

WHY RTI? A CLOSER LOOK AT RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

Why RTI? A Closer Look at Response to Intervention:
A Meta- Synthesis

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Abstract

In many schools throughout our nation students are falling behind grade level. These students are often not getting the help they need until they are two or more grade levels below what is expected of their peers. Response to Intervention, or RTI, is one approach schools are using to help meet the needs of all students. Response to Intervention is a way to use data and take an individualized approach to learning and teaching. It is a process that needs support, direction, and resources to implement. This meta-synthesis of the literature on Response to Intervention investigates best practices and it also investigates how RTI can be useful in the classroom today.

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1.Introduction

1.1 Background

The Response to Intervention process, or RTI, has been available for use and application in education for several decades (Kashi, 2008). RTI is an intervention process as well as a method used to identify students for special education. RTI is not radically new, but rather represents a formal recognition that one size or method of education does not fit all students (Kashi, 2008). Response to Intervention helps teachers and schools adapt to the different learning needs of children in a typical classroom. Andria Young (2011) states “Response to Intervention has been implemented to ensure that all students receive any needed instruction and interventions to achieve academic success” (p.45).

RTI is being used in schools in lieu of a discrepancy model that was once in place. Educators had utilized the discrepancy model in order to determine the existence of a severe discrepancy between student achievement and intellectual ability (Cohen & Spenciner, 2011). In the past, IQ tests were used as the measuring tool to place students in special education, but we are now far away from that method. Over time, researchers began looking for a more scientific approach. We now use data to gauge where the student is and to set goals for where the student should be academically. We use research based interventions, constantly monitor whether the interventions are working or not, and make changes as needed.

Over time the custom of using the discrepancy model to classify learning disabilities proved to be problematic because there was not a clear consensus on what constituted a

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discrepancy. Different states and schools set differing parameters to classify a student as having a learning discrepancy. This proved to be problematic because students could qualify or not qualify for services based on where they lived. The discrepancy model used IQ testing and compared student results to the achievements levels of other students in the same grade. RTI differs from the discrepancy approach because it uses research based interventions to classify students rather than mathematical discrepancies between scores achieved on standardized assessments.

Response to Intervention has been around for many years but looked a bit different in the past. Kashi (2008) states, “RTI provides a more flexible, mainstream approach that adapts well to the different cognitive and cultural learning styles inherent to minority students whether or not underperforming” (p. 38). Years ago students were being labeled and placed in special education due to being a minority. There were over representations of students from minority groups such as African Americans and Latino children in special education. This still exists today, however RTI is one solution to this problem. RTI represents an approach to intervention that takes into account several factors, such as the needs of the student as well as the quality and rigor of classroom instruction.

In 2004 RTI was included into the revision of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), thus allowing RTI to be included as part of disability identification of learning disabilities (Hughes, 2011). As a result, states throughout the nation began implementing RTI or began moving toward the implementation process. RTI helped tighten the relationship between special education and general education to ensure the quality education of all students.

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No Child Left Behind and RTI both emphasize the quality of instruction that all students receive. In 2004 No Child Left Behind was in full implementation, and RTI was seen as another way to aide in that implementation by ensuring each child was receiving the best education possible. By adding RTI to IDEA, an admission was made that IQ tests were not necessarily the best way to evaluate a student's ability or disability. RTI helped show teachers and schools, through the use of data, that most children could be served in the general education classroom. David Prasse (2011) stated "So while RTI began as a response to addressing student outcomes for special education students, it quickly emerged as a general education initiative" (p. 2). RTI was viewed as a way to bridge the special education and the general education programs. Response to Intervention was designed to help struggling students and became a step in the process to be utilized prior to placing students into special education. RTI needed to be formalized so that educators could focus on student outcomes.

RTI evolved from the concept of overrepresentation in special education. Prasse (2011) stated, " when a student was not learning at an acceptable rate or was not at grade level, general education learned to look elsewhere"(p. 2). The general education teachers immediately thought that something was wrong with the student. RTI has been developed as a solution. It is an intervention that focuses on delivering explicit systematic instruction. It is monitored frequently by assessments and is data driven.

For RTI to be successful, core instruction must be delivered with integrity and fidelity. Since the development of RTI, there has been increased admission that student underachievement may not all be the fault of the student. Hughes and Dexter (2011)

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stated, “ The Commission took the position that many problems affecting students identified with LD are not related to deficits in the student, but rather due to inappropriate and/or ineffective instruction” (p. 5). With RTI, rather than all of the focus being placed on the student, other factors are examined to find out what might be causing student underachievement. In using the RTI model it is assumed that all teachers are delivering strong core instruction. Core instruction is the scientific instruction that all students receive in the general classroom. It is the ninety minutes of math and reading that should be delivered each day. Students who are not responding to the core curriculum are then targeted for specific interventions.

There is no cookie cutter approach to Response to Intervention. Different schools and districts throughout the United States are using RTI in different ways. Despite the variances in implementation however, RTI does have common components at its foundational level. The RTI process begins with a universal screening. A universal screening is an assessment used to target areas in students that need additional support. Universal screenings are designed to be brief, targeted assessments that are used to pinpoint certain areas that need targeted instruction. Universal screenings are usually administered two to three times per year and normally focus on math and reading skills. The data gathered from universal screenings provide teachers with a snapshot of what is happening with the student academically.

There are many different components that make up a true Response to Intervention program. Response to Intervention is focused on a three-tiered model or approach. The tiers were developed to accommodate the unique learning styles of all students; the tier

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system acknowledges that not all students learn the same and that some will need more support than others. The three-tier system ensures that no students fall through the cracks and that interventions are used early on.

Tier one of the three-tier system offers support for all students in general education. This tier is comprised of the core curriculum that all students are receiving and is meant to target all students. Cohen & Spencier (2011) state, “Whole class instruction also provides numerous opportunities such as classroom projects, performances, and class discussions for monitoring progress” (p. 23). In tier one, teachers also utilize benchmark testing a few times per year to monitor student progress. Benchmark testing is used to assess different areas of reading and math and compares the student’s scores to normed scores that give a reference to where the student should be academically.

Tier Two is focused on students whose performance and rate of progress is behind that of their peers as determined by the benchmark testing. AIMS and MAP tests are two different assessments that are used to determine if students are not responding to tier one. Using testing data as a guide, students may be placed in small groups to receive special interventions. Problem solving and collaborative planning are used to reach the students in need. Scientific, research-based practices are used to target students in need. Parents are informed and are invited to be part of the process. Teachers have the option of using curriculum tests to monitor subject mastery.

If a student is not responding to tier one core instruction, then they receive small group support on the specific skill or areas of need. Tier two interventions are put into place for 12 weeks and student progress is monitored once a month. If students show

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appropriate growth and progress then they should go back to receiving tier one instruction using differentiation as needed in the classroom. The student's progress is still monitored however in case they need to receive tier two supports again.

Tier three intervention is very specific and target area based. This level of intervention can happen in a small group or on an individual basis. The interventions used are intensive, systematic, and specialized for the individual student. Parents are informed of the process and teachers work together to provide appropriate interventions for each targeted student. If a student has received tier three interventions for several weeks and is still not responding, they may be referred for special education.

RTI is part of a wider initiative to improve student performance in the classroom. It is used to pinpoint the problem and develop a scientifically based intervention. It is not specifically used for special education students, but rather to help all students learn. Robert Wedl (2005) states that "An important point to be made about the Response to Intervention approach is that is not specifically a special education eligibility tool, rather it is a data-based decision-making system that can be used for all students within the school" (p. 8).

In Alaska many school districts are beginning to implement RTI. Buffum (2010) states that "some schools implement out of compliance, some to improve test scores, and some in an effort to refer more students to special education" (p.10). He states, "Far too many schools find the cultural beliefs and essential practices of RTI such a radical departure from how schools have functioned for the past century that they are unwilling to commit to the level of change necessary to succeed" (p. 11). RTI is culturally relevant

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and takes an individualized approach when working with students. This could be one reason schools in Alaska are implementing RTI. It takes culture into consideration and allows teachers to examine every student's needs and how those needs can be met in that particular the school.

Reading is a big concern among schools and RTI can help improve reading scores. RTI is not new, but is beginning to become the primary intervention strategy used in schools and classrooms. In Alaska, some schools have a high population of Alaska Native students. Alaska Natives are often over represented in special education primarily due cultural differences and language differences. The RTI process relies on data and assessments to see what areas need improvement and interventions.

In a Response to Intervention program teaming or professional learning communities are essential. Usually teams are comprised of various teachers, school administrators, and parents who work together to help the child succeed. The team meets about once a month to discuss the interventions in place and what changes need to be made. They discuss the options and how long the interventions will last.

There are issues concerning RTI that researchers and educators are still trying to figure out. There are questions as well as discussion about how many interventions should be put in place at one time and how long an intervention should be used before being replaced by a different one. Some educators worry about the fidelity of intervention because for an intervention to be successful it needs to be implemented the same way for every student.

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RTI helps bridge general education and special education. With RTI, general and special education are not seen as two separate entities but as part of one system developed to help the student succeed. Using RTI allows teachers to have documentation and data to make decisions. RTI uses scientific interventions and uses data to assess how the students are responding to them. This documentation helps educators make decisions about students as a team. It also helps with over-representation of certain student populations in special education by taking culture and experiences into consideration.

1.2. Authors experiences and beliefs

I am a fourth year teacher and I am constantly learning new things about myself as an educator. One component of teaching I am still trying to wrap my head around is how to implement Response to Intervention (RTI) in a school that is in a rural, remote, predominantly Alaska Native village (often called “bush” Alaska), with limited staff and resources. I remember attending a meeting earlier this school year where the principal told us we should have been doing RTI in our classrooms all year. The special education teachers at my school are only allowed to work with special education students. I became frustrated because the principal’s comment goes against what I have been learning for the past two years in regards to RTI. I wondered “How do you just do RTI?” I am determined and I have a passion to learn more about Response to Intervention so that I can better meet the needs of my students.

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Before moving to Alaska I was employed as a substitute teacher in Ohio. This experience allowed me the opportunity to work in multiple grades in one school. Throughout this experience my expectations and educational values began to formulate and take shape. I became accustomed to working with students who were mostly on academic grade level with some even testing above their current grade level. The school's climate was very positive for students, parents and school staff. The school made it a priority to acknowledge student success and focus on strengths and positives. The school had a very low turnover rate for teachers and the majority of the teachers had been at the same position for several years. This consistency built a strong academic presence throughout the school.

Four years ago I decided to accept a teaching position with the Lower Kuskokwim School District, and I moved to the Yup'ik Eskimo village of Quinhagak. This village of 700 residents is located approximately 70 miles southwest of Bethel, AK. My initial 3 years of teaching at Kuinerrarmiut Elitnaurviat were spent in a self-contained, multiple grade classroom teaching 3rd and 4th grades. This year I am one of two on-site special education teachers and I work mostly with elementary special education students. Currently, I work with students with varying disabilities. I collaborate with the classroom teachers to provide interventions and differentiated activities to benefit students. I have a unique perspective on education because I have had both of these experiences – being a classroom teacher and now a special education teacher. I see how collaboration between the two can be a rich experience.

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Soon after moving to Alaska it became apparent to me that teaching in rural Alaska was going to be completely different from my previous experiences in Ohio. I had students of varying levels in my classroom and some were two or more grade levels behind. It was my job to differentiate and design a plan that made every student successful in my classroom. I attended as many professional development opportunities as I could because I wanted to enrich my experience and utilize the gifts my students had to offer. I really worked at learning the curriculum to provide quality instruction for all students.

One of the biggest learning lessons for me was how to integrate student's cultural experiences into my teaching. I remember having to explain what a stoplight was to students and wondering how they did not know that. As I continued teaching the curriculum, I had many experiences where I would really have to explain things that seemed natural to me. Language was also a difference I saw and noticed right from the beginning. Many students spoke a combination of Yu'pik and English and I began to wonder how language and culture played a part in the gaps I saw. I began to understand the importance of integrating culture and understanding cultural differences in teaching.

During my third year of teaching I started to hear about Response to Intervention. Our school had students who couldn't read, do basic math, and students that really had no interest in school. The solution, or so I thought at the time, seemed to be Response to Intervention. At the time our staff's solution was to keep students thirty minutes longer after school. We thought we could throw students on the computer and test scores would just go up. Although using computer programs can be helpful in raising academic

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achievement, a practice my district supports, I feel that student success and achievement starts with core instruction. By teaching core instruction with fidelity and by ensuring there is an integration of culture students can and will be successful. Core instruction is the main program taught in the classroom, coupled with the strategies used to differentiate lessons for students.

Last year my district as a whole had a strong push towards putting a Response to Intervention program in place. Many of the schools have started the progress of implementing RTI. Staff at those schools have received training and have tested students for replacement programs. This has not yet happened at my school. We are supposed to be doing RTI in our own classroom each and every day. My school (Quinhagak) is lacking the guidance and leadership that the research suggests we need in order to implement an effective RTI program. I am interested in researching Response to Intervention because at my site (of 20 teachers) there exist many different opinions regarding what RTI should look like in the classroom and this has piqued my interest in what the literature says. Our staff never defined what it is we would like to accomplish this school year and I think if we come up with a somewhat uniform plan that we can implement across the board, it would really benefit our students. We need to start with the vision. I think it is important for us to realize that RTI can be successful whether there are two teachers or 85 teachers in the building, it will just look a little different based on our site-specific needs.

I believe that Response to Intervention will be beneficial to our students as long as we receive adequate training and the proper materials are utilized. My biggest need as a

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teacher in the implementation of RTI is leadership and support from administration.

Without that and without buy-in from other teachers, we will not be successful as a whole. I believe that throwing a child on the computer to do a program such as Imagine Learning or IXL is not a solution, however this is one approach that is being supported by our district at this time. From my experiences, a lot of the computer programs are too hard for students and they are not really receiving the practice they need. Many of the computer programs I have investigated are not individualized to each student's needs, which is an essential component of Response to Intervention. In my classroom I want to use RTI, but I find that I also go to a computer program first rather than looking for other resources because it is convenient. I would like to use Response to Intervention as a time to work on individual needs. I would like to use the data from state testing and tests from our district to assess what skills still need to be taught or mastered. I am interested in finding out how to provide intervention for all students at the same time with only one teacher.

Currently our school does not have a shared understanding of RTI. We have aides going into the classroom who are helping, and we are calling it RTI. We are supposed to be improving tests scores but there is an unclear picture of how to do that. Our district had us attend trainings on RTI, however we seem stuck on the implementation of the program at our site.

As I went through the process of learning about RTI, I really questioned how culturally relevant the screening tests are to my students. When I administered the AIMS and MAP tests my students were asked questions about things they have never heard of

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and I was unable to help them. My students are being tested on things they have never been exposed to, which is frustrating. Students' lack of exposure to items referenced in the screening tests can lead to over identification of students in special education and students in need of a replacement program. I am looking for solutions and things that can be done to help children with the language of the test. I would like to know how RTI is culturally relevant and how it can benefit all students. As a special education teacher every student on my caseload receives speech and language services. This makes me question what is happening with the core instruction and what can be do to positively impact the students we are working with in regards to speech.

I hoped that by doing this research I could share my findings with staff and community members. I want them to see the benefits of supporting the RTI effort at our site. As a community and school we need to help our students become proficient in reading, writing, and math. I think community members and parents would be interested in learning more about the RTI process, in knowing what we are doing for RTI at our site, and in learning what support they could offer the school in this regard. The research suggests parental involvement is huge to make RTI successful. I want to find out how we can include parents more and expose them to RTI.

Response to Intervention seems to be the new and upcoming thing in many schools. It is used as a tool to improve teaching and assist students with learning, and it can benefit all types of learners and students. By doing this research and review of the literature I hoped to gain knowledge I could use in my classroom. I hoped to look at other rural schools as examples and learn how RTI is being implemented at other sites. I was

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especially interested in reading more about the cultural component that I feel is lacking in RTI.

Response to Intervention pertains to me as a person because it is being implemented in my school district. As the special education teacher, a lot of people feel it is my job to take on RTI. Staff members at my school have suggested that the special education department should take over RTI. I feel it is something we should work at together as a team. There should be integration and collaboration between regular and special education as we move forward with the implementation process. I am learning through research that there is no cookie cutter approach; instead we need to work together to develop a plan that works for our site. We need to use the research and our vision to define RTI in our own school.

My past role as a classroom teacher helped me to learn more about Response to Intervention and this will help me throughout my teaching career. This interest in learning more and expanding my knowledge on this topic has led me to formulate the following research questions:

1. What are effective ways of implementing of RTI?
2. Are the best practices of RTI culturally relevant?
3. What benefits can come from using Response to Intervention in schools?
4. How do you implement Response to Intervention with limited resources?

1.3 Purpose of this meta-synthesis

This meta-synthesis, which focused on Response to Intervention, had many purposes. One purpose was to locate and identify information on RTI best practices

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currently being used in schools. Another purpose was to find strategies and ideas regarding how RTI is used currently in schools. A third purpose was to understand how RTI has evolved and what direction it is currently heading in. A fourth purpose was to discover what components, if any, of RTI are culturally relevant and how RTI can impact students from all cultural backgrounds. My final purpose in conducting this meta-synthesis was to identify themes that emerged from the articles and to share them with my site administrator and colleagues at my current school.

2. Methods

2.1 Selection Criteria

The 25 journal articles included in this meta-synthesis met the following selection criteria:

1. The articles explored issues related to Response to Intervention.
2. The articles explored issues related to best practices of RTI.
3. The articles explored issues related to areas of RTI that need additional research.
4. The articles were published in peer-reviewed journals.
5. The articles were published between 2005 and 2013.

2.2 Search Procedures

In fall of 2013 and spring of 2014, I conducted systematic searches of five databases that index articles related to Response to Intervention.

2.2.1 Database searches

I conducted Boolean searches within the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC, Ebscohost) using these specific search terms:

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1. (“Response to Intervention”) AND (“Limited resources”).
2. (“Response to Intervention”) AND (“Alaska Natives”).
3. (“Response to Intervention”) AND (“Cultural considerations”).
4. (“Response to Interventions”) AND (“Strategies”).
5. (“Response to Intervention”) AND (“Culturally responsive”).
6. (“Response to Intervention”) AND (“Best practices”).

These database searches yielded a total of 23 articles (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010; Casey, Robertson, Williamson, Serio, & Elswick, 2011; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012; Gagnon, 2010; Hernandez-Finch, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Kaldon, Flynt, & Ross, 2011; Kashi, 2008; Liberman-Betz, Vail, & Chai, 2013; Little, 2012; Martinez & Young, 2011; O’Connor & Witter-Freeman, 2012; Prasse, 2012; Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012; Robinson, 2010; Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009; Strohmyer, 2010; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009; Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & Mckenna, 2012; Utle, Obiakor, & Bakken, 2011; Wedl, 2005; White, Polly, & Audette, 2011; Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2012).

2.2.2 Ancestral searches

An ancestral search involves looking at reference lists of previously published works to locate additional articles. I conducted ancestral searches using the articles I found from my database search. These ancestral searches yielded two more articles that met my selection criteria (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Gilbert, Compton, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2012).

2.3 Coding Procedures

I developed a coding form to categorize the information presented in each of the

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25 articles. This coding form was based on: (a) publication type; (b) research design; (c) participants; (d) data sources; and (e) findings of the studies.

2.3.1 Coding procedures

Each journal article was evaluated and classified according to publication type (e.g., research study, opinion piece/position paper, review of the literature). Opinion pieces are based on the author's beliefs and feelings about the topic. Research studies use a formal research design to gather and/or analyze quantitative and/or qualitative data. Descriptive works describe experience, but do not use particular methods to attain data. Opinion pieces/position papers explain, justify, or recommend a particular course of action based on the author's opinions and/or beliefs. Reviews of the literature critically analyze the published literature on a topic through summary, classification, and comparison.

2.3.2 Research design

Each empirical study was further classified by research design (i.e., quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods research). Quantitative research uses numbers to explain findings. Qualitative research uses interviews, surveys, and language to explore findings. Mixed methods research involves a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to present findings.

2.3.3 Participants, data sources, and findings

I identified the participants in each study (e.g., students, teachers, and administrators). I also identified the data sources used in each study (e.g., observations, interviews, and surveys). Lastly, I summarized the findings of each study (Table 2).

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2.4 Data analysis

I used a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method previously employed by Duke and Ward (2009) to analyze the 25 articles included in this meta-synthesis. I first identified significant statements within each article. For the purpose of this meta-synthesis, I defined significant statements as statements that addressed issues related to: (a) need for more research; (b) cultural relevance; (c) best practices of RTI; (d) challenges of RTI; (e) perceptions of RTI. I then generated a list of non-repetitive, significant statements with paraphrased formulated meanings. These paraphrased formulated meanings represented my interoperation of each significant statement. Lastly, the meanings for all 25 articles were grouped into theme clusters, represented as emergent themes.

3.Results

3.1 Publication type

I located 25 articles that met my selection criteria. The publication type of each of these articles is located in Table 1. Fourteen of the 25 articles (56%) included in the meta-synthesis were research studies (Casey et al., 2011; Gagnon, 2010; Gilbert et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Kaldon et al., 2011; Liberman-Betz et al., 2013; Martinez & Young, 2011; Robinson, 2010; Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009; Strohmyer, 2010; Swanson et al., 2012; White et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2012). Six of the articles (24%) were reviews of the literature (Fuchs et al., 2012; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Little, 2012; O'Connor & Witter-Freeman, 2012). Two of the articles (8%) were opinion pieces (Buffum et al., 2010; Prasse, 2012). Three of the articles (12%)

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were reports (Kashi, 2008; Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009; Wedl,2005).

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Table 1

Author(s) & Year of Publication	Publication Type
Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2010	Opinion Piece
Casey, Robertson, Williamson, Serio, & Elswick, 2011	Quantitative Research Study
Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012	Review of the literature
Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2010	Review of the literature
Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006	Review of the literature
Gagnon, 2010	Qualitative research study
Gilbert, Compton, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2012	Quantitative research study
Hernandez-Finch, 2012	Qualitative Research Study
Hughes & Dexter, 2011	Qualitative Research
Kaldon, Flynt, & Ross, 2011	Qualitative Research
Kashi, 2008	School district report
Liberman-Betz, Vail, & Chai, 2013	Quantitative Research study
Little, 2012	Review of the literature
Martinez & Young, 2011	Quantitative Research Study
O'Connor & Witter-Freeman, 2012	Review of the literature
Prasse, 2012	Opinion Piece
Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012	Review of the literature
Robinson, 2010	Mixed Methods
Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009	Quantitative Research Study
Strohmyer, 2010	Quantitative Research Study
Stuart & Rinaldi, 2009	Planning framework
Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & Mckenna, 2012	Qualitative study
Utley, Obiakor, & Bakken, 2011	Review of the literature
Wedl, 2005	Report
White, Polly, & Audette, 2011	Qualitative Research
Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2012	Quantitative Research

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3.2 Research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the studies

I located fourteen articles that met my selection criteria (Casey et al., 2011; Gagnon, 2010; Gilbert et al., 2012; Hernandez, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Kaldon et al., 2011; Liberman-Betz et al., 2013; Martinez & Young, 2011; Robinson, 2010; Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009; Strohmyer, 2010; Swanson et al., 2012; White et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2012). The research design, participants, data sources, and findings of the studies are listed in table 2.

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Table 2

Authors	Research Design	Participants	Data Sources	Findings
Casey, Robertston, Williamson, Serio, & Elswick, 2011	Casey study, Quantitative	8 year old female	Baseline and progress recording reading passages, Aims web probes	Using brief intervention probes can be beneficial prior to implementing RTI. Brief intervention probes are referred to as probes used to determine what areas the student needs help with. It allows you to easily decide what intervention should be used. It allows teachers to test out an intervention rather than waiting 12 weeks to see if the intervention is working.
Gagnon, 2010	Qualitative Research study	Central office staff, teachers, and school leaders	Surveys	Teachers need more support from central office and school leadership. RTI helps helping students make academic gains. Challenges include lack of time to implement RTI and lack of training.
Hernandez-Finch, 2012	Qualitative	NA	2 other studies on implementation of RTI.	More research is needed on how to implement RTI with students of cultural differences. There is a need for studies that look at numbers and specific cases.
Hughes & Dexter, 2011	Qualitative	NA	13 published field studies	Meta-synthesis of field studies with themes of RTI improving academic achievement. There needs to be more research on professional development,

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				administrative support, teacher buy-in, and planning time.
Kaldon, Flynt, & Ross, 2011	Qualitative	28 Leveled Literacy teachers and 125 classroom teachers	Fountas & Pinnel Benchmark Assessment and DIBELS	Using this intervention (Leveled Literacy) showed significant growth in elementary students. There was more growth seen than students receiving only classroom instruction.
Lieberman-Betz, O. Vail, & Chai, 2013	Quantitative	28 articles	Systematic searches	RTI should be goal oriented. Families should be involved in the process. More research needs to be done on the entire components of RTI.
Martinez & Young, 2011	Quantitative	99 educators	Online surveys	RTI process is perceived positively by educators. Strengths were found in relation to early identification of students. Students were identified early on before waiting for them to fail.
Robinson, 2010	Mixed Methods	200 general and special education teachers	Surveys	Teachers need to be trained on cultural practices. Support is needed more successful implementation. More research still needs to be done.
Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009	Quantitative	5 states (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Washington, Oregon)	Interviews	These five states are beginning to implement RTI. Each have different types of support that are helping to implement the program.
Strohmyer, 2010	Quantitative	Rural superintendents and principals	Surveys	Schools need adequate training to implement RTI. Administrators as well teachers need to be trained.

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Swanson, Solis, Ciullo, & Mckenna, 2012	Qualitative	All teachers who taught grades 3-5 in a school district	Observation tools, focus groups, interviews	Districts need to evaluate how RTI is being implemented in their district. Teachers liked how RTI met student needs. They were able to problem solve for each student. Implementing RTI also comes with challenges such as documentation and scheduling.
White, Polly, & Audette, 2011	Qualitative	15 teachers of schools RTI leadership team	Interviews	Importance of teacher and principal leadership. Importance of communicating the rationale behind RTI and creating a targeted focus. Make a plan to involve parents in the RTI process.
Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2013	Quantitative	Racial groups in all 50 states receiving special education services	Growth models and data collected from a period of 5 years	Assessed the disproportionality in education. Findings indicate some improvement from 10 years ago.
Other studies that I found: (Part 2)				
Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006	Review of literature	NA	NA	An in-depth look behind the why of RTI. There is a process between each step. It uses student data and planning to impact the student.
Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012	Metasynthesis of the literature	NA	NA	Instruction is essential when implementing RTI. It is important to make use of school resources.
Kashi, 2008	Overview of Alaskan school district	Kenai Peninsula Borough	NA	RTI is sensitive to human diversity with students who struggle due to

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		School District		cultural differences. RTI is suitable for a broad range of underperforming students.
O'Connor & Freeman, 2012	Review of literature	NA	Articles focusing on district support	No matter where you are in the RTI process, quality and coordination of support is essential. Culture and beliefs can impact the implementation of RTI. RTI should be weaved into a district's philosophy and beliefs.
Little, 2012	Comparison of action research and RTI	NA	NA	RTI takes planning and consideration. Both want to improve student achievement and offer support to students.
Proctor, Graves, & Esch, 2012	Overview of 3 tiered RTI model	African American Students		One of the benefits of RTI is its focus on prevention and early identification. RTI can decrease disproportionality in special education by helping students early on.
Utley, Obiakor, & Bakken, 2011	Review of the literature	NA	NA	Understanding culture is important. Culturally responsive instruction stresses respect for diversity.
Wedl, 2005	Report	NA	NA	The recent research behind RTI makes it a useful tool. This helps identify students for special education without using discrepancy model.

3.2.1 Research design

Six of the 13 studies (46%) used a quantitative research design (Casey et al., 2011; Lieberman-Betz et al., 2013; Martinez & Young, 2011; Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009; Strohmeyer, 2010; Zhang et al., 2013). Six of the 13 studies (46%) used a qualitative research design (Gagnon, 2010; Hernandez-Finch, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Kaldon et al., 2011; Swanson et al., 2012; White et al., 2011). One of the 13 studies (8%) used a mixed methods research design (Robinson, 2010).

3.2.2 Participants and data sources

The majority of the 13 research studies included in this meta-synthesis used data from teachers and students. Three of the 13 articles (23%) used data from students (Casey et al., 2011; Gagnon, 2010; Zhang et al., 2013). Seven of the 13 articles (54%) used data from teachers and/or administrators (Kaldon et al., 2011; Martinez & Young, 2011; Robinson, 2010; Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009; Strohmeyer, 2010; Swanson et al., 2012; White et al., 2011). One (8%) of the 13 articles used articles to collect data (Lieberman-Betz et al., 2013). Two of the articles (15%) did not have the data listed (Hernandez-Finch, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011).

There were a variety of data sources used to collect data. Two of the 13 studies

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(15%) used benchmark testing to collect data (Casey et al., 2011; Kaldon et al., 2011). Four of the 13 (31%) studies used surveys to collect data (Gagnon, 2010; Martinez & Young, 2011; Robinson, 2010; Strohmyer, 2010). Three of the 13 studies (23%) used interviews to collect data (Stepanek & Peixotto, 2009; Swanson et al., 2012; White et al., 2011). One of the 13 articles (8%) used growth data over a period of five years (Zhang et al., 2013). Three of 13 studies (23%) used searches to find data (Hernandez-Finch, 2012; Hughes & Dexter, 2011; Lieberman-Betz et al., 2013).

3.2.3 Findings of the studies

The findings of the 13 research studies included in this meta-synthesis can be summarized as follows:

1. Using RTI can have a positive impact on academic student growth. When school staff made time to look at student data and create an individualized approach, students showed growth. They were able to move among the tiers and fill in the gaps related to their learning. Progressing monitoring aides and supports the implementation of RTI.
2. While many schools are currently implementing RTI, more research needs to be done to find out what strategies have proven to be effective. RTI does not have a one-size-fits-all approach. RTI is based on individual needs. It will be important to look at both rural and urban schools.
3. Teachers, school administration, the district, as well as families need to work together to implement RTI. Teachers need adequate trainings on interventions, planning, and scheduling. School administration needs training on how to lead

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teachers and assist with implementation. District staff needs training on the resources and how to support schools. Families need support and training on what they can do at home to positively impact what is being done at school.

3.4 Emergent themes

Five themes emerged from my analysis of 25 articles included in this meta-synthesis. The themes include: (a) need for more research; (b) cultural relevance and benefits; (c) best practices of RTI; (d) challenges of RTI; (e) perceptions of RTI. These five themes and their meanings are in table 3.

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Table 3

Theme Clusters	Formulated Meanings
Need for more research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How can long term use of RTI be an alternate to discrepancy model. There needs to be more research on how it impacts special education referrals. ● Important to see how RTI impacts early childhood and what can be done in preschool to start the process from the beginning of the child's education. ● Continuing researching how to implement RTI in small schools. ● Research on professional development, administrative support, teacher buy in, and planning will help benefit professionals. ● Currently 47 out of 50 states are implementing RTI, an in-depth look at what these states are doing would be beneficial as schools continue to implement RTI. ● Overrepresentation of minority groups is still an issue. This area needs to be researched further to explore the trends and how RTI impacts overrepresentation directly. ● There is a need for more research on educators implementing RTI, which would look at specific data on interventions that worked and progress that has been made. More research needs to exist in both rural and urban schools.
Cultural relevance and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The process of response to intervention takes learning styles and cultural differences into consideration by looking at the student's background and how they learn. ● Individualized planning will help students and is the core of RTI. ● RTI adapts well to cognitive and learning styles. There are interventions available based on the need of the student. ● RTI can help avoid over-identification of minority students by providing them with interventions and documenting how they respond to them. ● Those who truly have a disability can usually receive intervention. ● RTI focuses on prevention and over identification. ● RTI respects diversity by taking culture into consideration. ● RTI considers beliefs and traditional practices, which allow educators to better educate students. ● Learning should be fun, rigorous, exciting, and challenging. ● Special education and general education should work together to make structured learning environments. ● The emphasis on RTI is a positive way to gather data and make informed decisions while taking into consideration culture. ● Culture is a part of the data collection process.
Best practices of RTI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educators should have the belief we can effectively educate all students.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research based instruction and a strong core curriculum ensures students are receiving quality instruction. ● Core curriculum in reading should focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and text comprehension. ● RTI should have multiple tiers of interventions based on student needs. Tier one focuses on the main classroom instruction. Tier two takes a look at specific areas that need help. Tier three is a research-based intervention designed to increase the rate in which the student meets the grade level expectations. ● Continuous monitoring of student progress allows you to see growth and try new interventions. ● Considering English Language Learner (ELL) students and cultural diversity allows educators to focus on how they are teaching. ● Without parent support RTI will not be as strong as it could be. Parents should be involved in monitoring the progress and setting goals for the student. ● Setting goals for students allows them to see the progress that is being made. ● RTI should drive instruction meaning the tier one (core instruction) should be strong. Teachers should differentiate as needed and provide tier two and three interventions as soon as possible. Instruction should consider culture, which is vital when implementing RTI. ● Teachers should present information in many different ways allowing for all types of learners. ● Schools need strong district leadership and school leadership. ● Having a school wide purpose and mission helps schools to determine exactly why they are implementing RTI and what they hope to do by doing so. It allows work to be more focused and with a purpose.
<p style="text-align: center;">Challenges of RTI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of documentation does not allow you to have data to support the RTI process. Documentation can be difficult to fit in. ● Lack of teacher training on RTI can lead to frustration and teacher turnover, particularly new teachers. ● Teachers often feel lost with so much information and need a structured support with strong leadership and clarity. ● School personnel should make sure they understand the rationale behind RTI and have a clear understanding of the framework. ● Finding effective assessments are important when implementing RTI. Teachers often struggle with what assessments to give their students. ● Research shows if teachers have a mindset that not all students can learn that will have a negative impact on the RTI process. ● Funding RTI and buying intervention materials can be difficult in

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	<p>schools with limited resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We often assess students but do not test them on what we are teaching. It is important to make sure assessments align with the instruction. ● Educators who fail to recognize that students have cultural differences and that it impacts their learning can have a negative impact on RTI. ● RTI should not be done from a compliance perspective. It should be done by looking at cultural practices and essential practices of RTI and the incorporating them into instruction. ● Coordinating schedules of students who need interventions in more than one area can be challenging. ● Removing students from instruction for RTI limits the time they are in the classroom.
<p>Perceptions of RTI</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RTI is a more systematic process that structures interventions throughout the learning environment ● Documentation and preparations can be a time consuming aspect of RTI. ● Educators can learn a lot about the learning styles of their students through the process of RTI. They can track how they respond to different research based interventions. ● Team members are able to learn about students besides their own. They are able to help identify students together. ● Good teachers already do a lot of the best practices of RTI in their classroom. ● By offering interventions early you are able to identify students early instead of using the wait to fail model. ● RTI is a focused approach and is usually done in small groups, which allows for more engagement.

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4. Discussion

In this section I have summarized the themes from my analysis of the 26 articles included in my meta-synthesis. I then connected them to my work as a special education teacher.

4.1 Need for more research

Response to Intervention methods are being implemented with increased frequency in schools, however the research in the field of RTI is still not complete. Although there has been a lot of research done, there is still need for more research.

Currently, 47 out of 50 states are implementing RTI. As educators we can, and should, learn from each other about positive aspects and challenges related to the implementation of RTI. Some case studies and research studies have focused on what schools in rural districts are doing, but a closer look would help provide a framework for other schools. Looking at urban schools would also give educators ideas about larger schools and what resources are being used while implementing RTI.

Overrepresentation of minority groups in special education has been an issue for years. More research needs to be done regarding how RTI directly impacts over representation, both positively and negatively. The exact use and implementation of RTI as an intervention is still not clear. Teachers need support with implementation and more professional development in order to successfully implement RTI. The research suggests that teachers who received support were successful and felt comfortable with the implementation of RTI.

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As someone who is working in a rural school district, I am interested in reading additional research about rural school districts; specifically I want to learn how schools with limited resources and staff are implementing RTI. RTI is important in that special education and general education work together to help children succeed. I would like to keep learning how RTI impacts special education directly and how both regular and special educators can work together to better implement RTI.

4.2 Cultural relevance and benefits

Culture is the beliefs, traditions and learning styles that impact our day-to-day existence. RTI takes culture into consideration by utilizing an individualized approach. RTI is a positive way to gather data about students while taking culture into consideration. RTI can assist with over identification of minority students by looking at the overall big picture. The research shows that RTI examines how students learn and then what interventions can help meet their needs. It allows the teacher to look at the student's background, reflect on the student's learning style, and determine whether the student is a visual, auditory, kinesthetic, logical, or a combination learner while best addressing their needs. RTI takes language and learning into consideration by allowing teachers to have conversations about culture and its role in the classroom.

It is essential to understand the cultural learning styles of students. As educators we need to have conversations about how we are incorporating cultural strengths into our classroom. RTI allows teachers to take an individualized approach and look at the specific learning styles of students. The research states that students of minorities may learn differently than Caucasian students. They may often act out due to their needs not

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being met in the classroom. The research also states that RTI allows teachers to take a problem solving approach to intervention. Parents and teachers are able to work together to discuss the child and think of ways to improve student learning.

Culture is a huge part of my job in Quinhagak, Alaska. I have to consider the local cultural differences and cultural beliefs. I then reflect upon my core instruction and ask myself is it relevant to the students. Acknowledging and embracing cultural strengths does have a positive impact on student learning and is essential to implementing RTI.

4.3 Best practices of RTI

The analysis of the 25 articles made it clear that there are some key best practices of RTI. Best practices can be defined as things that should be done to make the implementation successful. Core instruction is the basis of a successful RTI program. Students should be getting a strong core instruction. In reading this means there should be ample focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and text comprehension. The 25 articles focus on implementing interventions. If classroom teaching is poor and you are not addressing core issues, then it is logical that you will have students who need interventions. Poor teaching does not mean a student has a disability.

Monitoring progress is another key component of RTI. Students are constantly monitored through testing so that they may stop receiving interventions when they are no longer needed. Constant monitoring allows teachers to target specific areas. The research suggests that monitoring progress is essential in determining if the intervention is working or not. It is important to look at the data and discuss what trends you are seeing.

Schools, districts, families, and teachers should work together to implement RTI,

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and it will take time, resources, and support. A good RTI program utilizes resources and staff. Teachers need to sit down and talk about the students, set goals for them, and have a mission behind what they are doing. Articles suggest that having a discussion about RTI and how the implementation would work is essential in creating a strong foundation.

As a special education teacher I want to help my school implement RTI. Students should not receive tier three interventions (the most intensive interventions which include removing a child from the classroom) due to poor teaching. We should be offering students curriculum that takes into account their learning styles and culture. The best practices of RTI are what we should be considering when we are lesson planning and making decisions for our students.

While completing my research I read about RTI best practices which I already use in my classroom. I have found that students do indeed benefit from a variety of instructional methods. Some students learn better from a hands-on approach while others do better from direct instruction. I set goals with my students and their parents and we go over the goals and student progress quarterly. I also work hand in hand with other teachers to collaborate and provide interventions. For example, while in my classroom I may have a group of six or seven students, but in that group I have many different activities and lesson differentiation is happening.

4.4 Challenges of RTI

The research suggests that one of the biggest challenges of RTI is documentation and finding the time for completing paperwork. For a successful program to work you need to have data showing what you are doing and how it is working. It can be frustrating

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for educators to have to do all of this on top of their everyday routines. Some people feel we already test students too much and constant monitoring of their progress adds even more testing.

Culture can be a challenge of RTI as well. Not having a clear understanding of its role in RTI can lead to frustration. Educators should not do RTI because they are being made to, but rather because they want to help the students learn. When they do this they take student learning styles into consideration as well as student backgrounds and life experiences.

Response to Intervention is proving to be a challenge to implement in a small school. My current school has adopted the RTI model, but knowing how to develop interventions and what to do with the data is proving to be a challenge. As a teacher I have experienced many of these challenges in my daily profession. Coordinating schedules, finding the time, and deciding what interventions to use have been our biggest issues. It will be important for my staff to start with the main philosophy as to why we are doing what we are doing and how we can better help the students. We have looked at data, but done nothing with it. I think it will be important to look at the framework as a whole staff and discuss key aspects of the program. The information in the articles support the fact that it is not just my school experiencing these issues but that it is a common issue among different programs that are being implemented.

The research says that to begin RTI you should have a clear focus and make professional learning communities where you discuss individual students. There should be strong leadership and support among the local and district level administrators. Some

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articles discussed doing a school wide screening where school staff look at data and decide what students need extra support and interventions. Articles brought up lack of training as an issue impacting implementation. Seeking professional development on RTI and interventions will allow teachers to feel comfortable about what they are being expected to implemented.

4.5 Perceptions of RTI

The research suggests that RTI can be engaging and interactive for students. Since some interventions are often done in a small group, students receive more focused attention. Some interventions are universal which means every child receives support. These are positive perceptions of RTI because every student is getting a plan that meets their needs. Every student is considered when looking at the bigger picture of RTI.

RTI is a systematic process that structures interventions throughout the learning environment. Students are constantly monitored and students that need interventions are provided with them before it is too late. With RTI, teachers no longer have to wait for poor learning results before helping students. RTI uses interventions and incorporates them into the daily teaching routine. These are the aspects of RTI that educators appreciate and value.

The research suggests there are also some negative perceptions of RTI. RTI can be time consuming for educators as it requires them to document as well as fit interventions into their daily teaching routine. The research also suggests that teachers need more training. With training and a strong support system, teachers will be able to

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implement RTI without as much frustration.

In my school I think RTI is perceived both positively and negatively at this point. There has been some frustration as to where to start. The research suggests starting with the mission and notes that having a conversation on why RTI should be implemented is essential. This is a positive step because we will be having conversations about every child in our school. We will be able to pool our resources and talents together to help meet the needs of our students.

4. Conclusion

This meta-synthesis analyzes the key components of Response to Intervention and how it is utilized in schools today. It highlights challenges and successes teachers have experienced in relation to RTI. As a teacher who has been in the implementation process of RTI in two separate schools, this research process has enhanced my perspective on how RTI is implemented and how it impacts student learning. I now have tools and ideas I can share with my colleagues as we continue the implementation process.

The research allowed me to see the impact of culture on learning. As a teacher in a rural school district it is important to consider curriculum materials can be made culturally relevant. The research also focuses on strong core instruction and using testing to determine interventions. I am more likely now to have conversations with my colleagues about how to consider culture in our core instruction and ensuring what students are being tested on is being taught. During my first two years in Alaska I took two state-required culture classes. The research suggests RTI should not be done out of

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compliance, but rather in compliance with implementation protocols because we want our students to be successful. We want to provide interventions and include them in the student's day-to-day environment. By doing this it will allow for a rich learning experience for all children.

I become very frustrated when I reflect how my school began the RTI implementation process. As a special education teacher I felt that I did not know where to start or how to implement the interventions. I had a lot of data and some of it did not make sense to me. Doing this meta-synthesis helped me understand the process and how this process can be important to Alaska Natives. Alaska Natives are labeled as having a learning disability at a much higher rate than other groups in our state. This is partially due to language differences and cultural differences. Many of my students are Yupik and their education has been a mix between English and Yupik. By doing RTI we will have documentation and can have conversations about how to make learning successful for each and every student.

After reviewing the literature I think it will be beneficial to sit down with administration and have conversations about what I learned in regards to RTI. The research suggests strong leadership is crucial. There is so much information available on RTI and it can be confusing when thinking about where to start. RTI is not something you can "just do". Teachers need support and a strong understanding of interventions they can use with students in their classrooms. After completing this meta-synthesis I think I can help lead discussions about RTI. I am by no means an expert on RTI but I now have experiences and knowledge to guide my learning. I believe all students can learn and be

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successful, and I am determined to aide in the implementation process at my school.

One of the most important pieces I will take away from this experience is how culture and RTI go together. It will be important to look at how my student's experiences impact what they learn in the classroom. I want to make sure I consider learning styles and needs of my individual students. The research suggests that RTI is culturally relevant and can positively impact student achievement.

Throughout this entire process I wondered why implementing RTI in an Alaska Native village was important. My conclusion is that when implemented correctly, RTI helps meet the unique needs of all students. Most of my students are English Language Learners and they would benefit from small group instruction. When working with my students I am always thinking about how I can incorporate their culture in my teaching. I try to explain language and vocabulary as much as possible. My goal is that every student that I work with feels accomplished and successful. By implementing RTI, educators are taking the first step in helping children make gains academically and well as helping students who may need referred for special education. As I continue to work out in Alaska, I will share my findings with my colleagues, administrators, as well as district support.

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