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Implementing Response to Intervention (RtI) in a Juvenile Detention Center Using Action Research

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Abstract
While proponents claimed Response to Intervention (RtI) improved student learning and prevented failure, there was an absence of research in effectiveness. Applying action research within a case study, there was an investigation into the process of reforming and improving RtI within a short-term juvenile detention center in the Midwest of the United States for students in grades 5-12. Using the conceptual framework of adaptive leadership, there was an analysis of policies and procedures, observations, interviews, and student work. RtI as a stand-alone program revealed many teachers lacked evidence-based instructional methods and alternative teachers lacked content knowledge, making implementation difficult. Within the action research method, role ambiguity caused problems with fidelity, with the need to infuse strategic leadership with action research when teachers' sense of self and professional were challenged.

Keywords: Response to Intervention, Strategic Leadership, Juvenile Delinquency, Action Research, Adaptive Leadership

1. Introduction

Response to Intervention (RtI) has been on the educational landscape for decades, with a goal to improve learning for all students while providing a mechanism for valid and reliable identification of students with disabilities (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Scaling and translation of RtI beyond the theoretical failed to produce the desired results, leaving many questions unanswered (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009). Students in juvenile detention centers showed, as a group, poor academic and behavioral outcomes, with graduating high school a significant factor in reducing recidivism (Engstrom & Scott, 2020). Juvenile delinquents are in need of an effective, engaging, and innovative educational system.

While RtI struggled to show value-added measures on student achievement beyond preferences of researchers and teachers (Cowan & Maxwell, 2015), little guidance existed for short-term juvenile detention centers. No studies were identified which examined short-term juvenile detention centers; the research on long-term juvenile detention centers was often not applicable. Coker (2021) found reading comprehension, prosociality, and high social self-esteem predicted academic achievement in short-term juvenile detention centers.

The paper starts with a literature review connecting RtI with juvenile detention centers. The conceptual framework describes the theory underlying the study, and then the methodology, sample, and results present a narrative of the action research. Afterward, a discussion and conclusion explore how to apply action research in general and RtI as a practice to improve teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

Educators and scholars hailed the promises and potential of RtI, but there was a dearth of randomized-controlled trials (RCTs) and large-scale, longitudinal studies. While RtI was supposed to be evidence based, as a system, the evidence was and continues to be lacking. Danielson et al. (2007) and others stated there were many questions left unanswered, but the state of knowledge seems stuck in time. RtI lacks a coherent, universal definition and implementation, and many researchers found RtI transformed the nature of diagnoses of learning disabilities (Hendricks & Fuchs, 2020). Within juvenile detention centers, delinquents have poor behavior and academic performance which affect outcomes across the lifespan, but the causality or direction of each was not clearly defined (Katsiyannis et al., 2008; Kulkarni et al., 2020).

Research in short-term juvenile detention centers continues to be ignored. Short-term juvenile detention centers in the United States are akin to adult jails; when a juvenile is charged with a crime, and before adjudication of delinquency (guilt) or nondelinquency (not guilty), youths typically aged 10-21 reside in a local juvenile detention center. If the child is adjudicated delinquent, he might be released on probation, sentenced to time locally, sent to a treatment or rehabilitation center, or moved to a state facility (similar to a prison in the adult system). The average stays are often 1-30 days, though students can stay much longer for serious offenses. Juveniles rarely stay for status crimes; typically crimes which would be felonies as an adult are the reasons for delinquency. Macomber et al. (2010) barely mentioned RtI, and other researchers and programs focused on long-term facilities (e.g., McDaniel et al., 2011; Pederson et al., 2020; Snow et al., 2015).

Balu et al. (2015) presented one of the few large-scale, longitudinal studies about the efficacy of RtI: RtI not only lacked positive effects in student achievement, some cohorts suffered from being placed in the program. Many researchers were not dissuaded before or after. For example, one study proclaimed, “Rigorous research clearly shows that implementing the four essential RTI components with fidelity is an effective strategy to improve schools and increase student learning” (McInerney & Elledge, 2013, pp. 4). Yet, the McInerney study failed to mention the rigorous research; one must take as a given RtI was effective. Others (e.g., Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017) claimed if only there was fidelity; how or why no one can get it right never gets addressed, and no one was found to commission research which provided the evidence in evidence-based.

The following study sought to establish and improve RtI practices in a short-term juvenile detention center in the United States. Research often failed to translate, and action research sought to move from a top down, bureaucratic program to practitioner centered (Manfra, 2019). Most students arrived with severe social, emotional, and academic problems, so the research question asked: How and what can be done to transform RtI to improve student learning? Action research was mapped as a process to implement, understand, and improve RtI. The findings give insight into short-term juvenile detention centers, fidelity issues, and leadership concerns.

3. Conceptual Framework

The strategic framework centered on the components of adaptive leadership. Adaptive leadership was apt to the situation because the initiative was new, created tension by challenging norms, and expected behaviors and outcomes stretched the current capacity (Heifetz et al., 2009). A novel way to apply adaptive leadership can be generated from the application of the care of chronic illness, where the professional and the receiver—the teacher and the student in the current situation—coproduce and co-respond to situations which move beyond the technical (Anderson et al., 2015). Characteristics of adaptive leadership can be broken down to continuous diagnosis, experimentation, honoring the past, developing multiple perspectives, and time (Heifetz et al., 2009) to fluidly adapt to the education of juvenile delinquents.

4. Methodology

To analyze the data, there were observations, direct participation, training sessions, review of documents, and interviews of participants. The project involved participatory action research to implement, manage, and evaluate an RtI program in a regional juvenile detention. Action research tests and applies theory to practical situations within an organization with an iterative process (Avison et al., 1999). There was an attempt to go beyond the literal to developing inferences and conjectures which could create significant, lasting understandings and improvements (Susman & Evered, 1978).

Sagor (2000) and Norton (2018) proposed using theory as a means to identify problems, develop possible solutions, and evaluate results in a spiral fashion. Unlike traditional research, the researcher was a part of the process and enacted changes throughout the process. Coker (2020a) proposed three improvements in conducting and reporting action research: compositing, ghosting, and unbracketing. All three methods were employed with HIRA (hypothesis, inquiry, response, and analysis):

1. Hypothesis: What were the causes of student failures? Students who were behind academically or had behavioral problems needed education and support; students do poor work or misbehave because of deficits in knowledge and ability. By accelerating growth with high-intensity tutoring—as opposed to remediation or enabling—students can make significant improvements in targeted interventions. Marzano's commercially available program, *RtI at Work*, supported and influenced the implementation.
2. Inquiry: What was the situation at the school, the classroom, the staff members, and the students? The problem was many students—typically 20-60%—failed to respond to classroom instruction and support by behaving appropriately but refusing to complete work. Staffing was in a rut, doing what it had always done, so a change was needed to improve student success. Finances were not a problem, so new programs or initiatives could be financed. The time frame was to implement a new program within three months after a year of training and planning. Business-as-usual approaches must be discontinued, so an effective and efficient RtI program was planned to solve the problem of student failure. Examining different perspectives, of staff members and outside experts, made the process iterative and continuously revised.
3. Response: How can we create a better practice to improve student achievement? First, one must answer what will each person do differently. There was a plan for focused interventions tailored to the needs of each student which demonstrated mastery and, or improvement of skills and knowledge. Especially perplexing was what to do about student apathy, or students who were well behaved and compliant but refused to work. Teachers would become interventionists, who planned and delivered instruction collaboratively and conducted regular formative assessments beyond the traditional classroom during intervention periods.
4. Analysis: How do we know we made a difference? Where do we go from here to continue improvement? The first measurement was improvement of students' academics and behavior. Direct observations, review of records, and student demonstrations were measured. Reducing apathy was measured by improved grades and compliance. The second measurement was process oriented toward staff collaboration. Daily and weekly meetings, as well as weekly training sessions, allowed for continuous reassessments.

Participatory action research examined teachers' positionality by four units of analysis: personal, professional, colleague, and global membership within the profession. Using a matrix analysis within action research, the four roles gave insight into the different motivations and expectancy of participants—both teachers and students—with an intersection with the five spokes of adaptive leadership: diagnosis, experimentation, honoring the past, multiple perspectives, and time to implement. The coding schema utilized a macrocoding schema: generating a matrix of summaries (in vivo, descriptive, and interpretative), answering how/what/why, and a constant comparison of divergences and discrepancies. The conceptual framework was used abductively to develop metamessages which were grouped as themes which were continually tested throughout the time of the action research. To complement the qualitative research, there was a comparison to efficacy of RtI within the school district adjoining the detention center. A quantitative analysis of test scores after the implementation of RtI

within the school district of the juvenile detention center was conducted with repeated measures ANOVA using JASP (JASP Team (2020). JASP (Version 0.14.1)[Computer software]).

Lennie's (2006) guidelines were followed to increase trustworthiness and credibility, with multiple data sources and methodologies and reviews of evaluations and results in an iterative fashion with participants. There was a check for dysfluency and disagreements to minimize bias. Yin (2017) directs case study research to systematically search for and consider disconfirmation as a means to generate multiple, plausible alternatives and theories. A narrative described key findings and themes using first person.

5. Sample and Setting

The author's school was the site of the action research project. There was an RtI program in place, but the school leader and teacher—the author—wanted to improve interventions and transform collaboration. The school was in the Midwest of the United States in a short-term juvenile detention center. As a short-term juvenile detention center, most students enrolled for approximately 25 school days with a ratio of four students to one teacher; the school operated on a block schedule, with individual tutoring the primary teaching method. Mostly all students were boys in high school with extensive histories of failure. Computer programs were used for electives and extra assistance. There were five teachers present: one had over 40 years of experience and an elementary teaching certificate; one had over 20 years of experience as a special education teacher; another had over 40 years of experience as an elementary teacher; a teacher with over 30 years of experience as a high school teacher; and the lead teacher with 20 years of experience in regular and special education, an adjunct professor, and researcher.

6. Results

With COVID-19, the plans to reinvent the RtI program were put off by over a year. The school had weekly training sessions and discussions, with the announcement the program would be implemented and "learn as you go." Like the reminder to the students, staff members were told there would be mistakes and missteps, and a continuous improvement cycle of planning, doing, studying, and acting meant the program might look different day to day or week to week. Everyone was encouraged to share work products, plan together, and directly observe each other.

As someone who teaches and consults with others on strategic leadership, many best practices were used. Besides training, staff members were disarmed to believe there would be mistakes and problems; the author frequently led first with his own failings and misunderstandings. There was no weekly professional learning community (PLC) schedule, so the weekly training sessions could target needs as they arose. Staff members were also instructed the author would help with any planning or delivery at any time. Non-confrontational approaches with students were emphasized, with each RtI session "planting the seed" and allowing for a follow up for students to accomplish the desired objectives.

To conduct an RtI program, teachers had to identify students in need. All students who entered underwent a comprehensive case study which included assessing behavior, reading, and mathematics with qualitative and quantitative measures. Inventories were implemented, to be reviewed weekly to determine student weaknesses. Staff members were instructed to be on the lookout for academic and behavioral problems from reviewing records daily.

Curricular planning, instructional delivery, and formative and summative assessments were the guidelines developed and issued, but the author reminded staff members that students' needs always dictated planning and delivery. To guide delivery, the author's instructional coaching framework was used: Distributed, Repetitive, Compare/Contrast, Higher-Ordered Thinking Skills, Interleave & Interactive, Goal Setting, and Graphical representation or DR. CHI^2GG as a checkup for implementing evidence-based instruction (Beauchamp & Kennewell, 2010; Cook et al., 2013; Gettinger et al., 1982; Kozlowski & Bell, 2006; Krug et al., 1990; Lin et al., 2013; Rau et al., 2015; Schunk, 1990; Taylor & Rohrer, 2010). As shown in Figure 2, staff were instructed to

follow the I-We-You format, with admonitions for variety to generate interest and the inclusion of high school level work, even if the students were very far behind. Some other methods were vocabulary instruction (SEA or synonyms, examples/nonexamples, and antonyms) and making learning active, such as simulations and skits. Teachers were told RtI was *never* students learning on their own but a teacher using direct instruction and monitoring results.

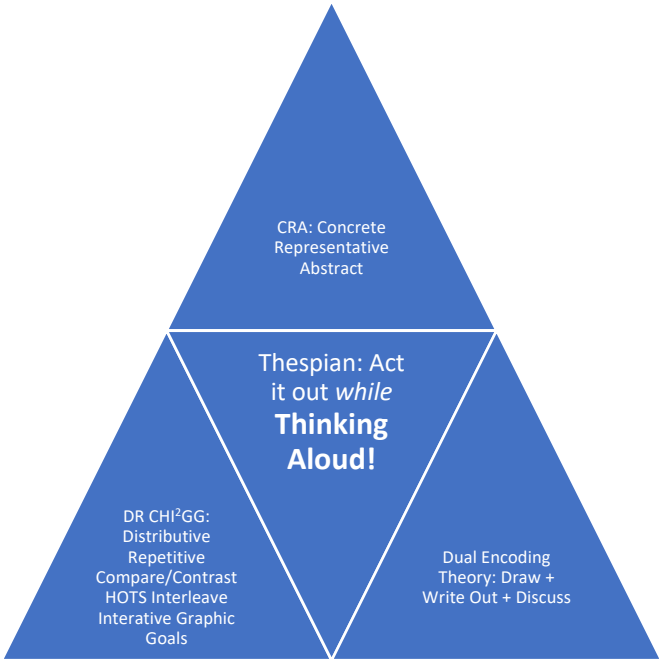

Figure 1: Instructional components of RtI.

The initial program included a checklist to ensure fidelity. There were directions and initial meetings to plan curriculum and instruction around reading and math interventions because most students lacked proficient reading skills (Coker, 2021). Inventories plus a qualitative analysis of student work suggested RtI curriculum and instruction for students. RtI could be used to either improve poor skills or an elaboration and expansion of students without difficulties. Staff members were advised to center activities around think alouds with rich discussions, writings, and graphical representations and a liberal use of interdisciplinary connections. Start off slow and build back better was the slogan. Focusing on essential skills and limiting vocabulary to manageable proportions were recommended. Concrete-Representational-Abstract (CRA) was formally taught to staff members for use in mathematics, as well as co-planning model lesson plans. Five themes emerged around instruction and strategic planning: lack of research-based instructional strategies, poor teacher preparation, fidelity and shortcuts, reflective ability, and strategic planning which led to an incorrect diagnosis.

Lack of research-based instructional strategies. One would assume with a staff where the junior member had 23-years of experience, with two members of the staff former principals, research-based instructional strategies would be a foregone conclusion. A variety of activities around the pyramid were proposed to include simulations and a gamification to increase interest. Staff members observed the author present lesson plans around writing constitutional amendments as a simulation and another finding the main idea, with acting out the lessons and modeling I-We-You. Initially, everything seemed fine, and the author assisted and monitored planning and execution. Soon, many problems ensued.

Teachers did not know evidence-based instructional strategies. First, there were lessons which only followed worksheets. Teachers were told to move beyond worksheets and use either a student's assigned work or higher-level work to teach the skills. One teacher immediately changed to all worksheets; matching, multiple choice, and fill-in-the-blank were the order of the day. Retrospectively, the teacher was known to use all worksheets all

the time—all her colleagues in regular school derided her as the "packet queen." CRA was also replaced with standard worksheets of fill-in-the-blank.

Not all teachers were so myopic. Under guidance, a teacher's reading about digestion was reformulated into a simulation of following a cheeseburger traveling through the alimentary canal. Another teacher who could not see how elementary math skills could be applied to high school was told to look at velocity problems in science. There was the reminder staff members should also try to build the second goal of students reading and acquiring high school-level skills and knowledge.

An anchor of read-write-discuss was added to build authentic learning. Teachers still clung to worksheets. Some examples show how poor the situation was when unsupervised. One student read the definition of skimming and scanning but never did the activity. Staff member struggled with the entire pyramid, and though the student was rated as reaching his goal for skimming and scanning, the first time he did it was with me, and he had little competence. The doing part could not be constructed beyond following a worksheet.

Authentic education was always problematic, but the many scenarios clarified the situation. Fake was not the word—contrived was. All the worksheets were clear cut and easy; the nouns and adjectives were always the same pattern, as well as main idea, inferences, and fractions, etc. Yet, natural work, from reading Shakespeare to a biology textbook to other stories meant the teacher had to authentically think aloud and figure out what was done. Teachers were scared and shocked, and they spent an inordinate amount of time finding worksheets where they knew the answers and could control the pace. Reading a worksheet about the vocabulary of how to find the main idea was easier. Teachers lacked evidence-based instructional practices and proceeded to teach the way they either had been taught or liked. When I was not present, many students stated they did not want to attend school because they felt the teachers did not help.

Two more problems were common: inappropriate work and enabling. Teachers picked remedial work most of the time, and even when they were instructed to pick high school-level work, they chose the instructional pages in the textbooks. Shanahan (2020) was taught as a guide to include a variety of reading levels, but teachers were uncomfortable teaching high school-level skills beyond surface knowledge. Cueing has little efficacy (Davis et al., 2021; Hempenstall, 2017), and in the current situation, it served as an example of enabling (for example, if a student did not know a word, teachers would act it out, like for a student who did not know the word recline, or another example in math started with "You know," and then pointing out what area looked like, etc.).

The problem of apathy was perplexing; students were well behaved, but many students completed little work. Some stated they never worked in school and passed no matter what, something which records confirmed. These same students then thought doing little—more than one had ever done before—should result in passing. Social promotion was probably a key factor, as students who missed sometimes 90% of school passed most classes and even graduated. Goal setting for completing work was conducted with each student struggling each period (with discussions and formally writing goals). There was positive progress for most students.

Lack of teacher preparation. If teachers thought talk alouds and acting out were impossible, the reason for all worksheets became clear: lack of teacher knowledge. Alternative schools in the state under study allowed any teaching certification to teach all subjects regardless of preparation. Planning took an inordinate amount of time because the teachers did not know the curriculum and lacked subject-matter proficiency. There was difficulty with breaking down skills into steps. How can one teach what one does not know? For example, inferences were a nebula when presented to students. Propaganda vocabulary was unknown by the teachers. An egregious example was a teacher presenting how to read timelines drew all the pictures and demonstrated four years to be twice as long as eight years and slightly longer than five years. She was extremely proud of the neat pictures, though the construction was clearly erroneous and included all the errors I warned her about before teaching the activity. Another teacher claimed impeachment *must* follow all rules of criminal law. Another teacher did not even attempt to explain independent and dependent variables, calling me to assist. Enabling was common unless watched closely—even the special education teacher wanted to read for poor readers and reduce requirements.

Reading strategies and how to teach vocabulary were nonexistent in the repertoire of the teaching staff beyond reading a worksheet.

Teachers rolled their eyes, outright did the opposite when no one was present, or stated they did not have the personality. The methods proposed were tested with colleagues in other buildings, and read-write-discuss and other methods were considered factors which could be easily implemented. Any excuse possible was proffered by worksheets and little authentic learning were necessities. Possibly staff members thought the students had no future and were not worth the time and effort; an alternative, supported by Flores and Barahona-López (2021), might be teachers see the same students return regularly, feel stressed from being in an environment which might be dangerous and chaotic, and little progress seems to be made. How could one not feel powerless and helpless? Even the examples of student excitement and requests for more assistance did not persuade teachers.

Fidelity and shortcuts. The student-to-teacher ratio was 4:1 or less. There was ample time to conduct all planning. Evidence was teachers either enabled or did most of the work assigned when not observed. There was little diagnosis or a qualitative review of student work, as probes were often wrong. Teachers would often plan the same activity for all students regardless of need. Instead of dynamic interventions—with staff members reminded students had tried death-by-worksheet as an approach for nine to ten years of schooling—staff members could not figure out how to read, write, and discuss without a worksheet. The problem of lack of vocabulary follows students throughout life (Beck et al., 2013), but teachers persisted in avoiding rich writings and discussions with graphical representations. Identifying new needs did not regularly happen *sua sponte*.

Reflective ability. The author teaches graduate students how to reflect, using coaching, modeling, and guidance to find problems, a gap, and develop an action plan (Coker, 2020b). Teachers did not show an inability—they showed an unwillingness. They all except one had reached a point where there was simply nothing new to learn or do. The most important aspect was teacher management, not student learning. Any recommendation or criticisms—the hallmark of effective feedback by considering multiple perspectives and alternatives—were considered a threat to the self, one's professional identity, and one's worksheet-centered view of education. Instead of collaborating, staff members lobbied others to resist. Covering the curriculum and getting the right answer were what mattered.

Strategic leadership. There would have been a qualitative literature review, but there were few systematic, national, or randomized control trials as evidence RtI and, or differentiated instruction produced a positive effect (Sparks, 2015). Another research question was added during the process: What were the strategic implications needed for success? Admittedly, the author who teaches strategic leadership at the graduate level and has worked on a myriad of strategic plans, was blindsided. Read-write-discuss sounded easy. Outside colleagues never identified any potential problem. Yet, the entire process almost capsized from teachers who resisted and worked to sabotage the entire process. There were three primary reasons: lack of belief in the process, lack of the author forecasting the change in one's sense of professionalism, and a failure to break down the process by individual need.

All schools in my district have school improvement plans (SIPs), like most every school in the nation. Like most every school in the nation, the SIPs were paper-only plans: There was no real purpose or work toward systematic improvement. As shown in Table 2 for eight diverse K-8 schools (student $N = 4700$) in my district for PARCC results from 2015-2018 using repeated measures ANOVA (Mauchly's test of sphericity ($\chi 2(2) = 8.55$, $p = 0.132$) was not significant), the SIPs and RtI were endeavors which *never* produced any meaningful change. There was a medium effect size, and a post hoc test using Holm correction revealed a significant drop in test scores between 2015 to 2016 and 2017. For a school district which used 30 minutes per day for RtI—8.33% instructional time and approximately 10% of staff salaries—no effects beyond all the promises of great articles, training sessions, and experts occurred. RtI produced no visible results. Indeed, some might claim a net negative. The yearly professional development plans also seemed to make no difference in student achievement. My teachers expected the results to be the activity.

Table 2: PARCC Test Results 2015-2018: Within Subjects Effects

Cases	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p	ω^2
RM Factor 1	212.750	3	70.917	4.619	0.011	0.037
Residuals	368.500	24	15.354			

Note. Type III Sum of Squares

Perhaps no greater failure in RtI existed than not identifying the change in teacher work from reformulating existing RtI practices. I have headed controversial decisions with little support, and yet none received the pushback of asking staff members to "just sit and do some work with students." Unlike all strategic plans in my district and the vast majority I run across, my staff members had to become someone different. Ask most any teachers about the goals in the school improvement plan, and not only does no one know them, no one does anything different. Any strategic plan which requires staff members to abandon past practices and adopt new ones needs a plan to acclimate and support changes. Sabotage, satisficing, and focusing on what the teacher wanted became common to ward off threats to self. There was a continuum, from no change to a total transformation, and as one moved toward transformation, one's sense of professionalism and possible self will be challenged and eroded. Inexperienced teachers would have been easier to deal with, and sadly, two teachers were better than three.

Some staff members were receptive. Hanlon's razor was applied to the problem: Never attribute to malice which you can incompetence. Starting small, one staff member was approached and mollified before moving on to another. Following the guidelines of Kamil et al. (2008), the process was reverse engineered to build competence and confidence by teaching and modeling concrete reading strategies to be used in all interventions. Starting small as a pilot, a teacher was asked to work with a student by asking "Who did what?," draw pictures with explanations during the I-We-Do, and write a title while sharing personal knowledge and inquiring about what a student liked, knew, or thought. Then the teacher, after sharing the results, was told the findings of Kamil et al. (2008) were the basis, and a thinking routine of a SMidGe was used (summarization, main idea, and graphical representation) while activating background knowledge. The think aloud was a huge success, and a similar activity with SMG was used with starting an IV (inferences and vocabulary) to improve the reading comprehension health: inferences by asking "Why/What next?" and "If so, then" and specific vocabulary techniques. The constructive conversations algorithm was also added as a process to make the change concrete (Zwiers et al., 2015). The PLCs happened at any time as true instructional coaching and support, and strategies and methods were operationalized into a concrete action. Staff members began to feel much more comfortable with the entire process.

Action research produced macrochanges within the school with three new mental maps: a.) Action research was recast as a spider web, with the entire process fractured and multidirectional at all times; b.) RtI served as a vehicle to implement and improve robust evidence-based teaching practices centered around creating value in student learning; c.) Strategic leadership became infused with action research, and as one breaks from the past and experiences role ambiguity and transformation, the personal effects became a centerpiece of all further deletions, changes, and adoptions of new programs. Building absorptive capacity which created new norms, values, and behaviors inherently created friction and must be considered from the angst experienced as plans changed one's definition of self as professional.

7. Discussion

The transformation of an RtI program in a short-term juvenile detention center proved to be difficult and gave insight into a multitude of problems, some of which were unexpected. Schools adopted RtI programs or some iteration for almost twenty years; even within the current study, RtI had been practiced and planned for about 15 years. A number of insights were gained: RtI lacks a coherent research base and fails to translate; poor teacher preparation both instructionally and within the content areas render many interventions useless; and strategic planning must consider adoptions of new programs which interfere with role stability as a main concern.

RtI programs failed to translate into valuable practices in most schools despite many small-scale studies claiming effectiveness (Gersten et al., 2017; Smale-Jacobse et al., 2019). The claims were far flung, especially with small samples and singular programs, but National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores not only failed to show improvements, but growth also slowed (Ferguson, 2020). Another downside was the fundamental nature of learning disabilities changed, with students with difficulties dumped into the label (Kranzler et al., 2020). At a national, state, and local level, RtI programs failed to replicate, with most schools not seeing positive results.

Schmoker (2010) lamented differentiated instruction proved unworkable and resulted in students no longer learning a common curriculum. As found in the current study, providing and delivering a rigorous, relevant curriculum with adequate support can alter the trajectory of school performance (Goodwin, 2000). Lack of student engagement should be reimagined to increase student interactivity and achievement (Chi & Wylie, 2014). Most RtI studies cling to what people liked (e.g., Thomas et al., 2020) as the measure of student success, as value-added improvements remained elusive. What Works Clearinghouse and others failed to demonstrate randomized-controlled trials or longitudinal data despite two decades of implementation,

Within the current study, which could be extrapolated to other research, findings showed lack of evidence-based research teaching strategies and poor content preparation. Teachers often teach the way they like to learn and which was the easiest to implement, despite Hattie (2012) and Marzano (2007) regurgitating highly effective, low-cost methods to improve student achievement: specific goals and objectives, direct instruction, and frequent checks for understanding, etc. Teacher preparation in the content area also improves student learning (e.g., Bastian & Janda, 2018; Clotfelter et al., 2007), but teachers in many states, such as the current study, can teach any subject within an alternative school setting. Lack of knowledge meant many teachers were stuck at a superficial level, were clearly erroneous in concepts, and often glossed over topics because they did not know enough to teach the subject matter. There was a glaring discrepancy which suggested advanced education degrees often did not posit an instructional advantage which translated into improved student achievement (Badgett et al., 2014). One could add another caveat to the action research study from the repeated measures ANOVA findings and other studies: Professional development was neither professional nor development.

Action research should include strategic planning as a formal mechanism when there was the expectation of a change in one's role. Read, write, and discuss. Follow DR CHI^{2}GG. Use SMG and IV. Yet, the resistance was of epic proportions, and there was a failure to anticipate noncompliance and sabotage. Heifetz et al. (2009) stated honoring the past while developing new processes must be considered; when there were changes, the change created role ambiguity, which led some to become protectionistic over one's sense of self. There was little concern for one's effectiveness or lack thereof, and students were ignored. Strategic planning must include training and support, with the admonition of piecemeal implementation and winning confederates over as early adopters.

A failure to anticipate problems resulted from an incorrect diagnosis assuming teachers would want to improve their teaching and their students' learning. A number of fixes could avoid problems in the future. First, improved communication and distributed leadership can develop understanding and ownership throughout the process (Pitelis & Wagner, 2019). Secondly, instead of getting bogged down in the political, resistance should be incorporated into strategic action research with a focus on positive outcomes (Delprino, 2013). Thirdly, as Mintzberg (1994) stated a long time ago, strategic planning cannot adequately expect obstacles and downsides, as many leaders focus solely on the subject. Strategic action research changed the focus from the subject (RtI) to a focus on the subject and the vehicle (the personnel implementing the plan). A lack of push down and push up of planning was a failure of leadership.

8. Limitations

A strength of action research was also a limitation: An iterative process, grounded in the minute-by-minute, day-by-day implementation, rarely saw one variable changed. The results meant sometimes false causations and attributions could be common, regardless of success of the initiative. Another limitation was social desirability: Members were aware of acting appropriately and professionally within interviews and conversations, so there

might be other reasons or concerns which were hidden. Lastly, all action research suffers from a generalizability problem, as the bounded study might neither replicate nor be reproducible.

9. Conclusion

"While the advantage was not statistically significant, the researcher felt that results of this study supported the effectiveness of a Response to Intervention program" (Hite & McGahey, 2015, pp. 39). NAEP scores have not shown RtI to have a positive effect (Borders, 2019) in the face of almost universal adoption. RtI lacks evidence when translated at the school and classroom level, leading researchers to make claims of effectiveness despite the lack of visible, value-added results. Savage and Ellis (2019) reported differences in academic achievement between violent and nonviolent offenders when controlling for other variables, making the case for targeted interventions. Students in juvenile detention centers experience a multitude of problems which create a cascade of failure throughout the entire system, but applying RtI and differentiated instruction have not produced the desired results.

Recasting RtI as a means to focus PLC meetings on lesson studies, specific student needs, and reflection-in-action moves beyond a one-dimensional aspect of intervention for struggling students. Students with academic and behavioral problems benefit from systematic, direct instruction (Mather et al., 2001), but teachers have for decades, like the current study, lacked the prerequisite skills and attitudes. Collaboration within a safe environment could alter the landscape, but there must be active leadership focused on the goals as well as the support for the personnel to accomplish them (Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 2011). Maintenance, or combatting entropy of the system with continuous refinement of operations, must be a vigilant practice with any change initiative.

Schmoker (2019) suggested fads and novel solutions were not the answer to what ails schools, and a sound curriculum with reading, discussion, and writing at the center were evidence-based ways to improve teaching and learning. Yet, schools continue to be plagued by activities which promise little, such as group work, worksheets, and other banal activities. Strategic action research, using HIRA, a matrix, and the formal inclusion of strategic planning which considers threats to the self and sense of professionalism, could strengthen PLCs and professional development around the praxis of instruction and student learning. Action research can be cathartic as well as a systematic way to reflect-in-action where professional development becomes a journey and not a destination.

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