia

Mia is an African-American female who received on-grade-level scores in communication skills throughout kindergarten and first grade. However, during second grade, her father died unexpectedly and a teacher’s note that year stated, “stopped trying.” Additionally, her teacher noted that reading fluently was difficult for her. In third grade, Mia’s scores in reading varied with indications that she “needs to read every day” and had a “lack of motivation.” In fourth grade, Mia was placed in Tier 2 of RTI, maintained below average scores in reading, and did not pass the state’s end-of-year

assessment. Her fifth-grade year was similar, and she was placed in Tier 3 of RTI. When I met Mia in sixth grade, she was always smiling and very soft-spoken. Mia continued to always smile in seventh grade, but she had learned to amplify her voice and share her opinions honestly. At times, she spoke of verbal conflicts with various teachers and of minor discipline infractions. During class discussions, Mia would frequently raise her hand to participate. However, she did not appear very confident when stating her answer. When working independently, she always seemed focused and on task. Once she told me that her mom “fussed” about her grades. I asked, “Why do you think your mom wants you to do better and try harder?” Mia responded,

Because she like wants me to get better grades and she just tells me to do better. I think she told me that she was supposed to go to college or something like that, but she had got pregnant with my sister and she never finished school.

When asked about her dreams, she consistently said for two years, “To be a doctor or a teacher.”

Daniel

Daniel is a biracial male whose comments in kindergarten related to word knowledge, stating that he had “made progress in alphabet skills but [should] continue to work on letter sound [and] sight words.” Daniel continued to experience unsuccessful scores and notations of reading fluency was a concern through third grade when he also failed the state’s end-of-year assessment. Therefore, in fourth grade, Daniel was placed in Tier 2 of RTI with a focus on developing his fluency. He maintained above average scores in reading in both fourth and fifth grades and passed the state’s end-of-year

reading assessment in fourth grade. However, he continued in Tier 2 of RTI as he entered middle school. As a young adolescent, Daniel had a very laid back demeanor and freely shared his opinions. For instance, in seventh grade when I asked about the new seating on large bouncy-balls in his classroom, he said, “Uh, they say it’s supposed to make you comprehend better, but I don’t know, I don’t feel any different.” During class, Daniel was an active participant and stated,

Yeah, I’m gonna participate. It doesn’t matter if I’m bored or not. I’m going to do something. If I’m not raising my hand and answering questions, then I’d be talking to somebody and getting into trouble and I can’t do that.

When discussing his future, Daniel told me that his mother went to college at night after he was born, and she expected him to go to college. During his first interview in sixth grade, he said that he wanted to be “an astrophysicist,” and during his last interview in seventh grade, he said, “All I know is I want a job where I can make a lot of money. I think I might have to get a doctorate or something like go to an eight-year college.” Daniel was motivated by his mother’s educational success and her encouragement.

Olivia

Olivia is a Hispanic female who entered kindergarten as an English learner; however, she soon received on-grade-level scores in communication skills through second grade. Early school notes to her parents stated, “very excited about learning” and “reading and writing skills are developing wonderfully.” However, she was retained in third grade with a note stating, “struggles with comprehension,” and she did not pass the state’s end-of-year reading assessment. She continued to receive exceptionally low

scores on the state's end-of-year reading assessment. In fourth grade, she was placed in Tier 2 of RTI. In the fall of fifth grade, Olivia witnessed her younger sister being hit by a car while waiting for the morning school bus. Her sister survived, but Olivia suffered from panic attacks at school all during that school year. Because of this, the RTI team decided to place her in Tier 3 of RTI to offer her extra support. By sixth grade, I was fortunate to know her as a happy and friendly young girl who loved sharing stories about her family. She was always respectful in our interviews and she appeared to be a model citizen in the classroom but was not eager to participate. When asked why, Olivia said, "Once last year I got the answer wrong and because I would always love to participate and people would look at me and laugh and that's why I stopped participating." Even though she did not often feel confident enough to participate in class discussions, it was evident to me that Olivia valued education through her work ethic and stated that she wanted to be "a teacher or a nurse."

Allison

Allison is a white female who received on-grade-level scores in communication skills in kindergarten. However, an early school note to her parents indicated a need for her to work on word knowledge and stated, "please work with her on sounding out words when reading or writing." Additionally, she received unsuccessful marks on reading fluently. Allison repeated second grade. Her grades in reading were average in third through fifth grades and she demonstrated she could pass the state's end-of-year reading assessment. However, toward the end of fifth grade, she was placed in Tier 2 of RTI at her parent's request. When I met Allison, she did not hesitate sharing her thoughts.

Often focused on the perceived injustices she felt from her teachers, Allison shared her feelings about elementary teachers having pre-conceived ideas of students and how middle school teachers moved too quickly or did not do a whole lot because of the lack of time in classes. When I observed Allison, she often participated in class discussions but either did not complete her homework or misplaced it. She referred to “having family issues” yet also having her parents who supported her education and who provided incentives for good grades. Her immediate dream was to join the ROTC and eventually to join the army.

Natalie

Natalie is a white female whose kindergarten notes also indicated a need for her to work on word knowledge. One note stated, “keep working on memorizing your sight words.” As early as first grade, difficulty with paying attention was a concern. In third through fifth grades, Natalie maintained average scores in reading and passed the state’s end-of-year reading assessment in third and fourth grades. However, she was placed in Tier 2 of RTI in fourth grade, and it was noted that she was taking medication for ADHD. As a young adolescent, Natalie continually referred to her ADHD diagnosis, but also stated that she often chose not to take her medication. During my observations of class discussions and working on assignments in class, it seemed evident when she had not taken her medication because on those days she appeared distracted. Additionally, not using her prescribed eyeglasses was problematic for her academic growth until seventh grade when she got a case and began taking care of them. Natalie often shared with me that she did not always finish her homework because she often was expected to watch

over her younger siblings. When I interviewed Natalie with her mother and siblings during the summer after seventh grade, I was struck by how attentive she was to her younger sister and baby brother. The dream she shared with me was to be “a vet or a banker.”

James

James is a white male whose kindergarten notes to his parents indicated his need to work on “writing his letters, rhyming words, and sounding out words.” In first and second grades, James needed extra support with his reading but was making good progress. With his reading score below average and failing the state’s end-of-year reading assessment, James repeated third grade. At this time, he was placed in Tier 2 of RTI and was also diagnosed with ADHD. He maintained above average scores in reading during his third through fifth grades and passed the state’s end-of-year reading assessment in fourth grade. As a young adolescent male, James frequently shared his interest in hunting and fishing with me. During my observations, he was a respectful model citizen in the classroom. James frequently raised his hand to participate in class discussions and almost always completed his homework. The middle school language arts teachers also encouraged him to read for twenty minutes each night as homework. James took this task seriously and told me that his mom also “reads it and then she asks me questions about it.” He often spoke of reading fishing and hunting magazines at home as well. James was a sentimental young man and did not shy away from sharing his emotions, tearing up at times. Although he never shared what he would like to be

when he grew up, it appeared he valued his parents' support and would continue to do his best in school.

My Positionality

During my fourteenth year of teaching, I completed the National Board for Teaching Standards portfolio. It was through this process that I realized I was an English/language arts teacher who did not know how to teach a child to read. Through my undergraduate training, I had courses on children's and adolescent's literature, but I had no training on how to diagnose or correct reading problems in my students. Therefore, I began graduate work in K-12 reading education. For the first time, I learned about phonics instruction, phonemic awareness, orthographic patterns, and repeated readings. I learned how to conduct informal reading inventories with struggling readers to determine their instructional level and how to provide appropriate interventions to ensure student improvement. I continued my studies in literacy and earned the post-master's certificate in reading education. One course in particular focused on the RTI movement sweeping across America and the possible implications for struggling readers.

Children who quickly grasp the skills for reading acquisition are supported in the regular classroom and continually develop their reading skills. On the other hand, struggling readers who fall behind during their early formal education years often continue to stay behind, the gap widening each year. With strong, present-day RTI programs in place within many elementary schools, strategic interventions can offer struggling readers the skills needed to catch up with their non-struggling peers. As I continued to read about the implementation of RTI within elementary schools, I began to

question what RTI should look like at the middle school level. The initial literature on RTI presented it as a pathway to intensive corrective instruction that would create an improvement in student's reading abilities or, if the student was non-responsive to the instruction, would move him/her to a referral for special education testing. Based on this literature, I questioned why students were being moved up the tiers of RTI in middle school. Instead, it seemed to me that if a student was learning disabled in reading, he/she should have already been tested and identified at the elementary level. Thus, I believe that, provided with the appropriate instruction, students should be experiencing success and moving down the tiers of RTI at the middle school level.

The potential advantage I think my goals, beliefs, and experiences have for my study is that it will provide new considerations for the expectation of RTI at the middle school level. The potential disadvantage is my biases toward what I believe has been a gross mis-implementation of RTI at the middle school level.

Data Collection

Consent

Before a researcher begins data collection, he/she must obtain consent through his/her institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the selected site (Yin, 2013). Establishing a trusting relationship and good rapport with the "gatekeepers" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 90) of the selected site is critical for gaining appropriate access to the potential participants for the study. Once permission had been granted by the site and the selected participants, data collection began.

Interviews

Patton (2002) states “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). Because “case study researchers seek multiple views on the world they are exploring” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 75), interviews allow participants to share the meanings they make of their worlds. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews allows for flexibility, yet creates direction that will lead participants to offer the responses needed for case study research (Schensul, Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999; Merriam, 2009). Because I value young adolescents’ perspectives, I chose to use semi-structured interviews (see Appendices A and B) to guide the responses from the participants. I chose this type of interview because it allows for flexibility yet led 11-13 year olds to respond in concert with the research questions (Schensul et al., 1999; Merriam, 2009). By asking participants how they described their abilities and needs as readers, I hoped to understand their very personal perceptions of themselves as struggling readers. Additionally, by asking them to describe their reading instructional settings and how they felt those settings are meeting their reading needs, I hoped to understand how their identities as struggling readers were shaped.

I continued developing the rapport I established with the participants during the pilot study and maintained my neutrality to what was shared (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2009). As Peshkin (1988) recommends, I monitored my feelings, both positive and negative, throughout the data collection process in an attempt to identify my subjectivities. Although I took field notes during the interviews, I also audiotaped the

interviews so that they could later be transcribed for analysis. Immediately following the interviews, I used analytical memos (Merriam, 2009; Maxwell, 2013) to document my initial thoughts. Finally, using Kvale's (1996) interview quality criteria, I attempted to follow up and seek clarification on the students' responses to my interview questions in later interviews.

Over the course of this study, I interviewed five of the participants seven times. Because Isaac was absent from school during the week of interviews in the spring of the second year, he was interviewed six times. However, another participant, Natalie, was interviewed eight times because she volunteered to meet with me again. Each interview lasted no longer than 30 minutes.

Observations

When conducting observations, the researcher should be a "careful observer" (Merriam, 2009, p. 117). Noting how people interact and through what kinds of activities is of importance (Merriam, 2009). In order to scaffold interview questions and best understand the participants' interview responses, I conducted four observations of the participants in both the remedial reading class and the regular language arts class. Because these observations gave me context as to how the participants participated and interacted with their peers and teachers in their reading instructional settings, my follow-up interview questions were more individualized for each participant in hopes of better understanding their perceptions of themselves as struggling readers. To protect the anonymity of non-participants within these settings, I did not videotape the observations. Instead, I took extensive field notes during each observation. Again, immediately after

the observations, I took the time to write analytical memos (Merriam, 2009; Maxwell, 2013) to document my initial thoughts.

Artifacts

Documents such as letters, e-mails, agendas, progress reports, calendars, and notes can all add to the understanding of a specific case. For case studies, these types of artifacts can corroborate data from other sources. Additionally, inferences can be made from such documents, which may prompt additional investigation of the case (Merriam, 2009). In an effort to better understand each participant's background and ability, I reviewed his/her report cards, progress reports, work samples, and RTI notes and progress monitoring data. These data shed light on the historical picture of the participants as struggling readers and how they aligned with formal school assessments.

Data Analysis

Cross-case analysis is used to compare and contrast two or more single case studies. Using the 49 interview transcriptions with the seven participants, field notes from the eight classroom observations (four within the regular English/language arts classroom and four within the reading remediation classroom), and artifacts available, data analyses began in the following steps.

Step One

First, after transcribing the interviews, I created spreadsheets (see Figure 2) that allowed me to pull responses from the interviews and organize the data by research question, participant, and year. This process allowed me to see the data more clearly in order to move forward with the next step.

Step Two

Next, I drew upon Merriam's (2009) data analysis design to begin open coding the responses from the first set of data. I documented notes and concepts in the margins. Then, I used analytical coding to group the notes and concepts that went together. I, then, took the next set of data and went through the same process of open coding, keeping in mind the notes and concepts that were drawn from the first set of data. By reviewing the groupings created through analytical coding, I began to sort them into initial themes. Continuing review of all the data in a similar fashion, I was then able to use cross-case analysis to document themes that appeared across participants' responses. The initial themes were then grouped within each of the following categories (a) reading experiences, (b) needs as a reader, (c) responses to the instruction provided in the regular language arts setting, and (d) responses to the instruction provided in the remedial reading setting.

Step Three

I reviewed the data from the observations of the participants in their instructional settings. Although the field notes from these observations were used to help guide follow-up interview questions, taking a second look at these data allowed me to draw further conclusions about each participant's academic identity. Noting their engagement and participation in the lessons allowed me to see patterns that corresponded with what they shared about their reading instruction, instructional setting, and activities.

Step Four

I also reviewed the data from the artifacts of the participants. By looking at their academic notes, progress reports, and work samples, I was able to learn about the teachers' assessment of students as well as note patterns that corresponded with the participants' responses about their perceptions of their reading abilities.

Step Five

As analysis continued and assertions were made about the findings, all sources of data were reviewed multiple times to keep my assertions accurate and true to what the data represented.

Validity

Merriam (2009) notes the importance of including one's biases in the research study. I already held the assumption that struggling students disliked attending the reading remediation class as one of their elective class periods. Because they were assigned to this class, they were missing the opportunity to explore topics of interest to them such as art, band, or drama. Therefore, it was critical that I displayed signs of neutral reactivity to their responses. Additionally, when evaluating the data, it was critical that I harnessed the teacher in me and controlled my opinions about the instructional practices taking place. As my advisor, Dr. Colleen Fairbanks served in the role of identifying moments when the teacher in me replaced the researcher.

Ethics

Merriam (2009) discusses the importance of maintaining high ethical standards when planning to conduct research. Because case study research tends to focus on

human affairs, training about the protection of human subjects is a must when using this methodology. Special care must be taken when obtaining informed consent from participants, explicitly describing the nature of the study to avoid any misconceptions or any sense of coercion. Finally, those participating must be protected through privacy and confidentiality guidelines. Therefore, I was especially mindful to uphold myself to a high code of ethics when handling and reporting the data from this study. All data were kept locked in a secured location and I did my best to minimize any risks to the participants.

Final Thoughts

I drew from Merriam's (2009) model of qualitative research. Through semi-structured, conversational-style interviews, observations of the participants in their language arts and remedial reading settings, and reviewing valuable documents to corroborate their stories, I collected thick, rich data that will potentially offer a significant understanding to the field of adolescent literacy.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS OF THIS STUDY

This chapter begins with a discussion of how the theoretical framework contributes to the study. Next, a table provides the reader with information about the participants' perceived reading identities in relation to what is noted in their school documents. Then, a discussion of the findings is shared using the literacy terms of the participants to describe their abilities as readers by naming deficits in vocabulary knowledge, reading fluency, and/or reading comprehension. Specifically, the findings discuss the following research questions:

- What influences students' understanding of themselves as readers and their reading instruction?
 - How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI describe their abilities and needs as readers?
 - How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI believe their reading needs are being met?

Introduction

When looking at the questions I wanted to ask for this study, I was drawn to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory with a focus on how these participants' reading identities were constructed by their school interactions across time. Because a

culture is defined as having “shared beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, structured relationships, ways of doing things (customs), socialization practices, and symbol systems (such as spoken and written language)” (Miller, 2011, p. 172), we can define the school setting as a culture in which children interact and construct meanings from the school’s set of expected behavior norms. The norms for what it means to be a good reader can be understood from what Wortham (2006) identified as *models of identity*. Wortham (2006) shared, “Individuals behave in certain ways or possess certain characteristics, and those behaviors or characteristics are interpreted by the individual and by others as signs of identity, as indications that the individual belongs to a recognized social type” (p. 30). Through the social interaction in school, children construct their identities as readers at an early age (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006) and continue to re-define these identities across time (Alsup, 2005).

Children’s prior performances with the academic demands in school affect their views as to whether they will succeed or fail when presented with the same demands again (Zimmerman, 1995). If children experience success on a task and attribute their success to hard work rather than being lucky, they will also be more likely to internalize a higher self-efficacy for such a task and subsequently be more willing to work harder and persist when faced with difficulty on a similar task in the future (Bandura, 1986; Schunk et al., 2008; Zimmerman, 1995). The participants in this study received feedback early in their school experience about their struggles with letter/word recognition, reading fluency, and/or reading comprehension as noted in their school files. Additionally, more often than not, they were unable to pass the state’s end of year reading assessment. I

posit that these early experiences affected their beliefs on future school demands with reading and how they identified themselves as adolescent readers.

The Participants

At a middle school in a rural school district of the Southeast, seven students who were in either Tier 2 or Tier 3 of Response to Intervention for reading participated in this study from 2013-2015. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the participants' identities. The seven participants were Isaac, Mia, Daniel, Olivia, Allison, Natalie, and James. Below is a table that displays the participants' identifications on tiers of RTI, perceived reading deficits they shared during interviews, reading deficits noted in their school files, and sixth grade CogAT results:

Table 2. Participant Identifications

| Participant | Tier Start of Study | Tier End of Study | Named Perceived Deficits | Deficits Noted in Files | CogAT 6th Grade |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Isaac | 2 | 2 | vocabulary fluency | word knowledge fluency | above average |
| Natalie | 2 | 2 | vocabulary Fluency comprehension | word knowledge | below average |
| Olivia | 2 | 2 | vocabulary comprehension | comprehension | below average |
| Mia | 3 | 2 | vocabulary fluency comprehension | comprehension | below average |
| Allison | 2 | 2 | vocabulary fluency | word knowledge fluency | below average |

Table 2. (Cont.)

| Participant | Tier Start of Study | Tier End of Study | Named Perceived Deficits | Deficits Noted in Files | CogAT 6th Grade |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------------|--|---------------------------------|------------------|
| Daniel | 2 | 2 | vocabulary fluency comprehension | word knowledge fluency | above average |
| James | 2 | 1 | fluency comprehension | word knowledge comprehension | below average |

Participants' School Histories

In the school district the participants attended, the problem-solving model of RTI was used to make decisions about student progress and the implementation of needed interventions. This is important to note since this model allows for flexibility with the duration of interventions (Wixson et al., 2010). Five of the seven participants were placed in Tier 2 for reading in fourth grade, but James was placed in Tier 2 during his second year of third grade and Allison was placed in Tier 2 in fifth grade. Additionally, five of the seven participants passed the state's end-of-year reading assessment at least one year during elementary school. Mia and Olivia never did.

Five of the seven participants, Isaac, Daniel, Allison, Natalie, and James, had notations in their files during their early school years for their need to work on word knowledge (letters, letter sounds, sight words, and rhyming words). Olivia, James, and Mia were deemed to be struggling with comprehension early on. Finally, three of the participants, Isaac, Daniel, and Allison, had notations that reading fluency was a concern.

It cannot be known what the participants' elementary teachers may have shared during parent/teacher conferences or in talking to the students individually about their progress. However, what is known is that these students used the components of reading identified as deficits in their early school years to describe their reading abilities as adolescents.

Outside Influences on Participants' Academic Performance

It is also important to discuss the various outside influences that potentially played a role on many of the participants' academic performance in the classroom.

For example, Natalie and James were both diagnosed with ADHD in elementary school. It was never evident to me that James had attention difficulties, and I am not aware that he took medication. On the other hand, it was clear to me that Natalie struggled with her attention span and often missed taking her prescribed medication. She did not complete her homework regularly and had trouble keeping up with and caring for her eyeglasses.

Another example was the impact of family concerns or crises on the participants. Four of the participants either had notations in their school files and/or shared openly about such concerns. For example, although Mia's father died when she was in second grade, five years later this wound was still very fresh as she sobbed during an interview about this experience. Notations pertaining to a "lack of motivation" and had "stopped trying" raise questions about whether the school knew about her loss or if the teacher considered there may have been a connection between her academic struggles and this loss.

Because the school knew about Olivia seeing her sister hit by a car, they responded by moving her up to Tier 3 in RTI in order to provide extra support. During our interviews, she discussed how her family was important to her and she was often concerned about helping her younger siblings with their schoolwork.

Additionally, Natalie lived in a single-parent home and was often expected to care for her younger siblings in the evenings. She shared how this impacted her ability to focus on her homework.

Finally, although Allison spoke of family vacations and parental support of her education, she also often mentioned having “family issues” that prevented her from completing her homework. She never elaborated on these “issues”.

It is not known how much these outside influences potentially affected the participants’ academic performance. However, it is noteworthy, especially since the participants often referred to things like “family issues” and losing eyeglasses from preventing them getting their schoolwork completed.

Identities as Readers

Faircloth (2009) and Hall (2012) share that adolescent students’ reading identities are constructed based upon their experiences and interactions within school. When looking at all of the participants’ school histories, it appeared that they internalized the reading deficits assigned to them early in their school lives and developed the identity of a struggling reader. Zimmerman (1995) refers to such self-defining via school records as an “educational crucible” (p. 202) where “children acquire their self-conceptions of academic agency” (p. 202). The experiences children have in school with academic tasks

affect how they view themselves with regards to these tasks (Zimmerman, 1995). For students to know and use the literacy vocabulary to identify their perceived needs speaks to the role of the institution's impact on students' sense of who they are as readers.

Participants' Views of Vocabulary, Reading Fluency, and Reading Comprehension

When asked "Is there anything you'd like to change about your reading?" the participants clearly identified themselves as either struggling with vocabulary, reading fluency, or reading comprehension. Their perceptions of vocabulary mainly focused on their difficulty to pronounce the "big words" rather than not knowing how to break apart the words in order to construct meaning (Beck et al., 2002). When discussing fluency, the participants mostly referred to their rate in terms of speed of reading rather than prosody, accuracy, or understanding (Kuhn et al., 2010). Finally, in regard to reading comprehension, several participants stated their need of "help with comprehension."

Vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension were the three skills the participants identified as skills necessary to their reading success, which constitute three of the five essential requirements (pillars) cited in *The National Reading Panel Report* (2000). Phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, the other two pillars named by *The National Reading Panel Report* (2000), are critical to early reading instruction and were clearly stressed in the participants' early notes in school. Comments such as "needs to work on sounding out words when he reads and writes" convey the push of phonemic awareness and phonics instruction in their early school lives. Five of the seven participants appeared early on to be behind with their language skills and continued to experience a widening of reading gap of which Biemiller (1999) and Stanovich (1986)

speak. Vocabulary was also seen as challenging for these students when they faced more complex texts (Biemiller, 1999). Three of the participants had early notations that fluency was a concern for them. When asked, “Who do you know that is a good reader?” six of them associated good reading with “reading at a good speed.” Although rate is important in predicting young children’s future success with reading comprehension (Hudson, Torgesen, Lane, & Turner, 2012; Veenendaal, Groen, & Verhoeven, 2015), for older students, reading prosody is a better predictor for deeper understanding (Basaran, 2013). Finally, five of the participants said that they needed to improve their reading comprehension. This conclusion was likely influenced by their unsuccessful experiences with the end-of-year reading assessment scores. A closer look at how the participants spoke about vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension will be shared in the following sections in order to discuss the research question, “How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI describe their abilities and needs as readers?”

Vocabulary

As previously discussed, during early schooling, all children do not have exposure to the same number of words which results in a significant difference in students’ language and vocabulary use (Biemiller, 1999). Five of the six participants who identified vocabulary as something they needed to improve in order to be more successful readers also had notations in their elementary files concerning word meanings, suggesting the impact of the school setting on these students’ perceptions of their abilities and needs. Although some of the examples relate more to phonics, the participants perceived them as relating to vocabulary.

Perceived vocabulary deficits identified by the participants. Early in Natalie's school notes, there were comments such as "keep memorizing your sight words" and "needs to work on phonics skills to read words she does not know." In sixth grade, Natalie shared with me that her aunt had given her two *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-2007) books, and she had a strong desire to read them. She also shared that these books were not accessible to her, stating, "At my house, we have two *Harry Potter* books and I want to read one of them except some of the words in there are too big for me to try to comprehend." In seventh grade, she spoke of these books again and was saddened by her inability to read them.

The two English learners, Isaac and Olivia, also recognized unknown words as an obstacle for them. Isaac had an early school note stating, "needs to work on sounding out words as he reads and writes." He often spoke to me about his need "to understand more words." Additionally, Olivia, when discussing her younger brother as a good reader, said,

How he would pronounce the words without me helping him. He could say them amazingly, and I was impressed by him. I mean, I feel a little bit jealous because those words he can read are like sixth grade words.

Allison also shared that her language arts teacher was "helping me with big words." When talking about math class, she commented, "I have trouble with word problems because I don't understand the words."

Additionally, Olivia, Isaac, Mia, Daniel, and Allison all spoke of the need for direct vocabulary instruction. Olivia, Isaac, and Mia indicated that learning prefixes,

suffixes, and root words were helping them become better readers. Daniel and Allison also knew there were parts to words but not how to break them down to understand their meaning. Finally, Isaac shared that his content area teachers' vocabulary instruction for words "like militarism, alliance, and stuff like that" was helping him.

Reported instructional experiences with vocabulary. The participants reported that their teachers addressed vocabulary instruction with them in a variety of ways. In language arts classrooms, such instruction included providing a weekly spelling list of 15-20 words and vocabulary pulled from their current reading text. When reading a text, a few teachers chose to teach students how to use context clues to make inferences about the meanings of unfamiliar words while reading as Beck et al. (2002) discuss, and other teachers chose to pre-teach the vocabulary, having students look up the words prior to reading the text. In content area classrooms, teachers discussed unfamiliar words with students as the words pertained to their current unit of study.

Importance of Vocabulary Knowledge for the Participants

If students enter fourth grade deemed below average with vocabulary and language skills, they will not be able to successfully attend to the fourth-grade level text (Biemiller, 1999). Most of the six participants naming vocabulary knowledge as a need for them shared how they needed to know "the big words". Natalie shared she could not read her *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-2007) books due to the words. Likewise, Isaac and Olivia said they had trouble pronouncing the big words in texts. Olivia, Isaac, Mia, Daniel, and Allison mentioned the importance of learning prefixes and suffixes even though Daniel and Allison discussed the trouble they had breaking down words to

understand their meanings. Finally, Allison mentioned how difficult word problems were for her because she didn't understand the words. For these six participants, they believed increasing their vocabulary knowledge would help them.

Reading Fluency

Based on the results of their timed readings, self-comparison to their peers, and what teachers had communicated to them, six of the participants discussed their reading fluency as problematic. Although there have been many attempts to write a definition for reading fluency, I prefer this one because it encompasses all the facets of fluency:

Fluency combines accuracy, automaticity, and oral reading prosody, which, taken together, facilitates the reader's construction of meaning. It is demonstrated during oral reading through ease of word recognition, appropriate pacing, phrasing, and intonation. It is a factor in both oral and silent reading that can limit or support comprehension.
(Kuhn et al., 2010, p. 240)

From this perspective, fluency is much more complex than just the rate at which words are read as the participants in this study believed.

Perceived reading fluency deficits identified by the participants. For Isaac, Daniel, and Allison, feedback from teachers over the years may have had a direct impact on their desire to read more fluently. A note of Isaac's stated, "working on recognizing sight words and reading faster." He shared with me in sixth grade that he wanted "to read more faster." For multiple years, there were comments in Daniel's file that indicated he struggled with fluency. Strategies such as Readers Theatre were put in place and his oral reading fluency was tested bi-weekly during fifth grade. When talking with me, Daniel described a good reader as "a fast reader." He also shared, "If you're fluent and you read

to someone else, they will be able to understand you better,” and he had the desire to “keep my pace steady cause I can read fast and then I’ll slow down then I speed up again.” Likewise, Allison shared with me, “I read at a medium pace.” When discussing what a good reader does, Allison referred to her friend, saying, “She reads a story good, not too fast and not too slow, at a good speed.”

Similarly, James and Mia described their reading pace as slow and having the need to read faster.

Finally, Natalie commented that reading a book over and over like *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2007) helped her to read faster and better identify words. This practice is similar to the repeated readings (Samuels, 1979) that foster increased reading rate. Unfortunately by reading this book multiple times, Natalie was not increasing her practice with more complex texts and could not experience optimal gains (Wexler, Vaughn, Edmonds, & Reutebuch, 2008). As a result, what Natalie did not realize is that continual practice reading this type of book might never help her gain the skills to read her *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-2007) books.

Reported instructional experiences with fluency. The participants reported that timed readings for rate were used as progress monitoring data for RTI during seventh grade; however, the strategies, such as repeated readings, that Samuels (1979) suggested to help a child improve his/her accuracy and automaticity were not implemented, according to the participants. Even though there appears to be a strong relationship between automaticity and reading comprehension (Deeney, 2010; Paige, Rasinski, & Magpuri-Lavell, 2012; Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Wilfong, Friedauer, & Heim, 2005;

Valencia, Smith, Reece, Li, Wixson, & Newman, 2010), there is little time available in the middle school day to ensure that repeated readings for individual students can be supervised appropriately. This omission is especially disconcerting as research supports the need to build struggling readers' fluency capacities even at the secondary level (Dudley, 2005; Paige et al., 2012; Rasinski et al., 2005).

Importance of Reading Fluency for the Participants

The six participants who named reading fluency as a concern for them considered increased reading rate as something they needed in order to be a successful reader. It seemed as though the participants silently compared what their reading sounds like to others' more fluent reading rates because several actually named people they considered to be good readers based upon their reading speed. Although Daniel did mention others would be able to comprehend what he was reading aloud if he read more fluently, it is not clear the participants understood that there are actually three components to reading fluency (a) word recognition accuracy, (b) automaticity, and (c) prosody which, combined, support readers' comprehension of a text (Kuhn et al., 2010).

During the students' seventh grade remedial reading class, the participants were progress monitored for reading fluency via timed readings; James was not in the class that year so there were no data for him. Allison was the only participant who named fluency as a concern who scored above the 50th percentile compared to the expected reading fluency rate for average seventh grade students reading seventh grade leveled text. The other four participants, Daniel, Isaac, Mia, and Natalie all consistently scored below the 50th percentile in reading fluency. These low performances may have

influenced their reading identities and may have prompted them to name fluency as a needed area of improvement. For whatever reason, the six participants who named reading fluency as something they needed in order to become a better reader had internalized this need either through their experiences with timed readings, comparison of their reading rates to their peers', or notations made by their teachers.

Reading Comprehension

According to Perfetti (1985), reading comprehension is the skill of constructing meaning from text. For struggling adolescent readers, it is important to meet them at their zone of proximal development and foster their use of content-area and discipline-specific strategies (Applebee, 2013). Five of the participants mentioned reading comprehension as a need for them, three of whom also had documentation about comprehension needs in their early school notes.

Perceived reading comprehension deficits identified by the participants. The participants identified a variety of difficulties with reading comprehension.

As shared previously, when discussing her desire to read *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-2007) books, Natalie stated, "Some of the words in there are too big for me to try to comprehend." She knew that unfamiliarity with the vocabulary would prevent her from understanding what she was reading.

Daniel shared his frustration when he said, "It's just that if I read sometimes, I get confused and I don't like having to go back and re-read again." His comment speaks to how students with low self-efficacies may develop avoidance goals and give up (Schunk et al., 2008).

For Olivia, James, and Mia, prior teachers' comments raised concern about their reading comprehension. In an interview, Olivia stated, "And the thing that I want to work on most for my reading is comprehension because that's where I need help a whole bunch." In third grade, James received a note, stating he "rushes through." In talking with me, he once stated that his concern with reading related to "the reading and the remembering it" but "it's gotten better. Just slowing down and reading it more carefully, not rushing through it." Because of the prior note about him rushing, it appeared as though someone may have given him this advice. Finally, Mia shared, "I like reading, but I just don't comprehend well."

All of the participants commented that it was difficult to keep up with the required readings for their language arts class. Outside reading for the Accelerated Reader (AR) (Renaissance Learning, Inc.) program was expected during sixth grade and, because the program was not available in seventh grade, the teachers made a similar requirement. For example, one of the seventh grade teachers required the students to read a book and create a quiz similar to the ones found in AR (Renaissance Learning, Inc.).

Olivia told me that she decided to put one of her chosen books back in order to meet the requirements for AR (Renaissance Learning, Inc.) since the end of the quarter was approaching. She explained, "Um, I didn't get to finish it because I had to get AR points so I traded it to get like a smaller book to get my AR points."

Similarly, Natalie spoke of "trying to get an AR test taken" and Isaac remarked, "I'm getting books so I can get more AR points."

Because a grade was attached to the requirement of reading for AR (Renaissance Learning, Inc.), the students felt the urgent need to read. They also realized, however, that doing so required that they sacrifice reading a book of choice in order to get the grade. Four participants, Allison, Mia, Natalie, and Isaac, also indicated that the books they had chosen to read on their own were small, short books for AR (Renaissance Learning, Inc.). They spoke of reading *Nature's Children* (Devarness, 1985) books (thin, story-like books about animals) and graphic novels. Selections such as these are short and written to be easily accessible, which enabled them to meet the specific grade requirements for their regular English/language arts class.

In seventh grade, the students were expected to read the class novel, *Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999), outside of class. This expectation was followed by in class discussion and quizzes on the assigned reading. Although all the participants indicated that they liked the book, they had difficulty keeping up with the outside reading.

For example, when asked how reading *Bud Not Buddy* (Curtis, 1999) was coming, Daniel said, "Um, We're supposed to be on page 129 by Monday and I'm on page 83."

Allison responded,

I have started it and I am on page 88 and I have to get to page 124. I'm going to have to read more to get to a 170 something because I was at the hospital a lot last week and I didn't have enough time to read.

Mia commented, "I don't want to read it. I have read some of it and on the test for the first part, I made like a 30 on it."

Finally, Natalie said, “I read it some and then I put the book down and then I have to start the book all over again because I lost my place.”

Bud Not Buddy (Curtis, 1999) is written at a 950 lexile reading level, which is appropriate for an average seventh grader, and it was clearly too difficult for these students to read on their own.

Reported instructional experiences with reading comprehension. The participants reported it was common practice for teachers to either read a text aloud with students or assign students to read a text on their own and then assign questions to answer. Although there were teachers who occasionally used Socratic Seminar to promote discussion and debate about a text, most often discussion was simply reviewing the answers to assigned questions.

In the reading remediation class in sixth grade, it was common practice for the teacher to assign students to summarize what they read. The participants spoke of either including too many details or not enough in their summaries and having to rewrite them. Additionally, SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.), a computer-based tutoring program, was used as a form of remedial instruction once a week for approximately 30 minutes during the reading remediation class. This program provided reading passages at students’ instructional reading levels with comprehension questions to answer as well as activities with grammar and spelling. At times, some participants shared their belief that SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) was helping them with their reading comprehension, while at other times, they discussed their dislike for the program.

Importance of Reading Comprehension for the Participants

Two of the five participants who stated that they had trouble understanding what they read also referenced either vocabulary or fluency as a factor inhibiting their comprehension of texts. Natalie said, “Some of the words in there are too big for me to try to comprehend.” James implied that he had learned to compensate for his low fluency rate by “just slowing down and reading it more carefully, not rushing through it.” This is what Walczyk and Griffith-Ross (2007) refer to as compensatory-encoding theory that occurs when students pause, look back, and re-read in order to comprehend. James appeared to attribute his increased success with comprehending texts to this strategy which, in turn, helped him feel more confident. Additionally, Daniel had previously mentioned his reading pace as a concern and also shared that, although he did not like to, sometimes he would also have to go back and re-read in order to comprehend. The last two participants who stated comprehension was a problem for them, Olivia and Mia, did not attribute any insight into what their struggles with comprehension were, only that they had trouble understanding what they read sometimes.

Although all the participants always named the current read-aloud, classroom text as their favorite book, they participated in very little independent reading based upon their interests. Instead, they spoke of returning chosen books to the library in order to check out smaller or easier books to read so they could meet their teachers’ expectations for the AR (Renaissance Learning, Inc.) program. With this program in sixth grade, the participants were expected to read books and take quizzes that were made up of very low-level comprehension questions. Then, students received a grade each nine-week period

for AR (Renaissance Learning, Inc.) which was weighted as a test grade. In seventh grade, the school no longer had access to the AR (Renaissance Learning, Inc.) program, but teachers still required students to read independently and complete an assignment with their chosen book. However, the participants confirmed with me they continued to choose books in seventh grade based upon ease of getting the assignment done rather than something truly of interest to them.

Summary of Identities as Readers

When comparing comments made in their school notes over the years, it appeared that these students constructed their reading identities based upon their interactions with peers and teachers in school. All of the participants identified struggles with reading that related to comments in their early school notes. Each of them named at least one of the following reading pillars (NRPR, 2000) as a need to help them become a better reader (a) vocabulary, (b) reading fluency, or (c) reading comprehension.

Students' Perceptions of Reading Instruction

Realizing their assignment to the reading remediation class was due to their inadequacies as readers and in order to improve their reading deficits, the participants placed trust in their teachers to guide them. During this study, at various times, they all shared their belief that the instruction taking place in both their regular language arts and remedial reading classes benefitted them in ways that would help them become better readers. In both settings, for example, the participants discussed the importance of vocabulary instruction. They spoke of the need for "learning bigger words." However, even though some mentioned learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes, most of this

discussion was in the context of having the words pronounced for them as they were reading aloud together with partners or with the whole class. This practice, during both years in their regular language arts classrooms, was viewed as aiding in their reading comprehension of the texts.

In their reading remediation class, all of the students spoke about fluency readings, SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.), and learning strategies to answer test-prep style questions. Fluency readings were used as progress monitoring data for all remedial students. Students read a passage aloud for three minutes and documented how many words per minute they read, thus focusing on rate rather than prosody and meaning. The SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) computer program was also used for progress monitoring. After taking the initial placement test, students were assigned an instructional reading level in the program. Then, once a week for about 30 minutes, they read passages and completed activities geared to their instructional level. Initially, the participants saw this as helping them. Over time, however, most of them did not attribute any gains to the program. Finally, because of their persistent failure to pass the state's end of year reading assessment, a good deal of focus was placed on strategy use when reading and answering multiple-choice questions. While they were engaged with these strategies during the school year, the participants believed they were "doing better" with these tasks. When they saw their scores on the state's end of year reading assessment each year, five of them were disappointed with their failing scores. Comments such as "I thought I was doing better than I was" and "I was sad for myself" speak to their frustration.

I will discuss the answers to the research question, “How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI believe their reading needs are being met?” in the following sections.

Perceptions of Regular English/Language Arts Experiences

Students were somewhat ability grouped in language arts and math classes. Therefore, teachers had the opportunity to select appropriately leveled reading materials to use with their classes and some did so. Others, however, chose to use the same material (i.e., novels) with all of their classes. No matter the level of the students, it was common practice for teachers to read aloud the selected text together in class and have students answer questions about what was read. As mentioned earlier, some teachers held Socratic Seminar discussions while others simply went over the answers to the questions. Additionally, although some vocabulary instruction took place using the selected whole class texts, it was also common practice for students’ weekly spelling words to become their weekly vocabulary words as well. In sixth grade, the participants were assigned to three different English/language arts teachers. They were assigned to the three teachers as follows (a) Daniel, James, Natalie, and Olivia with Ms. X; (b) Allison and Isaac with Ms. Y; and (c) Mia with Mr. Z. In seventh grade, they were assigned to two different English/language arts teachers (a) Allison and Natalie with Ms. A and (b) Daniel, James, Olivia, Isaac, and Mia with Ms. B. The inclusion teacher, Ms. C, co-taught with both classroom teachers. In the following sections, I analyze students’ perceived positive and negative experiences in English/language arts classes.

Perceived positive experiences. All seven participants in this study discussed positive experiences from being in their English/language arts classrooms. I asked, “Do

you believe your regular language arts class is helping you become a better reader?" The participants identified three areas in which this class was helping them (a) vocabulary instruction, (b) reading aloud together, and (c) class discussion.

Benefits of vocabulary instruction. Five participants, Allison, Natalie, Olivia, Mia, and Isaac, said that they were learning new vocabulary. Interestingly, all but Mia had earlier identified vocabulary knowledge as a deficit for them. In sixth grade, Allison's response was,

Mmm. Yeah, if we're reading a book and we read out loud to her and then she like if we are wrong pronouncing a word, she'll make us write it down. Then, write it in like those little like half the word out and then we'll have to say it and we'll have to read the thing over again. So, she makes us get the word right. She helps us pronounce things. She gives us the definition and then she says the word and then we say the word and then write down the definition.

Allison believed that writing an unknown word with its definition and syllable breaks helped her learn not only how to pronounce the word but its meaning as well. Similarly, Natalie responded,

Yes, because we're doing vocabulary and it's helping me with words I've never heard of and it's helping us with definitions and words, with like vocabulary. I don't know a word and we have to write down the part of speech. I got to know the parts of speech in order to try to figure out the definition on my own, like if it's a verb, an activity.

Here, Natalie discussed using a vocabulary strategy that had been taught by her teacher. She believed if she could determine the part of speech of the unknown word using context clues, then she might determine its meaning. It appeared, through their

responses, that both Allison's and Natalie's teachers were placing significant emphasis on learning the vocabulary by breaking apart the words, writing the definitions, and learning the words' part of speech.

As a struggling ELL student, learning new words was especially important to Olivia. When asked if her language arts instruction was helping her become a better reader, she said, "Yes, because the vocabulary are words that I've never learned before or words that I'm now learning this year." It appeared that Olivia believed her new knowledge of specific vocabulary words would transfer when reading texts in the future.

Mia further stated, "Well, spelling. My grades have been in like the 90's and then my vocabulary tests, I've been like getting 70's on those. They are the same words as the spelling." These comments suggest that Mia felt she was successfully learning new words.

For their spelling each week, the seventh grade language arts teachers chose to teach derivational patterns with Greek and Latin roots. Four participants perceived this to be valuable in building their vocabulary knowledge as well.

Olivia said, "Mm, uh, because how Ms. [B] is making us do [write] the vocabulary three times each cause that's pretty much words I haven't heard or seen before and like what bi, poly, and mono mean." Olivia had concluded that, by learning prefix meanings, she might determine the meaning of unknown words.

Likewise, Isaac, also an ELL student, appreciated the vocabulary lessons in his English/language arts class:

...cause I really want to learn to write more words. Each day, we go back and we have a bell ringer and each day we have homework. We have like three times each, to write a sentence, and to define the word. She gives us words each week so we can learn the prefix of the words and she gives a test each week on Friday.

He, too, believed there was value in learning prefix meanings.

Additionally, Natalie said, “I like language arts because of the stuff we do in there like projects, our vocabulary and stuff. It helps because we did vocabulary games and stuff.”

Finally, Allison agreed that vocabulary instruction was important:

Uh, yeah, because Ms. [C] helps a lot. They’ll also help us with the vocabulary tests because they know that some of the words don’t make sense [to the students]. You know how if they say the word out loud, then you can understand it more? They’ll do that and then I’ll finally get the word and I’m making a good grade on those things.

Allison was not identified as an exceptional student, yet she often spoke of help from this teacher. Although Allison said that the instruction in this class was helping her become a better reader, her only reference was that she was getting assistance on the tests and, therefore, making better grades.

These five participants perceived their vocabulary instruction within their regular English/language arts class as helping them become better readers. They all spoke of learning the meanings of words new to them. Mia spoke of her grades as being an indication she was learning. Allison also spoke of the importance of using syllable breaks in order to pronounce these new words (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2003). Likewise, Natalie shared how she was learning to use a word’s part of speech to

assist with determining its meaning. Finally, Olivia and Issac pointed out the benefit of learning prefixes and suffixes in order to figure out the meanings of these new words.

Benefit of reading aloud together. Four participants, Daniel, Isaac, James, and Olivia, perceived benefits to reading aloud together with the teacher in their English/language arts class. Additionally, all but Isaac had previously named comprehension as a deficit for them.

In sixth grade, Daniel's response was, "Yes, because with reading *Touching Spirit Bear*, I get to read with the class and it helps me read faster and understand what I'm reading." In addition to reading comprehension, Daniel had previously identified fluency as one of his deficits. By hearing his peers read the text aloud, Daniel had (a) compared his reading fluency with his peers and (b) believed that more fluent reading aided with his comprehension.

Isaac said, "We do like we read a lot of books and she gives a test about it and we got to write about it."

Likewise, James named both the read alouds and the activities that accompanied them as helpful: "Yes, because with reading *Touching Spirit Bear*, almost every day and we do complete sentences on our study guides." He, too, viewed active reading and writing as beneficial to him as a reader. James also said that listening to the audio helped as well, noting that "when he [voice from audio book] says it with a question mark or an exclamation mark, he says it in different ways" it helped with his comprehension.

Finally, when asked if her English/language arts class was helping her become a better reader, Olivia responded, "Yes, from reading the book out loud."

Even though only four participants named reading aloud as a class as helping them become better readers, it was evident for all of the participants that the books chosen as the class read alouds engaged them as readers. In sixth grade, the read alouds were (a) *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2002), (b) *Bridge to Terrabithia* (Patterson, 1977), (c) *Sixth Grade Can Kill You* (DeClements, 1985), and (d) *Tuck Everlasting* (Babbitt, 1975). Depending on what they were reading at the time of the interviews, when asked, “What is your favorite book?” all the participants named their current read aloud.

During her first interview, Natalie responded, “I think it’s the book we’re reading now, *Touching Spirit Bear*. I like that book. It’s like a little bit of everything in one book, like action and fantasy and all kinds of other stuff.”

Similarly, Mia drew a connection to her favorite choice when she said, “*Sixth Grade Can Kill You* cause most it was true like I don’t like sixth grade. There’s too much drama.” In seventh grade, the class read alouds were (a) *Nothing but the Truth* (Avi, 1991) and (b) *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* (Curtis, 1963).

In his first interview, James said, “I like the book. We’re reading about a kid getting in trouble at school [*Nothing but the Truth*].” Later in the year he said, “I like *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* cause I like the way it led up to what Civil Rights was and how it affected us and American history.”

Daniel shared James’s assessment:

Um, the one we read for this project, the iMovie, *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. I liked that it was about Civil Rights and, uh, like how it was in the south like years ago. I liked that the older brother would pick

on the younger brother cuz that like shows the real word cause I know my brother likes to pick on me and I pick on my little sister and stuff.

During her first interview, Mia shared, “We’re reading *Nothing but the Truth*. Well, like the main character, I don’t always tell the truth.” In a later interview, she shared,

The Watsons Go to Birmingham because it’s about when African-Americans didn’t have the same rights and I know that has to do with social studies, but, uh, I watched the movie about that to in language arts. There’s not as much detail in the movie. I just liked the setting.

Likewise, Olivia responded, “My favorite book is *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. The thing I liked about that book was like it was how it was back during the Civil Rights movement.”

Finally, Natalie shared, “*The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. It’s funny and I can also learn from it like what happened back then.”

Reading aloud as a class with struggling adolescent readers can (a) build vocabulary knowledge, (b) increase fluency, (c) increase comprehension, and (d) increase motivation (Wolfson, 2008). Therefore, it is understandable that the four participants perceived reading aloud as beneficial to them. Additionally, since all of the participants named the current class read aloud as their favorite book at one time or another, it appeared as though these readings successfully engaged them.

Benefit of class discussion. When asked if their English/language arts class was helping them become better readers, three participants, Daniel, James, and Natalie, noted how discussing the texts together aided in their reading comprehension.

In sixth grade, Daniel said, “After we read the section, she’ll, we’ll discuss it. She’ll be like, ‘So, what’s happening?’ and we’ll just like tell her.”

James identified class discussions as helping him understand a text, commenting “If people don’t get it, you can figure it out by what the teacher says and what’s the right answer to it.”

Likewise, in seventh grade, Natalie said, “Yeah, cause we have reading packets we go over.” During an observation of Natalie’s class, I noted the following questions being asked from a reading packet: “What does Bud tell him to do to prove that he was not a vampire?” “What does the man use as bait to get Bud to talk to him?”

Finally, in seventh grade, James shared,

Yes, Ms. [B] helps us read. She helps us comprehend it. We talk about it. She breaks it down. If you don’t understand, she’ll go over it until you understand. It doesn’t matter how many times you have to ask her, she’ll do it.

Daniel, James, and Natalie indicated that discussing the texts together in class helped them to understand what they had read. Daniel described the skill of summarization when he said, “She’ll be like, ‘So, what’s happening?’ and we’ll just like tell her.” Similarly, James and Natalie referenced going over the answers to questions as a class. These two activities were perceived as beneficial to these students as readers.

Summary of perceived positive experiences. All seven participants described ways in which their English/language arts instruction was helping them become better readers. First, five of them named vocabulary instruction that taught them to (a) use syllable breaks to pronounce words, (b) determine a word’s part of speech to assist with

meaning, and (c) use prefixes and suffixes to determine word meaning as beneficial.

Next, four participants believed that reading texts aloud together as a class helped them be engaged with the texts and improved their comprehension. Finally, three participants named class discussion as an activity that was aiding their comprehension with texts.

Perceived negative experiences. When asked if their English/language arts class was helping them become better readers, four of the seven participants described negative experiences with their English/language arts instruction during at least one interview. These participants, Allison, James, Mia, and Natalie, were vocal about not always seeing benefits from their English/language arts instruction.

In sixth grade, the participants were scheduled in three different English/language arts classes, and the following examples refer to each of the three different classes.

James said, “Maybe. I don’t know. We just do work.”

Allison stated, “The teacher moves too fast,” and she did not feel like she was ever given a chance to answer a question, commenting,

She’ll ask us a question and, if you don’t know it, she just says, ‘Okay, let’s go to the next question.’ A lot of the kids [get] frustrated in the class because they have a good answer too, but if one kid gets the right answer, she don’t let the other kids get it.

Finally, Mia responded, “He just reads to us...it’s not really helping me.”

These responses spoke to these students’ frustrations with not being engaged with texts nor having critical discussions about texts. As mentioned earlier, literacy research and motivation research both suggest allowing students the opportunity to engage in

textual discourse in order to promote reading comprehension and engagement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Schunk et al., 2008; Sturdevant et al., 2006).

In seventh grade, the participants were scheduled in two different English/language arts classes; Mia was in one class and Natalie was in the other. When asked if she thought her English/language arts class was helping her become a reader, Mia shared, “No, because just the way like she teaches. We don’t really do nothing in there. I mean, we just read the book.” She also spoke about the class being a waste of time, commenting, “Um, like I need stuff shown to us instead of just talk. When [Ms. C] is in there, it’s not, but when she’s not, uh, it’s just a lot of talk.” Here, we see a student’s perception about how time is wasted, which led her to question whether she was getting the instruction she needed as a reader, especially when the collaborative exceptional children’s teacher was not in the room.

Unlike most of the other participants, Natalie did not like reading aloud together in class. She shared,

No. I can more comprehend it if I’m reading by myself cause it’s hard for me to comprehend when someone else is reading it and they’re not asking questions about the word because they might know it but I don’t, so that’s why I’d like to be reading it so I can ask what the word is or what it means.

She realized what she needed in order to make meaning from a text.

Summary of perceived negative experiences. When looking at the responses the participants made in regard to their regular English/language arts instruction, these four participants felt, at some point during the two years, that they were wasting time in

this class. Two of them, Mia and Natalie, reported that the practice of reading aloud as a whole class did not help them. For Natalie especially, it was distraction. Additionally, Mia perceived that there was not much instruction happening in her class and that there was often too much “talk” [talk about things not related to academic learning]. Finally, for James to comment, “we just do work” speaks to the low level of engagement he experienced.

Summary of Perceptions of Regular English/Language Arts Experiences

At various times during the interviews, all the participants in this study perceived the instruction taking place in their regular English/language arts classroom as helping them become better readers. Several participants perceived vocabulary instruction, reading aloud together, and class discussion as practices that helped them become better readers. However, at some point, four participants shared they did not believe the instruction was beneficial.

Perceptions of Reading Remediation Experiences

At the middle school the participants attended, the RTI remediation interventions for students on Tier 2 or Tier 3 took place during either the 30- minute club time during the school day (previously known as Advisor/Advisee time within the middle school concept) or during a 40-minute elective period. During the participants’ sixth grade year, Mrs. S (pseudonym) was the teacher of the 40-minute elective period for all grade levels. She had previously been an elective teacher who went back to school and obtained a reading licensure certificate (18 hours of coursework). Mrs. S retired at the end of that school year. The next year, Mrs. T (pseudonym) taught this class. She was certified to

teach exceptional children and had taught in a co-teaching setting as well as resource classes. The teacher of this class had the autonomy to structure the class as she chose. The participants shared that they (a) read novels, (b) read short passages with state assessment type questions, (c) worked with vocabulary words, and (d) completed activities on computer programs.

Perceived positive experiences. Although six of the participants were unhappy to be in the remedial remediation class at some point during the two years of interviews, all of them also shared very favorable opinions of the experience as well, saying: (a) I need the help offered and (b) the instruction offered is helping me. In the following section, I will share these perceptions.

I need the help offered. I asked the participants to “tell me your feelings about being assigned to the reading remediation class as an elective class.” In sixth grade, all seven of the participants thought that they needed the help offered via the reading remediation class. Their perceptions tied to both the early identification of reading deficits in elementary school as well as to reading difficulties they encountered in middle school.

Two students saw the remediation class as intended to help them perform better in their other classes. For example, Allison was, at first, unclear about why the remedial reading class was on her schedule. She said, for example, “I like it. It’s where you try to bring up your grades, I think, cause I asked her why we in here and she said it’s just to get us like beyond passing and you get to get out of reading remediation.” Allison saw

the remediation class as an opportunity to improve her reading ability and improve her test scores with the end result of no longer needing the assistance. Similarly, Olivia said, “I was pretty happy at first because I needed help. It’s where I’m supposed to be and getting help with and having a teacher who can teach very well.”

Several participants also referred to the language of reading deficits when responding to this question. For example, three of them spoke about improving their fluency by being in this class.

James responded, for example, “I’m kind of glad that I’m in there because it helps me, like our nouns and proper nouns, our fluency.”

Daniel also commented, “I don’t have really good fluency, so it helps me with that.”

Finally, Isaac also referred to fluency, “It’s helping me to read more faster and write more better. It will help me like understand the book more better.”

Other students referred to benefits related to other deficits. Mia referred to comprehension as a deficit, explaining,

I like it because it helps me with my comprehension. It helps me, and then, what we learn in that class, we probably also learn in Mr. [Z’s] class [English/language arts]. So, it’s extra help for me so I can understand it better.

Finally, Natalie discussed improving her vocabulary deficit, responding,,

Yes, it will help me by like reading big words so I can read the more thicker adult books with big words in them. I like reading remediation because we’ve been reading chapter books and we’re learning lots of stuff that will help us get ready for the EOG [end-of-year reading assessment].

In this sense, Natalie connected the need for vocabulary to also improve her reading comprehension.

In seventh grade, James was removed from the class and often spoke of “doing fine” without it.

Four of the participants continued to believe that they needed the help offered from the reading remediation class.

Mia said, “I’d rather be in there just for the extra help and so I can be a better reader and have extra help.”

Likewise, Natalie said, “I don’t mind it because it does give extra help. I like the teacher.”

Isaac also commented, “It’s good. [I’m] understanding words and reading faster.”

Finally, Daniel shared, “...We all work together in that class and uh Mrs. [T] will work with us if we need help and it seems like it’s getting easier as the year goes on.”

These participants understood why they had been assigned the reading remediation class and were willing to embrace the extra help. They believed the class was addressing their perceived reading deficits and building their proficiency in reading.

The instruction offered is helping me. Next, I asked the participants, “Do you think that being in the reading remediation class is helping you become a better reader?”

In sixth grade, all of the participants said that they believed the remedial reading instruction was helping them, often addressing their previously named reading deficits. Six of them discussed the benefit of learning prefixes and suffixes in order to build their vocabulary skills.

James said, “We’re taking a bunch of notes about prefixes and suffixes.”

Likewise, Daniel commented, “We’re working on prefixes, suffixes, and root words or adding on the words because we learned sub means under and marine means water and so submarine means under water.”

Allison responded, “She’s helping me with big words, so that was my worst problem.”

Mia commented, “I’m feeling better about myself because I’m getting, putting myself where I need to be. We’re doing, I forgot, suffix, prefix, and stuff like that.”

Olivia also shared, “I’m learning words I’ve never heard before and improving my vocabulary.”

Finally, Isaac said, “We’re reading big words and small words and sometimes when we don’t know the words, she helps us understand the words.” It was evident that the teacher had discussed the benefits of learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes and the participants were eager to learn them in order to help build their vocabulary knowledge, believing this knowledge would help them become better readers.

Additionally, several of the participants spoke of improving their overall reading ability and comprehension via strategies used in the class.

Isaac shared, “And, when we finish a chapter, she gives us a paper and we have to answer the questions and write about it. First, we do the questions and then we do the re-tell summary. She checks it and then we go over it.”

Natalie said,

It helps me because we're learning like parts of speech to help us read a story and help us understand what's going on and picture it. And I think SuccessMaker is good because it helps me learn different stuff and I like answer questions and stuff and she gave us a notebook to write down stuff like notes for the EOG and stuff and I really like it.

James believed that, "Doing SuccessMaker and stuff to get our reading up. I think it's helped me learn. I have more confidence in myself and she has strategies and stuff to help us too."

In seventh grade, many of the participants continued to refer to their specific reading deficits and how the class was helping them. Early that year, James was removed from the reading remediation class. The other six participants, however, continued to believe the class was helping them become better readers (even though Olivia and Allison wanted an opportunity to have a different class).

Daniel explained why he thought his reading had improved:

I think that I am getting better in that class and I like Mrs. [T] better than Mrs. [S] because I learn when I have fun and I have fun in that class. We all work together in that class and, uh, Mrs. [T] will work with us if we need help and it seems like it's getting easier as the year goes on. My fluency has gotten better and my reading has gotten faster and I can understand what I'm saying. Reading the passages helps me 'cause I try to read it as fast as I can and understand it to answer the questions. Um, we'll read for three minutes on a big sheet of paper. It's got a full story on it and usually I'll read like 100 to 120 words.

Daniel viewed his second year in reading remediation as a place where he received support from the teacher and students by all working together. Additionally, by completing timed fluency readings, he was able to see progress in this area.

Likewise, Allison, Olivia, Natalie, Mia, and Isaac spoke of the support they felt they were getting during their second year of reading remediation. They all discussed reading together, the teacher stopping to talk about the text with them, fun vocabulary activities, and Read Theory (ReadTheory LLC), an online reading program with short passages and questions to answer. It was clear that the participants viewed Mrs. T as providing instruction that was fostering their literacy growth.

Summary of perceived positive experiences. Although some of the participants were unsure at first as to why they had been assigned to reading remediation, it was evident that Mrs. S and Mrs. T had explained to them that the goal of the class was for the students to improve their reading abilities and perform better on the end of year state reading assessment. Through their responses, it appeared that the participants viewed these teachers as improving their reading skills via the varied instructional methods used such as (a) vocabulary instruction on prefixes and suffixes, (b) answering questions and writing summaries, (c) fluency readings, and (d) computer reading programs such as SuccessMaker (Pearson, Inc.) and Read Theory (ReadTheory LLC).

Perceived negative experiences. As mentioned previously, six of the participants voiced negative perceptions about being in the reading remediation class at some point across the two years of this study and clearly spoke to their struggling reader identities. By being assigned to reading remediation class, they made statements to the effect that: (a) it makes me feel bad, (b) I am missing opportunities, and (c) I do not need the class. The comment implying “it makes me feel bad” related directly to their beliefs that they could not perform the skills needed to be deemed successful readers. However,

“I am missing opportunities” and “I do not need the class” spoke directly to their desire to be removed from the class. These negative experiences are described and analyzed below.

It makes me feel bad. When asked their feelings about being assigned to the reading remediation class early in sixth grade, it was clear several of them were devastated.

James responded, tearfully, “I thought I was doing better than I was.” James’s response to his continued placement in remediation conveyed to his disappointment at still being deemed a struggling reader.

Similarly, Allison said, “I mean, first, when I figured it out, I was kind of down because I thought I wasn’t that smart until she told us it wasn’t a problem up in here [points to brain].”

Olivia said, “After they said that we needed help with the words that we don’t understand, I felt pretty bad for myself because why was I in reading remediation.”

For several students, these feelings continued in seventh grade.

Daniel said, “I just don’t like it. I just don’t like feeling like I’m not as good as everyone else in reading so much that I have to be in a reading class.”

Initially, Allison was not in reading remediation for the first couple of weeks of school. Her response to the change in her schedule indicated her frustration:

I don’t know how I got in there. I was making like 100’s in there. They just gave me the card and no one explained why. I just went. I don’t want to ask the question why because it could be like, it could really hurt.

Olivia offered similar sentiments,

At first, I was pretty devastated about it and because I got it again and so I was like, oh get over it, I understand why I got it and whenever [Mrs. Thomas] introduced herself, I was like, okay I can get over this and so far it's turned out good. I wasn't devastated anymore.

Although these participants may never have said anything to anyone else about their disappointment in being assigned to the reading remediation class, it was clear they had feelings of frustration because they continued to be labeled a struggling reader. Using words like “devastated” and “I’m not as good as everyone else in reading” illustrated the impact on their already struggling reader identities.

I am missing opportunities. Another consequence from being assigned to the reading remediation class was the loss of other elective classes. Where other students were able to take new elective classes each nine weeks grading period, most of these students remained in the reading remediation class all year. They shared their frustrations with me.

In sixth grade, Mia said, “I don’t get anything else.”

James complained that he wanted “something else besides that, I don’t know.”

By contrast, Allison was clear about her interest in other electives:

I would be wanting to do art cause I wanted to do band and art and my mom, not my mom, my grandma, she was in art and she has this painting of me and my sister and my dad and my mom together in a house with a Christmas tree.

Olivia responded similarly, “I’m kinda jealous because they have an elective and I have the same one [math and reading remediation every day all year]. I would like to

have art and then the main one is drama.” In these comments, both girls expressed their desire to be able to take electives that interested them. For Olivia, having both math and reading remediation classes prevented her from having no more than one non-academic class, which was PE.

Natalie commented, “I do want to get better at art, but it’s not like somebody is going to ask me to draw something. I mean, I draw stick people. They look like bees.” Like Allison, Natalie wanted the opportunity to have formal instruction in art.

In seventh grade, Daniel said, “I’d rather be in drama or life skills. I have all permanent PE, remediation, and band.” By participating in band, students only had one other choice elective and, for these students, that class was chosen for them – reading remediation.

Finally, Allison shared she wanted life skills instead of reading remediation and indicated how mad she would be next year if she did not have some choice electives.

The participants realized by having reading remediation all year they were not able to take classes such as art, drama, or life skills and this upset many of them.

After the end of semester Benchmark, the RTI team decided to move Mia from Tier 3 to Tier 2 and removed her from the remedial reading class. When I interviewed her after that happened, Mia was very distraught about this situation. She said, “They took me out of it. Well, the Benchmark test, I made a higher grade than anybody and my grade was good in [Mrs. T’s] class and they pulled me out of there. I was mad.” Even though Mia wanted out of the reading remediation class in sixth grade, she felt bad when she was removed from the class in seventh grade. When I asked, “Did they ask how you

felt about it?” Her response was, “Nope. It was recent like the beginning of last month. I have the computer class now, but I still go see her every Friday now.” I asked, “So, what are you doing in there on Fridays?” She said,

Just sit and watch them do work. Like I just go in there to see her because I get mad because I liked the class and I felt like it helped me and I feel like I haven’t accomplished what I should have. Like when she told me they taking me out of the class, I was about to cry, yeah, I like [Mrs. Thomas]. The next day, they changed my schedule.

Here, Mia now viewed her loss of reading remediation as a missed opportunity to improve her reading competency.

I asked, “Did you share all of this with your mother?” She said,

Uh, huh [yes]. They done replaced me. They got somebody else in there. I wasn’t even, on the Benchmark, I wasn’t even focused I was just marking answers. I’m gonna try that on my EOGs now. I hope they’ll put me back.

I asked, “What was she doing that seemed like it was helping you?” She said,

Well, like we would do, I think she explains more because I guess [Mrs. Smith] didn’t explain as much as [Mrs. Thomas] does now. I think those maze tests and we had these little sheets where we would time ourselves and we would count the words and I was improving on it.

Here, Mia named the progress monitoring tools as helping her rather than specific strategies she had learned.

I do not need the class. When asked, “If you were assigned to the reading remediation class again next year, how would you feel about that?” In sixth grade, four

participants, James, Allison, Mia, and Daniel, said they should not be in the reading remediation class a second year.

James said, “Not be in the class. It’s boring.” Similarly, Allison pointed out, “I already have a reading class and it’s like we do the same thing in each class.” For James and Allison, their responses seemed to relate to a lack of engagement. At some point during sixth grade, their response to the class appeared to shift and they saw it as boring or not valuable for them.

Mia commented, “No, I don’t want to because I feel like I’ve gotten enough help - but then I want to be in there because I’ll have extra help but I told myself to try harder and I want to get through it.” Daniel was a little unsure saying, “Well, I really don’t think I should be in there because I can read fine but it helps me a lot because I can read fine, but I don’t have really good fluency so it helps me with that.” For Mia and Daniel, it appeared that they were torn, realizing they were getting help in the class with their perceived reading deficits but wanting to be deemed successful enough in order to move out of the class.

In seventh grade, early in the year, Allison was still frustrated. She complained that she wanted

...to get out of reading remediation. Honestly, I’m understanding reading a lot because we have Mrs. [A] and Ms. [C]. I don’t need a third teacher because we’re doing the same thing in our elective with Mrs. [Thomas]. We’re learning about nouns and we’re learning about nouns in there and we’re learning about verbs and all that. And, you know how last year I told you I’d get confused what Ms. [Y] would teach me and what Mrs. [Smith] would teach me? Now, I’m just learning the same thing over from an hour ago. I don’t want to be in there no more. I mean, my grade is

awesome in reading – in both of them – like it’s 90 in language arts and a 95 or 90 in remediation. I just don’t understand why I’m in there.

Allison’s frustration may have stemmed from initially not being assigned to the class during the first few weeks of school and then suddenly being told her schedule had changed. Because she associated success in reading with the grades she was making on her report card and the fact that no one told her ‘why’ she was moved back into the class, Allison was frustrated with the whole process.

Although all of these students had named perceived deficits with their reading abilities early in the study, it appeared that these four participants did not see the value of the class at least once during this study.

Summary of perceived negative experiences. At some point during the study, all of the participants except Isaac voiced their frustrations with being assigned to the reading remediation class. Four of the participants commented that it made them feel bad for themselves as readers. By James tearing up and saying, “I thought I was doing better than I was” and Olivia speaking of being “devastated” by placement within the class, we get a sense of just how upset they were about this class assignment. Six of the participants voiced their disappointment missing the opportunities that other elective classes might have offered them. Allison, Natalie, and Olivia would have liked art class at some point. At another time during the study, Olivia and Daniel shared their desire to be in the drama class instead and Allison believed she would have enjoyed the life skills class. Finally, four of the participants, James, Allison, Mia, and Daniel, shared they did not believe they needed the class. Being able to “read fine” or the class being “boring”

were words used to describe why they believed they should be able to move out of the class.

Summary of Perceptions of Reading Remediation Experiences

Using the problem-solving model of RTI, both reading remediation teachers did their best to provide instruction they believed would foster their students' literacy growth. Although students did make gains during the school year that cannot be measured on a standardized test, when realizing that only one participant passed the end-of-year reading assessment in seventh grade, it is difficult to determine if the costs outweigh the benefits.

Conclusion

The data in this study provided valuable insight into these students' perceptions of their reading abilities and the instruction they were receiving. First, it was evident that the participants had internalized the reading deficits placed upon them in their early school years and along with their interactions and experiences with literacy in school across time had constructed the reading identity of struggling reader. Sharing they wanted to improve specific reading skills such as fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary demonstrated their desire to become better readers. Finally, the participants trusted their teachers to foster their literacy growth. Although there were times when some of the participants were unsure if the instruction was helping them become better readers, they all named things their teachers were doing that they believed helped improve their reading abilities.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Because the state in which the participants in this study attend public school uses the problem-solving model of RTI, there is greater flexibility for a school team to make instructional decisions regarding appropriate interventions a child might benefit from. In this particular district, the decision was made several years ago to use the RTI data as the sole determinant for identifying learning disabilities in children at the elementary school level. Once a child is placed in Tier 2 of RTI, research-based interventions deemed appropriate are tried and monitored. If the child is responsive to the remedial instruction, the RTI team decides if he/she should remain at this tier and continue these same interventions for some time longer or be moved down to Tier 1. If the child is not responsive, the team might either choose to try a different intervention or move him/her to Tier 3 for more intensive remedial instruction. However, as long as the progress-monitoring data collected shows a positive trend-line, the child is determined to be responding to the interventions provided and no referral for testing of a learning disability is deemed necessary. Therefore, when the participants in this study entered middle school on an RTI tier, interventions and progress monitoring were continued using the same procedures begun in elementary school.

Discussion

Connections between Reader Identities and the School's Implementation of RTI

All students in RTI were monitored regularly for reading rate via timed readings, an on-grade level timed reading maze, and their scores on the SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) computer program. When looking at the participants' data across time, it was clear that five of the participants remained in the RTI system, showing a positive trend line in their data, yet not making the gains needed to become successful readers and to move out of RTI.

The five students who remained in RTI, showing a positive trend line in their data, were Allison, Isaac, Natalie, Daniel, and Olivia. Other than Allison, who was placed in RTI during fifth grade, these students were placed in RTI during fourth grade. Two students, James (placed in RTI at beginning of repeating third grade) and Mia (placed in RTI during fourth grade), moved down a tier in RTI and out of the elective reading remediation class during middle school. Yet their later performance on the seventh grade state end of year reading assessment would indicate they were not proficient in reading. All of the participants identified areas in reading they struggled with, noting little improvement across this study.

Students considered for testing of a learning disability. Due to her parent's request, Allison was placed in Tier 2 of RTI during fifth grade. RTI notes indicated that her mother had requested that she be tested for a learning disability but did not want her identified as an exceptional child. Consequently, by placing her in a tier of RTI, she could receive instructional support without such a label. Allison often spoke of

struggling with vocabulary and fluency when reading and, although she felt bad for herself for being in reading remediation, appreciated the help from the reading remediation teachers, believing that the instruction she was receiving was helping her become a better reader. Similarly, RTI notes indicated that Olivia was placed on the radar for possible testing for a learning disability in fifth grade. She often spoke of struggling with vocabulary and comprehension and wanted to become a better reader like her younger brother. Olivia, too, spoke of feeling bad for herself for being in reading remediation but felt like she was placed where she needed to be in order to get help and grow as a reader. Finally, Mia's RTI notes also stated the team was considering her for testing for a learning disability in fifth grade. She named vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension as areas that she needed help with. Even though at one time she was frustrated with being in the reading remediation class, she became visibly upset when she was moved down a tier in RTI and out of the class when her Benchmark data indicated that she was proficient in reading in seventh grade. Mia shared how she did not believe she had made the gains necessary to no longer be deemed a struggling reader and her subsequent data supported this belief. Although all three of these students were considered for testing for a learning disability, they never were.

Students who seemed to have made minimal gains. Two students, Natalie and Daniel, appeared to be making minimal gains in reading, keeping them in Tier 2 of RTI but not becoming proficient in reading. Natalie named vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension as deficits preventing her from being able to read as well as she would like. She often spoke of wanting to read bigger books like *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997-

2007) but not having the skills in order to so. Additionally, it appeared that her ADHD diagnosis may have affected the way she was able to attend to text. Likewise, Daniel spoke of checking out bigger books to read on his own but not being able to finish them. He often discussed with me about his dissatisfaction with his fluency but claimed his comprehension was strong, although he was not successful on the state's end of year reading assessments. Although both of these students believed their reading remediation teachers were helping them, they both voiced their desire to not be in the class during eighth grade.

Students who seemed to have made stronger gains. Two students, Isaac and James, appeared to have made the most gains in their reading ability across the two years of this study. Isaac named vocabulary and fluency as skills he would like to improve in order to become a better reader and was always positive about how the reading remediation class was helping him. He demonstrated clear comprehension of texts and the ability to use discourse to share his opinions about the texts based upon my observations. The final entry in the RTI notes at the end of his seventh grade year was dated March 11, 2015 and stated "Continue Tier 2; revisit before the end of 4th quarter." It was clear that this review did not happen. James had named struggles with fluency and comprehension. However, he often spoke of reading hunting and fishing magazines at home with his parents. James was visibly upset about being in the reading remediation class in sixth grade but conveyed to me he believed it was helping him. In the fall of his seventh grade year, his ELA teacher recommended he be taken out of RTI and he was.

Implications from RTI Data

Most of the participants within this study had been in Tier 2 or Tier 3 of RTI for four years, which is not what RTI was intended for. The decisions made by this school district's RTI teams were inconsistent with the RTI framework in regard to duration of interventions. As I reviewed the participants' progress-monitoring data throughout this study, I discovered it was noteworthy. Five of the seven participants in this study received reading interventions for two years at either the Tier 2 or Tier 3 level in elementary school while one student, James, was in Tier 2 for three years in elementary school. Although a four-five-minute timed fluency test would more accurately measure reading prosody (Deeney, 2010), the participants measured their fluency rate via a one-minute passage each week. Next, even though the SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) computer reading program has shown "no discernible effects on comprehension and reading fluency for adolescent readers" (WWC Intervention Report, 2015, p. 1), the school district used it to remediate and progress-monitor students. As measured by SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.), all of the participants in this study entered sixth grade reading between 3.25 to 4.25 grade level. Once a week, for 30 minutes, they logged onto this program and worked through reading comprehension activities on their reading level. However, over the course of the year, the reading growth measured by this program was only between 0.41 – 0.86 months.

Although SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) was used in seventh grade as well, the reading remediation teacher added on-grade-level AIMSweb maze progress-monitoring. Using AIMSweb mazes, Isaac, Natalie, and Allison consistently performed

along the 50th percentile trend-line, which represented average ability on grade level. However, Olivia performed a little higher at the 75th percentile and Daniel's seventh grade scores were so low that the teacher began testing him using sixth grade mazes where he consistently performed along the 50th percentile. Since James had been dismissed from RTI at the beginning of seventh grade, his folder was apparently lost or misplaced and could not be located at the end of the year. Finally, Mia's progress-monitoring scores since she had been moved down to Tier 2 and removed from the reading remediation class had steadily declined throughout the spring semester.

Looking at the progress monitoring tools being used and the data they were providing, it appears there was a disconnect between addressing individual student needs (as RTI was intended) and using appropriate progress monitoring tools to address whether those needs were being met. For example, if a student identified the need for vocabulary knowledge, there was no tool being used to progress-monitor growth in this area. Likewise, a one-minute fluency test and SuccessMaker scores are not effective progress-monitoring tools (Deeney, 2010; WWC Intervention Report, 2015). Therefore, these students were not experiencing appropriate feedback that would help them re-define themselves from struggling to proficient reader. Throughout the study, the participants continued to name the same perceived deficits and shared they were making little to no progress in overcoming them.

Conclusions

Data in this study support the conclusion that struggling adolescent readers perceived themselves as having specific reading deficits. All of the seven participants in

this study made direct references between their current reading abilities and comments in their elementary school notes. They believed that by improving these perceived deficits they would become more proficient readers. In order to improve these deficits, they depended on and believed their teachers' instructional practices would help them become better readers. When analyzing the data, these struggling adolescent readers (a) self-identified as struggling readers, (b) wanted to become better readers, and (c) trusted their teachers to foster their literacy growth.

Self-Identification as Struggling Readers

Reading identity refers to how capable students believe they are with the skill of comprehending, how important reading is to them, and their understandings of what a good reader is (Hall, 2012). Data in this study support factors such as prior performances with reading tasks, experiences by comparing themselves to peers who appear to more proficient with their reading fluency, verbal persuasions from teachers about areas for improvement (Schunk et al., 2008), and results on standardized tests each year as possibly attributing to the participants' self-identifications as struggling readers.

Early in their school lives, the participants had been identified with specific reading deficits. By fourth grade, most of them had been placed in Tier 2 of RTI and began receiving interventions. By internalizing the reading deficits assigned to them early on, the participants seemed to have taken up the "educational crucible" that Zimmerman (1995, p. 202) speaks of. It appeared that the participants in this study had constructed their identities as struggling readers from their early school experiences with literacy and from the remedial instruction through RTI they subsequently received.

Being assigned to the reading remediation class in middle school appeared to have only strengthened the message to the participants that they continued to be deemed struggling readers. Six participants, at some point during the study, shared negative feelings about being assigned to this class. At the beginning of sixth grade, the participants made the following comments, which illustrate their feelings of being labeled a struggling reader:

James: I thought I was doing better than I was.

Allison: I mean, first, when I figured it out, I was kind of down because I thought I wasn't that smart...

Olivia: After they said that we needed help with the words that we don't understand, I felt pretty bad for myself because why was I in reading remediation?

Daniel: I just don't like it. I just don't like feeling like I'm not as good as everyone else in reading so much that I have to be in a reading class.

In seventh grade, the impact of students' reading identities was also demonstrated by Allison's distress because of her schedule change. It appeared as though she had been given a regular elective schedule and then someone realized that she should have been in the reading remediation class. I asked Allison if she had asked why her schedule had been changed. Her response was, "...I don't want to ask the question why because it could be like, it could really hurt." Speaking to their struggling reader identities, the participants in this study named at least one of the following reading components as a deficit for them (a) vocabulary, (b) reading fluency, and (c) reading comprehension.

Vocabulary. Five participants named vocabulary as a deficit when asked what they needed in order to become a better reader. They believed that if they just knew the words they would be able to read better. It appeared that the majority of the vocabulary

instruction the participants were receiving pertained to weekly spelling words. In seventh grade, the spelling words were derivational patterns of words, which they believed were helpful for them to learn in order to determine the meanings of unknown words (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2005).

Reading Fluency. Six of the participants named reading fluency (rate) as a deficit for them and believed it was something that would help them with their reading. When asked whom they would name as a good reader, most of them named someone that “read not too fast, just the right speed.” They often spoke of how important reading faster was for them, believing that it would aid in their understanding of the texts.

Reading Comprehension. Five of the participants named reading comprehension as a struggle for them. They often spoke of how reading texts aloud together in class, along with teacher-led discussions of the readings was beneficial to them. However, when assigned to read texts on their own, they shared that they did not complete the assigned readings for school and chose to read less complex trading books of interest to them in order to meet the reading requirements for AR.

It appeared that, based upon their interactions and experiences within the school setting, these participants felt at least one of these pillars of reading was preventing them from becoming proficient readers.

Struggling Adolescent Readers Want to Become Better Readers

Comments related to wanting to read faster, learning the big words, and helping with comprehension, speak to the participants’ desire to overcome perceived reading deficits and to become more proficient with reading. Contrary to the research suggesting

that students with struggling reader identities avoid the opportunity to engage in literacy activities (Guthrie & Davis, 2003; Hall, 2012; Hall, 2016), the participants in this study demonstrated that they had a sincere desire to become better readers and read more complex texts on their own.

Three participants spoke directly to wanting to engage with more complex texts. In sixth grade, for example, Daniel commented during one interview, “Well, the most recent book I checked out was *The Witch and Wizard* by James Patterson. It’s about ‘that’ thick [indicating approximately two inches]. I’m on the third chapter.” However, in a later interview, Daniel admitted that he never finished the book with a disappointing nod, not commenting as to why. Similarly, Olivia demonstrated a desire to read complex texts. She had shared with me that she wanted to read *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012) because she had seen the movie trailer and thought it would be good. During the summer, she recalled, “Whenever I went to Kmart, I would read the book, *The Fault in Our Stars*, and I would always put a little place-mark at where I was at.” Each time she went to Kmart, she found the book she had been reading and continued where she left off. It is unknown if Olivia would have persisted through to finish *The Fault in Our Stars* (Green, 2012), and she never mentioned if she checked it out from the library in order to do so. Finally, Natalie admitted, “At my house, we have two Harry Potter books and I want to read one of them except some of the words in there are too big for me to try to comprehend.” Because of their interests, the books they yearned to read ranged in lexile level from 710 to 880, which falls in the range for an average twelve-year-old’s reading level (<http://toefljunior.lexile.com/en/what-does-a-lexile-measure-mean/>). However, due

to the complexity, sentence length, and unfamiliar vocabulary of books at this level, they were often too difficult for these students to complete.

Struggling Adolescent Readers Trust Teachers to Foster Literacy Growth

The participants in this study wanted to improve the reading deficits that had been assigned to them and they had internalized, and they were convinced that the interventions they were receiving would remediate these deficits and help them read as well as their peers. At some point during the study, all seven of the participants stated that they believed their regular language arts classes and the reading remediation classes were helping them become better readers.

Pertaining to their language arts classes, several of the participants believed they were increasing their vocabulary knowledge by learning the meanings of prefixes and suffixes. They shared that they had never been taught how to break a word into parts to determine its meaning. Additionally, several believed that reading novels aloud in class and participating in class discussions were helping them become better readers. They discussed how reading together moved them along in the book at a faster rate and pausing to discuss the text occasionally helped them understand the text better. The participants believed the activities such as vocabulary study, reading the novel aloud, answering questions in complete sentences, and going over their reading packets were helping them, and they had placed trust in their teachers to foster their literacy growth.

Similar beliefs about the reading remediation class were also discussed. They had studied prefixes and suffixes to determine word meanings in that class as well. Additionally, they said it was common practice for the teacher to require them to answer

questions and write about a text they had read. Like their language arts classes, the participants believed their study of vocabulary, reading texts together, and answering questions about what they read were fostering their literacy growth.

Implications

As evidenced in the research literature, struggling middle school students who receive intensive, individualized after-school tutoring can make strong gains in their reading ability (Morris et al., 1996; Morris & Gaffney, 2011). However, there has been little research conducted on the implementation of RTI in secondary schools where remediation takes place in a small group setting of approximately eight to ten students and is not individualized (Prewett et al., 2012). Although it appears there was a “bank” of interventions for teachers to implement within this study, the interventions were the same as those used for elementary students. Such interventions included additional time on SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) and reading logs to complete with parents in the evenings. By using these interventions, the participants in this study appeared to have made modest progress similar to the studies where middle schools have implemented RTI programs like elementary schools and found mixed to small results (Faggella- Luby & Wardwell, 2011; Graves et al., 2011; Pyle & Vaughn, 2012; Vaughn et al., 2010; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012). Because most of the participants in this study appear to be permanently placed in RTI without making the gains needed to become successful readers, the findings from this study suggest that the RTI structure currently in place within this school district needs to be reconsidered.

These research findings have strong implications for classroom teachers, school RTI teams, and school districts. This research suggests that these students have self-identified themselves as struggling readers, internalizing the reading deficits placed upon them by the school institution. Taking into account these research findings and what the participants said about their reading abilities and instruction, I conclude the following: (a) students' perceptions and interests should be carefully considered when planning instruction and (b) RTI assessment tools need to be carefully considered. Below I explore these two areas and recommendations that might more effectively support adolescent readers.

Students' Perceptions and Interests Should Be Carefully Considered When Planning Instruction

As I observed and interviewed the participants, it was clear that all of them had internalized the label of struggling reader but wanted to read better and had faith in their teachers to foster their literacy growth. Equally important, they all wanted to actively participate in class discussions, although Olivia and Mia were not quite as confident sharing aloud. However, these class discussions appeared to be structured as initiation-response-evaluation instead of lively, meaningful discussions as suggested by McCabe and Margolis (2001). When asked to elaborate about why a particular book was their favorite, Daniel, Allison, and James had a lot to share with me about character development. For example, Daniel enjoyed *Touching Spirit Bear* (Mikaelsen, 2002) and noted, "Because I think that Cole has been through a lot and the change in how he acts is a really good change." Likewise, Olivia, Mia, Natalie, and Isaac had a lot to say about the connections they made with the characters and what was especially entertaining about

the books they liked. For example, when referencing *Nothing but the Truth* (Avi, 1991), Olivia enjoyed how the boy character created disturbances at school in order to get out of class, humming during a serious event. Mia, Natalie, and Isaac all mentioned *The Year Down Yonder* (Peck, 2000) as a favorite because the characters were funny, especially grandma. It was clear that Daniel, Olivia, Mia, Natalie, and Isaac had paid attention when the teachers were reading aloud to them in class. They understood the characters and could summarize what was going on. It was also clear that James and Allison could make a connection with the text to themselves, which is a during-reading strategy they were implementing. Their responses reveal their understandings of the class read aloud books, and given the opportunity, they had a lot to say about what was going on in the texts.

When the participants described the instructional practices they perceived were helping them become better readers, they described learning new vocabulary, fluency readings, reading aloud texts together in class, answering questions about the texts, and class discussions. They revealed through their interviews that the sixth-grade reading remediation teacher, Mrs. S., asked them to write summaries about what they had read, taught them how to choose the best answer when taking a multiple choice test, and used SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) to monitor their progress. Additionally, they spoke of the seventh grade reading remediation teacher, Mrs. T., reading aloud with them and asking them questions about the text as she read aloud to them. They were also completing fluency readings and continued practice on SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) that year. In their language arts classes, the participants talked about

reading the class texts aloud together and answering questions in packets. Then, they reviewed the answers to the questions as a class. The participants in this study believed these instructional practices were helping them become better readers, yet most of them remained in the remedial reading class, not making the gains needed to reach grade-level proficiency. Although all of the participants, at one time during the study, perceived the instruction they were receiving as beneficial, some of these feelings changed in later interviews.

Schools seldom implement interventions in the ways that the researchers recommend (Allington, 2011). As a result, the interventions are not as effective as they could be and students continue to lag behind. When looking at students' end of year state reading assessments, performance on tasks within the classroom, and progress-monitoring data via a computer program or maze tests, it is difficult for school RTI teams to make decisions about what interventions should be used, how the interventions should be implemented, when a student should be moved up or down a tier, or when a student should be referred for testing for exceptional children's services (Craig & Sarlo, 2012). Considering the research-based practices of adolescent literacy when planning RTI interventions may offer much promise.

One important principle of adolescent literacy is tapping into student interest (Sturtevant et al., 2006). Two types of interest, personal and situative, work interchangeably within the classroom (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). Situational interest is temporary and is usually in the control of the teacher. For example, teachers can increase situational interest by sparking student interest prior to reading a text by building

background knowledge. On the other hand, personal interest is what the student is naturally interested in. Personal interest has an impact on academic motivation, including persistence and effort and “situational interest is always motivating” (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). When teachers use students’ personal interests when designing instruction, students are more engaged and such increased engagement leads to higher motivation to achieve set goals and increase self-efficacy (Schunk et al., 2008). When the participants were asked what types of books they enjoyed, they named mysteries, adventure books, dramas, and biographies. By tapping into these interests, teachers might have increased their students’ opportunities for literacy growth. Instead of conducting whole class read alouds with a text that teachers chose, they might have allowed students to choose a text that matched their interests and abilities and created literature circle discussion groups. Additionally, by talking with students about their interests, the teachers might have helped students find books they were interested in and they could read independently.

Creating a classroom where readers share ideas is another important principle of adolescent literacy instruction. McCabe and Margolis (2001), for example, argued to create a safe and supportive environment, teachers should arrange their room so that students can easily engage in discourse with one another. “Struggling readers, with low self-efficacy about reading, need to be regularly involved in lively, meaningful discussions with good readers whom they respect and who value reading” (McCabe & Margolis, 2001, p. 48). Similarly Wade and Moje (2000) advocated the importance of oral texts (speaking) created through literature discussion within participatory classrooms. When teachers assign students to read specific texts and give them a context

in which to do so, they scaffold a situated learning experience. For example, when teachers choose texts all related to the same theme, students may be able to use the texts as a tool to constantly re-examine the theme being studied. This thematic approach provides an avenue for students to begin a discussion about texts and ideas. Finally, peer-led discussion groups are often successful at “decentering the teacher’s authority and encouraging students to explore their own questions about the literature” (Wade & Moje, 2000, p. 618).

RTI Assessment Tools Need To Be Carefully Considered

Through observations and interviews with the participants, it was evident to me that they were skillful in summarizing key events of a text and could provide analysis of textual characters, often making personal connections with them. However, it appeared that these skills could not be tested using the school’s progress-monitoring assessment tools.

The school’s RTI team used the participants’ end of year reading assessments, oral reading fluency rates, AIMSweb mazes, and scores from SuccessMaker (Pearson Education, Inc.) to determine who were struggling readers and to progress monitor in order to decide if they would continue to remain in RTI for reading interventions. These assessments were flawed for several reasons. For example, Denton, Barth, Fletcher, Wexler, Vaughn, Cirino, Romain, and Francis (2011) argue that the only thing end-of-year reading assessments determine is the likelihood that students will pass the end-of-year reading assessment the following year. In addition, Deeney (2010) argues that because reading fluency includes accuracy, rate, prosody, and comprehension as

determined by *The Literacy Dictionary* (Harris, 1995), measuring only accuracy and rate via one-minute timed readings does not accurately measure fluency. Therefore, such timed readings do not assist teachers determine why students are not fluent readers or what instruction is needed to help them become fluent. Instead, Deeney (2010) recommends that a students' endurance be considered in order to address prosody and comprehension as well. By asking students to read for four-five minutes rather one-minute, teachers can better get at the causes for a students' dysfluency and provide appropriate interventions. Denton et al., (2011) also maintain that the one-minute oral reading fluency timed readings used with elementary students do not assess the competence of middle school students and that their oral reading fluency be tested via silent reading sentence verification assessments because they provide a stronger connection with reading comprehension. Finally, although Denton et al., (2011) did not find a strong correlation with AIMSweb mazes and comprehension, other researchers have (Silberglitt, Burns, Madyun, & Lail, 2006; Torgesen, Nettles, Howard, Winterbottom, 2003). Nonetheless, Deeney (2010) and Denton et al., (2011) stress the importance of looking more closely at what the assessments tell teachers so that they may provide the individualized interventions that students need. For example, targeting word analysis skills and reading comprehension would be appropriate for students who read connected texts at slow rates and targeting verbal knowledge and embedded meaning within texts would be helpful for students who have strong oral reading fluency but poor comprehension (Denton et al., 2011).

Because the problem-solving model of RTI allows for the use of progress-monitoring assessments that do not necessarily drive the interventions being used and flexibility with the duration of interventions, six of the participants had been in RTI for four years and one for three years. When the students showed so little growth over the course of a year and continued to hover around the same scores on the fluency readings and curriculum-based mazes, it should have been clear that the interventions were not having the desired effect. As a result, these interventions did not foster these struggling adolescent readers' literacy growth or the opportunity for them to redefine their reading identities. Because the instruction appeared to be a one-size-fits-all approach with low-level questioning and few opportunities to collaborate, nor did students receive instruction that aligned with what researchers say are best practices for adolescent readers and are especially necessary to those who struggle (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 2006; Applebee, 2013; Brozo, 2011; Pressly & Harris, 2006; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Sturtevant et al., 2006).

Instead, if RTI teams at the middle school level considered Brozo's (2011) suggestions, struggling students might experience more success. As previously noted, Brozo (2011) recommends using the students as resources by asking them about what they need in order to increase their reading competence level. Although the participants in this study named the very deficits that had been assigned to them by the school, by having a conversation about what they felt they needed, teachers could individualize their instruction and assist students with goal setting (Schunk et al., 2008). Brozo (2011) also recommends implementing a school-wide comprehensive approach to literacy. This

approach would require that teachers were trained on strategies to use in all content area classrooms and would ensure that instruction tapped students' interests in order to better engage them. By incorporating content-area as well as discipline-specific literacy strategies within content area subjects, students would receive the instruction that researchers deem as best practice and might better foster these students' literacy growth.

Limitations

There were several threats to the validity of this study. The first threat was my own professional biases. I worked several years as a classroom teacher at the school site, and therefore, I was very much aware of my potential biases towards the RTI interventions and instructional practices taking place there. Patton (2002) states that “qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit” (p. 341). Therefore, because I valued their perspectives, I chose to use semi-structured interviews to guide the responses from the participants (Schensul et al., 1999). Because I knew my biases, I did not ask leading questions based upon my own assumptions and was careful of my reactivity to the responses (Maxwell, 2013) during my interviews. Although I took field notes during the interviews, I also audiotaped them so that they could later be transcribed for analysis. Immediately following the interviews, I used analytical memos (Maxwell, 2013) to document my initial thoughts. Additionally, I took intensive field notes during the classroom observations. Again, immediately after the observations, I took the time to use analytical memos (Maxwell, 2013) to document my initial thoughts.

Another limitation to this study was in the selection of participants. I invited all eleven students who met the criteria for the study to participate. However, only eight returned the signed parental consent and student assent forms initially, and one of those eight moved at the end of the first year. As a result, there were only seven participants who agreed to participate in this study across the two-year span. Additionally, during the student interviews, because I was a teacher at the school, I knew that the participants could potentially be uncomfortable sharing their perceptions about themselves as readers as well as discussing their teachers' instructional practices with me. To address this concern, I reassured the participants that their identities would remain anonymous at the beginning of each interview. I explained that I would not share information they provided about their perceptions of themselves or of the instruction they were receiving. Finally, in order to ensure that the reporting of the data was objective and credible, my committee chair worked closely with me to prevent me from making assumptions about the data.

Final Thoughts

Children enter kindergarten at all stages of reading readiness. In order to prevent the instructional gap from widening as Biemiller (1999) and Stanovich (1986) describe, it is imperative that elementary teachers be proactive in responding to the instructional needs of students who enter kindergarten deemed as behind (Allington, 2011). As students move through school, teachers must provide interventions in the early school years that will promote the literacy growth needed to ensure that students get the instruction they need to succeed in subsequent grades. However, if students are still

struggling when they reach middle school, teachers should turn to the research-based practices in adolescent literacy and engagement that will support the growth of students' literacy skills and opportunities to redefine their struggling reader identities rather than providing only skill-based instruction (Greenleaf et al., 2001). Using RTI protocol similar to elementary school to provide interventions and progress-monitor at this level does not appear to be in these students' best interests because they are not making the gains needed to be moved out of RTI. Instead, the focus at this level should be on the incorporation of content-area as well as discipline-specific strategies across all subject areas. Additionally, as Brozo (2011) argued, teachers should use the students as resources and talk to them individually about their reading. Consequently, if students have ownership in their learning, they would most likely be more engaged and potentially could rewrite their reading identities from struggling to proficient readers.

The participants in this study had self-identified as struggling readers in part because they internalized the reading deficits identified in their early school years and because they remained in reading remediation for years, working on the same set of skills. In order to provide the space for struggling adolescent readers to rewrite their reading identities, students who struggle should be given opportunities to engage in complex texts by (a) using research based strategies such as questioning, predicting, and summarizing; (b) being involved in discussions about the texts that promote higher order thinking skills; and (c) being given opportunities to write responses to the texts that allow them to draw meaningful connections. The participants clearly understood more about the texts they read than they had the opportunity to display and could have done more

than what the progress monitoring data showed. Most of the participants shared their dreams of pursuing careers that require a higher education, and they relied on their teachers and their school to help them reach these goals. Future research addressing teachers' perceptions of RTI implementation may offer further understanding of the current practices at the middle school level.

Figure 1. A Matrix for a Study of Perceptions of Struggling Adolescent Readers on Tier 2 or Tier 3 of Response to Intervention.

| Research Questions | Why do I need to know this? | Where will I gather data? | Data collection methods | Whom do I contact for access? | Data Analysis |
|--|---|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI describe their abilities and needs as readers? | -to understand these students' perceptions of being labeled a "struggling reader" | -students | -semi-structured interviews -memos | superintendent -principal -teacher -parents of students -students | -audio taping transcription -coding |
| How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI believe their reading needs are being met? | -to understand these students' perceptions of what it means to be in a remedial reading setting -to understand these students' perceptions of how their regular language arts teacher may be meeting their needs | -students | -semi-structured interviews -memos | superintendent -principal -teacher -parents of students -students | -audio taping transcription -coding |

Figure 2. A Matrix for Sample Data Analysis of Perceptions of Struggling Adolescent Readers on Tier 2 or Tier 3 of Response to Intervention.

| Question | 6 th Grade Responses | 7 th Grade Responses | Needs as Readers |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p>How do struggling adolescent readers in RTI describe their abilities and needs as readers?</p> <p>Is there anything you'd like to change about your reading? If so, what?</p> | | | |
| James | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The reading parts and understanding it -It's really slow (fluency) | -I don't think I need anything. I'm not in reading remediation this year. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -comprehension -fluency |
| Daniel | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Long words. I don't know how to pronounce them. -My fluency. It said at a 4th grade level. -It's just that if I read sometimes I get confused and I don't like having to go back and re-read again. | -Keep my pace steady cause I can read fast and then I'll slow down and then I speed up again. I just want to keep it like going fast to medium. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -vocabulary -comprehension -fluency |
| Allison | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I have trouble with big words. Some were just too big of words and that's what I'm scared about. -I read at a medium pace. | -I want to understand bigger words. They'll be big words and Mrs.[] will say the word out loud. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -vocabulary -fluency |
| Mia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I like reading, but I just don't comprehend well. -Just the words – reading the words | -I mean sometimes I can read fast and know what the passage is, but if it's not my interest then I read slow. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -vocabulary -fluency -comprehension |
| Olivia | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I think the words. I don't understand to make them smaller, like not with an -ing but the first word and then right after I learn the first word then add the -ing and what it means. -And the thing that I want to work on most for my reading is comprehension because | -I mean I'm not upset about it but sometimes I am because sometimes I don't comprehend things. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -vocabulary -comprehension |

| | | | |
|---------|---|----------------------|--|
| | that's where I need help a whole bunch. | | |
| Natalie | <p>-To be able to read a word that's like an 8th grade word or bigger because I want to be able to read <i>Harry Potter</i> books, but I can't because the words are too big for me to read and understand because my aunt gave me a whole collection of <i>Harry Potter</i> books.</p> <p>-I'm also reading <i>Diary of a Wimpy Kid</i> that I've already read like a dozen times. Once I read a book over and over, I get faster and I get better with words.</p> <p>-At my house, we have two <i>Harry Potter</i> books and I want to read one of them except some of the words in there are too big for me to try to comprehend.</p> | -not a good reader | <p>-vocabulary</p> <p>-fluency</p> <p>-comprehension</p> |
| Isaac | <p>-to read more faster</p> <p>-to understand more words</p> | -to read more faster | <p>-vocabulary</p> <p>-fluency</p> |

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APPENDIX A

FIRST INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:
Interviewer:
Place:

Time:
Interviewee:

Script: *Thank you so much for allowing me to talk with you about reading. The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of your experiences with reading in school. Everything you share with me will be kept confidential, between us – nothing will be shared with your past/current teachers.*

| Questions by Interviewer | Responses |
|---|-----------|
| 1. Over the summer, what types of reading did you engage in? a. Tell me about the ____ you read. b. What interested you about this reading? | |
| 2. What are your favorite classes in school this year? Why? a. What kinds of activities do you do in there? | |
| 3. What are your least favorite classes in school this year? Why? a. What kinds of activities do you do in there? | |
| 4. Do you have a favorite story/book you've read this year? If so, what? What did you like about it? | |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>5. What would motivate you to pick up something to read on your own, either in school or outside of school?</p> | |
| <p>6. What type of reading do you choose to engage in, outside of school? Magazines? Social media? Internet?</p> <p>a. Why do you suppose you're interested in ____?</p> | |
| <p>7. Is there anything you'd like to change about your reading? If so, what? If not, how would you describe yourself as a reader?</p> | |
| <p>8. Now that you are in 6th grade, what type of help do you feel you need in order to improve your reading skills?</p> | |
| <p>9. Tell me your feelings about being assigned to the reading remediation class as an elective class this year.</p> | |
| <p>10. Do you think that being in the reading remediation class will help you become a better reader? Why or why not?</p> <p>a. (If so) What kinds of activities do you believe are helping you?</p> | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>11. Do you believe your regular language arts class will help you become a better reader? Why or why not?</p> <p>a. (If so) What kinds of activities do you believe are helping you?</p> | |
| <p>12. Do you believe your other content area classes will help you become a better reader? Why or why not?</p> <p>a. (If so) What kinds of activities do you believe are helping you?</p> | |

APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:
Interviewer:
Place:

Time:
Interviewee:

Script: *Thank you so much for allowing me to talk with you about reading. The purpose of this interview is to gain a better understanding of your experiences with reading in school. Everything you share with me will be kept confidential, between us – nothing will be shared with your past/current teachers.*

| Questions by Interviewer | Responses |
|--|-----------|
| 1. What are your favorite classes in school this year? Why? a. What kinds of activities do you do in there? | |
| 2. What are your least favorite classes in school this year? Why? a. What kinds of activities do you do in there? | |
| 3. Do you have a favorite story/book you've read this year? If so, what? What did you like about it? | |
| 4. What would motivate you to pick up something to read on your own, either in school or outside of school? | |
| 5. What type of reading do you choose to engage in, outside of school? Magazines? Social media? Internet? | |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>a. Why are you interested in reading _____?</p> | |
| <p>6. At this point in the year, tell me your feelings about being assigned to the reading remediation class as an elective class this year.</p> | |
| <p>7. Do you think that being in the reading remediation class is helping you become a better reader? Why or why not?</p> <p>a. What types of activities do you do in there?</p> <p>b. (If so) Which activities do you think are helping you?</p> | |
| <p>8. Do you believe your regular language arts class is helping you become a better reader? Why or why not?</p> <p>a. What types of activities do you do in there?</p> <p>b. (If so) Which activities do you think are helping you?</p> | |
| <p>9. Do you believe your other content area classes are helping you become a better reader? Why or why not?</p> <p>a. What types of activities do you do in there?</p> <p>b. (If so) Which activities do you think are helping you?</p> | |