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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT TEAMS

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CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: A MULTIPLE CASE
STUDY OF INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT TEAMS

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ABSTRACT

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: A MULTIPLE CASE
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The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand how culturally responsive actions, behaviors and practices of school building leaders, teachers and support staff during the Instructional Support Team (IST) process impact equitable outcomes for all students within the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) process. The participants of the study are the members of two Instructional Support Teams (IST); one elementary team and the other a middle school team. Data was collected through interviews, collected documents, and audio-visual materials. There is little guidance on how to address equitable outcomes of the Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) process and a lack of research focused on culturally responsive actions and behaviors of the Instructional Support Team (IST). The current study provides insight into how culturally responsive practices of IST members impact equitable outcomes for students.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and friends that have supported me throughout this entire process. To my husband Mark, who had to listen to all of the online course work during the pandemic and put up with my unavailability at times. I appreciate your love and support and selfless pride in this accomplishment. To my children, Alex and Julia, thank you for dealing with my emergency computer questions and I hope you always remember that you can accomplish anything you want in life. I love you both more than you will ever know. To my parents, thank you for your pride, encouragement and for being great role models. I love you all.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

For more than 65 years, the United States has addressed the importance of equitable education through court cases and legislature. From Brown vs. The Board of Education in 1954, to the No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, the need to establish equitable opportunities for all students has been apparent. NCLB intended to reduce the wide disproportionality in educational outcomes for students based on socio-economic status and race (Krownapple, 2017). Part of No Child Left Behind was to establish standards and track the growth and progress of students in the areas of literacy and mathematics. As significant achievement gaps continued to exist, No Child Left Behind was expanded upon with Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), by President Obama in 2015 (Krownapple, 2017). ESSA incorporated goals to support disadvantaged students, monitor low-performing schools and require schools to teach with high expectations for all students (Krownapple, 2017). Adopting legislature with provisions for all schools to teach with high standards is a positive attempt for equitable outcomes and has led to some improvements. However, legislature alone cannot bring about the necessary change needed for all students to obtain those equitable outcomes.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) uses national data from educational resources to develop a federally mandated report titled The Report of Education. The most recent 2021 report breaks down the demographics of the 50.7 million students enrolled in public education in the United States (Report on Condition of Education, 2021). Of the 50.7 million public school students, 23.8 were White. This indicates that approximately 54 percent of public-school students in the U.S. according to

the latest Condition of Education report represent diverse populations. The breakdown of the report indicates 7.7 million students as Black, 2.7 million students Asian, 13.8 million students Hispanic, .5 million students American Indian/Alaska Native, 2.1 million multi-racial students, and 186,00 students of Pacific Islander decent (Report on Condition of Education, 2021). These statistics demonstrate a need to address the growing diversity among our students.

Culturally and linguistically diverse students make up a disproportionate representation of special education population (Klinger; Edwards 2006). The Response to Intervention (RTI) program has been shown to support culturally, and linguistically diverse students and has developed and gained momentum since 2004 (Klinger & Edwards, 2006).

Response to Intervention, is a multi-tiered system of supports developed to provide interventions for students at risk of failing in school (Fuchs & Fuchs,2006). Interest in RTI developed as dissatisfaction grew with the methods available to identify students with learning disabilities (Wright, 2007). RTI started to gain recognition in 2004, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act was revised and signed by President Bush (Fuch,D., & Fuchs, l.S. 2006). Through the IDEIA Act of 2004, the United States government provided new regulations for determining if a student required special education services. Instead of utilizing the IQ-assessment and discrepancy model, the IDEIA Act had new requirements. Data collection from progress monitoring along with demonstration that a student was provided with instruction in an appropriate setting with qualified teachers would be needed to determine if a student qualified for special education (Wright, 2007). Through early intervention and progress

monitoring, RTI offered possibilities for addressing the disproportionality of culturally diverse students referred to special education (Montalvo, et. al, 2014).

In 2015, a shift from RTI to a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) began in several states across the U.S. This shift came from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and the need to include both academic and behavioral supports under one framework (Bailey, 2019). By 2019 more than 50% of the U.S. state education departments shifted their terminology to MTSS. With this shift to MTSS, the opportunity to change the perception of RTI from a prevention model for academics to a prevention framework that includes behavioral and social and emotional learning for all students emerged. Many states used this opportunity to develop a more comprehensive framework to include academic and behavior interventions (Bailey, 2019). Incorporating behavior as part of the system of supports, provides opportunities to address the whole child and to take into consideration the socio-cultural influences that impact students (Montalvo et. al., 2014). Often, the research refers to RTI and MTSS interchangeably, however, in the current study, the researcher will refer to MTSS as the prevention model.

There are several different models of the MTSS process. All models utilize a universal screener to assess students throughout the school year. Each model requires continued progress monitoring to determine if students are meeting the standards or need additional interventions for success. The progress monitoring is what drives instruction at different tiers within the model. Some MTSS models have three tiers and others have four. The first tier of the three- tiered model begins in the general education classroom where all students receive high quality instruction that is delivered utilizing research-based reading and math programs (Shapiro, 2022). Students that require additional

support receive supplemental instruction at Tier 2. Tier 2 instruction is delivered in small groups with a specialist and is typically for students that are falling below the grade level expectations and at potential risk of failure. Tier 3 is for students not responding to the instructional support they are receiving in Tier 2 (Shapiro, 2002). In some MTSS models, Tier 3 is considered special education. In other models, Tier 3 is more intensive instruction than Tier 2, but is not necessarily special education (Shapiro, 2002).

An important component of the MTSS process is the Instructional Support Team often referred to as IST. It is essential for the fidelity of the MTSS framework to have a team in place to evaluate appropriate interventions to support struggling students. Instructional support teams generally consist of classroom teachers, building administrators, and support staff. Support staff may include school psychologists, social workers, speech and language specialists, occupational therapists, reading support staff, math support staff, behaviorists, or any other school staff member that can support the student and the decision-making process. The members of the team may rotate, but function best when they have a have a clear process established and meet on a regular basis (Bailey et. al., 2020). The MTSS team uses a problem-solving approach to make decisions based on data from screening tools, progress monitoring and the results of established interventions (Metcalf, 2020). Members of the Instructional Support Team discuss students that are having difficulties reaching their potential in one or more area of concern. Through meeting discussions, the team addresses the needs of the student, potential reasons for concern and what interventions and accommodations can be put into place to support the students. The team meets again to analyze if the results of the interventions (Metcalf, 2020).

The steps of a problem-solving team (IST) can start with a chosen facilitator introducing the team members, their assigned roles, presenting the purpose of the meeting and the structure of the meeting. The second step would be a teacher of record presenting details about a student of concern including their strengths and interests.(Wright, 2022). Step three of an IST would be for the team to review data that were collected prior to the meeting such as universal screener data, reading levels, attendance records, behavioral data and any other information to understand the problem being addressed for the student. The fourth step of the IST would be to set outcome and intervention goals for the student of concern and to determine how the data would be collected and monitored. During this fifth step the team would work together put a plan in place to support the student. The plan would include the intervention strategies that would be used, who will collect the data and for how long the data will be collected and when to schedule the next meeting if necessary. (Wright, 2022).   Ultimately the decisions of the IST have an impact on the outcomes for students. If the IST is to meet the needs of all students, they must problem-solve with the diversity of the student in mind (Newall, 2017). Culturally responsive problem solving incorporates strategies into the discussion that reflect the cultural attitudes and beliefs of the team members (Newall, 2017). Culturally responsive decision making during the IST process can provide more equitable outcomes for students of color, students that are economically disadvantaged, English Language Learners, as well as students with IEP's (Newall, 2017).

The current study will focus on the cultural components of the IST process, and the importance of addressing cultural challenges such as policies, practices and beliefs that contribute to stereotypes of students' intellectual abilities (Ahram, et. al, 2022). Cultural

challenges are the personal beliefs of administrators, teachers and staff members, as well as practices and policies that contribute to stereotypical perceptions of students' ability to achieve (Ahram et al., 2022). Gay (2000) defines culturally responsive teaching as using students' cultural knowledge, backgrounds, learning styles, experiences, and frames of reference to make learning relevant. Implementing culturally responsive practices that are research-based support the specific needs of students with diverse backgrounds and reduce achievement gaps (Bui, Y.N., Fagan Y.M. 2013). Examples of culturally responsive instructional practices could include supporting teachers in looking at curriculum and instructional materials to determine effectiveness for culturally diverse students (Montalvo, 2014). Asking questions to determine the source of difficulty for a student and discussing corrective actions can guide teachers to look at areas such as preferred learning styles and cultural and linguistic proficiencies of their students (Montalvo, 2014). In 2018, the New York State Education Department, New York State Board of Regents, and experts in the field of education developed a framework for culturally responsive- sustaining education (NYSED, 2018). The framework, grounded in four principles was intended to promote policies to educate all students equitably. The Culturally Responsive Sustaining Framework was designed to help determine best practices to promote positive outcomes for students (NYSED, 2018). The four principles of the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Framework are: (1) Welcoming and affirming environment; (2) High expectations and rigorous instruction; (3) Inclusive curriculum and assessment; and (4) Ongoing professional learning (NYSED, 2018).

Instructional Support Teams could provide equitable outcomes for students if they worked together to problem-solve within the diverse cultural context of their school

environment (Newall, 2017). It is important for each member of the problem-solving team to reflect on their individual cultural beliefs and how those beliefs impact their views of their students (Newall, 2017). Once individuals are aware of their own values and cultural beliefs within the problem-solving process, they can be aware of how it impacts identifying problems and developing solutions (Newall, 2017). Bringing team members' cultural beliefs into the IST discussion can have a positive influence on student outcomes through awareness of how culture plays a role in how students respond to classroom management and teaching styles (Newall, 2017).

Cobb and Krownapple, (2019) define equity in education as the development of policies and the carrying out of practices that ensure outcomes are not predictable by stereotypes or demographics. For education to be equitable, each student should be provided with what they need to be successful, have a sense of belonging, and have responsive teachers and building leaders that are culturally responsive (MCart, A. & Miller, D. 2020). Within the structure of the MTSS process, students at risk of failure are to receive interventions to support their learning challenges.

The Instructional Support Team (IST) members collaborate to determine interventions that are appropriate for students at risk. The culturally responsive actions and behaviors of IST members have an impact on equitable student outcomes. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (2021) describes years of inequities in education for students with disabilities, low socio-economic status, and students of color. Previous research has emphasized the importance of incorporating culturally responsive practices within the MTSS process where students' cultural backgrounds and experiences are connected to the academic skills they need to master (Montalvo et. al., 2014).

However, there is little research linking culturally responsive actions and behaviors of the MTSS Instructional Support Team to equitable outcomes for students.

Earlier studies have shown that culturally responsive teaching had positive impacts on student engagement, reading comprehension, student grit, attendance rates, and an overall intrinsic interest in school (Muniz, J. 2020). However, there is little research linking culturally responsive actions and behaviors of the Multi System of Supports IST team to equitable outcomes for students. A qualitative multiple case study will provide insight into the culturally responsive actions and behaviors utilized during the Instructional Support Team meetings (Creswell, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study will be to understand how culturally responsive actions, practices, and behaviors of school building leaders, teachers, and support staff during the IST process impact equitable outcomes for all students within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). This multiple case study examined the interactions of two Instructional Support Teams from two different schools, to explore how they make decisions to support all students. Case one is an elementary school Instructional Support Team (IST) and case 2 is a middle school Instructional Support Teams (IST), each part of the same school district. The selection of an elementary school and middle school will provide stronger analytical conclusions to support students in both elementary and secondary educational environments within the same school district (Yin, 2009). The central phenomenon of the study will be to understand how the cultural responsiveness of a community of practice, specifically the IST, impacts equitable outcomes for students. At this stage in the research, the actions,

practices and behaviors of the school leaders, teachers and support staff will be described as those of the members of the IST. The IST can be defined as the decision-making team within the MTSS process.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Theoretical Framework

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's theory of communities of practice will be used as a theoretical framework for the current study (Smith, 2003). The work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger developed the Community of Practice framework from a social learning model they developed called Situated Learning. The model of Situated Learning suggests that learning is not independent but is a social process that takes place when engaged in a community of practice (Smith, 2003). Communities of Practice theory is a social learning theory and can be defined as a group of people with a shared concern working together to create a better situation (Wenger, 2015). Through Wenger's framework of communities of practice, communities are defined by members having mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise (Brouwer et. al, 2011). The IST can be considered a community of practice as it is a group of educator's working together to support students. The members have a mutual interest and are connected through this community. The shared repertoire involves the shared language, concepts, and routines and have an impact on the teams' perspectives (Brouwer et. al, 2011). The joint enterprise is the teams understanding of the purpose and accountability of their community (Brouwer et al., 2011).

Culturally responsive practices of a team can maximize learning opportunities for every student (Newall, 2017). In 2018 New York State adopted a framework titled a

Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education. This Culturally Responsive-Sustaining framework, referred to as CR-S was developed to support all educators in developing and implementing policies and practices to provide all students with educational equity (NYSED, 2018). CR-S was also developed to provide appropriate support and services for students' success (NYSED, 2018). The framework is grounded in the following four principles: welcoming and affirming environment, high expectations and rigorous instruction, inclusive curriculum and assessment, and ongoing professional learning (NYSED, 2018). Utilizing this framework within a community of practice would support culturally responsive practices in a school environment. The members of the IST may have varying cultural identities and have cultural differences that impact their perceptions and beliefs. Becoming of aware of these cultural beliefs and how they impact educational outcomes is important for the decision-making process of the IST (Newall, 2020). Awareness of one's cultural beliefs increases cultural competence. Culturally responsive problem solving within the Instructional Support Team includes awareness of the cultural attitudes and beliefs of the team members (Newall, 2020). The NYSED's CR-S framework can be used as a guide to determine the culturally responsive practices of the IST members and how they impact outcomes for students.

Conceptual Framework

Guiding the current research study will be Wenger's Social Learning Theory of Communities of Practice. This applies to the actions and behaviors of the members of the instructional support team (IST). Members of IST are a community of practice with the responsibility to analyze data and make decisions to support students that are struggling in school. The teams' actions, practices and behaviors, impact the outcomes for students.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Demonstrating the Theoretical Concepts in the Study
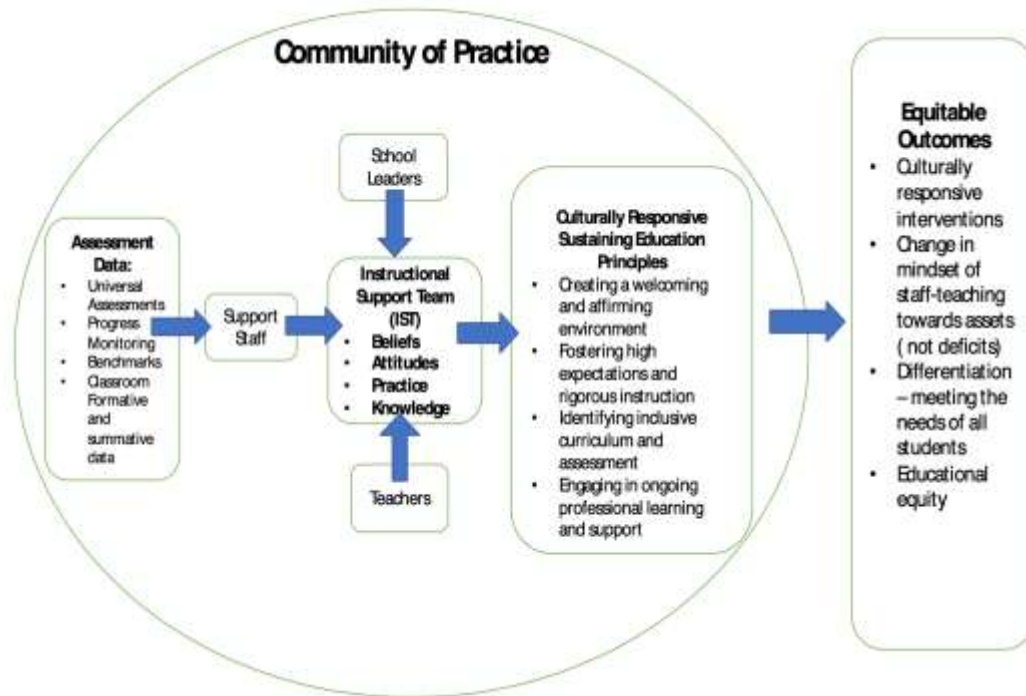
Culturally responsive problem-solving is way to guide the discussion of the team members as they work collaboratively to determine equitable outcomes for students (Newall, 2020). Using the NYSED Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education Framework (CR-S), can guide the discussion and decision making of the IST. Utilizing the four principles of the CR-S; a welcoming and affirming environment, high expectations and rigorous instruction, inclusive curriculum and assessment, and ongoing professional learning can support the IST goal of equitable outcomes for all students (NYSED, 2018).

Understanding how cultural responsiveness within a community of practice of the IST members is demonstrated in Figure 1. The members of the IST, teachers, support staff and building leaders utilize data to problem solve. At the IST, the universal assessments, progress-monitoring data, classroom formative and summative assessments are analyzed. The beliefs, attitudes, practices and knowledge of the IST members impact the problem-solving discussions impacting decisions for student outcomes. As a guide for culturally responsive problem-solving, IST can utilize the NYSED CR-S Framework principles as a guide. Culturally responsive beliefs, attitudes, practices and knowledge of the IST can have a positive outcome for students.

There is a lack of literature on the cultural responsiveness of communities of practice and how it connects to the work of an Instructional Support Team (IST). Insight is required to better understand the practices of the IST and how cultural responsiveness impacts equitable outcomes for students. The Social Learning Theory of Communities of Practice combined with culturally responsive practices can be effective in reducing disproportionate outcomes for students.

Significance of the Study

Equity in education has been a National Education goal since 2002 when the No Child Left Behind act was established to reduce disproportionate outcomes for students based on race and socioeconomic status (Krownapple, 2017). Patterns of disproportionality of students in special education have been consistent for the past 40 years (Hosp, 2021). For the past 25 years, MTSS has been considered a way to address disproportionate placement of students in special education programs (Hosp, 2021). The process of MTSS varies among schools and school districts, however a goal of any

MTSS model is to improve outcomes for all students through the decision-making process of the instructional support team (IST) (Metcalf, 2021).

There is little guidance and research on how to address inequitable outcomes and disproportionate outcomes of the MTSS process (Hosp, 2021). Research has shown that many MTSS teams are not set up to support all students by using data, research-based interventions, preventive measures, and culturally responsive decision making. (Morales-James, 2021). The acknowledgement of culture and its' impact on learning is missing from most schools' frameworks of MTSS (Morales-James, 2021). New York State developed the CR-S framework with the goal to help educators implement a culturally responsive and sustaining student-centered learning environment (NYSED, 2018). There is a lack of research focused on culturally responsive practices within the IST. Using the four principles of New York States CR-S Framework as a guide, this multiple case study can identify culturally responsive actions and behaviors of the IST. The current study will provide insight into how culturally responsive actions and behaviors of the IST members impact equitable outcomes for all students.

Connections With Social Justice

The role of the IST members has an impact on equitable outcomes for students. Developing culturally responsive practices as part of the practice of an IST will help to guide and influence the practices of classroom teachers as they implement interventions and accommodations for their students. Implementing culturally responsive practices within the IST can help to shift the mindset of how to align interventions and instruction to meet the needs of all students. Implementing the NYSED CR-S framework principles

into communities of practice, such as the IST can help to instill cultural awareness into all educational initiatives.

Research Questions

Central Question

How do culturally responsive actions, behaviors, and practices of school building leaders, teachers, and support staff during the IST process impact equitable outcomes for all students?

Research Sub Question 1

What are the actions, practices, and behaviors of IST members?

Research Sub Question 2

How does the IST function as a community of practice?

Research Sub Question 3

What are the equitable outcomes of the IST process?

Definition of Terms

There are several key terms that will be utilized throughout this research.

Attitudes

Notions of student success based on assets or deficits related to disabilities, cultural background, socio-economic status, gender, or family circumstances (Ahram, 2022).

Beliefs

The perceptions of educators regarding the intellectual abilities and capabilities of their students based on diversity, disability, family backgrounds, language, and socio-economic status (Ahram, 2022).

Community of Practice

A community of practice is defined as groups of people that share a concern and engage in a collective process and utilize a shared repertoire of resources for their practice (Wenger-Traynor, 2015).

Culturally Responsive Practices

An approach to teaching and leadership that considers, recognizes, and values students' cultural backgrounds and utilizes them as an asset to inform teaching and school experiences (Wisconsin RTI Center, 2017)

Disproportionality

A smaller or larger number of students from a specific background receiving special education services or behavioral consequences than the overall population of that background (Rtinetwork.org, 2022).

Educational Equity

A school environment where all students have access to the educational resources that they need despite their race, gender, family background, or socio-economic status (Wisconsin RTI Center, 2017).

Instructional Support Team (IST)

Team of school level educators responsible for problem-solving, decision-making and data analysis for students (rtinetwork.org, 2022). The team is usually comprised of school administrator, school psychologist, social worker, teacher, and other support staff.

Knowledge

Acknowledging and recognizing that culture is an important component to learning and shaping the thinking process of individuals (Ahram, 2022). Understanding

the MTSS process and how to implement research -based interventions, collect and analyze data, and support all students.

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

A schoolwide framework utilizing data-based problem solving to support the academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs of all students. This framework incorporates the use of interventions for all students at various tiers of intensity based on need (nyrti.org, 2022).

Practice

Applying and utilizing research-based interventions to support all students. Using progress monitoring to collect and analyze data to demonstrate areas of struggle for students at risk. The ability to embrace culture as an asset for students and incorporate knowledge about each student into teaching (Ahram, 2022).

Progress Monitoring

A research-based practice used to assess students' academic performance and effectiveness of instruction for that student. (rtinetwork.org, 2022). Within MTSS, students' progress is monitored with a research-based intervention to determine if the intervention is supporting the student in the area of need.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The previous chapter provided an introduction and the research questions which will guide this study. The current researcher investigates the beliefs, attitudes, actions and knowledge of an elementary and middle school instructional support team (IST) to explore how they make decisions to support all students. The purpose of the study will be to understand how culturally responsive actions and behaviors of school building leaders, teachers and support staff during the IST process impact equitable outcomes for students. The research will examine cultural responsiveness within a community of practice through the IST process and the impacts on outcomes for students.

Chapter two will provide an understanding of the theoretical framework and introduce the reader to a review of the related literature. The chapter closes with a statement of how the current study contributes to culturally responsive communities of practice and equitable educational outcomes for students.

Theoretical Framework

Community of Practice Theory

The current research proposes that culturally responsive actions and behaviors within a community of practice can have equitable outcomes for students. In 1998, Etienne Wenger defined Community of Practice as a group having mutual engagement, shared repertoire and joint enterprise (Brouwer 2011). The theory of Community of Practice comes from social learning theories and the concept that learning is social and comes from the participation in life activities (Infed, 2021). The work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger came together as a model of learning that involved the participation in a "community of practice" (Infed.org, 2021). Lave and Wenger describe communities of

practice to be a meeting where groups of people with a common concern collaboratively

construct, transform, and negotiate meanings of practice (Brouwer, 2011). Their work

guided some significant impacts within organizations and more recently within the school

setting (Infed.org, 2021). Wenger describes and defines the community of practice to

have three dimensions: The mutual engagement is how the members function together,

joint enterprise being what the community of practice is about and understood by the

members, and the shared repertoire developed by the members collaboratively over time

(Infed.org, 2021).

The Instructional Support Team within the MTSS process is the problem-solving

team in place to support students in need. As a community of practice, the members of a

team share a concern, interact on an ongoing basis, and work together to solve problems

(Wenger, McDermott, Snyder, 2002). The IST is ultimately in place for the members to

work collaboratively and make decisions that improve student performance (Newall,

2018). Wengner and Traynor describe three characteristics necessary for there to be a

community of practice. Those characteristics are the domain, community, and the

practice (EB- Wenger-Traynor, 20150. The domain in the community of practice is

identified by shared interests and commitment among the members. (EB -Wenger-

Traynor, 2015). IST members have a shared interest and commitment in supporting the

students discussed at the problem-solving meetings. Community is the meeting of sharing

information, expertise and discussion to support the common interest (EB-Wegner-

Traynor, 2015). The problem-solving team (IST) is made up of building leaders, teachers

and support staff that have a variety of expertise and knowledge to support the students

up for discussion. When the team comes together to discuss students, they are sharing

their knowledge and working together to problem-solve and determine appropriate interventions for students in need. Wegner and Traynor, 2015, describe practice as being a developed shared repertoire of resources that support the needs of the community. The IST discussions revolve around the problem-solving strategies to support students. Community of Practice Theory suggests that the development of shared practice takes time to develop through the experiences of the members (Wegner, Traynor, 2025).

School environments have many communities of practice. To increase collaboration between teachers, scholars have researched promoting teacher communities in schools (Brouwer et. al., 2011). A study by Bolam et al. (2005) found that teachers were more collaborative when they worked as a part of a community of practice (Brouwer et. Al., 2011).

A component of Lave and Wenger's Community of Practice Theory is the (LPP) Legitimate Peripheral Participation which describes the level of participation among the community members and the impact on the community. The relationships between long-standing members of the community of practice and new members are important components of the theory (Flores, 2007). Different perspectives within the community of practice can help develop one's own level of understanding (Flores, 2007). Lave and Wenger's theory of LPP imply that there can be tension in the relationships of new member and veteran members of communities of practice. In 2002, Wenger and colleagues identified expertise and distributed knowledge as successful elements of communities of practice (Flores, 2007).

Members of the IST work collaboratively while sharing their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and practices to provide equitable outcomes for students. Communities of

practice, specifically IST, consider contributions of the members to problem solve and make decisions for the success of students (Flores, 2007). Contributing members of the IST's actions and behaviors are shaped by their personal experiences, beliefs, knowledge and backgrounds. This study will look at how culturally responsive practices within a Community of Practice impacts the problem-solving decision making of an IST.

Review of Related Literature

The following review of related literature is divided into six sections: Instructional Support Teams/Problem-Solving Teams, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Culturally Responsive Leadership, Community of Practice, Culturally Responsive Practices, and Pre-Service Programs. Each section provides an analysis of research studies, and a detailed review of the research and how it relates to the current research. The conclusion states how the current research study will add to the existing research and knowledge base of culturally responsive communities of practice, specifically the IST.

Instructional Support Teams/Problem Solving-Teams

An analysis of team-based problem solving was conducted by Horner et. al, 2018 to determine the impacts of implementing the problem-solving model Team-Initiated Problem Solving (TIPS). The researchers were interested in studying the effects of professional development of TIPS for existing problem-solving teams, looking at team implementation of solutions and the impact on student outcomes (Horner et. al., 2018). To conduct this randomized, controlled study, the researchers worked with 38 elementary support teams all participating in PBIS for at least one year from North Carolina and Oregon. Additional criteria for each participating team were the use of the School-Wide

Information System for reporting student behavior and had a PBIS team that met at least monthly. To participate in the 2.5-year study, the teams were randomly assigned to either the Immediate (IM) and Waitlist (WL) school teams.

Researchers observed teams that met monthly to review student data and identify both academic and social issues (Horner et. al. 2018). Teams in the IM group participated in extensive professional development on use of TIPS including meeting foundations, including roles and responsibilities of the team members, formats, documentation and processes to identify student issues (Horner, et. al., 2018). Data were collected at the team meeting through observations using the Decision Observation, Recording, and Analysis-II (DORA-II). The data was collected by two independent observers and analyzed through In Vivo. The researchers found that the TIPS professional development provided beneficial results in running effective and efficient problem-solving meetings (Horner, et. al, 2018). In addition, after implementation of the TIPs professional development, there were statistically significant increase in the team's ability to identify a goal, implement and identify solutions, and assess the fidelity of the solutions (Horner, et. al, 2018). The participants also indicated that continued professional development would be beneficial for the problem-solving teams.

Horner's, 2018 study connects to the current research by examining the efficiency and effectiveness of the problem-solving teams for student outcomes. Horner's 2018 study demonstrates the importance of training and professional development for the fidelity of school based problem-solving teams. However, this study did not address how culturally responsive practices of the team member may add to equitable outcomes for students.

A qualitative study by Meyer and Behar-Horenstein, (2015) sought to understand the impact of teacher team perspectives regarding the implementation of RTI. Through focus groups and interviews of teacher team members, the researchers sought to determine how RTI affects teacher learning, type of new practices are required of teachers during implementation, and how district and school leadership can support teacher team problem solving (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). Six first grade teachers from a Title I school, in a rural southeastern town, volunteered to participate in the study. The first-grade team was made up of five female and one male teacher with an average of 5.3 years of teaching experience. All the teachers had ESOL training and completed the two-hour district mandated RTI online training (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015).

Data were gathered through three focus group interviews, two observations, an interview with the school principal and a review of field notes, memos and RTI artifacts. Data was analyzed by "open-coding" and coding using In Vivo and information was categorized into themes (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). The researcher found that teachers became more collaborative with analyzing their data once RTI was implemented in their school. However, the data also revealed that teachers were lacking in their knowledge on how to analyze data and experienced frustration with the time needed to implement strategies they discuss (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). Data revealed that teachers were concerned with their lack of knowledge of "research-based" interventions, lack of administrative support and directives, and lack of professional development (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015). Teachers wanted more resources such as flowcharts, guides on the decision-making process, and lists of research-based intervention. Implementation of RTI and the team decision making process encouraged teachers to

collaborate and work as a team to problem-solve and motivated the teachers to learn more about the process. The study confirmed prior research on the importance of professional development, specifically the need for training on implementing research-based interventions (Meyer& Behar-Horenstein, 2015). The findings of this study also confirm the need for strong administrative leadership and involvement in the process. This study found that teachers are receptive and desire more direction and coaching from administration as well as invite on-going discussion with administration about students.

This study connects to the current research by reiterating the importance of the appropriate training for effective problem-solving of school-based problem-solving teams. The researchers cited that team problem-solving may suffer if goals and structures of the team were not developed (Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015).

Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and Equity

Avant (2016) explored the potential of using the process of Response to Intervention and/or a Multi-Tiered System of Support to encourage social justice in schools. Response to Intervention, as well as a Multi-Tiered System of Support is a schoolwide early intervention process designed to improve outcomes of students. As the diversity of the general education population increases, this study acknowledged the need for teaching staff to become knowledgeable on how to encourage and teach social justice within the Response to Intervention process. The purpose of the study was to understand how implementing an RTI process can support social justice in today's classrooms.

A sample of 772 social workers were asked to participate in this study. The sample were all members of the Illinois Association of School Social Workers and represent various universities in the state of Illinois. All 772 members received and

emailed letter with a description of the study and an invitation to participate. In addition to the description, the letter contained a link to a survey that was developed using the Survey Monkey platform. After three weeks, a reminder email was sent out regarding participation in the study. Of the 772 members, 313 responded to the survey and 192 participants fully completed the survey for a 25% response rate. The survey consisted of multiple choice and open questions.

Survey Monkey utilized descriptive statistics to compute percentages for the multiple- choice questions. The open choice responses were analyzed by theme using a qualitative data analysis. The theme that emerged were: (1) Fairness and equity by 40% of the participants indicating that those participants perceived the RTI/MTSS process as a system to provide equitable supports for any struggling student. (2) Of the 192 respondents, 18% perceived the RTI/MTSS process to be a system that addresses both academic need as well as behavioral gaps. These school social workers felt that having the RTI/MTSS system in place allowed for the process to be addressed to support the students as opposed to addressing individual behaviors. (3) Approximately 10% of the participants described the RTI/MTSS process as needing improvements in promoting social justice. These social workers perceived the RTI/MTSS process to not be fair and equitable for all students and that some teachers were not understanding the meaning behind "fair and equitable". (4) The recurring theme of key components of social justice was recognized by 10% of the participants meaning that this 10% perceived the RTI/MTSS process to include practices that promote social justice.

The findings of this study indicate that school social workers should take a leadership role in guiding the staff on understanding diversity and promoting social

justice. Social workers are trained to support social justice; however, all school professionals need to be trained to recognize injustices so that all students are treated fairly. The findings of Avant's study demonstrated that educational leaders, teachers, and other school professionals should embrace the role diversity plays within the Response to Intervention process.

This study by Avant, 2016, connects to the current research because social workers and other support staff are a part of most ISTs. Support staff often take on leadership positions and can provide turn-key training for other staff members. Culturally responsive behaviors of the IST can be informed by school support staff as they take a leadership role in the MTSS process.

Barrett and Newman, 2018 studied how a Midwest regional education service agency (RESA) implemented MTSS and the impact it had on identification and achievement of students with learning disabilities. The RESA in this study served 12 school districts with diverse populations of approximately 44,000 students. RESA introduced MTSS in 2007-2008 in three school buildings and added seven additional buildings in the 2008-2009 school year (Barrett & Newmann, 2018). In 2009-2010 RESA rolled out the implementation of MTSS in 50 buildings with funds provided for MTSS coaches, universal screeners, interventions and professional development (Barrett & Newmann, 2018). Implementation of MTSS in the 12 districts was monitored and assessed through RESA and professional development was provided for up to 1,000 educators each year.

Data were collected from students receiving special education services, specifically the number of students classified as (SLD), a student with a specific learning

disability for a period of 10 years. State assessment scores were also collected for

students with a classification of SLD for a period of 10 years (Barrett & Newmann,

2018). To assess proficiency on state assessments and track the percentage of students

classified as SLD, the researchers used descriptive statistics (Barrett & Newmann, 2018).

An additional assessment of the MTSS process was studied by looking at a group of 553

students and 542 students that were immersed in MTSS for three years and all having

taken the ELA and Math state assessments in 2014-2015 and classified as a SLD (Barret

& Newmann, 2018).

Results through RESA indicated that students receiving special education services

decreased over time and third grade math proficiency increased. Total population of K-12

students receiving services classified as SLD decreased, students receiving services under

speech and language (SLI) did not change, and students receiving services under Autism

Spectrum Disorder increased (Barrett & Newmann, 2018). Results were somewhat

inconsistent when comparing all the districts under the RESA implementation of MTSS.

The researchers explain that it is difficult to compare the effectiveness of MTSS across

multiple school districts and building because the fidelity and integrity of implementation

varies for many reasons.

For successful implementation of MTSS, the researchers suggest the importance

of integrity of implementation of MTSS, the importance of professional development,

personnel changes and type of data collected. The current research intends to address

these areas as they connect to cultural responsiveness.

Role of Leadership

Bean and Lillenstein (2012) investigated the changing roles of educators involved in implementing a Response to Intervention framework in a school setting. A qualitative research study was conducted to determine from educational leaders, factors that were important for successful implementation of RTI. Bean and Lillenstein (2012), developed a questionnaire asking three key questions to five school principals already using the RTI process. The three questions were: (1) What were the thoughts and perceptions of educators about their roles within the RTI process? (2) In what ways had role and function expectations changed? (3) What skill sets were essential if educators were to be effective in this systemic effort to improve instruction for all students? (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

The five participants answered the three questions through questionnaires sent to each of them. In addition to the three questions, they also were asked background questions about their school setting. Observations and interviews of school personnel were also conducted at the school sites to collect information from literacy coaches, reading specialists, special education teachers, and general education classroom teachers to gather data about the implementation of the RTI process in the schools. Data were analyzed from the questionnaire and quotes from interviews were used to identify the role of the participant and the way their role changed due to the implementation of RTI.

Results from the data analysis indicated that implementing RTI for reading instruction changes the roles of leaders in a school building. The school principal needs to empower the stakeholders and be actively involved in the implementation process. It is also important for all building leaders to have extensive knowledge of the literacy

process, data interpretation, and how cultural diversity impacts student learning. Collaboration, and sharing information such as students' backgrounds was suggested as an effective way to support literacy instruction and implementation supports within the RTI process. The study also concluded that a team approach to supporting students was a necessary change and that shift in the culture needed to come from principal leadership (Bean & Lillentstein, 2012). Principals need to set the tone and culture of the school to promote the leadership of support staff and encourage ongoing collaboration.

The study by Bean and Lillenstein (2012) informs the current study by highlighting schools as a community of learners where collaboration is key to improving student outcomes. The current study focuses on the culturally responsive collaboration of the IST members and the implications for student outcomes.

Swindlehurst et al, (2015), conducted a quantitative study to determine principals' perceptions of the implementation of the RTI process within their schools. The researchers developed a 39 item Likert style survey to assess the various ways RTI/MTSS was implemented throughout the state and to determine how to best support the RTI/MTSS process successfully. The survey included 34 closed item questions and 5 optional open-ended responses. The survey was field tested twice to improve the design and ensure maximum participation.

The survey was delivered to 313 principals through email with a recruitment letter and an official endorsement from the department of education (Swindlehurst et. Al (2015). Two- hundred six surveys were completed and returned for a response rate of 62.4%.

Analysis of the survey was conducted using the SPSS software and descriptive statistics. The results of the survey indicated that RTI was implemented differently throughout the New England state. The results indicated that 59.25% of the participating schools were implementing RTI, however, full implementation was reported by 14.3% of the participating principals. Partial implementation of the RTI/MTSS process was reported at 60.43%. Elementary school principals reported that their school made RTI a priority at 59.6%, middle school reported RTI being a priority at 43.5% and 25% of the high school principals reported RTI as a priority.

The study also looked at six different areas that they considered to be full implementation of RTI. The areas measured by the survey regarding level of implementation were professional development, consistent progress monitoring, teachers using research-based practices, regular team meetings, universal screening, and parental involvement. The study found the implementation of the schools to be inconsistent across these elements. The data indicated that those school implementing RTI were able to reduce the number of students that receive special education services (Swindlehurst et. al, (2015).

Swindlehurst, et. al. (2015) chose to survey principals regarding the implementation of RTI because the researchers determined that principals should have the most knowledge about the implementation of RTI within their school. The current study will be looking at the culturally responsive actions and behaviors of the IST and the building leader will be a member of the IST.

Community of Practice

A 2007 study by Flores, sought to understand how pre-service teacher education and knowledge of social justice can be influenced by a community of practice within a school environment. Flores sought to determine, how teacher education for social justice influenced teachers practices in school, how was the teachers' identity and practice influenced by the school, and how the school community impacted the teacher's ability to teach for social justice (Flores, 2007). New teachers bring fresh perspectives into an existing school community with an established culture and practice. Flores's study looked at how the new teachers embraced the contradictions of their knowledge and beliefs with the community of practice within the schools they were working in.

An ethnographic study was conducted, and data were collected through field notes from observations, reflective journal notes from observations, teacher and student work samples, interviews with teachers, university faculty members, principals and students from each class (Flores, 2007). The researcher observed four teachers all within their first three years of teaching after being immersed in a four-semester pre-service program for social justice. The data were analyzed through grounded theory and themes were identified and triangulated between data sources (Flores, 2007).

The main category was university and school contradictions and recurring themes included purpose of schooling, student views, practices, influences, collegial relationships and identity all connecting to theory of community of practice (Flores, 2007). The researcher found that the extensive social justice preparation of the new teachers provided them with the confidence to stick to their ideals and knowledge base to support their students despite the existing culture of the school. It was evident through

this study that the practices of the participants of the study were influenced by their prior history (Flores, 2007). However, resistance to conform to the existing school culture compromised the new teacher experience due to feelings of isolation and self-efficacy (Flores, 2007). Flores's study demonstrated how both experience and theoretical knowledge are vitally important in developing successful, responsive teaching for diverse students.

This study connects to the current research in referencing the importance of collaborations and extending the collaboration between K-12 and higher education. The current study will look at how culturally responsive actions, practices and behaviors of a community of practice impact equitable outcomes for students. Communities of practice can bridge a connection between teacher education programs and K-12 schools to support equitable outcomes for students.

Brouwer et. al, 2011 set out to study the extensiveness of communities of practice in the school environment and to explore the impact of diversity of teacher teams. A mixed methods study was conducted, and data was collected from seven teacher teams made up of a total of 72 teachers, from one secondary school located in the Netherlands. Participants were selected based on their participation and collaboration on a teacher team as well as the diversity of the team members based on interdisciplinarity (Brouwer et. al., 2011). The interdisciplinarity of the team members provided diversity by subject matter, professional and demographics of the individual members of the team (Brouwer et. al., 2011).

The three aspects of a community of practice were measured: degree of mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise (Brouwer et. al., 2011). A

questionnaire was used to measure the perceptions of teachers on the three aspects of community of practice utilizing a five-point Likert scale ranging from "agree" to "disagree". Observations of 14 team meetings were conducted and evaluated using an observation instrument and scored.

Results of quantitative data indicated that teacher teams perceived mutual engaged moderately with a mean score of .63, shared repertoire as limited with a mean score of .45, and joint enterprise with a moderate mean score of .45 (Brouwer et. al, 2011). These results indicate that the teachers perceive the community of practice to occur at this school moderately. The qualitative results from observations indicated that the mutual engagement was strong, shared repertoires and joint enterprises were moderate. The data implied that higher levels of the three aspects of community of practice happen when there is diversity in educational level and gender but less diversity in years of experience and type of experience (Brouwer et. al, 2011).

The present study will extend the existing literature by delving into the importance of culturally responsive practices of the community of practice.

Culturally Responsive Practices

Cressey, (2019), conducted a case study to provide a multi-year example of a school that implemented a system for social, emotional and behavioral supports in a bilingual high-needs elementary school. The study examined the integration of SEL, CRP, and PBIS practices through an MTSS model. The study set out to understand to what extent did the system change process reflect theories and practices from SEL, CRP, and PBIS (Cressey, 2019).

The participants of the study were 681 students in a large bilingual K-5 elementary school in an urban/suburban school district in the Northeast. The student body was diverse consisting of 69.9 % Hispanic, 22.5% White, 3.7% Black, 3.2 % Multi-Racial, .6 % Asian, and .1 % Native American (Cressey, 2019). Approximately 59% of the student population did not speak English as their first language. Approximately 20% of the student population were students with disabilities and 47.1 % were of low socio-economic status (Cressey, 2019). The school model was complete immersion of the entire student body in bilingual education and had an established implementation of Tier 1 SEL and PBIS supports for the students.

The researcher conducted a three-year case study and utilized a mixed methods approach to collect and analyze data. The Student Risk Screening Scale (SRSS) and the Student Internalizing Behavior Screener (SIBS) were used as quantitative measures to collect data from each student twice a year. A measure of the fidelity of implementation was also used to collect quantitative data. Qualitative data was collected through anecdotal notes from training materials, meetings, meeting minutes and other documents from the team (Cressy, 2019).

Results of the study were broken down by year. In year one of the study, observations and artifacts indicated a strong understanding of PBIS approaches. A self-assessment survey (SET) indicated that the school was at an average level (77%) of PBIS implementation. SEL and CRP approaches were also evident through the Open Circle Curriculum for SEL and the dual language immersion program for CRP (Cressey, 2019). An MTSS team focused on tier 2 culturally responsive interventions, specifically Check In, Check Out (CICO) and how to administer support for staff on CICO and how to use

CICO data for decision making (Cressey, 2019). CICO was evaluated and tweaked over the course of year 2. It was determined that the model worked well for many students at the end of year two. Many asked to participate again and staff members volunteered to participate as CICO coordinators for the following year (Cressey, 2019). It became evident that relationships and emotional experiences of students and staff members demonstrated that combining SEL, CRP and PBIS is beneficial. After the third year, and continued success of CICO, the data analyzed through the Team Fidelity Inventory (TFI) indicated that additional interventions should be implemented so that there were choices in place to meet the needs of all the students. Conclusions of the study determined that evidence based SEL programs are a great place for school districts to support students, social/emotional needs, but may be strengthened through the integration of culturally responsive practices (Cressey, 2019). SEL programs are not equitable if they are not implemented with culturally responsive practices in place. When integrating SEL,CRP and PBIS, over time, equitable outcomes for students can be achieved (Cressey, 2019).

The current study will add to the existing literature, by examining how the Instructional Support Team utilizes The Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education to support equitable outcomes for students.

Bui and Fagan, (2013) conducted a study using a quasi-experimental nonequivalent pre-test and post-test design. The purpose of their study was to improve reading comprehension of grade 5 students from diverse backgrounds through the Integrated Reading Comprehension Strategy (IRCS) intervention (Bui & Fagan, 2013).

The independent variable (IRCS) was evaluated on two levels. The first level, IRCS, integrated three culturally responsive strategies including story grammar

instruction, using prediction to activate prior knowledge and word webs. Level two, IRCS Plus, added the two additional strategies of cooperative learning and using multicultural literature (Bui, & Fagan, 2013).

The sample of participants were 49 students from two fifth-grade classes from an urban California elementary school. The demographics consisted of 55% Hispanic, 18% African American, 14% European American, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5% other non-White. Sixty-five percent qualify for free and reduced lunch and 37% are English Language Learners (Bui, & Fagan, 2013). Half of the first class was randomly combined with half of the second class each comparable in gender, ethnicity and ability. The classes assigned one group to participate in IRCS and the other group was assigned to participate in IRCS Plus. The IRCS Plus group incorporated multicultural literature to the instruction and cooperative learning in pairs. The researchers administered a reading inventory to each of the students before and after the intervention to measure background knowledge, word recognition, reading comprehension, and story retell (Bui & Fagan, 2013).

A paired sample t-test was used to determine any significant mean score differences between the pretest and the posttest. Students in both the IRCS and IRCS Plus group increased in their scores for word recognition by .02. The data showed that for reading comprehension the IRCS Plus group increased by .18 and the IRCS group increased their mean score by .13. There was no significant difference on the posttest for story retell. The increase in the mean scores for word recognition increased the groups level to instructional for grade 5. Students in both the IRCS and IRCS Plus groups made significant increases in their mean reading comprehension scores from pretest to posttest but only the IRCS Plus group's mean score increase was enough to move to the

instructional level. Students mean scores for story retell improved but not enough to be at the instructional level and IRCS Plus students had a greater increase in their mean scores for reading comprehension. The findings of this study support the benefits of using a culturally responsive teaching framework that make connections for students to their cultural backgrounds (Bui, & Fagan, 2013). The research demonstrated that using research-based reading strategies with culturally responsive practices, such as students bringing their personal experiences to the classroom, can have positive impacts for reading comprehension (Bui & Fagan, 2013). Building vocabulary using graphic organizers can help to make up for the lack of background knowledge by building concept knowledge and using prereading strategies to engage students are research-based strategies that improve reading comprehension. The incorporation of multicultural literature and texts and opportunities for collaborative work are culturally responsive practices that benefit diverse students and help provide equitable outcomes (Bui & Fagan, 2013).

Bui and Fagan's (2013) study connects to the current research by demonstrating the benefits of culturally responsive research-based interventions to support student outcomes. The reading strategies mentioned in (Bui & Fagan's, 2013) study may be useful culturally responsive interventions for IST members to suggest for struggling readers.

Pre-service Programs

A qualitative study was conducted by Athanases & Martin (2006), to address how students in a preservice college program learn to teach diversity from their program and their perceptions of the process after completing the program. The researchers wanted to

determine how the graduates of the program connected their current teaching practices

for diversity to their credential program (Athanases & Martin, 2006).

There were 38 participants of the study all current teachers having graduated from

a California research university. Most of the participants graduated within 3 years of the

study while a few taught for 4-10 years since graduation.   The participants all

participated in 5 focus groups that convened at the site of the study in groups of 5-10 for

3 hours each (Athanases & Martin, 2006). Focus group participants represented the larger

population of preservice teachers from the California university with over one-third

teachers of color. Only 13% of the teachers were male, and all participants were

elementary teachers. The focus group discussion was audiotaped, and transcripts and

field notes were utilized as data resources (Athanases & Martin, 2006). The focus group

discussions included reflection on the teachers' perceptions of how they were prepared

for diversity work in school through advocacy and practice as well as how they are

supported with this work in their current school. All transcripts were analyzed, coded,

and topics categorized. The constant comparative method was used to streamline the

categories (Athanases & Martin, 2006).

Results from the data indicated that the California university preservice program

had a strength in the infusion of language, culture, and equity coursework. The results

also demonstrated that along with the coursework, the participation in student teaching in

diverse placements supported the preparation of the preservice teachers as equity

advocates (Athanases & Martin, 2006). Common themes that consistently came up within

the focus groups were the culturally responsive and equity focuses pedagogy, preparation

to teach ELL students, developing cultural knowledge and sensitivity, and learning to

advocate beyond the classroom (Athanases & Martin, 2006). In addition to the most consistent themes, student teaching came up as a strength of the preservice program and included supervisors as equity mentors, student teacher placements in diverse schools, ongoing cohort discussions of equity-based teaching (Athanses & Martin, 2006).

Athanses and Martin point out that diversity and equity was not taught in isolation. Through their research, Athanses and Martin determined that the preservice program infused equity into their program and that attention to diversity and equity was modeled by instructors and student teacher supervisors. The current study will extend the research by demonstrating the importance of incorporating culturally responsive practices into all communities of practice.

Lazar, (2018) conducted a study informed by the concept of landscape of practice that comes from the participation in many communities of practice. The purpose of the study was to determine how three preservice students developed an understanding of the structural factors that shaped learning opportunities for students and the literacy and language capacities of students (Lazar, 2018).

Three student participants were selected from a total of twelve volunteers. The three women participants were teacher candidates at a private mid-Atlantic university, white English speaking, one bilingual. The teacher education program where this study was conducted included social justice goals in the mission statement and incorporated social justice in two educational foundations courses. Social justice was also incorporated into methodology coursework including culturally responsive instruction and student teaching in schools with a diverse population (Lazar, 2018).

Data were collected through one-hour long interview between November and December each year for four years (2011-2015). A final interview for each participant was conducted in the summer after graduation and notes were taken during the interview. The three candidates also completed responses to questions using a Likert-scale rating of 1-10. Other data collected were documents such as course syllabi, field placement handbook, field placement records, school demographics and department mission statements (Lazar, 2018). The data from the interviews were coded using Hyper-Research software and data was organized to identify patterns of growth in the preservice teachers.

The findings of the study demonstrated that in year one of the program, the three participants had deficit views in that they believed that the students in the practicum were at a disadvantage because of their backgrounds (Lazar, 2018). The candidates' views made a shift in year two of their preservice program after participation in two foundation courses and were able to identify structural factors that impacted learning opportunities for students in culturally nondominant underserved communities (CNU; Lazar, 2018). The final interviews indicated some differences in the perceptions of each candidate. The candidates developed understanding about inequitable opportunities for students, however, they lacked an understanding of the factors that shape circumstances for some families (Lazar, 2018). The candidates developed views about literacy and recognized structural elements impacting learning outcomes for students in CNU. The findings indicate that the knowledge of literacy instruction could be expanded beyond the scope of the depth of understanding the study indicated (Lazar, 2018). The findings also indicated that there is work that needs to be done to improve the preservice teaching programs to prepare teachers for work in CNU (Lazar, 2018).

Lazar's 2018 study demonstrates how participation in multiple communities of practice impact perceptions of teachers. The study also raised the importance of the consistency of incorporating equity work into all communities of practice. The current study focuses on the IST as a community of practice and the culturally responsive actions and behaviors of the IST members and the implications for student outcomes.

Conclusion

The review of the related literature on the community of practice provides evidence that all communities within a school setting, as well as the members of those communities, have an impact on student outcomes. Most researchers (Lazar, A. M. , 2018), (Athanases, S.Z. & Martin K.J, 2006), (Bui, Y.N. & Fagan, Y.M., 2013), (Cressey, J., 2019), (Avant, D. W. , 2016), (Flores, M.T. , 2007) concluded that adopting culturally responsive practices has positive impacts on student outcomes. The study conducted by (Flores, M. T., 2007) discusses the importance on combining concepts of social justice within communities of practice.

Some researchers within this review (Horner et. al, 2018), (Barrett, C.A. & Newman, D. S., 2018) indicated the need to improve the implementation of MTSS and problem-solving within the MTSS process. The present study will extend the research to the Instructional Support Team as a community of practice. The study will examine the culturally responsive practices of the IST and how the members actions, practices and behaviors impact equitable outcomes for students.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLODY

This chapter describes the methodological procedures that were utilized to conduct this study. A qualitative multiple-case study design is most appropriate to investigate complex social phenomena such as the work of a school's instructional support team (IST) (Yin, 2009). This research aligned with the researcher's interest to understand how culturally responsive actions, behaviors and practices of the IST members impact equitable outcomes for students. A multiple case study was the research method chosen for this study so that the actions, practices and behaviors of the IST members (school administrators, teachers and support staff) provide insight into developing equitable outcomes for students.

 Multiple case study research was the methodological structure for this study because the researcher interviewed members of the Instructional Support Team that are integral in the decision-making process of an MTSS team within two school environments in one school district (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Multiple case study research is used to explore real-life systems through multiple sources of data collected over a period of time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This case study is bounded by the group activity of the community of practice through a detailed, multi-source data collection throughout the academic 2022-2023 school year.

The current research explored the culturally responsive actions, practices, and behaviors of a community of practice of two instructional support teams (IST) within a school district.

Chapter 2 presented a strong argument that culturally responsive practices are integral in providing equitable outcomes for students. Researchers determined that

adopting culturally responsive practices in school environments resulted in positive academic growth in reading comprehension (Bui & Fagan, 2013). Case study research methods are used in group and organizational situations and are beneficial when there is a need to understand social phenomena (Yin, 2009). Communities of practice are social interactions of mutual engagement, shared repertoire, and joint enterprise (Brouwer, et. Al ,2011). Conducting a multiple case study research design will provide the researcher the opportunity to analyze a decision-making process, specifically the process of the instructional support team (IST) in real-time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within a case study design, participant observation of the interactions of the members of the IST allows for real-life data (Yin, 2009). The IST process is an essential component of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) program. Case study research methodology is conducive when conducting program evaluations (Yazan, 2015).

Research Questions

Central Research Question

How do culturally responsive actions, behaviors, and practices of school building leaders, teachers, and support staff during the IST process impact equitable outcomes for all students?

Research Sub Question 1

What are the actions, practices, and behaviors of IST members?

Research Sub Question 2

How does the IST function as a community of practice?

Research Sub Question 3

What are the equitable outcomes of the IST process?

Setting

       The study took place in a suburban school district approximately sixty miles from a large city. The school district is comprised of four schools, two elementary, one middle school and one high school. For the current research, participants are the members of two different Instructional Support Teams (IST) employed in a suburban elementary school K-2, and middle school 6-8 in New York state. The elementary school (case 1) has a total population of 540 students and the middle school (case 2) has 750 students.

       The demographics of the school district is 4% Black/African American,16% Latino/Hispanic, 4% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 70% White, and 4% Multiracial. English Language Learners make up 4% of the population, 17% of the population are students with disabilities, and 15% are considered economically disadvantaged (nysed.gov., 2021)To have access to this population, the researcher gained IRB permission from St. John's University and written consent from the district's officials to conduct the study.

       The middle school and elementary school were intentionally selected for the current study based on being a part of the same school district but with completely different age groups, staff members, and structures of the daily routines and interactions with students.

       To address ethical issues, the researcher applied for IRB approval from St. John's University. Once approval was granted from the IRB along with signed approval from the superintendent, and a signed informed consent letter, the researcher met with the school district's superintendent to explain the purpose of the study, rationale for selection of the setting, participants, and procedures for collecting data. The researcher provided an

explanation of how the study will be ethical and addressed three principles that guided

the ethics of the study: "respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice" (Creswell

& Poth, 2018). After receiving permission from the school district to conduct the study in

both the middle school and elementary school, the researcher arranged to meet with the

principals of each building to explain the purpose of the study, rationale for selection of

each school, the rationale for selecting the participants, and how the ethical principles

will be addressed throughout the case study. The researcher had each principal sign an

informed consent letter, and the researcher met with each of the IST members to have

each participating member sign an informed consent letter. Any student being discussed

at IST will be referred to using a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality and anonymity

of the student.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to conduct this multiple case study. The members

of the instructional support team were the target groups recruited to participate in the

study. The individual members of the IST were recruited to participate in the study. The

members of the team included teachers, administrators, and support staff. This purposeful

sample was able to best inform the researcher of the data needed to understand the

phenomenon of culturally responsive communities of practice, specifically the IST

(Creswell & Poth, 2018).

There were sixteen participants in total, eight participants per case. Case one

participants from the elementary school, consisted of eight educators described as: School

Principal, female with 15 years of experience; Assistant Principal, female with 6 years of

experience; School Psychologist, female with 16 years of experience; School Social

Worker, female, with 10 years of experience; Academic Intervention Teacher, Male, with 30 years of experience, Behaviorist, female, with 4 years of experience; and two General Education teachers, both female, one with 22 years of experience and the other with 5 years of experience. Case two participants from the middle school consisted of eight educators described as: The School Principal, female with 7 years of experience; School Psychologist, female, with 2 years of experience; School Social Worker, female, with 16 years of experience; Academic Intervention Teacher, female with 18 years of experience; English Teacher, female; with 13 years of experience; and 3 General Education Teachers, all female, with 24 years of experience, 25 years of experience and 5 years of experience.

Ethical considerations were addressed while conducting this study to protect all participants with care and consideration (Yin, 2009). The researcher explained the purpose of the study to all the participants and was forthcoming and informed participants of the procedures and their rights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The benefits of the study were explained to identify how their participation would contribute to improving outcomes in education for all students. In addition, the researcher formally asked for consent of the participants prior to conducting the study. Privacy and confidentiality of all participants are protected by not sharing names verbally or in written form so that they are not sought after to be in an additional study (Yin, 2009).

To ensure confidentiality and privacy, all data is kept in a triple locked location that is password protected, on a locked laptop, in a locked location at all times. Identities of participants are kept anonymous using pseudonyms. The names of any students discussed in meetings are protected using pseudonyms as well. There were no limitations

related to the representation of the participants. All members of the IST were invited to participate in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

Scholars in the field of case study research contend that it is important for case study researchers to collect data from multiple sources in order to fully understand the entirety of the case (Yazan, 2015). In a case study research, Yin, 2009, explained that evidence can come from six main data sources: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. The goal is to obtain evidence that comes directly from human events and behaviors (Yin, 2009).

This current study collected data from interviews and artifact collection, specifically email documents, audiovisual materials, and district forms and memos. Prior to beginning data collection, the researcher sought IRB approval from the St. John's University. After receiving approval from the IRB, the researcher contacted the superintendent of the school district where the schools are a part of. Contact with the superintendent was in person and with an official letter through email requesting to conduct research at the site proposed. Full disclosure of the study was detailed in the letter to the superintendent.

Once the researcher had approval from the St. John's IRB, and approval from the superintendent of schools, a letter was sent to the principal of each building selected for the study. To build ethical confidence, the letter to the superintendent and each principal included (a) proof of IRB approval to conduct the study, (b) purpose of the study, (c) rationale for selecting each school as a research site, (d) credentials of researcher, (e) data collection methods, and (f) explanation of how the data will be used. The researcher

obtained signatures from the superintendent first and then each of the principals to commence research at each school site.

Once the letters were signed by the superintendent and principals, the researcher began setting up interviews. The researcher asked the principal to introduce the researcher to the IST members and provided the IST members with an explanation of the purpose of the study. The researcher obtained informed consent from all participants and data collection began when consent forms were completed and collected by the researcher.

Data collection in a case study relies on triangulation and the collection of data from three sources. This study relied on the collection of data through individual interviews with members of the IST, and documents collected during the IST and MTSS process. In addition to the collection of IST documents, audiovisual material will be collected as well as other documents. Collecting multiple sources of evidence is a benefit of conducting a case study. Utilizing multiple sources, specifically the process of triangulation, corroborates evidence and develops more accurate conclusions (Yin, 2009).

Interviews

The researcher gathered the data from the participants 45–60-minute individual interviews. The participants had the choice to participate in the interview through the online Webex platform at a convenient time for the participant or in person on site of their school. Open-ended questions were used to obtain information from participants to gain insights and perceptions of the IST process.

A recording device was used to record the interviews with permission from the participants. Each member of the IST was interviewed once throughout the research

study. Confirmation and brief follow up questions were asked in emails with a few of the

participants. The interviews were conducted in person as one-to-one interviews, and one

was conducted through an online synchronous meeting utilizing Webex. A benefit to

conducting in person interviews established comfort and trust with the participant and

allowed for the researcher to observe non-verbal behaviors. Interview notes were rich and

thick in narrative descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This includes complete

descriptions of the participants being interviewed. Table 1 provides a description of the

interview questions including the crossover of the research questions, interview

questions, conceptual framework and possible coding words. There are bullets to guide

additional questions that may have been included in the interview.

Table 1

Summary of Data Collection for Interview Questions Guided by Research Question 1

Research Question	Interview Questions	Theoretical Framework Codes/Themes	Literature Review/ Codes/Themes
1.What are the actions, practices, and behaviors of IST members?	1.What is the process your team uses to support a student? (Scenario provided) 2. How do you make decisions as a member of the IST? 3. How do you determine appropriate interventions for teachers to utilize in the classroom for a particular student? 4. Can you provide an example of how students backgrounds, strengths, and interests may be utilized in the decision-making process?	-Themes: 1. Collaboration Among Members of the Instructional Support Team. Subtheme: Implementing Interventions 2. Data Collection and the Use of Data **Codes:** -Inclusive practices -Asset based Perceptions -Collaborative decision making -Understanding cultural backgrounds of all students	Themes: 1.Collaboration Among Members of the Instructional Support Team Subtheme: Implementing Interventions **Codes**: -Asset -deficits -collaboration -Culturally responsive -Cultural backgrounds -Interventions

Table 2

Summary of Data Collection for Interview Questions Guided by Research Question 2

Research Question	Interview Question	Theoretical Framework/Codes/Themes	Literature Review Codes/Themes
2. How does the IST function as a community of practice?	1. Can you describe the various roles of the instructional support team members? How do those roles impact the problem solving for the students? 2. How do the team members share their resources for problem solving such as intervention resources, collected data, and progress monitoring? 3. Can you describe professional development opportunities the team has participated in to support their practice? Have all members attended the PD together? Do some of the members attend PD and turn-key the information for the other members? 4. Can you explain how the members of the team collaborate to develop supports for students utilizing different areas of expertise?	Themes: 1.Collaboration Among Members of the IST 3. Fostering Relationships 4. Professional Development Opportunities for Staff Members Subthemes: - Implementing Interventions -Relationships with students -Relationships within the Community of Practice Members Codes: -Engaging in ongoing PD -Establishing protocol that streamlines the IST -members utilize data and culturally responsive practices to problem-solve -Use of data -Collaboration -Brainstorming -Not sure how to use data -Training on the use of data	Themes: 1. Collaboration Among Members of the IST 3. Fostering Relationships 4. Professional Development Opportunities for Staff Members Subthemes: -Implementing Interventions -Relationships with students. -Relationships of the Community of Practice Members Codes: -Ongoing PD -Purposeful PD -Culturally Responsive Education - Understanding how to utilize data -Progress Monitoring -Collaboration

Table 3

Summary of Data Collection for Interview Questions Guided by Research Question 3

Research Question	Interview Question	Theoretical Framework/Codes/Themes	Literature Review/Codes/Themes
3. What are the equitable outcomes of the IST process?	1. Can you give examples of equitable practices that were used in IST meetings to determine interventions for students? 2. Can you describe an IST or problem-solving meeting where you had to advocate for a student that you felt was not getting what they needed out of the meeting? Why did you feel that way?	Themes: 3. Fostering Relationships 5. Equitable Practices Subthemes: -Expectations -Access Codes: -meeting the needs of all students -Understanding backgrounds -Rigorous -Trauma -ELL students -Social Worker -Communication	Theme: 5. Equitable Practices Subthemes: -high expectations -access Codes: -meeting needs of all students -strengths of students -reading strategies -Social Worker role -leadership -communication

Artifacts

Artifacts were collected from the IST process as an additional source of evidence.

Some of those artifacts were IST agendas, IST minutes taken throughout the meeting,

IST written plan for implementation of interventions for student, IST data collected prior

to the meeting with information about the student including assessment and progress

monitoring data, schedules from professional development, and district-wide forms

utilized for the MTSS process. For confidentiality, the students name was removed from

the artifacts. In case study research, it is recommended that multiple sources of data be

collected to create an in-depth detailed description of the case.(Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Artifacts are an additional resource of data that added to the data collection and validity of the research.

Audiovisual

Additional data was collected utilizing audio-visual techniques. Some of this data included photos of information from the school website about the MTSS plan in place for the school district, MTSS Google Slides used for professional development provided by the school district, and calendars for planning purposes. For confidentiality, the students' names were removed from the artifacts and pseudonyms were given to the students for documentation purposes.

Webex as a Platform for Synchronous Interviews

Using a platform such as Webex to conduct interviews provides a convenient option for synchronous interaction. Computer-based communication offers greater flexibility when it comes to time and location (Lobe, Morgan & Hoffman, 2020). Conducting an online interview can be considered a version of a traditional face-to-face interview (Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2020).

The researcher has a Webex account through St. John's University and was able to invite a participant to join a session for an online interview as a Webex host. To participate in an online session, the participant must have access to the internet, have working speakers, microphone and camera, and to be able to work in a quiet space without distractions (Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2020).

The online interviews were conducted in the same one session interview format as the in-person interviews. The sessions consisted of the same open-ended questions as the

in person interviews reflecting on the IST process. The researcher obtained consent from participants prior to conducting any of the interviews.

Trustworthiness of the Design

Trustworthiness of a qualitative multiple case study research design refers to the accuracy of the research, data and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). The trustworthiness of this current study was viewed through the studies credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Amankwaa, 2016).

Credibility is the confidence in the accuracy or truth of the research findings. Transferability is how the current research can be applied to other future studies. Dependability demonstrates that the findings could be replicated, and confirmability is the degree of neutrality where the findings are based on participants responses and not bias or personal motivations of the researcher (Amankwaa, 2016).

To establish and ensure trustworthiness, the researcher implemented the following strategies in this current study: reflection, triangulation, thick description and inquiry audits.

Reflection

The researcher was reflective throughout the research process by recording entries in a reflective journal. Reflexivity is another method to ensure credibility. The researcher journaled after each interview and reflected on her beliefs and values to ensure reporting only the data obtained from the participants and not opinions based on preconceived beliefs. Transferability was achieved through thick and vivid description. (Amankwaa, 2016). Journaling helped to keep track of decision making, research process, coding, and researchers' preconceptions, values and beliefs. (Amankwaa, 2016).

Transferability was achieved through thick and vivid description. (Amankwaa, 2016).

The researcher provided vivid details about the participants of the study including details

about their actions, behaviors, attitudes and reactions from the participant interviews.

Thick, Vivid Description

The researcher used thick description to ensure transferability. Developing a

rapport so that the participants felt comfortable provided detailed responses, asking open-

ended questions throughout the interview process, and writing up the responses with

description and detail will provide thick description (Amankwaa, 2016).

Inquiry Audit/Peer Review

To further establish dependability, the researcher will have constant and

consistent engagement with her mentor and committee members throughout the study.

This practice will support the evaluation and accuracy of the findings and conclusions of

the study (Amankwaa, 2016).

Triangulation

Confirmability will be established through triangulation of data utilizing

interviews and the collection of artifacts, emails and audiovisual materials .Observations

of the IST meetings will be cross-referenced with interviews of the participants. Artifacts

collected from the IST meetings will be cross-referenced and all data will be triangulated

during the analysis process to corroborate the findings (Amankwaa, 2016).

Audio Recording and Verbatim Transcription

Confirmability was established through audio recordings of the in-depth

interviews with consent from the participants. Audio recordings captured accurate

responses of the participants and were transcribed during the research process.

Research Ethics

  Three ethical principles must be in place to guide a qualitative research study. Those principles are: "respect for participants, welfare of the participants, and justice" (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This section will outline steps that were taken by the researcher to ensure that these ethical principles were upheld during this study.

1. The researcher maintained the privacy and anonymity of the participants, including the school district.

2. Once approval from the St. John's IRB was obtained, the researcher sought approval from the superintendent and principals of the school site.

3. All participants were reminded throughout the process that participation is voluntary. Participants were also be notified that they do not have to answer any question that makes them feel uncomfortable and can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

4. The researcher set up meetings with the IST members to explain the purpose of the study, the process and to establish a rapport.

5. The participants received a consent form and were informed that their participation is voluntary. All members of the IST have remained anonymous and confidential as pseudonyms were used.

6. The researcher explained the data collection processes such as interviews of the IST members conducted in person or via Webex, and the collection of artifacts.

7. Participants were notified that email correspondence will be encrypted for their privacy and all Webex meetings would be attended by the researcher and participant only.

8. An email account was set up for the purposes of collecting data and corresponding with the participants of the research study with security features and encryption.

9. All collected data has been triple locked on a password protected, locked laptop, kept in a locked office.

10. Completed consent forms and other documents related to the study have been kept in a secure electronic folder password protected on a locked computer.

11. Participants were able to review transcripts from their responses through member-checking and decide if there is information that they choose not to share.

Data Analysis Approach

The current study conducted data analysis through preparation and organization of the data collected throughout the study. Data was separated into identified themes and coded (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additional subthemes emerged from the data as well and included in the analysis. Information is represented in the form of tables, figures and text. The current research is a multiple case study, so comparison of themes has been identified as part of the analysis. Case study research analysis involves detailed description of the case and the setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Thick and vivid descriptions from the interviews were compared and analyzed from each of the participant interviews. Audio recordings of the interviews support the researcher in obtaining detailed descriptive and verbatim statements from participants. Artifacts from the IST meetings are useful in supporting the transcriptions and notes from the interviews. Common emerging themes were analyzed from all data sources manually. Themes from both cases were compared and analyzed.

Throughout the data analysis, participants confidentiality and anonymity were protected using pseudonyms.

The researcher utilized all data from the transcribed audio participant interviews, audiovisual materials collected from the school district, emails, and MTSS district forms to present her findings and provided a discussion, limitations, suggestions for additional research, and conclusions relevant to the purpose of the study.

Researcher Role

The researcher conducted this case study and collected and analyzed the data. As part of the trustworthiness of this study, the researcher was aware of all personal bias. The researcher identifies as a White, English speaking female educator. She has been an educator for the past 20 years as a public-school teacher and building administrator. The researcher journaled and reflected on any personal bias throughout the research process. It is possible that personal bias can alter perceptions of the researcher. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher reviewed her work consistently with her mentor and committee members to obtain their perspectives on the data analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter provided details to explain how a multiple case study was an appropriate research design to conduct this current study on the culturally responsive actions, behaviors, and practices of an IST and the impact on equitable outcomes for students. The researcher described the setting, participants, data collection procedures, trustworthiness, of the case study design, research ethics, data analysis approach, role of the researcher. Chapter four provides a descriptive explanation of how themes were interpreted from the collected data Themes, along with the data sources are reported and

discussed addressing each research question. Data analysis is reported for each of the research questions as well as a summary of the findings. Chapter five includes the implications of the findings as they relate to the conceptual and theoretical framework. The findings are connected to the literature review in chapter two. Limitations of the study as they relate to trustworthiness are presented in chapter five as well as recommendations for future practice and future research.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to examine how culturally responsive actions, behaviors, and practices of a community of practice, specifically the members of the instructional support team, impact equitable outcomes for students. This study utilized multiple data sources including interviews from sixteen participants, audiovisual materials, artifacts and email responses. This chapter describes and analyzes the two cases, participants, data collected, themes that emerged related to each of the research questions, and a cross case analysis.

The study takes place in a suburban school district approximately fifty miles from a large city. The school district is comprised of four schools, two elementary, one middle school and one high school. The selection of an elementary school and middle school will provide stronger analytical conclusions to support students in both elementary and secondary educational environments (Yin, 2009). As of the beginning of the current school year, during the time the research took place, the school district began to streamline their IST process and make a shift from RTI to MTSS. Throughout the data collection process, there are references to before the shift and during the shift to MTSS.

Data collected from each site was analyzed and coded into themes. Each case is described in detail by theme and subthemes. The research questions are answered through the cross-case analysis.

Description of Cases

Case 1 Elementary School

Case 1 is comprised of eight educators from a public elementary school located in a suburban community The school is made up of elementary students in kindergarten

through second grade. Total enrollment at the time of the study was 540 students. The

demographics of student population is 71.2% White, 4.3% Black, 5.4% Asian/Asian

Pacific Islander, 15% Hispanic/Latino, .1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4%

Multiracial.

Each of the participants were interviewed in person and audio recorded. The eight

participants included: principal, assistant principal, school psychologist, social worker,

AIS Teacher, behaviorist, and two general education teachers were interviewed. Table 2

describes the eight participants including pseudonym, title, gender, and years of

experience.

Table 4

*Description of Participants
in Case 1*

Pseudonym	Title	Gender	Years of Experience
Mara	Principal	Female	15
Nancy	Assistant Principal	Female	6
Grace	Psychologist	Female	16
Zayna	Social Worker	Female	10
Leonard	AIS Teacher	Male	30
Neelsa	Behaviorist	Female	4
Olivia	Gen. Education Teacher	Female	22
Heather	Gen. Education Teacher	Female	5

Mara- School Principal. Mara was a special education teacher with experience

teaching in the high school and in the elementary school. In the elementary school she

worked in the general education classroom as an integrated teacher for several years collaborating with the general education classroom teacher. Mara moved into administration where she was an Assistant Director for Special Education and then a building Assistant Principal prior to becoming a principal of the Elementary School Grades K-2. Mara has been working in the school district for the past 15 years.

Nancy- Assistant Principal. Nancy has been a CSE chairperson for one year and special education classroom teacher for one year before starting her position of Assistant Principal for the past 4 years. Nancy has been working in this school district for 6 years.

Grace- School Psychologist. Grace has worked as a school psychologist in both elementary buildings in this school district. She has been working in the school district for 16 years.

Zayna- School Social Worker. Zayna is the school social worker as well as the Homeless Liaison for the school district . Zayna has been working in the school district for the past 10 years.

Leonard -AIS Teacher. Leonard has worked in the capacity of general education classroom teacher, data coordinator and Academic Intervention Specialist in this school district. He has been in the position of AIS Math Teacher for the last 10 years. Leonard has been working within the school district for the past 30 years.

Neelsa -Behaviorist. Neelsa is a behaviorist and works in both elementary schools in the school district. She spends three days in the elementary school of this case study and works directly with teachers and students. She observes students and designs behavior plans to meet their needs. Neelsa supports teachers in implementing the behavior plans. Neelsa has been working within this school for 4 years.

Olivia -General Education Classroom Teacher. Olivia has been a general education teacher for the past 24 years. Olivia has worked in grades one and two but is currently a grade 2 teacher. She has worked with many different student populations such as ENL students, AIS students and special education students. Olivia is currently taking coursework on administration.

Heather -General Education Classroom Teacher. Heather is currently a grade 2 teacher with a background in Gifted and Talented students. Heather has worked in both elementary schools in the school district and has been working within the district for 5 years.

Case 2 Middle School

Case 2 is comprised of eight educators from a public middle school in the same school district on long island. This middle school is made up of grades six through eight with a total enrollment of 750 students. The demographics of student population is 71.2% White, 4.3% Black, 5.4% Asian/Asian Pacific Islander, 15% Hispanic/Latino, .1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 4% Multiracial.

Each of the eight participants were interviewed in person and audio recorded. The eight participants included: building principal, school psychologist, social worker, AIS teacher, English teacher, and 3 general education teachers. Table 3 describes the eight participants including pseudonym, title, gender and years of experience.

Table 5

Pseudonym	Title	Gender	Years of Experience
Cora	Principal	Female	7
Mindy	Psychologist	Female	2
Harriet	Social Worker	Female	16
Kelsey	AIS Teacher	Female	18
Lynn	English Teacher	Female	13
Robyn	Gen. Education Teacher	Female	24
Jennifer	Gen. Education Teacher	Female	25
Gloria	Gen. Education Teacher	Female	5

Cora -School Principal. Cora has several years of experience as a guidance counselor. Cora became a Director of Guidance and Building Assistant Principal prior to becoming the middle school Principal. Cora has worked for seven years in the school district.

Mindy -School Psychologist. Mindy is a relatively new educator and has worked as a school psychologist for two years. Her prior experience was working with middle school and high school students as an intern.

Harriet -School Social Worker. Harriet has worked in all the buildings within the school district when she first started out as a school social worker. Harriet has spent the last 11 years as the middle school social worker and has worked within the school district for the past 16 years.

Kelsey -AIS Teacher. Kelsey is an Academic Intervention Teacher in the middle school. Kelsey has experience as a reading teacher in the elementary school as well as the middle school. Kelsey has taken on the role of MTSS coordinator in addition to her role as AIS Teacher. Kelsey has been working within the school district for the past 18 years.

Lynn -English Teacher. Lynn is a classroom English Teacher and the school district SEL Coordinator. Lynn provides professional development on SEL and Technology for teachers in the school district throughout the school year. Lynn has been teaching in the middle school for the past 13 years.

Robyn -General Education Classroom Teacher. Robyn has many years of experience in elementary school and has been a general education teacher in the middle school for the past eight years. Robyn has been working in the school district for the past 24 years as a general education classroom teacher.

Jennifer -General Education Classroom Teacher. Jennifer is a general education teacher in the middle school. Jennifer has led committees on character education and community service. Her areas of focus for the past 25 years have been language arts and social studies. Jennifer has been working within the school district for the past 25 years.

Gloria -General Education Classroom Teacher. Gloria is a general education classroom teacher with a background in STEAM education. As a middle school teacher, Gloria has specialized in language arts and mathematics for the past 5 years. Gloria has been working in the school district for the past 5 years.

Findings

This multiple-case study was designed to understand the interactions of the Instructional Support Team members as a community of practice and how those interactions impact outcomes for students. Case one is the Instructional Support Team from a suburban elementary school and case two is the Instructional Support Team from the middle school of the same suburban school district. The study focused on a central question and three research questions:

Central Question

How do culturally responsive actions, behaviors, and practices of school building leaders, teachers and support staff during the IST process impact equitable outcomes for students?

Research Sub Question 1

What are the actions, practices, and behaviors of IST members?

Research Sub Question 2

How does the IST function as a community of practice?

Research Sub Question 3

What are the equitable outcomes of the IST process?

Throughout the research process, the researcher conducted personal interviews of eight educators from each of the research sites, for a total of sixteen educators. The researcher transcribed the audio interviews and analyzed each of the transcripts to identify repetitive phrases and key words. Coding was done by analyzing the transcripts and making connections to the initial research and research questions (Yin, 2009). The researcher collected information from each interview, email and artifact and created

categories of information to develop a list of codes (Creswell, J.W. & Poth, N.P., 2018).

After an analysis of the codes, five themes were developed. The five themes that

emerged were: (1) Collaboration Among Members of the IST; (2) Data Collection and

the Use of the data, (3)Fostering Relationships (4) Professional Development

Opportunities for Staff Members; and (5) Equitable practices. Through the thematic

analysis subthemes emerged under some of the themes. A subtheme of collaboration was

implementing interventions . The theme of fostering relationships can be broken down

into two subthemes: (1) relationships with students, and (2) relationships between the IST

members. The two subthemes of equitable practices that emerged were (1) accessibility

and (2) expectations.

Table 6

Interpretive Themes.

Theme	Data Source	Trustworthiness
1: Collaboration among members of the IST	Interviews, audiovisual, emails	audio recordings, verbatim transcription, triangulation, thick descripton, reflection, peer review
2:Data collection and use of the data	Interviews, artifacts,audiovisual	audio recordings, verbatim transcription, triangulation, thick description, refelction, peer review
3: Fostering relationships	Interviews	audio recordings, verbatim transcription, triangulation, thick description, reflection, peer review
4: Professional development opportunities for staff members	Interviews, audiovisual, emails, artifacts	audio recordings, verbatim transcription, triangulation, thick description, reflection, peer review
5: Equity is interpreted differently by IST members	Interviews	audio recordings, verbatim transcription, thick description, reflection, peer review

Case 1 -Elementary School

Theme 1: Collaboration Among Members of the Instructional Support Team

A recurring theme that came up during analysis of the data was the importance of collaboration among the members of the Instructional Support Team. Mara and Nancy both shared that up until recently, teachers would come to them with a concern about a student and they would determine, based on information from the teacher, if there should be a team meeting to provide a Tier 2 service for the student. Nancy shared that there has been a shift in process, and now the Instructional Support Team process is more collaborative. "It's collaborative, we give everybody a chance to weigh in and then we generally come to a consensus." Mara said, "we never make a decision in isolation". con

During the personal interview with Grace, the school psychologist, shared how she was chairing the IST meetings in the past with a small team but now the new process includes set members that bring their diverse backgrounds to the problem-solving team. She shared, "I always think it is great to have that diversity of background and thinkers, so we are not looking at the straight up reading problem, but also the big picture and the whole child". Grace also shared that the team brainstorms and takes everyone's input at the meeting to determine what type of intervention would need to be implemented for a child. Zayna, the school social worker described the decision-making process as collaborative when determining appropriate interventions for teachers to utilize in the classroom. Zayna said, "whoever is there will provide strategies". Leonard, an academic intervention teacher said, "everybody talks out their parts of what they represent". Neelsa shared,

I think it is a very collaborative process. I think everybody kind of comes with

their tools and their set of knowledge and their skills and depending on the

situation or the students that we're talking about will give the team ideas and then

the team will take what they have and work with it.

Of the eight participants from the elementary school, the two general education

classroom teachers did not mention the word collaboration or refer to collaboration as

part of the process to support students or the decision-making process of the team. Those

that mentioned collaboration were administrators and support staff. These members were

described by various participants as resources for teachers. The social worker was

described as the resource for obtaining background and family information and the key to

connecting to students. The psychologist and behaviorist were described as providing

others with interventions for behavioral issues, and the administrators in the elementary

school were described as decision makers in the IST process.

Theme 2: Data Collection and the Use of Data

Collecting data and the use of the data was another recurring theme. During the

personal interview with Mara, the school principal mentioned that data would most likely

be collected prior to the IST meeting. Mara said,

We have a speech teacher there, we have the social worker there, we have the

psychologist there, we have an administrator there. So, all those people looking at

that data and coming together and saying "was this building level intervention

discussed or executed" or we would like to see more data in this area.

Leonard explained that after the team looked at a students' background

information provided by the school social worker and possibly from previous classroom

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teachers, the team would look at data such as test scores. Olivia, one of the general education teachers spoke about data collection in her classroom. She said, " you would work with the student in the classroom. You would really collect your assessment data and anecdotal notes". Olivia said that previously, after the initial collection of data, she would go to her administrators with the data, and they would make some suggestions of things to try in the classroom or possibly schedule an IST meeting for that student if the student were a year or more behind in reading or math. Olivia shared that the process has currently changed. She explained the new process as follows:

> So, the intent is very different in that, my understanding is that we are being much narrower in our focus when we approach the student and any deficits. We are supposed to try to pinpoint one deficit and implement one, maybe two interventions to try to address that specific deficit. We're supposed to record data at the beginning of that implementation and continue recording data for a period of time. The period of time is a little blurry. No one really knows. It seems to depend greatly on the intervention.

Olivia tried to explain the new MTSS process, and how the team was collecting and using data. She said that if the first intervention was not working for a student the classroom teacher would reach out to a specialist to obtain additional ideas on how to support the student in the classroom. Olivia said, "We would implement the new intervention and then we are supposed to continue to collect data now on whatever this new piece may be". She explained that before the new changes were made to the MTSS process they would go to their administrators at this point in the process. Olivia said, "They were kind of the gatekeeper to getting anything beyond, but that step has been
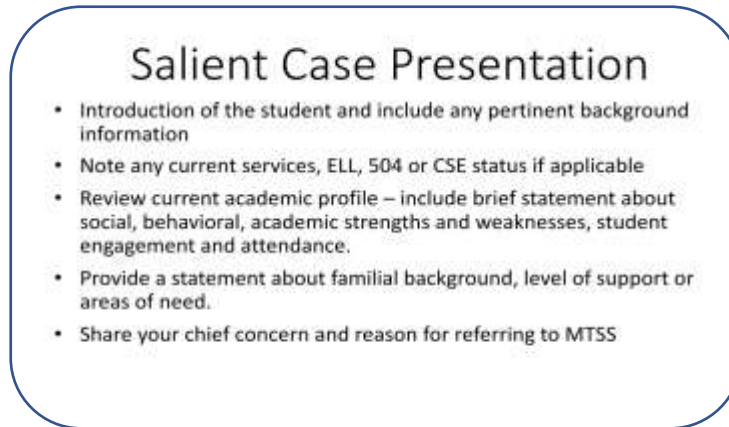
omitted which I think has a lot of us a little nervous." Olivia shared that she had not yet been to an updated MTSS/IST meeting and had several scheduled and was looking forward to seeing how the new process will go. Olivia was nervous about the change in the process because she had not yet been to an IST where the new process was being followed and was unsure of the outcomes. Olivia also shared, " We changed the whole process before people really knew how to do some of the most critical pieces. Right, so we have not had training on data collection".

Olivia was focused on determining how to address the "deficits" a child was facing; however, she did not mention the strengths of a student and how the strengths could be utilized to support a student when determining interventions.

In addition to the participant interviews, audiovisual materials were collected from an in-house professional development on MTSS by two of the Assistant Superintendents of the school district. The materials were coded, and themes emerged that aligned with the themes from the participant interviews. The audiovisual materials describe in bullet points the format of the IST and the information educators should provide for an IST meeting. Figure 1is a slide from the presentation listing the data that should be collected and documented prior to the IST meeting and discussed with the team at the meeting.

Figure 2

Slide From District Professional Development Presentation

Salient Case Presentation
- Introduction of the student and include any pertinent background information
- Note any current services, ELL, 504 or CSE status if applicable
- Review current academic profile – include brief statement about social, behavioral, academic strengths and weaknesses, student engagement and attendance.
- Provide a statement about familial background, level of support or areas of need.
- Share your chief concern and reason for referring to MTSS

Theme 3: Fostering Relationships

In response to the interview question, "Can you give an example of how a student's backgrounds, strengths, and interests may be utilized in the decision-making process?" the theme of fostering relationships emerged. Mara explained that often there may be a plan in place to address certain behaviors, but "it's not one that suits the child." Mara said, " we talk about really knowing the profile, and who we are working with. Did we involve the child in creating the plan?" Nancy discussed behavior plans and making sure that you know the interests of a student so that they are motivated by the plan. " Some students like to earn time on the computer".

Grace, the school psychologist, explained that understanding the students background is very important. She said,

> We must be able to support as best we can. I think in terms of interests, we're
>
> always trying to encourage teachers to kind of get to know their kids. Motivation

comes from inside, but you must show interest in a child and get to know them

and know what they're interested in and how to motivate them so that you can

kind of spark that intrinsic motivation.

Grace also reiterated how important it is to know and understand a student's background.

She said that through much of the research that she has conducted, many mental illnesses

come from childhood traumas. Grace said, "So, what might look like ADHD might really

be that a child is hungry, hasn't been cared for, or the behavior can be triggered by

something else that is going on".

Zayna, the school social worker explained that by getting to know a student and

what they have been through can completely change how to support them and change the

perspective of what the prime concern may be for that student. When Leonard , the AIS

teacher, was first asked to explain the process the team uses to support a student, he

started off by saying, "we would try to look at the background." His reasoning for this

was,

Is there anything in the child's background that would make us think that it's

going to be harder for us to get this child to move along? In other words, should

we be more patient because of extenuating circumstances?" One of the interview

questions asked about how a student's background, strengths and interests may be

utilized in the decision-making process. Leonard shared, "the more we know

about a child the better." Leonard also said, " if I know that the only thing this

student cares about in school is art, I am going to turn all of math ideas into

drawing.

Olivia, the classroom teacher shared that knowing a student's background is critical. She said,

> If you have a child that just moved in from Queens, wherever, what have you, they may have a very different background experience that they're bringing to the table that might allow you to use different materials that will allow you to make different references.

Oliva responded to learning about a student's interests with,

> The interests can be a way to get some of the work done that they may not otherwise want to do. I have a child who likes to write about this one particular topic. So, if I can find a way to shift the genre, but still have it be about that topic, I can get the child to write.

Most of the participants feel that understanding students' backgrounds is an important part of the decision-making process for all students.

Theme 4: Professional Development Opportunities for Staff Members

It was shared that the school district provided professional development to help with the shift from RTI to MTSS. Jim Wright was hired to provide a series of workshops on implementing MTSS and helping those in attendance to work towards making that shift. Mara shared that Jim Wright worked with her MTSS building committee members. Mara said that those that attended the workshops with Jim Wright were, "our AIS teachers, classroom teacher representation from each grade so it could be turnkey to all of our constituents." Mara also shared that the building MTSS committee shares something at every faculty meeting and every grade level meeting. Mara also shared," We're going to be looking at the resources in the building because what we found too is that

professional development is great, but when that ends, what resources do we have people are not aware of?" Mara described finding ways to keep the professional development regarding MTSS going strong by communicating with her staff throughout the year about the process. She described working with her building level MTSS committee to support the rest of the staff in understanding how the process should look when attending an IST or MTSS meeting for a student. At one of the faculty meetings, Mara had the MTSS committee present a "fishbowl" example of what an MTSS meeting would look like. Members of the MTSS committee "acted out" an MTSS meeting. As part of the January grade level meetings, Mara shared with her staff a "salient case presentation" guide for discussing a student of concern at an IST meeting. This "salient case presentation" was part of the district wide professional development provided by both Assistant Superintendents. (Figure 2).

When asked about professional development, the assistant principal said, "Jim Wright is really the first thing I could think of we've had that's been specific to this process." Nancy explained that prior to the Jim Wright professional development, maybe others have gone to individual workshops. Nancy also said, "our members are now turnkeying all of that information, which is great." When Grace, the school psychologist was asked about professional development, she said,

> I'm not sure about that. I know some of them went to the Jim Wright professional
> development. I don't really know what went on there. I can't really speak to that.
> There has been some professional development that we had just recently, like I
> am not sure some of them were that relevant to what we needed, or what we do.

Zayna, the school social worker said, "There is no professional development that I know of that we've been asked to go to regarding that." When asked about professional development, Leonard said,

Last year we got together and worked with the other AIS math teachers to put together a list of math interventions on the Google drive. If anyone was looking for level one interventions, they can go to this place and just click things and see what stands out for a child.

Neelsa, the behaviorist shared, " I know right now they are doing da Vinci training with reading. I feel that is supportive in some way. I know a lot of students struggle with reading." Neelsa felt that she thought there was some turnkeying happening with the reading professional development.

Olivia, the classroom teacher discussed recent professional development on MTSS provided by the two assistant superintendents. She said, "Recently, we had a long professional development for two and a half hours with no breaks. We worked through two different case studies while mimicking the MTSS process." Olivia also shared, "but that was the most significant PD we've had". Heather, another general education teacher shared, "We have attended in-house workshops led by the MTSS team".

Each participant interviewed had different perceptions of professional development experiences. Even the key members of the Instructional Support Team (IST) had different reflections of professional development experiences. The Jim Wright workshops implemented by the school district were not attended by all members of this IST. All members of the Instructional Support Team spoke about the importance of the school social worker and how she played an important role in providing background

information. However, the school social worker had no idea about any professional development related to the MTSS and IST process.

Theme 5: Equitable Practices

Participants were asked to describe equitable practices that were used in an IST to determine interventions. The responses to this question varied by each participant. Some of the participants had difficulty understanding the question.

Mara, the school principal stated, "I think I am having trouble with this question because I don't think we would never not be equitable."

Mara also stated,

> I had so much trouble with this question because it's a child, but that is why we
> have the social worker as part of that committee because she brings information
> that we might never have. She has incredible relationships with the students, with
> the families, with extended family. She is an excellent advocate for these students
> in ensuring that we know the full picture so that when you talk about equitable
> practice, we know the full picture to be able to support these kids with knowing
> the global picture.

Nancy shared that the social worker is "crucial" in their building for ensuring that students get what they need. Nancy said, "she gets to know the students' families. A lot of times she (social worker) has information that we might not be privy to that could help us in determining what a student might need." Nancy was asked if there was ever an IST meeting where she felt that she had to advocate for a student that may not be getting "what they needed" out of the meeting. Nancy responded, "when that happens, I try to go back to the data because you can't argue with the data". Nancy also said, " whenever I go

back to the data, I also try to go back to what the classroom teacher is seeing because they know the child best."

Grace, the school psychologist brought up equity early in the personal interview when asked about how backgrounds, strengths and interests are utilized in the decision-making process. Grace talked about the social and emotional issues that come up and the inequity in finding outside support for students.

Grace said,

It is hard to find therapists. Some people can't afford, don't have time, they're busy working. So, you start to see how the gap can widen sometimes between the haves and the have nots because the people who have the resources can get the help and they work to do that.

In response to the question about equitable practices that were used in the IST to determine interventions, Grace said,

I think we try to be as equitable as possible, but it is hard because you have guidelines about how much data and information you need before you can make a referral and get a child the support that they need. What I am finding is a big issue is the parents that are in the know, which is usually White, middle to upper class, call special education and ask for a referral. Sometimes the child doesn't even need a thing but the parent calls.

Grace explained that it is frustrating that there are other students that may need the support and they are not getting what they need. Grace said,

so, you were asking for how we are equitable and how we're trying to ensure

equity, there are times that the system, I think is propagating inequity and that is

the struggle I am facing right now.

Grace also shared that there are some practices and interventions in school that

need to be reviewed. Grace connected looking at interventions and what is in place for

students to the question about equity. Grace explained that they need to make sure that

they are using interventions that would be beneficial for all their learners and making sure

that they are research-based interventions. Grace explained that not all students are

successful with the reading programs that are in place, but many students get outside

tutors. Grace said, "The kids that are struggling will get tutors, and they'll learn how to

read. They'll have a tutor teach them phonics, but they're not necessarily getting that in

school. So, there we go again, that gap is widening."

When asked about equitable practices used in an IST meeting to determine

interventions for students , Zayna , the school social worker responded, "I'm equitable.

You have certain families that get the sky and the moon. The families that I work with a

lot, with equity, if I don't shout, they don't know they can, they don't know what is

available to them." Zayna shared, " I think they try to be (equitable) as much as they

can, but certain children get more than others because some parents' voices are louder

than others." When asked, " How do you make decisions as a member of the IST?"

Leonard suggested that expectations for student improvement should be different

depending on the support a student has at home. He said,

Do you think it's reasonable to give this child six weeks and expect to see

anything if there's a single parent or a family that is, let's say not educationally

supportive, you know, you take care of school, that's your job and I'm going to take care of home.

When Leonard was asked about equitable practices of the IST he said, "it's always equitable because we focus on what this particular child needs".   Neelsa, the behaviorist weighed in on equitable practices thinking about how there are complaints at times about how often a student may get a break or receive something that is written into their behavior plan when comparing that student to another student. Neelsa said,

> Sometimes there is a little pushback that I see from a behavioral perspective, it doesn't matter what other students are thinking. That student needs multiple breaks and is going to be successful and able to access the curriculum with these supports in place.

When asked about examples of equitable practices that were used in IST meetings to determine interventions for students, Olivia, a general education teacher shared, " I am going to be really candid here, I don't think we think about equity quite enough sometimes". Olivia said, " we think about it from a deficit model, this child doesn't have the support at home or maybe can't get online to access some resources." Olivia also shared,

> I have had some circumstances with students where I have had concerns about things not happening because of their background and because of a language at home or their status as an ENL student. Yes, statistically they are over-identified but there are cases where there is an actual disability, and they happen to speak another language. Finding our way through that is something we really need to improve.

Heather, the other general education teacher described equitable practices to be access to flexible seating, supplies if needed such as pencil grips and other types of writing implements. She also used the example of providing Chromebooks with access to typing programs and voice recording programs. Heather said,

> For socioeconomic equity, some parents may not have a vehicle to attend meetings, we have offered the option to attend meetings over Google Meets. For those same parents we ensure that the student has access to healthy snacks as well as reading materials as we cannot assume they have access to the public library or the means to purchase books for home.

> Through responses to the question asking about equitable practice that were used in IST meetings to determine interventions for students, equity was interpreted differently by all elementary participants. Both school administrators referred to the school social worker, Zayna, to ensure students "received what they needed" based on their backgrounds. Mara and Nancy spoke about the relationships that Zayna had with families and how families shared personal information with her that they may not otherwise feel comfortable sharing. Zayna explained that she is the person that knows the primary issue impacting a student based on information shared from families. As a member of the IST, Zayna will share this information as needed.

> Both Zayna, the school social worker and Grace, the school psychologist had concerns about equitable practices. They both expressed situations they felt were not equitable related to access and resources. Limited access and limited resources lead to limited opportunities for students.

Case 2 Middle School

Theme 1: Collaboration Among Members of the Instructional Support Team

The first question asked during the personal interview with Cora, the principal of the middle school was regarding the process the instructional support team uses to support students. In describing the IST process of the middle school, Cora mentioned that a concerned teacher would reach out to the IST members and, "kind of brainstorm with maybe a counselor to see if there's any social emotional problems going on at home." Collaboration was encouraged with other team members to see if there were similar concerns among other teachers on the team. Cora also said at IST the teacher would, "kind of brainstorm with the members of the IST on how to best support the student." Cora also described the IST as a way for the team to "come together as a team" and utilize everyone's area of expertise to support the student of concern.

Mindy, the school psychologist referred to collaboration when supporting teachers in implementing interventions related to social and emotional issues. Mindy said, "You want to make sure that someone who is knowledgeable in those areas to be on the committee that day, whether it is myself or a school counselor so that they can provide appropriate feedback to help the teacher in the classroom."

In response to what process the team uses to support a student, Harriet, the school social worker referred to collaboration with all team members by collecting history and information from the guidance counselor, and classroom teachers. She mentioned the importance of gathering information to have a full picture of what may be impacting behaviors. Once the information was collected, Harriet said that the next steps would be,

"looking at it collaboratively again, it would be a path of the least restrictive recommendations".

As a support service provider, Kelsey describes collaboration in terms of working with classroom teachers to make suggestions for interventions. Kelsey said, " We usually meet with the classroom teacher to go over and help them with suggestions of what they could do in the classroom." Lynn, a classroom teacher said, " You would work together as an MTSS team to come up with a common goal or idea for that child." Lynn described the collaboration to take place after data collection. In responding to how to determine what interventions to implement for a student, Lynn said, " In the past it has been that the teacher provides an intervention and brings the data back, but I am thinking that now moving forward we're all coming up with the interventions together at the meeting."

When Robyn was asked about the process the IST would use to support a student she said, "ok, you've tried a bunch of things for eight weeks and no movement. You are concerned. So, if you are going to IST, we're hopeful that they're going to be receiving tier two". Robyn shared that the IST makes decisions, "through conversation and coming together to brainstorm and usually people are respectful".

Jennifer and Gloria, classroom teachers, described the IST process to involve collaboration with a team of teachers that work with the student. In middle school, students have a different teacher for each subject area and all the teachers are part of a team.

Jennifer said, "Meet with other teachers on the team to see if similar issues are being faced in those classrooms and look at the various resources that were provided through the RTI process and the committee." Jennifer described the "team concept" and

how the team of teachers always talk about their students and know what the issues are. Jennifer also talked about the importance of the IST meeting and said, "I think it is really important for an administrator be part of the team because they have background for us because we don't always have that."

All participants spoke of the IST process to be a collaborative process. Each participant mentioned working with the other professionals in the building to support students. The middle school teachers work as part of a "team" and referred to their team members when asked about making decisions to support students.

Theme 2: Data Collection and the Use of Data

Cora, the middle school principal, described the use of tier one interventions as "a way to collect data over time." Kelsey, the AIS teacher described the decision-making process of the IST to include, " the teacher presenting their case". She said, "we usually go over all of the data and from there we usually make a decision."

Lynn mentioned data and the collection of data using universal assessments and "ongoing formative assessments and summative assessments from the classroom". Lynn described using the data from the assessments during an IST meeting. Lynn also said, in those meetings you almost had to convince people that there were issues, but sometimes you would not have the data to back that up because we didn't have a universal screener."Lynn also explained,

> We used to have STAR and then STAR got taken away and then we didn't have
> time to look at the data. So, in the past you're just going by what you are seeing as
> a teacher which is still valid, but at the end of the day it's not the science behind
> what you are seeing so it is important to have it.

The middle school participants all seem to understand that data collection is part of the IST process. There seems to be some inconsistencies about the type of data that should be collected and that is needed to bring to an IST meeting. There was very little discussion on how to utilize the data when determining interventions for students. Recently a document was shared with staff that attended an in-house professional development led by both Assistant Superintendents. At that professional development, a presentation was shared with information about what data is to be collected prior to attending an IST. This was recently shared with staff members and will serve as guidance for future IST meetings. (See Figure 1)

Theme 3: Fostering Relationships:

When asked about how students' backgrounds, strengths and interests are utilized in the decision-making process, Cora talked about how getting to know students at the middle school level is so important. Cora said, "we try to get to know the students as much as possible and see what makes them tick." Cora also shared that they like to work with the student when developing a behavior plan if the issue they are seeing is related to behaviors. Cora said, " if you don't know the student, it is really an inaccurate picture of the student." Mindy, the middle school psychologist said, " I always like to use strengths, and to build upon them rather than focusing on their weaknesses. If we find something that they're good at and that they would gravitate to more naturally, it makes it easier to have internal motivators."

Harriet, the middle school social worker spoke a lot about the importance of getting to know the students and understanding what motivates them. If the concern is a behavioral issue, Harriet said that a behavior plan should include, " it's called a reinforcer

checklist to see what they would want to work for and what would motivate them." When

Harriet was asked about how students' backgrounds, strengths and interests may be

utilized in the IST decision making process, she said, " the whole thing is about building

relationships with kids." She shared an experience she had in a meeting earlier in the day.

Harriet said,

> someone said that this child lies. And I am like, well, lying is kind of harsh and
>
> maybe we could say that he really believes what he's saying and that he can't
>
> think past the thought now. So, he doesn't realize that things are becoming
>
> miscommunicated along the way.

> Lynn, a classroom teacher said, "we would figure out those strengths and those

key people that the student is able to connect with and find time for that student to be

with that specific person." Jennifer, a classroom teacher, also talked about getting to

know each student and "letting the team know who we think the student is connecting

with first, so that can kind of become the point person, if that makes sense.". Gloria, a

classroom teacher, also spoke about building relationships with students to get to know

their strengths and what motivates them.

All participants from the middle school spoke about the importance of building

relationships with students. Mindy, the school psychologist talked about getting to know

a student's strengths and building upon those strengths to support the student. Harriet, the

school social worker reiterated the importance of truly knowing a student so that they

would not be misunderstood. Harriet's insight insinuated that perceptions of a student

may be different if you don't truly know who they are and understand their backgrounds.

The classroom teachers acknowledged the importance of "someone having a connection"

with students but did not say that they thought it was important for specifically

themselves to have that connection.

Theme 4: Professional Development Opportunities for Staff Members

All participants were asked to describe professional development opportunities

the IST members have participated in to support their practice. Cora, the building

principal said, "So I think it is really having top leadership believing in what an IST can

do, what an MTSS committee can do for a student to provide PD opportunities, to

provide people time to collaborate, so that it is able to be successful." Mindy, the school

psychologist shared, " We had a multi-week PD on MTSS and best practices from Jim

Wright who is the guru of this stuff. We followed up with having smaller groups of

people come together to collaborate on different ways to implement it within the

buildings."

 Mindy said that only some of the core members were at the Jim Wright professional

development. She added, "We're streamlining it to other people that will be involved

within the process over time." Harriet said,

> We all do our own thing, and I don't really know about what teachers have to do,
>
> but I have to take continuing credits. So, anything I do in that realm is going to
>
> help me there because I'm going to have more resources in my pocket.
>
> Kelsey, an AIS teacher said, " we have all types of professional development."

She shared that a lot of the professional development she had attended in the past

pertained to reading, working in small groups or individual students. Kelsey shared, "

We've had training with Jim Wright." Kelsey also shared, "Our subcommittee presents at

faculty meetings, and also department meetings, and share information about the MTSS process."

Lynn shared that there is currently a lot of professional development. She said, "So now with the professional development, it really kind of trained me to change that mindset and to realize that these are the tools in my toolbox. I have these tier one interventions and that's what I'm doing in my classroom."

Lynn shared that she realizes that her goal is not to get the struggling student extra support outside of the classroom, "but it is my responsibility to help him while he is with me, so what interventions can I do to succeed in that?"

Robyn and Jennifer, both classroom teachers, mentioned signing up for professional development sometimes and that it is dependent on their subject area or something that is related to a building goal for the year. Gloria, another classroom teacher participated in professional development for project-based learning but not for MTSS.

The professional development opportunities have not been consistent throughout the middle school. All members of the IST did not receive the same professional development training with Jim Wright. Cora, the principal mentioned that the shift in the MTSS process should be led by building leaders, yet she did not attend the Jim Wright professional development. Harriet, the school social worker did not refer to the Jim Wright professional development and mentioned that everyone does their own thing when it comes to attending professional development.

Theme 5: Equitable Practices

All participants were asked to give examples of equitable practices utilized in IST meetings to determine interventions for students. Cora, the middle school principal said, "

to come from an equitable place is really knowing the students, knowing the student's situation and stepping in where the student really needs the help." Cora also shared that "every student comes from a different background and embracing that background." Cora expressed the importance of knowing and understanding what a student may experience at home.

Mindy, the school psychologist, shared one concern of hers regarding equitable practices is "exclusionary factors" that may be a barrier to having the student receive support." She explained that she has heard teachers say that a student does not attend extra help and therefore before looking for another way to support that student in the classroom, they should start attending extra help. Mindy said,

> There are a lot of parents that rely on a child to come home and take care of a younger sibling or has other responsibilities." She added, " you have to make sure that the things we are doing are happening during the school day and are accessible to all of our students regardless of what they're dealing with outside.

Harriet described equitable practices as, "having all members of all different disciplines on the team." Kelsey, the AIS teacher said, "Working with the classroom teacher or providing extra help and being more flexible with students that can't get a ride in for extra help in the morning." Kelsey also shared, "We're in the process of setting up a homework center after school for the students that don't have support to get their homework done.

Lynn, a classroom teacher shared that equitable practices were making sure that her ELL students received information for their family in their home language. Robyn , another classroom teacher shared that she did not feel that practices were always

equitable. Robyn referred to a situation where one of her students struggled in her math class. She said, " the student came from a Spanish speaking home but did not receive ENL services, but her siblings did." Robyn explained that she and her team was told that there was nothing they could do for the student at the building level. Robyn shared,

> The ENL teacher was really helpful to us. That felt so good. We were told by the assistant principal that the parent needs to provide the child with English books that the child can read and not keep the TV on Spanish speaking stations. That child should be immersed in more English because there is nothing that is saying she needs services. It is really something that is happening in the home. So, to me and to my team, we were quite horrified and that was inequitable.

Jennifer shared that equitable practices are interpreted by process being the same for all students.

It was evident from the participant responses on equitable practices, that there was a large difference in the way they each understood and interpreted the meaning of equity within the MTSS process. Some of the participants expressed that providing the same process for all students was equitable. Cora expressed that to be equitable you need to really know a student and their background. She did not explain what you would do with that information to support the student. Mindy, the school psychologist brought up "exclusionary practices" and two of the teachers brought up concerns about equity and how equity impacts communication with non-English speaking guardians and ELL students receiving the support that they need to succeed.

Cross Case Analysis by Research Question

The cross-case analysis answers the research questions and describes the

similarities and differences of each case based on information obtained from the

participant interviews. A thematic analysis of the data collected from the elementary

school educators, middle school educators, and collected artifacts provided information to

make in depth comparisons of the two cases.

To understand the context of the analysis of this multiple case study, some terms

from the research questions will be defined. The first research sub-question addresses the

actions, practices and behaviors of the IST members. For the purposes of this study, the

actions refer to implementation of interventions for students, data collection, and

meetings involving collaboration regarding a student. Practices of the IST members refer

to the structure of an IST meeting. This includes roles of the IST members before, during

and after the meeting. Practices also include who is in attendance, the role they play in

supporting the student, information and data that is brought to an IST meeting, and

follow-up to an IST meeting. Behaviors refer to the sharing of information at an IST

meeting, collaboration among members, and attitudes of individual members of the IST.

Research Sub Question 1

What are the actions, practices, and behaviors of IST members?

Actions and Practices of IST Members. Through the participant interviews, the

elementary administrators reflected on their IST practice and how the shift in practice

from RTI to MTSS within the school district has helped them make some changes. Nancy

and Mara from the elementary school described the shift as becoming more of a

collaboration. They explained that the process is collaborative, and decisions for students

are being made through collaboration at the Instructional Support Team meetings. Mara, Nancy and Olivia from the elementary school, explained that the roles of the IST members before, during and after the IST meeting has shifted. Previously, Grace, the school psychologist was the facilitator at the IST meeting. Currently, the role of facilitator will rotate as will the other role of writing up the notes on the MTSS form.

Cora, the middle school administrator, referred to brainstorming and collaboration to confirm areas of concern with other colleagues. Mindy, the middle school psychologist referred to collaboration when sharing an area of expertise. Harriet, the middle school social worker referred to collaboration as an important part of collecting information and as part of the decision-making process. The middle school participants did not mention that the process is becoming more collaborative based on the shift in practice indicating that their perception of collaboration as part of the IST process has always been the same.

Another reflection of both actions and practices of the IST members at the elementary school is the increase in the number of members of the IST to include a group of educators with different areas of expertise. This information was shared by Grace, the elementary school psychologist. Grace also shared that the collaboration among the members is key in how they make decisions about implementing interventions to support students. Zayna, the school social worker also described IST meetings to be collaborative when determining interventions for students. The general education teachers did not talk about the IST process being collaborative. Kelsey, the AIS teacher from the middle school also talked about the increase in the members of the IST and how the members are more diverse in their areas of expertise. Kelsey mentioned that a special education

teacher is invited to the meetings if needed, a reading specialist, and anyone else that may have an area of expertise that can support the student.

After conducting participant interviews and analyzing the data, it is evident that collaboration is an action of the IST members. Collaboration takes place prior to the IST meeting, during the IST meeting and is a necessary action after an IST meeting to support students and to monitor their progress.

Overall, both cases indicate that collaboration is an important part of the IST process. Details on how, when and who is part of the collaboration seems to vary among the two cases.

Both elementary administrators explained previously that they would make decisions for students when approached by a concerned teacher, but now the process is more collaborative, and the decisions are made at the IST with all members working together. The elementary administrators also explained that at least one of them is always in attendance at the IST to collaborate with the team. Cora, the middle school principal, is not always at the IST and therefore not always part of the collaboration in making decisions for students.

Implementing interventions for students, a subtheme of collaboration, is another action of the IST members. As the school district works through their shift from RTI to MTSS, the implementation of interventions seemed to be a work in progress for classroom teachers. It was shared at the elementary level that interventions should be in place prior to an IST meeting. Data should be collected on the progress a student is making with an intervention, and that data should be documented and brought to the IST meeting. The IST members collaborate to discuss different interventions that may be

implemented if a student continues to struggle despite the implementation of the previous intervention.

The middle school participants referred to the "team approach" when collaborating about students of concern prior to an IST meeting. Middle school students work with a team of teachers. The teacher participants all referred to working with their team to collaborate for students within the MTSS process. When students are brought up to IST in the middle school, all team members attend the IST meeting to collaborate on how to support the student of concern.

Data collection is another action of the members of the IST. Both the elementary educators and the middle school educators described the collection of data as taking place prior to the IST meeting. The elementary participants described data as results of universal screener, data on tier one interventions collected over time in the classroom, and anecdotal notes. The middle school described data as test results, formative and summative assessment results, and universal assessments.

In both cases, it was shared that MTSS forms for students are accessible on Infinite Campus, the student information system the district utilizes for all students. The form can be accessed through a student's profile. An action of the IST members is to complete this MTSS form prior to attending an IST (Figures 2-5). It was reported that all teachers are not confident in completing these forms and need support to do so.

Figure 3

District MTSS Form

Figure 4

District MTSS Form 2nd Page

Areas of Concern: Check off all that describe this student in each column. Be prepared to bring data/artifacts to demonstrate concerns. (Include work samples, behavior charts, anecdotal notes, test scores.)

Social/Emotional	Behavior	Work Study Skills	Reading
☐ Lacks Self Confidence	☐ Interrupts/ Calls Out	☐ Unfocused	☐ Lacks Decoding/ Word Attack Strategies
☐ Presents with Anxiety	☐ Does Not Follow School Rules Lacks Self-Control	☐ Poor Time Management	☐ Lacks Grade Appropriate Vocabulary ☐ Applying ☐ Comprehending
☐ Difficulty Making/Maintaining Friendships	☐ Physically Aggressive Towards Self/ Others	☐ Cannot Work Independently	
☐ Little or No Interaction with Teacher and/or Peers	☐ Unable to Follow the Teacher's Plan	☐ Cannot Work with Others	☐ Poor Sight Word Recognition ☐ Comprehension ☐ Fluency
☐ Easily Angered/Annoyed	☐ Verbally Aggressive Towards Others	☐ Cannot Follows Direction	☐ Does not use reading strategies to support the understanding of a text
☐ Physically Inappropriate		☐ Disorganized	☐ Does not integrate new knowledge with prior knowledge
☐ Withdrawn/ Unhappy, Variations in Mood	☐ Other: _____	☐ Does Not Follow Classroom Routine ☐ Other:	☐ Has difficulty applying close reading strategies

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Figure 5

District MTSS Form 3rd Page

Writing	Math	Speech/Language	Gross Motor/ Fine Motor
☐ Inability to match pictures with words.	☐ Unable to identify numbers up to _____	Expressive Language ☐ Poor Sentence Structure	☐ Illegible Handwriting
☐ Lacks developmentally appropriate illustrations.	☐ Unable to write numbers up to _____	☐ Word Finding/ Vocabulary	☐ Clumsy/ Trips, Falls off Chair
☐ Poor Written Expression	☐ Difficulty with counting numbers in order	☐ Difficulty Retelling Stories/ Explaining Personal Experiences	☐ Trouble Going Up/Down Stairs
☐ Poor Organization of Ideas	☐ Struggles with 1:1 correspondence.	Pragmatics ☐ Off - Topic / Unrelated Comments	☐ Difficulty Crossing Midline
☐ Poor Encoding/ Spelling	☐ Difficulty in Understanding Math Concepts	☐ Difficulty taking other's perspective	☐ Near Point/ Far Point Copying
☐ Poor Use of Mechanics	☐ Struggles with Basic Facts	Receptive Language ☐ Following Multi-step Directions (Not Classroom Routine)	☐ Navigating Playground Equipment
☐ Lacks Basic Sentence Structure	☐ Difficulty Problem Solving	☐ Poor Listening Comprehension	☐ PE Motor Task Concerns
☐ Difficulty applying	☐ Struggles to use Reasoning when		

Figure 6

District MTSS Form 4th Page

Data									
Assessment	**Score**	**Date**	**Score**	**Date**	**Score**	**Date**	**Score**	**Date**	**Comments**
F&P Instructional Text Level									
Universal Assessment Reading - IRL Score									
Fundations Unit Test Scores									
High Frequency Words Test									
Universal Assessment Math									
Math Unit Assessment									
IXL Reading									
IXL Math									

Additional Information (As needed):

Kelsey, the middle school AIS Teacher shared that MTSS resources such as a flow chart, lists of suggested interventions, and other resources are shared in a district MTSS Google Drive folder. These are resources available for all staff members and can be used for data collection.

Data collection was described as a part of the IST process in the elementary and middle school. In each case data needed to be collected prior to an IST and data was discussed at the IST. At both sites there was some confusion about exactly what type of

data should be collected. In the elementary school one of the teachers explained that although they are collecting data, they have not been trained in how to use the data to support students and the process is challenging.

Behaviors of the IST Members. Behaviors of the IST members are reflected through attitudes of the individual members. As the participants described the collaboration that takes place at an IST meeting, the word respectful was utilized in describing the interactions of the team members. One of the classroom teachers said, " you come together and brainstorm and everyone is respectful".

Sharing different perspectives from an area of expertise was a subtheme that was mentioned by every participant. This was described by the Cora, that each area of expertise weighs in when making decisions for students. Mara, the elementary principal said, "We all lien on one another and our areas of expertise". Participants spoke about the value varying perspectives have on the decision-making process. The role of the social worker was emphasized in both cases has having an important impact on the team perspective. The elementary school participants all talked about the importance of Zayna and her relationships with students and their families. There was a clear appreciation and respect for Zayna's knowledge and input.

Another comment was repeated at the elementary and middle school level. Kelsey, the middle school AIS teacher, and Oliva, an elementary classroom teacher both stated that at an IST meeting the teacher " presents their case". This comment insinuates that a teacher is attending the IST meeting as an outsider presenting their case to an established group that will make a decision based on the information that the teacher presents. However, the classroom teacher should be an equal part of the decision-making

process and a part of the IST for the student of concern. This insinuates a hierarchy that impacts the attitudes of all members of the IST. Nancy, the assistant principal of the elementary school also used similar vernacular. Nancy stated,

> The teacher is the one that has the whole picture and puts that together for us. So, I try to make sure that the teacher is being heard. Sometimes they are not heard in those meeting. They think that they are limited to just presenting almost sort of their case. And then they have to let the team take over. I think the teacher really sometimes has to be the one that leads the charge for what the student really needs and advocate for them.

Nancy confirms in this statement that the teacher's voice is not always heard at an IST and teachers are confirming that they feel this way at times. Although most of the behaviors at an IST seemed to be positive in terms of sharing, brainstorming, and respectful, there are some behaviors such as defensive and disregarded that can have a negative impact on the IST process.

Research Sub Question 2

How does the IST function as a community of practice?

Participants from both cases responded to how the IST functions as a community of practice with a clear response of collaboration and brainstorming. The subtheme of sharing perspectives was a common response from participants. Participants also spoke about sharing their area of expertise and were open to their experience of providing support in addition to receiving support from other professionals.

As a community of practice, the members of a team share a concern, interact on an ongoing basis, and work together to solve problems (Wenger, McDermott, Snyder,

2002). In both cases, the IST is a community of practice working together with the members to solve problems for students. This school district is currently refining their community of practice by redefining the roles of the members, inviting additional members with various areas of expertise to support the decision-making process, and collecting more data prior to the IST meeting.

Providing professional development on MTSS for staff is a way the district is supporting the change process for the IST meetings and the entire MTSS process. One of the Assistant Superintendents stated at an in-house professional development, " A good IST group will become familiar with each other's knowledge and the knowledge will become common knowledge among the group." This comment speaks to a community of practice and how they interact and work together to problem solve effectively.

Participants shared professional development opportunities the IST members participated in to support their practice. Some of the members attended a series of workshops by Jim Wright (Figure 3). Not all members attended this series. Some members shared that they attended other professional development of their choice not related to MTSS. It was shared that the district is providing ongoing professional development to continue the work and to turnkey the information for all staff members.

Figure 7

Jim Wright Professional Development Schedule

> - W 9 Feb 2022: Session 1: **MTSS: An Overview for Schools** (4 hours).
> - Th 10 Mar 2022: Session 2: **Tier 1: Classroom Interventions** (4 hours).
> - W 6 April 2022: Session 3: **Tier 1: Classroom Data Collection** (4 hours).
> - Th 14 April 2022: Session 4: **Tier 2: Strategic Interventions** (2 hours: morning).
> - Th 12 May 2022: Session 5: **Tier 3: Intensive Interventions: MTSS Problem-Solving Team** (2 hours: morning).
> - W 18 May 2022: Session 6: **MTSS Needs Assessment: Analyzing School-Wide Data** (2 hours: morning).
> - F 20 May 2022: Session 7: **MTSS: Writing a School Plan** (6 hours).

There were some concerns participants had about members of the community of practice. Grace, the elementary school psychologist and Harriet, the middle school social worker were concerned that students may present with certain behaviors as a result of trauma, and those behaviors may be perceived by classroom teachers as something very different.

In each case, teachers explained that they had to seek out information about students from support staff in their school. This implied that teachers don't always have all the information about a student. However, all participants acknowledged that knowing a student's strengths and background is an important part of the process to support

students. Teachers are members of the IST and therefore a part of the community of practice. In both cases there is a breakdown in the communication of important information prior to the IST meetings.

Research Sub Question 3

What are the equitable outcomes of the IST process?

The participants had different ideas about equity and provided different responses of equitable practices that were used in IST meetings to determine interventions for students. There was little consistency within both cases in the responses to equitable practices of the IST.

The administrators of the elementary school, Mara and Nancy referred to the importance of their social worker, Zayna in ensuring equitable outcomes for students. They both shared that Zayna has incredible relationships with students and families and is most likely to have information that others may not have because of those relationships. They shared that because of those relationships, Zayna is a key member of the IST and makes sure students "get what they need".

Cora, the middle school principal expressed the importance of knowing and understanding a student's background. Some of the classroom teachers expressed that they don't always have enough information about a student, however, there was no mention of a specific resource or person they had as a "go to" to uncover details about a student's background. Kelsey mentioned getting additional information about students from the guidance counselors, but it was vague as to how the classroom teachers and other members of the IST obtained important information about a student's background.

Zayna and Grace had concerns about inequity within the process. They both shared that students who have parents that understand "how the system works" get "more" than students who do not have that same advocacy at home. Grace also shared that students from families with a lower socioeconomic status do not have the means to acquire tutors and outside therapists. She was concerned with how this widens gaps for students that are already behind their peers.

Accessibility, a subtheme of equitable practices, was directly mentioned by the middle school psychologist when discussing equitable outcomes for students. Mindy said, " We have to make sure that the things we are doing are happening during the school day and are accessible to all of our students regardless of what they're dealing with outside." As a new initiative, the middle school was implementing an after school "homework help" program now that the school district reinstated late busses. This is an effort to increase equitable outcomes as it would support students that do not have parents at home that can help with homework or are able to afford private tutors. When looking at equity within the school environment, researchers have pointed to all students having the same opportunity and access to resources (McCart & Miller, 2020).

A few of the educators said that the process of "being the same for all students" meant that the process was equitable. Robyn described a situation in the middle school where she felt ELL students were not "getting what they need" due to policies that are in place that prevent them from receiving building level interventions. Robyn said that she is not the only teacher that has experienced frustration when trying to support students when English is not their primary language. Some students that do not speak English as

their first language do not qualify for ELL services yet need additional support to succeed in the classroom.

Expectations of students came up throughout the participant interviews. Leonard, the AIS teacher from the elementary school suggested that expectations of student success should be different if they don't have support at home.

Conclusion

Data were collected from educators through participant interviews, emails, audiovisual material and artifacts from an elementary school and middle school in one school district. This data was analyzed to understand the culturally responsive actions, practices, and behaviors of a community of practice, specifically the members of the instructional support team, and how that impacts equitable outcomes for students. Five themes emerged from analyzing the data. Those themes were: (1) Collaboration among members of the IST; (2) Data collection and the use of data; (3) Fostering relationships; (4) Professional development opportunities for staff; and (5) Equitable practices.

Analysis of the first theme indicated that all member of the IST in both cases feel that collaboration is an important component of the process. The second theme regarding data collection indicated that most of the participants from each case were aware that data collection is part of the IST process. Members of the IST utilized data in some capacity to support students. The third theme of fostering relationships emerged from the interview process. Case one participants from the elementary school spoke of the school social worker as a key IST member in fostering relationships with students. Case two middle school participants spoke of a "team approach" and using that approach to determine who can support the student best based on their connections. The fourth theme of professional

development had similarities and differences among the two cases. The school district provided MTSS professional development for some of the IST members. Those members in attendance varied among the two cases. Participants described different professional development experiences related and unrelated to MTSS and IST.

The fifth theme of equitable practices were defined differently by all participants indicating that participants all have a very different understanding of equity and equitable practices. Some of the participants felt that the IST practice is the same for all students and therefor described the process as being equitable. Other members of IST from each case that had concerns regarding equitable practices and equitable outcomes for students. As the school district implements changes in the MTSS process and structure of IST, there are recommendations that can support those changes and improve equitable outcomes for students.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

In conducting this multiple case study, the researcher set out to understand how the actions, behaviors and practices of the members of the two Instructional Support Team impact equitable outcomes for students. Data analysis from sixteen personal interviews, email interview responses, and collected artifacts contributed to key findings of this multiple case study. The first major finding uncovered the actions, behaviors and practices of the Instructional Support Team members. The second finding looked at how the members of the Instructional Support Teams functioned as communities of practice and how that practice impacts equitable outcomes for students. The third finding determined how the work of the Instructional Support Teams impacted equitable outcomes for students and how those outcomes were determined to be equitable. Chapter 5 explores how each of the findings connect to the theoretical framework and previous literature discussed in Chapter 2.

The researcher will describe how the research questions and findings correlate, explain the limitations of the study and provide recommendations for future research and practice.

Implications of Findings

Guiding the study, the concepts of the theoretical framework of a Community of Practice with the New York State adopted framework of Culturally Responsive-Sustaining framework helped to develop research questions.

Research Sub Question 1

What are the actions, practices, and behaviors of IST members?

In determining how culturally responsive actions, behaviors, and practices of school building leaders, teachers and support staff impact equitable outcomes for students, it is important to understand the actions, practices and behaviors.

Through participant interviews, emails and collected artifacts, it was evident that collaboration, brainstorming, and sharing areas of expertise were essential components of the IST process in both cases of this research study. As a community of practice, the members of both Instructional Support Teams worked together in mutual interest of a student. Data collected from the participant interviews indicated that all members of both IST's had an interest in supporting the student of concern. The decisions the IST makes prior, and during an IST meeting was a collaborative process that involved all members of the IST. Lave and Wenger's framework of Communities of Practice can be defined as a group of people with a shared concern working together to create a better situation (Wenger, 2015). The mutual interests of the members of the IST's regarding the student of concern along with their collaborative efforts exhibit strong characteristics of a community of practice. Lave and Wenger's framework of Communities of Practice developed from the social theory of Situated Learning (Smith, 2003). The Instructional Support Team is a social group that works together to problem solve for students. Through that collaborative process, members share their areas of expertise and learn from one another throughout the process.

The data collected from the current study indicated that collaboration is taking place throughout the MTSS process in this school district. In both the elementary school and middle school there was a concerted effort to streamline the MTSS process and have opportunities for ongoing collaboration with colleagues prior to an IST meeting as well at

during the formal IST meeting. Practices of the IST are defined as the roles the members of the IST take on during the meetings. Common routines with shared language and routines are an important part of the community of practice framework. Those members in attendance at the IST were part of the practice and routine of the IST. There were some inconsistencies in the two cases in terms of the roles and attendance of the IST members. The elementary school always had administrators in attendance at an IST where the middle school did not always have an administrator present at the IST. Practices of the IST should be consistent throughout the school district being that MTSS is a district-wide process with decisions impacting students throughout their education. School leaders are an integral part of the process and lead by example. They should be present and part of the IST process as a collaborative member of the IST.

Brouwer et. al, 2011, described a community of practice to have a shared repertoire and that the shared language, concepts and routines impact perspectives of the members. This idea of a repertoire of a shared routines describes the practices of the members of the IST. Routines of both IST meetings in a school district should be the same so that the perspectives and understanding of the process is the same for all staff that are part of the MTSS process. In both the elementary school and the middle school, classroom teachers expressed that at times they needed suggestions on how to support students in their classrooms. In both cases classroom teachers reported that they received suggestions from specialty area teachers either prior to an IST meeting or at the IST meeting. If teachers need suggestions on interventions to support students, they may also need support in implementing those interventions in their classrooms.

Behaviors of the IST members are described as respectful, collaborative, defensive, and supportive. Attitudes that impact the decision-making process can also be considered behaviors. Classroom teachers from each case indicated that when they attended an Instructional Support Team meeting, they were hopeful that the students would be receiving an outside support such as AIS services. The receiving of an outside service was an expected outcome for classroom teachers. Attitudes such as these are getting in the way of finding ways to support students in the classroom. The attitude of "not getting what you want" from an IST meeting as opposed to " what does this child need" in the classroom and what can I do to make that happen is getting in the way of equitable outcomes for students. The attitude of a teacher feeling like they had to "present their case" at an IST impacts outcomes for students. Every person at the meeting is a part of the community of practice and should all work as a team. Administrators should work to shift the culture and ensure that teachers and support staff all feel seen and heard at an IST and each member of the community of practice is an equal and valued member of the team, bringing their area of expertise, knowledge, collected data, and experience to support the student of concern.

As part of a community of practice members should have a joint enterprise (Brouwer et. al, 2011). Joint enterprise is the way the team understands the purpose of their community. In both cases, there is a disconnect with this component of the community of practice. The classroom teachers should understand that they are an equal part of the decision-making process and a member of the community of practice. The comments about a teacher having the "present their case" insinuates a hierarchy that impacts the attitudes of the members of the IST. It was clear from the participant

interviews in both cases that some behaviors and attitudes of the IST members indicated

that not everyone had the same understanding of a community of practice, specifically the

joint enterprise of the IST. This could also be the reason why the elementary teachers did

not refer to the IST process as being collaborative or use the word collaboration when

describing the process.

Research Sub Question 2

How does the IST function as a community of practice?

Professional development opportunities for the IST to support the community of

practice was explored during the research study. Ongoing professional development is

one of the principles of a Culturally Responsive Sustaining education. The data collected

in each case through participant interviews, emails, and audiovisual materials indicated

that providing professional development was a practice of the school district. As the

district began making a shift from RTI to MTSS they brought in professional

development to support this undertaking. Each school put together an MTSS team and

invited those members to participate in ongoing workshops with Jim Wright, an MTSS

professional developer. This professional development took place over seven sessions.

Three of the sessions were four hours long and the remaining four sessions were between

three and four hours in length. After interviewing members of the elementary and middle

school MTSS team, it was determined that not all members of the team participated in the

same professional development with Jim Wright. The middle school principal, and

middle school social worker, as well as the elementary school social worker did not

attend the professional development with Jim Wright even though they have all been

identified as standing members of the IST. The middle school principal expressed the

importance of the building leadership leading the charge in the shift from RTI to MTSS. However, you must be active and present in a process if you are to lead the charge and to model the appropriate steps for your staff. There was no consistency between the two cases in who attended the professional development with Jim Wright. This inconsistency demonstrates that the two IST's defined their members differently when the professional development was put together. This can also mean that the members of the IST could have changed after the professional development.

The Culturally Responsive Sustaining education principle on professional development specifies that all teachers and staff members have on-going training on implicit biases, specifically on identifying and challenging your own implicit biases (New York State Education Department, 2022). The CR-S principle also suggests school leaders provide professional learning activities for staff to become familiar with diverse communities that make up the student population. The data analysis demonstrated the need for training on CR-S principles, equity, and diversity for the school district.

Research Sub Question 3

What are the equitable outcomes of the IST process?

Through this study, the actions, practices and behaviors of the community of practice (members of the IST) can be examined through the Culurally Responsive Sustaining framework to determine if outcomes are equitable for students. The first principle of the framework is ensuring that there is a welcoming and affirming environment for students. The theme of fostering relationships emerged throughout the study and is an important component of the Culturally Responsive Sustaining framework. One of the tenets of creating a welcoming and affirming environment is through building

a rapport with students and their families by learning about their backgrounds, interests, learning preferences, culture, goals (New York State Education Department, 2022). The framework suggests that classroom teachers incorporate this knowledge into classroom management strategies and reward and incentive practices.

The current study indicated that the participant educators of both cases believed that understanding a student's background and building relationships is important. However, in both cases, classroom teachers described support staff as having more opportunity and access to getting to know students background and to understand what a student may be going through at home. This seemed to be an issue and potential barrier for classroom teachers in the elementary environment as well as the middle school but in different ways. There is a clear disconnect in both cases between what specialists such as psychologists and social workers understand about specific students and what is perceived by classroom teachers. The elementary school participants described the social worker as the key staff member in getting to know a student's background. In the elementary environment, the social worker developed close relationships with families, which in turn provided a tremendous amount of information about backgrounds. It was indicated that the social worker will share the information with the necessary staff members if needed. For a classroom teacher to equitably support students, it is important to understand a student's background. It is not easy to provide students with what they need if you are not aware of their circumstances, traumas and background information. Classroom teachers should be informed about all students to gain better understanding of their individual needs and be able to provide equitable outcomes for each student. Classroom teachers are part of a student's everyday life. It would be beneficial if the

social worker brought the classroom teacher and the family together to talk as a team to support the student. In the middle school, the social worker and guidance counselors had information about students that teachers were unaware of. Teachers expressed that it was difficult in the middle school to obtain information about students and their personal struggles. The middle school teachers also suggested that they determined as a team who had the "best" connection with the student so that person could help in supporting the student. All the teachers and staff members working with students should have a connection with their students. If we are to create a welcoming and affirming environment for all of our students, we need to focus on how to build those relationships and take the time to get to know families and students at a deeper level. For the school culture to be equitable, research shows that there needs to be a goal to understand race, culture, class, needs, and personalities of students (McCart & Miller, 2020). The sharing of background information is of the essence in ensuring that outcomes of the IST decisions are equitable.

The second principle of the Culturally Responsive Sustaining education framework is having high expectations and rigorous instruction for all students. One of the participants in the elementary school shared that you needed to adjust your expectations depending on what a student faced at home. Not having the same expectations for all students is not equitable. The Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education framework specifically states that the expectations you have for your students should be in place regardless of any identity markers (New York State Education Department, 2022). The idea that equity is about accessibility indicates that beliefs about who should, can or will succeed need to be examined (McCart & Miller 2020).

Relationship to Prior Research

Research has indicated that implementing the MTSS process and utilizing Instructional Support Teams (IST) to problem-solve for students requires a lot of support for educators. A study conducted by Meyer and Behar-Horenstein, 2015 revealed that teachers were more collaborative when working within the MTSS process. Meyer & Behar-Horenstein indicated that teachers needed support on how to analyze data and lacked knowledge on research-based interventions. The study also revealed that teachers had concerns about lack of training from administration and professional development. Meyer & Behar- Horenstein's previous study confirmed the need for professional development on implementing research-based interventions. Horner's 2018 study found that professional development increased the problem-solving teams' interactions and ability to work together to solve problems. Meyer & Behar-Horenstein's findings confirmed that teachers wanted to learn more about the problem-solving process and desire more direction and coaching from administration. Previous research found that IST problem-solving may suffer if the structure of the team were not developed (Meyer & Behar- Horenstein, 2015). Research has indicated that professional development and continuous professional development can provide beneficial results in running efficient problem-solving meetings (Horner, et. al, 2018).

The current multiple case study builds upon Meyer & Behar-Horenstein's (2015) previous research by interviewing participants with different levels of participation in professional development. Professional development is necessary for all members of the IST so that everyone has the same understanding of the process. There was confusion about the MTSS process and the structure of the IST because all the members did not

attend the same professional development and all members have had different levels of

professional development. While the district is working on "turnkeying" the information

learned, there is clearly a transition period where many staff members do not have the

same understanding of the process.

The findings of Avant's 2016 study exploring using the MTSS process to

encourage social justice found that social workers played an important role in guiding

staff on understanding diversity. Avant's study found that 40% of the social worker's

surveyed perceived MTSS as a system that could provide equitable supports for students.

Only 10% of the social workers in Avant's study perceived the MTSS process to include

practices that promote social justice. The current study supported Avant's study in that

the social worker is an important part of the IST process. In the current multiple case

study, the elementary case participants revered their social worker and described her as

the key communicator to students and their families. The current research found that the

social worker often has information about students that is unknown to the other staff

members and is important in the IST process so that the outcomes for the student are

equitable, meaning that the student gets what they need. Both Avant's 2016 study and the

current study suggest that the social worker take on a leadership role in promoting

equitable practices and fostering relationships through the IST and MTSS process.

A study conducted by Brouwer et. al. (2011) studied the impact of diversity on

communities of practice, specifically teacher teams, in a school environment. Brouwer's

study indicated that teachers perceived mutual engagement to be higher than shared

repertoire and joint engagement. This is supported by the current multiple case study

where participants from both cases were collaborative in their efforts to problem-solve

for students and all had a clear understanding that the purpose of the IST is to work together to determine how to support a student of concern. The shared repertoire was not clear and consistent for all participants and joint enterprise, understanding the purpose of the IST had inconsistencies demonstrated through the behaviors and attitudes of some of the participants.

Cressey, 2019 conducted a study to determine the effects of combining SEL practices with Culturally Responsive Practices and PBIS within the MTSS process. It was determined that SEL programs may be strengthened through the integration of culturally responsive practice and the integration of SEL, CRP and PBIS can achieve equitable outcomes for students (Cressey, 2019). The current multiple case study indicates the lack of culturally responsive practices integrated into the IST process and the difference in the understanding of equitable practices among staff members.

Bui and Fagan's (2013) study on improving the reading comprehension levels of grade 5 students from diverse backgrounds demonstrated that using research-based strategies with culturally responsive practices can have positive impacts on learning. Participants of the current multiple case study were unfamiliar with culturally responsive practices or did not relate culturally responsive practices to supporting students through the IST process. Two of the sixteen participants spoke about accessibility and a strength-based approach, but most of the participants did not acknowledge culturally responsive practices.

Limitations of the Study

While the findings of this multiple case study consisted of data from sixteen participants, the sample was limited in the diversity of the participant groups. In the

elementary school, seven of the eight participants were female, two were administrators and six had more than five years of experience. Seven of the participants were White and one Hispanic. In the middle school, all eight of the participants were female, only one was an administrator, six had more than five years of experience and all participants were White. Obtaining a more diverse participant pool could provide additional insight into equitable practices of the IST.

Another limitation of the study was location. Although the study was a multiple case study, it took place in two different locations within the same school district. This school district is a predominately White community with the student population being 70% White, 4% Black/African American, 16% Latino/Hispanic, 6% Asian or Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander, and 4% Multiracial (nysed.gov, 2022). Providing data from another district with different demographics could provide additional insight. In addition, data from another school district with a different MTSS process in place could provide different perspectives of the participants.

This study took place during a period of change for this school district. In each location, staff members were adjusting to a shift from RTI to MTSS. Due to this shift in practice, there was confusion regarding steps to take within the process of MTSS and what data was necessary to bring to an Instructional Support Team meeting. This change in practice may have impacted perceptions of the participants.

Due to the shift in practice from RTI to MTSS the school district invested in Professional Development on MTSS for some of the staff members. Each building had members of the IST participate in the professional development, however, not all members of the two Instructional Support Teams participated. This can be considered

another limitation as the knowledge of each member of the IST was different depending on their attendance of the same professional development opportunities.

Recommendations for Future Practice

A recommendation for future practice from the findings of this multiple case study is to provide the same professional development for all staff that would be participating in the MTSS process. The study showed that there were inconsistencies in the professional development provided for the members of the IST. The two cases had different members of their Instructional Support Teams attend district-wide professional development on streamlining their MTSS process. These inconsistencies in professional development among the members of the individual Instructional Support Teams caused confusion within the community of practice. It is also recommended to plan for on-going professional development regarding the MTSS and IST process over an extended period of time so that all staff become comfortable with the process and feel like they are a part of the process. It would be beneficial for the school district to develop a professional development policy for staff members. As a district takes on a new initiative such as streamlining and shifting a process such as the MTSS process, all staff members should be required to participate in professional development regarding that shift in practice. If it were not possible for all members to participate in professional development due to coverage or other obstacles, a plan for sharing the professional development among staff members is suggested. There should be core team members that train staff over a scheduled period of time so that everyone has the knowledge on how to implement new protocol. Core members should be proficient in the professional development so they could train new staff members.

In addition to professional development on the MTSS process, a recommendation for future practice is to provide training for all staff on how to implement the NYS Culturally Responsive -Sustaining Education Framework. This framework was developed by the New York State Board of Regents and the NYS Education Department in 2018 and have now has an implementation guide. (New York State Department of Education, 2022) The framework encourages equity and inclusion for all students and their families and includes strategies for students, teachers, administrators and district administration. This work should be included in all work, initiatives, streamlining and changes that are implemented in school districts across the country. Knowledge of the framework would support equitable practices and ensure that outcomes for students were equitable. To meet the needs of all students, the IST must problem solve with a clear understanding of equity and diversity (Newall, 2017).

In addition to training on MTSS, and the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Educational Framework, it is also recommended that teachers service providers receive training on implementing research-based interventions and how to utilize data to drive instruction and support students in the classroom. This study indicated that teachers felt insecure in the areas of implementing interventions for students and using data to drive instruction. Support in these areas would build confidence, encourage the use of both interventions and progress monitoring, and provide more information to support students in the general education classroom. This training would be a step in shifting the teachers' perceptions on who is responsible for providing interventions for students. Often the classroom teachers feel that it is the responsibility of a support service provider to provide interventions for struggling students.

Proactive communication and collaboration about students are another implication and recommendation of this research study. Participants in both cases of this study expressed their frustration in not having enough information about a student's background. In the elementary school they described the school social worker as the "keeper of information" about a student, their familial background and other information that may be impacting their academics and behaviors in the school environment. In the middle school there were similar concerns about teachers not having the information they need to understand what a student is "going through". There needs to be a way to open the communication between teachers and support staff in a more proactive process so that teachers have information about their students, can support them, understand them, and build upon the relationships they have with them. This would enable the teachers to make deeper connections with their students which should have a positive impact on student success. Building relationships with students should be a priority and is key to their success in school.

Recommendations for Future Research

The Instructional Support Team or problem-solving team is an important component of the MTSS process. The IST collaborates on providing appropriate research-based interventions to support students that are struggling in the classroom with academic, behavioral, or social-emotional areas of need. If the decision making during the IST process embodies culturally responsive actions, practices and behaviors, it could provide more equitable outcomes for students of color, English Language Learners, students with diagnosed disabilities, and students that are economically disadvantaged (Newall, 2017).

This multiple case study focused on one elementary school and one middle school from the same school district. A recommendation for future research would be to replicate this multiple case study by comparing the outcomes from two different school districts with different demographics or multiple districts over an extended time period.

Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a similar study comparing two different IST groups from different school districts with similar demographics where both schools are the same grade levels. One of the schools should have implemented or provided training on the Culturally Responsive Sustaining Framework. A comparison of the problem-solving teams' actions, practices and behaviors can be made to see if there was a deeper understanding of culturally responsive practices and equity when the framework is intentionally implemented in school and the staff has knowledge and training about how to incorporate a culturally responsive framework into their everyday work with students.

Building leadership and district leadership impact outcomes for students. Another recommendation for future research is to conduct a similar study looking at the impacts of the perceptions of building leaders on the IST process and their knowledge of culturally responsive practices and how that impacts the perceptions of the teaching staff on the concept of equity. This can be done through a quantitative study utilizing surveys and analyzing the results through a statistical analysis.

Conclusion

The MTSS process and the role of the Instructional Support Team is in process to support students in areas where they may be struggling in school. These areas of struggle can be academic, behavioral, or social and emotional in nature. The process of supporting

students through the IST allows for the collaboration of a community of practice to determine how to best support a student.

The MTSS process takes place in school districts across the country and many districts are making changes to their process to ensure fidelity and to make sure that the needs of our students are being met. To ensure that the MTSS process and IST support the best possible outcomes for students, culturally responsive practices should be in place and provide a foundation of knowledge for all educators. Equity in education is defined as all students being provided with a sense of belonging in a school of excellent teaching, high expectations for all students, where teaching and learning is responsive, and fluid and all students get what they need to be successful (McCart & Miller, 2020).

The findings from this study suggest that there are some positive actions, practices and behaviors in place during the community of practice (IST) that support equitable outcomes for students in the both the elementary school and the middle school. Collaborative practices, the belief in fostering relationships with students, the desire to know about a student's background, and participation in professional development all contribute to equitable outcomes for students. The findings also indicated that there is a lack of consistency in professional development for all IST members, lack of understanding of equitable practices, and support needed for teachers to use data and implement interventions.

Recommendations for future practice suggest that all staff would benefit from the streamlining of professional development of the MTSS process to include all staff involved in the process. It is also suggested that there be district-wide implementation of staff understanding and learning how to utilize all four principles of the New York State,

Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education Framework. Consistency with MTSS

professional development combined with training on Culturally Responsive Sustaining

Educational Framework for all staff would have a positive impact on equitable outcomes

for students.

APPENDIX A IRB APPROVAL

IRB-FY2023-18 - Initial: Initial - Expedited - St. John's

do-not-reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>
Mon 9/12/2022 1:03 PM

To: Andrea M. Horowitz <andrea.horowitz20@my.stjohns.edu>;Dr. Joan I. Birringer-Haig
<birringj@stjohns.edu>

* External Email *

**ST. JOHN'S
UNIVERSITY**

Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Sep 12, 2022 1:02:37 PM EDT

PI: Andrea Horowitz
CO-PI: Joan Birringer-Haig
The School of Education, Ed Admin & Instruc Leadership

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2023-18** *Culturally Responsive Community of Practice: A Multiple Case Study of Instructional Support Teams*

Dear Andrea Horowitz:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Culturally Responsive Community of Practice: A Multiple Case Study of Instructional Support Teams*. The approval is effective from September 12, 2022 through September 11, 2023.

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. **Cultural Responsiveness**

   A. How do you make decisions as a team?

   - Decisions regarding interventions

   - Decisions regarding moving into the next tier

   B. How are students' backgrounds utilized in decision making?

2. **Community of Practice**

   A. What is a community of practice to you?

   B. How does the IST exemplify a community of practice?

   C. What is the structure of the IST in your building?

   - PD

   - Culturally responsive practices

   - Function within MTSS process

3. **Equity**

   A. What does equitable practice mean to you?

How does the IST determine that a student is not reaching their potential and that there is a need for interve

APPENDIX C LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT – SCHOOL DISTRICT

SUPERINTENDENT

Dear _____,

My name is Andrea Horowitz , and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at St. John's University. I am conducting a study for my dissertation titled: *Culturally Responsive Community of Practice: A Multiple Case Study of Instructional Support Teams.* The details of the study are provided below.

Purpose – The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to investigate how the cultural responsiveness of the instructional support team impacts equitable outcomes for students. The selection criteria for participation in this study are members of two instructional support teams, one from an elementary and the other a middle school from the same school district with a diverse population.

Participation Requirements - The elementary and middle level IST members in your district will be asked to participate in an individual interview via the secure St. John's University WebEx program at a convenient time for them or participate in an in-person interview at the site of their school. The interview will include a few short, open-ended questions no longer than 45 minutes. The sessions will be audio and video-recorded using WebEx or audio recorded if in person.

Potential Risk - There are no known risks in this study. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time and may choose not to participate in the interview process. All data will be kept confidential. At no time will a name or identifying school information be included in the study.

Potential Benefit - There are no direct benefits to your school district for participating in this research project. No incentives will be offered. However, the results may have informational benefits for educators and policy makers regarding possible ways to

improve the effectiveness of principals' feedback following observations, which in turn will help teachers to grow professionally in their instructional practices and indirectly benefit student achievement.

Anonymity / Confidentiality - The data collected in this study will be kept confidential. All data are coded such that your school district and teachers will be anonymous. In addition, the coded data will only be available to the researcher associated with this project. No identifying information will be collected.

Right to Withdraw - Your school district and teachers have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants may omit any questions on the survey they do not wish to answer.

Contact Information - If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Andrea Horowitz at andrea.horowitz20@stjohns.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, 718.990.1955, or digiuser@stjohns.edu. If you feel you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the dissertation chair and Co-Investigator, Dr. Joan Birringer-Haig, at birringj@stjohns.edu.

I would be pleased to meet with you to further explain my doctoral study and what is required for my research. I am available at any time of day or evening. Please respond either to this email or by calling me at (516) 652-4646 to let me know your interest in supporting this study.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Andrea Horowitz

_____

Doctoral Candidate,
Administrative and Instructional Leadership
St. John's University
Queens, NY 11439

Signatures

I have read the above description of the proposed study by Andrea Horowitz and understand the conditions of the district personnel's participation. I understand the data will be coded and will not be used in any way to identify the school district, the superintendent, the school, or the staff members. Your signature indicates that you agree to allow the district personnel (elementary and middle level teachers) to participate in this study.

Superintendent's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Superintendent's Name:

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: *(Andrea Horowitz)*

APPENDIX D LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT – PRINCIPAL

Dear _____,

My name is Andrea Horowitz , and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at St. John's University. I am conducting a study for my dissertation titled: *Culturally Responsive Community of Practice: A Multiple Case Study of Instructional Support Teams.* The details of the study are provided below.

Purpose – The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to investigate how the cultural responsiveness of the instructional support team impacts equitable outcomes for students. The selection criteria for participation in this study are members of two instructional support teams, one from an elementary and the other a middle school from the same school district with a diverse population.

Participation Requirements - The IST members in your school will be asked to participate in an individual interview via the secure St. John's University WebEx program at a convenient time for them or participate in an in-person interview at the site of their school. The interview will include a few short, open-ended questions no longer than 45 minutes. The sessions will be audio and video-recorded using WebEx or audio recorded if in person.

Potential Risk - There are no known risks in this study. Participation is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time and may choose not to participate in the interview process.   All data will be kept confidential. At no time will a name or identifying school information be included in the study.

Potential Benefit - There are no direct benefits to your school district for participating in this research project. No incentives will be offered. However, the results may have informational benefits for educators and policy makers regarding possible ways to improve the effectiveness of principals' feedback following observations, which in turn

will help teachers to grow professionally in their instructional practices and indirectly benefit student achievement.

Anonymity / Confidentiality - The data collected in this study will be kept confidential. All data are coded such that your school district and teachers will be anonymous. In addition, the coded data will only be available to the researcher associated with this project. No identifying information will be collected.

Right to Withdraw - Your school district and teachers have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants may omit any questions on the survey they do not wish to answer.

Contact Information - If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Andrea Horowitz at andrea.horowitz20@stjohns.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, 718.990.1955, or digiuser@stjohns.edu. If you feel you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the dissertation chair and Co-Investigator, Dr. Joan Birringer-Haig, at birringj@stjohns.edu.

I would be pleased to meet with you to further explain my doctoral study and what is required for my research. I am available at any time of day or evening. Please respond either to this email or by calling me at (516) 652-4646 to let me know your interest in supporting this study.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Andrea Horowitz

_____

Doctoral Candidate,
Administrative and Instructional Leadership
St. John's University
Queens, NY 11439

Signatures

I have read the above description of the proposed study by Andrea Horowitz and understand the conditions of the district personnel's participation. I understand the data will be coded and will not be used in any way to identify the school district, the superintendent, the school, or the staff members. Your signature indicates that you agree to allow the district personnel (elementary and middle level teachers) to participate in this study.

Superintendent's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Superintendent's Name:

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: *(Andrea Horowitz)*

Dear _____,

You are invited to participate in my doctoral research study on how the culturally responsive actions, beliefs and practices of the Instructional Support Team (IST) member impact equitable outcomes for students. I am Andrea Horowitz, and I am conducting a study for my dissertation study titled, Culturally *Responsive Community of Practice: A Multiple Case Study of the Instructional Support Teams.*

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to investigate how the cultural responsiveness of the instructional support team impacts equitable outcomes for students. The selection criteria for participation in this study are members of two instructional support teams, one from an elementary and the other a middle school from the same school district with a diverse population.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview via the secure St. John's University WebEx program, which will last no longer than 45 minutes. The interview will include approximately 8-10 open-ended questions. The sessions will be audio and video recorded using WebEx. During the interview or focus group, I will be asking you questions about your experiences as a member of the IST.

Possible Risks and Benefits: There are no known potential risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, it is reasonable to expect that your participation will provide researchers and practitioners

with information about how problem-solving teams can work collaboratively to provide equitable outcomes for students. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, if you prefer not to answer a question, or if you want to end an interview or focus group at any time, you are free to withdraw without penalty.

Confidentiality: Your identity as a participant will remain confidential. Your name or the name of your school will not be included in any forms, transcription, data analysis, or summary reports. Pseudonyms will be used in the study. This consent form is the only document identifying you as a participant and it will be stored securely in the office of the Principal Investigator available only to the Principal Investigator in a locked cabinet.

Contact Information: If you have questions about the purpose of this investigation, you may contact the Principal Investigator, _____ at _____@stjohns.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, 718.990.1955, or digiuser@stjohns.edu. If you feel you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the dissertation chair and Co-Investigator, Dr. Joan Birringer-Haig, at birringj@stjohns.edu.

Your signature acknowledges receipt of a copy of the consent form as well as your willingness to participate in the study.

_____
Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

Your signature acknowledges your consent to be audio and video recorded via WebEx for the interviews and/or focus group.

_____ I agree to be audio recorded during the interview or focus group.

_____ I agree to be video recorded during the interview or focus group.

_____

Printed Name of Participant

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

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Vita

Name	*Andrea Horowitz*
Baccalaureate Degree	*Bachelor of Science* *SUNY Old Westbury, Old* *Westbury, NY* *Major: Elementary* *Education*
Date Graduated	*May, 2003*
Master's Degree	*Master of Science* *Dowling College,* *Oakdale, NY* *Major: Literacy Education*
Date Graduated	*May, 2006*
Other Degrees and Certificates	*School Building Leader,* *School District Leader,* *Stony Brook University,* *Stony Brook, NY*
Date Graduated	*August, 2017*