

Copyright  
by  
Nara Nami Takakawa  
2013

**The Dissertation Committee for Nara Nami Takakawa Certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:**

**Problem-Solving Team Deliberations in a Response to Intervention Framework about Struggling Latino English Language Learners in Early Primary Grades**

**Committee:**

---

Audrey M. Sorrells, Supervisor

---

Shernaz B. García

---

Alba A. Ortiz

---

James L. Schaller

---

Nina Zuna

---

Christopher P. Brown

---

Deborah Palmer

**Problem-Solving Team Deliberations in a Response to Intervention  
Framework about Struggling Latino English Language Learners in  
Early Primary Grades**

**by**

**Nara Nami Takakawa, B.A.; M.A.; M.Ed.**

**Dissertation**

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Austin  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Texas at Austin**

**December 2013**

## **Dedication**

To my grandfather, Shinsaku Takakawa  
For instilling in me the importance and value of education

To my parents, Frederick and Betty Takakawa  
For their unwavering love, support, and belief in me

## **Acknowledgements**

The writing of a dissertation is never a solitary endeavor by the author. Doctoral students rely on the guidance, expertise, and mentorship of their committee chairs. For me, that person was Dr. Shernaz García. Thank you for your commitment to me and my research project even after your retirement from The University of Texas at Austin. Your supervision, guidance, and encouragement at all hours of the day and night were what sustained me and enabled me to finish. Dr. Alba Ortiz, thank you for being my academic and professional mentor, and Dr. Deb Palmer, thank you for sharing your knowledge, expertise, and words of encouragement. I am grateful to Dr. Christopher Brown who helped me think deeply about my method in its earliest stages. I would also like to acknowledge Drs. James Schaller and Nina Zuna for their willingness to serve on my revamped committee. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Audrey Sorrells for agreeing to serve as my official supervisor; I literally could not have completed this dissertation without you. And last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank Stephanie Hill-Townsend, who saved the day on many occasions and helped me navigate the murky waters of university bureaucracy.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the faculty and staff at Cotton Tree Elementary in Cherry Creek ISD. I am sincerely grateful and honored that you all welcomed me into your school and placed your trust in me. Your commitment to your students and their families is truly inspiring.

Finally, to my friends across the country and to my family in Hawaii (you know who you are), thank you for your never-ending belief in me. It was more important to me than you'll ever know.

# **Problem-Solving Team Deliberations in a Response to Intervention Framework about Struggling Latino English Language Learners in Early Primary Grades**

Nara Nami Takakawa, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Audrey M. Sorrells

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tiered framework that focuses on the early identification and support of students who are struggling to learn. In the problem-solving model of RTI, where a multidisciplinary team uses data to drive decision making, much remains unknown about how RTI should be implemented when struggling English language learners (ELLs) are the focus of team deliberations. The development of the multidisciplinary problem-solving team (PST) is grounded in the assumption that professionals from different disciplines such as school psychology, special education, and counseling would make less biased decisions than a single individual. However, a group of professionals may still make biased decisions based on stereotypes of ethnicity (Orosco, 2010), social class (Knotek, 2003), and inadequate knowledge of second language acquisition and bilingualism (Orosco, 2010). Not much is known about the process of team decision-making; in fact, no research to-date has examined how a PST deliberates about struggling ELLs.

A qualitative case study approach was utilized to investigate how one school's multidisciplinary problem-solving team used data in their deliberations about struggling ELLs in early primary grades. Ten members of a PST at an elementary school in an urban

area of Texas participated in this study; seven ELLs were the focus of the observed team meetings. Data were generated from the discourse of the team meetings, interviews, and school documents, including students' cumulative folders and language proficiency assessment records. Data were analyzed using discourse analysis, content analysis, and pattern-matching logic.

Findings revealed that the Tier 3 problem-solving process was not aligned with the district's expressed intent. In addition, a hierarchy of control constrained the problem-solving process and restricted the PST's ability to freely discuss the cases of struggling ELLs. Implications for implementing RTI with ELLs and suggestions for future research are presented.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	xiii
List of Figures.....	xiv
Prologue.....	1
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	4
Demographic Context and Achievement of ELLs .....	4
Disproportionality in Special Education .....	6
Response to Intervention .....	7
The Problem-Solving Team Model of RTI .....	10
The Limitations of RTI and Implications for ELLs .....	13
Culturally Responsive RTI .....	14
Determining Eligibility of English Language Learners for Special Education	16
Purpose of the Study .....	18
Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature .....	20
The Historical Context of Culturally Responsive Prereferral .....	20
Preventing the Disproportionate Representation of ELLs in Special Education .....	22
Questionable Testing Practices.....	24
Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Prereferral Interventions ...	27
Deterring Underachievement and Failure at School.....	27
Early Intervention for Students Who Struggle .....	30
Clinical Teaching.....	31
Access to Problem-Solving Teams that Support General Educators .....	32
Response to Intervention .....	35
Operationalizing RTI in a Culturally Responsive Framework .....	35
Tier 1 .....	36
Tier 2 .....	37
Tier 3 .....	37

Theoretical foundations of discourse analysis.....	39
Summary.....	47
Chapter 3: Method.....	48
Research Design.....	48
Context and Setting.....	50
The District’s Problem-Solving Team Process.....	51
Tier 1.....	52
Tier 2.....	53
Tier 3.....	55
Selection of School and Secondary Participants.....	58
The Campus Problem-Solving Team.....	59
Secondary Participants.....	60
Profile of Cotton Tree Elementary.....	60
Privacy and Maintaining Confidentiality.....	65
Faculty and Staff.....	66
Parents.....	67
Entry into the field.....	68
Informal Observer.....	68
Compensatory Strategies.....	69
Sustained Contact.....	70
Piloting the Analysis of Discourse Data.....	70
Data Collection.....	71
Data Sources.....	71
Observation of PST Meetings.....	72
Transcription of the Discourse Data.....	74
Field Notes.....	76
Interviews.....	77
Campus PST and Other faculty.....	78
Parents.....	78
Documents.....	79

Data Analysis.....	80
Content Analysis of the Discourse of the Meetings .....	80
Discourse Analysis .....	82
Interview Analysis .....	83
Analyzing Case Study Evidence: Developing a Case Description .....	84
Ensuring Trustworthiness .....	84
Credibility .....	86
Utility of Findings and Limitations .....	86
Chapter 4: Results.....	88
The Problem-Solving Team Process at Cotton Tree Elementary .....	88
Educational Features of Cotton Tree Elementary School .....	88
An Overview of the Dual Language Enrichment Program .....	89
Instructional Departmentalization .....	90
Assessments of Language Proficiency .....	91
Overview of the Problem-Solving Team Meetings .....	92
The Problem-Solving Team at Cotton Tree Elementary School .....	93
Victor Jiménez, Principal .....	93
Avery Paredes, Assistant Principal.....	96
Rebecca Croft, Communities in Schools Program Manager ....	100
Rachel Moore, School Counselor .....	102
Joshua Smith, Parent Support Specialist .....	105
Elise Fox, Bilingual Education Literacy Interventionist .....	106
Teacher and Student Profiles .....	107
Olivia Estes, First Grade Teacher .....	108
Carl Turner, First Grade Teacher .....	114
Elizabeth Aguilar, Second Grade Teacher .....	119
The Implementation of Cherry Creek ISD’s Problem-Solving (RTI) Process	125
Structure of the PST .....	126
PST Meeting Attendance .....	127
Team Members’ Roles and Responsibilities .....	128

Conceptual Understanding of the RTI Framework .....	131
Elements of RTI Are Present, But Not Clearly Defined or Described .....	131
Inaccurate or No Conceptual Understanding .....	132
Selective Implementation of Tier 2 Problem Solving .....	133
Types of Data Discussed by PST members .....	135
The Discourse of the Problem-Solving Team Meetings .....	138
A Hierarchy of Control: The Overall Control of the Online Database	142
During the Meetings: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Control .....	144
Primary Control of the Meeting by the Online Database through the Assistant Principal .....	144
The Assistant Principal: Primary Control.....	151
The Teacher: Secondary Control .....	167
The Teacher: Tertiary Control .....	171
Uncovering the Hidden Values of PST Members .....	174
Chapter 5: Discussion .....	180
Working Hypotheses .....	182
Tier 3 Problem-Solving Process Was Not Aligned with the Intent Expressed in District Guidelines .....	182
An Incomplete Conceptual Understanding of RTI.....	182
District Emphasis on Compliance Masked Cotton Tree’s Incomplete Understanding of RTI.....	184
A Discrepancy between Campus PST Members and Teachers about the Problem-Solving Process.....	186
The District Did Not Monitor the Problem-Solving Process According to Its Own Guidelines .....	188
A Hierarchy of Control Constrained the Problem-Solving Process ..	190
Profound Impact of the Online Database on the PST Meetings	191
Recognizing Constraints.....	196
Implications for Practice.....	197
District-Level Implications.....	197
School-Level Implications.....	198

Implications for Research .....	199
Conclusion .....	200
Appendix A .....	201
Appendix B.....	204
Appendix C.....	211
Appendix D .....	212
Appendix E.....	216
Appendix F .....	217
Appendix G .....	218
References .....	219

## **List of Tables**

Table 1 Description of Discourse Theory and Relevant Features of Interest.....	45
Table 2 A Comparison of School, District, and State Student Enrollment by Program and Category for the 2011-2012 School Year .....	61
Table 3 2011 State Accountability Requirements for Each Rating Category and Cotton Tree Performance Results .....	63
Table 4 Percent of Students at School, District, and State Level Who Met Standard on 2012 STAAR Exam.....	64
Table 5 Percent of Students Categorized as LEP Who Met or Exceeded Achievement Levels by Subject, School Year, and Grade at School, District and State Levels .....	65
Table 6 Primary and Secondary Research Questions and Data Sources .....	72
Table 7 Students' Demographic and Sociological Information Discussed at PST Meetings .....	136
Table 8 Educational Profile and Performance Data Discussed during PST Meetings .....	136
Table 9 Problem-Solving Efforts Discussed during PST Meetings .....	138
Table 10 Number of Utterances Spoken by Attendees at PST Meetings .....	140
Table 11 Number of Words Spoken by Attendees at PST Meetings .....	142
Table 12 Duration of Silent Periods during PST Meetings .....	148
Table 13 Binary Oppositions Mentioned about Students during PST Meetings Related to Student Academic Characteristics .....	176
Table 14 Binary Oppositions Mentioned about Students during PST Meetings Related to Non-Academic Student Characteristics.....	177

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Layout of Six Major Sections of District's Online Database. ....149

## Prologue

I can trace the genesis of my interest in students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds who might have learning disabilities to my tenure as a developmental writing teacher at a community college in my home state of Hawai‘i. My students ranged in age from 18 to 55, were of different nationalities and ethnicities, spoke many native languages other than English, had been in the U.S. for different lengths of time, and had varying abilities reading and writing in English. I did my best to make grammar and writing an enjoyable experience for my students, so I found it very rewarding when students told me that my class was the first time they had enjoyed learning English. In order to motivate my students, I always told them on the first day of the semester that writing was a skill like surfing or playing basketball. They would never become good at it by just watching other people surf or play basketball; at some point, they needed to get on a surfboard and try to catch a wave or get on the court and shoot baskets. Thus, in order to become good writers, they needed to write, revise, rewrite, revise, and write again.

For most of my students, my maxim ended up being true; the ones who put in the effort were able to improve their command of grammar and the different rhetorical styles that we studied. However, for a few of my students, no amount of effort resulted in improved writing skills. These few still stand out in my memory because I believe that I failed them as their teacher. They had significant needs in both reading and writing and made very little progress throughout the semester. One of them even told me, “Miss, I can’t understand our textbook.” At the time, I could only suspect that they had learning disabilities. To complicate matters, many of these students were not native speakers of English. Some of them spoke Cambodian or Tagalog as a native language while others

grew up speaking the local dialect of American English called “Pidgin”<sup>1</sup> by its speakers. (Linguists use its formal, more accurate name, Hawai‘i Creole English, or HCE.) It became clear to me that my training in English as a Second Language (ESL) was woefully inadequate for I was ill-prepared to teach students who encountered significant difficulty comprehending our textbook or writing a coherent paragraph developed around a main idea. I did not know how to determine why these students faced such challenges, or how best to tailor my instruction to meet their needs. It eventually became clear to me that I needed to further my education.

My first step was to find an appropriate graduate program. At the time, I thought that the identification of learning disabilities would be best accomplished through testing. So, I applied and was accepted into the master’s program in Educational Psychology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. I took courses in the social context of learning, testing, psychopathology, and statistics; I even took courses in special education as an elective. But, as I advanced through the program, I never felt able to answer the question that had started me on this journey in the first place. Eventually, I knew that I needed to look elsewhere.

My search eventually led me to the doctoral program in Multicultural Special Education at The University of Texas at Austin. I finally started to grasp the complexity of disability determination in CLD students as well as the inadequacies of past practices. Almost immediately, I began reading about Response to Intervention (RTI). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) was rewritten and signed into law in December 2004. IDEA 2004 gave schools the option of using RTI as a strategy for disability identification. One goal of RTI was to address cultural and

---

<sup>1</sup> A simplification of a contact language that develops when people without a common language must communicate. A pidgin has limited vocabulary, morphology, and syntax as well as a narrow range of functions. A pidgin becomes a creole when it acquires native speakers (Jaworski, 1998).

linguistic inequities in the traditional method of special education evaluation. Thereafter, I became interested in how CLD students, most especially English language learners (ELLs<sup>2</sup>), fared in this new framework and if it was a reliable method of disability determination. Because RTI is being implemented in school districts nation-wide, the need is urgent to gain a better understanding of how schools are implementing when ELLs are the students who are struggling academically, socially, and/or behaviorally.

---

<sup>2</sup> Many terms exist that refer to students whose English proficiency is limited, who may need additional instructional support. In this paper “English language learners” will be used to refer to students who are not native speakers of English and are still in the process of acquiring English. “Limited English Proficient” or LEP is the official term used by the federal government that refers to students who are unable to benefit from instruction in English.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This study investigated how a Response to Intervention (RTI) problem-solving team at an elementary school with a high population of English language learners (ELLs) deliberated about struggling ELLs. Developing a better understanding of how a problem-solving team used data to discuss ELLs who are encountering academic difficulties is important given the increasing numbers of ELLs in U.S. public schools (Aud, et al., 2011) and the nation-wide implementation of RTI as a method for Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) determination (The State Chart, 2010). According to the National Center on Response to Intervention, all 50 states are implementing RTI as an option for SLD determination; for some states such as Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, and Illinois, it is the only option. Yet, questions remain whether the RTI as a framework is able to respond to the complex needs of ELLs.

### **DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT AND ACHIEVEMENT OF ELLS**

The enrollment in U.S. public schools has been undergoing rapid changes in recent years. Between 1980 and 2009, the percentage of students who spoke a language other than English at home between the ages of 5 – 17 increased from approximately 10% (4.7 million) to 21% (11.2 million) of the population in this age range (Aud et al., 2011). By 2030, it is estimated that 40% of students nationwide will speak a language other than English as a first language (U.S. Department of Education & National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, 2003). Although Spanish speakers comprise approximately 73% of the ELL population, 13% of students speak an Asian or Pacific Island language while 10% speak an Indo-European language, such as French, German, or Portuguese (Aud et al., 2011). ELLs are a heterogeneous population not only in terms of native language, but also in national origin, ethnicity, socioeconomic background,

immigration status, and generation in the United States (Aud et al., 2011; August & Hakuta, 1997). ELLs enter public schools at different ages, with varying language abilities in English, and with different educational experiences in their native language (Durán, 2008).

Students from CLD backgrounds experience widespread disparities in resources, opportunities to learn, and achievement, all of which disadvantage CLD students compared to their White peers (Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan, 2007). In addition, recent systemic factors have adversely impacted the schooling experiences of ELLs, including the pervasive shortage of bilingual educators, the passage of English-only legislation, and the availability of language supports (Sullivan, 2011). In fact, nearly 32% of children who spoke a language other than English in the home live in the three states that implemented English-only policies: California, Arizona, and Massachusetts (Aud et al., 2011). The achievement patterns of ELLs reflect higher dropout rates, the lowest achievement scores, and the highest rates of poverty (McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, Cutting, Leos, & D’Emilio, 2005). In terms of reading achievement, data reported in the 2011 Nation’s Report Card for Reading show that ELLs have consistently lower average scale scores than non-ELL students at both the fourth- and eighth-grade levels across all states with reportable data (NCES, 2011). Compared to White students, ELLs fail in school at a significantly higher rate due to factors that are correlated to their racial/ethnic minority status, limited English proficiency, or lower social class (Artiles, Trent, & Palmer, 2004). All these factors concomitantly influence student performance and have been viewed as reasons for underachievement, which should be a cause for concern for educators because inadequate academic progress is a primary reason for an ELL to be referred for a special education evaluation (Orosco, Almanza de Schonewise, de Onis, Klingner, & Hoover, 2008). Perhaps, educators should instead consider how the system

of education in the U.S. does not appropriately respond to these students' needs. Hence, the need is great to develop a better understanding of how to better serve CLD students, especially those who are struggling to learn.

### **DISPROPORTIONALITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

The disproportionate representation<sup>3</sup> of students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in special education programs has been a concern for both educators and policy makers for over 40 years (Artiles, Trent, & Kuan, 1997; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Patton, 1998; Sullivan, 2011), ever since Dunn (1968) noticed that CLD students were disproportionately identified as having mental retardation<sup>4</sup>. Heller, Holtzman, and Messick stated in 1982:

Disproportion is a problem if children are invalidly placed in programs for mentally retarded students. . . .if children are unduly exposed to the likelihood of such placement by being in schools or classes with poor-quality regular instruction. . . . [and] if the quality and academic relevance of the instruction in special programs classes block students' educational progress, including decreasing the likelihood of their return to the regular classroom. (pp. 18-20)

Heller and colleagues were addressing issues of poor instruction and referral for special education, both of which might result in an inappropriate placement. These scholars expressed their concern in 1982, yet its relevance today—30 years later—is undeniable because it requires educators to ensure the validity of ELL placement in special education. Unfortunately, available research implicates current practices because English language learners are over- and underrepresented in special education (Artiles,

---

<sup>3</sup> Occurs when unequal proportions of different student groups of the overall school population exist in specialized programs such as special education and gifted and talented classes (Artiles & Trent, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> The current and appropriate term is Intellectual Disability.

Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2005; Sullivan, 2011; Tung et al., 2009) by grade, language proficiency, language program placement, and disability category. Although Response to Intervention holds great promise as a framework for improving past practices, questions remain whether RTI can appropriately respond to the needs of English language learners and impact their disproportionate representation in special education programs.

### **RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004) authorized educators to use Response to Intervention as an alternative process of identifying students with Specific Learning Disabilities. Although an operationalized definition of RTI is yet to be determined (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005; Kavale, 2005), Burns and Ysseldyke acknowledge that scholars agree about certain features of RTI: the use of interventions in a multi-tiered format and the significance of the direct assessment of academic skills. D. Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, and Young (2003) describe RTI as generally involving the following five steps:

1. Students participate in effective general education instruction provided by their classroom teacher;
2. Progress is monitored;
3. Those students who do not respond to the effective instruction are given additional or different remediation;
4. Progress is again monitored; and
5. Those students who are not responsive to the more intense intervention are either qualified or evaluated for special education. (p. 10)

The multi-tiered process of RTI (see D. Fuchs et al., 2003) has two fundamentally different models: problem solving or standard protocol. In general, problem-solving

models move school personnel through a four-tiered process in the identification and remediation of student difficulties (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005). In Tier 1, educators consult with the student's parents, and in Tier 2, with the building's assistance team. If the student still fails to achieve success, school district personnel are consulted to analyze the problem within the general education classroom (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005). Students who are still not successful at Tier 3 are then considered for special education eligibility, which is considered Tier 4 (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005).

The standard-protocol model of RTI typically has three tiers. The first is Tier 1, which is considered classroom instruction (D. Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). In this setting, classroom teachers should use scientifically validated<sup>3</sup> instruction, which should be given to all "children with similar problems in a given domain" (D. Fuchs et al., 2003, p. 166). Student progress is continually monitored and assessed, and student responsiveness is evaluated. If a student does not respond at an expected rate according to one of these methods, he or she would advance through the tiers (from Tier 1 to Tier 2 or Tier 2 to Tier 3) and receive increasingly more intensive interventions (D. Fuchs & L. Fuchs, 2006). It is assumed that all students will benefit from increased fidelity of implementation because only one intervention must be mastered and applied by educators. It is also assumed to be easier to assess the fidelity of its implementation since these interventions are applied to a large group of students (D. Fuchs et al., 2003). If a student continues to perform at a low level (e.g., 10<sup>th</sup> percentile or below), the cause can be attributed to a learning disability, which would then qualify the student for special education referral (Healy, Vanderwood, & Edelston, 2005). In the standard protocol model, language background or English proficiency level of the student generally may not influence evaluations of student performance.

A perceived advantage of RTI is that it enables educators to provide services to students who are struggling before they fail in school (Vaughn & L. Fuchs, 2003) unlike the IQ-achievement discrepancy model that required a considerable discrepancy between measures of aptitude and achievement before action could be taken. Students typically were required to wait until they were one or more standard deviations behind in reading achievement. This model, often referred to as “wait to fail,” has several disadvantages, including not providing necessary services to students who may need it and using identification measures that are not linked to instruction (Vaughn & L. Fuchs, 2003). Thus, the developers of RTI had intended for it to be more equitable; however, RTI does not elaborate how the process should differ based on socio-cultural and/or linguistic differences.

RTI is an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model that has proven unreliable when implemented with CLD learners. The IQ-achievement discrepancy model has been associated with qualifying disproportionate numbers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for special education services (Donovan & Cross, 2002). However, questions remain whether RTI can accurately identify Specific Learning Disabilities in students who are struggling, especially if they are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (García & Ortiz, 2008). Perhaps, it is the problem-solving model (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2005) of Response to Intervention that has the potential to identify the “right students” (García & Ortiz, 2004, p. 1) for special education services. The problem-solving team could deliver improved instruction, intervention, and assessment, which together should inform a disability determination. The members of this team deliberate about factors influencing the performance of struggling students in order to recommend appropriate, alternative interventions to address identified concerns. It is purposefully comprised of diverse individuals including administrators, teachers,

reading specialists, social service personnel, parent support specialists, and/or parents. However, much remains unknown about PSTs and their decision-making process when ELLs are the focus of their deliberations. Therefore, this study examined the deliberations of a PST to determine what and how information was being used to make decisions about academically and/or socially struggling ELLs, including referring ELLs for a special education evaluation.

### **The Problem-Solving Team Model of RTI**

D. Fuchs and his colleagues (2003) assert that the “problem-solving model appears more sensitive to individual differences” (p. 167). This ability to consider each student’s unique needs is akin to what intervention assistance teams (IATs) do. One function of the IAT is to assist the referring teacher by making adjustments to his or her practice for the benefit of the student (Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006). This type of IAT is known as the teacher assistance team (TAT; Chalfant, Pysh, & Moultrie, 1979) whose function is to serve as the “day-to-day problem-solving unit for teachers within a particular building” (p. 88). According to Chalfant and colleagues, membership on the TAT is comprised of three general educators with the referring teacher serving as the fourth member, and the parent as the fifth. The team reviews data that might explain a student’s difficulties, and suggests interventions that the classroom teacher implements in his or her classroom (Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas, & Cook, 2003). The progress of the student is monitored, and follow-up meetings are held to review the student’s progress and response to the intervention (Ortiz et al., 2006).

If the student makes adequate progress, the case is closed. However, if the student is still struggling, the second type of IAT, the student assistance team (SAT) is convened. The SAT can be the TAT with additional members, or it can be a separate team entirely

(Ortiz et al., 2006). In either configuration, the SAT includes the teacher experiencing difficulty with a student and a variety of specialists, such as administrators, special educators, and assessment personnel (Ortiz et al., 2006). The teachers and specialists combine their expertise to review the case, and may make additional classroom-based interventions, recommend other programs or service, or decide that the student should be recommended for a special education evaluation (Ortiz et al., 2006).

Thus, problem-solving teams come in various configurations with different purposes. The multidisciplinary team came into being through federal laws (EAHCA, 1975; IDEA, 1996; & IDEIA, 2004) that sought to improve educational services for children with disabilities by mandating nondiscriminatory identification and evaluation. The rationale behind the composition of this team was that referrals would be less biased if made by a group of professionals rather than an individual deciding alone (Ysseldyke & Algozzine, 1983).

To-date, the findings of research conducted on the decision-making process of PSTs have been mixed. Gutkin and Nemeth (1997) reviewed the literature on factors that impacted decision making in school-based teams in schools and other settings. They selected specific factors for review that are the most relevant to field-based school psychology: “the power of the majority, the value of dissent, polarization, and shared norms” (p. 196). Each of these factors impacted the ability of the group to make “good” decisions although Gutkin and Nemeth acknowledge that it is impossible to know the accuracy of PST diagnoses.

Other researchers have found that a group of diverse professionals does not always make more accurate decisions together. Martinez (2006) found that teachers in Texas who had training and experience with ELLs were better able to determine student needs and design specific and effective interventions compared to the PST whose

members were not as knowledgeable about ELLs. Powers (2001) cited California Department of Education statistics from 2000 that indicated Student Study Teams were not impacting the overrepresentation of African American students and the underrepresentation of Hispanic students in special education programs. Knotek (2003) documented how the problem-solving teams in his study did not attain the goals of objectivity and fairness that are assumed to be the result of a multiplicity of perspectives. In fact, Knotek concluded that the PST deliberations reflected a tendency toward confirmatory bias because of the high correlation between the teacher's initial concerns and the student's eventual placement decision. Orosco and Klingner (2010) found that the PST in a predominantly Hispanic elementary school was not able to respond to the ELLs' language and literacy learning needs. Students were qualifying for more intensive interventions based on inadequate instruction, compounded with weak professional support and resources. The authors concluded that the particular model of RTI implemented at that school was not responsive to language and literacy learning needs of the students.

However, findings from other studies on school-based intervention teams suggest that PSTs can have a positive impact on educator practices such as increasing academic learning time and performance (Kovaleski, Gickling, Morrow, & Swank, 1999), reducing the referral to and placement in special education (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006), positively impacting disproportionality (Marston, Muyskens, Lau, & Canter, 2003), and appearing to increase collaboration between general and special education teachers (Kovaleski, Tucker, & Stevens, 1996). Although Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) and Marston et al. (2003) considered students from ethnically diverse backgrounds, none of the problem-solving teams in these studies considered English language learners. Based on Martinez's (2006) finding, it appears that a PST that deliberates about ELLs is more

likely to make more accurate decisions if there are team members who have knowledge and experience with ESL and/or bilingual education.

These findings demonstrate that some problem-solving teams do not collectively make better decisions, especially when the focus students are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. In order to more appropriately serve ELLs and systematically address the many possible factors that influence performance, it is vital to understand how a problem-solving team uses data to make decisions about struggling English language learners.

### **The Limitations of RTI and Implications for ELLs**

RTI holds much promise as a means through which schools can systematically improve instruction for all children and perhaps even impact referral rates; however, critics have articulated many reasons for concern. First of all, research on RTI has focused almost exclusively on reading interventions. Kavale (2005) states that this confounding between Specific Learning Disabilities and Reading Disabilities (RD) may be a problem because “SLD may not be solely a reading achievement problem” (p. 554). Kavale and Nye (1985-1986) stated that students with SLD may have difficulty learning to read, but many will demonstrate difficulties in other academic areas, especially math (as cited in Kavale, 2005). Second, if the reading interventions that are commonly used in RTI did not include ELLs in the research sample (Klingner & Edwards, 2006), the validity of using these very same interventions with English language learners remains questionable without more data. RTI also assumes that reading interventions that have been successful for monolingual English speakers transfer to teaching ELLs who are learning to read in a second language (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). Although there is some evidence of the transfer between languages of some components of reading, such as

phonological awareness (Healy, Vanderwood, & Edelston, 2005), the extent to which reading interventions designed for use with monolingual native English speaking students can also be used with ELLs is still unknown (Klingner, Artiles, & Méndez Barletta, 2006). Third, when students do not respond to an intervention, RTI data do not explain why (Kavale, 2005). In fact, other ecological variables that could impact a student's success with an intervention such as the quality of the teacher's instruction and the fidelity of the implementation are not considered (Kavale, 2005). Finally, the studies that included ELLs in the sample may not have provided enough demographic or background information to know if generalizability to other language groups would be possible (Klingner, Artiles, & Méndez Barletta, 2006).

### **Culturally Responsive RTI**

For RTI to be successful with students from diverse backgrounds, the framework must include the sociopolitical, cultural, and linguistic contexts that influence educational processes (García & Ortiz, 2008). A systemic approach requires that educators understand how both positive and negative outcomes of interventions are influenced by variables that have been heretofore overlooked in RTI research (Klingner & Edwards, 2006); specifically, teacher, classroom, school, and community characteristics as well as student variables such as culture, language status, and language proficiency (García & Ortiz, 2008). García and Ortiz advocate for a “broader systemic approach” (p. 28) that acknowledges the impact that societal, federal, state, district, and community forces have on the teaching and learning in schools. This framework is also built on the assumption that culture is not limited to students from diverse backgrounds, but rather is “the context of education for all students” (p. 28). Within this culturally responsive framework, García and Ortiz advocate for three phases that include a “schoolwide focus on preventing

underachievement” (p. 28), early intervention for students who are struggling, and the use of school-based, problem-solving teams to develop more intensive interventions.

The literature on culturally responsive RTI frameworks has recommended the use of the problem-solving process to determine why CLD students are struggling. In general, the problem-solving process is seen as more flexible (D. Fuchs et al., 2003) and better able to consider the multitude of factors, such as culture, first and second language acquisition, and instruction, that influences student performance and achievement. García and Ortiz (2008) recommend that general education classroom teachers, including bilingual education and ESL teachers, should have the primary responsibility for solving instructional problems, and that school-wide professional development activities may be needed to support their ability to respond effectively to students’ needs. In other words, instruction must be culturally responsive and build upon students’ home culture and language while respecting their funds of knowledge. Educators who are culturally responsive are less likely to reflexively attribute students’ poor performance to their culture, language, or family, which “could potentially lower expectations and/or fail to consider school, classroom or instructional variables during problem-solving efforts” (p. 29). In addition, problem-solving teams must include educators with expertise in how cultural and linguistic factors influence teaching and learning in order to be successful with students from CLD backgrounds. Specifically, this expertise would reflect knowledge about “second-language acquisition, cultural influences on learning, effective native language and ESL instruction, assessing progress in the native language and in English, and partnering with CLD parents and families” (p. 32). This expertise will give these specialists the ability to distinguish a language difference from a learning disability (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

## **DETERMINING ELIGIBILITY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Determining whether an English language learner qualifies for special education services is a complex process that depends upon “the adequacy and appropriateness of all phases of the placement process: early instruction, pre-referral activities, the decision to refer, and the process of assessment” (Harry & Klingner, 2006, p. 15). Unfortunately, extant data implicate U.S. schools by how they educate ELLs. Zehler and her colleagues (2003) reported that nearly 60% of Limited English Proficient (LEP<sup>5</sup>) students received instruction only in English, and 12% did not receive any services especially designed for ELLs. In addition, Zehler et al. reported a significant decrease in the use of native language instruction compared to data collected 10 years earlier. Failure to provide effective language supports for students who are still learning English results in an increased likelihood of failure due to inadequate instruction or instruction in an inappropriate language rather than a learning difficulty on the part of student (Ortiz, 2002). Findings from the Artiles et al. (2005) study suggest that ELLs in English immersion programs had the highest risk of being placed in a resource specialist program (a less restrictive form of special education program) compared to ELLs who are receiving modified English immersion or bilingual education. Teachers who lack understanding of bilingualism and second language acquisition may conclude that an ELL’s academic or social difficulties would be more appropriately addressed in special education and use this reasoning to justify a special education referral (Orosco, Almanza de Schonewise, de Onis, Klingner, & Hoover, 2008).

---

<sup>5</sup> Limited English Proficient (LEP) is the term given meaning in section 9101 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. This term applies to a non-native speaker of English whose “difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual - (i) the ability to meet the State's proficient level of achievement on State assessments described in section 1111(b)(3); (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English...”

The process of special education evaluation for CLD students “is, at best a work in progress and, at worst, a biased and damaging process” (Rhodes, Ochoa, & S. Ortiz, 2005, p. 42) because educators often overlook macro-factors (e.g., environmental, cultural, and economic) and individual factors such as language acquisition issues and acculturation characteristics. A. Ortiz (1997) noted that the data that educators gather during the referral and evaluation process and the decisions they make using these data, indicate that they do not adequately understand second language acquisition, limited English proficiency, or cultural and other differences that impact learning.

Examples of questionable special education referral and eligibility decisions about CLD students, and ELLs in particular, can be found in the literature. Patton (1998) discusses systemic failures in the assessment and referral process that contribute to the overrepresentation of African Americans students in special education. Scholars question the validity of special education decisions about Asian American students due to factors such as a lack of understanding about students’ prior learning, their proficiency in English, and the reliance of the parents’ opinions of their child’s native language proficiency (Poon-McBrayer & García, 2000; Sharpe, 1998). Ochoa, Rivera, and Powell (1997) that found that only 6% of the 859 school psychologists (SPs) surveyed who had conducted psychometric evaluation of bilingual students indicated that they had considered the student’s native language and whether the student had had ample time to acquire English before making a referral to special education. In a larger study of 1,507 SPs from eight states with the largest populations of Hispanics (Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, New Jersey, New York, and Texas), Ochoa and his colleagues (1997) determined that the most frequent reason for referral could be associated with second language acquisition and/or cultural factors. Figueroa and Newsome (2006) examined 19 psychological reports of students whose native languages were Spanish, Hmong, Lao,

Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu and found that none of the psychologists reported as invalid any of the tests that had been administered in English. These patterns highlight concerns that students from CLD backgrounds are at higher risk of qualifying for special education based on factors unrelated to a disability.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Being able to ascertain if an ELL has a learning disability has been challenging educators for decades (Geva, 2002). One reason for this difficulty stems from the fact that second language acquisition patterns may present to educators as learning disabilities (USDOE & NICHD, 2003) due to the use of a universalistic diagnostic lens. In other words, team members evaluate all students based on the values of the dominant social class and language, standard American English. As a result, PST members may have qualified ELLs for special education based on invalid or unreliable data.

Another reason why educators have had difficulty determining if an ELL has a learning disability stems from the assumptions that were made about the composition of the multidisciplinary team, of which the problem-solving team is a derivative. The rationale behind the multidisciplinary team assumed that professionals from different disciplines (e.g., school psychology, special education, and counseling) would make more accurate decisions than one individual alone. However, prior research on PSTs has uncovered many limitations of the team process when ELLs are the focus of deliberation. Research has shown that group decisions are likely to be influenced by racial and ethnic stereotypes (Orosco & Klingner, 2010), social class (Knotek, 2003), and inadequate knowledge of second language acquisition and bilingualism (Orosco & Klingner, 2010). However, not much is known about the process of team decision-making. To-date, no one has examined how a PST makes intervention and/or disability decisions about struggling

ELLs. Even less is known about how these aspects of the process are implemented when the members of a PST are knowledgeable about educational practices for ELLs and struggling ELLs. Therefore, this study followed a qualitative case study design to examine how members of a PST used data in their deliberations about struggling ELLs. The following questions guided the data collection and analysis:

1. How does the problem-solving team implement the district's RTI process when English language learners (ELLs) are the focus of deliberations?
  - a. How does the school's PST implement the district's guidelines during meetings for ELLs (including structures, data, process, and timelines)?
  - b. What types of data do team members consider?
2. What is the nature of team deliberations during the PST meetings (e.g., topics discussed, by whom, duration of team member talk, link to previous efforts)?
  - a. How does the team utilize data during the problem-solving and decision-making process for ELLs?
  - b. How do team members talk about students, data, themselves, and others during the PST meeting?

## **Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature**

RTI as a framework holds much promise for schools to provide improved instruction, intervention, and more accurate referrals to special education, but its ability to respond appropriately to the complex needs of ELLs is still relatively unknown. The nationwide implementation of RTI in conjunction with increases in the ELL population necessitates an urgent need to better understand how this framework serves ELLs. This chapter begins with a presentation of the historical context of culturally responsive prereferral, followed by a review of the literature in four main areas: preventing the disproportionate representation of ELLs in special education; Response to Intervention (RTI), including culturally responsive RTI; the decision making of problem-solving teams; and the theoretical foundations of discourse analysis. The literature on these topics is considered relevant in order to examine how members of an RTI problem-solving team use data in their deliberations about struggling ELLs.

### **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PREREFERRAL**

The concept of prereferral emerged out of a concern about the disproportionate representation of students. Dunn (1968) estimated that between 60% to 80% of students who were receiving special education services were from “low status backgrounds—including Afro-Americans, American Indians, Mexicans, and Puerto Rican Americans; those from nonstandard English speaking, broken, and disorganized, and inadequate homes; and children from other non-middle class environments” (p. 6). Dunn argued for educators to end the practice of labeling and segregating children from culturally diverse backgrounds into special education. Two years later, Deno (1970) highlighted the use of the pathological or “medical model” (Artiles & Trent, 1994, p. 410), which situates

disability within the child, to qualify and serve students in special education programs. Dunn and Deno both made recommendations for changes in practice.

Over a decade later, however, little progress had been made. In 1982, Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) stated, “Unequal representation in special education is not a new phenomenon. . . .The controversies that surround the earliest programs for children who were considered unable to profit from regular instruction still dominate the field of special education today” (p. 7). The authors cited several legislative efforts, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which were attempts to ensure that students who needed special education services could access them. However, students who did not have disabilities were still disproportionately qualifying for special education programs. However, Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) asserted that disproportionality itself was not the key issue

but rather the validity of referral and assessment procedures and the quality of instruction received, whether in the regular classroom or in special education settings. If needed and effective educational services are provided in the least restrictive environment to students validly targeted, then any resulting inequality in minority representation in those programs would not constitute an inequity. (p. 11)

Thus, disability identification and valid assessment “are inextricably linked to issues of instruction” (p. 77).

Heller, Holtzman, and Messick (1982) concluded their report by recommending “Principles of Responsibility” (p. 151) that distributed the responsibility of appropriate assessment and placement across various service providers, including the classroom

teacher, administrators, the placement team, and special education and assessment staff. Perhaps the responsibility of the classroom teacher is paramount because all special education referrals originate in the general education classroom. Heller and colleagues stressed the importance of the classroom teacher accessing a range of resource professionals from special educators, school psychologists, and bilingual education teachers to identify and implement various interventions or instructional strategies with a struggling child. “All avenues within the regular program should be pursued” (p. 156). A referral for special education assessment would only take place if all avenues failed.

Recognizing that teachers may not have access to such program resources and “often [have] no place to turn for help” (Chalfant, Pysh, & Moultrie, 1979, p. 85), the authors recommended the creation of teacher assistance teams (TATs) to problem-solve with a teacher who has a student who is experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties in the classroom. The TAT underwent further refinement with the Ortiz and García (1988) framework for preventing inappropriate referrals of Spanish-speaking students to special education evaluation through culturally responsive practice.

### **PREVENTING THE DISPROPORTIONATE REPRESENTATION OF ELLS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

Throughout the decades, many attempts have been made to address disproportionality in special education. Despite litigation (e.g., *Diana v. State Board of Education*, 1970), the passage of federal legislation, such as the Education for All Handicapped Children (EAHC) Act (1975), re-authorized in 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act, and re-authorized again in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act, the creation of organizational structures and service delivery models (Artiles & Trent, 1994), students from CLD backgrounds have continued to be disproportionately represented in special education depending upon

the disability category and other factors such as social class, race/ethnicity, or language (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Regarding English language learners specifically, the picture is an especially complex one as they are over- or underrepresented depending upon their grade, first language (L1) and English (L2) proficiency, type of language support or program, race/ethnicity, and category of disability (Artiles et al., 2002; 2005). Artiles and his colleagues (2005) analyzed the databases of 11 urban school districts in southern California for the 1998-1999 school year. Examination of the data revealed that ELLs were underrepresented in special education in the lower primary grades and overrepresented from Grades 6 to 12.

In terms of L1 and L2 proficiency, ELLs with limited proficiency were overrepresented in the learning disability (LD) category in both the elementary and secondary grades, but especially in elementary grades. In the Mental Retardation (MR) category, ELLs with limited L1 and L2 proficiency were overrepresented in the secondary grades, whereas ELLs with limited L2 were underrepresented. Artiles and his colleagues (2005) also reported that ELLs with limited L2 were underrepresented in the Language and Speech (LAS) category in the elementary grades. Conversely, ELLs with limited L1 and L2 were overrepresented in both the elementary and secondary grades.

In addition, Artiles and his colleagues (2005) report that most of the ELLs in the high-incidence disability categories came from low socioeconomic backgrounds in both the elementary and secondary grades (particularly in MR) with the exception of ELLs with LAS in the elementary grades. Artiles and his colleagues brought to light a serious issue: “[P]atterns vary depending on the indicators used and the level at which data are examined” (Artiles et al., 2005, p. 294). In fact, differences of under- and overrepresentation by grade had been obscured in the 2002 National Research Council

report because the data on Latino students were presented in aggregate and did not reveal any patterns of disproportionate representation (Samson & Lesaux, 2009). The complexity of the findings of Rueda, Artiles, Salazar, and Higareda (2002) and Artiles and his colleagues (2005) “reinforce the importance of disaggregating data based on factors other than race/ethnicity, including age, grade, and English-language proficiency status” (Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009, p. 106).

### **Questionable Testing Practices**

One possible explanation for the persistent endurance of the disproportionate representation of CLD students in special education may be attributed to the IQ-achievement discrepancy model of identification (Donovan & Cross, 2002). This model asserted that the existence of a learning disability could be ascertained by a severe discrepancy between performance on achievement and intelligence tests in one or more areas—oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, mathematics education, or mathematics reasoning (D. Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). D. Fuchs and colleagues (2003) offer a comprehensive critique of the IQ-intelligence discrepancy model:

Critics charge that IQ tests are a poor index of intelligence; the IQ-achievement discrepancy approach represents a ‘wait-to-fail’ model since many students must perform poorly for years before their achievement scores are sufficiently below their IQ scores; the low achievement of many children with the label reflects poor teaching rather than a disability, despite federal regulations requiring that appropriate learning experiences be a precondition of labeling; and much of the necessary and costly data collection has as little to do with instruction as the label itself. (p. 158)

For English language learners, however, the use of the IQ-intelligence discrepancy model raises additional psychometric issues of validity and reliability. Ochoa, Rivera, and Powell (1997) that found only 6% of the 859 school psychologists who self-reported prior experience conducting bilingual assessments indicated that they had considered the student's native language. Only 4% indicated that they had considered the number of years that ELLs had had instruction in English. Similarly, Poon-McBrayer and García's (2000) document analysis revealed the use of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale and the Kauffman Assessment Battery for Children, norm-referenced intelligence tests, to determine the special education eligibility for Asian American students, most of whom (92.3%) were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Figueroa and Newsome (2006) found similar results when they examined the psychological reports of 19 ELLs and found that none of these reports were judged as invalid even though the tests had been administered in English, the language that the students were still in the process of acquiring.

These studies of test administration practices implicate school practices in several ways. First, most of these ELLs were not receiving first language instruction and were instead being taught in a language for which they had yet to acquire academic proficiency. It is not difficult to extrapolate that these students would not then perform well on any kind of test, be it criterion-referenced, as state achievement tests often are, or norm-referenced tests, such as the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale. Second, it is questionable practice to give norm-referenced standardized tests to ELLs because they are being tested in a language they have not fully mastered. The test administrator could not be fully confident that the results were measuring what the test was intended to measure (validity) because of the linguistic demands of the test that might have confounded the results. Third, the publisher's norming sample probably did not include a

sizeable number of ELLs. Therefore, an ELL's test score should not be compared to the published percentile rankings or scores.

Taken together, these findings about questionable test administration practices call into question whether these professionals adequately understood fundamental psychometric principles as well as “limited English proficiency, second language acquisition, or cultural or other differences that mediate learning” (A. Ortiz, 1997, p. 325). Rhodes, Ochoa, and S. Ortiz (2005) state

the greatest problem associated with the use of any set of tests or test battery lies in the fact that these tests are often selected, administered, and then interpreted in an manner that is not guided by the literature on how culture or language influence test performance of individuals from various cultures or with various linguistic backgrounds. As such, decisions and conclusions based on such data are haphazard and largely indefensible because they do not address known patterns of bias that can arise when standardized, norm-referenced tests are incorporated within the assessment process. (p. 154)

Disproportionality remains a continuing problem. In a recently published study that analyzed district-level general and special education data in Arizona, Sullivan (2011) found patterns that mimicked findings from previous research on ELL representation in special education. At the state level, ELLs were overrepresented in special education programs and in the following high-incidence categories: specific learning disability (SLD), speech-language impairment (SLI), and mild mental retardation (MIMR). At the district level, however, there were patterns of over- and underrepresentation in many categories. These continued patterns of the disproportionate representation of ELLs in special education programs may be interpreted thusly: (a) Students are being placed in special education for reasons unrelated to a disability (Poon-McBrayer & García, 2000;

Sharpe, 1998); (b) students are not being identified and therefore denied services (Hui, 2005; Limbos & Geva, 2001); and (c) the students with disabilities do not receive appropriate services because they have been misclassified (Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006).

Ultimately, the question remains: Are the “right” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 4) students being identified to receive the appropriate services? Prereferral interventions were suggested as a method of distinguishing between students with disabilities from those who were experiencing difficulties in the classroom due to other factors such as inadequate opportunities to learn or inappropriate instruction (García & Ortiz, 2006). García and Ortiz (2006) describe four key features of prereferral interventions that are culturally and linguistically responsive for CLD learners. The following section begins with a description of the four key features as follows: (a) deterring school underachievement and failure, (b) early intervention for students who are struggling, (c) diagnostic and prescriptive teaching, and (d) the availability of problem-solving teams that support general educators. The section concludes with an overview of how teacher assistance teams (TATs; Chalfant, Pysh, & Moultrie, 1979) assist general educators identify, develop, and implement prereferral interventions in order to work more effectively with students who are struggling (Papalia-Berardi & Hall, 2007)

### **Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Prereferral Interventions**

#### ***Deterring Underachievement and Failure at School***

Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) define culture as “the shared implicit and explicit rules and traditions that express the beliefs, values, and goals of a group of people” (p. 3). Thus, children come to school with their own cultural identity that reflects the values and traditions of their cultural group. Schools, on the other hand, are places that reflect the

beliefs, values, and goals of the dominant social group in the United States. These “cultural practices form the basis of social, academic, and linguistic practices and act as the driving force for the varied experiences students have in schools” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 5). Thus, schools are places where students from culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families experience difficulty participating and functioning; in other words, they experience cultural incongruence. García and Ortiz describe four elements of school culture that are especially important in order for students and families from CLD backgrounds to experience success. These four elements are:

1. Shared responsibility among educators for educating all students;
2. Availability of a range of general education services and programs;
3. Collaborative relationships with culturally and linguistically diverse families; and
4. Ongoing professional development focused on effective practices for culturally and linguistically diverse learners. (p. 5)

These four elements form the foundation of teachers’ efforts to design and implement culturally and linguistically responsive curricula and instruction.

A positive school environment is created when teachers, administrators, and other service personnel share the same belief that all students can learn regardless of their language, culture, or social class, and that it is their shared responsibility to ensure that students from all background do learn (Ortiz, 2002). Thus, educators must have high expectations of all students regardless of their background, and they must “focus on designing accessible, inclusive, and equitable learning environments that develop bicultural/bilingual competence among all students” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 5). Perhaps most importantly, student failure should not be explained by a student’s intrinsic characteristics. Rather, student failure should be interpreted as a mismatch between the

student's learning environment and learning needs (García, Wilkinson, & Ortiz, 1995). Finally, shared responsibility of all students means that the school administration has created systemic opportunities to plan and coordinate services when students are taught by more than one program (e.g., pull-out ESL or special education) or teacher (García & Ortiz, 2006). If educators do not share responsibility for the success of all students, it can result in a “disconnect between instruction across teachers and programs and contribute to students' learning difficulties or slow down their progress” (p. 6).

A positive school climate is also created when schools offer a variety of services and programs in order to meet students' unique needs. These diverse offerings will give teachers and other service personnel alternatives other than special education as the place to instruct students who are struggling in the general education classroom (Rueda, Artiles, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). García and Ortiz (2006) list examples of school-based programs: “early childhood education, Title 1 services, bilingual education/ESL, gifted/talented education, and services for immigrant students” (p. 6). Community-based programs, such as counseling, tutoring, and medical care, can offer additional support to teachers, students, and families.

Creating collaborative relationships with students and their families is another characteristic of a positive school climate. Instead of viewing parents negatively, and placing the blame for student failure in the home, educators should instead value the funds of knowledge that families have (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992). Funds of knowledge refers to the accumulated skills, abilities, and practices or bodies of knowledge that are necessary in order for a household to function. Examples of funds of knowledge include skills and knowledge about animal husbandry, farming, construction, and business. Thus, parents' knowledge is recognized by the school and their input about their children is sought after and valued. “Ultimately, these messages can serve to

develop an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 7), which may encourage more active parent participation in such school activities as school governance and decision-making.

Given that students from CLD backgrounds who attend low-income, urban schools are often taught by teachers who have been inadequately prepared to work with students from CLD backgrounds, professional development (PD) that develops culturally competent practice takes on paramount importance. Lynch and Hamson (as cited in García & Ortiz, 2006) propose that effective professional development in this area should focus on “participants’ cultural self-awareness, attitudes/expectations, beliefs, knowledge, and skills” (p. 7). A desired outcome of such training should result in teachers’ increased understanding of the socio-cultural influences on both teaching and learning in a CLD setting. Another positive outcome of PD that develops the cultural competence of school staff is that everyone will share a foundation upon which to collaborate in culturally responsive ways (García & Ortiz, 2006).

### ***Early Intervention for Students Who Struggle***

Regardless of what school-wide systems are in place improve classroom instruction, there will still be some students who experience academic, social/emotional, and or behavioral challenges. In such cases, García and Ortiz (2006) recommend that interventions be implemented as soon as the learning difficulties are noticed because the process was often initiated too late to be successful. As a result, the classroom teacher’s failure to intervene early and provide effective interventions could explain why a student is struggling rather than the existence of a disability. The authors also indicate that they have purposefully chosen the phrase “early intervention” instead of “prereferral intervention” because the word prereferral implies that the outcome of the intervention

will eventually lead to a special education evaluation. Finally, García and Ortiz advocate that general educators should engage in early interventions at the classroom level through diagnostic/prescriptive teaching. Should the early interventions not prove successful, then the teacher should have access to campus-level supports, such as peer and expert consultation and problem-solving teams.

### ***Clinical Teaching***

Clinical teaching is described as instruction that is carefully sequenced. When students are experiencing difficulty, teachers should implement a clinical teaching cycle that involves the following steps (Ortiz, 2002):

1. Teach skills or content;
2. For students who experience difficulty, reteach using different strategies;
3. For students who continue to struggle, conduct informal assessments to pinpoint the difficulty;
4. Modify instruction based on assessment outcomes; and
5. Monitor student progress. (p. 43)

King-Sears, Burgess, & Lawson (1999) recommend that student progress can be monitored through the use of curriculum-based assessments, such as observations, inventories, and analyses of student work or behavior, in order to plan and modify instruction (as cited in García & Ortiz, 2006). In the case of a struggling English language learner, it is imperative that the teacher gauges both conversational and academic language proficiency in order to determine the language(s) of instruction as well as the learning goals and objectives for first and second language instruction (Ortiz & García, 1990). The compilation of assessment and performance data may prove

extremely useful if a student does end up being referred to a remedial or special education program (Ortiz, 2002).

### ***Access to Problem-Solving Teams that Support General Educators***

According to Ortiz (2002), if clinical teaching is unsuccessful and a student is still struggling to learn, teachers must have access to general education support systems to further problem solving. Ortiz suggests a general education support system with three elements: (a) peer or expert consultation, (b) teacher assistance teams (TATs), and (c) alternative programs and services.

**Peer or expert consultation.** General education teachers work collaboratively with peers or experts to develop appropriate strategies that address a student's learning difficulties. This peer or expert continues his or her assistance and guides the teacher through the implementation process. Ortiz (2002) offers many suggestions for how peers or experts may support general educators. They can share instructional resources or observe each other's classrooms with the goal of improving instruction or managing student behavior. ESL teachers could recommend instructional strategies that support ELLs while also coordinating content and ESL instruction.

**Teacher assistance teams.** The purpose of a teacher assistance team (Chalfant, Pysch, & Moultrie, 1979) is to assist teachers with academic and behavioral challenges that their students experience in the classroom. The TAT is comprised of four to six general educators, including the teacher who is requesting assistance with the design of interventions that will help a struggling learner. The student's parents are also invited to join the TAT. García and Ortiz (2006) distill the essential tasks that Chalfant and his colleagues recommend should occur at a TAT meeting:

1. Reach consensus as to the nature of the problem;

2. Determine priorities for intervention;
3. Help the teacher select the methods, strategies, or approaches to be used in solving the problem;
4. Assign responsibility for carrying out the recommendation; and
5. Establish a follow-up plan to monitor progress. (p. 9)

After the TAT meeting, the teacher implements the plan with assistance from other team members, if necessary. Follow-up meetings are convened to review student progress. The case is closed if the problem is resolved; if the problem is not resolved, then the TAT repeats the problem-solving process.

García and Ortiz (2006) make an important distinction between the TAT and prereferral interventions, which the teacher initiates because she views the difficulties of the student as the responsibility of someone else, such as interventionists or special educators.

When teachers contact the team, their focus is on requesting assistance from the TAT for themselves; they are not referring students to the team. In other words, they continue to “own” the problem but seek to resolve the situation with the assistance of peers, creating shared responsibility. (pp. 10–11)

García and Ortiz (2006) also recommend that a student’s progress be monitored and documented; in addition, the fidelity of the intervention’s implementation should also be verified. Additionally, if a learner from a culturally and linguistically diverse background does not respond to an intensive intervention, educators must evaluate if the intervention would have been able to meet the diverse needs of the CLD learner. The authors acknowledge that TATs have been successful at assisting teachers to meet the needs of their challenging students; however, there has been little discussion about the appropriateness of interventions for CLD populations.

**Alternative programs and services.** When classroom teachers request assistance from a campus-wide problem-solving team, it is imperative that the team has access to a variety of alternative programs and services that will support the student's learning (García & Ortiz, 2006). These services may include “one-on-one tutoring, family and student support groups, family counseling, services supported by federal Title I funds, and so forth” (p. 10). Slaven and Madden (1989) stress that it is important that these services are provided as a supplement that supports not replaces classroom instruction (as cited in García & Ortiz, 2006). In addition, Anderson and Pellicer (1998) suggest that these services be intensive and temporary, and if students are removed from their general education classrooms for instructional support, they should be returned to their classrooms as quickly as possible (as cited in García and Ortiz, 2006). Finally, alternative programs and services should be “based on what is known to be effective for culturally and linguistically diverse students, and that they reflect the same philosophy as the rest of the school (i.e., high expectations, equity practices, additive orientation, and resilience-focused)” (p. 11).

García and Ortiz (2006) assert that the systemic and procedural elements that they recommend are not meant to discourage referrals to special education; instead, these recommendations are meant to ensure that the “right” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 4) students are referred to special education and not students whose difficulties can be explained by factors other than a disability. Ultimately, these recommendations can improve the academic performance of CLD learners while reducing the number of students inappropriately referred to special education programs or inaccurately identified as having a disability.

In the following section, I describe Response to Intervention (RTI), a process that incorporates many elements of what García and Ortiz (2006) recommended to prevent the

inappropriate referral of CLD learners to special education programs. However, it remains to be seen whether Response to Intervention (RTI), a relatively new process for identifying learning disabilities, will be able to accurately discriminate between language difference or disability in CLD learners.

### **RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA; 2004) authorized educators to use Response to Intervention as an alternative to the IQ-achievement discrepancy method for identifying students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). RTI is premised upon the delivery of high-quality instruction in the classroom and the use of appropriate, direct interventions for students who are struggling (D. Fuchs et al., 2003). The progress of the student is monitored; those who do not perform as expected should receive more intensive interventions (D. Fuchs & L. Fuchs, 2006). If the student continues to struggle, then a special education evaluation may be considered (D. Fuchs et al., 2003).

#### **Operationalizing RTI in a Culturally Responsive Framework**

García and Ortiz (2008) advocate for a “broader systemic approach” (p. 28) that acknowledges the impact that societal, federal, state, district, and community forces have on the teaching and learning in schools. This framework is also built on the assumption that culture is not limited to students from diverse backgrounds, but rather is “the context of education for all students” (p. 28). Within this culturally responsive framework, García and Ortiz advocate for three phases that include a “schoolwide focus on preventing underachievement” (p. 28), early intervention for students who are struggling, and the use of school-based, problem-solving teams to develop more intensive interventions.

Although García and Ortiz (2008) state that the “phases of [their] framework

parallel commonly used tier models of RTI” (p. 28), there is one crucial difference. Unlike conventional RTI models where progression through the tiers proceeds in a linear fashion, Phase 1 should constantly be influencing instruction, intervention, and any decisions related to an ELL who is struggling to learn. Accepting the shared responsibility of educating all children at a school is a commitment that should remain constant regardless of which phase (or tier) a child is in. Similarly, providing culturally responsive programs and services, engaging in professional development, and collaborating with CLD families, which are all features of Phase 1, can and should occur in the culturally responsive RTI framework (García & Ortiz, 2008). In the following subsections, each tier within a culturally responsive RTI framework is described in detail.

### ***Tier 1***

RTI assumes that curricula in the general education classroom is evidence-based, implemented in a manner in which the authors’ intended, otherwise known as treatment fidelity, and is effective for all student (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008). For ELLs, this implies that the evidence-based instruction should have been validated with students like those upon whom the interventions are being implemented (Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

Other features of Tier 1 instruction are having adequate opportunity to learn using evidence-based, “culturally responsive, appropriate, quality instruction” (Klingner & Edwards, 2006, p. 109). An ELLs first and second language proficiency levels, their culture and background knowledge should also be taken into account (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Xu & Drame, 2008). An ELL’s progress should be closely monitored to determine if that student is meeting predetermined benchmarks. If additional instruction modifications, which may include re-teaching, instruction in the student’s native

language, or being placed in smaller groups, do not result in the meeting of benchmarks, then the student may be recommended for Tier 2 (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

### ***Tier 2***

If an ELL has received culturally responsive instruction implemented with fidelity and has not reached benchmarks or made adequate progress, then a second tier of intervention is warranted (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). At this level, interventions and not instructional adjustments are provided; yet, they still must be culturally and linguistically appropriate. Tier 2 interventions are often provided in small group settings with a specialist, such a Title I teacher, reading specialist, special education teacher, speech-language therapist, or the classroom teacher (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008). These interventions are meant to supplement the general education curriculum. ELLs who do not meet targeted outcomes may move on to Tier 3 while students who do, may return to Tier 1 instruction although close monitoring of their progress should continue (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

### ***Tier 3***

Klingner and Edwards (2006) state that Tier 3 should begin with a referral to either a teacher assistance team or a child study team, a step in the process that can overlap with the increased intensity of Tier 2. (It should be noted that García and Ortiz [2008] view TATs as more compatible with a culturally responsive RTI framework.) The members of either the TAT or child study team should be diverse and have expertise in culturally responsive pedagogy, bilingual or ESL instruction, and culturally sensitive assessment (Klingner & Edwards, 2006).

Should an ELL advance to Tier 3, he or she would receive more intensive interventions either individually or in small groups, and his or her progress would still be

closely monitored. As previously stated, the number of tiers in various RTI models varies; therefore, in a 3-tier model, the ELL would be receiving special education services. In some models, ELLs would be provided with intensive, individualized intervention while undergoing an assessment for special education qualification (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008). In a 4-tier model, ELLs would receive intensive intervention at Tier 3 and failure to meet targeted benchmarks would result in advancing to Tier 4 or special education. At this level, ELLs' learning should be compared to similar peers in terms of level of performance or learning slope, and any assessments that are used should be evaluated for appropriateness of use with ELLs and interpreted in a manner that considers the ELL's native and English language proficiency and level of acculturation (Esparza Brown & Doolittle, 2008).

RTI has been perceived as a means through which to effectively address disproportionality and equity issues (Marston, Muysen, Lau, & Canter, 2003). However, whether RTI can identify the "right" students (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 4) for the appropriate services still remains to be seen. On an even more fundamental level, it is still unknown if RTI is an appropriate framework for students whose native or home language is not English and who are still in the process of acquiring English as an additional language. These concerns and limitations are especially relevant as we consider the ability of the problem-solving team model of RTI to close the equity gap and impact the disproportionality of CLD students in special education programs (García & Ortiz, 2008).

Because problem-solving team members engage in the social act of talking to discuss the cases of struggling students who have not responded to interventions, I chose discourse analysis an appropriate method to answer my research question about the nature of team deliberations. Thus, this chapter concludes with a review of the theory of discourse analysis.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The primary data source for this study was the discourse of problem-solving meetings. Therefore, in order to analysis the discourse data, I used discourse analysis. The following section elaborates the various theories upon which discourse analysis is based. I used the concepts of intertextuality (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Johnstone, 2008), positioning (Davies & Harré, 1997; van Langenhove & Harré, 1998), critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2002), and Derrida's binaries (Sarup, 1993) when identifying and marking selections in the discourse that I found noteworthy. Finally, I employed the social theory of Panopticism (Foucault, 1979) that Foucault develops in *Discipline and Punish* in order to consider the discourse of the meetings as a whole and its possible origins. The discussion of discourse theory begins with intertextuality.

Bloome and Egan-Robertson (1993) cite Kristeva (1986) as the scholar who first utilized the term "intertextuality" in her seminal work "Bakhtin, le mot, le dialogue, et le roman" (translated as "Word, Dialogue, and Novel") published in *The Kristeva Reader*. Although Bakhtin is credited as the originator of the concept of intertextuality, Bloome & Egan-Robertson (1993) review the numerous ways intertextuality has been subsequently defined and applied in the fields of Literary Studies, "linguistic studies grounded in social semiotics" (p. 306), and educational studies of reading and writing. They assert that in Literary Studies, "intertextuality has been primarily located in the text and in the reader" (p. 306) whereas linguistic studies have located intertextuality in language, distinct from texts and readers although related to both. Educational studies of reading and writing have located intertextuality in students as readers and writers, "but it is also viewed as fostered by the conditions in which students read and write (e.g., the instructional task, the classroom environment)" (p. 306). Boome and Egan-Robertson view intertextuality as

grounded in a broader view of social interaction as a linguistic process. People act and react to each other, and they do so primarily through language. Intertextuality describes one of the social (and cultural) processes involved in how people act and react to each other. (p. 308)

Johnstone (2008) defines intertextuality as “ways in which texts and ways of talking refer to and build on other texts and discourses” (p. 164). Texts can build upon other texts that preceded it; a sequential order is followed. Texts can also be related by being of a similar category. For example, the formatting conventions of a letter (i.e., greetings and closings) may be added within the body of an email. Traces of intertextuality can range from “the most direct repetition to the most indirect allusion” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 164). Examples in discourse could be repetition or previously mentioned words used in new ways, the use educational of legal jargon, or the names of tests.

The second theory that framed the analysis was positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1997; van Langenhove & Harré, 1998). The idea of “positioning” evolved out of a need to conceptualize “linguistically oriented social analy[sis] in ways that the use of the concepts of ‘role’ prevented” (Davies & Harré, 1997). According to the authors, the use of ‘role’ functions to “highlight static, formal and ritualistic aspects” whereas positioning “helps focus attention of dynamic aspects of encounters” (p. 43). Davies and Harré elaborate:

An individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is is always an open question with a shifting answer depending upon the positions made available within one’s own and others’ discursive practices and within those

practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own and others' lives.  
(p. 46)

Davies and Harré intended that their view of positioning would contribute to the understanding of personhood. "Human beings are characterized both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity. It is one and the same person who is variously positioned in a conversation" (p. 46). Thus, positioning is very useful when considering how actors in a social situation relate to each other. "Positioning can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts..." (van Langenhove & Harré, 1998, p. 16). For example, a principal could position herself as the interlocutor with power vis-à-vis a classroom teacher. Because positioning is fluid and ongoing, the teacher could subsequently position herself as the authority when speaking about a struggling student in her classroom within the same conversation. In this circumstance, the classroom teacher possesses knowledge about the student that the principal does not possess and may want to know.

Rogers (2002a; 2002b) uses critical discourse analysis to write about the "discourse of disability" (2002a, p. 214) and highlights the special education referral process as "one of the places where questions of identity are strategically and institutionally posed" (p. 214). The discourse of disability

...is shaped and shapes individual identities in local (e.g., classroom interactions, curriculum materials, special education meetings), institutional (e.g., curriculum, district decisions on special education funding), and societal (e.g., policy) context.  
(p. 215)

Rogers (2002a) states that critical discourse analysis (CDA) focuses on identifying "points of tensions" (p. 221) in data to examine the ways in which power is

displayed in language. Rogers cites Wodak who said that the aim of CDA is to make contradictions transparent. To accomplish this, Rogers combined the approaches of Halliday (1978), Fairclough (1992), and Gee (1989; 1996) because “each of these theories of language allows a conceptualization of learning as social change and a rearticulation of the relationships between genres, discourses, and styles, a crucial element of learning” (p. 219).

*Genres* represent ways of interacting “that include configurations of texts—both oral and written—that constitute a coordination of activity” (Rogers, 2002a, p. 221). Fairclough (2010) elaborates, “For any particular practice, the question of genre is the question of how texts figure (in relation to other moments) within work, the production of social life, and therefore within the social interaction that constitutes work” (p. 174). Examples of speech genres might include “interviews, literacy lessons, chronology games, and so forth” (Rogers, 2002a, p. 221). In order to identify examples of genres in discourse, the analyst seeks to identify agreements and disagreements, topic control, and turn taking, which Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) define as the constant change between the roles of speaker and listener in a conversation.

Gee (1989; 1996) distinguishes between *Discourse* (upper case “D”) and *discourse* (lower case “d”) in the following way. Discourses (upper case “D”) are “ways of being in the world; they are forms of life which integrates words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities” (Gee, 1989, p. 6). Little (d) discourse, on the other hand, refers to language that is used in personal interactions. Both discourses “are social and political and have histories of participation” (Rogers, 2002b, p. 252). In fact, primary Discourse is acquired within the context of an individual’s home and community (Gee, 1996). Rogers (2002b) elaborates that

acquisition implies a preconscious element to understanding the cultural models—the storylines, beliefs, assumptions, and ways of being—that are associated with this Discourse. The construct of acquisition, alongside of learning, is important to researching cultural models because it suggests that there is an invisible element to the storylines that people generally pick up unknowingly. (p. 252).

*Styles* refers to how “text informs the identification of people involved in the practice” (Rogers, 2002a, p. 221). Fairclough specifies that

the question of style is the question of how text figures (in relation to other moments) in the identification of people involved in the practice (the construction of identities for them, and differences between them). Different styles attach to different identities. (p. 174)

Rogers (2002a) identified styles by focusing on the use of modals (which is reflective of the speaker’s commitment to the message), use of pronouns, and active and passive voice.

The concept of binaries, which has its origins in the metaphysics of presence, was the fourth theory used to support the discourse analysis. Sarup (1993) describes the metaphysics of presence as thought systems that depend on a foundation, a ground, or first principle. These systems are often defined by what they exclude, by a binary opposition to other concepts. Thus, metaphysical oppositions rely on an assumption of presence, and “it is because of this assumption of presence that a priority has been given to speech over writing” (p. 35). Derrida calls this phenomenon *phonocentrism*. The assumption is that the voice is the center, and the privileged medium of meaning; on the other hand, writing is a derivative of spoken words. In this manner, Western philosophers (e.g., Plato, Heidegger, and Lévi-Strauss) downgraded writing in favor of speech. To

them, writing was considered “artificial and alienated compared to the immediacy and vivacity of human speech” (Sarup, 1993, p. 36). Derrida identifies another assumption in Western philosophy, that of “logocentrism,” which is the assumption that an “essence, or truth...acts as the foundation of all our beliefs” (p. 37). In addition, “there seems to be a longing for a ‘transcendental signifier’ which would directly relate, correspond, to a secure stable ‘transcendental signified’ (i.e., a *logos* [emphasis in original])” (p. 37). According to Sarup, examples of such signs are matter, idea, world spirit, and God.

Derrida argues that phonocentrism-logocentrism relates to centrism itself—the human desire to posit a ‘central’ presence at beginning and end. He states that this longing for centre, an authorizing pressure, that spawns hierarchized oppositions. The superior term in these oppositions belongs to presence and the *logos*, the inferior serves to define its status and mark a fall. (p. 38)

Thus, the identification of binaries is helpful to uncover what a culture values and considers important. Binaries expose how thought systems depend on a first principle or foundation that is defined by a binary opposition to other concepts (Sarup, 1993). Therefore, interlocutors may reveal values of which they themselves may not even be conscious. Through the use of these discourse analysis techniques, I hoped to uncover not only the values of the participants, but also how power was negotiated between the interlocutors. I was also interested in the types of data that the team members referenced and discussed. Table 1 describes the aforementioned discourse theories and lists examples of what I looked for in the discourse.

Table 1  
Description of Discourse Theory and Relevant Features of Interest

	Description	What the analyst investigates
Intertextuality	“...ways in which texts and ways of talking refer to and build on other texts and discourses” (Johnstone, 2008, p. 164).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discourse that draw on previous discourses</li> </ul>
Positioning	<p>“...a procedure of making determinate a psychological phenomenon for the purposes at hand” (van Langenhove &amp; Harré, 1999, p. 17).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note: “One can position oneself or be positioned” (p. 17).</li> </ul>	<p>“...how a speaker’s contributions are hearable with respect to these and other polarities of character, and sometimes even of role” (p. 17).</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Powerful or powerless</li> <li>• Confident or apologetic</li> <li>• Authorized or unauthorized</li> </ul>
CDA: Genre	“...ways of interacting that include configurations of texts—both oral and written—that constitute a coordination of activity” (Rogers, 2002, p. 221).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement and disagreement</li> <li>• Topic control</li> <li>• Delivery (e.g., intonation, stress, accent)</li> <li>• Turn-taking</li> </ul>
CDA: Discourse	“...how texts are represented through production, consumption, and distribution of texts, as well as what perspective(s) they represent” (p. 221).	<p>Vocabulary and metaphor (e.g., word choice, positioning, and meaning)</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discourse of Teachers</li> <li>• Discourse of Disability</li> </ul>
CDA: Style	“...how text informs the identification of people involved in the practice. This encompasses the construction of identities for them, and differences between identities, across discourses and genres” (p. 221).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modality (e.g., would, should, may—nature of producer’s commitment to message in clause)</li> <li>• Transitivity</li> <li>• Use of pronouns</li> <li>• Active and passive voice</li> </ul>
Binaries	Attempt to break down the opposition by which we are accustomed to think and which ensure a survival of metaphysics in our thinking (Sarup, 1993).	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Matter/spirit</li> <li>• Subject/object</li> <li>• Veil/truth</li> <li>• Text/meaning</li> <li>• Interior/Exterior</li> </ul>

The final theory used in this study to analyze the discourse of the problem-solving meetings was Panopticism that was proposed by Michel Foucault (1979). He based Panopticism on the architectural structure of a Panopticon, a design for a prison, that was proposed by social theorist Jeremy Bentham in 1843 (as cited in Foucault, 1979). A Panopticon is a circular building with an observational tower located in its center. The building is divided into cells that are as wide the building. Each cell has two windows on opposite sides. One corresponds to the windows of the tower; the other is on the outside wall. This construction enables light to pass through the cell from one wall to the other thereby allowing an official in the tower to clearly see the cells' occupants. However, they would be invisible to each other (Foucault, 1979). The effect of the Panopticon is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p. 201). This arrangement ensures that the surveillance seems permanent to the inmate even if it is not and that "the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it" (p. 201). Thus, this concept of the constant surveillance of a prison can be applied to modern educational settings where schools are must obey rules, regulations, and laws or face possible sanctions especially in this age of high stakes testing and accountability.

## SUMMARY

Educators in the United States have been grappling with providing appropriate educational services to the “right” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 4) students for nearly 40 years. Factors other than a disability have placed a disproportionate number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds into special education programs. Teacher assistance teams were conceptualized as a way to support general educators in their efforts to provide interventions to their students who were struggling with academic or behavior issues. With the reauthorization of the IDEA in 2004, Response to Intervention systematized the prereferral process within a multi-tiered framework. There is great potential for RTI to improve instruction and intervention while referring only students with disabilities for a special education evaluation. However, RTI’s ability to appropriately respond to the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds remains relatively unknown. Specifically, not much is known about how a problem-solving team makes decisions about ELLs within an RTI framework. Since RTI is being implemented in all 50 states and the population of ELLs is projected to increase, further research is needed in order to better understand how RTI serves ELLs.

## **Chapter 3: Method**

This study examined the deliberations of a problem-solving team (PST) to determine what and how information was being used to make decisions about English language learners (ELLs) experiencing academic or behavioral difficulties in an elementary school in Texas. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What is the contextual background the team brings to the problem-solving process?
2. How does the problem-solving team implement the district's Response to Intervention (RTI) process when English language learners are the focus of deliberations?
  - a. How does the school's PST implement the district's guidelines during meetings for ELLs (including structures, data, process, and timelines)?
  - b. What types of data do team members consider?
3. What is the nature of team deliberations during the PST meetings (e.g., topics discussed, by whom, duration of team member talk, link to previous efforts)?
  - a. How does the team utilize data during the problem-solving and decision-making process for ELLs?
  - b. How do team members talk about students, data, themselves, and others during the PST meeting?

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

This study used a qualitative research design conducted from within the interpretivist and critical paradigms (Merriam, 2009). The interpretivist paradigm assumes that "reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single observable reality" (p. 8). Instead, each event has multiple interpretations or realities. Crotty (2003) states

that the “interpretivist approach . . . *looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world*” (p. 67, emphasis in original). The goal of critical inquiry, on the other hand, is to “critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Merriam, 2009, p. 34). In fact,

power dynamics are at the heart of critical research. Questions are asked about who has the power, how it’s negotiated, what structures in society reinforce the current distribution of power, and so on. It is also assumed that people unconsciously accept things the way they are, and in so doing, reinforce the status quo. . . .Power in combination with hegemonic social structures results in the marginalization and oppression of those without power (p. 35)

Ultimately, critical research is concerned with not only understanding a phenomenon and the meaning it has for the participants, but also with critiquing the status quo “in the hopes of bringing about a more just society” (p. 35).

I used the case study method to conduct an in-depth investigation of how one PST made decisions about struggling ELLs. “A case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system.” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Case study also copes well when there are more variables of interest than data points (Yin, 2009). In this study, the bounded system was the school’s Response to Intervention system that had multiple procedural steps of instruction and intervention at each of the 3 tiers of service.

In addition, case study is a particularly appropriate design in applied fields, such as education, because it “offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, pp. 50—51). For this project, case study design gave me the ability to approach the investigation more broadly from the perspective of wanting to

understand how a problem-solving team used data to make decisions about struggling ELLs. Specifically, the design was an embedded, single case design (Yin, 2009); the main unit of analysis was the problem-solving team meeting. The data that were used to develop the case study were drawn from the discourse of the PST meetings that I observed, interviews with team members related to those meetings, and documents, such as the district's website and student cumulative folders. The value of the case study is that it gave me the tools with which to uncover and explain complex social phenomenon that are occurring simultaneously. Shields (as cited in Merriam, 2007) argues in support of qualitative case studies because of how

they account for and include difference—ideologically, epistemologically, methodologically—and most importantly, humanly. They do not attempt to eliminate what cannot be discounted. They do not attempt to simplify what cannot be simplified. Thus, it is precisely because case study includes paradoxes and acknowledges that there are no simple answers, that it can and should qualify as the gold standard. (p. 13)

### **Context and Setting**

A large school district, Cherry Creek ISD (all names of schools and participants are pseudonyms), in an urban area of Texas was selected for this research because of the number of elementary schools with relatively high enrollments of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Approximately 60% of the students are categorized as Hispanic, and 9% are categorized as African American (District's Annual Report, 2012). This district mirrors national trends as the ELL population has grown by 35% over the past five years. English language learners make up approximately 27% of the overall student population (District's Annual Report, 2012).

## **The District's Problem-Solving Team Process**

In the following section, all references to and descriptions of the district's problem-solving model are based on the district's manual. More detailed source materials, such as graphics or flowcharts, were not provided in order to protect the confidentiality of the school and the district.

Cherry Creek ISD employs the problem-solving model of Response to Intervention instead of the standard protocol model (D. Fuchs et al., 2003). RTI in Cherry Creek ISD is a 3-tiered, problem-solving process that provides support for academics, behavior, and attendance. The district aims to meet the needs of the whole child through preventative and strategic interventions at the level of the entire school, targeted groups, and individuals. The district advances RTI's theoretical assumptions that all students can learn and achieve high standards if they are taught effectively, using research-based instruction while having access to a standards-based curriculum. Within the district's problem-solving system, educators have access to a comprehensive system of tiered interventions in order to address the full range of students' academic and behavioral challenges. In addition, the district manual states that effective problem solving is based on collaboration among educators, families, and communities, and that academic and behavioral performance data should inform instructional decisions. In Tier 1, all students receive scientifically based core academic instruction. Students who do not respond to the core instruction are identified for additional support at Tier 2. At this stage, the teacher consults with colleagues and engages in the problem-solving process to identify problems and select an appropriate intervention. The student's progress is monitored for a specific period of time. If, however, the student continues to struggle and does not respond to the intervention, the student is referred to the campus problem-solving team for Tier 3 interventions and supports. Further elaboration of each tier follows in the next section.

### ***Tier 1***

Cherry Creek ISD’s guidelines for Tier 1 of the RTI process stipulate that all students must receive core instruction based on scientifically rigorous, best practices in an academically challenging core curriculum. In Tier 1, teachers are expected to address the academic, behavior, and attendance needs of their students. Communicating learning objectives and academic and behavioral expectations to parents and maintaining a classroom management system are also important features of Tier 1. Finally, students should receive differentiated instruction and social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum in a safe, culturally responsive school environment. However, the manual does not describe the features of a culturally responsive school environment, nor does it address how to ensure that English language learners are receiving scientifically based instruction in any core academic subject. According to Cherry Creek ISD, most students, between 80% and 85%, should have their needs met in Tier 1.

For students who face challenges in academics, attendance, or behavior, and need additional support, teachers are expected to “use data to guide the identification of students” and “consult the dashboard of the [online database] as a data point.” At this stage, teachers should document how they differentiated the student’s instruction and provided support in small groups for 3—6 weeks. Students who make adequate progress should have their small-group instruction maintained as needed until they meet standards.

The progress of all students can be monitored using a variety of assessments. According to the district’s RTI website, Tier 1 literacy assessment may consist of formative assessments that yield baseline performance data and also identify students who are struggling. Summative assessments, such as Texas Primary Reading Inventory (TPRI; University of Texas System & Texas Education Agency, 2010—2014), Tejas LEE (University of Texas System & Texas Education Agency, 2010—2014),

Developmental Reading Assessment—2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (DRA2; Beaver & Carter, 2009) for Grades K to 2, provide information about student’s mastery of standards. (The District manual specifically notes that Tier 1 assessments may be used across the three tiers to inform instructional decision-making.)

If a student does not make adequate progress, the teacher transitions from Tier 1 to Tier 2 support by consulting with colleagues on any of the following teams: grade level, departmental, counseling/support services, or dropout prevention. Together, they evaluate the progress-monitoring data and create a learning plan designed specifically for the student who is still struggling. This plan is then entered into the online database.

### ***Tier 2***

If a student does not make adequate progress in Tier 1, he or she is then identified as needing additional support. A Tier 2 problem-solving team composed of the teacher and grade-level, departmental, or other teams evaluate the academic, attendance, behavior, and/or speech/language data. The Tier 2 team then creates an intervention and progress-monitoring plan that is documented in the district’s online database. The team is required to follow the steps:

1. Consult with parents or family;
2. Identify the specific area of need (e.g., academic, behavior/SEL, speech/language) and the specific problem;
3. Create measureable goal(s) using assessment data;
4. Select appropriate interventions from those available in the classroom, campus, or community;
5. Identify the individuals who will be responsible for implementing the intervention(s);

6. Communicate the plan to all necessary personnel, including parents;
7. Implement the intervention(s) with fidelity and monitor the student's progress for a period ranging between 3—9 weeks; and
8. Set a date for a follow up meeting to review how well the student has responded to the learning plan.

According to the district's teacher guidelines for the problem-solving process, it is estimated that 10 – 15% of students will go through this early-stage problem-solving process. The manual stipulates that students who demonstrate sufficient progress should continue to receive these interventions until their goals are achieved. However, if students are not making progress toward their goals during the progress-monitoring period, the fidelity of intervention implementation should be determined. The manual does not specifically identify the individual responsible for verifying the fidelity of the teacher's implementation; however, one of the responsibilities of Cherry Creek ISD's problem-solving system facilitator is to provide professional development, coaching, and technical assistance for early-stage problem solving, including coaching staff on how to implement Tier 2 interventions and other supports. In another section of the district manual that describes effective campus problem-solving teams, it stipulates that members of this team "will follow up with campus colleagues to ensure fidelity of implementation for proposed school interventions." However, the manual does not specify which members of the team are responsible for ensuring that Tier 2 (or Tier 3) interventions are being implemented with fidelity.

Once the system facilitator or a member of the campus problem-solving team determines that the interventions were implemented with fidelity, the Tier 2 team re-engages in the problem-solving process and determines needed adjustments (e.g., time, frequency, intensity) to the interventions and goals. If the Tier 2 team concludes that the

interventions were not implemented with fidelity, team members are expected to identify contributing factors, develop a plan to overcome the impediment, and appropriately support staff in implementing the modified plan. However, the district does not specify when the fidelity of implementation should be evaluated.

At the end of the progress-monitoring period, the teacher and Tier 2 team evaluate the student's progress. If the interventions were implemented with fidelity and the student is still struggling, the teacher confirms that the aforementioned early problem-solving steps have been implemented and all the relevant assessment and progress-monitoring data have been entered into the district's online database. If these conditions are met, the student may be referred to the campus problem-solving team for more intensive staffing, thereby activating Tier 3 of the process.

### ***Tier 3***

The district utilizes a multidisciplinary team model at Tier 3, to identify appropriate interventions and support for students who require more intensive interventions. Cherry Creek ISD estimates that fewer than 5% of students will need Tier 3 interventions. Regarding team composition, district guidelines specify that a campus administrator is necessary to plan and execute an effective and efficient team meeting. The campus leader (i.e., the principal or assistant principal), the student's teacher, and any other staff member who has essential information about the student or who may implement the intervention, must be invited to attend the campus PST meeting. Campus administration and the PST chair may determine who else may be considered permanent members of the campus PST. In addition, each campus is given the flexibility to invite other members based on the needs of the student. These may include: parents, counselor, reading or curriculum specialist, district and campus specialists (i.e., behavior, dropout

prevention, social services, parent support), ESL/bilingual teacher, special educator, school psychologist, school-based agency staff, school nurse, mentor, and/or probation officer. Parents' participation in the campus PST meeting is suggested but not mandatory.

District guidelines stipulate that an effective campus PST meets bi-weekly. The team is charged with considering three categories of students: those whose progress should be reviewed, students new to the PST, and students with special circumstances (e.g., parent request for PST staffing, speech-language, or safety concerns).

The district's guidelines specify four team member roles, each with different responsibilities during the meeting. An administrator or designee serves as the PST Chair who leads the PST meetings and ensures that the group adheres to the agreed-upon norms, such as staying on task and avoiding side conversations, being an active participant, and coming prepared to the meeting with any necessary and relevant information and data. The PST Chair is also responsible to creating an agenda for each meeting with the following students:

1. Who "are being staffed" for the first time by the PST;
2. Whose progress is being monitored by the PST; and
3. Who have special or extenuating circumstances of which the PST should be informed.

Finally, the PST Chair is responsible for sending the agenda with the specific names and times of the each student to be staffed to all necessary parties with enough lead time to ensure that they can attend prepared.

The second role of a PST member is the Timekeeper who ensures that the team stays on schedule and is "comfortable alerting team members to time considerations." The Recorder is the third team member role and is responsible for inputting meeting notes and intervention details into the online database. The fourth PST member role is the

advocate whose responsibility is to monitor the student's progress assigned interventions and goals. Typically, this person is the student's classroom teacher but could be another staff member who is a member of the PST. The responsibilities of all team members include:

1. Understanding the theoretical framework of the PST;
2. Understanding the problem-solving process of the entire tiered system;
3. Serving as models of campus PST implementation;
4. Helping "to support structures and procedures"; and
5. Actively engaging in the PST process through regular meeting attendance and carrying out team decisions.

Cherry Creek ISD recommends that each campus PST standardize the process of problem solving, which can be achieved by using a tool built into the district's online database. This tool provides teams the structure with which to develop a step-by-step support plan with more intensive Tier 3 goals, interventions, and progress monitoring for students with academic, behavioral, and/or attendance challenges. Similar to the steps involved in Tiers 1 and 2, Tier 3 involves collecting and analyzing data; planning thoughtful goals, interventions, and services; responding to obstacles, and reviewing the plan. The team then communicates the plan with the stakeholders, including the student's parents if they were not present at the meeting. Finally, the team sets a date for a follow-up meeting. The student enters another 3- to 9-week, progress-monitoring period that follows the same procedure required for Tier 2 progress monitoring. During this time period, fidelity of intervention implementation must be ensured, and interventions and goals adjusted as necessary. If the student still does not make adequate progress, the PST may recommend further evaluation by requesting that the campus Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), Licensed Specialist in School Psychology (LSSP), or Educational

Diagnostician review the case in the online database. The Special Education Referral section of the online database must also be completed. The campus team must then ensure that the following documents are complete:

1. Health and social history form;
2. English language proficiency testing within the previous 6 months;
3. Hearing and vision testing within the previous year;
4. For bilingual students, the Special Education/ELL Referral form completed by the classroom teacher (if applicable); and
5. Classroom observation, which is required for a referral for a learning disability evaluation.

The professional must have at least five school days to review the student's file. If the SLP, LSSP, or diagnostician verifies that all documentation requirements have been met, the campus PST meets again with the parent and LSSP or diagnostician to discuss the possibility of a special education evaluation. It is at this meeting that the campus PST decides, with the parent's consent, whether or not to move forward with a special education evaluation.

### **Selection of School and Secondary Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used to identify an elementary school in which to conduct this study. Purposeful sampling "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). The sampling should be a direct reflection of the purpose of the study while also guiding in the identification of possible rich sources of information (Merriam). Based on conversations with district personnel and teachers, I identified schools in Cherry Creek ISD that were implementing RTI and

had a larger percentage of English language learners. Five possible schools met these criteria.

I made initial contact with an administrator, either the principal or assistant principal, by email or over the phone. I introduced myself as a doctoral candidate in Multicultural Special Education at The University of Texas at Austin, briefly described the project, and requested a meeting. I was able to schedule face-to-face meetings at three different elementary schools. During each meeting, I further elaborated the details of the study, including the research questions, method, and prospective participants for the study. Two of the schools declined the invitation to participate in this research, but the assistant principal at the third elementary school reacted positively and arranged a meeting with the principal. I presented the principal of Cotton Tree Elementary School with a prospectus of the research study, explained it in detail, and answered his questions. The principal agreed to grant access on condition that the district approved the study.

### **The Campus Problem-Solving Team**

Campus PST meetings were selected for observation if the PST chair placed an ELL on the agenda. Because I was interested in struggling ELLs who were the focus students of PST meetings, the students met the following criteria:

1. Students were non-native English speakers and remained classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP);
2. Students were struggling academically, socially, and/or behaviorally and had been referred by their teacher to the campus PST for consideration.

The PST meeting was the case of this study; therefore, staff who were identified by campus administration as permanent members of the campus PST qualified for

inclusion in this study: the principal, assistant principal, community-based and school-based social workers, the counselor, and the parent support specialist.

### **Secondary Participants**

I was interested in how a campus PST deliberates about a struggling ELL; thus, any English language learner who met the aforementioned inclusion criteria qualified their teacher for participation in this study. During the 2012—2013 school year, Cotton Tree Elementary had a total of 9.5 Bilingual/ESL Education teachers on staff; three of them participated in this study. Other secondary participants included school personnel who attended PST meetings on an as-needed basis, such as the literacy interventionists and the special education teacher. In fact, I sought out the perspective of the special education for two reasons. First, she was often consulted to provide Tier 1 or Tier 2 support to classroom teachers. Second, she instructed the English-speaking students who had completed the 3-tiered problem-solving process and met the qualifications for special education services. As such, she might have had valuable insight about how RTI was being implemented at Cotton Tree. In this manner, she could provide data triangulation.

### **Profile of Cotton Tree Elementary**

Cotton Tree Elementary is located in a low socioeconomic neighborhood in Cherry Creek ISD (all names are pseudonyms). It serves approximately 500 students in pre-kindergarten to grade 5. Cotton Tree's stated goal is to educate the whole child by furthering the intellectual, social, and physical development of all students. The majority of Cotton Tree's students are Hispanic. Approximately 40% of Cotton Tree's students are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP), the term used by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to refer to students who are eligible for special language program services such as Bilingual Education or English as a Second Language. Table 2 reports student

enrollment by program and category at Cotton Tree based on their Academic Excellence Indicator System report for the 2011—2012 school year. This report is generated by TEA and aggregates a “wide range of information on the performance of students in each school and district in Texas every year” (TEA website).

Table 2  
A Comparison of School, District, and State Student Enrollment by Program and Category for the 2011-2012 School Year

<b>Students by Program and Category</b>	<b>Cotton Tree Elementary</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>State</b>
<b>Program</b>			
Bilingual/ESL Education	37%	27%	16%
Gifted/Talented	4%	7%	8%
Special Education	4%	10%	9%
Limited English Proficiency	39%	28%	17%
Economically Disadvantaged	97%	64%	60%
At-Risk	75%	47%	45%

In the following section, I present Cotton Tree’s accountability ratings and performance on the state standardized achievement exams to illustrate the strengths of its academic program. Data from 2011 were based on scores from the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). In 2012, TEA instituted a new standardized achievement exam, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). As a result, new accountability ratings were instituted and only limited school performance data are available.

In 2011, Cotton Tree Elementary’s Accountability Rating was “Academically Acceptable” by TEA based on its overall performance on the TAKS. This rating means that a minimum percentage of all students and each student group with a minimum number of students met the standard (indicated in parentheses) in the following core academic subjects:

1. Reading/ELA (70%);
2. Writing (70%);
3. Social Studies (70%);
4. Mathematics (65%); and
5. Science (60%).

Table 3 lists state accountability requirements for each rating category and the “Percent Met Standard” for Cotton Tree Elementary for the 2011 TAKS. Overall, most students at Cotton Tree Elementary met the standard on the TAKS. In fact, Cotton Tree missed “Recognized” status because only 71% of students met the standard in Science instead of the minimum of 80%.

Table 3  
2011 State Accountability Requirements for Each Rating Category and Cotton Tree  
Performance Results

Base Indicators	Academically Acceptable State Requirement	<i>Cotton Tree</i>	Recognized	Exemplary
TAKS (2011) All Students and each student group meeting minimum size: African American, Hispanic, White, Economically Disadvantaged	Meets each standard:  Reading/ELA <sup>a</sup> . .70% Writing.....70% Social Studies....70% Mathematics....65% Science.....60%  <b>OR</b> meets Required Improvement  <b>OR</b> meets standard with Texas Projection Measure <sup>c</sup> (TPM)	 89% 93% NR <sup>b</sup> 83% 71%	Meets 80% standard for each subject  <b>OR</b> meets 75% floor and Required Improvement  <b>OR</b> meets standard with TPM	Meets 90% standard for each subject  <b>OR</b> meets standard with TPM

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> ELA = English Language Arts. <sup>b</sup> NR = Not reported. <sup>c</sup> TPM is a TAKS progress indicator.

The following performance data in Table 4 were taken from Cotton Tree’s 2012 NCLB Report Card. It details the percent of Cotton Tree’s students who met 2012 STAAR standards in comparison to district and state performance data. As previously mentioned, the STAAR exam replaced the TAKS for grades 3 through 9 in math, reading, science, social studies, and writing. As a result, a new accountability rating system was instituted: *Met Standard*, *Improvement Required*, or *Not Rated*. Campuses could also receive distinction designations that “recognize outstanding academic achievement in reading/English language arts and mathematics” (2013 TEA Accountability Summary Report, p. 2). For the 2012-2013 school year, Cotton Tree received an accountability rating of *Met Standard* with a distinction for *Academic Achievement in Reading/English Language Arts*. This distinction recognized the school for being in the top quartile on at least half of the measures for which they were eligible.

Finally, this same NCLB Report states that Cotton Tree exceeded the campus attendance target of 90% for the school years 2010—2011 and 2011—2012 with an attendance rate of 96% each year.

Table 4  
Percent of Students at School, District, and State Level Who Met Standard on 2012 STAAR Exam

<b>TAKS Standard</b>	<b>Cotton Tree (LEP Students)</b>	<b>Cotton Tree (All Students)</b>	<b>District Average</b>	<b>State Average</b>
Reading/LA <sup>a b</sup>	89%	89%	85%	88%
Mathematics <sup>b</sup>	87%	84%	83%	83%
Science <sup>c</sup>	85%	90%	88%	87%

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> Language Arts. <sup>b</sup> Grades 3—5. <sup>c</sup> Grade 5 only.

Table 5 presents data from the 2011 and 2012 NCLB Report Cards for Cotton Tree Elementary. It details the academic achievement of students at Cotton Tree categorized as LEP for Reading/English Language Arts (R/ELA) and Mathematics in grades 3 through 5 over a three-year period. District and state data are also presented to serve as comparisons. It should also be noted that fewer than 1% of students categorized as LEP were exempted from taking the TAKS in 2011 and the STAAR in 2012.

Table 5  
Percent of Students Categorized as LEP Who Met or Exceeded Achievement Levels by  
Subject, School Year, and Grade at School, District and State Levels

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Cotton Tree</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>State</b>
Reading	2009-10	3	94%	88%	87%
		4	96%	75%	75%
		5	67%	74%	76%
	2010-11	3	88%	86%	85%
		4	79%	76%	75%
		5	92%	80%	79%
	2011-12	3	NR	91%	88%
		4	91%	82%	79%
		5	71%	77%	72%
Mathematics	2009-10	3	70%	79%	81%
		4	93%	82%	82%
		5	83%	82%	84%
	2010-11	3	74%	81%	83%
		4	86%	85%	83%
		5	83%	82%	84%
	2011-12	3	86%	86%	83%
		4	94%	90%	85%
		5	76%	82%	77%

*Note.* NR = Not Reported.

#### **PRIVACY AND MAINTAINING CONFIDENTIALITY**

The participants' privacy was respected in the following manner. They were assured that they must feel comfortable being recorded at all times. If they started to feel uncomfortable, they could indicate that they no longer wished to be recorded. I turned off all recording devices whenever a request was made for information not to be recorded.

They could choose the setting in which to express matters of concern and the extent to which they disclosed certain information. Participants could also decline to further participate in the study at any time if they so desired.

The confidentiality of the participants was maintained through the use of pseudonyms for the district, school, and all of the participants. Participants' real names were not used in any documents, including field notes and transcriptions, during the data analysis or reporting of results; only their pseudonyms were used. Neither were real names used during data analysis nor in the reporting of results.

The digital files of the audio recordings and transcriptions were stored on a password-protected laptop and backed up to a secure cloud server and portable hard drive. The hard drive and all hard copies were stored in a locked cabinet in my apartment. The only persons who had access to the files were the researcher, members of the dissertation committee, and research associates, such as Spanish-English translators and peer debrief partners. The digital files will be kept for one year and then deleted. Transcripts and field notes will be retained for future possible analysis.

### **Faculty and Staff**

In August 2012, the principal, Victor Jiménez, invited me to briefly explain my study to the entire faculty while they were undergoing training in preparation for the upcoming 2012—2013 school year. I was given time to address the entire faculty, state that this study fulfilled a partial requirement for my doctoral degree in Special Education, and explain the purpose and objectives of the study. Specifically, I explained that the study would focus on the problem-solving process of the PST when ELLs were the focus students. I reassured them that the school, the students, and themselves would remain completely confidential and that only pseudonyms would be used throughout the study.

They were also reassured that their participation would not extend beyond the typical roles and functions that they already performed as PST members, and I stressed that there would be no classroom or student observations. However, I did explain that I was interested in interviewing team members in order to get further background information and their insights about the focus students, but that these interviews would be optional. Teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions although no one did.

Informed consent (Appendix A) was obtained from PST members prior to each PST meeting observation. Because all team members spoke English, I quickly described the study and each member's anticipated participation in the study. I reassured them that their participation would not extend beyond the typical roles and functions that they already performed. I also reminded them that I hoped they would agree to be interviewed at a later time, so I could obtain further background information and insights about the students. The Staff Consent Form in English was handed out to all team members present, and they were given enough time to read through the entire document if they chose to do so. The consent form was signed and dated by each participant and the researcher. The consent forms were later photocopied and delivered, or scanned and emailed to each participant. I observed meetings for which consent was obtained from all participants on November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013.

## **Parents**

Cherry Creek ISD granted IRB approval in June 2012, but stipulated that Cotton Tree Elementary personnel could not release the names of students or their parents to me unless consent was given. As a result, I had to rely on the parent support specialist (PSS), Joshua Smith, to contact parents, explain the research project, and obtain their consent.

He speaks both English and Spanish, so communication could take place in the parents' preferred language.

I met with Mr. Smith at the start of the 2012—2013 school year and gave him 15 consent forms in both Spanish and English (both forms are listed in Appendix B) that had already been folded and placed in envelopes along with a book of stamps. In this way, he could send the consent form home via the child or mail them to the parent. However, if the parent preferred a meeting, then Mr. Smith would meet with the parent to explain the research project, describe how they and their child would participate, and answer any questions. Once the parent or legal guardian gave consent and signed the form, Cotton Tree released the child's name to me. Mr. Smith was able to obtain consent from two students' parents before the November 30, 2012 meeting. However, he was not able to contact the parents in time to mail home the consent forms before the May 9, 2013 meeting. Consequently, Mr. Smith phoned the parents before the May 9, 2013 meeting and obtained verbal consent with the intention of obtaining their signatures at a future date. Of the seven parents who verbally agreed to participate in this study, five signatures were ultimately obtained. As a result, there were a total of seven focus students in this study.

## **ENTRY INTO THE FIELD**

### **Informal Observer**

I was invited to attend campus problem-solving team meetings in mid-October 2011. I was able to attend two meetings as an observer. I briefly introduced myself to the PST members and summarized the research project briefly. Notes were taken, but only for specific purposes: the names and titles of PST members as a memory aid; terms that were unfamiliar, such as "DRA" (Beaver & Carter, 2009) and "TPRI" (University of

Texas System & Texas Education Agency, 2010—2014); or observations that might facilitate the actual data collection process. No notes relating to the personal information of the focus students, such as names, grades, or test scores, were recorded. This experience proved invaluable because I was able to anticipate problems (e.g., the ambient noise), and had enough time to consider ways to compensate for them. I was also able to experience what it was like not to understand all of the educational jargon that was being used by the educators at the meeting. For example, I had no idea what the “DRA” was nor what the different levels corresponded to in terms of performance. This experience enabled me to have a better understanding of how a non-educator, such a parent, might feel while listening to the discussion of the PST members. This insight later proved helpful during data analysis.

### **Compensatory Strategies**

I employed two strategies to counteract the size of the room, the distance of the participants from each other, and the intrusion of ambient noise. The first strategy was the use of two digital recording devices, placed in different locations on the table. One was a Livescribe Smartpen that digitally recorded speech while simultaneously linking it to hand-written notes. I diagrammed the seating arrangement of the team, assigned abbreviations based on their job titles to each position, and tracked turn-taking using the abbreviations. For example, the assistant principal was “AP” and the Communities in School Program Manager was “CIS.” A second digital recording device, an Olympus VN-8100PC, was placed in the middle of the table within arm’s reach of me, so I could manipulate it and work the controls when necessary. In this manner, the Olympus digital recorder obtained clearer recordings of the people who were farther away from the Livescribe pen. In addition, if one recording device failed to function properly, a backup

existed. The second strategy to maximize the chances of obtaining comprehensible recordings was the use of noise-reduction microphones for each device. I transcribed the discourse of the meetings according to transcription conventions presented in the data analysis section. As no parents attended any of the meetings I observed, it was not necessary to translate any part of the discussion from Spanish to English.

### **Sustained Contact**

While my study's IRB application was under district review, I remained in constant contact with Cotton Tree Elementary throughout the entire 2011–2012 school year by volunteering as a reading and writing tutor for two second-grade students for two hours twice a week. I also worked for a short time in the special education resource room. In this way, I became more familiar and comfortable at the school and was able to build rapport and trust with various school personnel, including the principal and special education teacher who became a personal friend with whom I am still in contact to this day. However, I only realized much later that sustained contact and developing close personal relationships with the faculty and staff had possible negative consequences. Because the school opened its doors to me, I wanted to offer my services in reciprocation. But most of all, I did not want to portray the school in a negative light or identify any examples of incompetent practice. However, once I came to understand my biases, I was better able to ensure that they did not impact the analysis of the data and my discussion.

### **Piloting the Analysis of Discourse Data**

I took a doctoral-level course on discourse analysis during the fall of 2011. One of the course requirements was the analysis of discourse data that was presented informally during an in-class workshop and formally as a written term paper. With the assistance of the assistant principal (AP), I asked a classroom teacher if she would be willing to

participate in a discussion with the AP about a non-ELL student who was struggling. After the AP and the teacher signed the IRB forms tailored to research for coursework, they were instructed to have a discussion about the student who had been struggling in class whom the teacher was considering forwarding to the PST. The teacher was to pretend that she was asking the AP for feedback on how she should process. We all met in the teacher's classroom one morning during her planning time. The AP and the teacher spoke for about 15 minutes; the researcher did not participate in any way. The conversation was digitally recorded. As a result of this assignment, I was able to practice using the data collection and transcription tools while also settling upon the transcription procedures and conventions described in the Data Collection section that follows. In addition, I decided that positioning, intertextuality, critical discourse analysis, and binaries were appropriate and informative methods to help me make sense of the discourse of the PST deliberations.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

### **Data Sources**

The primary data used to answer the research questions was the discourse of the PST meetings. Other types of data were collected in this study: observations of the PST meetings, interviews, and documents. The combination of these data sources facilitates a holistic interpretation (Merriam, 2009) of the decision-making process of a problem-solving team. Table 6 lists the primary and secondary research questions and the various data that were collected to answer them.

Additional documents that were submitted to the University's IRB included consent forms and interview questions that were tailored to faculty/staff (Appendix C) and parents (Appendix D). The consent forms and interview questions were provided in

English and Spanish. The application was submitted to the Office of Research Support in March 2012. The application was approved in July 2012 and granted Exempt status under IRB Protocol No. 2012-03-0108.

Table 6  
Primary and Secondary Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources (What and Who)
3. <i>What is the contextual background the team brings to the problem-solving process?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>
2. <i>How does the problem-solving team implement the district's RTI process when English language learners (ELLs) are the focus of deliberations?</i>	
a. How are the district's guidelines implemented by the school's PST during meetings for ELLs (including structures, data, process, and timelines)?	Documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District documents- manuals, forms, website</li> <li>• School/administration documents- forms, communication, reports</li> <li>• Faculty documents- forms, communication (e.g., notes, memos, newsletters to parents)</li> <li>• Observations (Field Notes)</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>
b. What types of data do team members consider?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations (Field Notes)</li> <li>• Transcripts of team meetings</li> </ul>
3. <i>What is the nature of team deliberations during the PST meetings (e.g., topics discussed, by whom, duration of team member talk, link to previous efforts)?</i>	
a. How does the team utilize data during the problem-solving and decision-making process for ELLs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations (Field Notes)</li> <li>• Interviews</li> </ul>
b. How do team members talk about students, data, themselves, and others during the PST meeting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transcripts of team meetings</li> </ul>

### Observation of PST Meetings

Merriam (2009) states that observations are a primary data source in qualitative inquiry and take place in the natural setting in order to provide the researcher with a firsthand account of the phenomenon. Observations also give the researcher knowledge of the context and culture of the school while serving as reference points for subsequent

interviews (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, observations can serve to triangulate emerging findings from interviews and document analysis (Merriam, 2009).

I attended and observed PST meetings when the following conditions were met: 1) An ELL was on the campus PST meeting agenda, and 2) The parent of the child gave consent to participate in this study. I had arranged to observe one meeting in both September and November 2012, but these meetings were postponed for undisclosed reasons. On a third occasion, in April 2013, the meeting that had been scheduled to discuss an ELL student was cancelled because the teacher was absent although I was not informed until I had arrived on campus. As a result, I was able to observe meetings of seven different focus students on two different days—November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013.

Given my interest in the nature of team deliberations, the primary data source was the discourse among the participants during the PST meetings. I attended the meetings concerning the seven focus students on two different days, November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013. Both meetings were audio-recorded and I attended as an observer. In order to determine the nature of team deliberations during the PST meeting, my observations and note-taking focused on:

1. The topics discussed;
2. How the team talked about data, the focus students, and others;
3. For each topic that was discussed, the duration of the discussion, and person(s) involved;
4. What team members presented as evidence (e.g., formal test scores and informal class assessments) to confirm or refute the potential presence of a disability; and
5. How team members engaged in the discussion itself.

## **Transcription of the Discourse Data**

The first stage of my analysis began when I selected the specific aspects of speech to represent in the transcriptions. Ochs (1979) stresses the importance of being selective because a transcript with too much detail will be difficult to follow and analyze. However, the analyst must be deliberate about the filtering process that “should reflect the particular interests – the hypotheses to be examined – of the researcher” (p. 168). Ochs also details the assumptions that are embedded in the top-to-bottom, right-to-left format of the English language. Reading a transcript from top-to-bottom, one assumes that “the contents of a speaker’s turn are usually treated as in some way *relevant* to the immediately prior turn” (p. 169, emphasis in original) unless otherwise indicated. In terms of left-to-right directionality, the reader assumes that “each line utterances to the left of other utterances have been produced earlier” (p. 170). In my transcriptions, I made sure to represent simultaneous or overlapped speech, emphasis, and pauses because who controlled the talk was important to me.

The audio recordings of the PST meetings were transcribed following the discussion. No parents attended either of the meetings I observed; hence, transcription of the meetings in Spanish was not required. Before beginning the transcription, I transferred the digital files of the audio recordings from the Livescribe pen, the handwritten notes from the Livescribe notebook, and the Olympus digital recorder to my laptop. Each file was named using the date and the pseudonym of the focus student. First, I used Express Scribe to transcribe the discourse of the meetings. Features in the speech such as verbal pauses, syllables or words that are stressed (identified by capital letters), rising intonation, laughter, and overlapping speech were noted. Acronyms that were used by the participants were indicated by the use of capital letters separated by hyphens to distinguish them from capital letters used to indicate stress. Selected transcription

conventions are illustrated below. In this example, there are two interlocutors, or speakers, the teacher and the assistant principal (AP). Immediately, the teacher says, that she “P-S-T’d” her student. The use of capital letters separated by hyphens indicates that these letters were said as individual letters. The word “really” is typed in all capital letters to indicate that the teacher stressed this word. At the end of the AP’s first statement, there is an ellipsis that corresponds to another ellipsis on the next line below. The overlapping ellipses indicate that there was no break in the speech between the interlocutors.

T: With her, I, um, P-S-T’d her at the beginning right after her B-O-Y, and she tested at a D-R-A 2, um, and it should be at a 4 or 6, but since then she's made LOTS of progress. Lots and lots of progress. Um, I, she reads independently at 8 already. So, she's doing REALLY well. So, she goes with AmeriCorps um, every day, so they pull her out for AmeriCorps, so she's just been really taking off. Really good.

AP: So her goal back in October was...

T: ... was just to be on level M-O-Y, and I think she'll definitely be there...

During the transcription process, I tried to capture the pauses and periods of silence, which I later timed to measure their duration. I also did my best to represent vocal utterances<sup>6</sup> such as “Uh huh,” “M’hm,” and “Ooh” because although brief, they still conveyed meaning. In addition, I did not edit out verbal pauses, such “um” or instances when phrases were ungrammatical because I did not know what would eventually become important in the analysis. Finally, I paid close attention to instances when someone interrupted someone else or changed the topic entirely. After completing

---

<sup>6</sup> Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992) define utterance as “what is said by any one person before or after another person begins to speak” (p. 395).

each transcription using Express Scribe, I used the digital recordings in Livescribe Desktop to verify the transcription, make corrections, and add rising or descending arrows about words to indicate rising or falling intonation. Notes from the Livescribe notebook (e.g., when someone arrived or left) were also added to the transcription in order to provide a fuller picture of what was occurring during the discourse.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes, or “the written account of the observations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 128), were taken during each observation. According to Merriam, “Field notes should be *highly descriptive*” (p. 130, emphasis in original). In other words, the participants, the setting, as well as the activities and behaviors of the participants and researcher should be described in such a way that readers are made to feel that they are there, seeing whatever the researcher is seeing (Merriam, 2009). A new seating chart was created whenever the meeting attendees changed; this usually happened when a new focus student was the topic of discussion. I also noted anyone who entered or left the room. Taylor and Bogdan (as cited in Merriam, 2009) suggest that the following techniques be practiced during the observation: (a) pay attention; (b) start from a wide perspective and then narrow the focus on a specific person, interaction, or activity while mentally ignoring all others; (c) look for key words in what people say that will stand out later; (d) concentrate on the first and last remarks of each conversation, and (e) during breaks in the discussion, mentally play back remarks and scenes.

All field notes were taken on an 8.5 by 11.75-inch Livescribe Dot Paper Notebook. The Livescribe pen enabled me to take notes while also digitally recording the meetings; using this notebook enabled me to digitally connect the recording to the hand-written notes. I drew a line three inches from the right edge of the notebook in order to

divide each page into two sections. The area left of the margin was for observational notes; the right side tracked reflective commentary and included thoughts, reactions, insights, and speculations. After the completion of each observation, I had planned to use the hand-written notes to create a more detailed narrative in order to maximize recall of the events that occurred. However, my field notes were very sparse due to the limited discourse and interaction between the meeting participants. The meetings for Julian and Cristina (two of the focus students) that I attended on November 30, 2012 had five or six participants: the AP, the referring teacher, the counselor, the district social worker, the literacy interventionist, and the parent support specialist. (The literacy interventionist left after Julian's meeting ended and before Cristina's began.) During both meetings, neither the counselor nor the district social worker spoke, and the PSS only added one short comment about Cristina. I often observed the team members looking at the flat screen monitor where the student's record was displayed. Similarly, I did not have much success writing descriptive field notes during the meetings I attended on May 9, 2013 because for four of the five meetings, only the assistant principal and the teacher were present.

## **Interviews**

As noted above, participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews following the PST meetings. Interviews were conducted with a total of 12 members of the campus PST, the three referring teachers, three parents of the focus students, and the special education teacher. The purpose of the interview was to elicit participants' perceptions of the meetings and discussions from their unique perspectives (Merriam, 2009). The "main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information" (p. 88). Stake (1995) asserts that it is "the main road to multiple realities"

(p. 64). This format enabled me to remain flexible and respond to the “emerging worldview of the [participant], and to new ideas on the topic” (Stake, 1995, p. 90).

### ***Campus PST and Other faculty***

The interviews with the campus PST members ranged from 11 minutes to 78 minutes. On average, each interview lasted approximately 35 minutes in length and was conducted with each of the following persons: the bilingual education classroom teacher of the focus student, the principal, assistant principal, the school counselor, literacy interventionist, social worker, parent support specialist, and special education teacher. School faculty and staff were asked about their educational backgrounds and training as well as their PST responsibilities (See Appendix C for questions). Specific questions about the focus students were then asked. All interviews were conducted between May and September 2013.

### ***Parents***

The perspectives of three parents were obtained through informal discussions that lasted for an average of nine minutes each. Cotton Tree’s parent support specialist, Joshua Smith, is a bilingual speaker of English and Spanish; thus, he facilitated these discussions in Spanish in September 2013. I had to rely on Joshua Smith instead of the Spanish-English interpreter whose services I had planned to utilize because I was unable to obtain her services on such short notice. My original intent was to have my interpreter conduct a semi-structured interview and ask parents to express their opinions about the PST meeting, the PST’s decisions, recommendations, and actions. I had also intended to ask their opinions about increasing parent attendance at and participation during the PST meetings (see Appendix D). However, the three parents who agreed to be interviewed had not attended the PST meetings about their child; as a result, I revised the questions

with input from Mr. Smith (also listed in Appendix C) in order to better align with the circumstances of this group of parents. Mr. Smith asked parents to describe their impression of their child's past and present performance at school, how Cotton Tree faculty communicated with them in the past, and how the school should communicate with parents to increase their participation in PST meetings. I did not participate in the interaction between Mr. Smith and the parents unless he had a question for me. This occurred approximately four times per interview. All interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed by a professional Spanish-English translator. The veracity of the English translations was confirmed by a second Spanish-English translator.

As a result of the parent support specialist, Joshua Smith, conducting the interviews instead of an interpreter unaffiliated with Cotton Tree Elementary, I recognize that it is highly likely that the parent perspective was not adequately captured because parents might not have wanted to report anything negative to a school employee. In addition, none of the three parents who agreed to be interviewed attended the PST meetings about their child thereby limiting their experience and perspective about the campus problem-solving team and process.

### ***Documents***

A variety of documents were examined in this study in order to “help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam, 2009, p. 163). Documents provided background support and context to what was discussed during the meeting. They also provided triangulation and a point of comparison to the data that team members presented during the meetings. The documents examined included student cumulative and LPAC folders, the district's PST website, and printed forms. Cherry Creek ISD's website proved invaluable to

understanding how the district wanted schools like Cotton Tree to implement their vision of Response to Intervention. The student cumulative and LPAC folders provided information about the student and their past schooling, such as prior schools attended and previous language programs. I also noted past performance in content areas in both English and Spanish with the objective of examining if and how folder data supplemented and supported the data presented at the campus PST meetings. Finally, I also examined the sign-in sheets of the meetings in order to report on PST member attendance.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

Merriam (2009) describes data analysis as the “process of making sense out of data” (p. 175), which involves “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what I has seen and read—it is the process of making meaning” (p. 175-176). In this study, I analyzed discourse data, interviews, and documents.

#### **Content Analysis of the Discourse of the Meetings**

The first round of coding began with a thorough reading of the transcript. On the second reading, I used an open coding procedure to write codes on the right-hand side of the page. Merriam defines coding as the process of noting potentially relevant information that may answer the research questions. Because I wanted to be open to all possibilities that any segment of data might be useful, I used open coding. After working through each transcript, I went back and reviewed my notations and comments (i.e., my codes), and grouped those that seemed to go together. Richards (as cited in Merriam) describes this process as axial or analytical coding that goes beyond descriptive coding because it emerges out of interpretation and reflection on meaning. I entered each of these open codes and the data they described into an Excel spreadsheet. Examples of

these codes from the PST meeting about Julian, one of the focus student, included: “# of siblings @ school,” “hearing & vision,” “attendance,” “behavior,” “Reading level – DRA,” “strategies & accommodations,” “goals,” and “progress monitoring.” I also drew a wide arc to indicate the location where the teacher and the literacy interventionist “[didn’t] agree on reading level.” Next, I entered the codes into an Excel spreadsheet in one column. Along the top of each row, I inserted the student and teacher’s pseudonym, meeting date, and grade level into one cell. I repeated the process for each student, filling in seven cells across one row. I inserted the data represented by the code into the cell that corresponded to the student. For example, Julian’s data for the code “# of siblings @ school” was “2 older sisters.” Eventually, categories began to emerge from the codes:

1. Student’s personal information
2. Assessment data
3. Performance
4. Goals and progress monitoring
5. Student in-school descriptors
6. Language information
7. Home/parent information
8. Other services
9. Miscellaneous

If I encountered data for which I did not have a code, I created a new one and categorized it appropriately. I repeated this process with each of the transcripts of the meetings. Eventually, three major categories emerged: students’ demographic and sociological information discussed at PST meetings, the educational profile and performance data discussed during PST meetings, and problem-solving efforts discussed

during the PST meetings. A complete list of the categories and codes can be found in Appendix E.

### **Discourse Analysis**

Discourse analysis enabled me to uncover and make sense of how a problem-solving team deliberates and makes decisions about ELLs who are struggling academically. I used several methods of discourse analysis, including intertextuality (Johnstone, 2008), positioning theory (van Langenhove & Harré, 1998), critical discourse analysis (Rogers, 2002), and the concept of binaries (Sarup, 1993). First, I printed a second transcript to conduct the discourse analysis, so I would not be influenced by the findings from the content analysis. I kept only one theory or relevant feature in mind while I read the transcript. Words, phrases, or passages that were remarkable for some reason (e.g., topic switch, vocabulary, and positioning) were highlighted using different colors to distinguish the discourse analysis technique, the domain (i.e., genre, discourse, and style), or to indicate its specific feature. For example, when I was looking for examples of intertextuality, I used a pink highlighter to mark examples such as test scores, test names, and references to prior conversations or notes. I used a yellow highlighter to indicate when there was a topic switch from one interlocutor to another; eventually, I used a pencil instead to draw a line across the width of the page in order to improve the visibility of the topic switch. In the margin, I noted who was taking control and the new topic being introduced. In this manner, each transcript was read a multitude of times.

The identified words, phrases, and passages were then categorized in order for codes to emerge from these data. I used TAMSanalyzer (Text Analysis Markup System; Weinstein, 2011), a qualitative software program specifically designed for coding and

extraction. TAMSAAnalyzer enabled me to apply color codes that corresponded to my coloring scheme to electronic text of each meeting and aggregate the codes across all of the meetings. Sample codes that emerged from the data include “binaries,” “content information teacher doesn’t have,” “data asked for by AP,” “Vocabulary,” “Agreement-Disagreement,” “Topic Control-AP,” “Topic Control-Teacher,” “Topic Control-Teacher,” and “Topic Switch.” Refer to Appendix F for a complete list of all the codes that emerged from the discourse analysis.

### **Interview Analysis**

I read the transcription of each interview and highlighted units of information. Merriam (2009) states that a unit meets two criteria. It should first be heuristic; in other words, it “should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information” (p. 177). In the case of the interviews, however, the codes corresponded to the questions they were asked, which were categorized into four major categories: personal background, problem-solving team, RTI, and student referral to PST. Examples of codes that reflected background were: position, college major/minor, graduate work, teaching credentials, years in education, and years in current position. A complete list of the categories and codes for the interviews is presented in Appendix G.

I also wrote down any notes, questions, insights, or commentary in the margins because they struck me as “interesting, potentially relevant, or important to [my] study” (Merriam, p. 178). Each interview went through this same process although I kept in mind the list of codes from previous interviews and checked to see if they were also present in the current interview that I was analyzing. Then, I made another list of notations and compared it to those from the previous transcript. These lists were then

merged into one master list that “constituted a primitive outline or classification system reflecting the recurring regularities or patterns in [my] study” (Merriam, p. 180). Eventually, themes emerged from these regularities and patterns.

### **Analyzing Case Study Evidence: Developing a Case Description**

Yin (2009) proposes that developing a descriptive framework can be used to organize the case study because “a descriptive approach may help to identify causal links to be analyzed—even quantitatively” (p. 131). In my study, the meetings of a problem-solving team were the case. I used the discourse of the meetings, interviews with PST members and other school personnel, and documents in order to write a story of the school, the team members, and the focus students. In addition, Yin suggests using both qualitative and quantitative data to analyze the case. I was able to quantify certain aspects of the discourse of the meetings, from which certain patterns emerged. Using both these techniques, an “overall pattern of complexity” (Yin, 2009, p. 132) emerged regarding the discourse of the team meetings.

### **ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS**

To ensure trustworthiness, several strategies were employed: peer review, member checks, triangulation, and reflexivity. In peer review, a knowledgeable colleague examines the raw data to assess whether initial findings are plausible (Merriam, 2009). For this study, the findings and interpretations of the discourse data were reviewed by two different peer groups. One group consisted of recently graduated doctoral students in Multicultural Special Education; the other was composed of doctoral students who were completing advanced coursework in discourse analysis. I presented claims to each of these groups based on my analysis of the data that I then had to defend. At times, I was offered alternative explanations that I had to consider. Through these discussions,

consensus was reached between the researcher and the peer groups, and revisions were made to the original findings.

Member checks is another strategy used to ensure trustworthiness. Member checks involve sharing initial findings with people who were interviewed and getting their feedback (Merriam, 2009). Cotton Tree's administrators and faculty who were interviewed had the opportunity to read their profiles and validate or change any of the descriptions or statements that I had written about them. Selected members of the campus PST, including the principal and assistant principal, were also given the chance to respond to my preliminary analysis and findings by stating whether or not my interpretations "rang true" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217).

Triangulation is employed in order to strengthen the internal validity of a study (Merriam, 2009). In this study, triangulation involved the use of multiple data sources such as discourse data, interviews, and documents, that were compared and cross-checked. For example, teachers interviewed in this study explained what their responsibility was when their student's case was being considered by the campus PST. I could compare what a teacher said she did during the interview to what she actually did. If there was alignment, then I could be more confident that my interpretation was an accurate reflection of the situation.

Reflexivity is related to the integrity of a qualitative researcher and involves the researcher reflecting critically about herself as a researcher as instrument (Merriam, 2009). Reflexivity gives researchers the opportunity to uncover and explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken (Merriam, 2009). In order to increase the integrity my study, I kept a reflexive journal in which I attempted to explain my biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding this research (Merriam, 2009). It was not immediately apparent to me that by maintaining sustained contact and

developing close professional relationships with a few of the faculty and staff, I started to develop an aversion to finding anything that would be disparaging to Cotton Tree Elementary. Instead, I wanted to find and report on examples of excellent practice. However, I am confident that I have been able to conduct my analysis without my biases clouding my judgment. This clarification may better enable others to understand how I arrived at a particular conclusion.

### **Credibility**

In order to promote credibility, I used rich, thick description. Rich, thick description refers to a “description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents” (Merriam, 2009, p. 227). I aimed to convey the actual setting and participants of the campus PST meeting and the context that surrounded it, so I wrote detailed profiles of Cotton Tree Elementary, the campus PST members, and focus students. I also described the structure of the PST meetings and what typically happens using rich detail. I also used long extracts of the discourse in order to demonstrate patterns that had emerged from the data. Basically, I tried to tell the story of how one problem-solving team deliberates about struggling English language learners.

### **Utility of Findings and Limitations**

This research is atypical in the field of special education because it is a qualitative case study, a design that has traditionally been less frequently published in special education journals (Pugach, 2001). More specifically, in case studies of problem-solving teams (e.g. Orosco & Klingner, 2010), the discussion of the problem-solving team meeting was not recorded and analyzed using methods of discourse analysis. The use of

discourse analysis within a case study may illuminate and offer insights into how one PST makes decisions about struggling ELLs. However, qualitative case study is limited by the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator (Merriam, 2009). It is for this reason that the researcher must be ever vigilant in being aware of potential biases that may affect the analysis and interpretation of the data. Further limitations commonly associated with case study research involve issues of reliability, validity, and generalizability.

Educators have continued to struggle to identify the “right” (García & Ortiz, 2006, p. 4) students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds for special education services. The problem-solving model of Response to Intervention, a process through which students receive instruction and intervention, was supposed to be a way for educators provide services to students who are struggling before they fail in school (Vaughn & L. Fuchs, 2003); however, questions remain as to how RTI can accurately identify Specific Learning Disabilities in students who are struggling, especially if they are from CLD backgrounds (García & Ortiz, 2008). I hoped that this study would illuminate how one team approached problem solving as a way of understanding best practices for determining the existence (or non-existence) of a disability in an English language learners. Additionally, I wanted to be able to identify specific types of data that informed team members’ decision making that improved student performance. Ultimately, the findings may serve to uncover the complex dynamics of the decision-making process of a problem-solving team.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

Case study design was implemented to investigate how a problem-solving team (PST) deliberated about English language learners (ELLs) who were experiencing academic difficulties at an elementary school in Texas. The main unit of analysis was the problem-solving team meeting, and the primary data of this study were the deliberations of the members of the PST meetings. The secondary focus of this study was to examine how team members discussed and positioned students, themselves, and others during the PST meetings. In this chapter, I first present an overview of the educational features of Cotton Tree Elementary School. Then, I present an overview of the problem-solving team, followed by profiles of the PST members, teachers of the student participants, and each focus student. All of these descriptions provide background information about the school, those who participated in this study, and the students whom they brought to the PST for consideration in order to contextualize my findings. I subsequently discuss how Cherry Creek ISD's guidelines were implemented by the PST during meetings for ELLs and what types of data the team members considered. The chapter concludes with a detailed description of the discourse of the team meetings.

### **THE PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAM PROCESS AT COTTON TREE ELEMENTARY**

#### **Educational Features of Cotton Tree Elementary School**

In order to understand the context in which the problem-solving team at Cotton Tree Elementary functioned, it became clear to me that additional details about the educational features of Cotton Tree Elementary were needed. Thus, the following section describes these important features and includes an overview of the Dual Language Enrichment (DLE) Education Program, instructional departmentalization as practiced at

Cotton Tree, and the assessments of English and Spanish language proficiency that were given by members of Cotton Tree's faculty.

### ***An Overview of the Dual Language Enrichment Program***

Over the past 20 years in the United States, a form of dual language education has developed in which children are expected to continue learning both their first and second languages at school for a minimum of six years. This type of bilingual education is called Dual Language Enrichment and is considered a form of enrichment or "additive" (Ruiz, 1984) bilingual education. Programs often include English-dominant children learning a non-dominant language as a second language as well as non-dominant language speakers learning English (Lindholm-Leary, 2001; Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2005). Recently, two consultants from the Rio Grande Valley region of Texas have begun to propagate a particular program model for dual language enrichment bilingual education. This model is known as the Gómez and Gómez model of Dual Language Education (Gómez, 2000).

Like many other school districts in Texas, Cherry Creek ISD has been implementing the Gómez and Gómez model of DLE (Gómez, 2000) district-wide for the past few years. In the DLE model, students become proficient in two languages through academic content instruction in both languages. Gómez, Freeman, and Freeman (2005) describe two basic DLE structures: one-way and two-way. The main difference between these two different structures is the linguistic and ethnic composition of the students. Typically, the students in a one-way dual language program are of the same ethnic and language group but differ in their language proficiency. "Some are English dominant, some are Spanish dominant, and some are more balanced bilinguals" (Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005, p. 148). In the DLE two-way model, about one-half of the students are

native English speakers who come from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as European, Asian, and African American, and different social and economic backgrounds (Gómez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005). In Texas, half of students in a DLE two-way classroom are typically native Spanish speakers. Because of Cotton Tree’s predominantly Hispanic student population, the school has implemented the DLE one-way model.

The DLE model determines the language of instruction by content area. From pre-K to fifth grade, Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science are taught in Spanish. Mathematics, on the other hand, is always taught in English. It should be noted that literacy instruction begins in the student’s native language and transitions to both English and the native language after three years in the DLE program. For a student who enters pre-K at Cotton Tree, this means that in second grade, he or she will begin learning English Language Arts in addition to Spanish Language Arts. Otherwise, the language of instruction for all other content areas – Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics – remains constant.

### ***Instructional Departmentalization***

At Cotton Tree Elementary, the teachers do not teach in self-contained classrooms where one teacher is responsible for teaching all core academic subjects to the same students every day. Instead, they engage in the practice of departmentalization, described by Chan and Jarman (2004) as occurring when “teachers teach in their area of specialization and students move from one classroom to another for instruction” (p. 70). Therefore, Cotton Tree teachers do not teach all core subjects to the students in their homeroom classroom. Instead, they are each partnered with another teacher at their grade level, such that one teacher might teach Language Arts to the students in both teachers’ classrooms while the other teacher teaches Math to the students in both classrooms.

### *Assessments of Language Proficiency*

Like all schools in Texas, Cotton Tree Elementary uses a variety of standardized assessments to evaluate the English and Spanish language proficiency of ELLs. In order to meet federal requirements to assess the English language proficiency of ELLs, the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS; TEA 2007—2012) is administered to students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in the four language domains of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In kindergarten and first grade, the ratings are determined by holistic observational assessments in the four domains. For grades 2 through 12, holistic ratings and multiple-choice reading tests are administered in five grade clusters. The holistic ratings are *Beginning*, *Intermediate*, *Advanced*, and *Advanced High*. Teachers rate student performance in each content area by comparing it to the characteristics listed for each rating.

The *Texas Primary Reading Inventory* (TPRI; University of Texas System and Texas Education Agency, 2004—2006) was designed to meet the requirements of Texas Education Code §28.006 (2006), which mandated that early reading assessments be administered to all students in kindergarten through second grade in public schools in Texas (TPRI Resources, 2013). The TPRI facilitates a teacher’s ability to identify students who may have difficulty reading in these grades, and enables them to create learning objectives for these students. Screenings are given at the beginning, middle, and end of school year. Criterion that qualifies a first grader for Tier 2 intervention at BOY is if the child is “Still Developing” (SD) on TPRI Grade 1 BOY screening. At MOY, the criteria are: “Frustrational on Story 3 or Story 4; OR an average fluency score of less than 40 WCPM” (*Sample TPRI Criteria*; 2013).

Similarly, the *Tejas LEE* (University of Texas System and Texas Education Agency, 2004—2006) was developed to give teachers the necessary tools to assess

students' early reading development in Spanish and the ability to plan Spanish reading instruction (*FAQs: TPRI & Tejas LEE*, 2013). The *Tejas LEE* has three performance levels: *Desarrollado*, *Nivel Esperado*, and *Nivel de Intervención* (Tejas LEE Student Performance Levels, 2010) that can be interpreted in the following ways:

*Desarrollado*— The student has mastered the skill and this skill does not need to be revisited.

*Nivel Esperado*— The student has not yet mastered the skill, but is well on his/her way to mastery and does not need to be targeted for intervention.

*Nivel de Intervención*— The student is performing in the lowest 25% of the population on this skill at this time and additional attention is recommended. (Student Performance Levels, 2010, para. 2)

This section continues with brief overview of the PST meetings followed by detailed profiles of PST members, teachers, and focus students. It should be noted that verbal pauses, and repeated words and word phrases were edited from quotations to increase readability.

### **Overview of the Problem-Solving Team Meetings**

Cotton Tree Elementary's campus problem-solving team met a total of 17 times during the 2012—2013 school year. The first meeting was held on September 14, 2012; the last meeting was held on May 31, 2013. The PST discussed an average of nine students per meeting although the number of students on the agenda ranged from range 5 to 28 students. The meetings with the greatest number of students on the agenda occurred in November and May.

In the next section, I profile the permanent members of the PST at Cotton Tree. During the 2012—2013 school year, the team was led by one of two administrators, the

principal and assistant principal; they both had leadership duties of the PST at different times of the year. Profiles of other permanent members of the PST include the Communities in Schools program manager, the school counselor, and the parent support specialist. The last profile presented is that of a literacy interventionist at Cotton Tree. Although she is not considered a permanent member of the PST, she was present at one of the meetings I observed and reported on the progress of the student that she was serving. During member checking, Ms. Paredes confirmed that all of the interventionists are requested to attend to meetings if a student they are serving is on the PST meeting agenda.

### **The Problem-Solving Team at Cotton Tree Elementary School**

#### ***Victor Jiménez, Principal***

The 2013—2014 school year marked the eighth year that Mr. Jiménez (all names are pseudonyms) has served as Cotton Tree Elementary’s principal. Prior to his tenure at Cotton Tree, he served for two years as the assistant principal at Calvin Elementary. He graduated from a private, religious university in Texas and majored in Bilingual Education with a minor in Spanish. He subsequently completed a master’s degree in Educational Administration at a large, public university, also in Texas. Mr. Jiménez has been in education for 25 years, all of them in Cherry Creek ISD, first as a classroom teacher and then as an administrator. He spent 15 years as a first-grade bilingual education classroom teacher. During his interview, Mr. Jiménez stated that he wanted to have a range of teaching experiences before moving into administration, so he spent one year in third grade, and half a year each in second and fifth grades. During member checking, Mr. Jiménez, confirmed that these classes were all bilingual education although

he specified that the fifth graders were transitioning to English. In the following section, Mr. Jiménez describes his beliefs regarding the education of English language learners.

***You need to have that really good understanding.*** Mr. Jiménez believes strongly that specialized knowledge is needed when working with English language learners. “You need to have that really good understanding” in order to have “a successful transition...to English from Spanish.” Mr. Jiménez later clarified that “You” in his previous statement referred to teachers and administrators. He also stressed the importance of understanding the difference between Cummins’ (1979) Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALPS). “Just because you have that conversational English doesn’t mean you’re ready to transition [from Spanish to English]. You have to have that academic [language]...before you can do that.” He strongly supports Cherry Creek ISD’s recent policy changes that provide more ESL support throughout middle and high school to students who were once classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). Mr. Jiménez was critical of the previous “mentality” of “I’m sorry that you’ve always been in bilingual [education], but by fifth grade, we have to put you in English because when you go to middle school, there’s no more support.” With the implementation of the Gómez and Gómez Dual Language Enrichment (DLE) Model, he believes that the district’s language policies and practices will continue to improve.

***PST Leader: Past and Present.*** Mr. Jiménez described the PST leader’s responsibilities as follows: ensure that teachers have entered reading and/or math goals, and progress monitoring data into the online database; and schedule meetings when teachers are ready to present to the campus PST. He also said that he encourages teachers to log all contact with parents as well as attempts to contact parents into the system. Mr.

Jiménez stated that he does his best to provide classroom coverage for teachers, so they can attend the meetings:

We really want to make sure we have the teachers in on all of the meetings because I know there are some campuses where they just have it kind of real quick and sometimes the teachers are not even present.

Mr. Jiménez affirmed that he also strives to include anyone else who provides student support, such as the parent support specialist, social workers, and interventionists. He also encourages teachers and interventionists to bring documentation of student performance such as progress monitoring data and work samples.

During the interview, Mr. Jiménez reported that Cotton Tree Elementary received high praise from Cherry Creek ISD officials for having the “model problem-solving team.” Cherry Creek ISD’s problem-solving team facilitators, who observe and oversee meetings district-wide, have told him that Cotton Tree’s PST is the model for the entire district. Mr. Jiménez stated that, according to district reports about how the Cotton Tree PST is utilizing the online system to input and track goals, “we were real high up” compared to other campuses. He explained that the district has quantified how many times certain fields are being used to input goals, progress monitor, and make notations.

Mr. Jiménez had always led the PST at Cotton Tree although he admitted that at most campuses, the assistant principal ran the meetings. However, Mr. Jiménez did something during the 2012-2013 school year that he had never done before: He handed over all the responsibilities of the PST meetings to the then-new assistant principal, Avery Paredes. Mr. Jiménez spent the fall semester training Ms. Paredes to coordinate and facilitate the meetings, and by the beginning of the second semester, she assumed total responsibility. Mr. Jiménez has been able to redirect his energies to doing classroom

observations and ensuring that teachers are engaging in high quality instruction that they implement with fidelity.

***We need to have good, strong core.*** Since he has relinquished the responsibilities of the PST to Ms. Paredes, Mr. Jiménez has decided to focus his attention on classroom instruction in the primary grades and especially wants to focus on first grade English. He has been concerned that the number of children being retained is too high; as a result, he wants to be sure that classroom instruction is of high quality.

Balanced literacy is going to be a big part of our focus from pre-K through first grade this year...And I'm going to have a lot of professional development related to that because we have a lot of students...they want to possibly retain but then they're losing out on that opportunity to learn. Because we say, 'We don't need to wait to get to intervention,' we need to have good, strong core. And if they're not having that, that's where we're failing and why are we trying to retain kids when it's not their fault?

Mr. Jiménez plans on conducting an abundance of classroom observations this year. "I'm going to be in there a *lot*, checking running records, anecdotal notes. I want to see...how they're grouping. That's going to be huge because we spend the majority of our time with primary grade PSTs." Ultimately, he wants to see 80% of the primary students reading at grade level in both Spanish or English, depending on the language of instruction, a percentage that Cotton Tree achieved three years ago, but has not been able to attain since.

***Avery Paredes, Assistant Principal***

Ms. Paredes has served as an educator in Cherry Creek ISD for a total of 12 years. Currently, she is in her second year as the assistant principal at Cotton Tree Elementary.

Prior to her assignment at Cotton Tree, she served as an administrative intern for one year while completing an administrator certification program. Her teaching background is extensive, including five years as a fifth grade teacher, and four and a half years each as an Instructional Coach and an Instructional Specialist. As an Instructional Coach, she was dedicated to improving the instruction of teachers on one campus; as an Instructional Specialist, she was assigned to a geographic area of Cherry Creek ISD and worked on several campuses. Ms. Paredes graduated from a public university in Texas with a major in Bilingual Education and a minor in Spanish. She holds certifications in Bilingual Education, Generalist K–8, and Administration.

*It's important that somebody understands their background.* Ms. Paredes is a unique administrator at Cotton Tree Elementary; not only did she grow up in the surrounding neighborhood, she is also a graduate of the school. She firmly believes that “it’s important that somebody understands their [ELLs’] background, understands a little bit about where they’re coming from....It’s the culture piece that some of our teachers don’t quite understand.” She recounted how, as a young girl, she was often left at home to care for younger siblings and refutes teachers’ interpretation of this situation as being neglectful.

I think [if] you understand the culture a little bit better, [the parents] are trying to raise responsible students...not that it’s okay to leave little ones at home, but it doesn’t always mean that parents are being neglectful. I think it means that they’re trying to work and provide for their family, and that’s the way that particular parent grew up.

In addition to cultural understanding, Ms. Paredes believes that it is important for teachers to have specialized knowledge when working with English language learners. Specifically, they need to “know the process that [ELLs] go through to acquire a second

language and understand that not only are they trying to acquire a second language, they're also trying to acquire content language." If an ELL is struggling in class, he or she is struggling with English and the content, and the teacher needs specialized knowledge to figure out how best to serve the student "to get the most content knowledge that he can and also develop his English language at the same time."

*We try to look at the whole child.* Ms. Paredes described the responsibilities of the campus problem-solving team as coming together and discussing students who are struggling and then brainstorming a possible solution.

It's kind of a year-long process. At the beginning when we start, we're looking at students who have been retained or placed, and monitoring [their progress] for six weeks....And then, as the semester progresses...if there's any other student that the teachers feel...[is] starting to show some struggles being able to meet all their goals, they also come [to PST].

Ms. Paredes stated that the team tries "to look at the whole child," including "social barriers that the student might be going through," their behavior, and any educational needs that the student might have. She sees the team's responsibility as coming up with "things that we can start to change" or do differently to support the teacher. She adds that Cotton Tree Elementary has the benefit of having on their PST the parent support specialist, a counselor, two Communities in Schools (CIS) social workers (the Program Manager works exclusively at Cotton Tree while the Wraparound Coordinator services several campuses), and a district-assigned social worker. Depending upon student and family need, different types of social services are provided. As an example of how the process might work for one student, Ms. Paredes explained that student support first centers in the classroom where the teacher tries new and different strategies. If no progress has been made, then the student might receive support from Ms.

Croft (the CIS Program Manager) or the district social worker, who will contact parents to suggest possible school-based and community resources. If these services are still insufficient, then the CIS Wraparound coordinator may become involved to “call you [parent] every day, take you places, and visit you at your home.”

Ms. Paredes has many responsibilities as the leader of the PST. She maintains a calendar where she tracks students and their follow-up meetings. She also uses the calendar to generate meeting agendas into which she will “plug in any new students who teachers are concerned about.” Ms. Paredes believes that a “big piece” is making sure that teachers

contact the parents about times and dates because from time to time we do invite parents to come and share their feedback...And some of our parents know about our problem-solving team meetings and they want to come. But other times, the parents are just made aware that we’re having a problem-solving team [meeting] and if they want to provide any information, and most of them are okay with just the teacher sharing with them what happened or what we discussed.

During the meeting itself, the various team members gather around the table to discuss their concerns, “provide some information, feedback, questions...Then, we kind of discuss with the teacher what she’s been doing in the classroom and try to figure out what are the next steps, what would we like to try?” After goals are set, the teacher returns to the classroom and implements the team’s suggestions and documents any progress. “Then, we come back and do a follow-up, and if they met their goal, we’re done. It closes out. If not, then, we go to the next step.” Students who need the most help typically take the longest to go through the entire PST process.

***Rebecca Croft, Communities in Schools Program Manager***

Ms. Croft has worked as a school social worker with the Communities in School (CIS) program for the past 16 years. For 14 of those years, she has served the students at Cotton Tree Elementary. Prior to moving to Texas and being hired at CIS, Ms. Croft was the school social worker on a special education team at an elementary school in a Midwestern state for four years. She also worked as a social worker at a shelter for victims of domestic violence, also in the Midwest. Ms. Croft is one of the few people on Cotton Tree's PST who was not educated in Texas. She received her undergraduate degree in Social Work from a small, liberal arts college and then obtained a master's degree in Social Work from a public university in two different Midwestern states.

***They have specific issues and needs.*** Ms. Croft agrees that educators need specialized knowledge when working with English language learners because they have specific issues and needs. To illustrate what a specific need could be, she said that students arrive at Cotton Tree "in different phases of their learning." Some students were born in Texas, enroll in school from pre-K, and are "still in a bilingual class in fifth grade, so they have not transitioned. And then, we have some kids who have recently moved to Austin, and they're just learning new English language skills, so I think having specialized skills for that whole gamut of children is going to be really important."

***We set up programs that will benefit the kids.*** As a school social worker, Ms. Croft's expertise focuses on providing social-emotional and behavioral support. "Many times, on the problem-solving team, children who are brought up are students I've worked with in the past, or my program has worked with in the past, or are going to be referred to me because of their issues." Ms. Croft describes her work as focusing on family matters that may be "impacting their education and their issues at school,

behavioral issues that might be impacting them and different things that might be a barrier for their learning.”

As the Program Manager for Communities in Schools at Cotton Tree Elementary, Ms. Croft has set up programs to address gaps that the school might have in services. For example, individual counseling or group services are provided for children depending on their needs. “We set up programs that will benefit the kids. We have a number of students that we need to serve throughout the year.” The services provided by Ms. Croft may differ each year depending on the needs of the children that year.

It might be groups for children of incarcerated parents, behavioral groups, social skills groups, all those kinds of things. We also have enrichment programs, again depending on what the school needs...I usually do some health and wellness kinds of things: yoga, running club, we created a dance program. Then, we do outreach to parents...connecting them with resources, getting support for them.

In addition to the campus-based programs that Ms. Croft runs, CIS also employs another social worker who supports Cotton Tree’s students and their families—the Care Coordinator. Care Coordination is also known as the Wraparound program. Cotton Tree’s Care Coordinator services two different schools and “works with a small number of families to give them intensive services.”

Ms. Croft also manages AmeriCorps members who tutor and mentor Cotton Tree students. Additionally, AmeriCorps provides “interns who do more individual counseling and group-counseling activities and support groups.” Ms. Croft clarified that while there are two AmeriCorps programs at Cotton Tree, she only manages one of them. The other AmeriCorps program provides literacy intervention in the primary grades, so their focus is only on reading. The AmeriCorps tutors under Ms. Croft’s supervision will tutor in any subject depending upon the needs of the child.

*We've done a pretty good job.* Ms. Croft described her role on the PST as being one of the team members who brainstorms, shares information, and follows up with the student if he or she might benefit from CIS services. Overall, Ms. Croft believes that the team has “done a pretty good job of welcoming concerns, brainstorming issues, you know, talking about the issues...I think Avery [assistant principal] and Victor [principal] do a really good job of facilitating that.” Ms. Croft also believes that the PST has the same type of discussion when considering struggling English language learners.

It seems like [much] of the discussion is the same...we're looking at all the different facets of the students, 'Are they attending school? Are they...getting support at home?' And then, one of those facets would be, 'Are they an English language learner? So that would come up, too, and there would be a discussion about that. I guess that would be the only way it's different...

However, Ms. Croft is concerned about the team's ability to follow up with the students. “It's just very overwhelming. We have an overwhelming number of referrals. And sometimes I think our gap is in maybe follow[ing] up with our students.” She would like every teacher who approaches the PST to feel that the decisions or suggestions made at the meeting that will help him or her with the student who is struggling.

I always want the teachers to leave feeling like 'I've got something new I can do, or something that's going to change, that I've some support in that.' Because I think my fear is that sometimes they don't think that it's worthwhile, so they're not going to refer kids that really need it.

***Rachel Moore, School Counselor***

Ms. Moore has worked only as a counselor in Cherry Creek ISD and has been at Cotton Tree Elementary for eight years. Originally, she was a classroom teacher and

taught Art for eight years in two different school districts in Texas. However, she decided to change her educational specialty, so she completed a master's degree program and obtained certification in Counseling. Ms. Moore's undergraduate degree is in Art from a public university in Texas. She received her teaching credentials in all-level Art.

*I'm just part of the discussion.* Ms. Moore described the responsibilities of the PST as considering the students who are recommended by their teachers because they are struggling academically, emotionally, or behaviorally.

Then we just discuss strategies...like what the teacher's implemented, what's working, what's not working for them. We look at the goals that the teachers have already put into [the online database]. We just review those, and then we make recommendations at the end that meeting what to do.

According to Ms. Moore, the goals are typically monitored for approximately six weeks, after which the team will revisit them to determine if they were implemented as recommended and whether they are working. If testing was recommended, the team will verify if the assessments were administered.

As far as her responsibilities on the PST, Ms. Moore portrayed her role as "just a participating member, so I'm just part of the discussion. I have more responsibility as a counselor when it comes to more emotional stuff." Ms. Moore listed the types of services that she can provide to a child who is struggling emotionally: giving specific guidance in the classroom, meeting with the family, or providing referrals for the family. "If the possibility of dyslexia is brought up, the team will examine what has been tried so far and where they need to be." After member checking, Ms. Moore clarified this statement by stating that the team looks at data to:

Determine if the student is on grade level or not. If they are significantly below grade level, that is one of the 'red flags' we pay attention to and after

reviewing/discussion other bits of data, we might be able to refer for dyslexia screening. Our goal is to have our students on grade level in all academic areas.

If testing is subsequently recommended, Ms. Moore, as Cotton Tree's 504<sup>7</sup> Coordinator, will assist with obtaining parent signatures, explaining the process to them, and completing the "documentation to make that happen."

***It's the same process.*** In Ms. Moore's experience, if the PST is considering a struggling ELL, the team first "look[s] at their language. If they're making progress in English, if they're kind of stuck in the middle of transitioning between Spanish and English." Specifically, the team reviews the student's abilities in Spanish and English and "make[s] sure where they're at before we consider proceeding with any further testing of any kind." When asked specifically, if the PST process is different when an ELL is being considered, Ms. Moore replied, "It's the same process....We just spend more discussion on that [second language acquisition] piece where we wouldn't have to do that with a non-ELL."

***I think we have a strong team.*** When I asked Ms. Moore if she was satisfied with the PST process, she replied, "Absolutely! Our school? Absolutely!" According to Ms. Moore, the team is led by "very knowledgeable administrators" with much personal and professional experience. "They [Mr. Jiménez and Ms. Paredes] both know Spanish. I think it helps that they're familiar with our community and our population...because they've been in this area for a very long time." Ms. Moore also believes that Mr. Jiménez and Ms. Paredes "run the meetings well. They know...what to offer, the goals, what intervention we have available on campus, and what we can refer them outside of campus. I think all those things kind of work together."

---

<sup>7</sup> A student is eligible for services under Section 504 if the student has a disability and must have modified instruction in order to benefit from the regular education program.

***Joshua Smith, Parent Support Specialist***

Mr. Smith has served as Cotton Tree Elementary's parent support specialist for six years. He has an associate's degree in Criminal Justice from a junior college in Texas and some college credits from a public university also in Texas.

As the parent support specialist, Mr. Smith's "job is to work with the parents." He relies upon "the principal's direction, [and] that's the direction we take and try to parallel with the teachers and what they're doing." Mr. Smith assists Cotton Tree's parents to gain "access [to] social services or medical care [and] maneuver through Cotton Tree and Cherry Creek ISD's bureaucracies." He also "makes home visits, discusses attendance, makes referrals about employment and immigration, reads letters, and teaches them how to work with the children." As Mr. Smith said, he does a "little bit of everything."

***I assist as needed.*** Mr. Smith described his role on the PST as providing assistance as it is needed. For example, if the issue is attendance, and the teacher has not been successful contacting the parents, he "will find them [both the parent and the teacher] and kind of discuss it with [them]." He discusses the issues with the teachers and an administrator, and then communicates the necessary information to the parents. Mr. Smith works as part of the team to "do what is needed to make things happen for the child, or for the teacher, or for the parents."

***We put it all together, and that's where it really happens.*** Mr. Smith characterized the staff at Cotton Tree Elementary as "one big family." As a result, much communication takes place even outside of PST although "the plan is normally devised...and discussed in the PST." Mr. Smith also believes in the necessity of knowing the children, their families, and what's going on at home. The question, "Why are these things happening?" needs to be asked. He asserted, "Everybody brings a little something to the PST, to the meeting. And, we put it all together and that's where it really happens."

The following section continues with the profiles of the teachers and their focus students who attended the problem-solving team meetings.

***Elise Fox, Bilingual Education Literacy Interventionist***

Ms. Fox has had a long tenure at Cotton Tree Elementary, serving for 24 years. She has spent the last 15 years as the literacy interventionist at Cotton Tree and the previous nine years as a classroom teacher in grades pre-K through second grade. Ms. Fox has worked in four different school districts in Texas although she has spent the most time working for Cherry Creek ISD. She graduated from a public university in Texas with a major in Elementary Education and a minor in Spanish. She is certified in Bilingual Education.

Ms. Fox believes that specialized knowledge is necessary when working with English language learners. “The specialized learning that teachers need to have is language background, or multicultural information about the families and students, and then also about how they learn language. Because all of it starts with oral language.”

***One of us will almost always be there.*** Ms. Fox characterized the responsibilities of the PST as going “through the process of a student’s needs.” The teacher initiates the process by submitting the request to the PST, after which a meeting is held that “involves the teacher, various administrators, and also the interventionist who is serving that student.” Ms. Fox affirmed that “we also try to have an interventionist at the problem-solving [meeting], so that we can help give them information about what some of the terminology means, what some of the programs are, and just to help them with any academic information.” Cotton Tree Elementary has two literacy interventionists, Ms. Fox and Ms. Evans, who provide extra support for students who are struggling to read. Due to Ms. Fox’s Spanish language skills, she provides interventions in Spanish while

Ms. Evan serves the monolingual English-speaking students. Ms. Johnson works with Ms. Fox part-time and also provides reading interventions to struggling learners in English. According to Ms. Fox, “one of the three will almost always be there.”

*I really think the PST is successful at meeting its responsibilities.* Ms. Fox commended Mr. Jiménez for his leadership of the PST. She believes that “he really addresses all of the children’s needs, and he’s pretty explicit with letting the teachers know what he needs from them before they come to PST. So, it kind of helps them to know...we’re not going to waste a lot of time, and if we need to revisit them, then we’ll be pretty clear on that.” When asked how Ms. Paredes has done managing the PST meetings since taking the helm in January 2012, Ms. Fox replied enthusiastically, “Avery is awesome! Great, too! She’s so good....Avery’s really good.”

### **Teacher and Student Profiles**

This section focuses on the profiles of the three bilingual education teachers at Cotton Tree Elementary who participated in this study and the students they referred to the campus PST. I first present the profiles of first grade teacher, Estes and her students, Julian, Cristina, and Dante. Next, I describe Carl Turner’s profile. He is also a first grade teacher and Ms. Estes’ partner teacher. The students he represented at the PST meeting were Corazón and Gabriela. The final teacher in this study is Elisabeth Aguilar, a second grade teacher. Her students are Juana and Adalina. It should be noted that PST team members referenced “DRA” scores for the first graders during their deliberations. During member checking, I confirmed with the assistant principal, Ms. Paredes, that the teachers were actually referring to scores of the Spanish equivalent of the DRA, Evaluación del Desarrollo de la Lectura (EDL; Ruiz & Machado Cuesta, 2006). EDL is an assessment used to determine Spanish reading proficiency. Celebration Press, the publisher, markets

EDL as the Spanish equivalent of the DRA. In order to clarify the language of the reading proficiency test, I use *EDL* in the following profiles when teachers were referring to the Spanish reading test.

***Olivia Estes, First Grade Teacher***

Olivia Estes is a first grade dual language teacher at Cotton Tree Elementary. She has been teaching for six years in Cherry Creek ISD. She majored in Education at a public university in Texas and is certified to teach bilingual education. During the year of my study, Ms. Estes taught Language Arts and Reading in Spanish to all her students and to those of Mr. Turner, her colleague. In the departmentalized arrangement that is practiced at Cotton Tree, Mr. Turner taught Math in English to students from both classes.

Ms. Estes believes that her responsibilities on the PST are to “determine if a student might need further testing...if they have a learning disability or an emotional disability.” She described her role on the team as “teacher” who “look[s] at the student and think[s] of different strategies we can use with them.” In terms of the campus PST meeting, Ms. Estes expressed concern that ELLs were not being identified early enough “they [don’t] act out as much...The culture is more quiet, more respectful, so usually, you don’t see a lot of the disabilities until later on. They get more frustrated and start acting out.” Ms. Estes referred to the problem-solving team a total of eight students who were struggling to read in Spanish from the two sections she taught. Ms. Estes was the only teacher whom I observed on both data collection days, November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013. In November 2012, she attended the PST to discuss three students, two of whom, Julian and Cristina, were participants in this study. In May 2013, Ms. Estes attended on behalf of three other students. One of three, Dante, was also a participant. The following

students' profiles were compiled from the PST meetings, teacher interviews, and student cumulative folders.

*Cristina.* Cristina was born in Texas in 2006 and was six years old at the time of the study. Her one brother, who is three years older, also attended Cotton Tree Elementary. Cristina's Home Language Survey reported that Spanish is her native language, and she uses it at home. However, Ms. Estes reported at the PST meeting on November 30, 2012, that Cristina answers in English even when Ms. Estes asks her a question in Spanish. "She's also really high in English. She's one of those that kind of prefers to speak in English." Christina's TELPAS ratings at the end of the 2012—2013 school year indicated that she has *Advanced* Listening comprehension, *Intermediate* Speaking, and *Beginning* Reading and Writing. In the middle of first grade, the most recent Spanish proficiency test data in her cumulative folder, Cristina's Tejas LEE performance rating was *Nivel Esperado*.

Unlike most of the children in this study who have only attended Cotton Tree Elementary, Cristina attended pre-K at another elementary school in Cherry Creek ISD for half of the school year and then transferred mid-year to a different school. Cristina finished pre-K and then stayed for entire her kindergarten year. She then transferred to Cotton Tree for first grade where she was placed as an English language learner in a one-way dual language classroom. At the beginning of the school year (BOY), Ms. Estes administered the *Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura* (EDL) to Cristina. She scored an EDL Level 2 when she "should [have been] at a 4 or 6." By the November 30, 2012 PST meeting, Ms. Estes reported that Cristina had made "lots and lots of progress" and was reading independently at an EDL Level 8. In addition to Ms. Estes' reading instruction in the classroom, Cristina had been receiving more intensive instruction with an AmeriCorps literacy tutor. At the meeting, Ms. Estes was confident that Cristina would

attain her middle-of-the-year (MOY) goal, which was an EDL Level 10. Cristina continued to make significant progress throughout the year. During her interview in June, Ms. Estes reported that Cristina's end-of-year (EOY) reading was at Level 18, which is an EDL level associated with beginning second grade. Essentially, Cristina advanced two EDL grades levels in one school year and is on target for second grade.

**Dante.** Dante was born in Texas in August 2006 and was six years old at the time of the study. He has four older siblings, two sisters and two brothers, all of whom attend schools in Cherry Creek ISD. His sisters are in high school, and one of his brothers attends middle school. The younger of Dante's brothers is currently in fifth grade at Cotton Tree. Dante's Home Language Survey indicates that his first language is Spanish, and he speaks Spanish at home. Dante's most recent TELPAS ratings were: *Beginning* for Reading and Writing, *Intermediate* for Speaking, and *Advanced* for Listening. Dante's MOY first grade performance rating for the Tejas LEE was *Nivel de Intervención*.

In 2010, Dante enrolled in pre-kindergarten at Cotton Tree Elementary. According to information in Dante's cumulative folder, he was placed in bilingual education in pre-K, kindergarten, and Grade 1. At the beginning of the 2012–2013 school year, Dante was reading at an EDL Level 1. He began receiving additional instruction from Ms. Fox, the literacy interventionist, from November 2012 until the end of the school year. According to Ms. Fox, Dante began to make significant progress after he began to receive reading interventions daily. While still receiving guided reading instruction from Ms. Estes, Dante also began receiving interventions from both Ms. Fox and Ms. Johnson, a part-time tutor who worked with Ms. Fox. As a result, Dante was able to reach an EOY EDL Level 10.

At the May 9<sup>th</sup> PST meeting, Ms. Estes reported that Dante's attitude toward reading had changed from not wanting to read at all to checking out books and "being

excited about being able to read.” Despite his improved attitude and reading level, Ms. Estes expressed concern that Dante’s reading fluency was not at grade level. He scored 9 words per minute (WPM) in the middle of the school year; by the end of the school year, Ms. Evans (Literacy Coach) who was present at the May 9<sup>th</sup> PST meeting, reported that Dante needed to be in the 45- to 60-words-per-minute range by the end of first grade. Ms. Evans explained that since fluency is tied to comprehension, Dante will have “trouble not just keeping up with the decoding; he’s going to have trouble keeping up with understanding what’s going on.” Ms. Estes was not able to report on Dante’s EOY WPM score because she had not yet given him the test. Ms. Estes also reported that Dante’s retelling of reading passages “was not in very much order. He kind of started in the middle, and then he would go back...” Due to Dante’s low EOY EDL score of Level 10, his reading fluency, and his retelling skills, the PST recommended that Dante be retained in first grade. In the middle of the school year, Ms. Estes had a parent conference with Dante’s mother in order to discuss Dante’s performance at school and the possibility that he might be retained in first grade. Dante’s mother signed the form acknowledging she was aware that Dante risked retention. However, at the end of the school year, she refused to grant permission for Dante to be retained; as a result, he was *placed* in second grade. Ms. Paredes clarified during member checking that being “placed” as opposed to “promoted” implied that a student was still “not performing to grade-level standards.”

Dante’s mother was interviewed in September 2013 and reported on Dante’s performance in first and second grade:

Sobre Dante, está bien, este, iba un poquito mal el año pasado y este avanzo mucho y le gusta la escuela ahorita. Está cumpliendo mucho se tarda en leer porque en este, como se llama, en leyendo...

[Dante is doing well. He was not doing very well last year. He advanced a lot and he likes school a lot now. He is slow in reading and was not doing well at his level. But now, he is trying to read more to advance in his level. They are helping him here at school...]

Dante's mother did not attend her son's PST meeting that was observed for this study; however, she has attended other meetings for Cotton Tree parents. She specifically mentioned one meeting for parents that she attended.

Porque da mucha información para cómo ayudar a los niños en la escuela con la tarea, con lo que deben de ir aprendiendo y avanzando. Todas las, a, como se dice, las a para que ellos, para que uno saber cómo ayudarles a ellos...

[You can get information on how to help your children in school with their homework, with what they should be learning and advancing and all strategies that can help them at home...]

Dante's mother also tries to stay in contact with her children's teachers.

Cuando empieza la escuela tener comunicación. Vengo y conozco los maestros y todo, y es lo que más, a, así para tener comunicación y saber cómo va en la escuela.

[When school starts, I come and meet the teachers so I can have good communication with them and know how they are doing in school.]

She specifically mentioned that she had just spoken with Dante's teacher: Hablé nomas con la maestra de Diego y este todo. Me díjo que estaba Dante progresando. [I just spoke with Diego's teacher; that's all. She told me that Dante was progressing.]

In general, she stated, "Me gusta asi todo lo que están haciendo. [I like everything they are doing.]" Her sole critique was based on an observation that some parents are not aware of meetings at Cotton Tree. She acknowledged that she has received letters and

announcements about activities at Cotton Tree in addition to sometimes receiving phone calls: “el director hablaba en el teléfono también y avisaba.” [The principal would also call me on the phone to let [us] know.] However, when she spoke with two of her friends who are also mothers of Cotton Tree students about one such activity, “no se enteraron [they were not aware].” Dante’s mother concluded by saying, “Le digo, no sé cómo será que uno se enteran y otros no. [I tell you, I don’t know why it is that some find out [about the activity] and others don’t.]”

**Julian.** Julian was born in Texas in 2006 and was seven years old at the time of the study. He is the youngest of three children and has two older sisters who also attend Cotton Tree Elementary School. Julian’s Home Language Survey stated that Julian’s native language is Spanish, and he speaks it at home. Ms. Estes reported that although Julian’s father speaks Spanish, his mother and sisters speak English. Ms. Estes considers Julian’s English language ability as “really good.” Julian’s most recent TELPAS ratings were: *Beginning* for Reading and Writing, *Intermediate* for Speaking, and *Advanced* for Listening. Julian’s kindergarten MOY Tejas Lee rating was *Nivel de Intervención*.

Julian entered pre-kindergarten at Cotton Tree Elementary in 2010 and was placed in a one-way dual language classroom as an English language learner. His pre-K teacher described him as a “sweet, well behaved student” who “behaves and works well in class.” Thus, Julian presented no behavior or attendance concerns and was described by Ms. Estes as “very quiet.” Because Julian was reading at an EDL Level 1 when he should have been at a Level 6, he received small-group intervention with the literacy specialist, Ms. Fox. Both Ms. Fox and Ms. Estes reported that Julian will “shut down” if he is unsure about something.

In the middle of the 2012—2013 school year, Julian’s mother approached Ms. Estes expressing concern that he might have some form of autism because he was very

“stand-offish with her, [and] he really [didn’t] like to hug her.” Specifically, he would push his mother away if she tried to hug him. Ms. Estes consulted with Ms. Scott, Cotton Tree’s special education teacher who was disinclined to believe that Dante had any form of autism due to his talkative and sociable nature and the fact that he played with many friends on the playground. By the end of the school year, Julian’s EDL Level was a 14<sup>8</sup>, which is one EDL level below beginning second grade. Due to the degree of progress he made throughout the year, he was placed in second grade.

***Carl Turner, First Grade Teacher***

During the year of my study, Carl Turner was a first-grade dual language teacher at Cotton Tree Elementary. He has been teaching first grade at Cotton Tree for eight years although he also taught pre-K and second grade for one year, and kindergarten and fifth grade for two years each. Mr. Turner has taught for all but three of his 19-year career in Cherry Creek ISD. During one of those years, he founded a one-room, multi-grade school in Mexico. He majored in Spanish Literature at a university in Texas and became a certified teacher of Bilingual Education through Teach for America. Mr. Turner was paired with Ms. Estes, so he taught Math to her students while she taught Spanish Language Arts to his.

Mr. Turner described the responsibilities of the PST as “a meeting place where we would come together and talk about the strengths and weaknesses of whatever child is there and find out how to improve where they’re at” regardless of the type of need—academic, social, economic. However, he questions whether the team is able to meet its responsibilities because

---

<sup>8</sup> The final two EDL levels for the end of first grade are: Level 12 and 14. There is no EDL Level 16. Level 18 is considered on grade level at the beginning second grade.

there are so many children that it becomes like you can't really sit there and talk about the true needs of what's going on with this child....We do, but everything seems a little rushed. And to me, it seems like 'check the box' and move on.

Mr. Turner explained his responsibilities on the PST as bringing “forth what the weaknesses are; we set up a goal of how we can maybe [use] different methods to approach this weakness.” Then, he engages in a period of progress monitoring to determine the success of the new approach. If no evidence of progress exists, the PST will suggest another intervention. He attended the May 9, 2013 meeting on behalf of two of his students, Corazón and Gabriela, but he “didn't really find any discrepancies” for them in Math and Science. He stated that he did not refer any of his students to the PST; they were all referred by Ms. Estes because of their performance “based on Language Arts.”

*Corazón.* Corazón was born in Texas in 2006 and was seven years old at the time of this study. During member checking, Ms. Paredes confirmed that when Corazón was 2 years old, her family moved to Mexico where she attended kindergarten. The summer before the 2012—2013 school year, Corazón's family moved back to Texas, so when she enrolled in the first grade at Cotton Tree Elementary in Fall 2012, it was her first experience with schooling in the United States. She has two sisters and two brothers of unknown ages; their birth dates were not included in Corazón's cumulative folder. Corazón's Home Language Survey stated that Spanish is her native language and that she uses it at home. When Corazón enrolled in Cotton Tree, she was given the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links (CTB/McGraw-Hill, 2006) test in English and Spanish to determine her proficiency in both languages. According to the test booklets in her cumulative folder, she scored a Level 1 in English and Level 4 in Spanish. Cherry Creek ISD's 2011 LAS-Links Dominance Chart interprets these scores as a “monolingual in a

language other than English”; in Corazón’s case, Spanish. Corazón’s TELPAS ratings seem be congruent with the LAS-Links assessment: Her English proficiency was rated at *Beginning* in Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. She was the only student in this study to receive the *Beginning* rating for all four language-proficiency skill areas. Corazón’s EDL score was “A,” a designation used for emergent readers.

Corazón was placed in Cotton Tree’s one-way dual language program as a first-grade English language learner. Due to her DRA score, Mr. Turner wanted “to get her some extra reading help.” In October 2012, Corazón began receiving reading interventions from Ms. Fox and was also tutored for a short time by an AmeriCorps instructor. Her participation in the AmeriCorps program eventually ended because she had met her goals. Corazón made steady progress in reading throughout the year. She met her MOY goal of reading at DRA Level 4. By the end of the school year, Corazón was evaluated at Level 12, two levels below the BOY second-grade level of 18. Mr. Turner has described Corazón as “very eager” with excellent behavior, and “just by sheer determination, she’s going to get it done.” Corazón was *placed* in second grade where she will continue to receive reading interventions with the goal of eventually reading on grade level.

**Gabriela.** Gabriela was born in Texas in 2006 and was seven years old at the time of the study. She has two older brothers; one is in middle school and the other is in high school. Mr. Turner reported at the May 9, 2013 PST meeting that Gabriela also has two older sisters (ages unknown). Gabriela’s Home Language Survey stated that Spanish is her first language and that it is spoken at home. However, Mr. Turner stated at the PST meeting, “I think she knows more English than we believe she does.” He supported his opinion by saying that he has observed Gabriela speaking in English “just about every day” with a new student who is English dominant who sits next to her in class. In

addition, Mr. Turner has observed Gabriela initiating conversations with her older brothers in English during dismissal. He recalled that Gabriela's mother stated that she was the only one who spoke Spanish at home. "The television is always in English. Everything gravitates around English." Gabriela's TELPAS ratings were: *Beginning* for Reading and Writing, *Intermediate* for Speaking, and *Advanced* for Listening.

Gabriela entered Cotton Tree Elementary's dual language pre-kindergarten as an English language learner in 2010. At the PST meeting, Mr. Turner described Gabriela as being "very low" academically in reading and writing; one of her main challenges was retaining information. He listed her strengths as being "very sweet and well behaved." During his interview, Mr. Turner added more detail about Gabriela, saying that she exhibited a "distant, blank look." When I asked him if she was not interested in what he was teaching in class, he disagreed. "We weren't even sure if she was hearing what we were saying....There's no reaction....to anything we said. Not a smile." Mr. Turner said that he felt like she was an anthropologist studying his classroom whose research question was: "Just what are these people doing?"

At the May 9<sup>th</sup> PST meeting, Mr. Turner reported that Gabriela's mother had taken her to a doctor for an evaluation and was prescribed medication for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Since Gabriela began taking medication in December 2012, Mr. Turner noticed "a change and a difference." Gabriela was "more engaged and seem[ed] to know what [was] going on a little bit better." Gabriela's mother, who agreed to be interviewed in September 2013, recounted a similar progression of events. She recalled Mr. Turner describing her daughter's classroom behavior in the following manner.

Ella no tenía ningún problema con los niños, ni nada. Simplemente cuando le hablaba como que está un poco distraída.

[She did not have any problems with the children or anything; only, when he would call on her, she seemed to be a little distracted.]

Apparently, Gabriela experienced a drastic change after receiving medication.

El año pasado, pues un poco baja en lectura, pero yo me imagino que como [la] doctora me recomendó que le diera unas pastillas, este, de repente empezó a mejorar.

[Last year, she was a little behind in reading, however, the doctor told me to give her some pills, and suddenly she started to improve.]

Gabriela was first put on a low dosage of the medication.

No me dijo exactamente lo que tenía, pero como le digo, me dio medicamento muy bajo para que, para concentrarse. Porque no es hiperactiva, ella es tranquila nada más. Como me imagino que se le hace difícil como poner atención, pero por eso le dijo la doctora que le iba a dar algo muy bajo nada más para calarla para ver si este, ponía más atención.

[She did not tell me exactly what it was she had, but like I tell you, she gave me a low dose medication so that, so she could concentration. Because she is not hyper-active, she is more calm, nothing else. I imagine that it is difficult to pay attention and that's why the doctor told her that she was giving her something of a low dose just to try to see if she would paid more attention.]

At the beginning of the 2012—2013 school year, Gabriela was rated at an EDL Level 1, the equivalent of the middle of kindergarten, so she started to receive reading interventions from Ms. Fox twice a week, and reading interventions from Ms. Johnson on the other three days, which increased her reading support to five days a week. By the end of the school year, Gabriela was rated at a EDL Level 8 (middle of first grade).

Despite being half a year behind most of her classmates in reading, Gabriela was placed in second grade. She had gained one year of growth in reading and was more attentive in class and getting work done. In addition, Ms. Paredes, the assistant principal at Cotton Tree Elementary, commented during the PST meeting that according to the Dual Language Enrichment Model, Gabriela would begin receiving English Language Arts instruction in addition to Spanish Language Arts in second grade. If she were retained in first grade, she would have repeated “the same basic stuff at the beginning of the year” that she had already mastered. Ms. Paredes asserted that by placing Gabriela in second grade, they would “be able to see which language she blossoms in more...which she takes to faster.” Consequently, Gabriela was placed in second grade with the intent that she would receive reading interventions as soon as school resumed in the fall. Mr. Turner was also instructed to follow up with Ms. Moore about getting 504<sup>9</sup> accommodations for Gabriela in order ensure she would be supported consistently throughout her elementary years and receive the modification and accommodations necessary to ensure her success.

***Elizabeth Aguilar, Second Grade Teacher***

Ms. Aguilar is a second grade teacher at Cotton Tree Elementary whose first language is Spanish. At the time of her interview in June 2013, she had just completed her fourth year of teaching second grade at Cotton Tree. According to Ms. Aguilar, the 2012—2013 school year was challenging for her because she had to conduct all her classroom instruction in English. She explained that teaching in English was more difficult for her because English is her second language. Prior to being hired as a second grade teacher, Ms. Aguilar had served as the teaching assistant (TA) in one of the Life

---

<sup>9</sup> A student is eligible for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 if the student has a disability and must have modified instruction in order to benefit from the regular education program.

Skills classrooms at Cotton Tree. While she was working as a TA, Ms. Aguilar was also completing an alternative certification program in Bilingual Education. When a second grade teaching position became available in the middle of the school year, Ms. Aguilar applied for the job and was hired. Ms. Aguilar changed careers from business to education. She graduated from a private religious university in Texas with a degree in Business Administration and worked in that field for five years.

Ms. Aguilar described the responsibilities of the campus PST as thinking of “any type of resource help for the student and their family to make the student successful academically.” However, she questioned if the PST was successful achieving this goal. “At times, it doesn’t seem that way; it just seems like it’s more following the process.” Ms. Aguilar was also critical of what she perceives as the inordinate amount of time and effort required before a decision is made to move forward with testing. “We have to put so much data into the computer before they actually even consider the student being tested for dyslexia, and also there’s not follow-up.” In terms of her responsibilities on the PST, Ms. Aguilar explained that she presents her accumulated data, including reading levels and progress-monitoring data, her concerns, and actual student work to the PST. At the May 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, Ms. Aguilar attended on behalf of three of her students, two of whom, Juana and Adalina, were participants in this study. In the following section, I present their profiles.

***Juana.*** Juana was born in Mexico in 2004 and was nine years old at the time of the study. She immigrated to the United States with her father and younger brother after her mother abandoned the family. According to Ms. Aguilar, Juana’s father stated that he wanted “to start fresh.” She entered kindergarten at Pine River Elementary in Cherry Creek ISD where she was retained in first grade. For second grade, she transferred to Cotton Tree Elementary. Juana’s younger brother also attends Cotton Tree and is in Mr.

Turner's first grade class. Juana's Home Language Survey states that Spanish is her first language and that it is spoken at home. Juana's TELPAS ratings were: *Intermediate* for Speaking, Reading, and Writing, and *Advanced* for Listening.

In 2012, Juana entered Cotton Tree Elementary's dual language program in the second grade as an English language learner. At the PST meeting on May 9, 2013, Ms. Aguilar reported that Juana had "pretty good attendance" and no behavior issues. Juana was referred to the PST due to her challenges with reading. Specifically, Ms. Aguilar expressed concern that Juana exhibited signs of having dyslexia: "[H]er reading level, her accuracy, and her words per minute have plateaued for a long time, and she makes the same mistakes....[I]t's almost like she's guessing what the next word is going to be, and it's the word that starts with that letter." For example, if the word that Juana was supposed to read was *mirando*, she would say *mourir*, "some random word that starts with an M." In addition, Juana "will just say part of the word [or] she won't say the whole word. She'll leave off the ending." Her reading tutor had also noticed the same pattern in Juana's reading. However, Ms. Aguilar stressed that Juana's strength was her comprehension; "she is able to figure out what's going on in the story even though she's reading the wrong word."

Juana's father's impression of his daughter's school performance seemed to support Ms. Aguilar's suspicions about Juana possibly having dyslexia. He was the third parent who later agreed to share his thoughts about his child's performance and the PST process in general. When asked how his daughter was doing academically, he responded by describing Juana as "muy despistada" [very distractible] although he believed that "le hecha ganas" [she gives it her best]. He elaborated by stating:

Se le hace muy difícil porque puede poner *brazo* pero se ve como *drazo*. Entonces, ella se sabe la pregunta, pero no más se le queda al revés. Luego se la ponen mala. Pero yo creo que es eso lo que le falla realmente.

[It is very hard for her, because, for example, she can write the word *brazo*, but it looks like *drazo*. So, she does know [the answer]; however, it is backwards, so it is marked wrong. I think that is really her problem.]

During the meeting, Ms. Paredes observed that the problem-solving team at Pine River Elementary had discussed similar concerns at their own PST, which Juana's father had attended. Ms. Aguilar stated that he signed a form at that meeting granting his permission to have her tested for dyslexia. However, during his interview, Juana's father was asked about 504 services and whether he had given permission for them. He replied that he signed forms at Pine River, "pero no me recuerdo realmente." [I do not really remember [what I signed].] Because no test scores were entered into the online database, Ms. Paredes assumed that the tests were never administered at Pine River. As a result, Ms. Paredes recommended dyslexia testing to be completed by the end of the 2012—2013 school year.

Ms. Aguilar expressed an additional concern about Juana's emotional well being because Ms. Moore, the school counselor, had reported that Juana sometimes cried "about how much she misses her mom" during her counseling sessions. Ms. Aguilar also reported that Juana's father informed her that Juana has already started her menses even though she was only nine years old in order to make the point that Juana was "going through a lot of emotional things as well." This revelation prompted Ms. Paredes to wonder how Juana's quicker maturation rate coupled with the self-knowledge that she had difficulty reading might affect her self-esteem. Earlier in the school year, Juana had begun participating in an after-school Expressive Dance class. She had also been

assigned a mentor through the AmeriCorps program in order to bolster her self-esteem although Ms. Aguilar reported that due to STAAR testing, Juana hadn't been able to see her mentor in awhile. Ms. Paredes indicated that she would put Juana on the list of students who would receive services from Ms. Croft at the beginning of the 2013—2014 school year.

*Adalina.* Adalina was born in Texas in 2005 and was eight years old at the time of the study. From 2009—2013, Adalina attended Penry Elementary in a neighboring school district. During the second week in February 2013, Adalina transferred to Cotton Tree Elementary. She had one younger brother in kindergarten and an older sister in fifth grade; both siblings attended Cotton Tree. Adalina's Home Language Survey stated that her first language is Spanish, and it is also the language she speaks at home. However, in a contradictory manner, the Home Language Survey also indicated that the "language spoken by the child" was English. I asked Ms. Paredes about this during member checking, so we checked her cumulative folder to verify that Adalina's parents had indeed indicated that her first language is Spanish, the language she speaks at home is Spanish, and the "language spoken by the child" is English. Ms. Paredes speculated that Adalina's parents wanted her be in an English-only classroom. Adalina's recent TELPAS ratings were *Beginning* for Reading, and *Intermediate* for Listening, Speaking, and Writing. No Spanish proficiency test scores were found in her cumulative folder.

Unlike the other focus students in this study, Adalina was not brought to the attention of the PST because she performed poorly in reading even though she struggled to read. Ms. Aguilar referred Adalina to the PST because of her numerous absences from school. As of the May 9<sup>th</sup> meeting, Ms. Paredes noted that Adalina had a total of nine unexcused absences. She had only been enrolled for 56 days, but had been absent for nine of them. Essentially, Adalina attended school only four days a week. During her

interview, Ms. Aguilar informed me that she needed to “pick her battles.” Even though Adalina’s MOY EDL Level was a 12, or the reading level of a middle-of-the-year first grader, Ms. Aguilar reasoned that Adalina needed to be at school in order to learn. She knew that if she “put [Adalina] in for reading, it would just come back at [her at the meeting], ‘Well, how are you going to read to her if she’s not here every day?’” During her interview, Ms. Aguilar noted that Adalina’s EOY EDL was Level 16, which is one level below the beginning of second grade. Adalina’s EOY grades indicated that she was struggling academically. She received ratings of “Needs Improvement” in Reading, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies; and “Emerging Understanding” for Math and Health.

Because Ms. Aguilar’s main concern was Adalina’s school attendance, she made many attempts to contact Adalina’s parents and diligently tracked her efforts in the online database. However, her calls and voice mail messages went unanswered. It was only after Ms. Aguilar left a voice mail message saying she could meet the mother at home, did Adalina’s mother respond. She approached Ms. Aguilar without an appointment during dismissal to say that she was available to discuss Adalina. Both Ms. Aguilar and Ms. Paredes agreed to enlist the assistance of Mr. Smith, the parent support specialist, to conduct a home visit after the PST meeting.

During the PST meeting, Ms. Aguilar mentioned that Adalina was also receiving out-of-school speech services although no one knew any details about the nature these services. Ms. Aguilar reported that Adalina did not exhibit any obvious speech impediments. If Adalina had not mentioned it, Ms. Aguilar insisted that she would not have noticed it. Ms. Paredes requested that Ms. Aguilar ask Adalina’s parents to bring in the speech paperwork in order to ensure that Adalina received appropriate services and support at school. Ultimately, Ms. Paredes accepted Ms. Aguilar’s recommendation to

retain Adalina in second grade primarily because of her poor attendance and the fact that she had not “had enough opportunity to learn at our school to get good instruction to be ready for the next grade level.” Ms. Paredes also flagged Adalina for monitoring for dyslexia and receptive and expressive language during the first six weeks of the 2013—2014 school year.

In the following section, I describe how the PST at Cotton Tree implemented the district’s RTI process. I begin by giving an overview of the meetings that I observed, specifically how they were organized and how each student was presented. Then, I describe the structure of the PST and who attended the meetings. The section continues with a review of the roles and responsibilities of the PST members and concludes with an illustration of team members’ conceptual understanding of RTI.

#### **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CHERRY CREEK ISD’S PROBLEM-SOLVING (RTI) PROCESS**

I attended two PST meetings at Cotton Tree Elementary on November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013. Although both meetings were held in different rooms, upon entering I immediately scanned the conference table for an appropriate seat. I chose to sit facing the team because I knew I would be watching them interact with each other. PST members, on the other hand, tended to sit where they would have a good view of the flat screen TV that had been mounted high on the walls of both rooms. The result was that I had my back to the screen, so if I wanted to see the monitor, I had to turn completely around and face my back to the people I was observing. Needless to say, I could only take brief glances at the monitor. Assistant Principal Paredes, who was the PST chair, always seemed to always be busily tapping the keyboard on her laptop. If she stopped typing, she was probably going to speak. Her laptop was connected to a projector that displayed the students’ records from the PST online database. The only PST members who really

engaged in any discussion at the meetings I observed were the AP, the teacher, and the interventionists. Typically, the AP asked a rapid series of questions that the teacher answered. Teachers also presented various types of information about the for whom students they advocated. At the end of the meeting, the team agreed on a decision, which could be a recommendation for testing, retention or placement, or continued progress monitoring.

### **Structure of the PST**

At Cotton Tree Elementary, Ms. Paredes, the assistant principal, served as the PST chair for the meetings held on November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013. Thus, she was responsible for scheduling the meetings, preparing the agenda and populating it with students, teachers, and times as well as sending the agenda to all relevant parties early enough to give them ample time to come prepared with information and data. In the following section, I describe how Ms. Paredes fulfilled her duties as PST chair.

Ms. Paredes, as PST chair, scheduled the meetings and created an agenda with assigned times at consistent intervals ranging from 20 to 40 minutes. Each requesting teacher and the cases of the students whom he or she wanted to discuss were assigned a time on the agenda. This ensured that the teacher would have to make only one appearance on the day of the meeting. The agendas were distributed via email to all the necessary persons at least one day prior to the meeting. On November 30, 2012, the permanent members of the PST convened at 10:15 a.m. in the Parent Room. Of the five teachers scheduled on the agenda, only one—Ms. Estes—had struggling ELLs. The meeting began at 10:30 a.m. with teachers who were not participants in this study occupying the first three time positions. At 1:40 p.m., Ms. Estes was scheduled to present

to the committee about Julian and Cristina. One last teacher followed Ms. Estes at 2:40 p.m. to discuss the last student's case.

On May 9, 2013, the PST meeting was relocated to the principal's office because of school activities in the Parent Room, the usual location of the PST meetings. A total of ten teachers were scheduled to present the cases of 28 students; five of whom were participants in my study. Ms. Aguilar was the first teacher on the agenda and scheduled at 8:00 a.m. She had referred the cases of three students to the PST that day, two of whom were focus students, Adalina and Juana. Ms. Estes followed her at 8:30 a.m. present her concerns about Dante and two other students. Finally, at 10:30 a.m., Mr. Turner attended the PST meeting to discuss four of his students, two of whom were focus students, Corazon and Gabriela. Four more teachers followed Mr. Turner at varying time intervals to discuss a total of 12 more students.

### **PST Meeting Attendance**

Cherry Creek ISD guidelines stipulate that the PST should be led by an administrator or designee who serves as the PST chair. In conjunction with the school's leadership team and administration, the PST chair designates additional school staff to serve as permanent members of the PST. The permanent members of the PST at Cotton Tree Elementary included the PST chair, the counselor, the CIS program manager, and the parent support specialist. Although they were expected to attend each meeting, they were sometimes prevented from doing so due to other professional responsibilities among other reasons. For example, Ms. Moore, the school counselor, informed me that she did not attend the meeting on May 9<sup>th</sup> because she was still administering STAAR exams. In fact, on May 9<sup>th</sup>, none of the permanent PST members other than Ms. Paredes attended all five of the discussions that I observed.

In terms of attendance, the permanent members of the PST had the highest percentages. According to Cotton Tree's sign-in sheets of the PST meetings, the school counselor attended 76% of campus PST meetings. Ms. Croft, the CIS program manager, and Mr. Smith, the parent support specialist, attended 71% of the PST meetings. Although not considered a permanent member of the PST, the district social worker, Ms. Soto, attended 53% of the Cotton Tree PST meetings, which was the highest of the as-needed members. The next closest was the CIS care coordinator at 24%. Other members of Cotton Tree's staff, such as the literacy interventionists, the school nurse, the diagnostician, and the CIS care coordinator attended between 6% and 24% of the PST meetings. The PST chair and the student's advocate were the only two PST members who attended the deliberations involving all seven focus students that I observed. Others who were present for at least one of these meetings included the literacy coach, literacy interventionist, CIS program manager, district social worker, and parent support specialist.

### **Team Members' Roles and Responsibilities**

District guidelines specify four team member roles: PST chair, advocate, timekeeper, and recorder. At Cotton Tree, Ms. Paredes assumed the roles of PST chair, timekeeper, and recorder. As the PST chair, she became the leader and directed the meetings. In the following example, Ms. Paredes started the discussion about Dante's case, inquired about his reading level, and then asked if he had another first name.

AP: So, our first student for Ms. Estes is Dante [last name].

T: M'hm.

AP: What's his, what's his reading DRA?

T: He is reading at a 10.

AP: Does he have another first name?

T: Dante? No, he does not...

AP: ...have another first name? Oh, here it is. Okay. So, he has pretty good attendance.

T: M'hm. Lately, he's been a little bit more absent, but all in all, he hasn't been so bad.

In addition to serving as the PST chair, Ms. Paredes also assumed the role of recorder. When she asked if Dante had another first name, she was simultaneously trying to locate his record in the online database and was initially unsuccessful. During the PST meetings, she took the meeting notes and entered the PST's recommendations into the online database.

In the previous example, Ms. Estes served as Dante's advocate. In general, advocates provided much information about academic and social concerns, testing and performance data, and familial background. It was their responsibility to monitor their student's progress on interventions and goals; however, there were times when the teachers were not fully informed about their student's performance and lacked specific information that Ms. Paredes requested. During the discussions about both Cristina and Dante, Ms. Paredes asked for information about their math performance, but Ms. Estes was not able to provide it because she had not conferred with Mr. Turner prior to the PST meeting. (Due to departmentalization, Ms. Estes taught reading in Spanish to Cristina and Dante while Mr. Turner taught them math in English.)

In another example of the advocate not having information that was requested, during the discussion about Juana's case, Ms. Aguilar suggested that her partner teacher, Ms. Muñoz, should have attended the meeting about Juana as well because she did not

have detailed information about Juana's performance in the other classroom. Like Ms. Estes, she had not consulted with her partner teacher before the campus PST meeting.

In a final example of an advocate not being fully prepared to report on his student, Mr. Turner did not have information that might have enriched the understanding about Corazon's overall performance. He reported that Corazón had received reading interventions from both Ms. Fox and an AmeriCorps tutor, but the tutor was no longer providing support because Corazón had met her goals. However, Mr. Turner was neither aware of Corazon's goals nor the specific performance outcomes of the intervention.

Ms. Paredes assumed the responsibilities of the final two PST member roles of timekeeper and recorder. As timekeeper, she was supposed to ensure that the team adhered to the schedule set by the PST chair, who also happened to be Ms. Paredes. However, the discussion about student cases often lasted longer than the allotted time. On May 9, 2013, during the discussion about Adalina's case with Ms. Aguilar, another teacher, Ms. Wheeler, interrupted the meeting because she was arriving to discuss her struggling students.

AP: What...who are you going to be with?

T: The next...who's next on the list?

AP: Ms. Wheeler [first grade teacher], we are running WAY behind schedule.

T: Okay. I'll come back. Okay, I'm going to leave this here. [Puts paper on conference table.]

AP: Will you on your out, would you stop and tell Ms. Estes that we're ready for her if she wants to come in. I don't know if she's in the front office, or if she's back in her room. We're almost done with this one. [The discussion ended approximately six minutes later.]

That morning, Ms. Aguilar was scheduled first on the agenda with a start time of 8:00 a.m. Adalina was the third of her three cases. When Ms. Wheeler arrived at 9:00 a.m., Ms. Paredes was already 30 minutes behind schedule. In her defense, Ms. Paredes told me that day that Mr. Jiménez had advised her to schedule only 10 minutes per student. He assured her that the placement and retention decisions that were the focus of all the discussions that day “would go fast.”

### **Conceptual Understanding of the RTI Framework**

Cherry Creek district’s guidelines stipulate that all team members have five responsibilities. They must support PST structures and procedures, and actively participate in the PST process by attending meetings and following through on team decisions. They must also have an understanding of the theory behind the PST framework being implemented district-wide. In addition, team members should understand the entire PST system process, including structures for all three tiers. Finally, team members must model campus PST implementation. Of the five stated responsibilities required of all team members, the PST at Cotton Tree has yet to meet the last three on this list. The analysis of the team member interviews revealed that all team members did not have a common conceptual understanding of Response to Intervention (RTI). When asked, “What is RTI?” The following patterns emerged from their responses:

#### ***Elements of RTI Are Present, But Not Clearly Defined or Described***

**Mr. Jiménez, Principal:** The Response to Intervention, the Tier 1, the Tier 2, that's what we're really looking at right now [to see] if there's a disconnect. First, not all, but some classes. But enough that it makes you worry cuz it's not just one class. You've just gotta make sure that number one, is there a disconnect? But, number two, doing it with fidelity.

[I asked Mr. Jiménez if the “disconnect” had to do with core instruction. He agreed, then proceeded to clarify that the disconnect occurred when teachers “say they think they’re doing it really well, but it’s not really effective.]

**Ms. Paredes, Assistant Principal:** So, I think that as the [PST]...we kind of work through this process together to kind of see, what have we done for this student in the classroom? What curriculum has changed, I mean, have you used any other type of curriculum to help the child? Kind of that first in-class something that the classroom teacher has tried to help the student before going to the next step...

**Ms. Moore, Counselor:** I'm assuming...that's probably what we're doing with PST. It's just, you know, identifying the kids who need the intervention, and that's why we're going to PST, and we're marking the specific interventions online.

**Ms. Scott, Special Education Teacher:** RTI is basically everything before they get, they decide, everything they decide to do before testing for special [education] is the way I understand it....The [PST] would recommend...reading interventions and math interventions [that] they try for a period of time...

### *Inaccurate or No Conceptual Understanding*

**Ms. Croft, CIS Program Manager:** It's the interventions, like, that the [literacy interventionists] do, and that the targeted issues that they're working on and that the teachers do as well in their classroom, like the small group, the different interventions that the specialists are doing...

**Ms. Fox, Literacy Interventionist:** It is a program that we use that has all of the multi-sensory strategies to use, and it's oral language, and it's multisensory, but mostly it's direct phonics instruction, and it's very systematic.

**Ms. Estes, Teacher:** We have not used Response to Intervention this year.

**Mr. Turner, Teacher:** I don't think we've done Response to Intervention here for the past two years. We used to do Response to Intervention. We had teachers that were coming, but I don't think we do it here anymore.

**Ms. Aguilar, Teacher:** [RTI] doesn't happen at our campus. At least this year, I wasn't involved....At one point, it was an actual unit, like a kit....They had binders of them, and you would do certain activities with them, so I never got one of those binders, but I think that in general, the [literacy interventionist] are the ones who take over the RTI.

**Mr. Smith, Parent Support Specialist:** I don't really know how to answer that question.

None of the participants in the study seemed to have a clear picture of the entire 3-tiered framework; instead, they mentioned parts or individual features of RTI. The most common misperception seemed to originate from the name of an actual reading intervention program that Cotton Tree had implemented several years earlier. This explains why the CIS program manager, literacy interventionist, and the homeroom teachers described RTI as a reading program or claimed that Cotton Tree was no longer implementing RTI.

### ***Selective Implementation of Tier 2 Problem Solving***

According to the district manual, Tier 1 consists of rigorous, scientifically based classroom instruction that supports all students. Students who are struggling in Tier 1 should be identified as needing additional support at Tier 2. At this stage, the teacher is supposed to actively engage the parent with grade-level peers or specialists to problem

solve to determine an appropriate intervention. Problem solving at Tier 2 does not seem to be systematically implemented, if at all, at Cotton Tree.

Evidence that teachers are moving directly from Tier 2 to Tier 3 was found in teachers' statements during their campus PST meetings. "With [Cristina], I PST'd her at the beginning [of the 2012—2013 school year] right after her BOY, and she tested at a D-R-A 2, um, E-D-L 2 and it should [have been] at a 4 or 6." Instead of proceeding directly to the campus PST, Ms. Estes should have discussed Cristina's case at a grade-level meeting. Ms. Estes also referred Corazón to the campus PST because she had a BOY EDL score of "A"; in fact, the first campus PST meeting that was held to discuss Corazón's case was held in November 2012. However, by the end of the school year when I observed the May 9<sup>th</sup> discussion about Corazón, she had made great progress and was highly praised by Mr. Turner as a motivated hard worker. Even though she was not yet performing at grade level, her EDL score was only two levels below EDL Level 18, the expected performance level for a second grader.

However, during her interview, Ms. Estes indicated that she had some awareness that she should access her grade-level team for Tier 2 support. When asked how she meets her team responsibilities, she thought I was referring to her grade-level team and answered,

I think we're semi-successful. I think we kind of focus sometimes more on when we're doing our team planning. Primarily, we're talking more about the planning and then the PST part of it kind of goes to the side. So, we didn't meet as often as we should.

Ms. Estes was aware that she could ask her grade-level team for support. However, the process does not seem as structured as the campus PST meetings.

Ms. Aguilar also neglected to discuss her challenges about Adalina's absences with a grade-level Tier 2 team or a specialist. Ms. Aguilar did not engage the assistance of Mr. Smith whose job it is to help with attendance issues and make home visits. Instead, she consistently documented in the online database the many times she had tried to contact Adalina's mother and made conference appointments that the mother did not attend. As it turns out, conferring with Mr. Smith and having him do a home visit was the recommendation that emerged from the PST meeting about Adalina.

During my member-checking meeting with Ms. Paredes, I had the opportunity to ask her about Tier 2 meetings and if they were held at Cotton Tree. She replied that they had implemented them last year with kindergarten and first grade teachers although for different reasons. The kindergarteners were having difficulty with inappropriate behavior in class; the first graders had very low EDL scores. When I asked her if only teachers participated, she replied that it was a combination of teachers and administrators, herself and Mr. Jiménez. This year, they are implementing a similarly structured grade-level team for fourth grade due to Spanish-to-English transition challenges.

#### **TYPES OF DATA DISCUSSED BY PST MEMBERS**

Information about each focus student was typically presented to the PST by his or her homeroom teacher, who served as the advocate. For purposes of analysis, I categorized the data into three general categories: *demographic/sociological information*, *educational profile*, and *performance* (see Tables 7, 8, and 9). Table 7, which focuses on students' demographic and sociological information that was discussed at the meeting, reveals two patterns. Mr. Turner mentioned nearly every category of data except for *Community services received* when discussing Gabriela's case. Some aspect of each student's personality was mentioned at all seven meetings.

Table 7  
Students' Demographic and Sociological Information Discussed at PST Meetings

	<u>1<sup>st</sup> grade: Estes</u>			<u>1<sup>st</sup> grade: Turner</u>		<u>2<sup>nd</sup> grade: Aguilar</u>	
	Cristina	Dante	Julian	Corazón	Gabriela	Adalina	Juana
Age	--	X	--	--	X	X	X
Home language	--	--	X	X	X	--	X
Siblings	--	X	X	X	X	X	--
Personality	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hearing & Vision	--	X	X	--	X	--	X
Behavior	--		X	X	X	--	X
Medication	--	--	--	--	X	--	--
Community services received	--	--	--	--	--	X	--

*Note.* -- = Not discussed.

One category of data was mentioned only once: *Community services received*. Ms. Aguilar reported that Adalina was receiving speech services in Spanish at a community-based clinic. However, Ms. Aguilar suspected that Adalina might have dyslexia because she had difficulty retaining information. “So, we go through the short vowels, and long vowels, and she’ll do fine and then she’s reading, and then, it’s just like [it] all went out the window.” Ms. Aguilar also stated that Adalina struggles in math and science as well.

Table 8 presents focus students’ educational profile and performance data discussed at the PST meetings. EDL scores and descriptions of student weaknesses were discussed at every PST meeting about the focus students. Three very different types of

Table 8  
Educational Profile and Performance Data Discussed during PST Meetings

	<u>1<sup>st</sup> grade: Estes</u>			<u>1<sup>st</sup> grade: Turner</u>		<u>2<sup>nd</sup> grade: Aguilar</u>	
	Cristin a	Dante	Julian	Corazón	Gabriela	Adalina	Juana
English proficiency	X	--	X	--	X	--	--
Spanish proficiency	X	X	X	--	X	--	X
Language of instruction	--	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reading performance:							
EDL Goal: Current or past	X	X	X	X	--	--	--
EDL scores	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Other reading assessments	X	X	--	--	X	X	X
Other goals: Current or past	--	--	--	--	X	--	X
Math performance	--	--	X	X	X	--	--
Strengths	--	X	--	X	X	--	X
Weaknesses	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Effort completing tasks	--	X	X	X	X	X	X
Homework completion	X	--	X	--	X	--	--
School attendance		X	X	X	X	X	X
Past Retention	--	--	--	--	--	--	X
Identified Learning Disability	--	--	--	--	X	X	--

data were brought up at six PST meetings: the language of instruction, student effort completing tasks, and school attendance.

Table 9 depicts problem-solving efforts discussed during the PST meetings. The two most frequently discussed efforts were descriptions of progress monitoring and interventions provided.

Table 9  
Problem-Solving Efforts Discussed during PST Meetings

	1 <sup>st</sup> grade: Estes			1 <sup>st</sup> grade: Turner		2 <sup>nd</sup> grade: Aguilar	
	Cristina	Dante	Julian	Corazón	Gabriela	Adalina	Juana
Parent contacted by teacher	X	X	X	--	X	X	X
Parent shared information with teacher	--	X	--	--	X	X	X
Description of progress monitoring	X	X	X	X	X	--	X
Interventions provided	X	X	X	X	X	--	X
Accommodations & modifications	--	--	X	--	X	--	X
Suspected Learning Difference or Disability	--	--	--	--	--	X	X
Proposed Retention	--	X	--	--	--	X	--

### THE DISCOURSE OF THE PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAM MEETINGS

At the November 30, 2012 PST meeting for Julian and Cristina, the team members present included the assistant principal (Ms. Paredes), the school counselor, the district social worker, the parent support specialist, and their classroom teacher, Ms. Estes. The literacy interventionist was only present for Julian’s meeting. In general, Ms.

Paredes and Ms. Estes spoke the most utterances and used the most words. The literacy interventionist engaged with Ms. Estes during the discussion about Julian's case, and the parent support specialist made only one comment about Cristina's family owning a retail business near the school. Neither the counselor nor the district social worker spoke during the discussion about either case.

At the PST meeting on May 9, 2013, only the assistant principal and the students' teachers were present at every meeting. Thus, the assistant principal and the teachers used the most words during their discussion about the students' cases. The literacy coach, Ms. Evans, attended only Dante's meeting, but she interjected and engaged the teacher in conversation. As a result, she spoke a similar number of utterances to Ms. Paredes while also increasing Ms. Estes' utterances.

Two general discourse patterns emerged from the seven cases discussed at the two meetings. First, when only the assistant principal and the teacher were present, their utterance count was nearly identical. However, if either the literacy interventionist or literacy coach was also present, as was the case for Julian and Dante's meetings, the teacher would make the most utterances because she engaged verbally with both the assistant principal and the interventionist. Second, the literacy interventionist and the literacy coach spoke utterances that were similar in quantity to those of the assistant principal for each of their respective meetings. Table 10 presents the number of utterances by the attendees at the problem-solving team meetings.

As with turn taking, counting the number of words spoken by interlocutors can reveal other dynamics of the conversation. During the meetings for Cristina, Julian, Dante, and Juana, the teacher took a greater quantity of turns than Ms. Paredes, the assistant principal. However, during the meetings for Corazón, Gabriela, and Adalina, Ms. Paredes used many more words than either Mr. Turner or Ms. Aguilar. In these

Table 10  
Number of Utterances Spoken by Attendees at PST Meetings

Attendees	Cristina 11/12/12	Julian 11/12/12	Dante 5/9/13	Corazón 5/9/13	Gabriela 5/9/13	Adalina 5/9/13	Juana 5/9/13
Assistant Principal*	17	14	65	40	67	69	65
Teachers:							
Ms. Estes	14	25	95	--	--	--	--
Mr. Turner	--	--	--	39	66	--	--
Ms. Aguilar	--	--	--	--	--	68	64
Literacy Interventionist	--	11	--	--	--	--	--
Literacy coach	--	--	63	--	--	--	--
Counselor*	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
Parent Support Specialist*	1	0	--	--	--	--	--
Social Worker*	0	0	--	--	--	--	--

*Note.* \* = Permanent PST member. -- = Did not attend meeting.

instances, the word count for Ms. Paredes became inflated because, for the most part, she was either reading goals or progress-monitoring data from the online database, or summarizing important points of the discussion. The following quotes represent three such instances when Ms. Paredes performed these actions:

And so it [online database] does say that she absorbs things quickly. Her goal for the M-O-Y was to be reading at a Level 4, so she's definitely surpassed that goal. I'm not sure she met it right at the M-O-Y or not, but it said that the student, by the end of January, she was expected to be reading by a 10. So you know she has met that goal and now she's at a 12. So, um, let's see. So that seems to be pretty good. Well, I feel pretty comfortable with saying that she should be placed in

[second grade]. (Corazon; Mr. Turner)

[Reading from the database] “The student receives support at home and has shown she is able to make progress.” I wanted to put the parent support thing ‘cause I think that's another thing that's going to help her in second grade. But I also wanted to talk, I was going to put “And has shown she was able to make progress given the appropriate environment, situation...” I didn't know what to put... (Gabriela; Mr. Turner)

What her attendance history was already like there, and if that plays any role into...well...even to make this decision, I feel pretty confident in saying that the opportunity to learn at OUR campus has not been there because she's been ABsent a lot of the days. When you're talking about one time a week, if that's your assessment day or that's you know, I don't know, whatever day that might be, she's missing a significant amount of instruction and so... (Adalina; Ms. Aguilar)

In every example, each teacher responded to the assistant principal only with the utterance, “M‘hm.” Each teacher and the AP took one speech turn each, but the quantity of words spoken was quite different. Table 11 presents a word count spoken by each interlocutor present.

Table 11  
Number of Words Spoken by Attendees at PST Meetings

Attendees	Cristina 11/12/12	Julian 11/12/12	Dante 5/9/13	Corazón 5/9/13	Gabriela 5/9/13	Adalina 5/9/13	Juana 5/9/13
Assistant Principal	113	313	893	911	2,253	2,019	868
Teachers:							
Ms. Estes	331	331	1,119				
Mr. Turner				370	754		
Ms. Aguilar						823	972
Literacy Interventionist	--	107	--	--	--	--	--
Literacy Coach	--	--	690	--	--	--	--
Counselor	0	0	--	--	--	--	--
Parent Support Specialist	9	0	--	--	--	--	--
Social Worker	0	0	--	--	--	--	--

*Note.* -- = Did not attend meeting.

### **A Hierarchy of Control: The Overall Control of the Online Database**

The Foucaultian (1979) concept of the Panopticon was instrumental in bringing to light the hierarchy of control in Cherry Creek ISD’s RTI problem-solving system. By design, “the Panopticon functions as a kind of laboratory of power” (Foucault, 1979, p. 204) and “must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men” (p. 205). Thus, in the setting of the problem-solving meetings, the online database is the Panopticon that provides its user, the assistant principal, with power during the meetings. Ms. Paredes was the only person

who interacted with the online database during the meeting; anyone else in attendance simply observed whatever Ms. Paredes decided to display.

However, the control of the online database on the behavior of the staff at Cotton Tree Elementary extended far beyond the actions and discourse of the participants during problem-solving meetings. As Foucault (1979) explains, the Panopticon

Makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power. It does this in several ways: because it can reduce the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is exercised. . . . [I]n these conditions, its strength is that it never intervenes, it is exercised spontaneously and without noise, it constitutes a mechanism whose effects follow from one another. (p. 206)

Thus, the influence of the online database permeated throughout the district through various actors and actions taken by those actors. For example, the district's PST facilitator informed Mr. Jiménez that Cotton Tree was the "model" PST because of the amount of information he and his staff entered into the database. The online database then served two purposes: 1) Staff in Cherry Creek ISD's PST division evaluated its schools' compliance by quantifying the usage of the database's fields; and 2) The positive feedback could have motivated Mr. Jiménez to then encourage his teachers and interventionists to track as much information as possible in the database, including any and all attempts to contact parents, test scores, progress-monitoring goals, interventions, and intervention groups. District directives were passed on "spontaneously and without noise" with "effects follow[ing] from one another" (p. 206). Due to the breadth and depth of the control over the actions of Cherry Creek ISD staff throughout the district, the online database exercised overall control over the entire RTI problem-solving process.

### **During the Meetings: Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Control**

At the level of the PST meeting, there was a clear hierarchy of control. The assistant principal's administrative position naturally afforded her authority over everyone else present (other than the principal) at the meetings. This authority combined with her roles of PST chair, recorder, and timekeeper and her utilization of the online database during the meetings gave her primary control over the discourse of the meetings. Secondary control was afforded to the classroom teacher who was specifically asked to report on the students by the assistant principal. A third interlocutor, usually one of the literacy interventionists, could also take secondary control of the discourse from the teacher by employing topic switches and/or interruptions. When the teacher relinquished control of the topic, her level of control was subsequently reduced to a tertiary level.

#### ***Primary Control of the Meeting by the Online Database through the Assistant Principal***

The most prominent feature of the PST meetings that I attended was the influence of the district's online database on the discourse and interactions of the PST members. Student records in the online database were displayed on a flat screen TV in both meeting locations, the Parent Room and the office of Cotton Tree's principal, Mr. Jiménez. The AP had her laptop connected to the monitor; thus, she controlled what those present saw. The display of the online database had an enormous impact on the discourse of the meetings in several significant ways. First, the database seemed to influence how team members interacted with each other and the technology. Second, the online database caused many periods of silence during the observed deliberations. Third, the online database seemed to impact the topics that the PST discussed about the focus students. Finally, the database seemed to cause the assistant principal to engage in non-sequiters.

In these ways, the online database exercised its control of the discourse of the meetings through the assistant principal.

As an example of the way that the online database influenced how PST members interacted with each other occurred during my very first observation in the field. In my field notes of Julian's meeting on November 30, 2012, I wrote:

[Staff, except for RM (counselor), are looking at flat screen TV.]

AP: Julian brought to the P-S-T for an academic concern. Um, he has 2 siblings here at school. He passed his hearing and his vision as of September of this year. And he has no attendance issues. And his goal that was set there was a question about...[looks at teacher] Did you put this one in, Ms. Estes?

The discussion about Cristina's case immediately followed Julian's during Ms. Estes' time allotment on the November 30, 2012 PST meeting agenda. Ms. Fox, the literacy interventionist, departed at the end of Julian's meeting, which left Mr. Smith (parent support specialist; PSS), Ms. Moore (school counselor), and Ms. Soto (Cherry Creek ISD social worker; SW) in attendance. At the end of Cristina's meeting, I wrote, "While AP is typing notes into system, PSS, SW, and counselor [are] looking at screen." It seemed like I was observing people who were watching a television and not participants in a problem-solving meeting.

The second way that the online database seemed to control the meetings through the assistant principal involved the number of silences or long pauses in the discourse. On numerous occasions, all discourse came to a halt while Ms. Paredes typed notes into the online database. Thus, if typing could be heard in the background of the audio recording, and no one was talking, I timed the periods of these silences using a stopwatch from the end of the last word spoken to the start of the next word spoken regardless of interlocutor.

The longer durations and higher frequency counts indicate that Ms. Paredes had much information to type into the database. For example, the first three silent periods during the discussion of Cristina's case occurred during the transition from the discussion about Julian.

AP: OK. [**No discourse: 5 sec**] Alright. [Door creaks open. LI (literacy interventionist) leaves. **No discourse: 4 sec**] Should we move on to the next one? Cristina? [Typing audible. **No discourse: 9 sec**]

AP: Alright. [Whispered]

T: With her, I, um, P-S-T'd her at the beginning right after her B-O-Y, and she tested at a D-R-A 2, um, or E-D-L 2 and it should be at a 4 or 6, but since then she's made LOTS of progress.

Many instances of "no discourse" also occurred when the assistant principal read out loud the notes that she was concurrently entering into the database. This exchange occurred near the end of the discussion about Corazón's case.

AP: [Typing audible. AP typing and reading at the same time] "She has made significant growth [Stopped reading. See? I tell you that W.] in reading and math." [Typing audible. **No discourse: 5 sec**] "B-O-Y D-R-A was A and E-O-Y D-R-A was 12." [Typing audible. **No discourse: 4 sec**] Um. [Typing audible. **No discourse: 9 sec**] [AP continues reading and typing at the same time.] "The P-S-T recommends the student be placed in second grade with immediate [um. deletes word] continued interventions with [Typing audible. **No discourse: 9 sec**]...[unintelligible] [Typing audible. **No discourse: 8 sec**] in the fall of 2013. So pretty much, I kinda want her to keep working with Ms. Fox to try to get her up to speed.

T: And continue working with Ms. Fox? Ok.

The number of times there were silent periods during each discussion about the focus students was yet another indicator of the influence of the online database during the meetings. An important consequence of this influence resulted in less discussion about problem solving and more “filling-in-a-form” talk. Table 12 presents the number of times when there was no discourse at each student’s deliberation and the duration in seconds. Numbers in the same row indicate the length of the silent periods in the same speech turn by a single interlocutor.

The third way that the database seemed to influence the discourse of the meeting through the assistant principal was reflected in the types of topics that the PST discussed. The online database had two primary sections: the student profile page and academic goals page. The student profile page was divided into six major subsections: a school photograph of the student; background information; attendance and discipline; hearing and vision exams and progress monitoring data; notifications; and current assessments. Figure 1 displays a layout of the major sections of the online database. Background information includes such student data as current and past schools, enrollment status, age, home language, and parent name and contact information. The attendance section lists year-to-date (YTD) enrollment, absences, and unexcused absences while discipline summarizes the YTD referrals, suspensions, and removals/expulsions. Progress-monitoring data refers to progress-monitoring groups, staffing teams, programs, and active interventions. A comparison of the student profile page of the online database and the data in Table 7, which presented the various types of student and educational data discussed at the meetings, reveals only three discrepancies: personality, student effort, and homework completion. In other words, there are no specific fields in the student’s database profile that track these data.

Table 12  
Duration of Silent Periods during PST Meetings

Student	Duration of Silences (in seconds)
Cristina	5, 4, 9*
	17
	12
Julian	9
	26, 3*
	19
Dante	5
	11
	15
	6
	6
	23
Corazón	6
	3
	9
	5, 4, 9, 9, 8*
	6
Gabriela	10
	5
	4
	5, 13, 5, 37*
	10
Adalina	9
	12
	28
Juana	7
	5
	17
	8

*Note.* \* = Silent periods in the same speech turn by a single interlocutor

The student performance data presented in Table 8 correlates with the academic goals section of the online database. This section tracks the following data: student strengths and challenges; strategies and accommodations employed; goal, measure, target score, and score; and information about what intervention was given by whom, in what grouping, frequency, and setting, and for how long. These categories immediately evoked comparisons to special education paperwork, such as the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP). The IEP is the planning document required by IDEA that documents the educational needs of their students with disabilities and includes PLAAFPs, measurable annual goals, and a statement describing the special education and related services to be provided to the student (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2011). Considering the student profile and academic goals sections of the online database together, Cotton Tree’s PST rarely discussed topics that did not correspond to data fields in the online database, providing further evidence of the impact of the online database on the quality of problem-solving by the team.

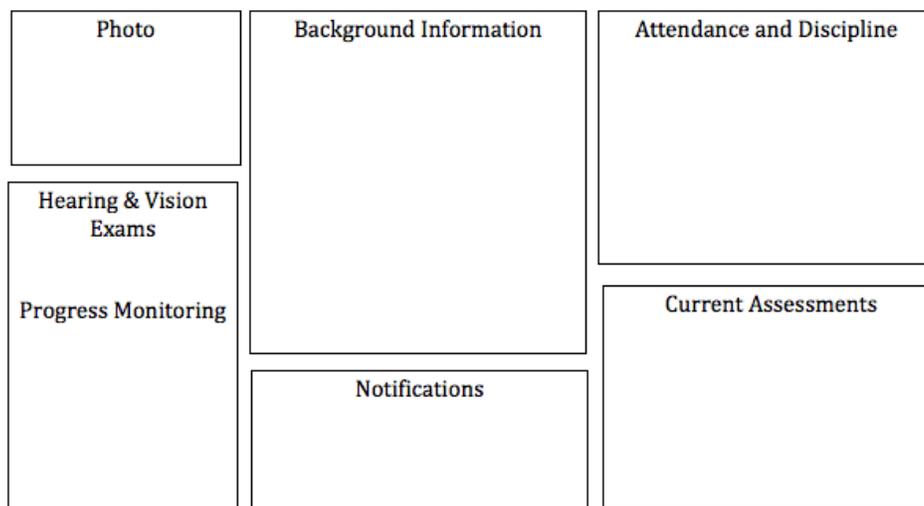


Figure 1: Layout of Six Major Sections of District’s Online Database.

Finally, the manner in which Ms. Paredes took back control of the topic of conversation seems to have been influenced by something other than the topic of the discussion. For example, during Adalina's meeting, Ms. Aguilar had control of the topic and was discussing the possibility that her student might have a learning disability and the fact that she was finally able to meet Adalina's mother. Ms. Paredes did not engage with Ms. Aguilar about why she suspected Adalina had a learning disability or elicit details about the meeting with her mother; instead, Ms. Paredes switched topics and asked if Adalina had been receiving speech therapy.

T: But, I think there's a little bit of a learning di...oh, and she's one that I finally met with Mom...

AP: ...and she had speech therapy?

It is not clear what caused Ms. Paredes to ask about speech therapy; it seems like a non-sequiter. However, Ms. Paredes was constantly reading or entering data into the online database that was displayed both on her laptop screen and the flat screen monitor in the meeting room. It is possible that information in the student's record prompted her to ask questions that did not flow logically from previously discussed topics.

Another example of an AP non-sequiter occurred near the beginning of the discussion about Corazón with Mr. Turner. After Ms. Paredes asked Mr. Turner to "tell us a little bit about Corazón," he proceeded to describe Corazón very positively in terms of her behavior.

T: Ok. Corazón. Very eager. The behavior, excellent behavior. Very eager learner. Even, I mean, she's going to try.

AP: Ok. And she has perfect atTENDance!

Ms. Paredes responded to Mr. Turner's positive report about Corazón by saying, "Ok." What excited her instead was a topic completely unrelated to her classroom behavior as

reported by Mr. Turner: Corazón's perfect attendance. This exchange between Ms. Paredes and Mr. Turner mirrors the previous exchange between Ms. Paredes and Ms. Aguilar and is another example of a non-sequiter by the AP in the discourse.

Ultimately, the breadth and depth of the control of the online database has potential serious consequences for the quality of the discussion about ELLs who are struggling because it limits the topics discussed and does not enable the team to truly engage in problem solving by considering the myriad factors that influence student performance and achievement, such as culture, first and second language acquisition, and instruction.

### ***The Assistant Principal: Primary Control***

Ms. Paredes, the assistant principal, also exercised her own control over the PST independent of the online database; she often determined who talked, about what, and when. For example, Ms. Paredes managed the meetings by beginning and ending the discussions about each focus student. In addition, she always chose the advocate to speak first in order to report on the ELL regardless of who else was present. Each advocate was responsible for reporting to the PST beginning-of-year (BOY), middle-of-year (MOY), and/or end-of-year (EOY) test scores, progress monitoring data, and relevant social or familial information that might provide further context or improve understanding of the case. Thus, the AP's control was evidenced by four factors: controlling the agenda through discourse, controlling the content of discussion, abruptly changing the topic, and asking questions or making statements in rapid succession. The following section discusses each element in turn.

**Controlling the agenda through discourse.** The first element of control, controlling the agenda through discourse, was evident when the assistant principal began

each meeting by introducing the student or by indicating to the PST that she was ready to move on to the next student on the agenda. Julian and Dante were each the first student to be discussed during Ms. Estes' time allotment on the PST meeting agenda on November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013, respectively. In the following extracts, Ms. Paredes started by stating the students' names and in Julian's case, indicating why he was on the campus PST's agenda.

[Julian was] brought to the PST for an academic concern.

So, our first student for Ms. Estes is Dante [last name].

Cristina, Corazon, Gabriela, Adalina, and Juana all followed another student on their respective agendas, which was evident in the way Ms. Paredes introduced them:

Okay. Alright. Should we move on to the next one? Cristina?

Alright. Next student....So, you're going to tell us a little bit about Corazón, Mr.

Turner before I... [does not complete her thought]

So, next is Gabriela [last name], but she is not an ELL. Is that correct?

And then, the next one is Adalina.

The next one is Juana [last name]?

In this manner, Ms. Paredes used the agenda to control which student the team was discussing. Even when teachers were there to discuss several students, no one ever indicated to the AP that they were ready to discuss the next student on the agenda. All members present, whether it was the permanent PST members or only the teacher, waited for Ms. Paredes to indicate when she was ready to begin the discussion about each student. In this manner, Ms. Paredes controlled the agenda through her discourse.

**Controlling the content of discussion.** The second example of how Ms. Paredes controlled the PST meetings is reflected in how she directed the content of deliberations. The beginning of the discussion about Julian's case provided two examples in quick

succession of AP control. After introducing Julian, Ms. Paredes recited information by summarizing out loud Julian's record and background information that were listed in the online database:

[AP] He has two siblings here at school. He passed his hearing and vision as of September of this year. And he has no attendance issues. And his goal that was set, there was a question about...Did you put this one in, Ms. Estes?

T: M'hm.

In the first seconds of the discussion of Julian's case, Ms. Paredes reviewed the reason why Julian was on the day's agenda, referenced his siblings, noted that he passed his vision and hearing tests and did not have attendance issues, and ended her speech turn by asking if Ms. Estes had entered a goal of Julian's in the database. Ms. Estes did not attempt to assert herself or take control; she simply answered the AP's question by confirming that she had indeed entered Julian's goal into the database.

The AP continued to summarize Julian's background information that included reading goals and interventions that had been tried to-date. In the following extract, she was actually reading from the online database that was displayed on the flat screen TV in the meeting room:

AP: And, um, so, pretty much the information I have at this point is, 'Julian, a sweet, well-behaved student,' so there are no behavior issues. He's reading at [an EDL] Level 1, and he should be at a Level 6. The strategies and accommodations that have been tried so far are 'Julian will be pulled out for small-group interventions by the [literacy interventionist],' and the goal is that Julian will be at a Level 10 by MOY testing, which is January? And, that's it. And then, do you want to report on his progress? [looks at teacher]

T: M hm. HE has been MAKing a lot of progress. We have seen his reading really, really go up. I put him now at maybe at a 4...

Once again, Ms. Paredes listed in succession: a report of Julian's behavior in class, his then-current EDL reading level and what it should have been by the end of November 2012, and the supplemental reading intervention that Julian had been receiving. At the end of this summary, Ms. Paredes gave secondary control to Ms. Aguilar by asking if she "wanted" to report on Julian's progress. Interestingly, Ms. Paredes gave the floor to Ms. Aguilar in the form of a question although she was not really giving Ms. Aguilar a choice in the matter because Ms. Aguilar could not have refused. In fact, the use of the interrogative structure enabled Ms. Paredes to tell Ms. Aguilar what she wanted her to do without having to give a direct command.

During the discussion of Adalina's case, Ms. Aguilar and Ms. Paredes actually disagreed about Adalina's educational background and what kind of paperwork her mother provided to the school. Ms. Aguilar stated that Ms. Paredes was confusing Adalina with another student, but Ms. Paredes insisted that she knew the facts of Adalina's case, and then set out to prove that she was correct by taking seven turns to argue her case. The interaction below elaborates the extent to which the AP attempted to prove her point; in doing so, no other topic was discussed.

AP: Ok. So, she's 'cause if she's the one that, ah, Mom we wanted her to sign the paperwork that's well, 'cause she came from [nearby school district]?

T: No.

AP: Where'd she come from?

T: You're confusing her with [name of another student].

AP: I'm not...

T: ...she's the, she's even newer.

AP: Yeah, she's newer, and what happened was that when Mom sent me the paperwork, she...and I remember having this conversation 'cause she had said that all her instruction was in English and so we told her she either needed to approve, so if she wanted that to continue, we suggested that approve ESL if that's if she really wanted...if she felt that she needed to be instructed in all English.

T: M'hm.

AP: But then, when I sent home the paper, she sent it back and she signed off on Dual Language...

T: Oh.

AP: ...and we sent her the brochures, and so I don't, um, that's kind of where we're at struggling right now with that conversation. She told us orally one thing, but then what she actually sent back was the, was the paperwork that said she wanted her in the Dual Language Program. But the instruction has been what she orally told us, right? The...

T: ...all English?

AP: ...all English.

T: Mm.

AP: Um. So let's see...[4-second pause] and that's because...Where does she come from? [Said softly:] Do you remember where she came from? See, I'm pretty, I want to say [neighboring school district]. I'm pretty sure because she has a brother in kindergarten and a sister in fifth grade, and so for the sister the only option in Cherry Creek was the late exit because she's in fifth grade and we don't have Dual Language. And so, we went ahead and

continued with what she was already getting because they started here in, uh, it was like the Spring. Yeah, February. So, we were going to STAAR test, so we asked the mom...and that's how that conversation came about. What had they been working on all year long? And that's when she said everything has been in English. So I need to...we need to go back and get her to come look at the paperwork and see if that's what she really intended on doing. Um, but she has nine unexcused absences?

T: Uh huh. And I've called Mom a LOT about that. She was absent yesterday. And every time I ask her why was she absent and she said because her mom woke up late.

AP: REally? 'Cause she was absent on April 19th, April 25th, April 29th...that's almost...

T: ...she's absent EVery Friday or Monday.

Here, Ms. Paredes and Ms. Aguilar disagree about Adalina's background information. In fact, Ms. Aguilar very directly said "No" and "You're confusing her with [name of another student]." Ms. Paredes insisted that she was recounting the history of the correct student and described in great detail conversations that she had had with Adalina's mother about determining her child's language of instruction and the paperwork that was necessary in order to follow through on the mother's wishes. About halfway through this exchange, Ms. Aguilar simply said, "Oh," which seemed to acknowledge that Ms. Paredes was indeed referring to Adalina's case and not that of some other student. However, Ms. Paredes still continued with her exposition, which ended with a topic switch about attendance. Only after Ms. Paredes mentioned the number of Adalina's unexcused absences, could Ms. Aguilar participate in the conversation again. The

following section examines several instances when the AP used abrupt topic shifts in order to control the topic.

**Abrupt topic shifts.** The third manner in which the AP controlled the discourse of the PST meetings involved her use of abrupt topic shifts. Ms. Paredes often changed the topic from what a teacher or interventionist was discussing to something else that she preferred to address instead, perhaps influenced by the online database. In the following exchange that occurred eight speech turns after the earlier exchange, during which Ms. Estes and Ms. Fox (the literacy interventionist) debated Julian's actual EDL reading level, Ms. Paredes listened to Ms. Estes recount Julian's past challenges completing homework. She described the condition in which Julian's homework was returned to her and how she had responded by modifying the number of problems she gave him, which resulted in reducing his frustration level. After the end of Ms. Estes' description of Julian's challenges and recent improvement regarding the condition of his homework, Ms. Paredes changed the topic:

T: He's trying a lot harder, I can tell. He was struggling a lot at the beginning with homework. Mom said he would struggle so much, and you could see his paper; it was all just like scratched up [Teacher gestured that student scratched homework] and erased and all. So, I give him like, everybody gets 15 words, he gets like 10 or 8, just so it's not as many for him. So he's not as frustrated. It comes back a lot better now. Um, he's kind of spacey, and, but he's been trying a lot harder lately.

AP: So, he has made progress on his reading goal?

Ms. Paredes did not react to any aspect of Ms. Estes' report about Julian, his struggles, her adjustments, or his recent improvement. Instead, she responded by changing the topic completely and inquiring about his progress on his reading goals.

As further evidence of how Ms. Paredes used topic shifts during PST deliberations to control the discourse of the meetings, the following interaction occurred during the discussion of Juana's case during which Ms. Paredes changed the topic on two occasions. After the AP indicated that she was ready to discuss a new student, Juana, she and Ms. Aguilar discussed the language of instruction, the fact that Juana had already been retained in first grade, and how she had been "dropped off [an AmeriCorps] program." The next topic they addressed was Juana's vision. The first topic switch occurred after Ms. Paredes commented that information in the database stated that Juana had passed her vision test the previous January; in the same speech utterance, she changed the topic to Juana's participation in an intervention program. In the second topic switch, the AP commented about Juana's attendance after receiving more up-to-date information about Juana's participation in the program from Ms. Aguilar as depicted earlier.

As she had done with Julian, Ms. Paredes referred directly to the online database during the discussion. According to information in the database, Juana was still participating in the intervention program. When Ms. Aguilar provided more up-to-date information that Juana had stopped participating due to space constraints, Ms. Paredes simply acknowledged this outcome with an "Ok" and changed the topic of discussion to Juana's "pretty good attendance." She was clearly in control of what information was discussed.

The following interchange demonstrates how a teacher might take control for a few speech turns and how the AP eventually reasserts control by changing the topic. At the beginning of the discussion about Corazón, Ms. Paredes asked Mr. Turner to describe Corazón. He responded by describing her in very positive terms. When Ms. Paredes changed the topic of conversation to Corazón's perfect attendance, Mr. Turner

enthusiastically agreed with the AP and then changed the topic himself by noting Corazón's EDL score that was listed in the online database. He maintained control for two speech turns before the AP engaged in a topic switch and took control back from him, as detailed below:

AP: So, you're going to tell us a little bit about Corazón, Mr. Turner before I...[doesn't complete her thought]

T: Ok. Corazón. Very eager. The behavior, excellent behavior. Very eager learner. Even, I mean, she's going to try.

AP: Ok. And she has perfect atTENDance!

T: And she has perfect attendance. She's wonderful. I think she was just low in her academics and her, in her reading ability, I think. Ah...so she was an 'A' when she showed up to us [refers to online database].

AP: She was an 'A.' M'hm.

T: And...her math is much better. I mean, she's pretty much here [being discussed at the PST meeting] because of reading.

AP: Ok.

T: Her math is, is fairly good. I mean...her lack of English ability interFERes with her math but yet she understands the concepts and she's still able, you know, she's working through it and she's plowing away and she's asking questions when she needs to...

AP: ...Do you know if she went to pre-K or Kinder anywhere? 'Cause it looks like she only started first grade here.

What is also interesting about this exchange is that Ms. Paredes did not react when Mr. Turner described Corazón as a very eager learner with excellent behavior who did her best. Instead of commenting on this positive report about Corazón's strengths, Ms.

Paredes remarked, “Ok. And she has perfect attendance!” Instead, she exhibited excitement by a slight increase in volume when she saw in the online database that Corazón’s had perfect attendance.

Two speech turns later, Mr. Turner reported that Corazón’s difficulty with word problems in math were most likely due to instruction being in English. Mr. Turner took control of the discussion for two of his speech turns and did his best to describe Corazón’s many positive traits while also stressing how hard she worked. However, Ms. Paredes again did not respond to Corazón’s strengths and eventually reasserted control by changing the topic and asking about her prior schooling, which then led to a discussion about kindergarten in Mexico and confirmation that the 2012—2013 school year was Corazón’s first in a U.S. school.

Another example follows of how Ms. Paredes controlled the discourse by changing the topic of discussion to something other than what was previously being discussed. In this extract, however, Ms. Paredes engaged in a topic switch with an interventionist, not the classroom teacher. Approximately five minutes into the discussion about Dante’s case, Ms. Paredes asked Ms. Evans, the literacy coach, (LC) if she thought Dante would be successful if he were placed in second grade. Specifically, Ms. Paredes wanted to know if it was probable for a child who had just acquired preliteracy skills to advance quickly “from [an EDL Level] 1 to a 10? [Or] is it going to slow down later on?” Ms. Evans did not directly respond to Ms. Paredes’ question and asked a clarifying question herself, “Is he going to take off from here and [go] really high?” Then, Ms. Estes and Ms. Evans engaged in a discussion about how Dante might perform if he were retained, which prompted Ms. Evans to describe the challenges some children might generally face after they are retained. What follows is the final statement Ms. Evans made

in this exchange with Ms. Estes, and the question that Ms. Paredes asked that resulted in a topic shift:

T: He's very immature.

LC: Ok.

T: He shows his age, that he's younger than other kids so...

LC: ...'Cause I'm kind of convinced that children, you know, we can work so hard with reading skills themselves, but at some point the child has to really understand this MATters.

T: M'hm ...

AP: ...Uh huh.

LC: Um, so that's kind of something I see...Some kids get it and start clicking and others just keep eking along because there's something more...

AP: What about the parent support at home?

Because Ms. Estes was more knowledgeable about Dante's home life than Ms. Evans, Ms. Estes answered the question by reporting that Dante's mother did not want him to be retained and opined that she did not think "he has the support at home." Although it seemed relevant for the entire PST to contemplate whether Dante would be successful in second grade if he were placed, the AP did not participate in this segment of the discussion nor did she ask any relevant questions or invite anyone else to provide input. Instead, she changed topics completely by asking about Dante's parental support at home.

During the discussion about Adalina's case, Ms. Aguilar provided evidence for why she thought Adalina might have dyslexia by describing how Adalina retained information with difficulty in the content areas of reading, math, and science. Ms.

Aguilar then changed the topic to her recent success at “finally” begin able to have met with Adalina’s mother, to which the AP responded by asking a question about speech therapy.

T: So, we go through the, the short vowels and long vowels, and she'll do it fine and then she's reading, and then it's just like all went out the window...

AP: M‘hm.

T: ...and in math too. And in science too. Like her answers are VERY RANdom. They're just, when we took the benchmark I noticed, um, she was circling two answers for almost everything. And I told her, “No it's just one answer. You pick your best answer. If you don't know make a smart guess and pick the best one.”

AP: Ah.

T: And I picked up her test and she has two answers circled for almost all of them...

AP: Ok.

T: ... so I just left it like that.

AP: Wow. [whispered]

T: But I think there's a little bit of a learning di...oh and she's one that I FI-nally met with Mom...

AP: ...and she had speech therapy?

T: ...and she had Speech therapy,  
lum...[Note: The line | marks simultaneous speech.]

AP: |Private?

Ms. Aguilar covered many topics during her description of Adalina’s difficulties. During her recitation, Ms. Paredes responded with these short utterances: M‘hm, ok, ah, and

wow. Near the end of this extract, Ms. Aguilar started to reiterate that she suspected Adalina had a learning disability, but she regulated her own speech and changed topics mid-word to impress upon Ms. Paredes that she had finally succeeded meeting with Adalina's mother. However, Ms. Paredes did not respond upon hearing that Ms. Aguilar had met with Adalina's mother after so many attempts; instead, she changed the topic completely to Adalina's private speech services. Ms. Aguilar acquiesced and answered Ms. Paredes' questions about Adalina's speech therapy to the best of her knowledge although the conversation did eventually return to the difficulty Ms. Aguilar had contacting Adalina's mother although not by Ms. Aguilar's choice. After discussing the importance of Adalina's speech therapy matching the language of instruction, Ms. Paredes changed the topic to the possibility of retention. She referred to a note in the online database that stated that Adalina's mother had been informed on April 16<sup>th</sup> of the possibility of Adalina being retained. She lamented, "I wish you would have told us sooner." Ms. Aguilar defended herself by responding, "Well, it was so hard to get ahold of her."

**Asking questions or making statements in rapid succession.** The final element of control as practiced by the assistant principal was asking questions or making declarative statements in rapid succession. Usually, the AP's interlocutor, who was most often the teacher, responded with short answers of agreement with varying degrees of formality or emphasis. For example, this was the exchange between Ms. Paredes and Ms. Aguilar near the beginning of Adalina's meeting.

AP: Is she LEP?

T: Yep.

AP: Oooh...and she's one of the new ones.

T: Yes, she's one of the new ones that just came in. She came in like at the end of January.

AP: And was she going to do a dual? She's the one that mom when I spoke to her, or when YOU spoke to her wanted to do the late exit because you were, you know, the language of instruction in reading was going to be in English. Yes? Or no.

T: She's the same one.

AP: She's doing dual language, so her Math is in English...

T: M'hm.

AP: ...and reading is in Spanish.

T: No. She's all English.

AP: Okay. So...if she's the one that Mom, we wanted her to sign the paperwork... she came from [name of nearby school district]?

T: No.

AP: Where did she come from?

T: You're confusing her with [name of another student].

By asking the questions that she did, Ms. Paredes simultaneously controlled the topics that were discussed, and she was able to ensure that her unknowns were addressed. The teacher could only answer the questions to the best of her ability.

A similar exchange with one important difference took place during the discussion about Gabriela's case. Ms. Paredes asked a series of rapid questions to which Mr. Turner answered in short utterances. Towards the end of this exchange, however, he took over control of the conversation by positioning himself as knowledgeable in order to discuss Gabriela's usage of medication. This is information that Ms. Paredes did not

have, so she listened to Mr. Turner. Ms. Paredes responded with short utterances to acknowledge that she was listening.

AP: OKAY. So Gabriela is okay, she just turned 7 in April, so I don't think she's been retained before. No, she has not been retained before.

T: |No. [said simultaneously]

AP: She has pretty good attendance. She has only been absent 3 days this year.

T: M'hm.

AP: She has no referrals, so she has pretty good behavior.

T: Yes. Yes.

AP: She passed her hearing and her vision. Does she wear glasses?

T: No, she doesn't wear glasses.

AP: And um, it seems like she's the youngest. I don't know how old he is, but...Um, let's see. She had a goal at the beginning of the spring semester...Um, we had a goal for her...her strengths are that she is very sweet and well behaved. Um, her academic concerns are that she's very low in reading and writing. In the first semester of first grade, she has made very little progressed [sic]...very little progress. She has an issue with retaining information. [Reads from online database.] "I can teach her a skill in guided reading one day and the next day, she already forgot."

T: Yes.

AP: That was in reading. She has been meeting...as of January when this goal was set, she had already been reading with the [literacy interventionist] and she was seen daily in a guided reading group with Ms. Estes, classroom teacher. Um, so the goal is that Gabriela will be developed in all areas of the Tejas LEE in E-O-Y and gain a year's growth. So, let's see.

So she's the one that started off at [an EDL] Level 1, which was kinder level, and then she went to a Level 8, um, which was... hmmm...in between the beginning of the year and the middle of the year of first grade. Um, she has been going to Ms. Fox all year long, um, the parent did sign the retention checklist, but really does not want her to be retained.

T: No. That's correct.

AP: Um, she started going...now she's going to Ms. Fox's...she used to go to just Ms. Fox, so it was like maybe two times a week.

T: M'hm.

AP: And then she goes now with Ms. Fox and Ms. Johnson [part-time reading interventionist], so now, she now she's been seen 5 times a week?

T: Right. Well...

AP: 4?

T: Yes, Ms. Johnson's already stopped that, so...

AP: Ok. Um, oh and she was the one that Mom recent...or Mom recently notified us that she had been recently diagnosed with A-D-D?

T: Apparently so. So she started, I guess, we're thinking she's still taking her meds and to be honest, there's a drastic improvement there. She had that before she had that loss, I don't know what's happening.

AP: M'hm.

T: General kind of absent look to her.

AP: M'hm.

T: Now it seems if she's more engaged and seems to know what's going on a little bit better.

In this interchange, Ms. Paredes used a series of questions and summary statements read from the online database to exert control over the discussion about Gabriela. Mr. Turner only responded with short utterances of agreement or clarification. He was not able to exert any control himself until the topic of the conversation switched to information that he knew about Gabriela that Ms. Paredes did not have. By positioning himself as knowledgeable about Gabriela, Mr. Turner was able to take control of the conversation from Ms. Paredes however briefly. In this manner, Ms. Paredes did not have exclusive control over the topics discussed during the PST meetings.

The assistant principal exerted primary control over the discourse of the problem-solving team meetings. Control was evidenced by four elements: controlling the agenda through discourse, controlling the content of discussion, abruptly changing the topic, and asking questions or making statements in rapid succession. There were instances when the AP was not able to maintain complete control over the discourse; however, teacher control over the discourse was typically short-lived as Ms. Paredes always took back control of the discussion. Thus, Ms. Paredes exerted primary control and the teachers exhibited secondary control. The following section describes the nature of secondary control in greater detail.

### ***The Teacher: Secondary Control***

The main indicator that teachers had secondary control of the PST meetings was when Ms. Paredes, the PST chair, gave teachers control by asking them questions or requesting that they report on their student as seen in the following excerpt of the discussions about Cristina, Julian, and Corazón. These were the only instances when the AP gave control to a teacher across the discussions about the seven focus students. In Cristina's case, Ms. Estes did not bring her report immediately after Ms. Paredes asked

about “mov[ing] on to the next one.” She waited until Ms. Paredes had indicated she was ready by the cessation of her typing and saying, “Alright” for the second time.

**Christina:**

AP: Ok. Alright. [Door creaks open. LI (literacy interventionist) leaves. No discourse: 4 sec.] Should we move on to the next one? Cristina? [Typing audible. No discourse: 9 sec]. Alright. [whispered]

T: With her, I, um, P-S-T'd her at the beginning right after her B-O-Y and she tested at a D-R-A 2, um, E-D-L 2 and it should be at a 4 or 6 but since then, she's made LOTS of progress.

**Julian:**

AP: And then, do you want to report on his [Julian's] progress? [looks at teacher]

T: M'hm. HE has been MAKING a lot of progress. We have seen his reading really really go up. I put him now at maybe at [an EDL Level] 4.

**Corazón:**

AP: So, you're going to tell us a little bit about Corazón, Mr. Turner before I... [does not complete her thought]

T: Ok. Corazón. Very eager. The behavior, excellent behavior. Very eager learner. Even, I mean, she's going to try.

Ms. Paredes exerted primary control over the discourse of the PST meetings although teachers were able to use the topic switch to gain momentary control. The fact that they could only take control and maintain it for only few speech turns is further evidence of their secondary control. The following exchange is an instance when a

teacher took control of the discussion by changing the topic. This exchange took place approximately three minutes after the second discussion about Adalina presented earlier. Ms. Paredes stated Adalina's age and remarked that she had not been retained. In the next speech turn, Ms. Aguilar did not respond to the fact that Adalina has not been retained; instead, she changed the topic by announcing her suspicions that Adalina might have a learning disability.

AP: Okay, And...she just turned eight. So, she would be...she hasn't been retained or anything.

T: She might also have a learning disability. She, I think, she shows some signs of dyslexia, but then it's hard for her to retain it.

AP: Oh, really?

T: We've been, like, we've been, I work with the most because since the other ones are being seen by Ms. Fox [literacy interventionist], I kind of give them a little bit less time so that I can focus on her since she's not receiving any help from Ms. Fox or anybody even AmeriCorps.

AP: Okay.

Ms. Aguilar maintained control throughout this exchange by describing Adalina's performance challenges. She made a series of declarative statements to which Ms. Paredes responded with short one- or two-word utterances. Eventually, however, Ms. Paredes took control back by using a topic switch and asking a question about the speech services that Adalina was receiving. During Adalina's meeting, this instance was the only example of the teacher changing the topic of the conversation. Every other topic switch was made by Ms. Paredes. Ms. Estes engaged in a similar exchange with Ms. Paredes by using a topic switch to take temporary control of the discussion about Cristina's case. Ms. Paredes was asking about Cristina's October goal, and Ms. Estes responded by saying

that she thought Cristina would master her goal. In the next speech turn, Ms. Estes changed the topic to Cristina's homework completion patterns. This exchange is detailed in the interchange that follows.

AP: So her goal back in October was...

T: ... was just to be on level M-O-Y, and I think she'll definitely be there...

AP: Ok.

T: ...and doing her homework in the beginning she wouldn't do it, and I'd explain, and I'd explain, and I'd show Mom, "This is how you do it." And the mom would always say that at her old school, they never gave her any homework. And so, she...she they never knew...she didn't know how to do it or whatever. And so, I brought her and I was like, "Okay this is how we do this one, and this is how we do this one." And she still wouldn't bring it. And FI-nally something clicked, and she's just been doing really well, really well.

AP: So, "Student is now completing homework assignments" and she's in the same situation with reading is in Spanish, math is in English.

T: M'hm.

AP: How's she doing in math?

T: Hmm...I didn't ask Mr. Turner. [Cristina's math teacher]

This pattern is almost identical to what Ms. Aguilar experienced during the discussion about Adalina. Each teacher took control of discussion by using a topic switch, which they could only maintain for a few speech turns before the AP took by control by using a topic switch herself. In a similar fashion, Mr. Turner was able to use the topic switch during his discussions; however, his control was also short-lived because

eventually, Ms. Paredes took back control. Thus, Ms. Paredes, the PST chair, maintained primary control over the discourse of the PST meetings while the teachers had secondary control.

### ***The Teacher: Tertiary Control***

In addition to primary and secondary levels of control, a tertiary level of control existed in the PST meetings. In these instances, another party, typically one of the literacy interventionists (LI) interjected herself into the teacher's discourse after she had been given control of the discussion by the assistant principal. By doing this, the literacy interventionist took over secondary control, thereby relegating the teacher to tertiary control of the discussion. As an example, Ms. Fox interjected while Ms. Estes was giving a report about Julian's performance data on two separate occasions. In the first instance, Ms. Estes was providing evidence that Julian had made progress and improved his reading abilities by increasing his EDL test score from Level 1 at the beginning of the year (BOY) to Level 4 at the time of the meeting (November 30, 2012). Ms. Fox did not agree with Ms. Estes' score, and the two engaged in a back-and-forth exchange, detailed below.

T: I put him now at maybe [an EDL] 4...

LI: Yeah, maybe a 6.

T: You think so?

LI: Yeah. Yeah. That's instructional.

T: Yeah, instructional.

LI: More instructional.

T: Yeah, independently at a 4.

LI: Yeah.

T: But, instructional at a 6.

By responding with “Yeah,” to Ms. Estes statement that Julian’s EDL score was a Level 4, Ms. Fox seemed to indicate that she agreed with Ms. Estes. However, she immediately offered the higher score of six. Ms. Estes did not readily agree with this higher score and questioned it. Ms. Fox replied that a Level 6 represented Julian’s *instructional* reading level. Ms. Estes agreed with this assessment because it allowed her to simultaneously maintain her position that Julian’s EDL level was a four, a score that represented Julian’s *independent* reading level. Ms. Fox then agreed with Ms. Estes’ assertion. The exchange ended with Ms. Estes agreeing to the Level 6 score that she had challenged a few seconds earlier. In this way, both professionals appeared to maintain their original positions and save face while also agreeing with each other.

Another example of Ms. Fox taking secondary control of the conversation and relegating the teacher to tertiary control occurred after Ms. Paredes asked Ms. Estes if she had been modifying Julian’s assignments. Ms. Estes replied affirmatively and was describing how she modified tests when Ms. Fox interjected again. This exchange follows below.

T: Mmm. Yeah. In-class assignments as well. Usually, I’ll call them, like if they’re testing or something I’d give them a test, I’ll call them and have them do it with me. So...[pause]

LI: He’s very quiet.

T: M’hm.

LI: And you know, whenever, you know, he’s not sure of it...

T: M’hm.

LI: ...then, he will  
just...shutdown completely.

- T: Yeah, he won't say anything.
- LI: He won't say anything...so he's real shy about it and he doesn't have confidence.
- AP: Okay.
- LI: Not a risker at all, right?
- T: I agree.
- AP: It's funny. I mean, it's not funny. It's interesting that his Language Arts is in Spanish, and his math is English, and he's shown improvement in both simultaneously.

Ms. Fox took advantage of the pause after Ms. Estes said the word “so,” and changed the topic of discussion from how Ms. Estes modified Julian’s tests to his behavior in class, especially when he encountered difficulty. Ms. Estes generally agreed with Ms. Fox’s comments and did not challenge anything she said. At the end of this exchange, Ms. Paredes took back control of the discussion from both Ms. Fox and Ms. Estes by changing the topic to her observation of the progress Julian had been making in both Language Arts and math. Thus, control of the topic of the discourse shifted between interlocutors although overall control still remained with Ms. Paredes, the PST chair.

The hierarchy of control influenced nearly all aspects of the discourse of the problem-solving team meetings about struggling ELLs. The online database exerted control by influencing how PST members interacted with each other, how they talked during the meetings, and the topics they discussed. The assistant principal exercised primary control over the meetings by controlling the agenda through discourse, controlling the content of the discussion, engaging in abrupt topic switches, and asking questions or making statements in rapid succession. However, overall control of the Cherry Creek ISD problem-solving process must be attributed to the online database

because of the breadth and depth of its influence. A consequence of this hierarchy of control manifested in a reduced quality of the problem-solving deliberations about the focus students. An examination of the discourse through the use of discourse analysis revealed a very complicated hierarchy of control. In the following section, I examine the binaries that emerged from the discourse of the PST meetings about the seven focus students in order to uncover the hidden cultural values of the PST members.

### UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN VALUES OF PST MEMBERS

Identifying binaries in discourse is useful for uncovering what a culture values and considers important. Sarup (1993) asserts that binaries expose how thought systems depend upon a foundational principal that is defined by binary opposition to other concepts. Searching out binaries may reveal the cultural values that interlocutors themselves may be unaware they have. While reading the transcripts, I identified verbs, adjectives, and noun phrases that represented one-half of a binary opposition; then, I created the other half of the binary. What follows are isolated statements from the discourse when the assistant principal, the teacher (Ms. Estes), and the literacy interventionist were discussing Julian's case. The binaries are bolded below.

AP: "A **sweet, well behaved** student," so there are no behavior issues.

T: HE has been **MAking a lot of progress**.

T: He was **struggling** a lot at the beginning with homework. Mom said he would **struggle** so much, and you could see his paper; it was all just like scratched up [Teacher gestured that student scratched homework] and erased and all.

T: Um, he's kind of **spacey**, and, but he's been **trying a lot harder** lately.

T: But Mom...whenever we conferenced, it was in English. He's **high in English**.

LI: He's very **quiet**.

LI: He won't say anything, [typing audible in background] and he's real **shy** about it, and he **doesn't have confidence**. **Not a risk taker** at all, right?

The following isolated statements were extracted from the discussion about Gabriela's case between the assistant principal and her teacher, Mr. Turner.

T: T: Now, it seems if she's **more engaged** and seems to know what's going on a little bit better.

AP: Um, we had a goal for her...her strengths are that she is very **sweet and well behaved**. Um, her academic concerns are that she's very **low in reading and writing**. In the first semester of first grade, she has made very little progressed [sic]...**very little progress**.

AP: 'Cause that's a note I have from November, that she seems **immature** with some of her behaviors, but then that she seems very **unmotivated**....That, um, **she doesn't participate in class**, she **doesn't complete her homework**.

AP: She has pretty **good attendance**. She has only been absent three days this year.... She has **no referrals**, so she has pretty **good behavior**.

AP: [Reading the note that she has just entered into online database.] "The student receives **support at home** and has shown she is able to **make progress**."

Table 13 lists the binary oppositions related to the academic characteristics that were identified in the discourse of the PST deliberations about the seven focus students.

Table 13  
Binary Oppositions Mentioned about Students during PST Meetings Related to Student  
Academic Characteristics

Student	Desirable	Undesirable
Julian	<b>Making Progress</b> Did not struggle with homework <b>Trying harder</b> <b>High in English</b>	Not making progress <b>Struggle with homework</b> <b>Not trying harder</b> Low in English
Cristina	<b>Progressing</b> <b>Complete homework</b> Asks questions <b>High in English</b>	Not progressing Does not complete homework <b>Does not ask questions</b> Low in English
Dante	<b>Progressing (MOY to EOY)</b> Sufficient progress  Good reading fluency	Not progressing <b>Insufficient progress (BOY to MOY)</b> <b>Poor reading fluency</b>
Corazón	<b>Makes effort</b> <b>Asks questions</b>	Makes no effort Does not ask questions
Gabriela	<b>More engaged (after medication)</b> High in reading and writing Made much progress Participates in class Completes homework	Less engaged (before medication) <b>Low in reading and writing</b> <b>Made little progress</b> <b>Does not participate in class</b> <b>Does not complete homework</b>
Juana	<b>Good comprehension</b> Good reader Does not guess	Poor comprehension <b>Poor reader</b> <b>Guesses</b>
Adalina	High all around Good recall Specific answers	<b>Low all around</b> <b>Poor recall</b> <b>Random answers</b>

*Note.* Bold text indicates the characteristic that was mentioned by participants during meetings.

Table 14 presents binary oppositions that reflect non-academic student characteristics that are mentioned by PST members. The bold text in both tables signifies binaries that were mentioned at the meetings; plain text indicates the binaries that I created. In addition, the binary oppositions were sorted into desirable and undesirable categories.

An examination of Table 13 reveals which students were having the most difficulty since they had the most undesirable academic characteristics. Dante had both desirable and undesirable traits, which seem contradictory. However, Ms. Estes reported that he had been struggling at the beginning of the school year and made very little progress; hence, “Insufficient progress” has a time indicator next to it (BOY to MOY) to indicate the period of the school year when Dante was having difficulty. In the middle of the school year, he started receiving daily reading interventions, and that is when Ms. Estes “saw a big jump in progress,” indicated by the “Progressing (MOY to EOY).”

In general, students who were reported by their teachers as making progress during the meetings had more positive academic and behavioral characteristics (as revealed in Table 14) than the students who were not considered to be making sufficient progress. By examining the desirable traits, it becomes clear that educators valued academic characteristics such as effort, making progress, good fluency and comprehension, completing homework, and asking questions. In terms of non-academic characteristics, the one characteristic that was most valued by team members was good (or excellent) behavior since it was mentioned in four of the discussions.

Table 14  
Binary Oppositions Mentioned about Students during PST Meetings Related to Non-Academic Student Characteristics

Student	Desirable	Undesirable
Julian	<b>Sweet</b> <b>Well behaved</b> Not shy <b>Quiet</b> High confidence Risk taker	Not sweet Not well behaved <b>Shy</b> Loud <b>Low confidence</b> <b>Not a risk taker</b>
Cristina	Sociable	<b>Not sociable</b>
Dante	Mature Supported at home	<b>Immature</b> <b>Unsupported at home</b>
Corazón	<b>Eager</b> <b>Excellent behavior</b> <b>Perfect attendance</b> <b>Motivated</b>	Not eager Poor behavior Poor attendance Unmotivated
Gabriela	Mature Motivated Good memory <b>Good attendance</b> <b>No referrals</b> <b>Well behaved</b> <b>Sweet</b> <b>Supported at home</b>	<b>Immature</b> <b>Unmotivated</b> <b>Poor memory</b> Poor attendance Referrals Poorly behaved Not sweet Unsupported at home
Juana	<b>Good behavior</b>	Poor behavior
Adalina	Good attendance Confident	<b>Poor attendance</b> <b>Not confident</b>

*Note.* Bold text indicates the characteristic that was mentioned by participants during meetings.

In sum, Cotton Tree Elementary has implemented aspects of Cherry Creek ISD's RTI guidelines while overlooking other directives. The school has created a problem-solving team with a strong, organized leader and comprised of a permanent group of

dedicated support staff that included the parent support specialist, the counselor, and the CIS program manager. However, the PST has yet to fulfill district-directed roles and responsibilities because the assistant principal performs three of the roles (Chair, Recorder, and Timekeeper) herself. In general, members of the PST did not have a clear conceptual understanding of Cherry Creek's RTI framework, which could explain why Cotton Tree staff has selectively implemented Tier 2 grade-level problem solving. The PST discussed a great variety of data during the meetings about struggling ELLs; however, their discussions were impacted by the omnipresence of the district's online database that restricted how team members interacted with one another and limited the topics that were discussed at the meetings.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

As a community college developmental writing teacher, my training and education in English as a Second Language (ESL) was not adequate to the task of teaching my students from non-dominant cultural and linguistic backgrounds whom I suspected might have a learning disability. Their difficulties with reading rendered the textbook inaccessible; writing a coherent paragraph was an insurmountable task. In short, I did not know how to adjust my teaching in order for them to be successful. So, I initiated a search for answers beginning at the office on campus that provided services for students with disabilities. No one could help me. Graduate level courses in special education were educational, but the curriculum did not address CLD learners. After I entered the Multicultural Special Education doctoral program at UT, I began to gain an understanding of the complexity of the intersection of ethnicity, language, and culture with disability.

In this study, I investigated how a problem-solving team implemented its district's guidelines regarding RTI when ELLs were the focus of deliberations. In particular, I studied the discourse of the PST meeting and how the team used data to make decisions about struggling ELLs. The use of discourse analysis to study the decision making of special education meetings is rare. A review of the literature identified Rogers (2002) as the only researcher who has used this technique to analyze the discourse of Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. The use of discourse analysis, and critical discourse analysis in particular, represents a new approach to the study of RTI. This technique uncovered both the form and function of language as it was being used in the real-life setting of problem-solving meetings about struggling ELLs.

The findings revealed that Cotton Tree staff and faculty who participated in this study had an incomplete conceptual understanding of RTI, which may have resulted in the selective implementation of district guidelines. In some areas, Cotton Tree implemented aspects of Cherry Creek ISD's RTI guidelines. For example, the PST had regular meetings, led by a strong, organized PST chair. The permanent team was comprised of a diverse group of professionals that included the parent support specialist, the counselor, and Communities in Schools (CIS) program manager. However, in other areas, Cotton Tree's PST did not adhere to district guidelines. The district-designated roles and responsibilities of the PST permanent members were not distributed equally amongst the members of the team and were instead concentrated in the PST chair. In addition, Cotton Tree staff reported that they selectively engaged in Tier 2 problem solving; in some cases, teachers referred struggling students directly to the campus PST without having first discussed the student's case with colleagues and/or specialists. Finally, the discussions of the PST meetings were impacted by the presence of the online database, which restricted the team member's interactions with each other and limited the breadth of the topics discussed at the meetings. In addition, the database affected how PST members interacted with each other and the technology. Each discussion about the focus students had multiple periods of silence while the team waited for the AP to type notes into the database, and the topics discussed were aligned with the data entry fields. The database also caused the AP to engage in non-sequiter topic shifts. In this chapter, I present my conclusions in the form of working hypotheses and situate my findings in the existing literature on RTI for ELLs, culturally responsive RTI, and discourse analysis. The chapter concludes with implications for research and practice.

## WORKING HYPOTHESES

### **Tier 3 Problem-Solving Process Was Not Aligned with the Intent Expressed in District Guidelines**

In the last few years, Cherry Creek ISD has adopted the problem-solving model of RTI as its framework for supporting struggling learners. According to the district manual, the problem-solving model of RTI replaced the previous prereferral intervention system. The relative novelty of the problem-solving RTI framework in Cherry Creek ISD could explain why there seemed to be confusion among the Cotton Tree staff about the goals and nature of RTI, how it was to be implemented at the school level, and how it was different from the previous prereferral system. In terms of Tier 3, specifically, Cotton Tree's problem-solving process was not aligned with the intent expressed in district guidelines in three ways. First, there was inconsistent and incomplete conceptual understanding of RTI. Second, the school and district's perceptions that they were performing well were not consistent with goals outlined in Cherry Creek ISD's manual that the whole child should be considered in the process of problem solving. The feedback that Mr. Jiménez received from Cherry Creek ISD's PST facilitator that Cotton Tree was the model PST campus led him to believe that his PST team was performing their responsibilities well. This impression directly contradicts the third aspect of this working hypothesis: Teachers did not share their district and principal's positive impressions of the PST process. An elaboration of each of these points follows.

#### ***An Incomplete Conceptual Understanding of RTI***

Cotton Tree staff had an incomplete conceptual understanding of RTI. The principal, assistant principal, counselor, and special education teacher could explain some features of the multi-tiered problem-solving process while participating bilingual education teachers misunderstood RTI to be a reading intervention program that Cotton

Tree had implemented a few years earlier but was no longer using. This inconsistent conceptual understanding of the framework by the staff at Cotton Tree counters district guidelines which lists the first responsibility of all team members as having a theoretical understanding of the RTI framework. Thus, in order to ensure that Cherry Creek faculty and staff had a clear understanding of the conceptual framework of the problem-solving model of RTI, Cherry Creek ISD had the responsibility of implementing effective professional development (PD) that explained the framework, the process, and how the district expected it to be implemented at each tier. In addition, the district's guidelines do not elaborate the process for how the problem-solving process should occur for English language learners (ELLs). Since nearly 30% of the district's population is comprised of ELLs, it seems a significant oversight on the part of the district. As a result, there were important consequences of having an incomplete understanding of RTI.

A consequence of an incomplete understanding of RTI was the inconsistent implementation of the district's RTI guidelines, especially in terms of bypassing the grade-level Tier 2 team in favor of the Tier 3 campus PST. Ms. Estes reported at the PST meeting about Cristina's case on November 30, 2012 that she "PST'd" her at the beginning of the 2012—2013 school year because of her low EDL score. She did not bring Cristina's case for consideration by her grade-level colleagues for Tier 2 problem solving. During her interview, Ms. Estes asserted that her grade-level team focused more on planning than on discussing struggling students. "The PST part of [the meeting] goes to the side." In Adalina's case, by the time of the PST meeting on May 9, 2013, Adalina had been enrolled for only 56 days, yet had nine unexcused absences. As a result, Adalina's absences from school were a major factor in her underachievement, but rather than consult with Mr. Smith, the parent support specialist for assistance, Ms. Aguilar referred Adalina's case directly to the campus PST.

This immediate referral to the campus PST may be a holdover practice from the previous prereferral system when struggling students were referred to the campus-level team to be considered for special education evaluation. Alternatively, it could be reflective of participating teachers not being clear about the purpose and goals of Tier 2 versus Tier 3 and how problem solving should occur at each tier. This overreliance on the campus PST also increased the number of ELLs the team had to review, which had its own consequences. Faculty and staff expressed concern for the number of referrals that the team had to consider. Ms. Croft (CIS program manager) believed that the PST had “an overwhelming number of referrals.” Similarly, Mr. Turner believed that the number of children that the PST needed to discuss influenced the quality of the team’s deliberations. “It’s difficult because I think there are so many children that it becomes like you can’t really sit there and talk about the true needs of what’s going on with the child.”

***District Emphasis on Compliance Masked Cotton Tree’s Incomplete Understanding of RTI***

Cherry Creek ISD’s emphasis on compliance masked Cotton Tree staff’s limited understanding of the RTI problem-solving process. The feedback that Mr. Jiménez received from the district’s PST facilitator was that Cotton Tree’s PST was the model PST for the district. This recognition was also announced at a vertical team meeting comprised of principals from area elementary, middle, and high schools in Cherry Creek ISD. In addition, Mr. Jiménez received positive feedback from the district’s social worker, Ms. Soto. She had responsibilities on several school campuses; hence, she attended PST meetings at these different schools. Mr. Jiménez reported that Ms. Soto commented, “It’s just really amazing how [you] do it” because of the effort that Cotton Tree administration made to involve the “PSS, the child, the Communities in Schools,

anybody who is providing support or service.” In addition, she was impressed that they “meet consistently and stay on teachers” to ensure that they were entering progress monitoring data into the online database. After receiving confirmation from two different sources and publicly acknowledged as the model, Mr. Jiménez believed that his team was performing its responsibilities exceptionally well. The district’s stated purpose of engaging in a problem-solving RTI process is to study the whole child and engage in collaborative problem solving while also including parental input at every tier. Yet, the district’s method of determining Cotton Tree’s model PST status could not possibly have determined if the team was engaging in genuine problem solving. Mr. Jiménez reported that the district quantified how many times he and his staff entered data into certain fields that were supposed to track meeting notes and action items by staff member. Because Cotton Tree’s PST met regularly as outlined in district guidelines, these fields, especially the field that tracked notes from the meeting, were well utilized. In all actuality, the district could only report that Cotton Tree had utilized the data fields in a model fashion. Whether they actually engaged in problem solving during their PST is another question entirely that is not answerable by quantifying the amount of data in various fields.

Ironically, the PST at Cotton Tree was being recognized for successfully implementing the district’s problem-solving process even though this very process contravenes what the district manual identifies as important: team flexibility and being able to consider the whole child. However, Cherry Creek ISD is only in the third year of implementing its problem-solving RTI system, which may explain the district’s focus on procedural compliance because the district wants to ensure that schools are utilizing the new system as conceived and designed. Unfortunately, an overreliance on compliance procedures appeared to take attention away from an outcomes-based evaluation. Perhaps

with time, as Cherry Creek staff become more accustomed to the problem-solving process, this focus on compliance will become more balanced with a focus on outcomes.

### ***A Discrepancy between Campus PST Members and Teachers about the Problem-Solving Process***

It should also be noted that a discrepancy existed between the principal and the permanent team members' positive impressions of the PST, and teachers' impressions of the problem-solving process. In general, permanent team members stated that the team was "really strong," (Ms. Moore, counselor), did a good job of "talking about the issues" (Ms. Croft, CIS program manager), and "putting it all together" (Mr. Smith, parent support specialist). However, teachers expressed very different views about the process, which could be described as antithetical to the impressions of the permanent team members. In fact, all four teachers interviewed in this study—three bilingual education teachers and one special education teacher—all questioned the ability of the RTI process to efficiently and accurately identify the "right" students. Mr. Turner reported that he and other faculty did not "like the amount of time between [figuring] something out," setting goals, and implementing them. Ms. Estes stated that she was concerned ELLs were "not identified soon enough." She frankly stated, "I feel like they're really under diagnosed in the younger grades." Ms. Aguilar was also critical of only being called to PST meetings "once a semester and they wait until it's third grade [to] have them tested for dyslexia....Why wait so long?" Finally, Ms. Scott, the special education teacher, expressed similar concerns about the length of time it took for a student to get a special education evaluation. "I don't think we're getting them [students who would benefit from special education services], and I think we're doing a disservice to them."

This discrepancy in perception could be due to several factors. Mr. Jiménez is in direct communication with district staff as well as the leaders of other campuses, so he

has an administrator's perspective or bird's eye view of what is occurring on his campus. Teachers, on the other hand, are the ones who are in direct contact with their students every day; thus, they are much more likely to be attuned to their students and classrooms. From the teachers' perspective, they had made appropriate modifications and done all they could for a student in the classroom. When the student continued to experience difficulty, they obtained Tier 2 interventions for the student (although sometimes it appears that they did not and referred directly to the campus PST instead). If the student was still experiencing difficulty and not making adequate progress, he or she was referred to the campus PST for problem solving. The PST made a recommendation after which followed a required progress-monitoring period that was supposed to range from three to nine weeks. Based on what teachers said during their interviews, this progress-monitoring period seemed to go on for long periods of time, perhaps even years. As a result, the amount of time teachers spent tracking communication with parents and entering data into the database served no good purpose if they were not used to support further testing for dyslexia or an evaluation for special education services. Teachers perhaps observed these patterns year after year; in fact, Ms. Aguilar stated that in her four years at Cotton Tree, only one of her students was eventually tested for dyslexia, and he was in his fourth year at the school as a second grader. Thus, long periods of progress monitoring would prevent struggling ELLs from being referred for a special education evaluation, which could be the district's way of addressing the overrepresentation of ELLs receiving special education services. However, another outcome of inordinately long progress-monitoring periods would be the underidentification of ELLs, which is what Ms. Estes suspects has been occurring, especially in the early primary grades.

All these teachers had similar concerns about the effectiveness of the PST to consistently and in a timely fashion identify students who might have disabilities. These

impressions might also explain why teachers sometimes bypassed problem solving at Tier 2 in order to get services for their struggling students in a more expedited fashion. Ultimately, it seems that the teachers were evaluating the effectiveness of the entire problem-solving RTI process whereas the permanent PST members, and perhaps even the district PST facilitator, were evaluating the performance of the PST based solely on the how much information school staff were entering into the database. To truly understand how a school is implementing RTI, it seems that an evaluation needs to be performed at each tier independently and of the entire system as a whole. Otherwise, any subsequent report will be based on partial and incomplete data.

***The District Did Not Monitor the Problem-Solving Process According to Its Own Guidelines***

Cherry Creek ISD itself did not follow its own guidelines in its monitoring of the problem-solving process. According to the district manual, team meetings should have focused on studying the needs of the whole child through collaborative problem solving. Unfortunately, due to the control of the online database to impact how team members interacted and what they discussed, no evidence emerged of collaborative problem solving. In fact, evidence existed of the AP not reacting to information that the teacher was sharing about the student, and instead responding with a non-sequiter. Because the PST discussed topics that were correlated to fields in the database, other types of data that could have illuminated important aspects of student performance were not discussed or considered by the team. Finally, no parents attended any of the observed discussions about the focus students although the district manual recommends communication with families at Tier 1, and the active involvement of parents in the problem-solving process at Tiers 2 and 3. Despite the specificity of the district's own guidelines, the only feedback that Mr. Jiménez received about how well he and his team were implementing the

district's process was based on the quantification of data entered in the online database. Perhaps when the district evaluates the problem-solving process in the future, PST facilitation staff should carefully consider how they will determine if and how PSTs are collaborating with each other and with parents. Also, the district should specify exactly what it means to consider the whole child in order to provide better guidance to their PSTs.

Another aspect of the process that was neither addressed in team meetings nor in the online database related to fidelity of implementation. Of the meetings that I observed, I did not witness the PST discussing the fidelity of implementation of Tier 1 classroom instruction. Neither did I observe any discussions about the fidelity of implementation of Tier 2 and 3 interventions. During my interviews of staff and faculty, Mr. Jiménez was the only person who mentioned fidelity of implementation. Thus, for a student such as Dante, whose performance did not improve for the first half of the school year, there was no discussion by the PST to determine if core instruction at Tier 1 or his interventions at Tier 2 had been implemented with fidelity. The district guidelines do not clearly define who is responsible for ensuring fidelity of implementation, only stating that members of the PST should “follow up with campus colleagues.” Perhaps, the district could specify who on the PST should be responsible for carrying out this task.

Kavale (2005) asserts that when students are not successful with an intervention, other ecological variables should be considered as explanatory variables, such as the quality of the teacher's instruction and the fidelity of the implementation. When Mr. Jiménez's interview was conducted in September 2013, he stated that his professional goal for the 2013—2014 school year would be to focus on observing reading instruction in the early primary grades with an emphasis on “first grade English” classes. He explained that this concern emanated from the high retention rates and low reading

achievement scores in first grade, which had led him to question the quality of the reading instruction. Thus, he intended to check running records, anecdotal notes, and how teachers were grouping students. Mr. Jiménez also planned to verify the fidelity of implementation of the reading program because “balanced literacy is going to be a big part of our focus from pre-K through first grade.”

### **A Hierarchy of Control Constrained the Problem-Solving Process**

A hierarchy of control constrained the problem-solving process during the PST meetings observed at Cotton Tree Elementary. Cherry Creek District’s online database, which functioned as a kind of educational Panopticon (Foucault, 1979), exercised the greatest control. It exerted a breadth and depth of control beyond the discourse of the PST meetings. In terms of breadth, the online database influenced a multitude of Cherry Creek ISD faculty and staff in settings other than the PST meetings. For example, teachers noted any and all attempts to contact parents, and teachers and interventionists entered progress-monitoring information into the online system prior to the meeting. At Cotton Tree, the principal and assistant principal monitored information that had been entered. Educational diagnosticians and school psychologists examined student records in the online database to approve referrals for special education evaluations. The district’s PST facilitator even reported to Cotton Tree’s vertical team how the school was the model PST campus because of its extensive use of the online database. All of these actions were taken by various personnel in order to comply with district rules and guidelines about the use of the online database in the context of RTI implementation. Cotton Tree PST members, and especially the AP, may have focused on compliance and “filling out the form” instead of truly engaging in a collaborative problem-solving discussion whose objective was to learn about the whole child. As a result, it mattered little that there were

bicultural professionals with skills in bilingual education on the PST, which is a recommendation from the culturally responsive RTI literature (García & Ortiz, 2008). The overpowering control of the form obviated their knowledge and expertise that could have contributed to better decisions and outcomes for these struggling ELLs.

### ***Profound Impact of the Online Database on the PST Meetings***

The online database impacted the meetings on a profound level and even influenced the deliberations through the assistant principal; in fact, the control of the AP was expanded beyond her expected role as PST chair as a result of the database. The online database was always prominently displayed in both meeting rooms. Thus, PST members were observed interacting with the technology by reading the students' records, watching as notes were typed into the system, and even correcting the AP's typos. During discussions about each focus student, there were multiple silent periods when all discussion came to a halt. Thus, the presence of the technology in the form of the online database negatively impacted the PST's interactions and inter-personal communication with each other. This technological and communication barrier is detrimental to the collaborative problem-solving process that assumes that team members will not only be fully engaged with each other but with the information about the struggling student. Educators become members of a multidisciplinary team because of their diverse professional backgrounds and expertise; thus, they need to be engaged with and react to the information that is being presented. If they are distracted and do not have the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and expertise because the team is interacting with the technology of the online database instead of with each other, their presence on the PST is underutilized. In order for the problem-solving model of RTI to be successfully implemented, participants must be actively engaged in listening to reports

about student performance, responding to each other, and contributing their knowledge and expertise.

The AP also engaged in non-sequiter topic switches that seemed to be influenced by fields in the database. All participants used the technique of the topic switch to take control of the conversation from another interlocutor. However, these non-sequiter topic switches were awkward because the AP often did not react to the information the teacher was presenting; instead, she asked questions about a completely unrelated topic. This example is further evidence of the AP's interaction with the form and her intent on filling it in, which had the unfortunate outcome of the AP not being fully engaged with the information that teachers were providing. In fact, during their interviews, two teachers commented on the formulaic nature of the meetings, which they attributed to the influence of the database. Mr. Turner stated, "We're rushed; [it] feels like [we] 'check the box.'" Ms. Aguilar commented that the team was "following the process." Thus, filling out the form became the focus of the meeting instead of engaging in a more holistic problem-solving process. This focus on taking discrete data points and considering them together to evaluate a student's abilities is called discrete point methodology. Damico (1991) originally wrote about discrete point methodology as a critique of how communication skills had been typically assessed. The first characteristic of this methodology is the belief that "the evaluator can fragment language into its components, analyze these components separately, and then bring the individual analyses together to comment on the student's communication skills" (Damico, 1991, p. 160). The PST at Cotton Tree was similarly considering a student's discrete skills in order to comment on the student's overall academic and language skills.

As a result, the topics of the discussions appeared to be constrained by the online database, which also raises the possibility that other information that might have been

pertinent or useful may not have been considered. García and Ortiz (1988; 2008) posit that student failure is due to a multiplicity of factors; thus, the solution should also involve more than one aspect of a student's experience at school. The authors suggest five different factors to consider that would shift the focus of problem solving from student-centered deficits to the student's learning environment: "teacher, instruction, evaluation of instruction, exposure to the curriculum, and student" (García & Ortiz, 2008, p. 35). For student factors, the authors specify discovering the student's "experiential background, language proficiency, cultural characteristics, cognitive/learning style, socioeconomic status, locus of control/attribution, modes of communication, self-concept, and motivation" (p. 35). During the discussions observed about the focus students, a few of these topics were discussed for some of the students, including experiential background, language proficiency, and motivation. However, other topics, such as cognitive/learning style, locus of control/attribution, and self-concept were not broached at all. If a PST considered each of the five factors in depth, what would be the resulting quality of the problem solving for the struggling ELL?

Additionally, despite the assistant principal's statement that the PST considered the "whole child" during PST deliberations, little evidence emerged to support her assertion. The utilization of the online database during PST meetings may have precluded more holistic discussions about struggling students because the team did not engage in discussions about the whole child. Although scholars do not agree on what exactly it means to consider the whole child, there appear to be some commonalities. Blank and Berg (2006) assert that children need "supportive environments that nurture their social, emotional, physical, moral, civic, and cognitive development" (p. 10) in order to succeed. In addition to developing skills in reading, writing, speaking, and math, Noddings (2005) suggests that students can also stage play, design murals, publish a school paper, and

collaborate on establishing school rules. Easton (1997) describes how Waldorf educators “strive to develop the aesthetic, spiritual, and interpersonal sensibilities of the child in ways that enrich, enliven, and reinforce intellectual knowing” (p. 87). A Waldorf education seeks to engage the hearts, hands, and the head. Thus, if the PST’s goal is to consider the whole child, then the discussions must go beyond the restricted set of variables in the online database in terms of topics and data discussed. Advocates should also consider students’ overall well-being, and performance in art, health, music, and physical education. Finally, parents should be viewed as collaborative partners whose input is sought and valued at every stage in the problem-solving process, a culturally responsive prereferral practice recommended by García and Ortiz (2006). No parents attended any of the deliberations observed although teachers did report on their interactions and communication with parents. Perhaps, each advocate should answer the following question at every PST: What experiences will develop the potential of my student?

Finally, at the level of the PST meeting, the PST chair maintained primary control over topics to be discussed and often determined the participation of team members during these discussions. This is not surprising because Ms. Paredes was expected to exert some level of control in her role as PST chair and her leadership position as the assistant principal of Cotton Tree Elementary. Teachers exercised secondary control of the discourse during the PST meetings. They often did not speak until the AP asked them to report on their student’s progress. Occasionally, the focus student’s teacher was able to briefly control a topic by engaging in a topic shift, but he or she did not maintain this control for very long. If one of the literacy interventionists was present, she interjected her opinion, which then relegated the teacher to a tertiary level of control. This phenomenon of the literacy interventionist challenging the teacher or interjecting during

teacher reports has been recognized as problematic for a long time. Chalfant, Pysh, and Moultrie (1979) recognized the negative impact that a specialist could have on teacher assistance teams (TATs) because of the “danger that [the specialist] may be assigned the role of ‘expert’” (p. 89), which could discourage teachers from contributing to the problem solving discussion.

A confluence of forces influenced the quality of the problem-solving discussions at the Cotton Tree PST meetings. Cherry Creek ISD’s online database exerted the most control based on its breadth and depth of influence that impacted many Cherry Creek ISD personnel at both the district and campus levels in multiple settings beyond the PST meeting. During the meetings observed, the online database impacted the discourse through the assistant principal, and the PST members present often interacted with the technology of the online database instead of each other. As a result, the online database impacted the quality of the problem-solving discussion. Ironically, this PST team with expertise in bilingual education and cultural understanding were restricted from utilizing their knowledge and skills in a way that would best address their struggling students’ needs.

As seen from the experience of problem solving at Cotton Tree Elementary, implementing the problem-solving model of RTI is not a straightforward process. According to the culturally responsive RTI literature (García & Ortiz, 2008), Cotton Tree had many supportive elements already in place that should have facilitated that the “right” students were being referred for special education evaluations. First of all, the school practiced a shared responsibility toward the learning of all students, which was further reinforced through the practice of departmentalization. In addition, the principal and assistant principal were bilingual in Spanish and English, were certified in Bilingual Education, and knew the community well. In the case of Ms. Paredes, she grew up in the

neighborhood and was a graduate of Cotton Tree Elementary. Finally, the PST members did not express deficit views of the students and did not blame their academic difficulties on their culture, first language, social class, or home life. Despite all of these positive factors, the ability of Cotton Tree's PST to engage in genuine problem solving was greatly hampered and restricted by the hierarchy of control of the online database which impacted nearly all aspects of the discourse of the meetings as well as actors and actions in settings well beyond the PST meetings.

### **RECOGNIZING CONSTRAINTS**

As with all research, I recognize that certain constraints have bounded this study. I provided rich, thick descriptions of the PST members, teachers, and focus students as well as the school setting in order for readers to be able to determine the transferability of these findings to their particular context. First, this study took place in one urban elementary school in Texas with participants who were Spanish-speaking Mexican Americans. No other languages or ethnic groups were included in this study. Second, I was able to attend the discussions about ELLs on two different days, November 30, 2012 and May 9, 2013, which yielded focus students who were only in first and second grade. Considering RTI is implemented school-wide at Cotton Tree, these participants were not representative of all grades or language groups. Third, I do not speak Spanish and thus was unable to conduct the parent interviews myself. Moreover, due to unforeseen circumstances, I had to rely on Mr. Smith, the parent support specialist, to serve as an interpreter, instead of a disinterested third party to conduct my interviews with parents. As a result, they might have not been as candid or forthcoming about their school experiences, especially if they did not want to criticize the school. In addition, the focus of the interview had to be altered because these parents did not attend their child's PST

meeting and could only provide their general impressions of their child's school performance. Thus, I was not able to gather parents' perspective of the effectiveness of the PST meetings. Finally, I only examined Tier 3, campus-level problem solving team deliberations at Cotton Tree; Tiers 1 and 2 were not investigated. Cumulatively, all of these factors limited the data set from which conclusions could be drawn.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

In order for RTI to function as designed, schools and school districts should implement the framework as conceptualized. Assuming that the practices of Cotton Tree are similar to those practiced at other elementary schools in Cherry Creek ISD, there may be implications that could be relevant to other schools.

#### **District-Level Implications**

**Professional development.** Cotton Tree's administrators and PST members had incomplete conceptual understandings of the district's RTI framework, which resulted in two negative consequences. All three bilingual education teachers in addition to the literacy interventionist interviewed in this study thought that RTI was the name of a reading intervention that the school was no longer implementing. They were not aware that RTI is a three-tiered process designed to ensure that all students receive appropriate services prior to being referred for a special education evaluation. Thus, it is Cherry Creek ISD's responsibility for ensuring that school staff receives the support they need. As such, staff and faculty district-wide might benefit from PD to better explain the RTI problem-solving process and how it differs from the previous prereferral system. A stronger and more accurate conceptual understanding of the RTI framework can serve as the foundation for successful implementation of district guidelines.

**Culturally responsive RTI.** Cherry Creek ISD's current problem-solving team guidelines do not elaborate how the problem-solving process should differ for ELLs, which has been a critique of past RTI models. Thus, PSTs may benefit from further specification that was based on culturally responsive RTI. In this manner, the PST might be better able to truly study the whole child and engage in deliberations that could facilitate in-depth problem solving.

### **School-Level Implications**

**Procedural implications.** The Cotton Tree PST could ensure that Tier 1 classroom instruction was indeed rigorous, scientifically based best practices and that Tier 2 interventions were appropriate for ELLs and implemented with fidelity. In this manner, a referral to Tier 3 would have increased validity, which would result in fewer referrals. In addition, in an attempt to improve the quality of the problem solving, Cotton Tree's PST could attempt to obviate the influence of the online database by not displaying it on the flat screen monitor during the meetings. Instead of everyone's attention being focused on the database, the team could focus instead on discussing each student's case and engaging in problem solving. The PST chair could also delegate the PST roles and responsibilities to other permanent team members. For example, the permanent members of the PST could all be trained to take notes and share the duties of the Recorder, which would free the PST chair to focus on leading a discussion that captured a holistic picture of the child. The Recorder's responsibility would be to take notes and enter the PST's recommendations into the online database that is being displayed only on the laptop. In this manner, perhaps Cotton Tree's PST would become closer to achieving its goal of considering the whole child.

**Collaboration with parents.** In light of the fact that none of the parents of the focus students attended their child’s PST meeting, the broader participation of families in the RTI process at Cotton Tree is unclear. Nonetheless, these parents’ perspectives were not represented during the observed meetings, raising questions about the role of parents in determining the nature of their child’s school-related difficulties. If this is a broader pattern, Cotton Tree staff will need to investigate the underlying reasons for their absence at meetings, and seek to improve parent participation. As with school staff, it will be important that parents understand the roles and functions of the PST. This also speaks to the fact school staff will need to have a clear understanding of the RTI process if they are to explain it to parents. If school officials are truly committed to understanding the “whole child,” obtaining the parent’s perspective should be an important part of that commitment.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

The findings of this qualitative case study served to raise a series of questions for future research. First, more studies are needed in schools with a similar population of ELLs and composition of PST members by sampling a greater number and range of meetings in order to include students in later primary grades. Also, longitudinal studies are needed to shed light on the long-term effectiveness of RTI in sustaining student performance, or whether some students (and which students) are eventually retained or referred for a special education evaluation. Third, studies that investigate changes in the discourse of the team meetings as a result of changes in the team composition could further elaborate the dynamics of control and power. For example, under what conditions do the social service providers participate, what do they say, and how do they say it? What happens when a parent joins the conversation? Equally important are studies that

investigate how the PST deliberates about struggling ELLs when meetings are not constrained by the online database, or studies that better understand why team members did not utilize their bilingual education and bicultural knowledge of the students and community during the meetings. What would the features of such a discussion be, and how might these features influence the outcomes of such meetings? Finally, additional studies could also examine the PSTs in schools with different populations of students who speak different languages in different geographic regions of the country.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study was designed to investigate how a PST team engaged in deliberations about struggling ELLs as well as to determine how the school was implementing district's RTI guidelines. It adds to the knowledge base about Tier 3 decision making because it highlights the multiple factors that impact all aspects of PST deliberations. Specifically, a PST led by a trained bilingual educator, who was also a cultural insider, was not able to achieve her goal of engaging in a holistic evaluation of struggling ELLs because of the overpowering influence of the online database. Rather the online database limited both the topics of the campus PST discussions and how the team deliberated.

This analysis of the deliberations of PST meetings has the potential to improve the discourse of the PST for the benefit of the ELL while also informing possible topics and tools for professional development. The use of discourse analysis revealed the multiple layers of control that negatively impact the quality of the discussions of PST meetings despite the best intentions and cultural and linguistic expertise of the participants. In turn, these findings have the potential to improve RTI implementation for ELLs.

## Appendix A

### Consent for Parent Participation in Research

#### Title: **PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAM DELIBERATIONS ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

##### **Purpose of the Study**

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a research study about how a campus Problem-Solving Team (PST) makes decisions about English language learners (ELLs) who are experiencing academic and/or social difficulties at school. The purpose of this study is **to gain a better understanding of the problem-solving process of a campus PST, and how information is used by teams to develop make instructional decisions or other recommendations for these children.**

##### **What will you to be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- allow yourself to be observed during team meetings that will be audio recorded;
- be interviewed about the focus students and the decision-making process of the PST. This interview will be audio recorded.

This study will take **approximately 120 minutes** and will include approximately **12** faculty and staff participants.

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

Possible discomforts and risks include those associated with being interviewed and observed while you interact with colleagues and share information about the focus students during the team meetings as well as your insights about the team decision-making process.

##### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the findings of this study may be used to identify best practices or provide suggestions for Problem-Solving Teams in \_\_\_\_\_.

**Do you have to participate?**

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

If you would like to participate **please print your name and the date, and sign on the appropriate line below**. You will receive a copy of this form.

**Will there be any compensation?**

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

**What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?**

This study is **confidential**, so all efforts will be made to maintain your confidentiality. Personally identifying information will not be noted in the file name. The digital files will be stored on a password-protected laptop and backed up to a secure server. The digital files will be heard only for research purposes by the researcher and the faculty sponsor. The files will be retained for possible future analysis.

The **records** of this study will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's locked office. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and members of the dissertation committee have the right to review the research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Throughout the study, the researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

The data resulting from your participation may be made presented at professional conferences or published in an academic paper in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you or your child with it, or with your participation in any study.

If you choose to participate in this study, the meetings in which you are a participant **will be audio** recorded. Any **audio** recordings will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for **one year** and then erased.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**

Prior, during or after your participation you can contact the researcher **NARA TAKAKAWA** at **(512) 363-0890** or send an email to **nara@utexas.edu**. This study

has been reviewed and approved by The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?**

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Office of Research Support by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

**Participation**

If you agree to participate, **please print your name and the date, and sign your name below.**

**Signature**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

Nara N. Takakawa

Print Name of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B

### Consentimiento de los Padres para Participación en la Investigación

#### Título: PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAM DELIBERATIONS ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

##### Introducción

El propósito de este formulario es proveerle información que puede afectar su decisión de participar o no participar en este estudio de investigación. La persona que realiza esta investigación responderá todas sus preguntas sobre este estudio. Por favor lea la información siguiente y haga cualquier pregunta que tenga antes de decidir si desea participar. Si decide tomar parte de este estudio, este formulario se utilizara para registrar su consentimiento.

##### Propósito del Estudio

Si usted está de acuerdo en participar en el estudio, se le preguntara sobre un estudio de investigación acerca de cómo un (PST) Problem-Solving Team, toma decisiones sobre estudiantes del idioma inglés (ELLs) English Language Learners, que están experimentando dificultades académicas y/o sociales en la escuela. El propósito de este estudio es para mejor entender el proceso de resolver problemas de un equipo PST, y como la información es utilizada por los equipos para hacer decisiones sobre instrucción o otras recomendaciones para estos niños.

##### ¿Que le pedirán que haga?

Si usted está de acuerdo en participar en éste estudio se le preguntara lo siguiente:

- Permite que la observan durante las juntas de equipo de su niño
- Permita que los entrevisten sobre su niño y el proceso de hacer decisiones del PST

La junta y la entrevista será audio grabado.

Este estudio tomara aproximadamente 120 minutos y se incluye aproximadamente seis (6) parejas.

##### ¿Cuáles son los riesgos por participar en este estudio?

Los posibles riesgos y incomodidades incluyen esos asociados con el hecho de estar entrevistado y/o observado mientras usted participa con los oficiales del colegio y comparte información de su niño durante las juntas de equipo.

Yo entiendo que mientras este estudio ha sido revisado por el \_\_\_\_\_ y por el director de la escuela de mi niño, el estudio no está conducido por el \_\_\_\_\_.

### **¿Cuales son los posibles beneficios de este estudio?**

Los posibles beneficios de este estudio son los siguientes:

Usted no recibirá ningún beneficio en participar en este estudio, sin embargo, los resultados del estudio puede utilizarse para identificar las mejores prácticas o proporcionar sugerencias para Equipo de Resolución de los Problemas \_\_\_\_\_.

### **¿Tiene usted que participar?**

No, su participación es voluntaria. Puede decidir no participar, o, si comienza el estudio, puede dejar de participar en cualquier momento. El hecho de negarse o dejar de participar no afectará su relación con La Universidad de Texas en Austin de ningún modo.

Si usted decide participar, por favor imprima y firmar su nombre junto con la fecha en la línea correspondiente. Usted recibirá una copia de este formulario y una copia firmada permanecerá en la carpeta permanente escolar de mi niño.

### **¿Habrá alguna compensación?**

Usted no recibirá ningún tipo de pago por participar en este estudio.

### **¿Cuáles son mis protecciones de privacidad y confidencialidad al tomar parte en este estudio de investigación?**

Este estudio es **confidencial**, por lo tanto, se harán todos los esfuerzos para mantener su confidencialidad. Información personal de identificación no se observará en el nombre del archivo. Los archivos digitales serán almacenados en un ordenador portátil protegido con contraseña y una copia en un servidor seguro. Los archivos digitales serán escuchados sólo para fines de investigación por el investigador y el patrocinador de la Facultad. Los archivos serán retenidos para futuro análisis.

Los **archivos** de este estudio serán almacenados en forma segura en un gabinete de archivo bloqueado en la oficina cerrada con llave del investigador. Las personas autorizadas de la Universidad de Texas en Austin, los miembros de la Junta de revisión institucional y miembros del Comité de disertación tienen derecho a revisar los expedientes de investigación y protegerán la confidencialidad de los registros en la medida permitida por la ley. Durante el periodo de estudio, el investigador la notificará de la nueva información disponible y que podría afectar su decisión de permanecer en el estudio.

Los datos resultantes de su participación pueden ser presentados en conferencias profesionales, o publicado en un artículo académico en el futuro para fines de investigación no detallada en este formulario de consentimiento. En estos casos, los datos no contendrán ninguna información de identificación que podría asociarse a usted o su hijo con ella, o con su participación en cualquier estudio.

Si elije participar en este estudio, las juntas en cuales usted participara serán audio-grabadas. Cualquier grabación de audio se almacenará en forma segura, y solo el investigador tendrá acceso a las grabaciones. Las grabaciones se mantendrán durante un año y luego se borran.

**¿A quién contactar con preguntas acerca del estudio?**

Antes, durante, o después de su participación, usted puede contactar a el investigador **NARA TAKAKAWA**, at **(512) 363-0890** o enviar un correo electrónico a **nara@utexas.edu**. Este estudio ha sido revisado y aprobado por la Junta de Oficina de apoyo a la Investigación y el numero de estudio es\_\_\_\_\_.

**¿A quién contactar con preguntas con respecto a sus derechos como participante de la investigación?**

Si usted tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos o si tiene cualquier descontento con cualquier parte de este estudio, puede contactar, anónimamente si así lo desea, a la Junta de Revisión Institucional por el teléfono al (512) 471-8871 o por correo electrónico a [orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu).

**Participacion**

Si usted está de acuerdo en participar, por favor imprimir y firme su nombre.

**Firma**

A usted se le ha informado acerca del propósito, los procedimientos, los beneficios y los riesgos de este estudio, y también ha recibido una copia de este formulario. Usted ha tenido la oportunidad de hacer preguntas antes de firmar, y ha sido informado que puede hacer otras preguntas en cualquier momento. Usted está de acuerdo en participar en este estudio voluntariamente. Al firmar este formulario, usted no estárenunciando a ninguno de sus derechos legales.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nombre en letra de molde

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

Como representante de este estudio, he explicado el propósito, los procedimientos, los beneficios, y los riesgos implicados en este estudio de investigación.

---

Nombre de Persona que obtiene consentimiento

---

Firma de la Persona que obtiene consentimiento

---

Fecha

---

## Consent for Parent Participation in Research

### Title: **PROBLEM-SOLVING TEAM DELIBERATIONS ABOUT ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. The person performing the research will answer any of your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions you might have before deciding whether or not to take part. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a research study about how a campus Problem-Solving Team (PST) makes decisions about English language learners (ELLs) who are experiencing academic and/or social difficulties at school. The purpose of this study is **to gain a better understanding of the problem-solving process of a campus PST, and how information is used by teams to make instructional decisions or other recommendations for these children.**

#### **What will you to be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- allow yourself to be observed during team meetings about your child;
- be interviewed about your child and the decision-making process of the PST.

Both the meeting and interview will be audio recorded.

This study will take **approximately 120 minutes** and will include approximately **six (6)** parent participants.

#### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

Possible discomforts and risks include those associated with being interviewed and observed while you interact with school officials and share information about your child during the team meetings.

I understand that while this research has been reviewed by [school district] and by the principal at my child's school, [school district] is not conducting this research.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

You will receive no direct benefit from participating in this study; however, the findings of this study may be used to identify best practices or provide suggestions for

Problem-Solving Teams in \_\_\_\_\_.

**Do you have to participate?**

No, your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate at all or, if you start the study, you may withdraw at any time. Withdrawal or refusing to participate will not affect your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin (University) in anyway.

If you would like to participate **please print and sign your name along with the date on the appropriate line below**. You will receive a copy of this form, and a signed copy will remain in my child's permanent school folder.

**Will there be any compensation?**

You will not receive any type of payment participating in this study.

**What are my confidentiality or privacy protections when participating in this research study?**

This study is **confidential**, so all efforts will be made to maintain your confidentiality. Personally identifying information will not be noted in the file name. The digital files will be stored on a password-protected laptop and backed up to a secure server. The digital files will be heard only for research purposes by the researcher and the faculty sponsor. The files will be retained for possible future analysis.

The **records** of this study will be stored securely in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's locked office. Authorized persons from The University of Texas at Austin, members of the Institutional Review Board, and members of the dissertation committee have the right to review the research records and will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Throughout the study, the researcher will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

The data resulting from your participation may be made presented at professional conferences or published in an academic paper in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you or your child with it, or with your participation in any study.

If you choose to participate in this study, the meetings in which you are a participant **will be audio** recorded. Any **audio** recordings will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept for **one year** and then erased.

**Whom to contact with questions about the study?**

Prior, during, or after your participation you can contact the researcher **NARA TAKAKAWA** at **(512) 363-0890** or send an email to **nara@utexas.edu**. This study has been reviewed and approved by \_\_\_\_\_ and The University Institutional Review Board and the study number is \_\_\_\_\_.

**Whom to contact with questions concerning your rights as a research participant?**

For questions about your rights or any dissatisfaction with any part of this study, you can contact, anonymously if you wish, the Office of Research Support by phone at (512) 471-8871 or email at orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

**Participation**

If you agree to participate, **please print and sign your name below.**

**Signature**

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, procedures, benefits, and the risks involved in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person obtaining consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C

### Interview Questions for Members of the Problem-Solving Team

#### I. Background

1. What is your name?
2. What is your educational background?
  - a. Where did you go to college?
  - b. What was your major?
  - c. What are your teaching credentials?
3. How long have you been in education? In what school districts?
4. Do you think specialized knowledge is needed when working with English language learners? If so, what? If not, why not?

#### II. Problem-Solving Team Responsibilities

5. What are the responsibilities of the Problem-Solving Team? What are your responsibilities on the team? What is your role?
6. Tell me about how your team meets these responsibilities. What about you?
  - a. Do you think the team is successful at meeting these responsibilities? Why or why not?
7. How does the team function when it's considering an ELL? How is the process different from a non-ELL?
8. How are interventions selected?
  - a. What assessments, both formal and informal, are considered and under what conditions?
9. Tell me about Response to Intervention, otherwise known as RTI?
  - a. How does it work in your school?
  - b. What impact is RTI making?
  - c. How does it work with ELLs? Is it impacting the disproportionate representation of ELLs in special education? If so, why and how? If not, why not?

#### III. Specific Questions about Students Who Have Been Referred to PST

10. Can you summarize [child's name] case? What do you think the main issues are? Why was this child recommended for PST consideration?
11. Have you ruled out anything? If so, what? How?
12. Is there anything else you want to find out more about? If there is, what is it?
13. What were your recommendations and why?

## Appendix D

### Sample Interview Questions for Parents in English

1. Tell me about your child.
  - a. How is she/he doing in school?
2. How does the school notify you about your child's academic progress?
3. You attended a Problem-Solving Team meeting. Why did you decide to attend? What is your understanding about the purpose of this meeting?
4. Tell me about your participation in the meeting.
  - a. Were you asked for information?
  - b. Were you asked to express your concerns and/or opinions about the problem?
5. What was the outcome of the meeting?
  - a. Were recommendations made to address the problem? For example, special reading programs or specific classes?
  - b. Were you asked to help your child at home?
  - c. Were community resources or doctor visits recommended?
6. What was your impression of the meeting?
  - a. Were your concerns addressed?
  - b. Were you satisfied with the outcomes of the meeting? If not, how could it be improved?
7. In your opinion, were the PST's recommendations successful?
  - a. If she/he is doing better, what made the difference?
  - b. If not, what do you recommend?
8. Has the PST had another meeting to evaluate your child's progress?
  - a. Have you met with your child's teacher to discuss his/her academic progress (after initial PST meeting)?
9. What recommendations would you give to the school to increase parent participation/attendance in PST meetings?
10. Would you like to add anything else?

### **Actual Interview Questions for Parents in English**

1. Tell us about your son/daughter. How is he or she doing academically?
2. How is your child doing this school year?
3. How do you feel about the progress you child has been making?
4. How does the school inform you of your child's academic progress?
5. Were you notified about your child's PST meeting?
6. How would you like to be contacted about the meeting?
7. What suggestions would you give to the school to increase the participation of the parents at the meetings with the problem-solving team?
8. What is the best way to ensure that parents attend the meeting?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

## Preguntas para Padres de Familia

1. Dígame sobre su hijo/a.
  - a. ¿Cómo le va en la escuela?
2. ¿Cómo le informa la escuela sobre el progreso académico de su hijo/a?
3. Usted participó en una reunión del Equipo de Resolución de los Problemas. ¿Por qué decidió asistir a la reunión? ¿Cuál es su conocimiento sobre el propósito de la reunión a la que usted asistió?
4. Dígame cuál fue su participación en la reunión.
  - a. ¿Se le solicitó alguna información?
  - b. ¿Se le solicitó expresar sus preocupaciones y/o sus opinión en cuanto al problema?
5. ¿Cuál fue el resultado de la reunión?
  - a. ¿Se hicieron recomendaciones para abordar el problema? Por ejemplo, ¿programas especiales de lectura o clases particulares?
  - b. ¿Se le solicitó ayudar a su hijo/a en casa?
  - c. ¿Se le recomendó algún recurso en la comunidad o visitar a un doctor?
6. ¿Cuál fue su impresión de la reunión?
  - a. ¿Se abordaron sus preocupaciones?
  - b. ¿Quedó satisfecho/a con los resultados de la reunión? Si no, ¿cómo se podría mejorar?
7. En su opinión, ¿tuvieron éxito las recomendaciones Equipo de Resolución de los Problemas?
  - a. Ahora, ¿le va bien a su hijo/a en la escuela? ¿A qué se debe?
  - b. Si persisten las dificultades, ¿qué recomendación le da usted?
8. Desde que usted participó en la reunión, ¿se ha reunido Equipo de Resolución de los Problemas de nuevo para evaluar el progreso de su hijo/a?
  - a. ¿se ha reunido usted con el maestro/a de su hijo/a para discutir su progreso académico?
9. ¿Qué consejos le daría al personal de la escuela para aumentar la participación/asistencia de los padres a las reuniones del Equipo de Resolución de los Problemas?
10. ¿Le gustaría agregar algo más?

### **Preguntas Actuales para Padres de Familia**

1. Dígame sobre su hijo/a.
  - a. ¿Cómo le va en la escuela?
2. ¿Cómo le va a su hijo/a este año escolar?
3. ¿Cómo se siente usted sobre el progreso académico que ha hecho su hijo/a?
4. ¿Cómo le informa la escuela del progreso académico de su hijo/a?
5. ¿Fue notificado usted sobre el equipo de resolución de los problemas de su hijo/a?
6. ¿Cómo quisiera usted ser avisado sobre la reunión?
7. ¿Qué sugerencias daría usted a la escuela para aumentar la participación de los padres en las reuniones con el equipo de resolución de los problemas?
8. ¿Qué consejos le daría al personal de la escuela para aumentar la participación/asistencia de los padres a las reuniones del Equipo de Resolución de los Problemas?
9. ¿Cuál es la mejor manera para asegurar que los padres asisten a la reunión?
10. ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría añadir?

## Appendix E

### Content Analysis Categories and Codes

#### Student's Personal Information

# of siblings @ school  
Sibling's academic performance  
Hearing & vision  
Uses glasses?  
Medication  
Attendance  
Age at time of meeting

#### Assessment Data- Reading/Math

EDL Score: Past  
EDL Score: Current  
S EDL Goal  
EDL Goal EOY  
TPRI: Past  
TPRI: Present  
Other Reading Scores  
Math Testing Data

#### Student In-School Descriptors

Student Behavior  
Student Emotional Development  
Student personality characteristics  
per Teacher  
Student personality characteristics  
per Others  
Student effort  
Student language preference  
Previous School(s)  
Identified Disabilities

#### Goals & Progress Monitoring

Description of Progress Monitoring  
Modifications  
Strategies & Accommodations  
Used  
Future or Past Retention  
PST Meeting Outcomes/  
Recommendations

#### Performance data

Performance data from other  
teachers  
Performance Difficulties

#### Language Information

Language at home  
Language of instruction  
Language proficiency: Eng  
Language proficiency: Span  
Language spoken by Parent(s)  
Language spoken by sibling

#### Home/Parent Information

Homework: Assistance  
Homework: Completion  
Homework: Condition  
Homework: Parent assistance  
Homework: St. ability to do it  
Homework: Parent evaluation of  
child's ability  
Parental Input  
Parental Contact by Admin  
Parental Contact by Teacher

#### Other Services

Other services rec'd: in-school  
Other services rec'd: out of school

#### Miscellaneous

Family's work or business

## Appendix F

### Discourse Analysis Categories and Codes

#### Binaries

#### Content Information

#### Content Information Teacher Doesn't Have

#### Data Asked>AP

#### Data Asked>Other

<b>Discourses</b>	Discourses>Vocabulary Discourses>Vocabulary Phrase
<b>Genre</b>	Genre>Agreement_Disagreement Genre>Topic Control-AP Genre>Topic Control-Other Genre>Topic Control-Teacher Genre> Topic Switch Genre>Turn Taking
<b>Intertextuality</b>	Intertextuality>Online Database Intertextuality>Previous Conversation Intertextuality>Previous Knowledge Intertextuality>Test Data
<b>Knowledge of BE or SLA</b>	
<b>No Discourse/Pauses</b>	
<b>Positioning</b>	Positioning>Leader Positioning>Expert/Knowledgeable
<b>Styles</b>	Styles>Commitment to Message Styles>Modals Styles>No Subject Styles>Pronouns Styles>Transitivity Styles>Voice-Active/Passive

## Appendix G

### Interview Analysis Categories and Codes

#### Background

Name (Pseudonym)  
Position  
College  
    Major  
    Minor  
Graduate work  
Teaching credentials  
Positions held  
Years in education  
Years as teacher  
Years in current position  
School districts  
ELL specialized knowledge  
    necessary?  
Why?/Why not?

#### RTI

What is RTI?  
How does it work at Cotton Tree?  
Challenges?  
What impact is RTI making?  
How does RTI work with ELLs?  
Useful info to determine disability  
    in ELLs.

#### Other Information

#### Problem-Solving Team

Responsibilities of PST  
Critique of PST  
Other members' responsibilities  
Responsibilities on team  
Role  
How team meets responsibilities  
Successful? Why or why not?  
How team functions when student  
    ELL?  
Is process different from non-ELL?

#### Student Referral to PST

Summary of case  
Why referred student to PST?  
What are main issues?  
What have you tried and for how  
    long?  
Have you been able to rule anything  
    out? What?  
What do you expect from PST  
    regarding students?

## References

- Artiles, A., Rueda, R., Salazar, J. & Higareda, I. (2005). Within-group diversity in minority disproportionate representation: English language learners in urban school districts. *Exceptional Children*, 71(3), 283-300.
- Artiles, A., & Trent, S. (1994). Overrepresentation of minority students in special education: A continuing debate. *The Journal of Special Education*, 27(4), 410-417.
- Artiles, A., & Trent, S. C. (2000). Representation of culturally/linguistically diverse students. In C. R. Reynolds, & E. Fletcher-Jantzen (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of special education, Vol. I* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 513-517). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Artiles, A., Trent, S., Kuan, L.-A. (1997). Learning disabilities empirical research on ethnic minority students: An analysis of 22 years of studies published in selected refereed journals. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 12(2), 82-91.
- Artiles, A. J., Trent, S. C., & Palmer, J. D. (2004). Culturally diverse students in special education: Legacies and prospects. In J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 716-735). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Aud, S., Hussar, W., Kena, G., Bianco, K., Frohlich, L., Kemp, J., & Tahan, K. (2011). *The condition of education 2011* (NCES 2011-033). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- August, D., & Hakuta, K. (Eds.). (1997). *Improving schooling for language-minority children: A research agenda*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

- Beaver, J., & Carter, M. (2009). *Developmental reading assessment—2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Blank, M., & Berg, A. (2006). All together now: Sharing responsibility for the whole child. Washington, DC : Institute for Educational Leadership. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/sharingresponsibility.pdf>
- Brayboy, B. J. M., Castagno, A. E., & Maughan, E. (2007). Equality and justice for all? Examining race in education scholarship. *Review of Research in Education, 31*, 159-194.
- Buck, G. W., Polloway, E. A., Smith-Thomas, A., & Cook, K. W. (2003). Prereferral intervention processes: A survey of State Practices. *Exceptional Children, 69*(3), 349-361.
- Burns, M. K., & Ysseldyke, J. E. (2005). Comparison of existing Response-to-Intervention models to identify and answer implementation questions. *The California School Psychologist, 10*, 9-20.
- Chalfant, J., Psyh, M., & Moultrie, R. (1979). Teacher assistance teams: A model for within building problem solving. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 2*, 85-96.
- Chan, T. C., & Jarman, D. (2004). Departmentalize elementary schools. *Principal, 84*(1); 70-72.
- Civil Rights Act of 1964. Pub. L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: SAGE Publications.
- CTB/McGraw-Hill. (2006). *Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links*. Monterey, CA: Author.

- Cummins, J. (1979). Cognitive/academic language proficiency, linguistic interdependence, the optimum age question and some other matters. *Working Papers on Bilingualism, 19*, 121-129.
- Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1997). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal of Social Behaviour, 20*(1), 43-63.
- Deno, E. (1970). Special education as developmental capital. *Exceptional Children, 37*, 229-237.
- Diana v. State Board of Education, Civ. Act. No. C-70-37 (N. D. Cal., 1970, *Further order*, 1973).
- Donovan, M. S., & Cross, C. T. (2002). *Minority students in special and gifted education*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Dunn, L. M. (1968). Special education for the mildly retarded: Is much of it justifiable? *Exceptional Children, 35*, 5-22.
- Durán, R. P. (2008). Assessing English-language learners' achievement. *Review of Research in Education, 32*, 292-327.
- Easton, F. (1997). Educating the whole child, "Head, Heart, and Hands": Learning from the Waldorf experience. *Theory into Practice, 36*(2), 87-94.
- Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Pub. L. No. 94-142.
- Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 107-110.
- Esparza Brown, J., & Doolittle, J. (2008). A cultural, linguistic, and ecological framework for Response to Intervention with English language learners. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 40*(5), 66-72.
- Fairclough, N. (1992). Intertextuality in critical discourse analysis. *Linguistics and Education, 6*(3-4), 269-293.

- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Essex, England: Pearson Education.
- Figueroa, R. A., & Newsome, P. (2006). The diagnosis of LD in English learners: Is it Nondiscriminatory? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39*(2), 206-214.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Random House.
- Fuchs, D., & Deshler, D. D. (2007). What we need to know about Responsiveness to Intervention (and shouldn't be afraid to ask). *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 22*(2), 129-136.
- Fuchs, D., & Fuchs, L. (2006). Introduction to Response to Intervention: What, what, and how valid is it? *New Directions in Research, 41*(1), 93-99.
- Fuchs, D., Mock, D., Morgan, P. L., & Young, C. L. (2003). Responsiveness-to-Intervention: Definitions, evidence, and implications for the learning disabilities construct. *Learning Disabilities, Research, & Practice, 18*(3), 157-171.
- García, S. B., & Ortiz, A. A. (1988). *Preventing inappropriate referrals of language minority students to special education*. Silver Spring, MD: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.
- García, S. B., & Ortiz, A. A. (2006). *Preventing disproportionate representation: Culturally and linguistically responsive prereferral intervention*. Denver, CO: National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCREST). Retrieved from <http://www.nccrest.org>
- García, S. B., & Ortiz, A. A. (2008). A framework for culturally and linguistically responsive design of Response-to-Intervention models. *Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners, 11*(1), 24-41.

- García, S. B., Wilkinson, C. T., & Ortiz, A. A. (1995). Enhancing achievement for language minority students: Classroom, school and family contexts. *Education and Urban Society*, 26(1), 52-58.
- Gee, J. P. (1989). Literacy, discourse, and linguistics: Introduction. *Journal of Education*, 17(1), 5-17.
- Gee, J. P. (1996). *Social linguistics and literacies: Ideology in discourses*. London: Falmer Press.
- Geva, E. (2002). Issues in the assessment of reading disabilities in L2 children—Beliefs and research evidence. *Dyslexia*, 6, 13-28.
- Gómez, L. (2000). Two-way bilingual education: Promoting educational and social change. *The Journal of the Texas Association for Bilingual Education*, 5(1), 43–54.
- Gómez, L., Freeman, D., & Freeman, Y. (2005). Dual language education: A promising 50-50 model. *Bilingual Research Journal: The Journal of the National Association for Bilingual Education*. 29(1), 145-164. doi: 10.1080/15235882.2005.10162828
- Gravois, T. A., & Rosenfield, S. A. (2006). Impact of instructional consultation teams on the disproportionate referral and placement of minority students in special education. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27(1), 42-52.
- Gutkin, T. B., & Nemeth, C. (1997). Selected factors impacting decision making in preferral intervention and other school-based teams: Exploring the intersection between school and social psychology. *Journal of School Psychology*, 35(2), 195-216.
- Halliday, M. A., K. (1978). *Language as social semiotic: The social interpretation of language and meaning*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.

- Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2006). *Why are so many minority students in special education?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Healy, K., Vanderwood, M., & Edelman, D. (2005). Early literacy interventions for English language learners: Support for an RTI model. *The California School Psychologist, 10*, 55-64.
- Heller, K. A., Holtzman, W. H., Messick, S. (Eds.) (1982). *Placing Children in Special Education: Equity Through Valid Educational Practices*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Hui, Y. (2005). General education teachers' perceptions of Asian American students: Implications for special education (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.
- Howard, E., Sugarman, J., Christian, D. (2003). *Trends in two-way immersion education: A review of the research*. (No. 63). Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997, Pub. L. No. 105-17, 20 U.S.C. Chapter 33 (1997).
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-446, U.S.C. §1400 et seq. (2004).
- Jawarski, A. (1998). Pidgins and creoles. In K. Johnson & H. Johnson (Eds.). *The encyclopedic dictionary of applied linguistics: A handbook for language teaching*. (p. 248). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Johnstone, B. (2008). *Discourse analysis* (2nd edition). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Kalyanpur, M., & Harry, B. (1999). Culture in special education: Building reciprocal family-professional relationships. Baltimore, MD: Paul. H. Brookes.

- Kavale, K. A. (2005). Identifying Specific Learning Disability: Is Responsiveness to Intervention the answer? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 38*(6), 553-562.
- Klingner, J. K., Artiles, A. J., & Méndez Barletta, L. M. (2006). English language learners who struggle with reading: Language acquisition or LD? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 39*(2), 108-128.
- Klingner, J. K., & Edwards, P. (2006). Cultural considerations with Response to Intervention models. *Reading Research Quarterly, 41*, 108-117.
- Knotek, S. (2003). Bias in problem solving and the social process of student study teams. *The Journal of Special Education, 37*(1), 2-14.
- Kovaleski, J. F., Gickling, E. E., Morrow, H., & Swank, P. R. (1999). High versus low implementation of instructional support teams: A case for maintaining program fidelity. *Remedial and Special Education, 20*, 170–183.
- Kovaleski, J. F., Tucker, J. A., & Stevens, L. J. (1996). Bridging special and regular education: The Pennsylvania initiative. *Educational Leadership, 53*, 44– 47.
- Limbos, M. M., & Geva, E. (2001). Accuracy of teacher assessments of second-language students at risk for reading disability. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 34*(2) 136-151.
- Linan-Thompson, S., & Ortiz, A. A. (2009). Response to Intervention and English-language learners: Instructional and assessment considerations. *Seminars in Speech and Language, 30*(2), 105-120.
- Lindholm-Leary, K. J. (2001). *Dual language education: Bilingual education and bilingualism*. Toanawanda, NY: Multilingual Matters.
- Marston, D., Muyskens, P., Lau, M., & Canter, A. (2003). Problem-solving model for decision making with high-incidence disabilities: The Minneapolis Experience. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 18*(3), 187-200.

- Martinez, C. (2006). Pre-referral interventions for English language learners, (Unpublished doctoral dissertation.) The University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX.
- McCardle, P., Mele-McCarthy, J., Cutting, L., Leos, K., & D’Emilio, T. (2005). Learning disabilities in English language learners: Identifying the issues. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 20(1), 1-5.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & González, N. (1992). Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.
- National Center for Education Statistics (2011). The nation’s report card: Reading 2011 (NCES 2012–457). Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.
- Noddings, N. (2005). What does it mean to educate the whole child? *Educational Leadership*, 63(1), 8-13.
- Ochoa, S. H., Rivera, B. D., & Powell, M. P. (1997). Factors used to comply with the exclusionary clause with bilingual and limited-English-proficient pupils: Initial Guidelines. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 12(3), 161-167.
- Ochs, E. (1999). Transcription as theory. In A. Jaworski & N. Coupland (Eds.), *The discourse reader* (pp. 167 - 182). New York: Routledge.
- Office of Special Education Programs. Results-Driven Accountability in Special Education Summary—4-5-12. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/rda-summary.doc>

- Orosco, M., Almanza de Schonewise, E., de Onis, C., Klingner, J., & Hoover, J. (2008). Distinguishing between language acquisition and learning disabilities among English language learners. J. K. Klingner, J. J. Hoover, and L. M. Baca (Eds.), *Why do English language learners struggle with reading?* (pp. 5-16). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Orosco, M. J., & Klingner, J. (2010). One school's implementation of RTI with English language learners: "Referring into RTI." *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 43*(3), 269-288.
- Ortiz, A. A. (1997). Learning disabilities occurring concomitantly with linguistic differences. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 30*(3), 321-332.
- Ortiz, A. A. (2002). Prevention of school failure and early intervention for English language learners. In A. J. Artiles & A. A. Ortiz (Eds.), *English language learners with special education needs: Identification, Assessment, and Instruction* (pp. 31-48). Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.
- Ortiz, A. A., Wilkinson, C. Y., Robertson-Courtney, P. & Kushner, M. I. (2006). Considerations in implementing intervention assistance teams to support English language learners. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*(1), 53-63.
- Papalia-Berardi, A., & Hall, T. E. (2007). Teacher assistance team social validity: A perspective from general educators. *Education & Treatment of Children, 30*(2), 89-110.
- Patton, J. M. (1998). The disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education: Looking behind the curtain for understanding and solutions. *The Journal of Special Education, 32*(1), 25-31.

- Poon-McBrayer, K. F., & García, S. B. (2000). Profiles of Asian American students with LD at initial referral, assessment, and placement in special education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 33*(1), 61-71.
- Powers, K. M. (2001). Problem solving student support teams. *The California School Psychologist, 6*, 19-30.
- Product QuickFacts (n.d.) *LAS Links Assessment for English Language Learners*. Retrieved from <http://www.ctb.com/ctb.com/control/ctbProductViewAction?productFamilyId=454&productId=780&p=products>
- Pugach, M. (2001). The stories we choose to tell: Fulfilling the promise of qualitative research for special education. *Exceptional Children, 67*(4), 439-453.
- Rhodes, R. L., Ochoa, S. H., & Ortiz, S. O. (2005). *Assessing culturally and linguistically diverse students: A practical guide*. New York: Guilford.
- Richards, J. C., Platt, J., & Platt, H. (1992). *Dictionary of language teaching & applied linguistics*. Essex, England: Longman Group.
- Rogers, R. (2002). Through the eyes of the institution: A critical discourse analysis of decision making in two special education meetings. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 33*(2), 213-237.
- Rosenberg, M. S., Westling, D. L., & McLeskey, J. (2011). *Special education for today's teachers: An introduction* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
- Rueda, R., Artiles, A. J., Salazar, J., & Higuera, I. (2002). An analysis of special education as a response to the diminished academic achievement of Chicano/Latino students: An update. In R. R. Valencia (Ed.), *Chicano school failure and success: Past, present, and future* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 310-332). London: Routledge/Palmer.

- Ruiz, H. (1984). Orientations in language planning. *National Association for Bilingual Education Journal*, 8(2) 15-34.
- Ruiz, O., & Machado Cuesta, V. (2006). *Evaluación del desarrollo de la lectura*. (2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed.). Parsipanny, NJ: Celebration Press.
- Sample TPRI Criteria for Placement in Tier 2. (2013). *TPRI Early Reading Assessment: Resources*. Texas Education Agency/The University of Texas System. Retrieved from <http://www.tpri.org/resources/teachers-resources.html>
- Samson, J. F., & Lesaux, N. K. (2009). Language-minority learners in special education. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 42(2), 148-162.
- Sarup, M. (1993). *An introduction guide to post-structuralism and postmodernism*. (2nd edition). Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.
- Tung, R., Uriarte, M., Diez, V., Lavan, N., Agusti, N., Karp, F., & Meschede, T. (2009). English learners in Boston public schools: Enrollment, engagement and academic outcomes, AY2003-AY2006. Boston: Mauricio Gastón Institute, University of Massachusetts, Boston.
- Sharpe, M. N. (1998). *Disproportionate representation of minorities in special education: A focus group study of professional and parent perspectives. Final Report III: Asian Americans*. St. Paul: Minnesota State Department of Children, Families, and Learning.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Sullivan, A. L. (2011). Disproportionality in special education identification and placement of English language learners. *Exceptional Children*, 77(3), 317-334.
- The State Chart. (2010). In *National Center on Response to Intervention: RTI State Database*. Retrieved from [http://state.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com\\_chart](http://state.rti4success.org/index.php?option=com_chart)

- Texas Education Agency. (2007-2012). *Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System*. Austin, TX: Author.
- Texas Education Agency. (2012). *State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness*.
- Texas Education Code §28.006 (2006).
- Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System: Manual for raters and test administrators grades K–12*. (2013). Austin, TX: Texas Education Agency. Retrieved from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/student.assessment/ell/telpas/>
- TPRI Resources (2013). TPRI Early Ready Assessment Resources: Researcher's Resources. Retrieved from <http://www.tpri.org/resources/researchers-resources.html#>
- University of Texas System and Texas Education Agency. (2010–2014). *Tejas LEE*. Austin, TX: Texas Reading Instruments.
- University of Texas System and Texas Education Agency. (2010–2014). *Texas Primary Reading Inventory*. Austin, TX: Texas Reading Instruments.
- U.S. Const. amend. XIV.
- U.S. Department of Education, & National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. (2003). *National symposium on learning disabilities in English language learners*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2009 Reading Assessment. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>
- Van Langenhovem, L. & Harré, R. (1998). Introducing positioning theory. In R. Harré & L. van Langenhove, (Eds.), *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of international action* (1st ed.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Vaughn, S., & Fuchs, L. S. (2003). Redefining learning disabilities as inadequate response to instruction: The promise and potential problems. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice, 18*(3), 137-146.
- Xu, Y., & Drame, E. (2008). Culturally appropriate context: Unlocking the potential of Response to Intervention for English language learners. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*, 305-311.
- Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ysseldyke, J. E., & Algozzine, B. (1983). LD or not LD: That's not the question! *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 16*(1), 29-31.
- Zehler, A. M., Fleischman, H. L., Hopstock, P. J., Pendzick, M. L., & Stephenson, T. G. (2003). *Descriptive study of services to LEP students and LEP students with disabilities: Findings on special education LEP students* [Special Topic Report 4]. Washington, DC: Development Associates. Retrieved from [http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/rcd/BE021199/special\\_ed4.pdf](http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/files/rcd/BE021199/special_ed4.pdf)
- Zigler, E. F., & Bishop-Josef, S. J., (2006). The cognitive child versus the whole child: Lessons from 40 Years of Head Start. Singer, D. G., Michnick Golinkoff, R., & Hirsh-Pasek, K. (Eds.), *play = learning: How play motivates and enhances children's cognitive and social-emotional growth*. New York: Oxford University Press.