Chapter 1

Introduction

According to the most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) now renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement

Act (IDEIA 2004), state and local education agencies are encouraged to use a response to

intervention model (RTI) to determine whether students possess a learning disability. Some of

the components of RTI have been used in schools for many years (Barnett, Daly, Jones, &

Lentz, 2004; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). For example, teachers and schools have provided

parents with progress reports at regular times using academic targets to monitor student growth

and achievement (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Graner, Faggella-Luby, & Fritschmann,

2005). However an added difference is that RTI attempts to rule out poor instruction as a reason

for a student's lack of achievement (Graner, et al., 2005).

RTI methods include steps to address students who continue to struggle despite attempted

interventions (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Graner, et al., 2005; Vaughn & Klinger, 2007).

There is a specific requirement that the interventions are scientifically based. An intervention is

said to be scientifically based when it is found to be effective in well-designed experimental

analyses. The inferred rationale for using scientifically based instructional interventions would

limit teachers to only use those interventions that have a proven track record of producing

positive outcomes for students (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005).

The call for scientifically research based interventions in the general education

curriculum was promoted by legislative mandates such as No Child Left Behind (Brown-Chidsey

& Steege, 2005), which was followed by IDEIA (2004). As stated by Harris-Murri, King, and

Rostenberg (2006), this is an important acknowledgement that the general education setting is

where the responsibility of student progress is placed. RTI stresses the use of evidence-based practices before referral to special education.

Additional information included in IDEIA (2004) states that local education agencies may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientifically, research based interventions as part of the evaluation procedures (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007; Graner, et al., 2005; Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2007; Stecker, 2007). Thus, RTI can serve as a "child-find" activity that leads to the provision of special education services for those students not responding to general education interventions (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). For those students, RTI interventions will be pre-referral activities necessary for special education referral. School districts now have the option of determining a student's eligibility for special education services under the classification of learning disabled by relying on data obtained on how students respond to interventions implemented using these scientifically based instructional methods and materials (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2007). To this end RTI has been introduced as a remedy for the over-identification of students diagnosed as having specific learning disabilities (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). The occurrence of learning disabilities is so prevalent that the category is often referred to as a high frequency category (Hallahan and Kauffman, 2006).

Learning Disabilities

Between 1977 and 1986, the number of students identified as learning disabled (LD) rose from 1 to 2 million (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006; Hallahan & Mercer, 2001; Hammill, 1993; Tanner, 2001). During the end of the civil rights movement revised eligibility criteria terminated the category of slow learners thus reclassifying many minority, low socio-economic group students, and English language learners as (LD). There is currently no federally mandated

eligibility requirement for classifying students as (LD). Eligibility determination is left to individual states; therefore there are no consistent methods used to determine LD across the nation (Graner, et al., 2005).   Furthermore, some evidence suggests that by using the current eligibility models there are no clear distinctions made between students with learning disabilities and students who are classified as slow learners (Aaron, 1997; Tanner, 2001). This is supported by studies comparing students identified as learning disabled in reading and students identified as poor readers being consistent in their findings that the current method neither confirms nor denies the presence of a learning disability.

More than half of all students with learning disabilities are served exclusively in general education classes (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). It is clear that most children with learning problems will spend most of their time in general education classrooms (Reschly, 2005).   IDEIA (2004) did not change the current definition of LD which stipulates that a child may not be identified as LD because of the lack of appropriate instruction in reading, writing, and math (Freund & Rich, 2004; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006). Therefore, it is the responsibility of the general educator to provide appropriate instruction in those areas. According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2005), general education teachers appear to have the primary responsibility of instructing and monitoring, when employing RTI methods.

Schools with higher concentrations of low income majority and low income minority children are less likely to have experienced teachers (Swartz, 2003). These inexperienced teachers may not possess the skills that are gained from spending years in the classroom and are more likely to recommend students particularly low income students for special services. Since 1968 there has been much discussion about the large numbers of minority students placed in special education programs (Artiles & Trent, 1994; Artiles, Harry, Reschly, & Chinn, 2001).

There has been discussion regarding the described responsibility of student instruction being placed on the general education teacher (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2005). Current RTI descriptions in the literature offer no conceptualization of the roles of special education teachers (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2005). Graner, et al., (2005) point out that although no empirical data have been published in the literature, the roles of teachers both special education and regular education have changed significantly due to RTI activities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to gather data and write a description of the roles special educators assume when implementing RTI related activities.

<div align="center">Background of the Problem</div>

Historically there have been major remedies proposed to address student over-identification (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005) and minority over-representation (Donovan & Cross, 2002) in special education LD programs. These remedies are identified as the Inclusion Movement, The Regular Education Initiative, The Learning Disabilities Summit, The Learning Disabilities Roundtable, The Researcher Roundtable, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004), and Response to Intervention.

Inclusion Movement

The goal of the inclusion movement was to integrate students with disabilities in general education as much as possible (Hammill, 1993). Public Law 94-142 was reauthorized by the federal government and the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act required that all students with disabilities be educated in the general education classroom the maximum extent appropriate. This least restrictive environment paradigm offered the proposal of a range of special education services from fully integrated into general education to classrooms that were totally separate from general education (Kavale & Forness, 2000). The idea was that most

students with special needs could be accommodated in regular classrooms with few in fully

separated classrooms (Hammill, 1993). In the late 1980s, the inclusion movement was

challenged. Some advocates for inclusion felt that pull-out programs and self-contained

classrooms were obstacles to their goal of total inclusion (Winzer, 1993).

The Regular Education Initiative

The desire of the inclusion movement was to have general education and special

education teachers share the responsibility for the students' instruction, and to have educational

programs, rather than the students labeled (Hammill, 1993). This was later titled the Regular

Education Initiative (REI). In 1986, Madeline Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special

Education and Rehabilitative Services in the Reagan administration and the mother of a child

with a disability promoted federal legislation that stated students with learning differences should

be educated in the general education classroom and that pullout programs were ineffective

(Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Mercer & Pullen, 2005). During the late 1980s and into the

1990s REI caused a shift in focus from the implementation of special education services to the

actual location of where special education services were being provided.

*The Individuals with Education Improvement Act of 2004*

Prior to the reauthorization of IDEA various stakeholders in the field of special education

were organized to discuss issues surrounding learning disabilities. The Learning Disabilities

Summit was held in August 2001 and the Learning Disabilities Roundtable was held in February

2002. Response to intervention became the primary theme throughout these meetings. The

resulting recommendations from these groups were incorporated in some form in the new law.

The expectation was that the recommendations would be implemented in a coordinated system

between general and special education where both groups are held accountable for educational outcomes of students with LD.

As previously mentioned, in 2004 the federal law governing special education was reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. The reauthorization of this law included new guidelines for determining eligibility for students with LD. Local education agencies were given the option of not basing LD eligibility exclusively on a child presenting a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability. The new IDEIA (2004) provides that a local education agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research based interventions as part of the evaluation process. In recent years, the interest in RTI intervention models has increased. When researching RTI, the model that is present in most research is a three tiered model of intervention (Bradley, et al., 2005; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Division of Learning Disabilities, 2005; Graner, et al., 2005). A four tier model is also described with special education placement being the fourth tier (Barnett et al., 2004; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005; Reschly, 2005). Figure 1.1 provides a visual representation of Ohio's RTI model.

Figure 1.1 also represents the percentages of students ideally being served in each tier. These guidelines help districts within the state of Ohio determine where curriculum and/or behavioral issues lie. If there are disproportionate numbers of students in the tiers, schools would address school wide instructional and or behavioral procedures. RTI integrates high-quality teaching with assessment in a systematic way, which allows students who are not successful, a chance to succeed with additional instructional methods and strategies. This three tier model focuses on including all students in universal screening and progress monitoring. Universal screening is a step taken by school personnel early in the school year to determine

which students are "at risk" for not meeting grade level standards (National Center for Learning

Disabilities, 2006). Following the recommendations presented by Fuchs and Fuchs (2007), all

children are assessed and those children scoring below a predetermined score move onto weekly

progress monitoring.
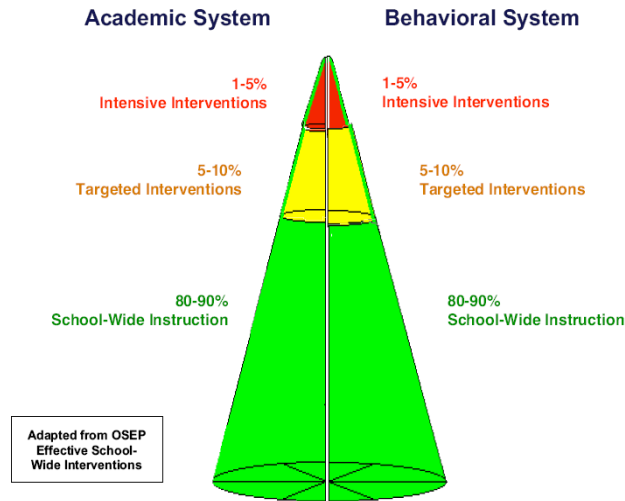
Figure 1.1: Ohio's Integrated Systems Model

Progress monitoring begins by collecting baseline data on student performance in

academics and behavior. Students are then placed in the tier of services they require based on

the baseline data. RTI is data driven, so no decisions are made without evidence to support them

(Barnett, et al., 2004; Bradley, et al., 2005; Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005). The majority of

students will be placed in tier 1 where they receive instruction which is scientifically based.

School-wide instruction is designed to meet the needs of most students in the school (Brown-

Chidsey & Steege, 2005). Students are periodically assessed at prescribed levels. The

assessment results are used to determine which students are in need of additional instructional

assistance. If students require targeted intervention, changes will be made in the instructional

routine to meet their individual needs. These tier-two interventions take place within the general

education classroom. The targeted, middle tier is for students at some risk for school failure and

provides more specific instruction for students in addition to the core curricula to ensure success

(SWOSERRC, n.d.). As progress is monitored, adjustments may be made to the interventions

which include the duration and the frequency.

Based on Ohio's model of RTI, while tier two interventions are being provided, students

are assessed at least weekly using curriculum based measures to collect evidence of the student's

progress. If the student does not show progress after the initial three week period, another, more

intensive tier two intervention may be implemented for another three weeks (SWOSERRC, n.d.).

After the second phase of tier two interventions the student's progress will be analyzed again.

Students who appear to improve as evidenced by the predetermined decision criteria will return

to the regular class instruction and continue progress monitoring (Brown-Chidsey & Steege,

2005). Those students who respond and are no longer considered at risk and are moved back to

tier one. Students who do not respond to intervention may be required to move to tier three.

Students who are in the targeted or tier- three level receive intensive instruction. At this

stage, school based problem solving is used to resolve issues with learning and behavior to help

prevent the need for special education or to determine if special education placement is

warranted. Data gathering continues to increase to develop more specific remediation. Students

who respond to this intensive intervention move back to tier two. Some students may remain at

this tier if they achieve success but cannot maintain this level of success in tier two. Still, other

students may not present success at this level and they are then recommended for formal referral

to special education.

A reoccurring theme in current RTI model descriptions is general education and special education collaboration. Throughout the many descriptions of various RTI models, the function and role of the special educator has not been clearly identified. An historical analysis of special education teacher roles will be reviewed to determine the potential job duties the special educator would perform in the RTI paradigm. Discussion will also be centered on the possibility of special education role confusion related to special education teachers being effective in performing their daily work requirements as they shift paradigms.

Teacher Roles

Since the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142) in 1975 the field of special education has experienced continued change (Winzer, 1993). With each change, the work related roles and responsibilities of special education teachers have continued to change. According to Crutchfield (1997) one of the primary responsibilities of special education teachers is to provide instruction for students with disabilities. This instruction includes adapting and developing materials to match the cognitive levels, learning styles, strengths, weakness, interests, and specific needs of their students. Crutchfield describes the enormous amount of paperwork special educators are required to complete. In addition to the same kinds of paperwork demands made of general education – attendance reports, grades, homework, tests, and discipline reports, special education teachers are responsible for the development of the Individualized Education Plans (IEP) of each student they serve. Special education teachers also maintain records that document the students' progress towards the IEP goals and objectives. "Other paperwork concerns [include] verification of student progress in general education classrooms, corroboration of meetings regarding the students, documentation of academic interventions, and

behavior management plans" (Kaff, 2004, p. 12). Finally, there are also federal, state, and local

school regulations and policies that require reports on the students' placements and progress.

Also according to Crutchfield (1997), about 95% of all special education teachers work in public

schools. The majority of special education teachers work in resource room settings. In

this setting, students are pulled out of their general education classroom for a part of the

day either individually or in small groups (Crutchfield, 1997). The students come and go

according to their individual schedules. In this setting, teachers usually work with

students from different grades, different levels and different content areas and various

disabilities in the same class setting. The special education teacher may spend time with

the individual student or small group of students working on strategies the students can

use to master test taking skills, organization skills, study skills or curricula materials.

With the inception of No Child Left Behind and its infusion with IDEIA (2004) many

schools are moving away from resource settings in favor of general education settings

where special education teachers work with general education teachers to combine their

expertise to jointly teach students for all or part of the school day (Friend, 2008).

 In collaborative settings, special education teachers may spend the majority of the day in

general education classes along with their special education students (Friend and Cook, 1992).

In this co-teaching environment the special education teacher provides support to the general

education teacher or in some cases leads the instruction for all students while the general

education teacher assists/supports. Still other special education teachers consult with general

education teachers assisting them with planning lessons that incorporate the modifications or

accommodations that are detailed within the students' IEPs (Friend & Cook, 2007). A

discussion of coteaching is undertaken because of the reliance of coteaching in many RTI

related activities. This study is centered on teacher roles and responsibilities in RTI. Many

teacher roles involve collaborative activities.

Coteaching

Coteaching is described as two or more educational professionals delivering instruction

to a group of students in a single space (Freund & Rich, 2004). Co-teaching encompasses many

types of collaborative teaching arrangements. Lessons are taught by either the general education

teacher or the special education teacher. The teachers plan lessons together and ideally all

aspects of classroom instruction and classroom management are planned equally.

Friend and Cook (2007) describe six coteaching approaches: (a) one teach, one observe;

(b) station teaching; (c) parallel teaching; (d) alternative teaching; (e) teaming; and (f) one teach,

one assist.   One teach, one observe is described as having one educational professional teach

while the other educational professional collect data on a single student, small group, or the

entire class for behaviors the teachers have agreed should be noted. Station teaching is an

approach that involves both teachers planning instruction for various stations where the students

move from one station to another according to a predetermined schedule. Station teaching

lowers the student teacher ratio as the students are broken into groups. Another form of

coteaching that reduces the student teacher ratio is parallel teaching. Parallel teaching involves

the teachers delivering instruction to groups of students however the groups do not switch as in

station teaching.

Another model of coteaching is alternative teaching. An example of alternative teaching

is when a small group of students is taken to the side and given instruction that is different from

what the large group is getting simultaneously. The final two models of coteaching are teaming

and one teach, one assist. Teaming, as with all of the models, involves both teachers planning

together however, in the delivery of a teaming model, both teachers share in the instruction. One teacher may explain while the other teacher demonstrates a concept. Both teachers circulate the room and the students complete their assignments. Finally the model of one teach, one assist calls for one teacher to teach while the other supports by walking around the room assisting students who have questions about their assigned work. Friend and Cook (2007) specifically describe coteaching as a service delivery model based on collaboration. They refer to coteaching as a "professional marriage" (p.129).

Collaboration

Collaboration in the literature has been defined in multiple ways. Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, and Vanhover (2006) define teacher collaboration as "teachers learning and working together to achieve common goals" (p. 169). Welch, Brownell, and Sheridan (1999) describe teacher collaboration as "dyads of teachers in classrooms and small groups of educators working together to solve problems" (p. 36). Friend and Cook (2007) define collaboration as "a style [of teaching with] for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p.7).

For teachers to adequately function in the RTI framework, Fisher, Frey, and Thousand (2003) have identified five categories of job responsibilities for special education teachers involved in collaborative settings including (a) assessment, (b) communication, (c) leadership, and (d) record keeping.

Teachers in inclusive settings do not maintain separate classrooms (Fisher et al., 2003). Both general educators and special educators assume equal responsibility for students in a single space. However, decisions regarding curricular adaptations are often left to the special educator (Fisher, et al., 2003). Therefore, the special educator is required to have knowledge of: (a) the

curriculum as well as how to create accommodations and modifications; (b) communication skills in order to participate in problem solving meetings, attending planning meetings, providing information to parents, administrators, and their colleagues; (c) assessment data and have the ability to interpret assessment results, communicate those results to general education teachers as well as parents, and assign grades based upon assessment data if needed; (d) maintaining records, such as IEPs, progress data, and implementation of accommodations and modifications; and (e) assistive technology and how it is used in the classroom.

Fisher, et al., (2003) also note that it is vital that special educators have knowledge of (a) behavioral supports and possess the skills necessary for collaboration between families and school personnel to develop behavioral goals and interventions, (b) management skills to be able to utilize paraeducators, peer tutors, related service providers, and fostering collegial relationships effectively to ensure successful friendships are created and maintained between students with special needs and typical students in general education classrooms. It is the opinion of these authors that the greatest asset a special educator should possess is knowledge of literacy and curriculum content. Special educators need "comprehensive understanding of literacy development for students with and without disabilities because this becomes the 'Rosetta stone' in their translation of curriculum" (p.47).

In addition to implementing the previously stated job responsibilities and serving in general education classrooms, special education teachers also serve on other collaborative teams. The collaborative team model was introduced in the 1980s as a way to address the overidentification of students with mild disabilities (Sindelar, Griffin, Smith, & Watanabe, 1992). Collaborative teams are used in RTI to discuss and make decisions about when students move throughout the tiers of interventions.

Collaborative Teams

Collaborative teams have been identified by many different terms throughout the literature. The most common terms are multidisciplinary teams (Graden, Casey, & Christenson (1985), teacher assistant teams (Chalfant, et al, (1979), prereferral intervention teams (Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985), and intervention assistant teams (House, Zimmer, & McInerney, 1990). All are considered a form of school based problem solving. School based problem solving was first described in the literature by Chalfant, Pysh, and Moultrie (1979). Known as a teacher assistance teams (TAT) they were suggested as a way to support general education teachers who were attempting to provide instruction for students with learning and behavioral problems during the inclusion movement. TAT membership was comprised of three general education teachers with the referring teacher as the fourth member and the parent as the fifth member. In some cases the principal serves as a team member. Team membership is determined by the core group of three. They discussed whether additional non-general education team members are warranted.

Graden, et al., (1985) created the term multidisciplinary team to describe a school based problem solving team in which professionals from other disciplines (i.e., general education, special education, occupational therapist, speech language pathologist) work collaboratively to address issues related to children in schools. This multidisciplinary consultative model (Sindelar et al., 1992), was created to prevent inappropriate special education placements. These aforementioned team descriptions do not specifically describe the role of the special educator. However the TAT was specifically designed only for general educators.

In addition to team membership, special educators also serve in the role of consultant. As consultants these specialists are viewed as having expert knowledge (Chalfant, Pysch, &

Moultrie, 1979); Paugach & Johnson, 1989) regarding students with learning and/or behavioral differences. The dilemma when serving in that capacity is when the special educator failed to correct the problem the perception of their possessing expert knowledge changed to a perception of incompetence. Graden (1989) critiques the notion of the special education expert and argues that this view is counterproductive to the development of partnerships among educators. She goes on to decry the notion of viewing the general education teacher as only helpful to problem solving team members but as an active participant in the problem solving process. It is believed that general education and special education teachers are both professionals with expert knowledge in very specific areas. In some instances teachers received college level training in both areas. With the many roles and responsibilities special education teachers are expected to perform, they could possibly become confused as to what role he or she should play.

Role Confusion

It is perceived that some of the roles of special education teachers will change significantly due to the collaborative practices required by RTI (Graner, et al., 2005) and No Child Left Behind (Salvia, Ysseldyke, & Bolt, 2007). Those teachers not involved in collaboration (e.g., special education resource room teachers) will now be asked to participate in collaborative team activities. Special educators, often referred to as support teachers (Graner, et al*.,* 2005), are required to perform the majority of the supporting activities such as collecting academic and behavioral data. RTI requires classroom teachers be supported by specialists and others trained in the problem solving process (Graner, et al., 2005).

There is a limited amount of information presented in the literature that considers what the role of the special education in RTI (Brown-Chidsey and Steege, 2005; Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2005). The extant literature has descriptions of general education teacher practices in

inclusive settings (Johnson and Pugach, 1990; Schumm and Vaughn, 1992; Schumm, Vaughn,

Hager, McDowell, Rothlein, & Samuell, 1995), yet most of these studies described the general

educator's role in what they do to support students with LD in their classrooms. There is limited

research describing the special education teachers' role in the education of students with LD in

general education classrooms. Considering the special education roles and responsibilities

previously described special educators will find themselves struggling with changing roles and

often increased responsibilities.

Wisniewski and Gargiulo (1997) found a relationship between role construction issues

and special education teacher responsibilities. They addressed countless issues involving

problems with teacher roles and responsibilities such as teachers seeking to implement new

practices associated with paradigm shifts are ill prepared to implement new best practices. This

produces role stress which contributes to the process of special education teacher burn out.

<center>Purpose of the Study</center>

The purpose of this study was to explore roles of special education teachers from the

perspectives of special education teachers. Specifically this study sought to answer the question

posed by Mastropiere and Scruggs (2005) regarding how will the roles of teachers change given

the significant demands of RTI? They specifically asked, "What exactly are special educators

doing and when" (p. 526)? There is evidence from the literature that special educators

experience difficulties with role construction when working within collaborative settings

(Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Gersten, 2001; Morvant & Gersten, 1995).

Some evidence suggests that special educators experience more difficulty with role construction

than their general education counterparts. Role construction issues include role dissonance,

which is characterized as a special educator's own expectations differing from the expectations

of the general educator; role ambiguity, where information pertinent to the assigned position is not provided; and role conflict which includes inconsistent expectations begin placed upon the special educator(Wasburn-Moses, 2005).

Role ambiguity is often an issue for special educators as their roles change from teaching in isolation to teaching in general education classrooms. Klinger and Vaughn (2002) described how a veteran special educator struggled to make sense of her new role as an inclusion specialist. She describes how she had to adjust and change roles depending on the personalities and preferences of the general education teachers as well as the students.

Changes in special education instructional practices have distorted the role of special educators (Wisniewski and Garguilo, 1997). As more and more special educators interact in general education classrooms, special education teachers will be called upon to consult with and support general education teachers in their attempt to provide instruction for students with special needs. Exactly what the special educator's role is in RTI has not been defined, creating role conflict and ambiguity as teachers use trail and error to figure out what works and what does not work.

Employing qualitative research methods within an interpretivist framework gives credence to the perspectives of special education teachers by giving voice to those who teach outside the mainstream of the general education classroom. This study answered the call of Klingner and Vaughn (2002) to give voice to special education teachers by addressing:

- In the RTI model, what is the constructed role of the special educator in the school community?
- In the RTI model what influenced the construction of this role?

Significance of the Study

Since RTI models are reasonably novel, descriptions of special education teacher responsibilities and functions are unclear. As RTI grows in popularity, this study will be an important work that gives a description of the actual functioning of special educators in school communities. Based on face-to face interview data the teachers will be asked to describe their daily activities and to describe how they would like to be utilized in the school community. If special educators are to thrive in RTI, public school communities must become places for teaching professionals to work and develop professionally (Crockett, 2001). A holistic view of the special educator's working conditions is needed to sustain their commitment to work and to make it possible for them to use their expertise. There is not consensus in the field of special education as to what role special educators should play in general education classrooms (Fisher, et al., 2003). This study, through the analysis of four special education teachers and one school administrator, provides information regarding the role of special education teachers in school communities and the factors that contributed to the construction of those roles. The ultimate responsibility of all special educators is taking care of students with disabilities. This care requires that care also be directed toward the teachers who work with them (Billingsley, 2004).

Chapter 2

Research Methods

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the job related roles and responsibilities of special education teachers in a public school setting from the perspective of special education teachers. Specifically this study was to provide a descriptive account of the how job duties and responsibilities were constructed by special education teachers working within the RTI framework. This study addressed the following questions within the RTI model: (a) What is the role of the special educator in the school community, and (b) what influenced the construction of this role?

Theoretical Lens

The epistemological foundation of this study was constructionism with a theoretical perspective of interpretivism (Crotty, 1998). In an interpretive paradigm, there are two fundamental assumptions which theoretically and methodologically guided this research. The first assumption was that by utilizing an interpretivist approach it was believed that meaning is produced by historically situated interpretations of the world (Crotty, 1998). What people know and believe to be true about the world is constructed as they interact over time in specific social settings (Schram, 2006). Working within an interpretivist paradigm it was my aim to understand the complex and constructed realities of special education teachers from the point of those who work as special educators.

The second assumption is that people understand their worlds through their engagement with the realities of their world (Crotty, 1998). Reality is constructed by thinking about or reflecting on our experiences with the world in order to comprehend what is around us and to sift

through what is an acceptable or unacceptable explanation of reality. Different people may

construct reality in different ways. Research conducted within a constructionist epistemology

considers the participant's view of truth as constructed or created through interactions in their

respective surroundings (Burck, 2005).

　　According to Hatch (2002), interpretation involves giving meaning to data. Interpretation

is about making sense of situations by generating explanations for what is going on with them. It

makes inferences, develops insights, attaches significance, refines understandings, draws

conclusions, and extrapolates lessons (p. 180).

　　It is believed that the roles of special education teachers are constructed based upon prior

knowledge and experiences (Kumar, 2006). Meanings are constructed by human beings as they

engage with the world that they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). According to Patton (2002) all

of our understandings are embedded within the context of our lives. The inquirer must reveal the

process of meaning and clarify what and how meanings are represented by individuals. "To

prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings" (Schwandt, 1994, p.

118). This approach allows perspectives to be studied in depth and conveyed directly to the

reader. To successfully translate or interpret the information, the inquirer strives to understand

the other's world and then translates the description of lived actions into a meaningful account

(Glesne, 1999). Accordingly, these perspectives allow new perspectives about issues to be

revealed (Williamson, 2006). Perception appears to involve interpretation rather than simple

transmission of meaning. "Perception is the act of one who sees, not the passive reception of

[meaning] reflected by [the individual]" (Cobern, 1993, p. 107). Schwandt (1994) described

reality as individual schemas that become realities therefore; knowledge is understood through

interpretation of the individual schemas.

It is believed that people, in this case special educators, select and process information through constructing hypotheses, decision making, and giving meaning and organization to experiences. In constructing their worlds, these special educators will perform functions such as "comprehending, applying, creating, elaborating, managing, critiquing, and cross referencing" (Kumar, 2006, p. 258) their basic knowledge. These activities are required to rationalize thoughts in construing meaning out of experiences. It is understood that special education teachers have some shared experiences; however, the reality of their individual worlds will be unique because the worlds are constructed by individuals who experiences the world from their own vantage points (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

An interpretivist lens was employed in this study because the research aspirations were to capture the experiences and interpretations of teachers of students with disabilities. Employing interpretive qualitative research methods allowed a visualization of how people interpret their worlds, and how those interpretations could be described. Interpretivist researchers focus on what an experience means for persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it (Schram, 2006). The researcher must first recognize and take responsibility for his or her own experiences. Thus researchers are asked to recognize how self and world are inseparable components of meaning (Groenewald, 1994).

Subjectivity Statement

In 1990, I became a special education resource teacher with the largest school district in the state of Arkansas. As a resource teacher, my job duties were to provide instruction for students identified with mild to moderate disabilities. My assignment was to travel between two elementary schools during the school day. The first half of the day I served a mixed population of neighborhood children and children from the inner city bussed to the school to achieve racial

balance. The other school was in a racially segregated neighborhood in the inner city. This

school was labeled an *incentive school* in order to provide additional programs in the hopes of

attracting non-minority students to the area. The student population was 99% African American.

As a special education resource teacher I was asked to go into general education

classrooms and provide services to students during their instructional time. My presence in the

general education classroom of one particular teacher was not looked upon favorably. We did

not communicate our expectations and I was not offered any information regarding the daily

activities of the students. I would go into the classroom and float from student to student

assisting in any way that was needed. The teacher would never acknowledge my presence and

would rarely acknowledge my attempt to exchange pleasantries. Yet, the teacher felt it necessary

to comment to the principal that I was of no assistance when I came into the classroom and there

was really no reason for me to be there. This teacher felt that my time would be better spent

pulling the students and working with them in my resource classroom. I was never able to forge

a relationship with this teacher before she transferred to a private school. This failed relationship

was the beginning of my career as a professional collaborator. I soon realized that I would have

to work with teachers who would resent my desire to teach special education and have to endure

hurtful comments from students who would exclaim that I was not a real teacher because I taught

special education. These comments and attitudes caused me to learn as much as I could about

special education and the requirements of providing services to students with special needs. My

desire to learn more put me in the position of facilitating in-service training sessions for teachers

regarding various aspects of special education. After teaching in the classroom and between two

elementary school buildings for three years I was re-assigned as a consultant/teacher.

My role was to collaborate with general education teachers and offer them assistance on the types of accommodations and modifications to provide for students with disabilities. With this position, I had the opportunity to provide professional development with the Arkansas Collaborative Educators Network. My audience was special educators and general educators throughout the state. I developed training modules for my district and had the opportunity to participate in a focus group sponsored by the Intercultural Development Research Association in San Antonio, Texas. I was again re-assigned as the district 504 Compliance Coordinator. It was my duty to ensure the district was in compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regulations. I created a 504 manual, due process forms, and was responsible for training the 504 coordinators in the schools and school staff members.

As the 504 coordinator, I attended due process meetings with parents and schools. My attendance was generally required when there were issues between the parent and school that could not be resolved at the school level. Many times the issues could have been resolved had the school staff members communicated and collaborated. Had the general education teachers, special education teachers, and 504 coordinators accepted each others expertise and felt confident in their professional knowledge and skills they could have all of the issues resolved. I began to tell the teachers and administrators that the issues would have been easily resolved because they were professionals, they had the necessary knowledge, and they should work together and collaborate. I worked to instill in the teachers what I felt was lacking; their confidence. Because of these experiences, I began to ask many questions. Why were the special education teachers and general education teachers so resistant to working together? Why was their expertise not accepted? What caused them to not assert their expertise? What are their

roles in the school community? They have the expert knowledge and why were they not utilized? Did they not want to be experts or was it because they were not respected as experts?

Context

The proposed study was conducted with four special education teachers and one administrator employed in the same school district in the Midwestern United States. For the purposes of this study, pseudonyms for the district and participants were created. Standard School District was selected because its location; it is located on the fringes of an urban school district, and it serves diverse students with and without disabilities.

According to 2005-2006 data compiled by the National Center for Education Statistics, Standard School District is described as a regular school district in a large suburban area comprised of children from families with high median incomes. See Figure 1 for a representation of Standard School District demographics. There are 10 schools within the district. There are 5,713 students of which 835 are students with Individual Education Plans and 271 are classified as Limited English Proficiency. Approximately 2,329 students receive free or reduced lunch, and there is a 60% minority student population. There are approximately 420 classroom teachers and 89 paraeducators. The school district is surrounded by a major urban center and the poverty levels range from low to above average. The community is described as high college completers with a professional/administrative workforce.

Table 1

School District Demographics

Standard School District	
Number of Schools	10
Number of Students	5713
American Indian	2
Asian	151
Black	2831
Hispanic	331
White	2216
Number of Teachers	432
Students with IEPs	868
English Language Learners	271
Students receiving Free and Reduced Lunch Rates	2329

Data retrieved from the National Center of Education Statistics: http://nces.ed.gov

Participants

All participants were volunteers and signed informed consents approved through the

University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board. All participants were female with an

average of 27 years of experience in the workforce. One teacher was Caucasian American, three

teachers were African American and the administrator was African American. Although four of

the participants had more 20 years experience in the field of education one teacher had only nine

years of experience in the education after being downsized from a career in the industrial area.

At the time of the study, each teacher worked within a public school that was participating in the

implementation of tiered levels of support known as response to intervention- or regionally

known as the Ohio Integrated Systems Model (OISM). Various schools were involved in either

Phase I or Phase II of OISM implementation. Phase I was defined by the researcher as year 1 or

2 of implementation of RTI practices, and phase II was defined as year 2 and beyond of

implementation of RTI practices.

Melanie was an African-American female who had 36 years of teaching experience. At

the time of this study she was an intervention specialist whose job duties included working in a

co-teaching environment and a pull-out, resource room setting. Lorna was an African-American

female who had worked in the area of special education since 1984. At the time of this study she

was an intervention specialist working with students in inclusionary settings. Betty was a

Caucasian-American female who has worked in the area of special education for 37 years.

Carmen was an African-American female who has only work in the area of special education for

9 years after switching careers when her previous employer abruptly went out of business.

Margaret was an African-American female with 31 years of experience with the district. She

began her career as a special educator and held various titles such a guidance counselor, assistant

principal, and director of student services prior to becoming the associate superintendent for

student services. Table 2 displays participant demographic data.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Participant[a]	*Years Teaching SPED*	*Grade Level*	*School OISM Phase*
Melanie	36	3-5	**II**
Lorna	23	6	**II**
Betty	37	3-5	**I**
Carmen	9	K-2	**II**
Margaret	**31**	**Administration**	**N/A**

a = all teacher participants provided services for students placed in the mild to moderate range of disabilities.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred during the summer and fall quarters of 2007. Data collection

instruments included: (a) two semi-structured interviews constructed to last no longer than 60

minutes and (b) one administrator semi-structured interview guide. Interview questions were

developed to address research questions. Interview guides are located in the appendixes.

I initially scheduled separate introductory meetings with two participants. These

meetings were conducted as introductory gestures. This gesticulation was also used to establish

rapport, trust and to arranging meeting dates, places, and times for interviews. Rapport was

easily established by making the participants aware that they would be seen as persons to whom I

was genuinely interested in and their participation would benefit those new to the profession and

teacher preparation programs. After the initial interviews were conducted the participants

recommended an additional pool of participants. Subsequent participants were initially

contacted by telephone and electronic mail messaging as an introductory gesture. All

participants were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Collection Strategies

Interviews were conducted to uncover things that cannot be directly observed and to

discover the lived words to the research participant (Patton, 2002; Shank, 2006). To elicit verbal

responses on their roles and responsibilities, and any job related concerns, two separate

interviews were conducted with each teacher. Interviews typically took 20 to 30 minutes to

complete. Each teacher chose a quiet place in their respective school buildings for the interviews

to be conducted. The first interview focused on background, professional career choices,

experiences, and data was gathered on how these variables influence the participants'

pedagogies. A second interview was conducted to gather more explicit information on the

participants' current role and role construction. All interviews were audio taped, transcribed

verbatim, and analyzed via constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Interpretive Analysis

The data were analyzed using interpretive methods described by Hatch (2002). The

process of interpretive analysis can be defined in eight steps. The steps include:

1. Read the data for a sense of the whole

2. Review impressions previously recorded in research journals, and/or bracketed in

    protocols and record theme in memos

3. Read the data, identify impressions, and record impressions in memos

4. Study memos for salient interpretations

5. Reread data, coding places where interpretations are supported or challenged

6. Write a draft summary

7. Review interpretations with participants

8. Write a revised summary and identify excerpts that support interpretations.

Each question was arranged in a chart where participant responses were transferred, then

colored coded and arranged in subcategories which flowed as if a group conversation was being

conducted. After the initial reading of the data, meaning units (Thomas, 2003), frames of

analysis (Hatch, 2002), or analysis units were created. The frames of analysis can also be

referred conceptual categories that help researchers look at data and allow for movement to the

next step of creating domains.

Data analysis procedures occurred as individual teacher interviews were transcribed and

added to ongoing conversations with relation to the data set. Categories from the raw data were

coded to capture key themes as processed and judged by the researcher. Multiple interpretations

were made from the raw data by the researcher as each interview was added and the data were reread. As stated in Hatch (2002), each reading brought new insights and concerns about what was more important or less important in the data. To further explore the domains, a visual representation of each layer of the domains was created (See appendix F). This allowed for exploration of the relationship within each frame of analysis.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or credibility refers to the truth, value, or believability of the findings (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994). To meet the criteria of trustworthiness in the current study, the researcher attempted to triangulate or view the phenomena from various dimensions using teacher interview transcripts, the administrator interview transcript, multiple contacts with participants, and member checking (Patton, 2002).

Member checking is a method of making the data and the researcher's interpretations available to the participants. Participants reviewed transcripts from their interviews and were asked to give feedback and or comments for possible corrections before data analysis was initiated. A second member check was done so that each teacher could confirm the accuracy of the data and researcher's interpretations.

Chapter 3

Findings

The findings of this study present two perspectives. The first is located in the role of the special education teacher in RTI and the second is situated in the way the role was constructed in the RTI framework. Due to the Standard School District mandate to practice co-teaching, special education teachers were found to exhibit characteristics of marginalization. This marginalization was directly related to the ambiguity teachers felt as they constructed their role in the RTI framework. The findings further indicated that challenges in the area of co-teaching, as cited in the literature, were indeed present among the educational participants in this study.

Special Education Teacher Roles in the RTI framework

Creating a Role from Ambiguity

The role of the special educator in the RTI framework was found to be somewhat ambiguous. Role ambiguity was more prevalent as the teachers shifted their thinking from special education resource room teachers to more collaborative roles as co-teachers (Billingsley, 2004). When asked to describe this paradigm shift and their perceptions of the special educator's role within the RTI framework, participants described their role in terms of the tasks they were involved in rather than to describe themselves as teachers (See Appendix F, Figure 2). These tasks included:

- a teacher administering progress monitoring

- resource room teacher facilitating small group instruction

- building level team members being responsible for building level curricular and
  behavioral intervention decisions

- IEP writer, writing educational plans for students found eligible for special education services, and

- special education legal expert, monitoring building wide compliance of federal regulations regarding the provision of services for students with disabilities.

Melanie identified her task of progress monitoring as, "I not only progress monitor kids who are in special education but I progress monitor students who are in regular education who are not up to where they should be." According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2005), general education teachers typically would have the primary responsibility for instructing and monitoring when employing RTI methods. However, in this study special education teachers voluntarily accepted the duties of monitoring. Betty and Melanie took on those duties to relieve the general education teachers of those additional responsibilities.

> Well we do testing. We do progress monitoring with DIBELS. We do that three times a year formally and then there are some kids who we do weekly. The ones that are intensive we do weekly and the ones who are in strategic we do every two weeks. I help with that. That's another way of helping the teachers (Betty, Interview 1).

Melanie explained that her decision to take on the responsibility of progress monitoring was done because the general education teacher "did not have time."

In addition to assisting general education teachers with progress monitoring, special educators described providing specialized instruction to students in a resource room environment. Betty reported, "I have a group that I pull everyday. I pull kids just [in the subjects] where they need [additional help in] it." This instruction was provided to remediate the general education curriculum or to provide intervention to those students not making adequate progress toward their academic goals. The special education teachers in this study all viewed

their main job duty as that of providing services to students at risk of academic failure. These particular teachers did not hesitate to provide services for students regardless of the students' special education status.

An overwhelming concern, expressed by the teachers, was the possibility of creating legal vulnerability for them and the district when providing services to students not officially found eligible for special services. This concern was directly expressed by Carmen. "We have a new special education coordinator and I asked him about it. I asked was I allowed to pull kids without IEPs? He said the new IDEA allows you to pull them for a while." Betty reported that she too was asked to pull students, and she "did not have anything on them." Melanie was more forthcoming with her apprehension, "That's against the law though isn't it?"

Friend and Cook (2007) illustrated special educators' concerns related to role ambiguity. More specifically many special service providers struggled to balance job responsibilities when the scope of those duties was not clear. They depicted the point by illustrating a case of a hypothetical teacher named Ms. Hawkins. Ms. Hawkins was expected to co-teach and provide pullout services for 21 students on her caseload and to assist informally with about 10 additional students who are considered at risk. This informal assistance caused Ms. Hawkins to question her ability to adequately provide services necessary for students who fit eligibility criteria .

The special education teachers in this study were required to spend part of their daily schedules serving as members of school based decision-making bodies. Melanie and Betty explained that they were OISM team members in their respective buildings. Melanie described her OISM team membership duties to include attending meetings and making decisions about reading and behavior. "We meet as a committee once a month, and we attend trainings. We look at the data on behavior from the building and we also look at the data for reading." Betty

begins her day at 7:00 a.m. to attend early morning team meetings. "Well, I come in the morning and I try to get here early just because probably two to three days I'm in meetings." Lorna begins her day much the same way. "Every day I have a chance to meet with the [grade level] team and we talk about the different students." Billingsley (2007), relates this role to that of a teacher leader. Teacher leaders participate in making decisions at the school and district levels. Friend and Cook (2007) described that the team approach has become increasingly popular for addressing school reform initiatives, site based management, planning teams, school improvement teams and the like. In their opinion, special educators are very familiar with teaming. They make the argument that being a member of a team requires very detailed understanding of the characteristics and functions of a team. Melanie described, "Everybody has the same role. All of us on the committee, we're equal partners there."

In addition to progress monitoring and facilitating small groups, the teachers in this study also described that they are responsible for writing plans for students found eligible for special education services. These findings confirmed findings from Crutchfield (1997). Special education teachers are required to complete paperwork associated with local, state, and federal regulations and policies that require students' placement and progress in special program and services. Betty described that after a student had been identified as eligible for special education services the intervention specialist would attend the evaluation meeting, listen to the report and then "they'll ask us to write the IEP."

A final descriptor used by teachers in this study was that of their role as legal expert. An example of this role was expressed by Melanie when she explained how she advocated for the due process rights of students in special education. This was done to prevent her building administrator from having students' IEPs changed without following proper procedures. "I've

had administrators come to me, going into a meeting or something, or they want to change a

kid's IEP, I'll tell them you can't do that. This is a legal document." Billingsley (2007) found

that teachers who possess both the skills and opportunities to collaborate with others tend to

exemplify characteristics of teacher leaders. More importantly special education teacher leaders

are adept at confronting barriers when they relate to the education of students with disabilities.

     The RTI model requires equal educational opportunities for students at risk of academic

failure and for students with disabilities in the general education setting. To comply with this

educational mandate, Standard School District made the unilateral decision to place special

education teachers in general education classrooms along side general education teachers. "I

think really the collaboration came about because we began to start looking at what it is we need

to do to make AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress]" (Margaret, Interview 1). The pull-out model of

the past had been modified by the Standard School District and was to be used as a tool solely to

provide intervention to those students not meeting benchmark criteria or not making progress.

     Throughout the study, all teachers discussed how this was their first year to participant in

mandatory inclusion. They used the term *inclusion* when referring to their participation in the

general education classroom as co-teachers. Co-teaching is not synonymous with inclusion

(Friend and Cook, 2007).   Inclusion is defined by Friend (2008) as "a belief system shared by

every member of the school as a learning community, often based on a mission statement or

vision, emphasizing the commitment to education *all* students so they can reach their potential"

(p. 520). Co-teaching is one of several service delivery options that have been promoted to

ensure students with disabilities receive the support they need in general education classrooms.

Co-teaching, as defined by Friend (2008) is:

a service delivery model in which two educators –one typically a general education

teacher and one a special education teacher or other specialist – combine their expertise

to jointly teach a heterogeneous group of students, some of whom have disabilities or

other special needs, in a single classroom for part or all of the school day. (p. 115)

When teachers talked about working in the general education setting they discussed not

wanting to be "intrusive." A common statement from the participants was that they did not want

to "be in the way" of the general education teacher or they incorrectly believed that their

presence in classrooms was to "help" the students with their academic work. Klingner and

Vaughn (2002) illustrated how even a master teacher struggled to make sense of her role within

the general education classroom. Their finding was sustained in this study. The participants in

this study could be considered as master teachers because they each had approximately 20 years

experience in the workforce but were confused about their role as co-teachers. According to

Friend and Cook (2007), co-teaching practices that underutilize the special education teacher are

likely to stigmatize students as much as pullout services Findings from this study support the

belief that the teachers suffer from being stigmatized as well. Betty's statement coincided with

this finding.

Sometimes I'll say can I teach that lesson and you support me. I also want the other kids

to know I'm there for all them. Not just my special education kids because that's a real

hard line to walk. You walk into the room and the kid goes oh no there is the special

education teacher. I want to be known as just another teacher on the team not a special

education teacher.

Klingner and Vaughn described the ambiguity of the co-teacher's role and described how

the teacher had to adjust and change roles depending on the personalities of the general

educators. Findings from this study point to Betty and her description of working with various

general education teachers:

> Well it depends on the teacher. There is one teacher who will sometimes let me teach a
>
> lesson. There is another teacher that I can go in and take a reading group for her. I think
>
> that's ideal. Then she takes a group. There is another teacher who just kind of lets me;
>
> she teaches and I kind of support. I go around and help different kids as she's teaching.

Klingner and Vaughn (2002) further elaborated that as more teachers have become involved in

co-teaching they have had few models to guide them as they entered new partnerships. This left

teachers with new roles that had frequently not been carefully considered, and they were

improperly prepared to perform their roles.

Lloyd (2002) explained that special educators new to co-teaching under-utilized their

expertise. This was confirmed by this study. Carmen described her role in the general education

classroom as "I just kind of roam around the room and if I see someone that hasn't picked up

their pencil or they are not on the page that they should be, I just kind of help them do that."

Betty further explained,

> It keeps changing. I keep saying every year it's different. You never know what to
>
> expect but I think the role is to provide the materials, provide the environment and
>
> provide the knowledge for that regular classroom teacher to make it work (Betty,
>
> Interview 2).

The district administration viewed the role of the special educator as that of "facilitator

and collaborator." Margaret described her expectations of the intervention specialists as being:

> Resources to the regular education teachers and to be involved in providing
>
> accommodations and modifications for the students in which they cased manage. In

addition to that, also working with some of those regular education students who are at risk.

For co-teaching to be effective, both educators must perceive themselves as professionals. They must further realize the benefit of having two professionals with different types of expertise working together (Dieker 2001; Salend, Gordon, & Lopez-Vona, 2002). However, the special education teachers expressed rejection from general education teachers. Betty recalled a general education teacher telling her not to work in her room during a regularly scheduled time. "Sometimes they kind of hint that they don't want you in there and I don't know what that's about. They'll say go do something else today."

Another overwhelming barrier to effective teacher collaboration is time (Friend and Cook, 2007). Teachers need time to work together for the purpose of planning and preparation. Planning time should be viewed as a priority for schools engaged in collaborative activities (Friend, 2008; Wood, 2006). One goal of Standard School District was to provide common planning time for co-teachers in schools practicing inclusion. "In some of our buildings we've tried to develop schedules so that the special education teacher who is collaborating with that fifth grade team has a planning period at the same time" (Margaret, Interview 1). Although this change had been implemented, lack of time to prepare is still an issue. Only one teacher expressed satisfaction with the amount of planning time she was given at the middle school level. Carmen, who at the time of this study had having recently transferred from a middle school setting, was dismayed by the lack of planning time at the elementary level. "Here you've got to just catch people and teachers as they are going or in passing opposed to having that time where you just sit down. Once a month we sit down but you lose a lot in months." To overcome this barrier of not having common planning time, teachers would meet before school, after school,

communicate through email or discuss student related issues as they passed each other in the

hallway. Friend and Bursuck (2002), encouraged teachers to be creative in ways they could

communicate with each other. They encouraged teachers to use email to share ideas, plan

lessons, communicate concerns, and formulate problem solving strategies.

The issue of role ambiguity seemed to be directly related to teachers not understanding

RTI. Three of the four teachers interviewed did not understand the connection between RTI and

student achievement. All teachers were deeply concerned when directed to provide their services

to students not officially placed in special education

As result of role ambiguity, special education teachers described being marginalized by

their general education counterparts. As an artifact of testing accountability, it is suspected that

general educators were reluctant to release even a small part of their territory to the special

educator. Friend and Bursuck (2002) again discussed how some teachers were reluctant to give

up classroom space and teaching procedures. Some were reluctant out of fear that different

teaching practices would also be effective. Whereas other teachers were reluctant because of

fear that students with disabilities would not achieve at high enough levels and the general

education teacher would be held accountable for that performance.

<div align="center">Role Construction</div>

Special Education Teacher Marginalization

When states adopted mandatory attendance policies teachers were faced with the new

problem instructing students who had previously been excluded from school. Teachers were

unwilling or reluctant at best to work with students with special needs (Winzer, 1999). They

were able to convince school administrators that in order to keep control of their classrooms they

would need to create separate classrooms. This meant that a place for undesirable students was

needed so that the more accepted members of society could be taught. According to Winzer, the

special education teachers were also viewed as inferior because their charges were deemed

inferior.

Although teachers in this study talked about being completely satisfied with their career

choice they often referred to incidents where they felt disempowered, disenfranchised, or

silenced in schools. Their primary challenge was fighting to be accepted as a teaching

professional in general education classrooms. Carmen expressed her disenfranchisement as

being viewed as incompetent by general education teachers. Having transferred from the middle

school setting, Carmen asked a fellow staff member what an elementary level IEP looked like.

According to Carmen, this colleague took it upon herself to inform the teachers as well as the

building principal that Carmen "did not know anything about special education." As Carmen

retold this incident the hurt and rejection she felt was still evident through her words and

behavior:

> It was kind of hairy in the very beginning. Coming from a middle school setting I asked,
>
> what does an IEP look like? They thought I didn't know anything. That's the reaction I
>
> got that I didn't know anything. Their response was you're a seasoned teacher. You
>
> should know. And when they went to the principal and said she needs some help. I was
>
> like oh my goodness!

Lorna expressed the feeling of disempowerment because of her previous association with

children with more intense needs. She was prevented from serving on building level teams. She

described her experience:

> I was not permitted to be involved in any additional professional development any
>
> outside training, any building wide committees or anything like that. I volunteered, I

applied for professional development , I wanted to be on committees, I'm used to begin

on committees that I don't even want to be on. So it was very unusual for me to have to

go to a school and for once, go in your room, do your job, and go home when it's time.

It was evident that even in schools where there was administrative commitment to

support co-teaching, special education teachers were silenced and regulated to subordinate roles.

The subordinate roles were characterized by: (a) planning that was dictated by the general

education teacher, (b) co-teaching that took place within the general education setting, and (c)

assessments that were designed by the general education teacher and adapted, if needed, by the

special education. These findings were consistent with those found by Rice and Zigmond

(2002). All teachers in this study described their job as Lorna described it "to go in the general

education classrooms to support the students and the teachers within that classroom." Again,

teachers felt limited as educational professionals.

In all of the interviews, there was no discussion of models of co-teaching that met the

criteria of shared space and responsibility identified by Rice and Zigmond. Lorna again

expressed that she was disappointed that she was not able to utilize her "nice, big" classroom.

This lapse in implementation could be the result of the relatively short time co-teaching had been

encouraged by Standard School District or an oversight in preparation on the district's part to

implement RTI related actives.

Working within the RTI paradigm, special education teachers face expectations of greater

collaboration than every before and greater efficacy for students' learning in the general

education classroom (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2005). For the most part, the special education

teachers in this study were attempting to provide services in collaborative settings that were not

conducive to the kinds of individualized special education services they had been trained to

provide. The roles and responsibilities of the four special education teachers were described from their own perspectives as primarily that of providing direct services to students with disabilities via working in general education classrooms or instructing small groups of students in the special education resource classroom. Even though the special education teachers were working in the general education environment, they were not actively involved in the delivery of instruction. The special education teachers were often not aware of what activities they would be engaged with until they actually crossed the threshold of the general education classroom door.

This study confirmed the findings of Dettmer, et al., (2002) that addressed the lack of planning in co-taught classrooms leaves the special education teacher as a helper of the general educator. The inadequate level of planning often reduced the special educators to that of a highly trained assistant. Betty discussed that she offered to grade tests, make copies tries to find materials and does little things so that teachers realized that she was there to help them and to make their life easier when they are "dealing with her student." Some teachers at the elementary level reportedly were not provided with common planning time to discuss instructional strategies or instructional decisions as envisioned by the district administration. Consequently, these educational professionals found it necessary to engage in creative planning time, before or after school, through email, notes in mailboxes, and incidental hallway discussions.

Summary

The findings of this study concurred with Morvant and Gersten (1995) who found that the environments in which special education teachers' worked was inadequate for meeting the challenges of their workload. Stressors such as job ambiguity emerged as critical impediments to the special education teachers construction of roles. Factors such as conflicting expectations of the special educator's function in the general education classroom, real or perceived

marginalization by general educators, lack of professional development opportunities provided

by the district, and continued requirement to complete regulatory paperwork were all prevalent in

this study. Findings also indicated that for special educators, lack of general education

classroom autonomy and the lack of understanding paradigm shifts were directly related to

special education teacher ambiguity. The ambiguity associated with the role of the special

education teacher often resulted in the special educator helping the general educator (Dettmer, et

al., 2002). The teachers in this study confirmed this finding.

Discussion

The collaborative nature of the RTI model required special education teachers to spend

the majority of the day in general education classes along with their special education students .

The most significant job function of the special educator in RTI is that of co-teacher. In addition

to the role of co-teacher, findings from this study suggest that special education teachers perceive

them selves in terms of the task that they complete. As a result of the district mandate to practice

inclusion, special education teachers felt marginalized. The role of marginalization was derived

from role ambiguity. There were two perspectives identified in the findings. The first

perspective was located in the role of the special education teacher and the second perspective

was situated in the way the role was constructed in the RTI framework.

Freund and Rich (2004) describe co-teaching as two or more educational professionals

delivering instruction to a group of students in a single space. Within the co-teaching model,

there are six approaches a) one teach, one observe; (b) station teaching; (c) parallel teaching; (d)

alternative teaching; (e) teaming; and (f) one teach, one assist (Friend, 2008). Findings from this

study revealed teachers participated in only one model of co-teaching; one teach one assist. The

model of one teach, one assist calls for one teacher to teach while the other supports by walking

around the room assisting students who have questions about their assigned work Friend and

Cook (2007). Furthermore, it was found that special education teachers were not consulted with

by general education teachers to assist them with planning lessons that incorporated the

modifications or accommodations that were detailed within the students' IEPs (Friend & Cook,

2007). The special education teachers were often not aware of what activities they would be

engaged with until they actually crossed the threshold of the general education classroom door.

This study confirmed the findings of Dettmer, et al., (2002) who suggested that the lack of planning in co-taught classrooms often leaves the special education teacher in the role of a helper of the general educator. Margaret expressed concern that without proper professional development training, general education teachers would view special educator as assistants. There was an admitted need for the district to provide professional development training centered on co-teaching and collaboration. Teachers confirmed the need by reportedly attending district sponsored trainings on content related matters; however, there was no mention of professional development offerings on co-teaching or collaboration. In fact, Lorna reported having to go around her building principal to the special education coordinator to be allowed to attend professional development opportunities.

In addition to assisting in general education classrooms, teachers described providing specialized instruction to students in a resource room environment. This instruction was provided as remediation to students having difficulty with the general education curriculum or to provide intervention to those students not making adequate progress toward their academic goals. The resource room was also used to teach learning strategies or provide accommodations such as oral testing or retesting. As teachers spend more time in general education classrooms, they use the results of their small group instruction to receive feedback on what works and what does not work. This information is then shared with the members of the building level decision making body which the special educator is a member. Billingsley (2007), relates this role to that of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders participate in making decisions at the school and district levels.

Special education teachers spend part of their creative planning time serving as members of school based decision-making bodies. Many RTI models include a problem-solving

component (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Reschly, 2005). At this stage, problem solving is used to resolve issues with learning and behavior that help prevent the need for special education or to determine if special education placement is warranted (Reschly, 2005). The special education teachers in this study felt that every team member served the same function. All stakeholders worked together to problem solve and provide guidance for students not making adequate progress. Many of the team functions were to review decision rules on when students move through the tiers of services and to monitor the effectiveness of instructional interventions. This perception confirms finds from Welch et al., (1999) that shared responsibilities for students with disabilities is a part of improving attitudes towards inclusion.

These findings confirmed findings from Crutchfield (1997). Special education teachers have the same kinds of paperwork demands that general education teacher do. They are required to complete paperwork associated with local, state, and federal regulations and policies that require students' placement and progress in special programs and services. Two teachers felt that they did not play an integral part in the evaluation process while other teachers felt comfortable with their roles. At the time of this study, Standard School District only required special education teachers to write IEPs after the test results were compiled and students were officially placed in special education.

Billingsley (2007) found that teachers who possess both the skills and opportunities to collaborate with others exhibit characteristics of teacher leaders. She further addressed that special education teacher leaders are adept at confronting barriers to the education of students who have disabilities. York-Barr, Sommerness, Duke, and Ghere (2005) discussed how special education teachers served as informal leaders by providing direction and by articulating a sophisticated understanding of collaboration to advocate across various levels of their

educational system to fight against their own isolation and marginalization as well as that of their students. This characteristic was demonstrated by Melanie who advocated for the due process rights of students in special education to avoid their IEPs being changed without following proper procedures.

Challenges to Role Construction

  Role ambiguity. The comments from the teachers in this study indicate the role ambiguity facing the special education teacher in the RTI framework. Role ambiguity occurred as the teachers shifted their thinking from special education resource room teachers to more collaborative roles as co-teachers (Billingsley, 2004). The issue of role ambiguity seemed to be directly related to teachers not understanding RTI. Three of the four teachers interviewed did not understand the connection between RTI and student achievement. It was found that a consequence of role ambiguity was teachers feeling marginalized by their general education colleagues. Teachers were viewed as incompetent, and ostracized because of their association with special education.

  Marginalization. Although teachers in this study talked about being completely satisfied with their career choice they often referred to incidents where they felt disempowered, disenfranchised, or silenced in schools. Their main challenge was fighting to be accepted as a teaching professional in general education classrooms. Teachers in this study provided progress monitoring because they felt the general education teachers did not have the time or flexibility in their schedules to administer assessments to all students in their classes. All teachers described the importance of progress monitoring as a way of informing the child's teachers of the child's present level of functioning. The findings of this study reveal that in this age of accountability, progress monitoring is a daily activity for the special educator because of their need to prove their place in the general education classroom by making important and substantial contributions

(Rice and Zigmond, 2000). Contrary to current scholarly arguments regarding the special

educator's role in RTI (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Mastropiere & Scruggs, 2005), all

special education teachers in this study discussed the responsibility of monitoring the progress of

all struggling students with and without special education placement.

Implications for Special Education Teacher Practice

It would be important to provide both general educators and special educators the

necessary training related to the co-teaching models and the art of collaboration. An initial topic

would be the roles of both educators in a co-taught environment. A critical component of the

special educators in this study, as noted by Friend and Cook (2007), is that they have equivalent

credentials and employment status as their general education counterparts. This means that they

can truly be partners in their inclusive classrooms.

Teachers cannot do their best work without the appropriate tools and information. The

need for in-depth training, high-quality professional development, presentation of research-based

materials, and teaching methods are essential for teaching students with disabilities (Cramer and

Stivers, 2007). Three out of four teachers in this study reported that they lacked a definition or

explanation of RTI. Melanie was the only teacher in this study who had a working knowledge of

RTI and had enough exposure to operationalize it and construct a role that worked both within

the general education environment and within the special education classroom. The

aforementioned findings would seem to suggest that teachers lacking pertinent information

regarding the paradigm within which they work would minimize their abilities to be effective

teachers. However, the opposite was found. All four teachers felt completely satisfied with their

career choice. This suggests that special education teachers are resilient in overcoming barriers in

order to provide positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

The special education teachers in this study all viewed their main job duty as that of providing services to students at risk of academic failure. These particular teachers did not hesitate to provide services for students regardless of the student's special education status. That was a stated goal of Margaret. The only concern expressed by the teachers was creating legal vulnerability for them and the district by providing services to students not officially found eligible for special services. The teachers were comfortable working within the general education classroom; however, they all felt that many students still needed pull out services to pre-teach, re-teach, or remediate the general classroom work.

Teachers viewed the goal of working in the general education classroom as a step toward inclusion of students into that general education curriculum. Teachers did not use the terms co-teach or co-taught classroom when referring to their work in the general education classrooms; the descriptive was always inclusion. Co-teaching is not synonymous with inclusion (Friend and Cook, 2007). Co-teaching is one of several service delivery options that have been promoted to ensure students with disabilities receive the support they need in general education classrooms. This suggests that the special education teacher did not feel welcomed in the general education classroom. Because both teachers were reportedly uncomfortable and uncertain of their roles, the general educator retained control while the special educator acted as a visitor not wanting to get in the way. For co-teaching to be effective, teachers must work together to "maximize the benefit of having two individuals with different types of expertise working together" (Friend, 2008, p.115).

In this current trend of districts responding to new initiatives, teachers such as the ones described in this study can suffer from higher levels of stress and lower job satisfaction. This job related stress was directly related to role ambiguity. Role ambiguity would not be considered a

surprising finding when found with persons new to the teaching field (Wasburn-Moses 2005);

however, it was an unexpected and significant finding when two teachers having more than 20

years of experience as special education teachers experienced stress related to role ambiguity.

Teachers were expected to provide specially designed instruction in general education settings

with no prior information provided to them regarding their job context and only minimal

explanation of RTI.

District- Level Implications

These findings suggest that district administrators need to provide support to all teachers.

In particular, teachers need to understand RTI and how they fit into the provision of supports.

By providing high quality professional development sessions for co-teaching partners, teachers

can begin to build professional working relationship (Cramer and Stivers, 2007). There are

undocumented systems of providing professional development for co-teaching partnerships that

have been successful in helping teachers resistant to working together build relationships and

create successful working relationships (Central Kentucky Special Education Cooperative,

2006). Co-teaching partnerships take time and effort to be successful. Comparing co-teaching to

a professional marriage (Friend and Cook, 2007), schools should avoid arranged partnerships.

It is suggested that when school districts make vested commitments to initiate new

reform initiatives, professional development trainings are provided prior to teachers being asked

for perform the duties. It is imperative that common planning time be provided for elementary

level teachers that consist of time during the instructional day. Several recommendations for

practice may be valuable for teachers, school administrators, and institutions of higher education.

1. As more research is undertaken, roles and responsibilities of special education

   teachers should be clearly defined (Mastropiere and Scruggs, 2005). These roles

   should describe how teaches are to be utilized in general education classrooms.

2. Co-teaching partners should be encouraged to use multiple models of co-teaching

   and be held accountable for demonstrating various models during administrator

   observations (Wood, 2006).

3. Administrators should also receive necessary training on what and how to observe

   in collaborative settings (Arick & Krug, 1993; Finkenbinder, 2001; Goor &

   Schwenn, 1997).

4. Professional development activities should focus on teachers working in

   collaborative environments, co-teaching, and collaborative problem solving. It is

   essential that school principals as well as special education administrators provide

   staff development programs that are purposeful and research based. Berkey and

   DuFour (1995) explain that effective staff development is purposeful and makes a

   conscious effort to change practices and beliefs in order to move the school

   toward a specific, articulated end. Administrators must insist that staff

   development is firmly rooted in the goals and vision of the district. Furthermore,

   they must make certain that staff members are aware of the relationship between

   the objectives of the program and the overall improvement goals of the school.

5. Institutions of higher education specifically teacher education programs should

   integrate RTI and collaboration in their general education and special education

   course requirements. Special education teachers will no longer provide

instruction to students in isolated classrooms. Teacher candidates need to

graduate with a sense of working with and managing adults as well as students.

Limitations

Limitations include sample size, timing of data collection, and limited geographic setting.

These findings were related to four special education teachers and one central office

administrator. Not all special education service models were represented and only teachers

involved with students identified as having mild to moderate disabilities were involved.

Furthermore this sample did not include teachers with less than 20 years experience in the

workforce. This exclusion was intentional to provide a perspective of persons experienced in

human relations and role construction in the work environment.

Another limitation of this study was that only voluntary participants were included. All

special education teachers within the Standard School District were contacted to participate;

however, only two participants responded to the initial recruitment effort. The other participants

were contacted individually and asked to participate.

Interviews were primarily conducted during the summer months when teachers were off

work and during the months shortly after the new school year began. Due to the implementation

of special education and intervention services conducted by this district, other school districts

within and outside of the state of Ohio may not experience these particular issues related to the

provision of student services. Nevertheless, enough data were collected, and all of the data

analyses were conducted in conjunction with the participants to ensure reliability of the findings

of this study. Through rich descriptions, generalizability is left to the readers (Hatch, 2002;

Glesne, 1999)

Suggestions for Future Research

More research is needed to further clarify the roles of special education teachers involved in RTI activities. This same study could be replicated with teachers in other school districts who have more experience working in RTI related activities. Teachers in this study raised a number of concerns about the influence of special education law on RTI related interventions. Research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of federally mandated rules and regulations and how they influence the types of services provided for students in schools.

RTI practices require special education to exist in conjunction with general education. Further research is needed to allow general educators to voice their perceptions of the role of the special educator within RTI. It would also be interesting for special education teachers to give voice to their perceptions of the role of general education teachers in RTI. Teachers would be asked their opinions in homogeneous and heterogeneous groupings to facilitate interesting and interactive dialogue.

Summary

Findings from this study led to the conclusion that these teachers find great satisfaction working with students with disabilities. Their passion for teaching was evident based on the descriptions they used even though they have had concerns regarding the system set up. They felt that they were often viewed as visitors in the general education classrooms and some indicated that respect and professional interactions depended on the individual personalities of their colleagues.

The results of this study attempted to describe the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers working within tiered levels of supports. Working within the RTI paradigm, special education teachers face expectations of greater collaboration than ever before and greater efficacy for students' learning in the general education classroom (Mastropieri and Scruggs,

2005). All teachers in this study reported working in the general education classroom assisting general education teachers. Special education teacher must modify their self-perception before they can be accepted by general education teachers. This need for special educators to change the way they view themselves was confirmed by Wood (2006).

There is an additional need for special educators to change their perceptions that they are separate from the rest of the school. Their new role as co-teachers requires that they consult with general educators about strategies to use with students with special needs in the context of the general education classroom. It is imperative that special educator refrain from classifying students as "my" students to "our" students. For the most part, the special education teachers in this study are attempting to provide services in collaborative settings that are not conducive to the kinds of individualized special education services they have been trained to provide. For this district, co-teaching had yet to be fully operationalized. It was still a philosophical construct. However their practice of co-teaching was evolving. It was also noted that that teachers in the district were working under district constraints regarding scheduling, space, and accountability. The decision to embark on a co-teaching approach was made by district level administrators for the betterment of students with disabilities' academic and social-emotional well being. This decision was also applied to other students identified as subgroups under NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Given the diversity of today's classrooms, it can only benefit all stakeholders if two or more highly qualified educational professionals combine their expertise and share responsibility for all aspects educating students.

The RTI initiative has further complicated the challenge special education teachers face in trying to move from a system focused on process to a system of product through accountability (A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families,

2002). The Regular Education Initiative and the Inclusion movement christened the general

education classroom as the place for all children. This may be an appropriate statement;

however, few general education teachers have been trained to work with students with

disabilities (Crutchfield, 1997). What is most disturbing about those statements is that

individuals who have chosen a career path to advocate for the rights of the disabled also have to

fight for the right to be considered as professional educators.

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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORMS

UNIVERSITY OF **Cincinnati**

October 24, 2007

Janice K. Wyatt-Ross, M ED
Education Criminal Justice & Human Services, Curriculum & Instruction
ML 0049

RE: IRB # 07-03-20-07E Special Educator role construction within Response to Intervention: A
Qualitative Analysis

Dear Ms. Wyatt-Ross:

The University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board - Social and Behavioral Sciences (IRB-S) has
reviewed and approved your modification **(Revise Title from "A Phenomenological Case Study of**
Special Education Teacher Roles and Perceptions of Acceptance within the Response to
Intervention Framework" to "Special Educator Role Construction Within Response to Intervention:
A Qualitative Analysis". Add key personnel: Pamela Williamson. Revise questionnaire: Add and
remove questions. Revise Consent with new title; replace interview tapes with digital recordings.
Revise Protocol with New Title). This approval does NOT affect the expiration date of your study.

Approval is effective 10-22-07 and expires 4-26-08.

If this modification necessitates changes to the consent, the approved consent version (with the IRB
approval date and expiration date in the footer) is attached to this approval. This is the version that
MUST be used with your participants.

The research MUST be conducted EXACTLY as approved. ANY modifications to the approved project
must be reviewed and approved by the IRB-S BEFORE being implemented.

To continue your research beyond the expiration date shown above, you MUST submit a Progress Report
to the IRB-S at least one month before the expiration date shown above. At the completion of your
research, you MUST submit a final Progress Report to the IRB-S marked "completed".

Also attached to this approval are Investigator Responsibilities, which are expected of all human subjects
researchers at the University of Cincinnati.

Sincerely,

Julie W. Gerlach, B.S.N., M.P.H., C.I.P.
Chair, UC IRB-S

JG: cn
cc: James Koschoreck, PhD

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORMS

Teacher Consent to Participate in a Research Study
University of Cincinnati c/o Janice Wyatt-Ross
College of Education, Criminal Justice and Human Services
Urban Educational Leadership Program
P.O. Box 2002
Cincinnati, OH 45221

UNIVERSITY OF
Cincinnati
Institutional Review Board –
Social & Behavioral Sciences
IRB #   07-03-20-07E
APPROVED 10-22-07
EXPIRES   4-26-08
Teacher Consent

April 2007

Dear Special Education Teacher,

I am inviting you to participate in a research study about special education. If you agree to participate, you will take part in two in-depth interviews about your experiences as a special educator, your perception of your role in the building, and your experience with and level of collaboration with general education teachers.

- The three interviews will be done May 2007 - November 2007. They will last approximately 60 minutes each. They will be audio taped and transcribed by me. Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. To protect your identify, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name, your school's name and the name of your district. During the study, the digital recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will destroy the recordings at the end of the study.
- I will ask you to review your interview transcripts to ensure that I have fully captured your experience. You will be asked to make corrections or additional comments to elaborate on your experience. I will ask that you do not edit for grammatical errors.

There will be no compensation for participation in this study. You are free to reject this inquiry and, should you consent, you may withdraw from the study at any time. I do not perceive any risks to you as a result of your participation in this study.

Your consent will be confirmed by your signature below.   A second copy is provided for your records. If you have any questions or concerns about this study or the procedures described above, please contact me (513-556-3799, work; wyattrjk@ucmail.uc.edu, email; 1-859-229-9833, mobile) or my advisor, Dr. James W. Koschoreck (513-556-6622, office; james.koschoreck@uc.edu, email). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at 513-558-5784.

Respectfully Submitted,

Janice Wyatt-Ross, Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student

I have read the procedures above for the study entitled "**Special Educator Role Construction Within Response to Intervention: A Qualitative Analysis.**" I consent to participate in the research study, and I have received a copy of this consent document.

_____
Signature of Teacher   Date

UNIVERSITY OF **Cincinnati**
Institutional Review Board –
Social & Behavioral Sciences
IRB #   07-03-20-07E
APPROVED 10-22-07
EXPIRES   4-26-08
Administrator Consent

Administrator Recruitment Letter and Consent
University of Cincinnati c/o Janice Wyatt-Ross
College of Education, Criminal Justice and Human Services
Urban Educational Leadership Program
P.O. Box 0049
Cincinnati, OH 45221

April 2007

Dear District Administrator,

My name is Janice Wyatt-Ross. I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati in the Urban Educational Leadership program. I would like to obtain your consent to complete one in-depth interview about the goals of your department regarding the special education program in which you administer. I would also request your support in seeking special education teachers to participate in a study of special education teacher roles in the implementation of tiered levels of support.

I will use the data collected from you and compare it with the experiences of special education teachers. I am independently recruiting four to six (4-6) elementary special education teachers who would agree to be interviewed by me and to participate as a co-researcher for a six (6) month period. I am asking for your support in the following way:

- To be interviewed by me individually one (1) time during May 2007 – November 2007. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed by me. To protect your identify, a pseudonym will be used in place of your name and the name of your district. During the study, the digital recordings will be kept in a locked file cabinet. I will destroy the recording at the end of the study.
- To review the interview transcript to ensure that I have fully captured your information. You will be asked to make corrections or additional comments to elaborate on your responses. I will ask that you do not edit for grammatical errors.

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. There will be no compensation for participation in this study. You are free to reject this inquiry and/or should you consent, you may withdraw your permission at any time. I do not perceive any risks as a result of your participation in this study.

Your consent to participate in this study will be confirmed by signing below. A second copy is provided for your records. If you have any questions or concerns about this study or the procedures described above, please contact me (513-556-3799, work; wyattrjk@ucmail.uc.edu, email; 859-229-9833, mobile) or my advisor, Dr. James W. Koschoreck (513-556-6622, office; james.koschoreck@uc.edu, email). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the University of Cincinnati Institutional Review Board – Social and Behavioral Sciences at 513-558-5784.

Respectfully Submitted,

Janice Wyatt-Ross, Principal Investigator
Doctoral Student

I have read the procedures above for the study entitled "Special Educator Role Construction Within Response to Intervention: A Qualitative Analysis." I consent to participate in the research study, and I have received a copy of this consent document.

_____   _____
Signature of District Administrator   Date

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT BROCHURE

Benefits

By participating in this study you will:

- Contribute to a better understanding of the experiences special education teachers have in public schools.

- Provide a special education teacher perspective to current educational literature.

- Create a venue whereby special education teachers can voice their opinions about the educational system.

UNIVERSITY OF
CINCINNATI

P.O. Box 20022
Cincinnati, OH
45221

Phone: 513-556-3799
Mobile: 1-859-229-9833
E-mail: janice.wyattross@uc.edu

UNIVERSITY OF
CINCINNATI

Special Educator Role Construction Within Response to Intervention: A Qualitative Analysis

Telephone: 513-556-3799

Dear Interested Teacher,

My name is Janice Wyatt-Ross. I am a former special education teacher and a current doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati. I would like to invite you to participate in an interview based study that is focused on writing a description of your role in school based problem solving teams. If you agree to be involved in this study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews, each lasting no more than 60 minutes in length. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience and will be conducted at a location that is most comfortable for you.

If you are interested in participating please contact me by telephone at 513-556-3799 or 1-859-229-9833. I may also be reached by email at **Janice.wyattross@uc.edu**

Thank you for your consideration,

Janice Wyatt-Ross

Participant Requirements

☐ Does your school provide tiered levels of supports to students?

☐ Does your school use a team based approach for literacy and/or behavior interventions?

☐ Are you a member of your building decision making team(s)?

☐ Have you taught special education in your current building during the last three years?

If you can answer yes to all of the questions above, then you are just right for the job. I would love to hear from you. Your involvement is vital for special education teachers everywhere. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Purpose

While much has been written about the roles and responsibilities of special education teachers, those findings were obtained from surveys and questionnaires. This study investigates how special education teachers experience acceptance in the public school community from the voice of the special education teacher. Teachers are asked to share their stories. The guiding research questions for this study are "What roles do special education teachers actually play in a school community from the perspective of the special education teacher? What is the opinion of special education teachers as it relates to their roles in the public school setting?

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

P.O. Box 20022
Cincinnati, OH
45221

Phone: 513-556-3799
Mobile: 1-859-229-9833
E-mail: janice.wyattross@uc.edu

APPENDIX D

TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Special Educator Role Construction Within Response to Intervention: A Qualitative Analysis
#07-03-20-07E
Interview Guide and Protocol

Types of questions

  Roles
  Construction of Role

Introductory Interview

1. What does teaching special education mean to you?
2. What do you like about being a special education teacher?
3. What building level committees are you a member? What are your duties on the committees which you are a member?
4. How would you describe your knowledge of the laws governing special education practices in public school?
5. Explain the professional development/in-service sessions you have presented.
6. What comments if any, have been made regarding the number of students you teach and your job duties? How did this make you feel?
7. What areas of special education have you been involved with in the past?
8. What is your current area of involvement and how long have you worked in this area?

Follow Up Interview

This interview will begin with a recap of the last interview. I will discuss with participants that "The last time we spoke we had a conversation about your relationship with other staff members. This time I want to follow up with questions related to why you decided to teach special education and any suggestions you have regarding district operations and additional thoughts."

9. Teachers will be asked additional questions to clear up inaccuracies from the previous interviews.
10. How do you know when students in general education are in need of instructional assistance?
11. In your opinion, what is the role of the special education teacher in the building?
12. What steps did you take to establish your role in the building?
13. Please explain how you facilitate inclusion placements in general education classrooms.
14. What is your role in the identification, referral, and evaluation process for students suspected as having a disability?
15. Can you please give a definition for the Ohio Integrated Systems Model (OISM)?
16. How is OISM useful to students in general education?
17. What is the role of the special education teacher in the OISM model?
18. What made you decide to become a special education teacher?
19. How do you know when students need tier 2 or 3 services?
20. Who determines when students need tier 2 or 3 services?
21. What do you like most about tiered levels of supports?
22. What would you like to change about the deliver of supports in your building?

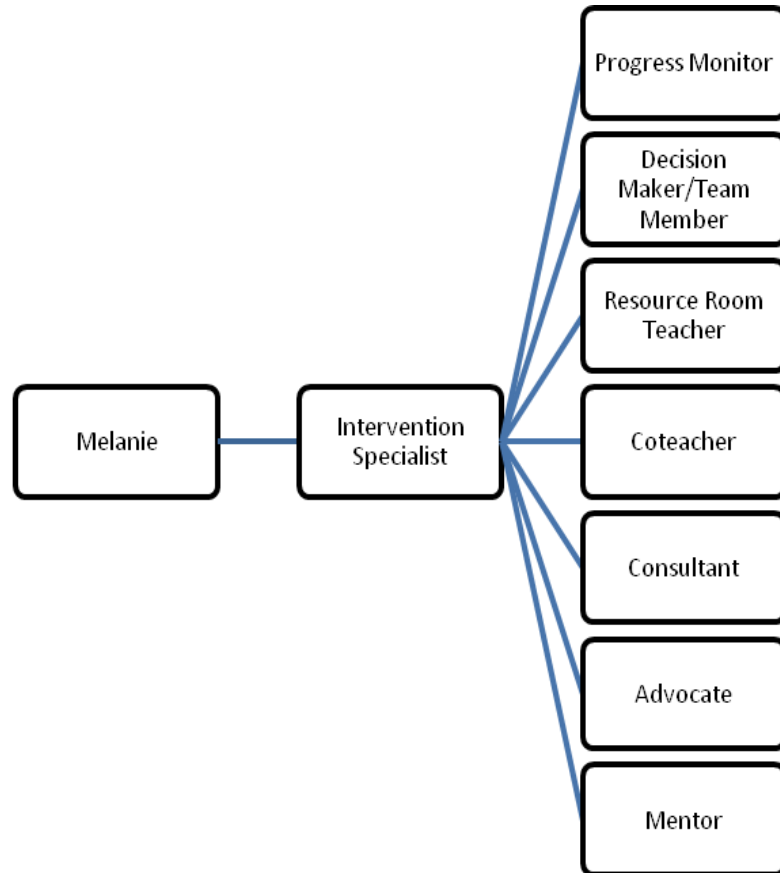| What is the role of the special educator in the school community?	What influenced the construction of this role?
How long have you worked in the area of special education?	What made you decide to become a special education teacher?
What areas of special education have you been involved with in the past?	What is your current area of involvement and how long have you worked in this area?
In your opinion, what is the role of the special education teacher in the building?	What steps did you take to establish your role in the building?
Can you please give a definition/description of the Ohio Integrated Systems Model?	What do you like about being a special education teacher?
How is OISM useful to students in general education?	How do you know when students in general education are in need to instructional assistance?
What is the role of the special education teacher in the OISM model?	How do you know and who determines when students need tier 2 or 3 services?
What is your role in the identification, referral, and evaluation process for students suspected of having a disability?	What is your experience with general education and special education collaboration?
What do you like most about tiered levels of support?	What does teaching special education mean to you?
How have your job responsibilities changed since becoming involved in OISM?	What building level committees are you a member? What are your duties on the committees which you are a member?
What additional training programs are needed to support the implementation of OISM?	What would you like to change about the delivery of supports in your building?
In your opinion, are there aspects of the interventions that need to be modified?	

APPENDIX E

ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Central Office Administrator Interview Question Guide

1. How many students are served in your district?
    a. How many students have IEPs
    b. How many students receive accommodations under Section 504
2. How many special education teachers are employed full time in your district? How many are part time?
3. As a supervisor with the department of student services which includes the provision of services for children with disabilities, what is your view of special education within your district?
    a. How do you prioritize your goals for the district?
    b. How do you share your goals with your staff and teachers?
4. What is your view of the special education teacher's role in the school?
5. How are teachers organized in terms of roles and responsibilities?
    a. Do you have lead teachers in each building? What is their role?
6. What characterizes an intervention specialist versus a regular special education teacher?
7. Thinking in terms of No Child Left Behind and the newly reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act how have you begun to address the new requirements for identifying students with learning disabilities?
    a. Do you anticipate special education teachers or intervention specialists taking on more responsibilities as this new mandate expands?
    b. How do you address highly qualified teachers
    c. Do you have a large amount of emergency certified or teachers working toward certification
    d. What type of trainings have you received on this new identification requirement called Response to Intervention?
8. What is your relationship with the Southwestern Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center?
9. What type of professional development training would you say is still needed for your staff and teachers?
10. What is your relationship with the Universities in the area?
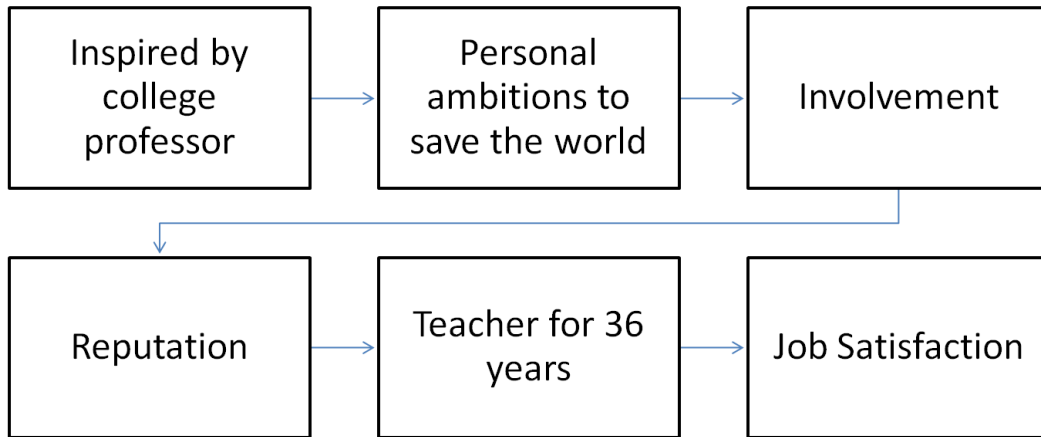11. What additional information would you like to share?

APPENDIX F

DATA ANALYSIS FIGURES

Figure A-1, Participant I –Research Objective One: What is the Role of the Special Educator in the School Community?
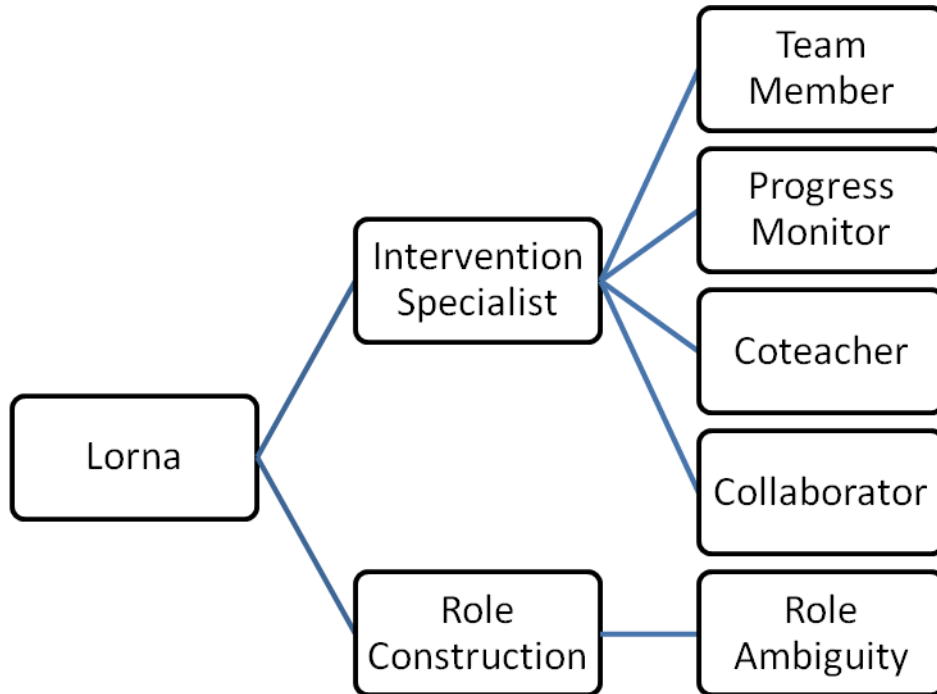
Inspired by college professor	Personal ambitions to save the world	Involvement

Reputation	Teacher for 36 years	Job Satisfaction

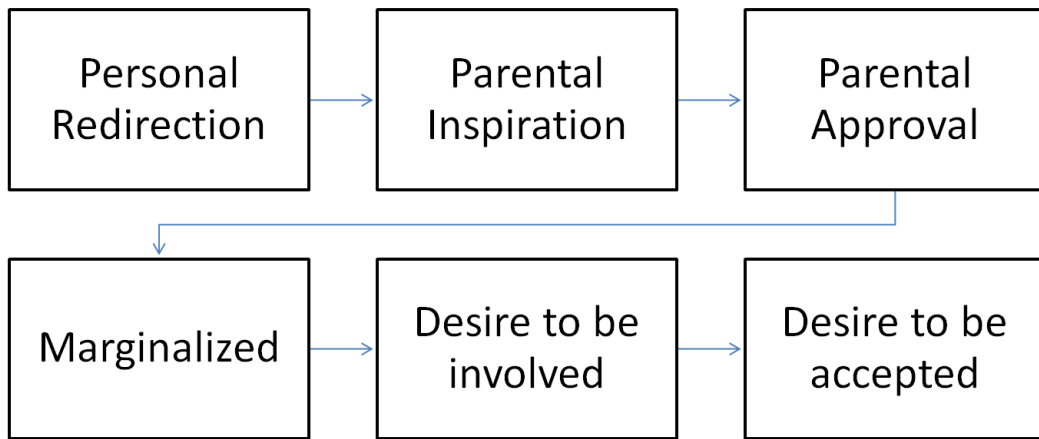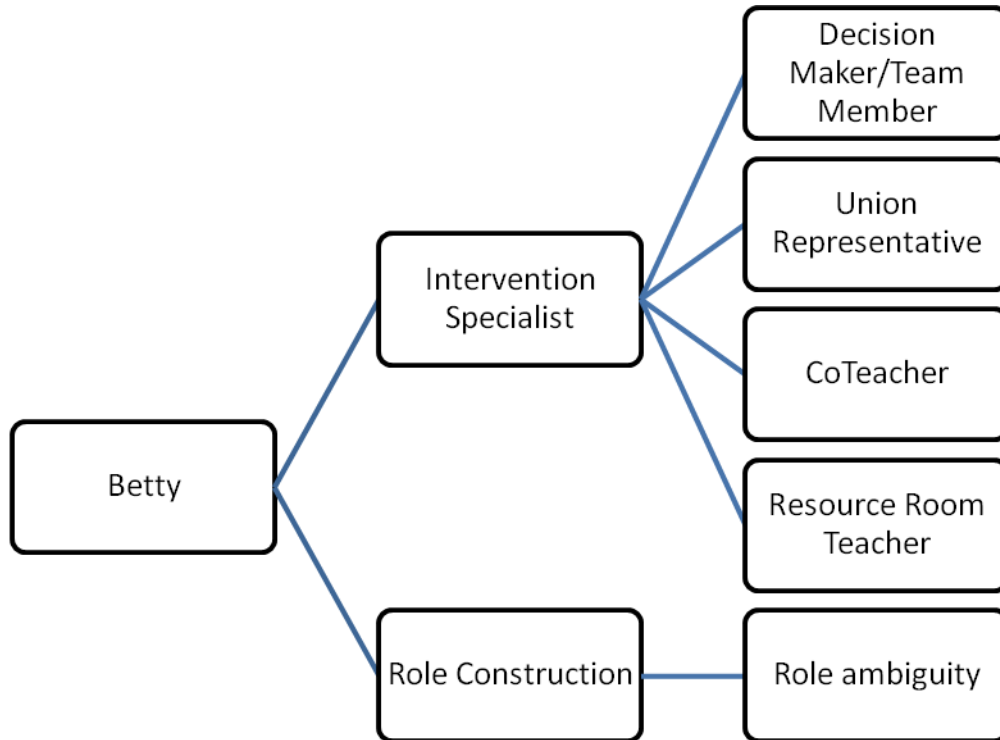**Figure A-2. Participant I –Research Objective Two: What Influenced the Construction of this Role?**

Figure B-1, Participant II – Research Objective One: What is the Role of the Special Educator in the School Community?

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┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│   Personal   │ ───→ │   Parental   │ ───→ │   Parental   │
│  Redirection │      │  Inspiration │      │   Approval   │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘

┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│ Marginalized │ ───→ │ Desire to be │ ───→ │ Desire to be │
│              │      │   involved   │      │   accepted   │
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
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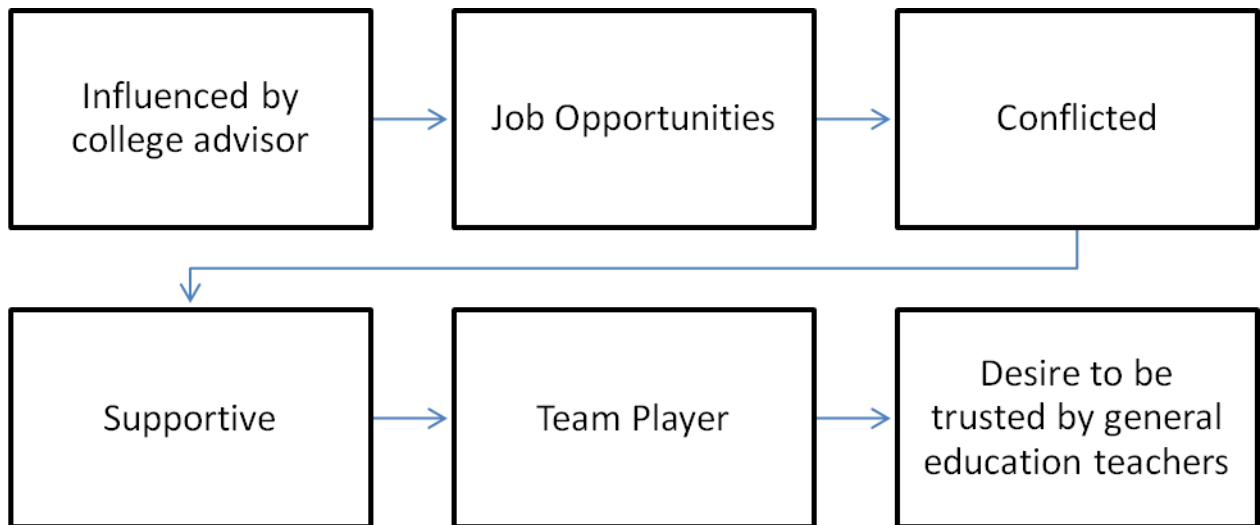
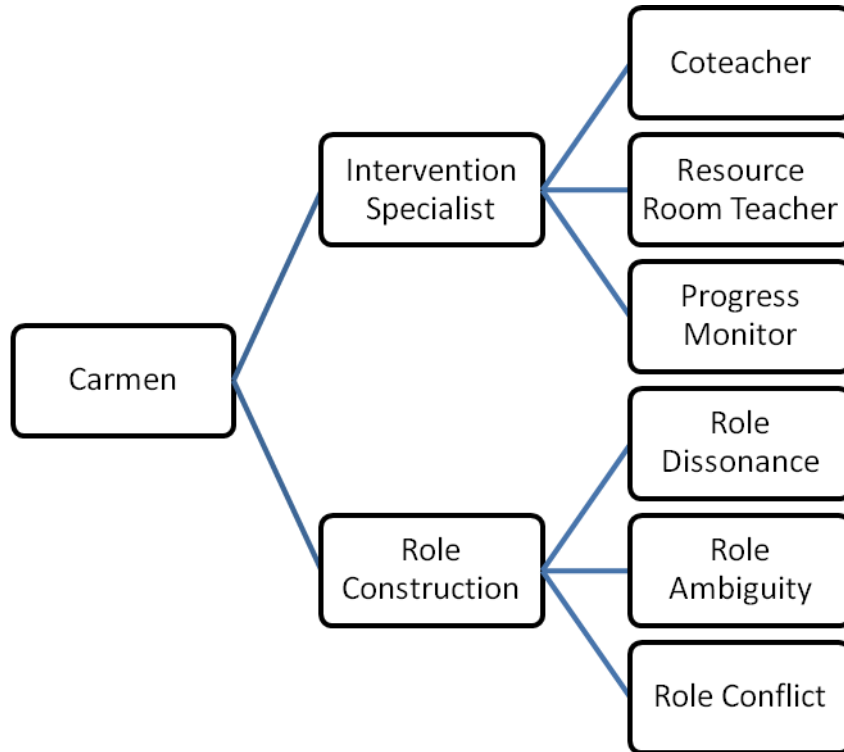**Figure B-2, Participant 2 – Research Objective Two: What Influenced the Construction of this Role?**

Figure C-1, Participant III – Research Objective One: What is the Role of the Special Educator in the School Community?

Figure C-2, Participant III – Research Objective Two – What influenced the Construction of this Role?

Figure D-1, Participant IV – Research Objective One – What is the Role of the Special Educator in the School Community?
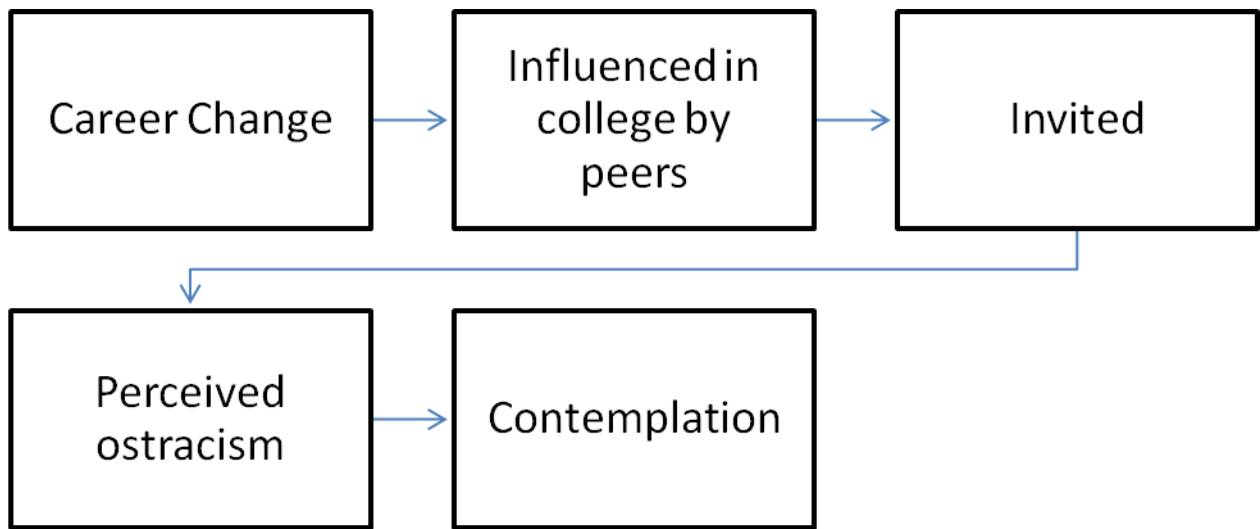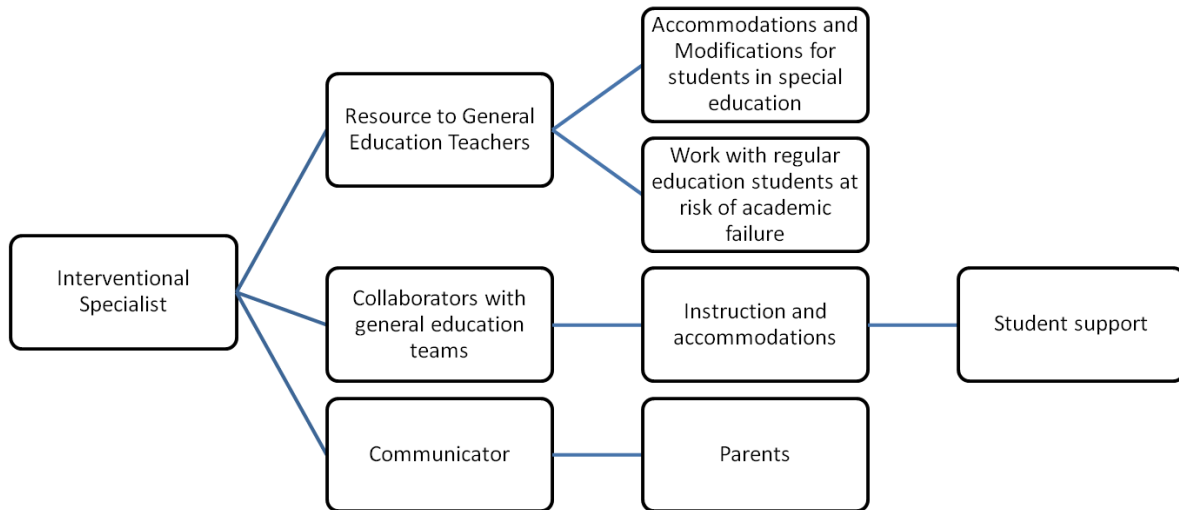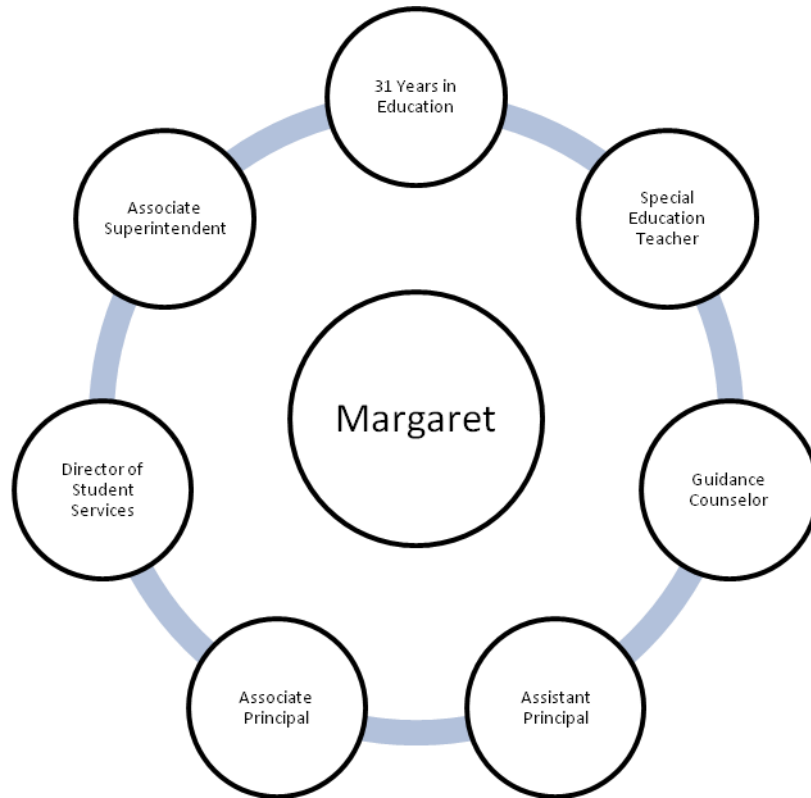
Figure D-2 - Participant IV - Research Objective Two - What Influenced the Construction of this Role?

Figure E-1, Case V - Research Objective One: What is the Role of the Special Educator in the School Community?

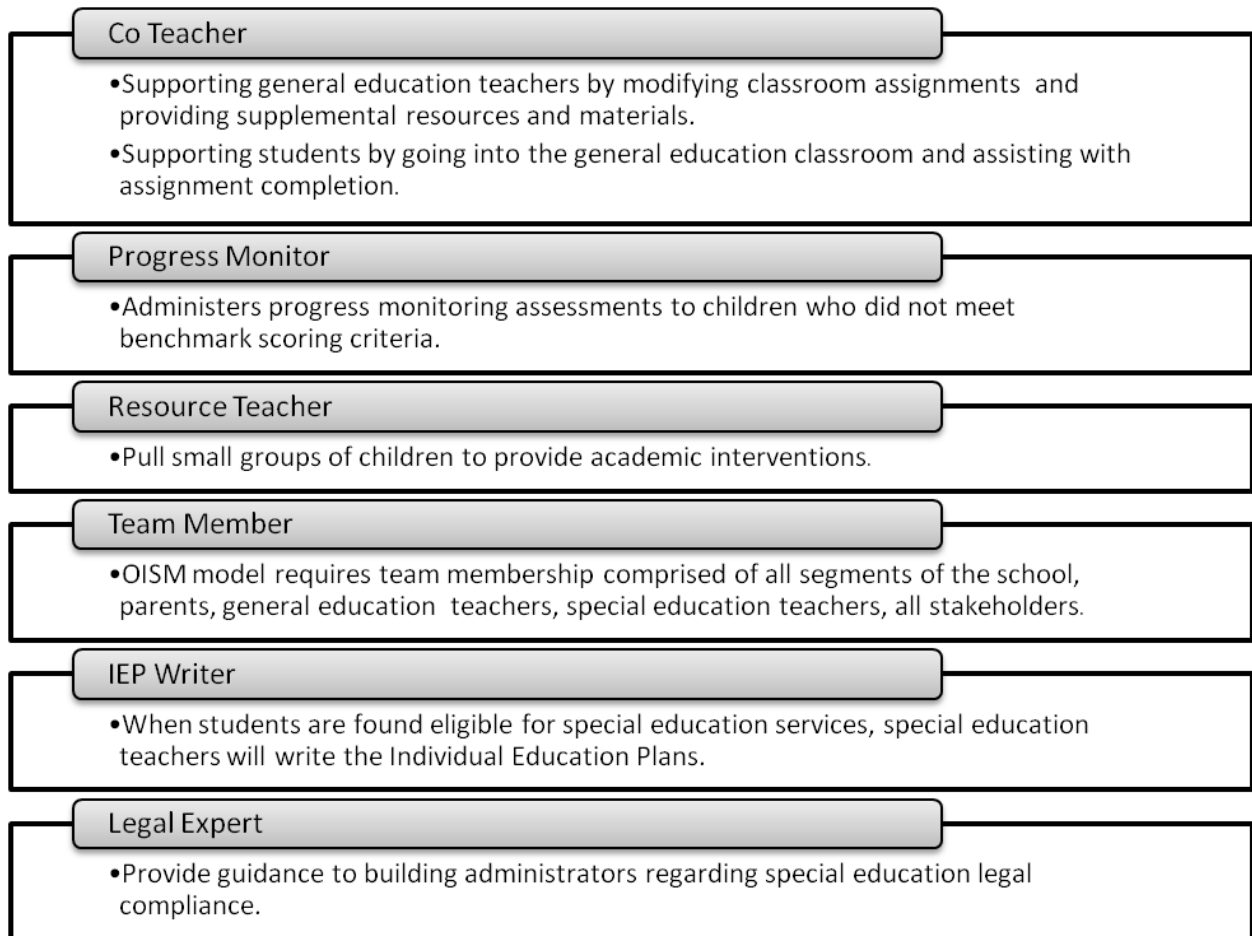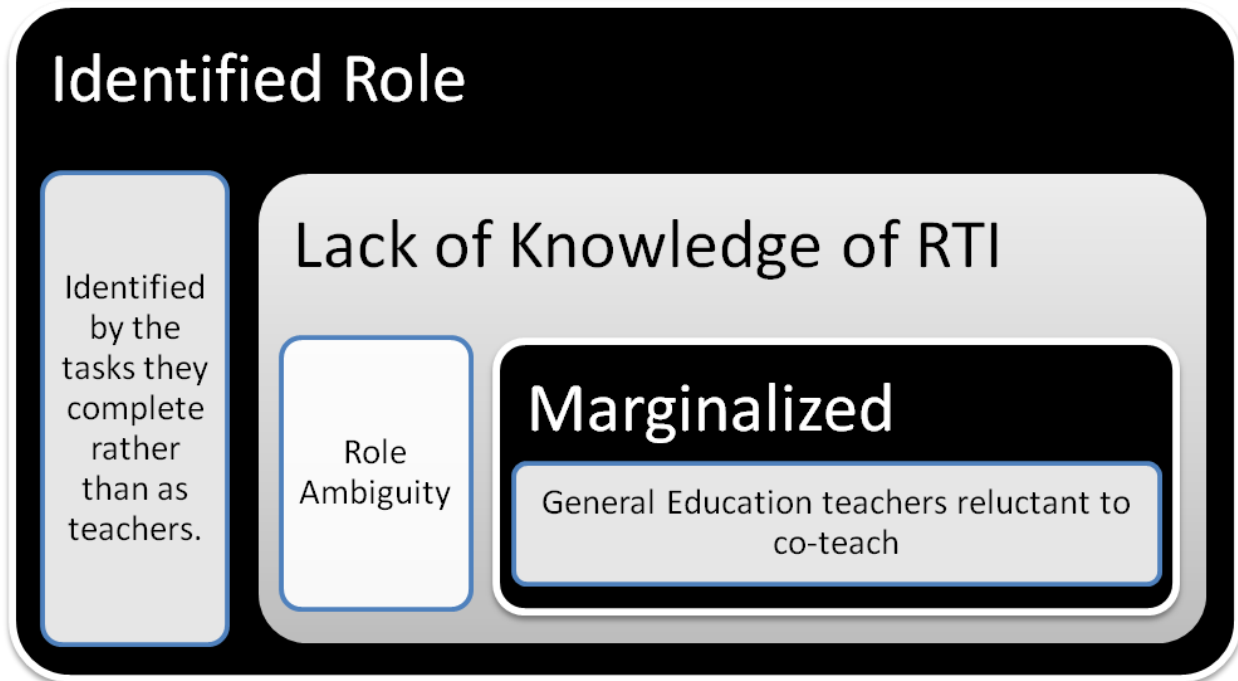**Figure E-2, Case V - Research Objective Two: What Influenced the Construction of this Role?**

Co Teacher

- Supporting general education teachers by modifying classroom assignments and providing supplemental resources and materials.
- Supporting students by going into the general education classroom and assisting with assignment completion.

Progress Monitor

- Administers progress monitoring assessments to children who did not meet benchmark scoring criteria.

Resource Teacher

- Pull small groups of children to provide academic interventions.

Team Member

- OISM model requires team membership comprised of all segments of the school, parents, general education teachers, special education teachers, all stakeholders.

IEP Writer

- When students are found eligible for special education services, special education teachers will write the Individual Education Plans.

Legal Expert

- Provide guidance to building administrators regarding special education legal compliance.

Figure 2. Descriptions of special education teacher roles in RTI.

Figure 3. Relationship between identified role and role construction