Teacher Educators: Addressing the Needs of All Learners

by

Ellen Cook

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

Joint Doctor of Philosophy
with San Francisco State University

in

Special Education
in the

Graduate Division
of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Judith W. Little, Chair
Professor Susan Courey
Professor Susan I. Stone

Summer 2017
Abstract

Teacher Educators: Addressing the Needs of All Learners

by

Ellen Cook

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Judith Warren Little, Chair

This qualitative dissertation examines how teacher preparation programs take up policy messages from two state agencies. These questions guided the study: 1) What are the messages about RTI and MTSS from the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; and, 2) How are RTI and MTSS taken up by preparation programs and understood by teacher educators? The research sites were two large public universities in urban areas in California with general and special education teacher preparation programs. Data was obtained from the websites of the CDE and CCTC, interviews with teacher educators, and preparation program materials.

Findings support that the CDE is the major proponent of RtI and MTSS but lacks the regulatory power to impact teacher preparation. While the CCTC did have regulatory authority over teacher preparation its guidelines were written in broad language and did not require that programs include specific practices necessary to implement RtI and MTSS. Without this regulatory press incorporation of RtI and MTSS was at the discretion of faculty. Special education was the source of knowledge about RtI and MTSS despite the fact that the CDE clearly situates these practices in general education. General education teacher educators were ambivalent about RtI and MTSS and were reluctant to sacrifice precious time during initial preparation to these topics.

These findings have implications for policy makers, teacher educators, and research on policy implementation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: Methodology</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Policy Messages from State Agencies</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4: Teacher Educators and the Interpretation and Implementation of RtI and MTSS</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Conclusion</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the amazing people who supported me during the odyssey that has been my dissertation. I was lucky to not only have a village, but an entire metropolitan area to encourage me along this very long way.

Thank you to Professor Sue Corey for her knowledge of special education and passion for improving the lives of students with special needs by preparing great teachers. She is a seemingly inexhaustible resource for all things special education and is a true inspiration. When filing this work seemed so far away she was always there. Her pragmatism, optimistic outlook, and Philadelphia humor always made me laugh and keep going. Thank you.

Thank you to Professor Judith Warren Little who was invaluable in taking this teacher, firmly rooted in the classroom, and turning her, kicking and screaming, into a teacher-scholar. She challenged my thinking and demanded that my analysis be worthy of my passion for special education. Her classes in qualitative research provided me with tools to ask questions when numbers could not tell the whole story. Thank you.

Thank you to Professor Cynthia Coburn who provided me the tools to explain the workings of the qualitative information I gathered. Her class in organizational theory and policy implementation research group were a revelation. I was so fortunate to have had the opportunity to be learn from Dr. Coburn. Thank you.

I appreciated the opportunity to have started my doctoral journey with Professor Pam LePage coordinating the Combined Credential Program at SFSU. I am grateful for the support from SFSU especially, Professors Marci Hanson, Nick Certo, and Phyllis Tappe. Their belief that I had something valuable to contribute to the field of special education was an impetus for me to continue. Thank you.

I also want to acknowledge the contribution from Professor Stone and her willingness to sit on my committee. She was so gracious in stepping in and making time in her busy schedule to review my work. Thank you.

When at times I found myself stuck, Andrew Galpern was very generous in guiding me through the analysis of my data to complete a required quantitative position paper. He cajoled me, humored me, nuded me, and just wouldn’t let me quit. I will be forever grateful that Andrew ignored whatever statute of limitations there might be on TA-ing and continued to be willing to help me. That position paper seemed insurmountable, but with Andrew’s patience and persistence, I completed it. That was a turning point in my program. Anything seemed doable after that. Thank you.

I could not have completed this work without the love and encouragement of my family and friends. They were so patient and sensitive when asking that question, “How are things going?” I so appreciated their interest in my work (even if it was feigned; I was so taken in by my current theory that it was often easy to overlook their glazed looks as I continued talking.). My children, Walt and Claire; I am so glad that my plan to wait until
my children were adults to become a doctoral student worked out so well. Thank you. It is hard to express in words the bedrock that my husband, Walt, has been throughout my journey. I couldn’t have done it without him. Thank you.

Finally, without participants, there is no data, and without data, no research. I am indebted to the many teacher educators who shared the challenges and joys they face in preparing California’s teachers. I hope that this research brings attention to the important work that you do each and every day; your contributions so often go unrecognized, yet there is no school without teachers. Thank you, thank you, and thank you.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Teachers today are expected to utilize scarce resources to work with an increasingly diverse and challenging student population for whom academic achievement is often elusive (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015). General education teachers enter classrooms to find children who are linguistically, culturally, and ethnically diverse, may live in economic insecurity, and are likely to be English language learners (Goldrick, Sindelar, Aabala, & Hirsch, 2014). In addition, teachers must meet the needs of students with special needs in their classrooms as states comply with federal mandates to provide the least restrictive placements for students with identified special education needs (LRE; Zirkel, 1996).

Intensified focus on standardized tests of student achievement to measure educational effectiveness compounds the pressure on teachers to provide instruction that is effective for a broad spectrum of learners. Yet students with learning disabilities who receive special education services seldom regain academic ground when compared to their general education classmates and are less likely to graduate from high school (Office of Special Education Programs, 2013). Research also finds that 70% of juveniles arrested were at one time in the special education system (Office of Special Education Programs, 2013). It is vitally important for students to remain in general education classrooms if at all possible.

The Response to Intervention (RtI) model, originally introduced as part of the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA, 2004) has gained widespread acceptance across the United States as a way to restructure instruction to address these challenges (Robinson, 2016). RtI, embedded within a Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS), is aimed at increasing student achievement, decreasing special education referrals, and reducing expenditures on special education.

The RtI model requires that teachers be adequately prepared to implement it. Yet teacher education programs are not preparing enough new educators ready to address the large number of students in general education classrooms with educational and social challenges (Crowe, 2010; National Research Council, 2010). General education teachers report an inability to adequately instruct students who struggle, teach diverse students, or implement RtI in the classroom (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009). Preparation programs have not been successful in providing new teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to implement RtI and to participate in a system of support services, such as MTSS (Barrio, Lindo, Combes, & Hovey, 2015).

The purpose of this study is to explore how general and special education preparation programs and teacher educators understand and integrate policy messages from state agencies about RtI/MTSS information into the preparation of new teachers.
General education preparation programs that prepare candidates for a multiple subject teaching credential and special education programs that prepare candidates for a mild to moderate educational specialist credential are the focus of this research. This work answers two questions: (1) What are the state’s policy message about RtI/MTSS; and (2) How are those policy messages understood, interpreted, and taken up by university programs of teacher education and individual teacher educators. Describing how teacher educators translate policy messages into practice illuminates the complexity of implementing policy and examines the role that teacher educators have in enacting educational reforms. Currently, it is unclear how teacher educators understand RtI/MTSS and how they share their understanding when preparing preservice teachers.

From Special Classes to Response-to-Intervention

*Between me and the other world there is ever an unasked question,*
*“How does it feel to be a problem?”*

--W.E.B. DuBois, “Strivings of the Negro People”

Dubois’ words, while meant to describe the outcast status of African-Americans in the United States, are easily applicable to “children who are difficult to teach and often at the same time troublesome to manage” (Franklin, 1994). RtI is an educational system to address the underperformance of those children to whom Franklin refers. Changing demographics, societal shifts, and legal incentives have made broadening the academic reach of general education classrooms imperative, as just discussed. RtI, with its roots in special education, has grown into a system in which schools structure resources, academic and behavioral, to support the success of every student. The purpose of this dissertation is to discover how general and special education teacher educators prepare new teachers to implement RtI and MTSS.

Universal Schooling to Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Since the enactment of universal schooling in the last century educators have searched for a way in which to educate students who are not easy to teach without disrupting the academic advancement of their normally developing peers (Semmel & Gerber, 1994). Initially these difficult to teach students were taught in special classes often with categorical designations. These classes were assumed to provide students with, “low-teacher pupil ratios, specially trained teachers, greater individualization of instruction in a homogeneous classroom, and an increased emphasis on social and vocational goals” (Johnson, 1962).

Special education was envisioned as separate classes and this was accepted practice until larger societal changes occurred in the late 1960s. These societal shifts were reflected in an influential paper written by Lloyd Dunn (1968). To understand the impact of this article, you must appreciate the standing of its author. Lloyd Dunn received his Ph.D. from the University of Illinois and became a pioneer in the area of developmental disabilities and creating special education as it was in the 1960s. As Chair of the Special Education department at Vanderbilt University’s Peabody College of Education (1953-
1967) he created several well-known standardized assessment tools, including the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, which is still in use today. He continued his career at the University of Hawaii (1967-1997) and served for several years as the president of the Council for Exceptional Children, the national professional organization for special education.

Dunn cast doubt onto the efficacy of separate classrooms and in doing so, brought into question their continued use in special education. With the social maelstrom of the 1960s as a backdrop, his argument resonated with the push for desegregation and society’s enhanced awareness of all forms of discrimination (Semmel, et al., 1994). Dunn contended that there wasn’t research to support the supposed benefit to students educated in separate placements. He argued for “less restrictive placement” (Dunn, 1968). While in retrospect, Dunn’s argument “lacked scholarly rigor” (MacMillan, 1971). The doubts regarding the status quo in special education raised in the article were the catalysts for others. Several pieces were published following the Dunn article and joined with Dunn in supporting disbanding special classes (Christopolos & Valletutti, 1972; Lilly, 1970). Articles attempting to insert an empirical analysis of the efficacy of special class placements into the debate (student outcomes were mixed) were largely ignored (Goldstein, 1967; Guskin & Spicker, 1968; Kirk, 1964).

These exchanges moved the emphasis in special education from the child to the program. This occurred even though effective teaching methods for students with special needs, at the time, were still uncertain no matter where the instructional setting (Kavale & Forness, 2000). The essence of special education and its separateness became the focus of change (Semmel, et al., 1994). This dispute about special education as separate from general education was incorporated into the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975; Now IDEA) that required, “that students with disabilities be provided an appropriate education designed to meet their unique needs in the least restrictive environment” (LRE; Kavale, et al, 2000). It also stipulated that, “students with disabilities are to be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with peers without disabilities (Mainstreamed)” (Kavale, et al, 2000).

Mainstreaming proved problematic to put into practice as the legal definition concentrated on the abstract goal. The language in the law required placing a student in a separate school or placement “only when the nature or severity of their disabilities were such that they could not receive an appropriate education in a general education classroom with supplementary aids and services” (Kavale, et al, 2000; Kaufman, Agard, & Semmel, 1986). Schools were obligated to present a range of educational placement options as characterized by the “Cascade model” (Deno, 1970; Reynolds, 1962). In this model, in the shape of an inverted pyramid, students were initially placed in general education classrooms, the least restrictive environment to the most restricted in a hospital or institution. Deno envisioned the student as possessing “developmental capital” that would grow if the student was appropriately placed with suitable supports. In the 1970s and 1980s this model of special education services was successful in providing the structure for enacting special education (Brown-Chidsey, Seppala & Segura, 2000). The Cascade model proved inadequate to address the unexpected rise in students with
learning disabilities beginning in the late 1980s (McBride, Dumont, & Willis, 2004; Ysseldyke, 2005).

To deal with the precipitous increase in students in special education with learning disabilities that began in the 1980s, the regular education initiative, or REI, program was proposed. It intended to intensify educational supports to students as a way to reduce referrals to special education.

The REI was based on the following assumptions: Students are more alike than different,

so truly “special” instruction is not required; good teachers can teach all students; all students can be provided with a quality education without reference to traditional special education categories; general education classrooms can manage all students without any segregation; and physically separate education was inherently discriminatory and inequitable. (Kavale, et al, 2000).

The ultimate goal of the REI was to unify general and special education (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Will, 1986).

There was little empirical research to support REI and its continued utilization was reinforced by philosophical rationales rather than data (Bryan & Bryan, 1988; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1988; Hallahan, Keller, McKinney, Lloyd, & Bryan, 1988). Those who favored REI were deemed “naïve liberals” (Kaufman, 1989). Those who questioned REI were labeled “segregationists” (Wang & Walbeg, 1988), and articles published at the time compared special education to slavery (Stainback & Stainback, 1987) and apartheid (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987).

Even among REI supporters there was disagreement as to which students REI was intended. Some adherents were adamant that students with mild disabilities were the target group (Pugach & Lilly, 1984) and others were just as convinced that students with severe and profound disabilities belonged in general education classrooms (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). Proponents of REI believed that the education of any student outside of the general education classroom would perpetuate two educational systems and would result only in a “blending at the margins” (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). General educators stepped back from the hotly contested debate about REI within the special education community. The result of general education’s nonparticipation in REI was that it had more impact in changing special education than its intended target, general education (Kavale et al, 2000).

In practice REI did not reduce special education referrals and students receiving services through special education (D’Alonzo & Boggs, 1990; National Council on Disability, 2004). There were other criticisms of REI. There was alarm about placing students with special needs with teachers who were not prepared to teach them (Coates, 1989; Semmel & Abernathy, 1991). The violation of a student’s right to receive his or her “free appropriate education” was another concern cited (Bryan, Bay, & Donohue,
Arguments that REI was intended to justify the status quo were added as well (Drame, 2002).

“Inclusive education” closely followed REI and was another attempt to reform special education (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The aim of inclusive education was to focus on the student with disabilities and creating services appropriate to meet student needs, as opposed to the place in which those services would be provided. Unlike REI, inclusive education did not intend to reduce the number of students receiving special education services (Kavale, 2002). A large component of the inclusion movement was a rigorous review of the services that special education could provide (Salisbury, Evans, & Palombaro, 1997). This analysis found that the preparation of general education classroom teachers was inadequate to successfully implement inclusion (Murphy, 1996; Taylor & Richards, 1997). As with REI, general education teachers were committed to support students with special needs in theory. In their own classrooms, however, general education teachers did not believe they had sufficient knowledge to address the educational demands of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms (Villa & Thousand, 1996).

Labels, Attitudes, and Beliefs

Mainstreaming was predicated upon the acceptance of general education teachers agreeing to educate students with special needs in their classrooms. From the first introduction of mainstreaming general education teachers, while endorsing the idea of integration in concept, were concerned about the reality of meeting the needs of students with special needs in their classrooms (Ringlaben & Price, 1981; Stephens & Braun, 1980). When general education teachers were assured that students with special needs would not add to their teaching duties, their attitude toward integration improved markedly (Gans, 1987; Houck & Rogers, 1994).

Other research identified additional concerns that made general education teachers uneasy about integrating students with special needs into their classrooms. They believed that including students with special needs would negatively affect the academic progress of all of the students in their classes. General education teachers were also alarmed at the prospect of dealing with the social and emotional needs of students with special needs (Larrivee & Cook, 1979). A similar study focusing on the attitudes of general education teachers toward their students with special needs who were included in their classrooms was conducted almost 20 years later. Teachers had become more familiar with special education and slightly more comfortable with the inclusion of special needs in their classrooms, however, general education teachers were found to express the least sympathy toward and be most apprehensive about including students with mild mental retardation and learning disabilities in their classrooms (Wilczenski, 1993).

The reality of how a general education classroom functions also impacts integrating students with special needs (Shanker, 1995). Classroom procedures were
more important to general education teachers with instruction presented to the whole-
class,

Teachers cared about children and were conscientious about their jobs—but Their mind-set was conformity, not accommodation. In these regular education classes, any student who could not conform would likely be unsuccessful (Baker & Zigmond, 1990).

Students themselves were not enamored about receiving additional help in the general education classroom (Vaughn, Schumm & Kouzekanani, 1993) and many students noted a preference for programs that took them out of the general education classroom to provide support (Guterman, 1995).

**Classification in Special Education**

Dunn’s article was a catalyst for the inclusion movement that began in the 1960s. At that time he advocated that students with mild mental retardation move into general education classrooms (Dunn, 1968). During that same period a definition to an alternative explanation for the condition in which expected learning did not occur was taking place. The term, “minimal brain dysfunction (MBD)” came into use (Clements, 1966). It was controversial, though because,

To the educational community, MBD was closely connected with the medical model, and implied that psychologists and physicians would have to work in schools in order to make a diagnosis. (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs & Barnes, 2007).

There were some similarities to the manifestation of mental retardation and MBD, that is the child doesn’t understand instruction and is not able to learn at the same pace as his or her normally developing peers.

The underlying reason for the learning delay distinguishes MBD and MR, however. In mental retardation (the current term used is intellectual disabilities) the cause for the learning delay is expected because the child’s capacity to learn is constrained by his or her aptitude or IQ (Kavale & Forness, 2000). With MBD, now LD, the learning problem is surprising as a child is assumed to be of average intelligence and the learning issues cannot be attributed to “emotional disturbance, economic disadvantage, linguistic diversity, and inadequate instruction” (Kavale et al, 2000).

Since the 1970s research has found students with special education classifications are viewed differently by general education teachers. In one paper, general education teachers were asked to write referrals based on behavior exhibited by a student they viewed on a videotape (Foster, Schmidt, and Sabatino, 1976). The student, in fact, was not in special education and the way in which he played and participated in classroom activities were all developmentally and age appropriate. Two groups of teachers watched the tape and rated his behavior. The group that was told that he was learning disabled
filled out a survey that was much more negative than the control group of teachers who were just asked to rate the child’s behavior as a typically developing student.

General and special education teacher expectations were a significant factor in a study that focused on including special education students to a gifted and talented program (Bianco, 2005). In this research, over 200 special and general education teachers were divided into three groups and a profile of the same student. One group’s student profile included the information that the student had a learning disability. The second profile of the second group noted that the student was in special education due to an emotional/behavioral disability. The third group of teachers received the student profile without any reference to special education. The results were that 91% of teachers recommended that the student without the label participate in the gifted program. While 70% of the teachers recommended that the student with an emotional/behavioral disability should be in the gifted program. And only 63% of teachers believed that the student with the learning disability should be placed in the gifted program.

**Students with Learning Disabilities Increase**

REI and inclusion did not transform general education as special educators had anticipated. Some have attributed this intransience to the fact that effective teaching practices supported by empirical evidence were not part of either REI or inclusion. Theoretical issues were the foundation of those reforms with moral arguments made regarding the rightness in educating all students (Kavale, et al, 2000). As the debate continued, the number of students diagnosed with a learning disability increased 300% between 1976 and 2000 (Cortella, & Horowitz, 2014). In both REI and inclusion, as previously noted, little attention was given to preparing general education teachers to implement these ambitious reforms (Cummings, Atkins, Allison & Cole, 2008).

In 2000, President George W. Bush formed the President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education (PCESE) to evaluate special education. It was charged with the responsibility of using data to create a national picture of the current state of special education and to suggest improvements for increasing the efficacy of educating students with special needs. The commission’s report was published in 2002 as, *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families*. One of the key findings of the report was that cooperation between general and special education was imperative to successfully meet the needs of students with special needs.

In addition to emphasizing the necessity of collaboration between general and special education, the report brought attention to instructional methods. They recommended that schools use teaching practices that could be implemented universally and were designed to prevent academic failure. The executive summary states,

> The current system uses an antiquated model that waits for a child to fail, instead of a model based on prevention and intervention. Too little emphasis is put on prevention, early and accurate identification of learning and behavior problems and aggressive intervention using research-based approaches. This means students
with disabilities do not get help early when that help can be most effective. Special education should be for those who do not respond to strong and appropriate instruction and methods provided in general education (PCESE, 2002, p.7).

These findings from the PCESE provided the stimulus for significant changes in the law governing special education.

In 2004, when Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), findings from the PCESE were incorporated into the bill. IDEIA recommended and encouraged states to use information gathered from the Response-to-Intervention (RtI) system to identify students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Particular details on the use of RtI were included in the federal regulations for IDEIA 2004 for states to use an option to qualify a student for special education services with an SLD.

**Response to Intervention (RtI)**

RtI is a way to organize instruction around a decision-making process that systematizes instruction and tracks student progress. It is a strategy that has several goals: (1) recognition of disparities between present levels and sought after achievement; (2) creating, employing, and amending interventions; (3) aligning the level of educational demand to the strength of the intervention; and (4) using several tiers to implement interventions (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009).

Two models of RtI are in use (Reschly & Bergstrom, 2009). The primary difference between them is the methodology used to reach the RtI goals. The **problem-solving model** uses steps that address the individual student’s issues, while the **standard-protocol**, provides instruction to small groups of students using curriculum that has been acknowledged to be effective to remediate missing skills and knowledge. Both systems are valuable and are focused on addressing the existing achievement level of the students and planning for movement toward the sought after level of performance.

The RtI principles in both methods are reasonably similar, with nine unifying concepts (Reschly & Bergstrom, 2009).

1. Multiple tiers of delivering instruction and assessment are used to provide instruction (interventions) with escalating intensity and exactness of data collection. Usually the model consists of three tiers.
2. State, federal and local educational institutions have articulated the overarching academic and behavioral standards that are incorporated into the RtI system. Priorities for individual students are determined by district norms.
3. Screening all students is performed cyclically to attempt to put in place preventative supports for students who may be at-risk for future problems.
4. Determining the difference between anticipated and current functioning is the heart of RtI at all stages in the school system (individual, classroom, school and districts).

5. Curriculum and strategies used in RtI are based on research that is empirical, aligned to the requirements of the student, and employed offer an adequate time frame to allow for students to demonstrate growth.

6. Using the curriculum and strategies in RtI must be provided to students in the manner in which the curriculum and strategy was designed, that is with fidelity.

7. Assessment of student progress is vital because students respond differently to instruction. This information is used to inform instruction of the student and may lead to changing the strategy used and/or making new goals for the student.

8. Educational decisions are made using information collected during the RtI process.

9. RtI outcomes are the basis for adjusting the intervention level for students.

Four steps are followed in the problem-solving model (Alberto & Trotman, 2008). Defining the problem and assessing the present level of performance is determined first. Then a plan is created with goals and strategies to be used. The plan, agreed upon in step two is used and strategies are provided with fidelity. Finally, information on student growth that has been collected throughout the implementation is reviewed. This research focuses on the standard protocol model of RtI since that is one that the California Department of Education has endorsed.

The Standard Protocol RtI Model

The centerpiece of RtI in Tier 1 is effective general education instruction led by a qualified teacher. Assessments in Tier 1 are administered several times throughout the year to ensure that students are reaching grade level benchmarks. According to research in reading instruction using an RtI model, there are about 20-30% of students who do not meet those grade expectations. Those students are provided with added instruction in Tier 2 (Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007).

Tier 2 supports also occur in the general education classroom. Students found to be struggling during Tier 1 assessments are taught in small group with a more specialized curriculum, daily for about 20 minutes, over the course of 20 weeks. Their progress is monitored more often than in Tier 1 (Vaughn et al, 2007). The rationale for the increased tracking of students is so instruction can be adjusted based on student need and also for determining when the student meets the grade level standards. Students who meet the grade level standard leave Tier 2. This may occur before the 20-week intervention cycle. Students who do not meet grade level expectations after 20 weeks are provided with support in Tier 3 (Bradley et al, 2007).
Some districts may deem Tier 3 intervention to be special education, but this is not always the case. Services for the 2-5% of students who need Tier 3 support are provided with 60 minutes of instruction in pairs or trios, using curriculum that is designed for their particular learning needs (Vaughn et al, 2007). Tier 3 instruction usually entails students’ leaving the general education classroom for a period of time. Referrals to special education often occur for students in Tier 3 support. Depending on district policy, data collected during the RtI process may be used to qualify students for special education, though additional testing may be necessary (Bradley et al, 2007).

The benefit of an RtI model is that it provides support for students who struggle before they fall too far behind grade level standards. It provides for the majority of students to successfully progress in their learning within the general education classroom. When RtI is implemented effectively there is a decrease both in special education referrals and students qualifying for special education when the RtI model (Fuch, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003; O’Connor, 2007; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2011). Changes must occur, although “…. effective implementation of the model demands a shift in how schools “do business” and most importantly has implications for the preparation of both general and special education teachers”(Richards, Pavri, Golez, Canges, & Murphy, 2007, p.58.) The RtI model anticipates that the roles of both general and special education teachers will change.

Teacher Practice within RtI

In Tier 1 general education teachers retain their traditional role as the curriculum experts in the classroom, as either grade level or content area authorities (Haager, 2007; Murawski, 2009). However, Tier 1 in an RtI model also requires that general education teachers must systematically evaluate and provide specialized instruction for students with learning issues prior to their referral to special education (Richards et al, 2007). With the rise of the accountability movement, general education teachers are conscious of their role to provide summative assessment of student progress. However, general education teachers often view assessment of learning issues or disabilities as a function of special education (Gersten & Domino, 2006). The specialized instruction within an RtI model is tied to ongoing formative assessment of student progress.

General education teachers must know about and be able to incorporate assessment into their teaching practice in both Tiers 1 and 2 (Bradley et al, 2007). In addition, they must know about a range of assessments, such as: initial baseline testing, curriculum-based assessments, like those that would monitor sight word familiarity in early grades, and standardized assessments that might capture longer-term gains (Wixson, 2011). General education teachers must also understand which assessments are suitable throughout the RtI process (Andrion, 2005).

RtI in Tier 1 pulls special educators into the general education classroom in unprecedented ways (Brownell et al, 2010). While special education teachers are knowledgeable about a continuum of formal and informal assessments; they historically have worked with students only after they have qualified for services (Brownell, Sindelar,
Kiely, & Danielson, 2010). Testing large groups of students seems beyond the mandate of special education teachers (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007).

Tier 2 continues to blur the lines between special education and general education (Richards et al, 2007). General education teachers are wary of recognizing students needing more intensive instruction and their ability to provide it (Conderman & Jonshton-Rodriguez, 2009). They don’t feel prepared to pinpoint specialized strategies that are appropriate and present them to students with consistency and reliability in Tier 2 (Greenfield, Rinaldi, Proctor, & Cardarelli, 2010). For Tier 2 to be implemented as envisioned, general education teachers must be familiar with remedial strategies that are research-based and be willing to incorporate those practices into their grade-level or content area curriculum (Brownell et al, 2010).

Traditionally, special education teachers are not responsible for students without Individual Education Plans (IEPs; Vaughn et al. 2003). In Tier 2, the scope of the work of the special education teacher expands if the special educator is required to work with students who have not been identified as special education students (Brownell et al, 2010) but are nonetheless struggling in the classroom. The responsibilities of special education teachers who are familiar with delivering instruction that is specialized may increase as they are provide professional learning to general education teachers in Tier 2 (Hagger & Mandavi, 2007). Yet, even with support from specialists, “general educators are responsible to plan and evaluate progress in Tier 2” (Hazelkorn et al, 2011).

Students in Tier 3 will receive instruction from specialists, usually special education teachers, however, those students will spend most of the school day in general education (Richards et al, 2007). Special education teachers will teach small groups of students in Tier 3, with responsibilities traditionally associated with special education. Special education will differentiate instruction for students, monitor their progress, and analyze data much as they did before RtI (Haager et al, 2007).

The literature of teacher practice and RtI and MTSS is emerging. The majority of the studies cited in this section are conceptual articles. To determine whether or not RtI and MTSS are effective systems to support students, teachers must understand how to implement these frameworks with fidelity. Empirical research in this area is essential for the continued viability of RtI and MTSS (Arden, Gandhi, Edmonds, & Danielson, 2017).

Preparing Teachers to Work with Students with Disabilities

There has been an increasing body of research in teacher education since the 1970s when there was a demand for a discernable foundation of teacher knowledge (Gideonse, 1989). Teacher reforms have taken place at the same time nation promised to appropriately educate students with disabilities, culminating with the passage of the 1975 Education for All handicapped Children Act (IDEA). However, preparing teachers to work with students with special needs has been given little attention in teacher preparation reforms or even within special education (Blanton, Pugach, Boveda, 2014). With its research base in the fields of psychology and medicine, special education, as a
discipline, has not accumulated much knowledge about teacher education (Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010).

One study reviewed nine key teacher education reform initiatives put forth between 1986 and 1998 (Valli & Rennert-Ariev, 2000) aligning them to the recommendations made by National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future reports (NCTAF, 1996, 1997). The study found that the teacher education reform initiatives concurred that the field needed disciplinary knowledge and assessments for teaching performance. When the topic of preparing new teachers to work with students with special needs was examined the researchers found little agreement as to the manner or extent this should be incorporated into the preparation of general education teachers.

This is significant because the education of students with disabilities has been part of the national education discussion since the 1970s with the passage of IDEA. The general education teacher is considered the primary teacher for students with special needs, in addition the other students in the classroom. Federal statistics reveal that 94.9% of students with disabilities (ages 6 to 21) are educated in general education classrooms part of each school day (Office of Special Education Programs, 2013). Of those students over 60% are in general education classes in excess of 80% of the day (Office of Special Education Programs, 2013).

According to IDEA, the education of students with special needs is the mutual responsibility of general and special education teachers (MetLife Foundation, 2010). Yet general education teachers have consistently expressed feelings of inadequacy about meeting the needs of students with special needs (MetLife, 2010). General education teachers prefer to have students who are difficult to work with removed from their classrooms (Cook, 2001). They have also expressed the belief that changing class assignments or giving extra instruction to one child is unfair to others (Mercer & Mercer, 2001). The preparation of general education teachers has not included differentiating instruction (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003). Yet the teachers of the lowest performing children must be the most tenacious, skilled and responsive in their interactions with those children (Lose, 2007).

To support the success of all students and achieve the aspiration to provide all children with an appropriate public education, teachers, all teachers, must possess the understanding and qualifications to address the learning needs of diverse students (Prasse, Breunlin, Giroux, Hunt, Morrison & Their, 2012). Reports from the National Reading Panel and The National Mathematics Advisory Council detail the subject matter knowledge and pedagogy that teachers need to know to be effective in the classroom (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Teacher Preparation and RtI/MTSS

RtI research includes classroom studies, professional learning, various interventions provided across tiers, elements of specific content areas and surveys of
teacher unease. There is an emerging body of research that examines how teacher preparation programs incorporate RtI into preservice curriculum (Harvey et al., 2014; Prasse et al., 2012). The Prasse study details the process that one institution followed to incorporate RtI and MTSS into its preparation program for elementary school teachers. The study conducted by Harvey used survey data from general education (98) and special education (66) faculty in the several states in the Midwest to determine the place that RtI has in preservice teacher preparation. Results revealed that special education faculty incorporated elements of RtI into coursework more often than their general education colleagues.

An ideal teacher preparation program for both special and general education teachers to successfully implement RtI and MTSS, according to one study, would include the following practices: “…. data-based decision-making, collecting and using student progress monitoring data for instructional planning, delivering scientific-based instruction and interventions, and working collaboratively within a problem-solving framework,” (Prasse et al., 2012). While that ideal may not be possible, adding specific practices within pre-existing coursework may be an alternative. According to some in the field, preparing general educators to use assessments to monitor instruction is the biggest hurdle to implementing RtI more broadly (Bradley, 2007).

A 2011 review focused on journal articles that focused on the instructional components of teaching RtI and recognizing the progress in RtI (Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy, & Brady, 2011). The authors’ methodical evaluation of 128 articles published between 2003 and 2008 found only eight articles that were published in general education journals and six of those were found in two reading journals. Psychology, leadership, and policy journals accounted for 15 articles. The overwhelming number of articles about RtI was to be found in a dozen different special education journals, even though the first two Tiers of RtI are the primary responsibility of general educators.

The silence in general education journals regarding RtI and MTSS impacts the preparation of new general education teachers according to research. One study that surveyed newly credentialed general education teachers describes their apprehensions about their ability to effectively carry out evolving policies (such as detailed goal tracking required in IEPs) and to meet ever increasing professional demands (data collection from progress monitoring, for example) (Tillery, Vargjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010). These worries escalate when general education teachers are questioned about how prepared they believe they are to work with programs that will expand their responsibilities and tasks, such as “increased diversity in the classrooms, and instructional innovations (e.g., RTI) “ (Tillery, et al, 2010). In order to mitigate these concerns, it is necessary to provide information to teachers on such initiatives early in the reform process (Hagger & Malmberg, 2011).

My dissertation builds on the findings in these studies. It provides a deeper examination of the way in which teacher educators understand RtI and MTSS. It also explores contextual factors that may inhibit or support their decisions. While progress has been made, there are gaps in our knowledge of how teacher preparation programs and
teacher educators understand and embed knowledge of RtI and MTSS into their programs and classes. The purpose of this study is to identify messages about RtI and MTSS from state institutions and follow those messages into preparation programs and the practice of teacher educators. This research uncovers how institutional messages travel through the institutional field. Frame analysis and sensemaking, conceptual tools from organizational theory, provide a way in which understand how individuals within institutions enact policy.

**Conceptual Framework**

Policy must go through many layers before it impacts students and teachers in classrooms (Cohen & Spillane, 1992; Coburn, 2005). The literature on implementing instructional policy is overflowing with examples of the many difficulties there are in getting policy into schools and to change how teachers teach (Cohen, 1990; Cuban, 1993; Lortie, 2002; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). Implementing reforms in teaching practice is complicated and progress toward change often unclear (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Matland, 1995). Studies that investigate how teachers’ reading practice change indicate that policy can push practice, but not always in the direction that policymakers had planned or believed possible (Correnti & Rowan, 2007; Achinstein, 2006; Hoffman, 2001; Coburn, 2004). Policy infiltrates teacher education programs, just as it enters schools and classrooms. There is a critical need to investigate the role that teacher educators have in implementing educational policy.

My dissertation draws on sensemaking and framing theory to investigate the role that teacher educators have in taking up the educational reform RtI and MTSS into their practice. These theories allow me to uncover how actors within organizations employ ideas and guidelines from the environment. This research builds on an established tradition of the applying the theory of sensemaking to illuminate educational change (Coburn, 2004; Spillane, et al., 2002).

I also draw on concepts from the policy implementation literature. Mechanisms of policy implementation help me conceptualize the power that state agencies possess to make changes within the institutional environment. Earlier research involving the use of incentives to motivate reforms and those studies will help me understand whether those were variables that influenced teacher educators (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Schneider & Ingram, 1990). Research in this area that focuses on the importance of state agencies will also help address the questions that drive this study (Cohen, 1982; Furman, 1988).

The concept of organizational capacity allows me to understand how the context of these programs impacts the way in which the policy is enacted. The situation for each institution is unique and research in capacity demonstrates that successful reform is often a function of the institutional resources available, as well as the individual actors (Kirst & Buckley, 2000; Orr, 1998; Stone, 1998). These studies have involved educational reforms that were successfully enacted in some urban schools. I will be relating the concept of sensemaking to that of individual capacity, too. The variation in policy implementation demands that multiple conceptual tools are used to understand the complex undertaking, educational reform.
Together these theories allow me to analyze how the messages from state agencies about RtI and MTSS translate into teacher preparation programs. By being aware of the way in which teacher educators connect with state policy messages, I uncover how they constrain or support the implementation of RtI and MTSS. My dissertation aims to answer these questions:

1. What are the messages about RTI and MTSS from the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing?
2. How are RTI and MTSS taken up by preparation programs and understood by teacher educators?

Organization of the Dissertation

The remainder of the dissertation is organized in four chapters. Chapter 2 details the methods in the study and the conceptual framework that guides this work. Chapter 3 examines the findings from the analysis of documents about RtI and MTSS from two state agencies, the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Chapter 4 uses interview data and analysis of program documents to uncover messages about RtI and MTSS within teacher education programs. The final chapter discusses the implications of these findings for teacher educators, policy makers, and recommends areas for future research.
Chapter 2: Methodology

This study examines the role teacher educators play in implementing the educational frameworks RtI & MTSS by addressing two questions: 1) What are the policy messages about RtI & MTSS directed to educators by the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; and, 2) How are RtI and MTSS embedded into teacher preparation programs and how do teacher educators understand them? This study examines two general education teacher preparation programs that prepare candidates to receive a Multiple Subject teaching credential to work in a self-contained classroom, usually an elementary school. It also reviews two special education credential programs that prepare candidates to receive a mild-to-moderate educational specialist teaching credential. I conducted an in-depth, qualitative study of the work of the teacher educators involved in these programs (Lin, 1998). I used an exploratory approach to understand the relationships among policy, teacher education, and policy implementation.

In this chapter I lay out the research design and methodology for the study. I begin by establishing the conceptual framework that guided data collection and analysis. Then I provide an overview of the case study design and research methodology, including the reasons for the specific qualitative methods chosen and the decision rules that guided data collection and analysis. Finally I present the ethical considerations involved in this research and the limitations of the study.

Conceptual Framework

Problems, according to researchers, exist in a social context and are understood by policymakers and stakeholders within the setting in which they occur (Dobbin, Sutton, Meyer, & Scott, 1993; Dowd & Dobbin, 1997). Any definition of a problem draws attention to certain characteristics and downplays others (Weiss, 1989). The process of defining or framing a policy problem is of particular significance in because it ascribes responsibility for the problem (Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stone, 1988) and the logic that sanctions some responses by policy makers and excludes others (Benford & Snow, 2000; Moore, 1988; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Stone, 1988; Weiss, 1989). In the act of framing a problem we increase the likelihood of certain solutions and reduce the employment of others (Coburn, 2006).

RtI and MTSS reframed the problem of struggling students. The special education definition placed the problem of academic failure within the student; the child ineffectively processed information. The school-based solution to that learning problem was to produce an Individualized Education Plan, a learning blueprint unique to that particular student. RtI and MTSS reimagined that failing to learn could be attributed to a mismatch between the student and the curriculum and instruction. Reframing academic failure in that way created solutions over which schools and teachers have control, through modifications to curriculum and instruction.
Research on problem framing has often focused on the making of policy and how problems are defined and incorporated into policy by those that govern. The way in which individual actors “reconstruct” educational policy during implementation has been an area of interest to researchers for decades (Coburn, 2006; Cohen, 1990; Weatherley & Lipsky, 1977). This research examines how policy is made by, or framed, by local participants. The decisions that local actors make have a decided influence on policy implementation. Sensemaking, a theory from sociology, has been used to understand how ground-level interpretation of policy colors the way in which the policy is enacted. Sensemaking occurs when an individual uses the prism of her preexisting beliefs and experience to understand new policy. The manner in which she creates that understanding forms the approaches she will use to respond to policy in practice (Guthrie, 1990; Jennings, 1996; Spillane, 2000; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane, Reiser, Reimer, 2002).

Framing and sensemaking are the foundation of the conceptual scaffold for this study. Framing guided the data analysis of the document review of information gathered from the CDE and CCTC websites about RtI and MTSS. I established a timeline of the frames, identified the sources of the frames, and noted the “contagion” or spread of the frames as they were assigned to an increasing number of CDE’s reform initiatives. Framing was the tool I used for my initial review of documents from teacher preparation programs as well.

Sensemaking was the conceptual tool I used for the analysis of transcripts of teacher interviews. It is believed that the wisdom and experience that individuals carry with them are the filters through which they incorporate new knowledge (Rumelhart, 1980; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Research has proposed that when faced with assimilating novel policy individuals draw on understandings and beliefs they already hold (Spillane, et al, 2002). Examining the link between the policy frame from the CDE and the sensemaking of this policy by the local actors, teacher educators, is the focus of this research.

**Research Design**

Questions of policy interpretation and implementation lend themselves well to qualitative research. Qualitative research provides the tools to address “answering questions about ‘what is happening?’ and ‘why or what is happening?’” according to a report issued by the National Research Council (Shavelson & Towne, 2002, p.99). More specifically, I used nested comparative case studies that offer me the opportunity to analyze the interaction between the policy messages in the larger field of teacher education and the response of teacher educators in two similarly situated institutions.

**Case Study Approach**

The focus of this research, the uptake RtI and MTSS, was particularly suited to the case study approach,
In terms of scope, a case study is an in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. The case study approach is appropriate especially if you think the context is relevant to the phenomenon (Yin, 2009).

Context was especially relevant in this research. The implementation of RtI and MTSS challenges the signature educational practices that are often used to delineate and separate general and special education educators. I chose to use a comparative case study approach so that I could collect a variety of evidence in order to “…. compare and contrast between cases” (Yin, 2009).

Site Selection

I gathered data from two institutions that are part of a large, public university system within California, Augustus State University (ASU) and Barney State University (BSU). Both universities were subject to the same state accreditation standards from the CCTC and have access to the same policy messages from the California Department of Education, a definite advantage for my study. Further, both institutions were located in large cities and, historically, have prepared a large percentage of the teachers for the struggling, diverse, urban school districts in which they are located. ASU and BSU house teacher preparation programs that are fully accredited by the CCTC to issue multiple-subject teaching credentials and mild-to-moderate teaching credentials. In each institution, special education and general education elementary teachers (multiple-subject) are prepared in separate programs, resulting in a sample of four programs.

Collecting data from similarly situated teacher preparation programs helped minimize some institutional variables and enabled me to focus on the way in which organizational and, especially individual actors, influence policy implementation. Another advantage to the research sites was that the urban districts, in which the institutions are located, employ a large percentage of the teachers prepared at these programs. That circumstance implied to me that there might be connections between the districts and the preparation programs. I believed that, if that were the case, the influence of the districts might have an impact the state policy messages that teacher preparation programs incorporated into their preparation programs.

The teacher preparation programs at ASU and BSU are appropriate comparison cases for several reasons. Both schools prepare general and special education teachers. The institutions within which the programs reside are large public universities. All four of the programs prepare a large number of teachers each year. Since they operate within the same higher education system and state certification system they are subject to the same policy expectations and regulatory requirements.

Participants

1 Consistent with IRB approval, the names of institutions and individuals are all pseudonyms.
Once the research sites were identified and appropriate permissions obtained, I recruited teacher educators from the programs of interest. I excluded interviews with general education teachers who prepare teachers for single-subject credentials and special education faculty who prepare teachers who work with moderate-to-severe students as those groups were beyond the scope of this study. The Department Chairs and Program Coordinators for the preparation programs at ASU and BSU were helpful in recruiting participants. See a breakdown of the teacher educators who participated in this study in Table 2.1.

At ASU, the general education and special education department chairs sent out emails of introduction to their faculties. The BSU special education department chair announced my research study at a faculty meeting, alerted faculty to expect an email invitation, and encouraged faculty participation. The multiple subject department chairperson at BSU, agreed to be interviewed. The chair also identified and provided introductions to two teacher educators for me to interview. The general education teacher educators that were recommended were those who taught the sections of the reading and math classes for the special education teacher candidates.

Following up on the introductions provided by the department chairs, I emailed an overview of my research study to faculty members who meet my inclusion criteria. I also left phone messages for potential participants. After several months of recruiting at both campuses the four department chairs and seven additional faculty members agreed to be interviewed for this study and provide syllabi for the courses that they taught. See Tables 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 for details of study participants.

Table 2.1

Study Participants by Department and Institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Teacher Educators</th>
<th>Special Education Teacher Educators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSU</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three general education teacher educators participated in this study. Two participants teach at BSU and the third is a member of the faculty at ASU. Within their department each of the teacher educators has a specialty. Math is the area of concentration for two of the general education faculty, while reading and literacy is the focus of the other teacher educator (Table 2.2).
Table 2.2

*General Education Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Educator</th>
<th>Area of specialization</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eva Elliott</td>
<td>Reading &amp; Literacy</td>
<td>Barney State (BSU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran Foster</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Barney State (BSU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy Kendall</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Augustus State (ASU)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five special education teacher educators participated in this study. Three participants teach at BSU and two are part of the faculty at ASU. The special education teacher educators teach a variety of classes in their respective programs. For the purpose of this study, the interview focused on the course the participants were teaching at the time of the interview (Table 2.3).

Table 2.3

*Special Education Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Educator</th>
<th>Course taught at time of interview</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annie Adams</td>
<td>Introduction to Mild to Moderate Disabilities</td>
<td>Barney State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Bennett</td>
<td>Advanced Literacy &amp; Instruction</td>
<td>Barney State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol Connor</td>
<td>Mild to Moderate: Advanced Methods (Math)</td>
<td>Barney State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helen Harry</td>
<td>Collaboration, Co-Teaching, and Consultation for Effective Education and Transition Planning</td>
<td>Augustus State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilana Isner</td>
<td>Advanced Study of Literacy Problems &amp; Specialized Interventions</td>
<td>Augustus State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data sources**

The study relied on documentary evidence of state-level policy messages and on a combination of individual interviews and relevant documents to examine local policy interpretation and implementation. The comparison of the relative strengths and weaknesses of evidence provided by documents can be found table 2.4 (Yin, 1994).

Table 2.4

*Documents as Evidence in Qualitative Research* (Yin, 1994).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Source of evidence</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the messages about RtI and MTSS from the California Department of</td>
<td>Document review from websites</td>
<td>&quot;Stable-can be reviewed repeatedly; Unobtrusive-not created for the study; Exact-</td>
<td>&quot;Retrievability-can be low; access-may be deliberately blocked; biased selectivity, if</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policy documents

I reviewed documents from the websites of the CDE and CCTC to identify policy messages about RtI and MTSS. I intentionally chose to use only formal documents from each organization for several reasons. First, the formal communication produced by an organization, such as information from a website, are valid reflections of institutional thought, or *framing*. This is a tenet of the theory that is the foundation of the conceptual framework that guided this study. Another reason I used documents that were readily available to the public was to eliminate lack of access to knowledge about RtI or MTSS as a reason to explain the level of awareness teacher educators might have regarding RtI and MTSS. In order to eliminate the claim that additional time was necessary for teacher educators to get clarity about documents from the website by having to contact individuals at either agency, I chose to have the documents stand as the sole source of knowledge about RtI and MTSS.

Program-level documents

Course syllabi, program handbooks, and other documents of interest were collected from the four teacher preparation programs. These represent the formal communication produced by the programs reflecting their institutional thought, or *framing*, and the possible inclusion of RtI and MTSS. These documents were reviewed and coded to discern where the knowledge and skills to implement RtI and MTSS were embedded in preparation programs.

Interviews

I used semi-structured interviews of department heads and teacher educators to collect data to address my question about local policy interpretation and implementation. The use of interviews is to, “ask about that which you cannot see or can no longer see” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). It was important for teacher educators to articulate what their personal perceptions of RtI and MTSS were and how they incorporated those understandings into their practice as teacher educators. Their responses were analyzed using sensemaking theory to identify connections their responses had to the way in which the CDE and CCTC framed RtI and MTSS. A table detailing the relative weaknesses and strengths of this methodology is provided in table 2.5.
I took multiple steps to increase the effectiveness of the interview questions. First, I drafted questions following a review of relevant literature in the areas of RtI and MTSS, teacher education, and interviewing methodology. Next, I shared the protocol with experts in the fields of teacher education and RtI and MTSS for their evaluation of the instrument. The comments from those experts were incorporated into a second draft of the protocol. I used the second draft to gather pilot data from several teacher educators who were not affiliated with either of the research sites. After evaluating data from the pilot study I revised the protocol again. Interview data was collected using the final version of the protocol.

Response bias in the protocol was addressed in constructing the instrument. Initial questions to teacher educators requested a general description of how they prepared preservice teachers to meet the needs of struggling students. I asked probing questions on the general topic of supporting struggling students as follow-up queries. I did not mention RtI and MTSS unless the interviewee had not included RtI and/or MTSS in any of their responses to the more broadly posed questions. The sequence of questions on the protocol was deliberately ordered in that way to reduce response bias from participants.

I recorded all interviews and they were conducted by phone or face-to-face. The length of interviews ranged from 40 to 60 minutes. Following the interview the researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews. After transcribing interviews the researcher clarified any ambiguities with participants by phone.

Data Analysis

Documents

I obtained documents from several websites: the CDE, the CCTC, and both research sites. Teacher educators provided program documents and course syllabi directly to me as well. These documents were initially provided in electronic form. I chose to download, print, and catalogue each document. The hard copies of the documents were catalogued by source at first and then further classified during data analysis.

In my research design and conceptual framework the CDE was the central agency for disseminating educational information in the state. For that reason, I began data collection using the search feature on the CDE website and the descriptor RtI. I chose to collect only first-level policy statements. I defined first-level policy statements as those
documents or text that were produced by the CDE itself. I ignored ancillary links on the CDE website that directed me to websites outside of the CDE Internet presence. After reviewing search results I printed each page. I then organized the paper documents to reflect the way that they were presented on the website. That is that the introductory page was first, followed by topical pages, etc. I was careful to note the dates that documents were produced and updated.

After compiling the documents from the CDE, I prepared for a “tracer study” which “…. provides data on organizational processes by following how a “tag” moves through a social system…” (Lee, 1999). Often compared to the way in which medical dyes are used during diagnostic tests, tags follow a label, which in this case was RtI. I followed the way in which RtI moved through the CDE. I noted the date of the use of RtI and the department within the CDE that produced the document. I used this information to create a timeline that identified when RtI was first used by the CDE, the department producing the information, as well as the audience to whom the document was directed. I also added the context of the communication, if it was available. I used this technique to follow the spread of RtI, RtI², and MTSS.

The results of my tracer study revealed that initially the CDE’s office of special education introduced RtI into the state. The office of special education presented RtI as an alternative way to diagnosis a student with a specific learning disability. The office of curriculum and instruction took over supplying the state’s educators with information about RtI when the decision was made to broaden the use of RtI and rechristen it RtI². The CDE eventually dropped the use of RtI², which was only in use within the state of California. The CDE adopted the term, MTSS, for the expanded use of the RtI process within general education that was used nationally. The office of curriculum and instruction remained the source of information for the state’s educators for MTSS.

In addition to using tracing to document the chronology and source of information about RtI, RtI², and MTSS, I used the technique of tagging of RtI, RtI², and MTSS to identify the spread of this educational system within the CDE. Following a process similar to the one described above, I was able to find multiple educational initiatives endorsed by the CDE. The objectives of those educational reforms, according to directives by the CDE, were to be delivered to students using the MTSS process.

The CCTC website was investigated in a similar fashion, using its search capability and the descriptors: RtI, RtI², and MTSS. Only a few documents were identified in the search of the CCTC website. Those that were identified were downloaded, printed out, and catalogued as previously described. The CCTC website was searched numerous times using descriptors from the coding matrix that was created to analyze interview data and program materials. This was done in the hope of uncovering underlying skills to support RtI and MTSS implementation from the CCTC. However, after evaluating the results of searches using skills from the coding matrix, I determined those documents referenced skills and practices that were generic to the support of diverse learners but lacked the specificity of the CDE’s frames regarding MTSS.
Documents obtained from the two research sites and teacher educators themselves were catalogued and organized by site, program, and, in the case of course syllabi. These documents were reviewed using the coding matrix of RtI and MTSS terms. The CDE frames were also used to determine if the specific definitions of MTSS could be found in program documents. Terms from the matrix or CDE frames were highlighted using a color code. The results of these searches were displayed on a chart to uncover links between and across programs and institutions. Patterns or anomalies were noted and marked for further analysis.

**Interviews**

Interview data were transcribed verbatim onto documents prepared with numbered lines to facilitate later review. Unclear words and sentences were noted and the researcher contacted the interviewee for clarification. Once the transcript was complete, the researcher printed out the transcript of each interview. Interview data was examined multiple times. The coding scheme for RtI and MTSS terms was used for the initial review with matches highlighted (Table 2.6).

Following the coding for RtI and MTSS terms, the interview data was compared between members of programs within each institution. Then I assembled charts representing responses by program colleagues, across programs, at each institution. These charts enabled me to analyze responses across programs and within each institution. I then constructed charts that evaluated like programs to each other, institution-to-institution; i.e., special education program to special education. Using those tables, I was able to study responses that might be related to common professional focuses, special education and general education.

**Data Coding**

Drawing from work by Haager & Mahdavi (2007; Teacher roles in implementing interventions) I developed a table of indicators of RtI and MTSS terms and practices to use when reviewing documents and interviews for this study. See Table 2.6 for RtI and MTSS terms and practices.

Table 2.6

*Coding Scheme for RtI and MTSS Terms and Practices from Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier 1</th>
<th>Rti/MTSS</th>
<th>General Education practices needed in Rti/MTSS</th>
<th>Special Education practices</th>
<th>Disputed area of practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Research based curriculum presented with fidelity by highly qualified teachers.</td>
<td>Provide PD on curriculum, effective teaching strategies.</td>
<td>Sped doesn’t usually work with students without IEPs and classroom teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RtI/MTSS</strong></td>
<td><strong>General Education practices needed in RtI/MTSS</strong></td>
<td><strong>Special Education practices</strong></td>
<td><strong>Disputed area of practice</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Baseline data collection, ongoing assessments, adjusting instruction based on data.</td>
<td>Traditionally only monitor individual or small groups of students with IEPs.</td>
<td>Gen Ed may lack knowledge and use of wide-range of assessment tools and changing instruction based on data.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Mentorship from Sped on use of assessments, progress monitoring and data-driven instruction.</td>
<td>Increased presence and interaction in classroom and with grade level curriculum</td>
<td>Usually separate spheres of expertise in delivering classroom instruction and support of students with IEPs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tier 2</td>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Provide alternative instruction to struggling students (time, place, skill) and knowledge of alternative curriculums and strategies.</td>
<td>Sped doesn’t traditionally work with students without IEPs.</td>
<td>Gen Ed may lack time, place, and knowledge of alternative curriculums for struggling students. Sped has knowledge and skills but not time and mandate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Knowledge of appropriate assessments across content-areas to track student progress, expertise to administer and interpret data, and time to deliver assessments and record progress.</td>
<td>Sped has assessment knowledge but traditionally scarce sped time is used to work with students with IEPs.</td>
<td>Sped has knowledge but not the mandate. Gen Ed has the mandate but may lack knowledge, expertise, and time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referrals to sped or other specialist</td>
<td>Must establish and collect appropriate data to substantiate referrals for sped</td>
<td>Traditionally Sped uses standardized tests for</td>
<td>Quality and quantity of data to refer/diagnosis for sped services must</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RtI/MTSS | General Education practices needed in RtI/MTSS | Special Education practices | Disputed area of practice
---|---|---|---
Collaboration | referrals and diagnosis | qualification. | be established between gen ed & sped.
Special education or other services. | Leverage expertise of sped and gen ed resources to provide support within gen ed. | Provide support to Gen Ed to document extra instruction and suggest curriculum and other supports for students without IEPs. | Gen ed most often refers struggling students out and sped consults with gen ed during sped referral process.
Tier 3

**Ethical considerations**

There was minimal risk to participants in this study as its focus was on professional practice and programmatic emphasis. The research posed no greater risk than individuals or programs would encounter in a review by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. To prevent loss of confidentiality data was stored on devices with encryption and password protection. To reduce any possible harm to the professional standings of departments the researcher used pseudonyms for both participants and research sites. Only programs were identified as either special education or general education.

**Limitations of the Study**

Some limitations of this study are the small number of teacher educators that were interviewed, the fact that data were gathered from only two universities, and that those institutions were located in only one state. The study was successful in tracking the CDE’s uptake of RtI and MTSS and CCTC’s response to the CDE. It also identified the manner in which four teacher preparation programs at two large, public universities in urban areas incorporated RtI and MTSS into preservice course work. It provided insight into the understanding that special education and general education teacher educators have of RtI/MTSS, as well. The issues identified in the study offer intriguing possibilities for further research, but the small size of the teacher educators interviewed and the use of only two research sites makes generalizing findings problematic.
The final limitation of this study is the researcher herself. I have made every effort to be aware of the values and prejudices that I bring to my work. I spent the first ten years as a general education elementary school teacher. For the last twenty years I have worked in special education, as a teacher, researcher, and teacher educator. My professional heart and identity is as a special education teacher. I have attempted, to the best of my ability to “tame my subjectivity” (Peshkin, 1988).

Summary

This chapter detailed the rationale for and description of the methods used to conduct this study. The chapter began with a brief review of the phenomena under study and provided a context for it within the field of education. A rationale for the conceptual framework that guided the research was then presented. An explanation of the data collected and the sources of the data followed, including decision rules for inclusion of participants and the choice of research sites. The application of the conceptual frame to the analysis of the data was discussed afterwards. Finally, the ethical considerations and limitations of the research were addressed. The chapter to follow presents findings from the document analysis of the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.
Chapter 3: Policy Messages from Key State Agencies

RtI and MTSS represent educational reforms that implicate state policy. In this chapter, I examine the role of the California Department of Education (CDE) and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) in promoting and supporting the implementation of RtI and MTSS. The section begins with an overview of educational governance in California and the functions that the CDE and CTC provide. This is followed by an analysis of documents obtained from the CDE website that trace RtI from its roots in special education to its place in current CDE policies. CCTC regulations are then examined for requirements that would facilitate RtI and MTSS implementation.

Educational governance in California

The structure of the governance of education in California has been described as a “crazy quilt” (Brewer, 2007). The often competing regulatory bodies with overlapping responsibilities include: an elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction who heads the California Department of Education; an eleven member State Board of Education (SBE) appointed by the governor; a Secretary of Education who serves as a member of the governor’s cabinet; and a Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) that operates under the Executive Branch and controls the licensing of teachers, administrators, and other educational professionals such as school psychologists and speech and language therapists.

An elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction and director of Education leads the California State Department of Education (CDE). According to the CDE website, its mission is to ensure a “world-class education for all students.” To fulfill this mission, the CDE uses its four primary functions—regulation, operation, administration of special services, and leadership of the state program—to make certain that local districts support the achievement of all groups of students. The growing influence of the CDE on state policy and programs has been attributed to increasing Federal pressure for standards-based instructional reform and accountability (Brewer, 2007).

The CDE uses its influence to promote educational policy and foster collaboration among schools, parents, teachers, administrators, and other educational organizations. Its leadership encourages local districts to use effective administrative practices, employ sound financial management, and leverage use of community resources to provide for its students. The CDE uses incentives, such as grants and awards, to encourage local districts to develop programs that enable all students to meet the state’s academic expectations.

While rarely used, the CDE is also capable of sanctioning local districts that consistently fail over time to provide an appropriate educational environment. However, the CDE does not directly oversee the preparation and licensure of the state’s educational workforce or the quality of its teacher preparation programs. Without regulatory power
the CDE relies on incentives to influence teacher quality and teacher preparation programs. Regulatory authority for the quality of educational personnel and the programs that prepare them resides with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC).

The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) was created as an independent agency in 1970. Prior to that time its functions were performed by the CDE. It is the oldest independent state regulatory agency that oversees educators in the United States. Its stated mission is: “To ensure integrity, relevance, and high quality in the preparation, certification, and discipline of the educators who serve all of California’s diverse students.” The CCTC establishes the criteria for and accreditation of preparation programs for educators. It also oversees the licensing and credentialing of all school personnel and it has the authority to punish those with credentials who violate professional standards. While the CCTC is an independent agency not under the authority of the CDE, these two agencies work in tandem to fulfill their complementary educational responsibilities.

The State Board of Education (SBE) plays a role in educational policy in California, but I have chosen not to examine the SBE’s part in the state’s adoption of RtI, RtI² and MTSS for several reasons. While the SBE provides an internal policy counterweight to the CDE, the CDE provides the public face for policy approved by SBE. I made the decision to concentrate on the CDE since its policies offer clearly articulated statements of the belief of the state’s educational leadership, including the SBE. I also wanted to include policy materials that were readily available to the public, like teacher educators. The CDE materials on RtI, RtI², and MTSS serve that purpose.

The CDE identifies and develops the state’s educational initiatives. It focuses on programs that pertain to the performance and improvement of schools, districts, and county offices. The CDE also provides the mechanism for implementing Federal reforms and satisfying Federal requirements. Some reforms are mandates, such as those governing special education, while others are discretionary, for example, funding fine arts education and supporting the professional development of teachers. When CDE assigns importance to a policy that bears on educator preparation and licensure, the CCTC translates those policies into regulations. The roles that the CDE and CCTC play in educational governance in California make them sensible organizations to understand the position that RtI and MTSS have in educational policy.

**The California Department of Education**

RtI was introduced in California by the CDE’s Special Education Division as part of the reauthorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), the law that funds special education. The 2004 IDEA reauthorization allowed states the option to modify the eligibility process for students suspected of having a specific learning disability. The controversial IQ-Discrepancy Model used to diagnose a learning disability, discussed in Chapter 2, could continue to be used. However, the RtI process became an alternative method to diagnosis a student with a specific learning disability.
Data generated, as part of the RtI process would be used in place of, or in addition to, standardized testing to qualify a student with a specific learning disability for special education services.

To use the RtI process to qualify a student for special education services several elements needed to be in place. Classroom instruction had to be led by a qualified teacher using a research-based curriculum. Student achievement was to be monitored regularly and instruction adjusted based on student progress. Adjustments to instruction might take the form of additional practice, working in a smaller group, and/or the use of a different curriculum. If learning problems continued after a specified number of intervention cycles, the student, in RtI language would be considered a “non-responder”. At that point, using the RtI data collected on student achievement, the student could be admitted directly into special education or referred for more a more comprehensive assessment before qualifying for special education services or other related support.

Federal policymakers anticipated that by allowing the use of RtI to qualify a student for special education services with a specific learning disability, students who were struggling academically would be identified early in the learning process. Identified students would be able to receive supplementary instructional assistance within general education. It was assumed that the majority of those students receiving extra practice in a targeted academic skill would need help for only a short period of time. After completing their supplementary instruction, the majority of students would then rejoin their peers and, with the added instruction, be successful in learning with the standard curriculum.

The very few students whose academic performance did not improve with additional help, “non-responders”, would be referred to special education or other appropriate services. It was hoped that by incorporating additional targeted educational support prior to referring every struggling student to special education that the overall number of students admitted to special education would decrease. Policy makers supported the use of RtI since it increased accountability within special education. This action brought special education policy into closer alignment with the accountability measures mandated in the bill that funds general education. The general education funding measure, often referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), was approved in 2000.

The 2004 IDEA Federal reauthorization signaled a major shift in the focus of special education. The CDE’s Special Education Division seminar in July 2005, presented a model of RTI to the Key Performance Indicator Stakeholder Committee (KPISC). The committee was comprised of parents, advocates, special education staff, professional organizations, and other administrator groups. The presentation provided an example of the successful implementation of RtI. That implementation of RtI delivered academic and behavioral services to students. The system provided for early intervention as well as steps to increase effective instruction.

The nature of the shift in the focus of special education practices is itemized on a slide from that 2005 presentation entitled, “How Our Work Has Changed” (slide 18):
1975
• Conduct assessments to identify the student’s special education needs.
• Identify the placement and services that would best address the student’s needs.
• Expand the variety and quality of services available in the schools and in the community.

1997
• Conduct assessments to identify the student’s special needs and their ability to be involved and progress in the general curriculum.
• To identify services, modifications, supports that will address the needs of the child and enable the child to progress in the general education curriculum.
• Support and provide instruction in the general education curriculum.

IDEA 2004
• Move from access to place to access to general curricula.
• Focus on improved outcomes in general curricula and functional areas with a balance of procedural guarantees.
• Identification of scientifically based strategies for intervention in reading and math.
• Response to Intervention and desire to elimination discrepancy model for SLD.

The emphasis in IDEA 2004 on instruction and strategies situates the student with special needs solidly within the general education classroom and curriculum. The national drive toward increased accountability in general education and twenty-five years of poor academic outcomes by students with learning disabilities were some factors for this change. The seminar ended by identifying the multiple goals for the 2004 IDEA authorization, including: “…shifting from procedural compliance to focus on student outcomes and identifying the right students at the right time” (slide 21).

The CDE’s Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Branch assumed responsibility for disseminating information on RtI following the July, 2005 presentation by the Special Education Division. The C&I partnered with the Sacramento County Office of Education (SCOE) to produce a series of five live web-based trainings that were presented to county offices of education representing the eleven California County Superintendents Educational Services Association service regions. The webcasts were also archived at SCOE for on-demand streaming by those unable to attend the live trainings.

The Curriculum and Instruction Branch of CDE provided multiple trainings in “the concept of RtI and detailed guidance to all administrators and site-based teams on how to implement this new approach” (November 20, 2005, memo from Sue Stickel, then Deputy Superintendent of CDE’s Curriculum and Instruction Branch, to the
members of the State Board of Education). A “Statewide Training on Response to Intervention” to inform county offices of education about RtI began in the fall of 2005, and Web-based trainings on RtI were scheduled for distribution in 2006.

The CDE’s Curriculum and Instruction Branch was the source of these professional learning opportunities targeted to general education administrators. CDE wanted to be certain that all administrators and district personnel were aware that:

Under the IDEA 2004, schools are prohibited from finding a student eligible for special education if it is determined that the student’s learning problems result from the lack of appropriate instruction in reading or mathematics. Local education agencies (LEAs) are encouraged to use a process that considers student’s response to research-based intervention as part of the evaluation procedure for eligibility for special education services. This process is referred to as Response to Intervention (RtI) in the education community.

The Curriculum and Instruction Branch of CDE and not the Special Education Division initiated training California’s educators to implement RtI.

This is a meaningful distinction indicating RtI’s migration from a Special Education process to one with implications for use by all educators. In taking this step, the CDE alerted all of the state’s educators that it would be important that general education teachers and administrators are knowledgeable about RtI and understand their role in its implementation.

2007: RtI²-Broadening the scope of RtI

The CDE’s RtI’s Technical Work Group met for the first time in July 2007. Composed of general and special educators, parents, and members of community organizations, this group was given the task of developing a framework to use RtI in California’s schools to determine whether or not a student had a specific learning disability (SLD). Their work became the basis for redefining RtI as a broader approach to instruction and intervention to benefit all students. This conceptual shift was acknowledged in a letter from, then State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O’Connell (November 14, 2008) to County and District Superintendents and Charter School Administrators:

Response to Intervention (RtI) is emerging nationally as an effective strategy to support every student. The California Department of Education (CDE) is squaring the term RtI to Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²) to define a general education approach of high quality instruction, early intervention, and prevention and behavioral strategies…. RtI² offers a way to eliminate achievement gaps through a school-wide process that provides assistance to every student, both high achieving and struggling learners. It is a process that utilizes all resources within a school and district in a collaborate manner to create a single, well-integrated
system of instruction and interventions informed by student outcome data. RtI$^2$ is fully aligned with the research on the effectiveness of early intervention and the recommendations of the California P-16 Council’s themes of access, culture and climate, expectations, and strategies.

The California Department of Education’s definition, philosophy and core components of RtI$^2$ were included as a three-page attachment in that letter from November 14, 2008, as well.

The CDE formally published the findings from the RtI Technical Work Group in 2009, in a document entitled: “Determining a Specific Learning Disability Eligibility Using Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI$^2$)”. The 32-page report included an introduction from Jack O’Connell, the State Superintendent at the time. His remarks detailed the components of RtI$^2$, and speculated on the organizational changes necessary to implement it.

We believe that the public school must meet the comprehensive learning needs of each student to reach high expectations. Equity access to quality public education is the right of every student and the responsibility of the State of California (CDE, 2009).

Those statements were taken from the “State of Education” address that Jack O’Connell had delivered on February 6, 2007, at a gathering of educational leaders in Sacramento. That vision was combined with the philosophy and introduction to the CDE’s publication about RtI$^2$ linking RtI$^2$ to California’s broader educational priorities. The introduction also notes that:

“Leadership is critical to the implementation of RtI$^2$...An education system implementing RtI$^2$ promotes collaboration and shared responsibility for the learning of all students across all personnel and programs located in any given school... RtI$^2$ provides a vehicle to strengthen performance for struggling students before educational problems increase in intensity and special education seems the only viable option” (CDE: SLD using RtI2, 2009, p. v-vi).

RtI$^2$ broadened the scope of the original process, RtI, outlined in IDEA.

In California, RtI referred only to the eligibility process within special education, the alternative to the discrepancy model to diagnosis a specific learning disability. RtI$^2$ in the state of California is proposed to be “A cohesive process that integrates resources from general education, categorical programs, and special education into a comprehensive system of core instruction and interventions that benefit every student” (CDE: SLD using RtI2, 2009, p.vi).

The CDE was motivated to expand RtI to RtI$^2$ as noted in the introductory remarks to the 2009 report written by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Jack O’Connell:
.... While improvement in our schools has been nearly universal, our across-the-board success has still failed to close an achievement gap that threatens the future of our diverse state. Recognizing this is important. Addressing it is imperative. Too often, the struggles of the African American student, the English learner, and the learning-disabled student were hidden by overall school achievement gains. That day is past. Today we are holding ourselves accountable for the results of all children. And when we see significant groups of students falling far short of the goal of proficiency that we hold for all students we must act. Today, equipped with specific knowledge of those gaps, we must focus as never before on solutions (CDE: Determining SLD using RtI², 2009, p. v).

The CDE argued that RtI² represented a powerful answer to persistent and increasing achievement gaps among California’s public school students.

The result of this transformation would be, “An education system implementing RtI² that promotes collaboration and shared responsibility for the learning of all students across all personnel and programs located in any given school” (CDE: Determining SLD using RtI², 2009, p. v). The CDE assigned general education the central role in the school wide implementation of RtI²,

A unified approach to teaching the RtI² process requires general educators and special educators, as well as other school personnel, to provide research based interventions and differentiated instruction to those students who are performing below expected levels of achievement (CDE: Determining SLD using RtI², 2009, p.5)

Contemplating the changes that this approach required, CDE underscored the key role of general education in implementing the RtI² framework.

The benefits to all students the CDE concluded, makes adoption of RtI² worth the effort. “Systematic change at the district, site, and classroom levels that impacts instruction, intervention, and identification are necessary due to the focus of RtI² on prevention that begins in the general education classroom” (CDE: Determining SLD using RtI², 2009, p.5).

Students are not the only beneficiaries of an RtI² system according to the CDE. Teachers will have the support of colleagues in meeting the needs of their students with RtI². The framework “promotes collaboration and shared responsibility for the learning of all students across all personnel and programs located in a given school (general education, teachers of English language learners, Title 1, special education/related service providers, administrators, and parents)” (CDE: Determining SLD using RtI², 2009, p. 5).

According to the guidelines, the CDE allowed districts the option whether or not to implement RtI² in schools demonstrating adequate academic achievement. However, schools that were involved in “Program Improvement” (PI) did not have that choice.
Those PI schools, whose students did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two reporting cycles and received Title 1 Funds, were required to use SBE approved interventions, like RTI\textsuperscript{2}. The continuous cycle of monitoring student achievement within an RTI\textsuperscript{2} system provided additional evidence that no group was left behind. An RTI\textsuperscript{2} process of systematic instruction linked to ongoing progress monitoring helped schools, and the state, to meet necessary Federal reporting requirements.

Having established its commitment to RTI\textsuperscript{2} with the publication of “Determining Specific Eligibility Using Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI\textsuperscript{2})” the CDE incorporated RTI\textsuperscript{2} in its Inventory of Services and Supports (ISS) in 2009 as well. The ISS was required of districts in Program Improvement under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Schools whose test scores did not meet expectations used ISS to develop action plans to address areas for improvement. CDE added RTI\textsuperscript{2} to the 2009 design of the ISS stating,

California has adopted a Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTI\textsuperscript{2}) model that supports tiered intervention as an essential general education responsibility. A rapid intervention system is needed in every school and district to catch students early before they are in serious academic difficulty. As a practice, every district needs a multi-tiered system including benchmark, strategic and intensive support levels (CDE website: ISS for SWD, p.3).

The CDE sustained its support for RTI\textsuperscript{2} through a transition in top leadership following the election of Tom Torlaksen as State Superintendent in 2010. In a letter from Torlaksen to the general public, dated August 2011, posted on the CDE website, he reiterated CDE’s endorsement for RTI\textsuperscript{2}. The letter began by aligning the CDE’s mission to RTI\textsuperscript{2} “…. To deliver on the promise of a world-class education for each and every one of our students, California’s Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTI\textsuperscript{2}) framework offers students and educators a system of academic and behavioral supports designed to promote student success.”

Student success is of vital importance, according to the CDE, and the components of RTI\textsuperscript{2} embody them all: ongoing assessment of student knowledge to modify instruction, leveraging school resources to best serve student need, and collaboration of educators at the school site. The statement concluded with an observation that this was an especially crucial time for California’s educators to embrace RTI\textsuperscript{2}; the state was facing the challenge of managing diminishing fiscal resources while attempting to maintain,

the rigor and high expectations set for learning, it is more important than ever to innovate and collaborate to maximize the results from other efforts. The RTI\textsuperscript{2} approach offers just such a compelling possibility. (CDE: SSPI letter, August, 2011)

In the six years that the RTI\textsuperscript{2} system had been in California, the CDE consistently advocated its use not only as an alternative method for obtaining eligibility for special
education, but as a tool for schools in Program Improvement, and recommended it as an effective and efficient way to organize instruction for all learners.

2013: MTSS (Multi-Tiered System of Supports)-- Rebranding the California RtI² Framework

In California, a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) according to the CDE provides,
...a basis for understanding how California educators can work together to ensure equitable access and opportunity for all students to achieve the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). MTSS includes Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²) as well as additional, distinct philosophies and concepts (CDE: Definition of MTSS).

MTSS “focuses on all students in education contexts. It is not designed for consideration in special education placement decisions, such as specific learning disabilities” (CDE: Definition of MTSS). MTSS has a more comprehensive approach to providing instruction and support for students as it aligns the “entire system of initiatives, supports, and resources, and by implementing continuous improvement processes at all levels of the system” (CDE: Definition of MTSS).

Elements of RtI² come under the broader umbrella of MTSS. MTSS is intended to encompass every aspect of the state’s system of initiatives, supports, and resources. Each district identifies and arranges support systems, including those for gifted and high-achieving students, by site, and then by grade level. MTSS implementation involves a commitment to use the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach along with CCSS-aligned classroom instruction. All students in education benefit as MTSS involves,

a paradigm shift by providing support and setting higher expectations for all students through intentional design and redesign of integrated services and supports, rather than selection of a few components of RtI and intensive interventions.... Integrating instructional and intervention support so that systemic changes are sustainable.... Challenging all school staff to change the way in which they have traditionally worked across school settings which MTSS differs from RtI² (CDE: Definition of MTSS).

From the perspective of the CDE the evolution of RtI² to MTSS was a natural one. This progression is expressed in a memo from the Superintendent prepared for the SBE and general public (October 1, 2013). In the memo the Superintendent describes the fundamental function that the CDE envisions for MTSS,

MTSS grew out of, and maintains many of the core elements of California’s Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²). The California Department of Education (CDE) continues to support RtI², which was introduced to the SBE in July of 2005. RtI² was envisioned soon after the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 was enacted. Early implementation efforts of many states were heavily focused on instruction provided to students with disabilities. Unlike most other
states, California educators felt strongly about including a focus on the instruction in general education classrooms, as well as instruction occurring in special education classrooms. Therefore in California, RtI\textsuperscript{2} includes instruction, as well as other ideas aligned to the current MTSS framework and clearly outlined in the RtI\textsuperscript{2}” (CDE: Superintendent Memo to SBE, October 1, 2013)

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction admitted that the implementation of RtI\textsuperscript{2} was varied throughout the state; some districts interpreted RtI\textsuperscript{2} as a classroom within the school and others used RtI\textsuperscript{2} to organize only in math and reading instruction. As the Superintendent pointed out, “A hallmark of MTSS is to utilize the instructional framework in all content areas” (CDE: Memo to SBE from SSPI, October 1, 2013).

The Superintendent continues in this memo by providing the widespread influence he hopes that MTSS will have in education in California. MTSS will serve as a stimulus to increase the coordination among the various supports and programs that serve California’s diverse student population. MTSS will be used to organize programs and address the needs of “socio-economically disadvantaged students, English learners, students with disabilities, and gifted students.” More significantly, MTSS will be the catalyst to unite California’s isolated educational services into one system “to offer students coordinated, timely, and effective support in all contents areas, as well as addressing behavioral needs” (CDE: Memo to SBE from SSPI, October 1, 2013).

Concerned that the increased academic expectations in the California Common Core State Standards “may reveal deficits in current instructional practices, as well as weaknesses in academic achievement based on the new standards”, the Superintendent is confident that, “an MTSS framework can be used to ensure that all students have full access to effective instruction and supports from the start in order to achieve better outcomes” (CDE: Memo to SBE from SSPI, October 1, 2013).

Consistent with its view of RtI\textsuperscript{2}, the CDE envisioned MTSS as part of general education. The information on MTSS is located under the Division of Curriculum & Instruction and is found using a tab for Curriculum Resources. Topics covered on these pages describe in detail California’s Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS). These areas are the CDE’s definition of MTSS and a comparison of MTSS to RtI\textsuperscript{2}.

The CDE has a comprehensive vision for MTSS in California’s schools, In California, MTTS is an integrated, comprehensive framework that focuses on CCSS (Common Core State Standards), core instruction, differentiated learning, student-centered learning, individualized student needs, and the alignment of systems necessary for all students’ academic, behavioral, and social success... MTSS offers the potential to create a needed systematic change through intentional design and redesign of services and supports that quickly identify and match the needs of all students (CDE: Definition of MTSS).
For the CDE, then, MTSS offers schools and districts a way to leverage the state’s numerous support services and programs. The ultimate objective is to improve the education of all of California’s students by universal adoption of the MTSS structure.

The scope of MTSS is more expansive than the vision of RtI\(^2\) according to the CDE website. The specific goals of MTSS are:

- Focusing on aligning the entire system of initiatives, supports, and resources.
- Promoting district participation in identifying and supporting systems for alignment of resources, as well as site and grade level.
- Systematically addressing support for all students, including gifted and high achievers.
- Enabling a paradigm shift for providing support and setting higher expectations for all students through intentional design and redesign of integrated services and supports, rather than selection of a few components of RtI and intensive interventions.
- Endorsing Universal Design for Learning instructional strategies so all students have opportunities for learning through differentiated content, processes, and product.
- Integrating instructional and intervention support so that systematic changes are sustainable and based on CCSS-aligned classroom instruction.
- Challenging all school staff to change the way they have traditionally worked across all school settings. (CDE: Definition of MTSS)

MTSS is intended to create a unified educational environment to “focus on all students in education contexts” (CDE: Definition of MTSS). The four key components of MTSS are: 1) high-quality differentiated classroom instruction; 2) systematic and sustainable change; 3) an integrated data system, and 4) positive behavioral support.

The CDE has attached the MTSS framework to implementation of multiple educational programs, reforms, and initiatives. It is to be used to enact all of the California Common Core Standards; Transitional Kindergarten; the instruction of English language learners; and the Student Assistance programs (Closing the Achievement Gap). CDE also maintains that MTSS provides a way in which to increase equity in classrooms by reducing the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education (CDE website).
Preparing educators to implement RtI, RtI² and MTSS

In the previous section I examined the messages about RtI, RtI², and MTSS incorporated into a range of CDE programs. This section considers the policy role of the CCTC with respect to the evolving definition of RtI, RtI², and MTSS. More specifically, it shows the manner in which the CCTC systematically incorporated the CDE’s priorities to RtI, RtI², and MTSS into its own professional expectations of the state’s teachers.

The CCTC, formed in 1970 under the Ryan Act, is located in California’s Executive Branch of government. It is the country’s oldest independent state standards board. That legislation formed the CCTC structure to license teachers and to create a credentialing terminology for California (Inglis, 2011). It is charged with a Mission,

…. To ensure integrity, relevance, and high quality in the preparation, certification, and discipline of the educators who serve all of California's diverse students” (CCTC: Mission).

The Commission establishes the requirements for the preparation of educators who will serve the state’s public schools, oversees the professional practices of the state’s educators, and exercises the authority to punish credential holders who violate CCTC regulations.

The nineteen member Commission is comprised of fifteen voting Commissioners. Fourteen of those voting members are appointed by the Governor to serve four-year terms as unpaid volunteers. These appointments are filled by a cross-section of stakeholders: six classroom teachers, one school administrator, one school board member, one school counselor or services credential holder, one higher education faculty member from an institution for teacher education, and four members from the public. The fifteenth voting member of the Commission is the State Superintendent of Public Instruction or his/her designee. The remaining four ex-officio seats are drawn from the higher education community in California and represent the Association of Independent California Colleges and Universities; Regents of the University of California; the California State University; and California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

The preamble to the Teacher Preparation and Licensing Law of 1970, often referred to as the Ryan Credential Reforms, includes this appeal,

Moreover, the Legislature finds that highly complex detailed and prescriptive regulations governing the preparation and licensing of teachers and administrators frustrate imagination, innovation, and responsiveness. In addition, the Legislature finds the diversity of functions served by modern education require licensing regulations which are flexible, realistic, responsive, and simple (29. AB 740, 1969, preamble).

The Vision of the CCTC promises that “All of California's students, preschool through grade 12, are inspired and prepared to achieve their highest potential by well
prepared and exceptionally qualified educators” (CCTC: Vision). The Commission drafted the first California Standards for the Teaching Profession (CSTP) in the 1990s in response to general discontent with the performance on the nation’s schools generally, and the state’s schools in particular. Policy makers had produced a series of commentaries that disparaged the adequacy of the nation’s schools in comparison to their international counterparts.

The competence of California’s teaching force to provide high-quality and effective instruction was in doubt by the public as the state’s student population became increasingly diverse (Inglis, 2011). Additional concerns were raised about the long-term effect that funding restrictions from state tax reforms enacted in the late 1970s were having on California’s schools. The CCTC revised and approved the final version of the CSTPs. A panel of educational leaders with expertise from all over the state volunteered their time to draft these standards initially, though. The CSTPs not only aligned with the CDE’s newly adopted content standards for students but raised the profile of the Commission (Fitch & Tierney, 2011).

CCTC: 2009 California Standards for the Teaching Profession

The CSTPs have been a powerful force in setting educational policy and practice since they were first published. Acknowledging the pivotal role that teacher quality plays in student achievement, the CSTPs are intended to provide agreed upon definitions of the complicated range of teachers’ work (Fitch & Tierney, 2011). The underlying foundation of the CSTPs is the belief that professional development for teachers is always evolving (CSTP, 2009, p.2). The CCTC accounts for the update,

The current version of the CSTP (2009) has been developed to respond to changes in the context for teaching and learning in California over the past decade and to address the pressing needs of an increasingly diverse P-12 student body. Particular attention has been paid to revising language related to student learning, assessment practices, and equitable pedagogy designed to address English learners and students with diverse learning needs (CSTP, 2009, p3).

The CSTPs are organized around six areas of practice: Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning; Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning; Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning; Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences for All Students; Assessing Students for Learning; and Developing as a Professional Educator. The CSTPs are benchmarks for professional growth for teachers throughout their careers. While all six of the California Standards for the Teaching Profession speak to the specific needs of students with disabilities, this discussion will concentrate on the first five standards that are relevant to preservice teacher preparation.

Standard 1: Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning, considers that teachers will use varied strategies, including technology, to meet the needs of their students. Teachers are expected to support students’ diverse learning needs by reworking materials,
making accommodations, and “monitoring student learning and adjusting instruction while teaching, including students with special needs.” (CSTP, 2009, p.5)

**Standard 2: Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning**

refers to establishing a classroom community that not only fosters student learning but reflects the variety of student learners and treats all with respect. Teachers create a “rigorous learning environment with high expectations and appropriate supports for all students…. They use instructional time to optimize learning.” (CSTP, 2009, p. 6-7).

**Standard 3: Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning**

considers all of the variables involved in teaching: knowledge of subject, content standards, and curriculum frameworks that skilled teachers manipulate to construct instruction that is effective. Teachers are also supposed to be familiar with pedagogy particular to that content area. The goal of incorporating technology and a variety of sources is encouraged, “to make the subject matter accessible to all students. They address the needs of English learners and students with special needs to provide equitable access to the content.” (CSTP, 2009, p. 9)

**Standard 4: Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences for All Students**

believes that teachers take into consideration multiple factors when setting up instruction such as, “…. knowledge of students’ academic readiness…. and individual development.” Teachers arrange instruction around clearly stated academic goals. In addition, teachers plan instruction “that incorporates appropriate strategies to meet the diverse need of all students. They modify and adapt instructional plans to meet the assessed learning needs of all students.” (CSTP, 2009, p.11)

**Standard 5: Assessing Student for Learning**

outlines the range of assessments and other sources of information that teachers will collect. They will use the data to track student progress and adjust instruction. Teachers will also “review data, both individually and with colleagues to monitor student learning.” Assessment data is used to establish goals for learning and to “plan, differentiate, and modify instruction.” Teachers will share information about assessment in a way that is understandable to both students and their families (CSTP, 2009, p.13).

**2012: Licensure issues constrain implementation of RtI**

In September of 2012 a joint report produced by a collaborative group of experts from both the CDE and CCTC was published, *Greatness by Design*. That collaborative group, the Task Force for Educator Excellence, was given the mandate by the State Department of Education’s Chief, Tom Torlakson, to review state of teacher preparation in the California. The report enumerated concerns about the preparation of the state’s general education teachers,

General Educators, generally prepared in a nine-month credential program that must carry as much content as programs that last two to four times as long in other states, often report that they feel underprepared to take on the responsibility of meeting the increasingly complex needs of the students in California’s schools,
especially students who have disabilities, are English Learners, from a range of cultural backgrounds or low socio-economic backgrounds. Overall, general educators require greater preparation to use differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning/Assistive technology, culturally responsive teaching methods, positive behavior supports, progress monitoring and Response to Intervention, and to do so in collaboration with their specialist colleagues. However, the limited time for general educator preparation does not afford consistent, focused clinical practice to high levels of success with the most challenging students prior to assuming full responsibility for a classroom, especially those who have disabilities and those who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CDE/CCT, 2012, p.36).

The Task Force was even more alarmed at the toll the 1998 reform (eliminating general education preparation for special education teachers) was having on the quality of the state’s special education teachers, and in turn, the students they teach. The Task Force explains,

The gaps in preparation for Special Educators (Education Specialists) are perhaps even more unsettling. The role of the Education Specialist is not well defined in California relative to meeting the needs of students who have the most complex disabilities and learning needs. Unlike many other states, Education Specialists in California are not required to have a general education credential prior to obtaining an Education Specialist credential. Whereas a special educator in a state like Connecticut or New York will typically have completed a four-year initial preparation program in a generalist teaching, plus a one- or two-year master’s degree in special education, a California special educator is likely to achieve her first and only training through a nine-month program in an internship program that provides too little preparation about child development, learning, and teaching generally, and too little about the complex medical, psychological and developmental influences on learning for students with disabilities, and very little about appropriate pedagogical techniques for the wide range of disabilities that require deep knowledge about sophisticated methods. Furthermore, such programs generally do not provide student teaching, thus placing full responsibility for teaching students with the most complex disabilities onto interns who receive just a few weeks of training prior to entering the classroom and do not have a cooperating teacher to watch, model and ask questions of.

At the same time, Education Specialists are not authorized to teach students who do not have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (i.e., typically developing students) if they do not hold a multiple subjects or single subject credential. This limits service delivery options in schools. Finally, Education Specialists are authorized to teach K-12 rather than being authorized to specialize in depth at the elementary or secondary level. This spreads their limited training time over an even greater expanse and limits their expertise at a given developmental level even further (CDE/CCTC, 2012, 37).

Even though RtI implementation was voluntary in California, the CCTC engaged
WestEd identified five obstacles that impeded RtI implementation in the state’s school districts, according to educational leaders in California: “…. 1) Availability of intervention resources; 2) Availability of resources for instruction and/or progress monitoring; 3) CTC licensure/certification requirements; 4) RtI practices not included in teacher training during preservice (preparation); 5) Data knowledge and skills sufficient to implement tracking and charting” (WestEd, 2012).

The CCTC was aware of the staffing issues that WestEd presented in December of 2012. WestEd cites “CTC licensure/certification requirements” as impeding RtI and MTSS implementation in California. These licensure and certification issues were the focus of an additional report by the CCTC that was presented to the full Commission following the WestEd findings. That CCTC document was entitled, 5A: Information/Action: Credentialing and Certificated Assignments Committee: Implementation of Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI) and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS). It explains the additional complications districts in California face when implementing RtI and MTSS. The flexibility of student grouping, bedrock of the RtI and MTSS approach to instruction, is contrary to the manner in which California credentials its teachers. The report notes,

It is not the RtI Tier that determines what authorization a teacher must hold, but the population of students the individual is teaching as well as the setting, duration, academic content, and grade levels served within each locally designed model. For students in general education, the teacher must hold a multiple subject or single subject teaching credential, or the equivalent. If the class is part of a departmentalized program (i.e., mathematics or history), the teacher should hold the appropriate single subject credential, or the equivalent, and if the class is a core setting at the middle school where the same students have two or more subjects together with the same teacher, the teacher should hold a multiple subject credential, or the equivalent.

If one or more of the students is identified as a student with special needs, a student with an IEP, and the most appropriate placement is in a special education setting, the teacher must hold an Education Specialist Teaching Credential, or the equivalent, to provide the special education instructional services identified within the Individual Education Program (IEP) for each student. The credential context is even more complicated because the teacher must hold an Education Specialist
Teaching Credential which authorizes the teacher to provide instructional services to students in the specific identified disability category of the student(s) (5A: Information/Action, CCTC, 2012, p.9).

Again, the problem of utilizing special education teachers with credentials issued after 1998 was cited as a complication for districts. Prior to 1998 California required that its special education teachers possess either a Multiple Subject or Single Subject general education teaching credential before they were eligible to enroll in a special education preparation program. In the 1990s California was under tremendous pressure from the federal government to increase the number of fully credentialed special education teachers in the state. California’s response was to expedite the special education credential process by eliminating the requirement for a general education teaching credential. The CCTC created a stand-alone “Educational Specialist” credential. Taking this into account when implementing RtI 2 and MTSS, the CCTC reminded districts that,

If the teacher in the Tier II setting holds an Education Specialist Teaching Credential but does not hold an additional general education teaching credential, he or she is not authorized to teach general education students in the Tier II setting on the basis of the special education credential (5A: Information/Action, CCTC, 2012, p.10).

Reading instruction posed a longer list of constraints to districts. This was especially problematic for schools since reading was the area in which highest numbers of districts reported using RtI frameworks to deliver instruction. The CCTC report clarifies for districts implementing RtI 2 and MTSS the teachers authorized to teach reading,

When the intervention model involves pullout instruction that replaces the reading content in the general education class or involves instruction in a separate departmentalized class then the following are provided as legally authorized assignment options.  
1) Reading and Language Arts Specialist Teaching Credential;  
2) Reading Certificate Restricted Reading Credential;  
3) Restricted Reading Credential;  
4) Elementary Level Credentials – Multiple Subject, Standard Elementary, or General Elementary.  
5) A Dual Credentialed Teacher holding both special and general education teaching credentials (elementary level or Single Subject English). All teachers that earned the Ryan Specialist Credential in Special Education (initially issued in 1976-1997) were required to also hold a general education teaching credential. Current Education Specialist holders also have the option of holding dual credentials and there are currently dual credentials offered. (5A: Information/Action, CCTC, 2012, p. 12).

The CCTC report reminded districts that while not ideal, there were “Local Assignment Options” that districts could use to address staffing issues regarding RtI 2 and MTSS. While the teachers involved must consent to be assigned outside of their basic credential
authorizations, these mechanisms permit districts to place teachers in areas of need. These teaching options usually require yearly review.

### 2015: Report from the Task Force on Special Education

The concerns detailed in *Greatness by Design* resulted in the formation of yet another Task Force that began work in 2013. The new Task Force was directed to examine Special Education in California. This new Task Force was another collaborative effort by the CDE and CCTC. In addition to individuals from both state agencies, stakeholders with various expertises and representing a variety of stakeholders gathered information about California’s system to support students in special education. The Task Force completed its work in 2014.

The report, by the CCTC and CDE, was published in 2015 with the title, *One System: Reforming Education to Serve All Students*. The report identifies ways for the state to increase the effectiveness of California’s special education system and identifies polices and practices the Task Force believes will improve the educational outcomes for all students. One of the findings was, “…. Many of the changes that this Task Force found central to improving special education, however, require change in general education” (Special Education Task Force (SETF), 2015, p.2). The report also noted that the state’s educational efforts are compromised by the current distinctions between special and general education.

Significant barriers to school success for all students have grown out of the unfortunate evolution of two separate “educations”. Expectations and services for students, teacher preparation and credentialing, and funding patterns are compromised as a result (SETF, 2015, p.2).

The overarching policy reform put forward by the Task Force is best reflected in the report’s title, *One System: Reforming Education to Serve All Students*.

The report also identified that schools in California do not have a system to provide early intervention for struggling students. This situation has a ripple effect on students and schools according to the Task Force since, “…. Research shows that well-timed and well-executed early intervention reduces the number of students with learning disabilities—by far the largest cohort in the special education ranks—and improves school outcomes for everyone”(SETF, 2015). The changes that the Task Force put forward were intended to be included in preparation course work for both special and general education teacher. Two broad areas of practices specifically recommended by the Task Force for all credential programs were evidence-based school and classroom practices, and educator preparation and professional learning that promotes the implementation of Rti$^2$ and MTSS into school practice.

The first mention of MTSS and Rti$^2$ in the report is found in the section devoted to Evidence-Based School and Classroom Practices. The Task Force recommends that,

A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is developed throughout the state,
Incorporating robust and aligned systems at all organizational levels that support response to instruction and intervention (RtI²) approaches and systematic programs of behavioral, social, and emotional learning (SETF, 2015).

The specificity of the terms MTSS and RtI² is in contrast to the language used in the CSTPs of 2009. In the 2009 CSTPs the description of support of students with special needs is posed in broad, general terms. The Task Force’ recommendation leaves no doubt as to the vision it believes will best serve the state’s students.

Again, RtI² and MTSS are referred to specifically, in the Task Force’s findings regarding Educator Preparation and Professional Learning. The Task Force recommends that both general and special education teachers are prepared using a collective core of knowledge, a “common trunk” (SETF, 2015), is the term used in the report. Among the practices included in that “common trunk” in the opinion of the Task Force are (SETF, 2015),

- A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) that includes social-emotional Learning and positive behavioral strategies and supports, and Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtI²)

- The use of data to monitor progress, informs instruction, and guide interventions.

The Task Force supports “a full scale overall redesign of credential programs” (SETF, 2015) that would result in “an integrated, shared foundation where special and general educators obtain their initial credentials together” (SETF, 2015). In 2016, the CCTC responded to many of the Task Force’s recommendations.

**Teacher Preparation Expectations mandate knowledge of MTSS**

The CCTC incorporated findings from the Special Education Task force in the General Education Teacher Performance Expectations (TPEs) for Multiple and Single Subject Credential Programs, issued in 2016, to take effect in 2017. The TPEs provide teacher preparation programs with the specific “knowledge, skills, and abilities that beginning general education teachers have the opportunity to learn in approved teacher preparation programs in California” (TPE, 2016). It is noteworthy, that,

General Education Teacher Performance Expectations, TPEs, were established in 1998 and language was added in 2010 to include Education Specialists. In 2013, the TPEs were revised for Education Specialists to align with Common Core State Standards and to articulate the understandings and abilities of Education Specialists to build a foundation for college and career readiness including adult independence for students with disabilities from birth to age 22 (CCTC, 2017, p.28).
The 2016 revised General Education Teacher Performance Expectations are program requirements that apply to all teacher preparation programs in California.

Each TPE is organized into two components, elements and narratives. The elements are a list of topics that are described in detail in the narrative section of the TPE. MTSS, specifically, appears in three sections of the 2016 TPEs for general education preparation programs. MTSS is a recommended practice in two different TPEs and is also endorsed as a pedagogical skill. As of 2017, general education teacher preparation programs must include instruction in MTSS to align with TPE 1: Teaching Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning and TPE 4: Planning instruction and designing learning experiences for all students. MTSS must also a pedagogy included in Language Arts methods classes for programs that prepare Multiple Subject Credential candidates.

MTSS will be part of the curriculum to address TPE 1, Teaching Engaging and Supporting All Students in Learning (TPE 1). Beginning teachers will be expected to,

Use a variety of developmentally and ability-appropriate instructional strategies, resources, and assistive technology, including principles of Universal Design of Learning (UDL) and Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to support access to the curriculum for a wide range of learners within the general education classroom and environment (CCTC, 2016, p.5).

In addition, preparation programs will also provide new teachers with skills to increase student engagement, such as,

a variety of instructional principles and approaches such as UDL and linguistic scaffolding to assure the active and equitable participation of all students and to promote engagement of all students within general education environments using the principles of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) as appropriate (CCTC, 2016, p. 6).

MTSS is specifically mentioned in TPE 4. TPE 4 focuses on the planning instruction and designing learning experiences for all students. Beginning teachers will be expected to:

Plan, design, implement and monitor instruction, making effective use of instructional time to maximize learning opportunities and provide access to the curriculum for all students by removing barriers and providing access through instructional strategies that include: appropriate use of instructional technology, including assistive technology; applying principles of UDL and MTSS (CCTC, 2016, p. 10)

In planning for instruction consistent with California's TK–12 content standards, beginning teachers access and apply their deep content knowledge of the subject area and use appropriate content-specific pedagogy consistent with research-based
practices in the field. Beginning teachers understand the principles of UDL and MTSS and apply these principles in the content field(s) of their credential(s) to plan instruction that meets individual student needs for all students…. (CCTC, 2016, p.11).

MTSS is a way in which to structure instruction and general education teachers must be prepared to teach within an MTSS structure. The CCTC is very clear in the way in which the state expects educators to organize learning.

The CCTC also recommends that MTSS be included as a pedagogical skill in teaching English Language Arts for Multiple Subject credential candidates. The TPEs state,

Preparation programs use the current frameworks in English Language Arts and English Language Development as a required resource for beginning teachers, faculty, and university field supervisors. Beginning teachers study, observe, and practice the five key themes of a robust and comprehensive instructional program: making meaning, language development, effective expression, content knowledge, and foundational skills. Beginning teachers have opportunities to study, observe, and practice several approaches to teaching and learning, including inquiry-based learning, collaborative learning, and direct instruction. Beginning teachers study, observe, and practice the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), and a culture of shared responsibility for student learning and development (CCTC, 2016, p.16).

In the 2016 TPEs the term MTSS is explicitly included by the CCTC. The 2016 TPEs lays out in detail where the CCTC expects this practice to be incorporated into the preparation of the state’s new teachers. There is no ambiguity about the CCTC’s endorsement of MTSS. In these TPEs the CCTC makes its expectations clear that initial teacher preparation programs must provide California’s new teachers with knowledge and skills about MTSS beginning in 2017.

Summary

The Special Education division of CDE introduced RtI to California educators in 2005. The CCTC has directed that all general and special education teacher preparation programs must incorporate the knowledge and skills to implement RtI2 and MTSS into their coursework by 2017. The Commission defines standards of practice for the state’s teachers and the programs that prepare them.

The long-standing and ever growing commitment to first, RtI2 and now, MTSS, from the CDE was established earlier. CDE has made it clear that the skills and knowledge to implement MTSS are crucial. The incorporation of MTSS into every major educational initiative in the California by the CDE makes it imperative that the state’s teachers possess the skills and knowledge to participate in an MTSS framework. The
State Superintendent of Public Instruction is clear in stating the pivotal role that the California’s educators have if MTSS will have the greatest impact on the state’s students,

MTSS is a “systems-wide approach that promotes deeper knowledge of differentiated instruction. It is aligned with Response to Intervention approach and problem-solving teams. It allows educators to evolve their thinking about how to create and maintain the structural support they need to address the needs of all California students. Explicitly acknowledging that our diverse California student population requires a comprehensive, flexible, evidence-based process such as MTSS moves educators, students, and parents forward in our journey. The resources referenced in this Website will help educators learn how to use MTSS processes so we can continue to work smarter and more collaboratively in order to level the playing field so all California students have the opportunity to realize their dreams” (MTSS introduction letter, first link on CDE webpage on MTSS; author; Tom Torlakson, June 10, 2014: Salutation: Fellow Californians).

With the adoption of the 2016 TPEs mandating knowledge of MTSS in the preparation of the state’s teachers, the CCTC has explicitly transferred that CDE policy into teacher practice.

This section has provided an overview of educational governance in California and introduced two key organizations, the CDE and the CCTC. The introduction of RtI, its evolution into RtI², and its current iteration as MTSS were explained. CDE policy documents that define and detail the state’s conceptions initially of RtI² and more recently the MTSS framework were examined. That analysis was followed by a review of the CCTC’s expectations of the state’s teachers using documents from the CCTC: the 2009 TPEs, Greatness by Design, and the 2015 Report from the Special Education Task Force, One System. The final section examined the documents issued most recently by the CCTC, the 2016 TPEs, that govern the state’s teacher preparation programs for general education and special education.

The CDE’s policies repeatedly made it evident that RtI² and MTSS were of paramount importance to the success of California’s students. The CCTC addressed those frameworks in general language until 2016. The CCTC explicitly defines the knowledge of MTSS in three key sections of the 2016 TPEs. TPEs govern programs that prepare all of California’s educators, both general education and special education. The next chapter examines the way the policy messages from the CDE and CCTC that were identified in this chapter about RtI and MTSS are taken up by teacher education programs.
Policy messages from the state—particularly the California Department of Education—promote the use of instructional strategies designed to support struggling learners in the general education classroom. The CDE strongly encourages the use of RtI and MTSS to implement its general education initiatives. The CDE website provides a detailed explanation of the evolution of RtI to RtI\(^2\) that provides the rationale for the distinction between RtI and RtI\(^2\) and justifies its use in general education.

Policy messages targeted specifically at RtI and MTSS are more clearly specified by the CDE. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC), which directly regulates institutions and programs of teacher education, provides broader guidelines. Although recent revisions to the CCTC Teacher Performance Expectations explicitly reference MTSS, this chapter illuminates some of the challenges that institutions may face in responding to the new expectations. This raises the question of how teacher educators and teacher education institutions interpret policy expectations regarding RtI and MTSS.

In this chapter I use interview data and document analysis to explore the way teacher preparation programs incorporate knowledge of RtI and MTSS. First, I review program documents, then the transcripts of interviews with the department chairs. I then turn my attention to analyzing the interviews of individual teacher educators and review syllabi for courses they currently teach. I describe how teacher educators at ASU and BSU incorporate knowledge of RtI and MTSS into their preparation programs.

Interpretation of RtI and MTSS at Augustus State University (ASU)

ASU teacher preparation programs that participated in this study were those that prepared mild-to-moderate educational specialists (special education) and for multiple subject (elementary education) candidates. In order to understand how RtI and MTSS are incorporated into the preparation of new teachers I interviewed five teacher educators from the general education and special education departments at Augustus State University and reviewed program documents.

Overall, I find that both the general education and special education programs at ASU provide information about RtI and MTSS but that the special education department is the main source of information. Information about RtI and MTSS is provided to general education credential candidates but it was unclear as to when the principles and practices associated with RtI and MTSS are applied. Further, department chairs were not aware of a press from school districts for including RtI and MTSS, as communicated in annual meetings with local administrators.
Common Classes within General Education and Special Education Programs

Classes taken in common by general education and special education students presented an opportunity to prepare the students to understand and participate in RtI and MTSS. Both programs require that candidates take two courses together, The Curriculum and Teaching of Elementary Mathematics, and the Foundations of Special Education. Students from either program may register for any section of these classes. The math course is taught by a general education teacher educator and the special education class by an instructor from the special education department.

These survey courses offer broad exposure to the weekly topics covered. Details of each meeting of these courses can be in Table 4.1. In addition to providing knowledge of math and special education, these courses offer candidates from different programs the opportunity to interact. The special education candidates continue to study topics introduced in the Foundations of Special Education class in greater depth. For general education teacher candidates, however, the course is the only one whose sole focus is special education in their preparation program. The ASU’s general education department chair explains, “RtI is technically taken during the special ed course.”

Table 4.1

General Education & Special Education Courses Taken in Common

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASU</th>
<th>Curriculum &amp; Teaching of Elementary Mathematics</th>
<th>Foundations of Special Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis, application, and evaluation of strategies for teaching reading in various milieux, emphasizing comprehension, phonics and other decoding skills and strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>General Education Faculty</td>
<td>Special Education Faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 1</td>
<td>Introduction &amp; course requirements; Teaching Mathematics: Foundations, Issues &amp; Perspectives NCTM and California Standards and Common Core</td>
<td>Course Overview and Introduction. Social and Historical perspectives on disability. Federal laws (IDEA, ADA, Section 504 of the Voc. Rehabilitation Act) and regulations, relevant court cases leading to the federal laws and relating to assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, including English language learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>Classifying and Patterning</td>
<td>Risk factors related to developing disabilities. Working with Families including those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. IFSPs, IEPs, ITPs for students with disabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 3</td>
<td>Number Concepts</td>
<td>Characteristics of, and providing a framework of support for, children with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a review of the syllabus for the Foundations of Special Education course, the content meets multiple CCTC standards including: “Standard 2: Professional, Legal and Ethical Practice; Standard 3: Educating Diverse Learners; Standard 11: Typical and Atypical Development; and Standard 14: Creating Healthy Learning Environments”. It also addresses TPEs identified by the CCTC for all credential candidates: “TPE 4: Making Content Accessible; TPE 8: Learning about Students; TPE 10: Instructional Planning; TPE 11: Social Environment; and TPE 12: Professional, Legal and Ethical Obligations.”

Students in the Foundations of Special Education course are exposed to a variety of special education issues during each meeting. The class begins with an overview of the history and development of special education in public schools in the United States and the laws that currently govern special education. Students spend the next session learning how to work with families with children with special needs, including those who may be
culturally and linguistically diverse. The legal documents associated with special education (i.e., IFSPs, IEPs, ITPs) are also discussed during that class.

The course work continues with a week examining ADD and positive behavior supports, while the next week is devoted to the characteristics of children with autism and communication disorders. After that there is a presentation on students who are visually impaired. The course ends by examining the needs of gifted and talented students. According to the syllabus there is one three-hour meeting for general education teaching candidates to learn about the “characteristics of, and providing a framework of support for, children with learning disabilities,” including RtI and MTSS.

Dr. Kendall, a general education teacher educator at ASU, teaches the math methods class. This class provides both special education and general education elementary credential candidates with an understanding of elementary math concepts and suggestions of appropriate pedagogy. Registration at ASU for the elementary math methods class is open to all teacher education candidates so the composition of the class includes a mix of special education and general education credential candidates.

The ideal course sequence is for credential candidates to enroll in the Math Curriculum and Methods’ class after completing the Foundations of Special Education course. Dr. Kendall believes that the special education course provides the credential candidates in the math class knowledge to teach students with special needs. Professor Kendall’s example underscores how incorporation of RtI is largely a matter of individual interest and discretion. She explains,

When we discuss a (math) concept we talk about how RtI and MTSS might fit into mathematics so the ones who are not ed specialists (special education teacher candidates) will get a better idea. Then I put them into groups to talk about it. The generalists (general education teacher candidates) can ask the questions they need to ask. The ed specialists can give them good examples. They (ed specialist teacher candidates) have a lot more experience in working with children who have any particular kind of special need. They share their information and it is extremely helpful to our students.

General education teacher candidates learn about RtI and MTSS in the Foundations of Special Education course taught by special education teacher educators. One of the ASU the general education teacher educator chooses to include the topics RtI and MTSS in the math methods class she teaches. That class includes both general and special education credential candidates. Special education teacher candidates are called upon to be resources for their general education classmates regarding additional instructional strategies for students with special needs in the Math Methods course.

**Special Education is the source of RtI and MTSS information**

At ASU all teacher credential candidates are exposed to RtI and MTSS in one course taught by special education faculty. General education teacher educators refer to
the knowledge from the Foundations of Special Education in methods classes. Special education teacher candidate classmates may be asked to share their knowledge of special education and RtI and MTSS when taking classes with general education credential. General education candidates receive direct instruction about RtI and MTSS in one class the Foundations of Special Education taught by special education faculty.

ASU deliberately includes information about RtI and MTSS throughout the initial special education teacher preparation program. According to the special education department chair,

“RtI and MTSS come in at the preliminary level (of teacher preparation). Students learn early about those models, partially because those models are used to identify students.”

The initial knowledge of RtI and MTSS introduced in the Foundations of Special Education course serves as a base upon which subsequent classes build. The special education preparation program courses are purposely sequenced to enhance the candidates’ knowledge and understanding of RtI and MTSS practices. Candidates are required to apply increasingly sophisticated knowledge of RtI and MTSS to the course content as they move through the program.

The special education department understands that knowledge of RtI and MTSS is important. The special education department chair explains the need this way,

They (RtI and MTSS) are also used to ameliorate or eliminate the need for specialized services if students can get extra help early enough. In the graduate level we have a course devoted to it (RtI and MTSS).

In addition to knowledge of RtI and MTSS, special education teacher candidates are expected to apply the RtI and MTSS principles. Specific practices essential for successfully implementing RtI and MTSS, such as collaboration, are included in the special education preparation program.

Special education candidates are required to take one course that focuses exclusively on collaboration, co-teaching, and consultation. These are skills are an example of those needed to implement RtI and MTSS successfully. Dr. Harry, the instructor observes,

Collaboration is emphasized in that district (biggest school district in which the university is located) and we spend a lot of time talking about collaboration. We discuss dealing with difficult people, resistance, pessimism, and hearing criticism. We have to teach them how to talk and how to achieve rapport.

Special education credential candidates, working with another special education candidate as a partner, prepare a case study and must present an instructional goal using several different models of co-teaching for their final project in the class. As schools
often randomly assign co-teaching partners, the instructor pairs students who do not know each other for this work. Dr. Harry explains, “It isn’t about teaching skills but more about human relationships.”

Dr. Isner at ASU easily incorporates knowledge and skills to implement RtI and MTSS into the Advanced Literacy course. She observes,

RTI fits organically into the whole framework of the class. All of the students they will teach are struggling at different levels and their challenges are different levels of severity. They start talking about the students in general education classrooms that struggle and some of the strategies that might fit into the first tier.

The content of the reading course is built around the processes of RtI and MTSS as a way in which to support learners with special needs, as Dr. Isner describes,

Over the course of the class we look at strategies that would fit more into the third tier, these are the strategies for when you teach a student one-to-one. Other strategies we look at are better to do in a small group because kids get more attention and that would be the second tier.

Dr. Isner is able to begin the advanced literacy instruction for older struggling students with just a review of the process of RtI and MTSS as she explains, “The RtI framework is taught in a course that is taken before the course that we are talking about. I do remind them of the terms, and how they are used.”

In addition to building on prior exposure to RtI and MTSS, the knowledge of core reading and language skills are taught earlier in the program as well. Dr. Isner describes this, “The class that focuses on fundamental reading skills talks about RTI a lot. That course looks at phonemic awareness and decoding and fluency, the more mechanical components of reading.”

At ASU the components of RtI and MTSS are interlaced into the fabric of the special education preparation program. Skills associated with effective special education teaching practice, such as collaboration and co-teaching are taught within an RtI and MTSS frame. This allows time in advanced classes to address curriculum and strategies in greater depth and complexity, according to faculty. The instructor of the advanced literacy class, Dr. Isner notes that at this point in their preparation, the preservice credential candidates, “… are familiar with RtI and are revisiting it rather than something that is brand new.”

In summary, ASU systematically includes RtI and MTSS in its initial special education teacher preparation program. The special education preparation program is sequenced so that candidates apply increasingly sophisticated knowledge of RtI and MTSS to course content. RtI and MTSS are practices threaded throughout the special education teacher preparation program. But general education teaching candidates are
introduced to the concepts of RtI and MTSS through one course, the Foundations of Special Education taught by a special education teacher educator. The knowledge learned in the Foundations of Special Education course is called upon in the Math Methods course that is taken by general education and special education candidates. After those two classes, it isn’t clear as to what other information general education candidates receive about RtI and MTSS from their general education preparation courses.

**Districts are a weak source of pressure to incorporate RtI and MTSS**

The special education teacher educators learn about district expectations regarding RtI and MTSS informally. Teacher educators take note of teaching practices when supervising student teachers in schools. Students provide teacher educators with information about district and school expectations when they take classes at ASU. According to these sources, Dr. Isner notes,

> The biggest district in our area uses RTI definitely. A lot of our interns are familiar with that first hand because they are working there. My impression from candidates in my classes is that smaller districts are not using RTI or MTSS.

Dr. Harry, another special education teacher educator at ASU, also observes, “The big district in our area calls it RtI². Collaboration is emphasized but it is all the responsibility of the special ed teacher from what I see when I do observations and what my teachers (candidates) tell me.”

There is also a formal way for the special education department and local districts to communicate. The special education department chair describes these meetings,

> We have a Community Advisory meeting every year that special education holds. We also have a college-wide Assessment Task Force. The Assessment Task Force meets twice a year with community stakeholders, people in the district administration level to have an ongoing conversation about what they wish they would see in our candidates.

These meetings are an opportunity for the university to provide information to local districts about CCTC credentialing changes. They are also a venue for districts to present their needs to program faculty. Reflecting on these meetings, the special department chair could not recall districts requesting that new teachers have more knowledge of RtI and MTSS.

The ASU general education chair also uses a formal method, a survey, to obtain information on district needs.

Across the IHE system we have completers’ surveys for those that complete a (teacher preparation program). It is given to first-year teachers and administrators (at their school site).
The ASU’s general education department reviews this data during an annual faculty retreat. The purpose of this exercise, the department chair notes is to, “…. see what we can do in terms of classes and what we can do better in terms of servicing them (future credential candidates).”

The ASU general education department chair remarked that there are concerns raised by these surveys that are consistently cited by both new teachers and administrators, but none that specifically requests that general education teachers have additional knowledge of RtI and MTSS. He explains,

So two things always come up for regular ed credential teachers. I don’t say they are incompetent, but challenges that they refer to, or they lack confidence in, is working with kids with special needs and ELLs (English language learners). Those are always the top two.

The chair acknowledges that the department’s eventual goal is to have the strategies about special needs learners, “…. that the methodology introduced in the course that deals with special needs is echoed across each methodology course. Whether it is in multiple subject, math, science, language arts or writing, we want to make sure it is echoed across each methodology course.” The chair believes that creating that “echo” throughout methodology course will address one of the challenges identified by the survey.

**Interpretation of RtI and MTSS at Barney State University**

At BSU the preparation programs for special education and general education teachers are entirely separate. Special education faculty provides any information about special education and RtI and MTSS to general education teacher candidates. The general education teacher educator opens up her class for these guest lectures at her discretion. General education teacher educators at BSU are ambivalent about or opposed to using RtI and MTSS as a system to support struggling students. They choose not to include these topics in their courses to initial general education teacher candidates.

**General Education Preparation to implement RtI and MTSS**

BSU does not include information about RtI and MTSS in general education reading or math methods courses. Dr. Foster (math methods) is uncomfortable in the conceptual underpinnings of RtI and MTSS, and finds them at odds with her understanding of learning and “productive struggle”. Dr. Elliott (reading methods class) believes that information regarding the needs of struggling learners is better placed in a program after candidates have had time to work in the field and have a deeper understanding of the foundations of reading. The content in the only reading class in BSU’s initial general education credential program focuses on basic reading theories, literacy development, and pedagogy.
General education teacher educators choose to defer to the knowledge of special education instructors with respect to RtI and MTSS. General education candidates in the multiple subject credential program may receive information about RtI and MTSS, in the context of the occasional guest lecture in a student teaching seminar. The general education department chair notes,

The sped faculty provides teacher candidates with presentations on special ed…. General ed teacher candidates haven’t taken a course in special education since 2004 when that one mainstreaming class was eliminated. None of us (gen ed faculty) is equipped to teach about special ed.

The general education department chair acknowledges the benefits of integrating special education and general education credential candidates,

… The goal is that special ed preservice candidates also are blended into multiple subject credential classes and that multiple subject credential people and professors learn more about special education.

There have been issues when special education and general education credential candidates have taken methods classes together, however. The chair describes these,

… I think that there is still an unclear understanding about that integration at the Department level. There is also that the sped candidates are all working teachers because they get hired before they even start student teaching and our students are in a credential program.

The general education department chair has plans in the future to provide general education credential candidates with more knowledge of special education,

… We are planning on teaching the seminar, the initial seminar for our (general ed) credential students for the three-semester students, where she (special ed faculty) would come in and do some lectures. We would show them some aspects about special ed children and help them understand some of the definitions…

The new seminar would include the current guest lectures from special education faculty. The course would remain a component of the seminar that the general education candidates take while they are in their first student teaching experience and falls within the second semester of the three-semester program.

**General Education Teacher Educators struggle with RtI and MTSS**

Despite the segregation and separation that occurs at BSU during the preparation of general education and special education credential candidates, it is possible to include information about RtI and MTSS. The level of individual discretion enjoyed by teacher educators at BSU suggests that an enthusiasm for these topics (RtI and MTSS) could result in incorporation of their incorporation in the base reading and math methods course
for general education credential candidates. However, the instructors for both these courses at BSU demonstrated skepticism about including information about RtI and MTSS as part of the initial teacher education program.

Dr. Eva Elliott describes the reading methods course for general education elementary credential candidates as one in which students are introduced to basic methods for reading instruction without special attention to students who struggle:

Basically our preservice teachers are trained to learn the basic methods of elementary school reading instruction. It isn’t so much that we focus on struggling readers in the credential program…. Initial candidates come into the program and know nothing about curriculum and instruction…. We used to have two classes that focused on reading but we had to eliminate one in order to meet the CCTC mandate to have a one-year credential program.

Rather, the knowledge to work with struggling readers is situated in the reading specialist program and is an advanced degree and credential. Information addressing the needs of readers with special needs is included in the textbook used in the reading specialist program.

Dr. Foster, who conducts the math methods course, takes an even stronger stance, saying that she struggles with the concept of RtI and making sense of it within her professional concept of learning and teaching. She reflects,

I am a little sour on this idea (RtI). I think it, I haven’t worked it out entirely, but it feels like it is in conflict with, in my mind, starting with the assumption that kids are trying to make sense of what they are doing and your job is to figure out what that is and to engage with them on the next step along the path. So, I don’t know RTI. I don’t have as much experience with it. I know that there is a big district push around it. It just feels too formulaic for the kinds of approaches to teaching mathematics that I want kids to have and that are reflected in the Common Core. So I don’t really do anything with it in this class.

RtI and MTSS processes are in conflict with Dr. Foster’s beliefs about learning and teaching. She adds,

I think another piece of it is that in Response to Intervention it suggests that there is a thing you are going to do and suddenly the kid is going to know something. I think that flies in the face of constructivism. It might make sense for certain skills. If you can tell a student is ready for something. But I think I have these issues with reteaching. I think that is the worst word. Why not say we are going to work on this more or we are going to visit it again? If you didn’t teach it in the first place, the definition of teaching, then there really isn’t reteaching, you know what I mean?

Like Dr. Elliott in the reading methods class, Dr. Foster concentrates class time on providing basic knowledge of elementary mathematic instruction.
Special Education Teacher Preparation and RtI and MTS

Special education teacher candidates learn about RtI and MTSS in several classes during their preparation, although the amount of information about RtI and MTSS included in courses is left to the discretion of the faculty member teaching the class. The belief that special education teacher educators have in the effectiveness of RtI and MTSS varies. Local school districts were not asking for the special education preparation program to add more information about RtI and MTSS according to the special education department chair.

At BSU general education teacher educators teach math and reading methods courses that are required components of both preparation programs, the multiple subject (elementary) and special education. Special education credential candidates are permitted to enroll only in sections designated for special education candidates. General education credential candidates attend methods courses as a cohort made up of other general education credential candidates. Special education credential candidates are taught in classes that do not include general education candidates so that informal exchanges between special education credential candidates and general education candidates are not possible.

RtI and MTSS are included in the curriculum preparing special education teachers. Information about RtI and MTSS are presented in classes such as: special education law, the introductory course in special education, the advanced literacy class, and the advanced (math) methods class. The extent of information regarding RtI and MTSS embedded into individual classes varies by instructor. In addition to content variability, credential candidates often take classes out of their intended sequence so faculty cannot assume that all students have prior knowledge of topics such as RtI and MTSS.

According to the department chair, Dr. David, “Students have just taken classes willy-nilly.” When that takes place special education teacher educators face additional challenges. The faculty teaching advanced methods courses cannot assume that all of the credential candidates in their classes possess knowledge from introductory courses. With such a range of preparedness it is difficult to add complexity to instruction in either the class content or in the use of RtI and MTSS.

The BSU special education teacher preparation program is designed so that Dr. Adams’ special education introduction course is taken in the first semester. Similar to the Special Education Foundations course at ASU, this survey class offers credential candidates an overview of special education, including RtI and MTSS. As Dr. Adams’ explains,

Briefly we go over the tiers and have them (teacher candidates) think about the tiers as they assess, how they progress monitor, and what to do they want to look for when they are deciding whether or not the student is responsive or not. We look at how a student is going to move between tiers and we spend a lot of time
looking at screening tools, looking at the RTI for Success website that gives a chart of all screening tools. They look at sensitivity and specificity, false positive and false negative rates.

The assignments for this class include the fundamentals of lesson planning, and incorporating RtI and MTSS into instruction.

The advanced methods courses are to be taken the semester before the candidate student teaches. One of the advanced methods courses, taught by Dr. Connor, emphasizes math. Dr. Connor uses knowledge and the application of RtI and MTSS as the cornerstones of instruction. This class is taught at a school site that houses an afterschool program for academic support. Credential candidates tutor middle school students enrolled in the afterschool program. Dr. Connor is able to model administration of assessments and demonstrate teaching strategies. She explains,

Progress monitoring is the focus of this class and more of the skills that students would need in order to do RTI. One of the major outcomes is to be sure that students are ready to use easy CBM or Aims Web where they get normed data. That is they compare their data with normed data in terms of reading and develop fluency among students and have changed the course so that it is offered in the field.

Dr. Connor observes and offers feedback to credential candidates as they administer assessments and provide instruction. Dr. Connor adds,

They are also learning different interventions, like the RRAC model that Fearson has or the Great Leaps program. These are specifically set up to teach and build fluency with students. They have choice of using one or the other. They also use the Otter Creek math all the way though so that they can do skill building, progress monitoring and see that there are different types of monitoring.

Dr. Connor notes that though RtI and MTSS organize much of the instruction, credential candidates also complete a conceptual lesson plan each time they design instruction.

Dr. Connor gave several reasons for using RtI and MTSS in the advanced methods course, including her attendance at professional conferences and reading of current research. She explains, “RTI was getting a lot of press out in the literature.” In addition to her own professional learning, Dr. Connor was motivated to include RtI and MTSS in the class by the program coordinator of the mild-to-moderate credential program. Dr. Connor, notes,

…. (She) had a background in RTI having worked with one of its strongest proponents during her (the program coordinator’s) graduate work. She knew this was the wave of the future…

Dr. Connors continues,
…. We wanted to update our program to reflect what was going on in terms of federal and national policy. We wanted to make sure our students were prepared. They are valuable skills for you to know. There is a strong evidence base behind using progress monitoring.

Dr. Connor’s awareness of educational policy in the larger educational field and encouragement from a colleague, the program coordinator, support her decision to integrate RtI and MTSS into the course.

The other advanced methods class in the special education preparation program focuses on literacy and is taught by special education teacher educator, Dr. Bennett. In the ideal sequence of classes this advanced methods class is literacy is taken after a candidate has successfully completed the reading course taught by general education teaching faculty. Dr. Bennett describes how RtI and MTSS fit into the curriculum in the

It’s a topic. I hate to refer to it as just that, it’s more than that. It comes up very overtly as a topic. It comes out through the course assignments because they are practicing doing an assessment and practicing, as I said in a limited form, progress monitoring. I use one particular IRIS module on RTI for this class.

Knowledge of RtI and MTSS is available to special education credential candidates in course readings as well, Dr. Bennett notes,

The textbook that I use also deals directly with RTI. While I don’t present it, it also has lesson plans that also follow the Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3 approach in it. I don’t present it, as this is the way you have to do it, in fact. I present it as let’s see what part of this works and how we might do it differently. I don’t adhere to that it would work for everybody.

It is important to Dr. Bennett that special education credential candidates are exposed to a wide range of instructional methods,

Teacher preparation is more about discovering what works about an approach, rather than, this is the approach you should use. The textbook does follow it (RtI and MTS) all the way through, using the terms, and has lots of lesson plans.

Dr. Bennett’s belief in her autonomy as a teacher educator influences her decision to include RtI and MTSS in the curriculum of the Advanced Literacy Class.

**Districts request more special education teachers, not preparation for RtI and MTSS**

BSU relies on informal interactions to communicate with its majority school district, according to the special education department chair. The chair referred to
frequent phone calls with the district as the manner in which they communicate. She noted that,

The main thing that they (the districts) have been pushing toward us is, well, one for sure thing is they need, more teachers. That it is the bottom line. They need more special ed teachers and interns. They are so desperate because of the teacher shortages.

When the chair was asked specifically about requests from the districts regarding preparing new teachers to implement RtI she responded,

I haven’t heard Response to Intervention in a long time. I don’t say that it is dying, but I don’t think it is as big as it used to be.

The elementary education department chair at BSU also relies on informal exchanges of information in maintaining the program’s long-standing relationship with the school district.

We work very closely with the school districts. There are several school sites at which faculty have worked intensively for seven or eight years (piloting special afterschool programs)…. Many of the teachers at those sites are our graduate students.

Those are the schools, she explained, in which the program places student teachers. She added, “…. with our biggest district we have worked intensively with them for as long as I can remember and continue to do so.” The department chair could not recall local districts requesting that new general education teachers have knowledge of RtI and MTSS.

In the next section I will compare how ASU and BSU integrate RtI and MTSS into their preparation programs. I will begin with an examination of the knowledge of RtI and MTSS that general education candidates receive. After that I review how special education teacher candidates are prepared to implement RtI and MTSS.

**Comparison of RtI and MTSS at ASU and BSU**

Both institutions and all four of the individual preparation programs in the study provide credential candidates with some knowledge about RtI and MTSS, but the depth of that knowledge varies. Reasons for the variability are due to institutional support, area of specialization, and —most important — the discretion of individual teacher educators. At both universities special education was the source of RtI and MTSS information even though the CDE positions these reforms firmly in general education. General education teacher credential candidates receive knowledge of RtI and MTSS at both ASU and BSU, though each school structures that delivery differently.
ASU has a formal process for disseminating information about RtI and MTSS to its general education candidates and has knowledge of RtI and MTSS woven throughout its preparation program for special education teachers. ASU requires that all of its teacher candidates enroll in one course about special education taught by special education faculty. Dr. Kendall, a general education teacher educator, interviewed for this study also attempts to tie RtI and MTSS into instruction in the math methods class she teaches. These casual interactions take place during discussions in the math methods class regarding RtI and MTSS and during collaborative group work. Dr. Kendall often strategically groups students to encourage these interactions that allow special education candidates to share their experiences using RtI and MTSS. Integrated preparation courses augment the formal course work about special education that general educators receive.

General education teacher educators at BSU do not include knowledge of RtI and MTSS in the methods courses they teach. Dr. Elliott teaches the only course on reading included in the initial credential program for general education teachers at BSU. She notes, “There is only so much you can squeeze into one methods course”. BSU provides information about special education and RtI and MTSS when students are involved in a field experience.

BSU relies solely on an informal avenue to expose general education candidates to special education and RtI and MTSS. Special education faculty may be invited to speak to general education candidates and discuss special education and RtI and MTSS within a student teaching seminar. A BSU policy that restricts registration in math and reading methods class is a barrier too. This system creates sections of methods classes composed exclusively of special education or general education candidates. This policy eliminates the possibility of even casual exchanges between future special and general education teachers about RtI and MTSS.

ASU and BSU include knowledge of RtI and MTSS in their special education teacher preparation programs. Again, there is variability in manner in which that information is situated in each program and the amount of time devoted to it. At ASU, RtI and MTSS knowledge and practices are integrated program-wide with a spiraling scope and sequence. BSU offers knowledge of RtI and MTSS in a number of courses, but instructor discretion may expand or decrease the amount of time spent on RtI and MTSS.

Special education teacher educators at both ASU and BSU are the primary source of knowledge about RtI and MTSS for credential candidates and their general education faculty colleagues. In some cases even special education credential candidates are viewed as resources for information about RtI and MTSS in general education classes. Special education teacher educators provide information about RtI and MTSS in multiple classes in programs that prepare special education teachers at ASU and BSU.

In the next chapter I discuss the implications of this research for teacher educators and policy makers and recommend areas for future research.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

This qualitative dissertation traces the way in which policy messages from state educational agencies are taken up by teacher preparation programs. I use the case of RtI and MTSS to understand how teacher educators and teacher preparation programs impact policy implementation. I was guided by two main questions: 1) What are the messages about RtI and MTSS from the California Department of Education and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; and, 2) How are RtI and MTSS taken up by preparation programs and understood by teacher educators? It is important to remember when discussing the findings from this study that the responses of preparation programs that were analyzed reflect program responses before the CCTC mandated inclusion of MTSS into teacher preparation in 2016 (effective 2017).

The data for the study were acquired from several sources. Documents obtained from the websites of the state agencies were analyzed for information about RtI and MTSS. Data, interviews and program documents, regarding teacher preparation was gathered from general education and special education credential programs situated within two large urban public universities in California. This research increases our understanding of the role that teacher educators have in implementing RtI and MTSS. I use conceptual tools from institutional theory, sensemaking and framing theory, to analyze policy messages and recognize the way in which those messages are understood and acted upon by individuals. I also utilize ideas about capacity and incentives to from research on policy implementation to describe the process of change.

Policy Messages from State Agencies

The CDE was the primary proponent for RtI and MTSS in California. The CDE’s endorsement did not automatically assure inclusion of reforms in teacher preparation programs since the CDE does not have regulatory authority over teachers and teacher preparation programs in California. Without central authority for the entire educational apparatus in the state, the CDE is dependent on the CCTC to align teacher practice with CDE reforms. In 2007, the CDE broadened RtI2 defining it as, “… a general education approach of high quality instruction, early intervention, and prevention and behavioral strategies…” (CDE, 2008). However, the CCTC, with regulatory authority over teacher education, did not explicitly align itself with the CDE’s message.

This finding is consistent with policy implementation research, which finds that policy systems with overlapping responsibility confuse their intended audience, “…. The segmented policy system sends a mélange of mixed and often competing signals that can undermine the authority and power of the policy” (Cohen & Spillane, 1992). In the case of RtI and MTSS, the CDE directed schools to alter service delivery to align with RtI2 and MTSS in 2007. Yet the agency preparing the teachers for those schools, the CCTC, did not mandate preparation programs provide knowledge of MTSS until 2017. The CDE clearly indicated in multiple reports and statements that MTSS was to be situated within general education. Another consequence of this confusion was that the teacher preparation programs that did respond and incorporate MTSS into preparation were
special education programs. The intended target of the message was for general education preparation programs. Not only was there a time lag in aligning policy but also general education programs ignored the policy, the intended target of the policy.

The CCTC’s message to programs, while consistent with RtI and MTSS principles, did not require that new teachers be taught how to specifically provide instruction within an MTSS structure, according to this study. The CCTC does have the authority to oversee teacher preparation, but it presented its expectations in broad, general terms. That language allowed for programs, and even individual teacher educators, to exercise personal discretion in enacting the CCTC’s goals.

This finding concurs with implementation research focusing on the impact of the language precision in crafting policy, “When policy directives pair a clear implementation goal with tractable procedures they are more likely to implemented” (Maxmanian & Sabatier, 1983 cited by Spillane, et al, 2002). The CCTC clarified its expectations in drafting the 2016 TPEs. It stated that MTSS was the specific set of practices that programs must include in preparation course work, replacing the more ambiguous language present in the 2009 TPEs.

The evolution of policy messages and teacher education requirements reflects ongoing framing and sensemaking within and across the two agencies. The CDE embraced the redefinition of the ever-present educational (and for some subgroups in the state increasing) problem of student struggle resulting in academic failure. Within an RtI and MTSS framework the solution to student struggle or failure is to change curriculum and/or instruction. The CDE possessed the state mandate to influence school curriculum and instruction. The RtI/MTSS frame was a perfect match between the educational solution in RtI/MTSS and the regulatory power of the CDE. It is not surprising that the CDE has added the RtI/MTSS framework to every state program in the last decade.

The CCTC reviewed the RtI/MTSS frame from the CDE, but initially treated the existing TPEs as adequate to meet the intent of that frame. It took almost a decade for the CCTC to change its schema and “make new sense” of its institutional model of struggling learners. The CCTC may have reinterpreted its institutional frame of reference when the Commission was presented with the findings in the report that it co-authored with the CDE in 2015, One System. The following year, 2016, the CCTC drafted new TPEs to be effective in 2017. With those revisions, the CCTC responded to the CDE policy by incorporating references to MTSS explicitly in the Teacher Performance Expectations to which teacher candidates and teacher education programs are held accountable. The CCTC response occurred almost a decade after the CDE began advocating that California’s schools use a tiered system of instruction and that teacher be prepared to do so.

Teacher Preparation Programs Interpret Policy Messages

Findings derived from teacher education programs suggest that the new alignment between CDE and CCTC policy messages may nonetheless present challenges for teacher
educators. Overall, responsibility for RtI and MTSS preparation remained the purview of special education. In general education programs, teacher educators were ambivalent about RtI and MTSS and general education preparation programs largely ignored these topics. The extent and depth of information about RtI and MTSS that was included in programs varied. Findings also revealed that the unpredictability of knowledge about RtI and MTSS varied between institutions and even within programs. These findings are consistent with research in teacher education.

Treatment of RtI and MTSS by general education faculty and programs, in the two case study institutions, was fairly limited and superficial. General education teacher educators interviewed for this study were familiar with RtI/MTSS but reluctant to incorporate the knowledge and skills needed to implement RtI/MTSS into course content. All of the general education teacher educators cited lack of time as a reason that prevented them from incorporating RtI and MTSS into course work. The general education teacher educators felt that the existing structure was insufficient to adequately address the teaching performance expectations already in place. They were alarmed at the prospect of making space for additional content in already overflowing course content. In addition to time, some participants expressed professional, ideological reservations about RtI/MTSS as a rationale for excluding these topics from course work.

The issue of organizational capacity is significant. It was a point that every general education faculty raised without prompting. There was universal frustration and dismay from general education faculty at the prospect of adding any more content into courses. (Examples of faculty comments at both institutions included: “There is only so much you can squeeze into one methods course”, “Our time is so short,” and “We need more time”). The CCTC and CDE are in complete agreement with the assessment from the teacher educators in this study. In 2012 the issue of preparation time was identified as a significant obstacle to improving teacher preparation (and student achievement) in California. The report, *Greatness by Design*, stated:

Some constraints to high-quality programs must also be removed. In 1970, California was the only state in the nation to outlaw undergraduate teacher education majors and to set a one-year cap on credits for preparation This antiquated policy now constrains teachers’ opportunities to learn compared with other states and introduces inefficiencies that the state cannot now afford It is time for California to remove barriers to undergraduate study of education, lift the cap on credits and encourage streamlined “blended” programs that teach content and pedagogy in tandem, especially in shortage fields like mathematics, physical science, world languages, special education and English language development In this way, preparation can be both improved and made more efficient at the same time (emphasis is from the original text; CDE & CCTC, 2012, p.15).

This finding, that teacher educators report lack of time, is consistent with policy implementation research on capacity. The capacity, specifically time, must be available in order for those charged with the implementation to enact the policy (Firestone, 1989). In addition, there may be an interaction between organizational and individual capacity
when implementers “fail to notice, intentionally ignore, or selectively attend to policies that are inconsistent with their own (and/or their agency’s) interests and agendas” (Firestone, 1989).

The true impact of individual capacity on the general education teacher educators is uncertain, that is whether they truly possess adequate knowledge to teach others about RtI and MTSS. There was an assumption of familiarity with RtI and MTSS on the part of the researcher in this study when interviewing teacher educators. The extent of the knowledge of RtI and MTSS principles and practices that participants actually possess was not measured. Doubts regarding the depth of understanding of RtI/MTSS practices and principles that general education faculty is based in research. According to recent studies from the teacher preparation literature, RtI and MTSS are rarely the topic of research or practice articles found in general education peer-reviewed journals (Barrio, et al, 2015; Hazelkorn, et al, 2010).

Studies of journal content highlight a larger and more troubling issue within teacher preparation that is “the lack of ownership and investment in RtI in general education research” (Barrio, et al, 2015, p.197). The general education teacher preparation community has chosen not to participate in this research. That impoverishes the conversation about how to best to prepare new teachers to implement this general education initiative. Without knowledge of RtI and MTSS it is unlikely that general education teacher educators will have the capacity to effectively prepare new teachers to work within those frameworks. Without this information general education teacher educators will be unprepared to participate effectively at their institutions in incorporating the skills and practices associated with RtI and MTSS into course work. Lacking an understanding of RtI and MTSS practice from research by general education may be a factor for teacher educators should they desire to make a reasoned and researched argument limiting or excluding the inclusion of RtI and MTSS practices in general education preparation.

Special education remains the principal source of knowledge about RtI and MTSS despite the CDE’s having situating the frameworks within general education. However, it is not clear that even student teachers in special education programs received in-depth preparation. When special education teacher educators included RtI (and MTSS) in the program curriculum it was uneven and, was often included at the discretion of the instructor. There was a difference in the extent and depth of RtI and MTSS knowledge and skills between the two programs that prepare special education teachers. These irregularities were found within the same special education preparation program at BSU, where teacher discretion determined course content. This finding is supported by the Midwest IHE survey as well (though their findings illustrated the difference between general and special education faculty). Results of their analysis revealed, “possible inconsistencies in teaching RtI as a component of course work by IHE departments” (Harvey, et al., 2014, p.9); as well as, “differing levels of the importance/emphasis on RtI training by department on key core principles” (Harvey, et al, 2014, p. 10).
Teacher Educators, Framing, and Sensemaking

These findings are consistent with sensemaking research. Teacher must redesign their preexisting cognitive frameworks to accommodate the new messages about RtI and MTSS (Coburn, 2001; Weick, 1995; Vaughn, 1996). According to theorists, these new frameworks are composed of aspects of a teacher’s professional identity, including beliefs and practices (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 1998). “Teachers notice new messages and construct understandings of them through the lens of their preexisting practices, and world views” (Spillane, 2002, p. 395), according to empirical studies in education that have used sensemaking theory (Coburn, 2002; Spillane, 1999). Theorists believe that, “different agents will construct different understandings, seeing what is new in terms of what is already known and believed. What we see is influenced by what we expect to see” (Spillane, 2002, p. 395). Those models provide a way to understand the way that implementers in this study tried to understand messages about RtI and MTSS.

Sensemaking theory also helps to explain the range of acceptance of RtI/MTSS among the teacher educators in the study. The general education teacher educators were, to varying degrees, uneasy about RtI and MTSS. The way that the act of learning and successful teaching is defined in the RtI/MTSS model is discordant with their construct of learning and teaching. A general education teacher puzzled aloud about one particular RtI/MTSS practice, reteaching,

I think that is the worst word. Why not say we are going to work on this more or we are going to visit it again? If you didn’t teach it in the first place, the definition of teaching, then there really isn’t reteaching.

Theorists believe that schemas, or world views, help people attend more closely to what they perceive is important and those perceptions go on to confirm their expectations (Olsen, Roese, & Zanna, 1996). The reaction of general education teacher educators to the idea of RtI/MTSS ranged from neutral to negative, though, as discussed earlier the true depth of their knowledge about the underlying principles and practices or RtI/MTSS is unknown.

Even the general education teacher educators who were not overtly critical of RtI and included information about RtI/MTSS in course work “bounded” their association with it. Those general education teacher educators discussed RtI/MTSS topics in their general education classes by referencing students back to information about RtI/MTSS that they had received from the special education class that had taken. In those same classes those general education teacher educators reinforced the association of special education with RtI/MTSS by encouraging special education candidates to share their experiences with RtI/MTSS with general education candidates. Sensemaking theorists believe that those actions indicate that the individuals (the general education teacher educators) didn’t truly assimilate or incorporate, the new information, in this case RtI/MTSS into their schema. Instead they placed the new information that couldn’t fit into an existing schema, within a context, a “bubble”. That information remains outside of their schema. When information is situated in that way, theorists postulate, that new
information is unlikely to move the individual to action, i.e. change their teaching practices in the case of RtI/MTSS (Higgins, 1996).

Sensemaking theory also helps us understand the enthusiasm that special education teacher educators expressed, almost universally, for RtI/MTSS. RtI/MTSS were so closely aligned with their schemas they voluntarily incorporated them into their preparation programs (Higgins, 1996). There was such resonance among special education regarding RtI/MTSS that even in the years that the CCTC was silent on the specifics of RtI/MTSS and exerted no regulatory pressure to programs, special education took up those messages and incorporated RtI/MTSS into preparation programs. There was such a powerful alignment between RtI/MTSS practice and the schema of special education teacher educators that they were able to disregard the fact that the CDE had clearly placed RtI/MTSS with general education.

There were several reasons for this cognitive harmony. RtI/MTSS originated in special education. The new information, RtI/MTSS was a product of the professional community with whom the special education teacher educators identify. That provides the information with a level of credence and believability. With that receptive cognitive groundwork, it is understandable why special education teacher educators were more willing to consider and accept information about RtI/MTSS. For special education teacher educators, this new information was coming from a trusted source so it was easier for them to assimilate RtI/MTSS into their schema or worldview.

The language of RtI/MTSS provided additional cognitive links to special education faculty increasing their receptivity to this new information. The terms used to describe the skills and practices within RtI/MTSS are medical in flavor: progress monitoring, response to intervention, treatment protocols. For special education teacher educators this language is a component of their schema, their mental model (Dweck, 1999; Hammer & Elby, 2002). Knowledge about RtI/MTSS was easier for them to assimilate because it met their expectations and explanations about learning and teaching. They did not experience the dissonance expressed by their general education colleague about reteaching, for example. The practices and principles associated with RtI/MTSS resonate with their model of learning and teaching. Theorists believe that “Intuitive models of learning and classroom interactions should strongly influence how agents interpret reforms” (Spillane, 2002, p.395).

**Implications for Policy**

A key finding of this study was the obstacle to policy implementation created by the division of responsibility between two key state agencies. CDE policy is directed to schools and school districts but has little to no direct authority over or impact on teacher preparation programs. The key to changing preparation programs is through the CCTC, which establishes standards that guide the accreditation of institutions and programs. It is important that these pivotal educational agencies collaborate in a timely fashion to produce parallel policies that support a common vision for California’s schools and teachers. The findings from this study describe the consequences when policy messages
are unclear.

The directives produced by these two agencies are successful in meeting the objectives that the state of California has assigned to each. The CDE’s audience are the “boots on the ground”, those educators and programs that are closest to children. The language in their reforms and policies is prescriptive, leaving little doubt to objectives and the steps to achieve the goals of the program. The CCTC’s audience is higher education. Their reports and communications create standards and teaching expectations that allow for intellectual interpretation. Both agencies are meeting the organizational goals that the state has set for them. However, the very nature of those objectives creates challenges for coherent policy implementation.

Developing an informational bridge between the constituents of CDE reforms, district and school leaders, and the CCTC constituency, teacher educators, may help address this communication gap. The CDE is in a weak position institutionally to change the preparation of the state’s teachers; that falls to the CCTC. While a communication mechanism sanctioned by the CCTC may not formally strengthen the CDE’s influence in preparation programs, it would at least clarify the CDE’s message to those programs. One option might be simply inviting teacher educators to participate in CDE produced professional learning opportunities. Many such presentations are already prepared for the school district administrators and are offered online. Using such a format additional attendees do not represent a financial burden. Creating points of common understanding may lay the groundwork for further collaboration between districts and teacher educators, in addition to raising awareness of CDE expectations for the state’s schools.

CCTC approval has strong regulatory power over teacher preparation programs and ---with the 2016 revision to the TPEs--- has taken steps to exercise that power to support the CDE’s mission. CCTC approval is essential since programs must be in good standing with the commission in order to remain viable and issue teaching credentials. The CCTC might consider encouraging teacher educators’ participation in CDE professional learning webinars. This knowledge could give preparation programs the opportunity to respond to current expectations in the state’s schools and apply that information in ways that help credential candidates transition successfully from academy to the classroom. In addition, by attending these seminars, teacher educators model the professional development expected of K-12 teachers.

**Implications for Teacher Education Programs and Practice**

Findings from this study show that teacher educators experienced no external pressure to build RtI and MTSS into programs in a systematic way. Even when teacher educators were aware of RtI and MTSS there was no coherent institutional response. Individual discretion looms large in the response within teacher preparation programs; teacher educators have individual discretion over what they do. There seems to be a tension for teacher educators as they enjoy academic freedom as members of the academy, yet must teach courses that are components of state mandates for professional licensure.
Findings from this study raise doubts regarding the individual capacity of teacher educators to enact these reforms. Opportunities for faculty learning about RtI/MTSS may be necessary before curriculum redesign begins. Findings from this study suggest teacher educators, especially general education teacher educators, would benefit from a deeper understanding of the underlying principles of RtI/MTSS. Awareness of these principles may provide professional links from RtI/MTSS skills to general education teaching practices. The redesign of courses will be more effective if RtI/MTSS is truly imbedded within course work, rather than presented as a stand-alone topic.

Uncertainty regarding organizational capacity was another finding from this study. Deans, department heads, and teacher educators will be challenged to absorb new content into programs that are already straining with existing requirements. The state continues to limit the preparation time of its teachers while simultaneously increasing the volume and complexity of the content and skills it expects of its new teachers. This point is raised perpetually, in report after report, year after year. Yet California cannot seem to muster the political and administrative will necessary to remove the straitjacket it has placed on teacher preparation. The current structure is untenable and continues to jeopardize the quality of preparation programs. At some point, these tensions may impact California’s ability to attract faculty to its teacher preparation programs, as well.

Implications for Future Research

This study contributes to the research on the relationship between teacher education and policy implementation. It identifies and provides an in-depth examination of the factors that influence the way in which policy messages move from the CDE to the CCTC and into teacher preparation programs. These findings enhance our understanding of how two state agencies conceptualize reform and the impact their messages have on teacher education. By identifying these influences, this study contributes to the scholarship on policy implementation and teacher preparation.

This study opens up several avenues for future research. A logical place to begin future research would be to address the limitations of this study. Expanding the number of institutions, and by extension, programs and participants, involved increases the ability to see larger trends, producing findings that could be generalized. A study that examines programs that offer integrated preparation programs would provide insight into how institutional organization aids or inhibits embedding policy messages. A study that focuses on single-subject preparation programs would be fascinating and provide the ability to compare and contrast the way in which policy is implemented within specific disciplines. Research that looks beyond the borders of California would determine if these issues are confined to a single state or have larger implications. Gathering data from states whose educational governance structures differ offers the opportunity to examine the impact that state level structure has on the uptake of policy messages across stakeholders.

Researching the impact that the 2016 TPEs have on preparation programs will be
another fertile area of study. There is very little research about the professional development of teacher educators. RtI/MTSS provides a particularly rich case for examining professional learning since the frameworks push professional boundaries on multiple levels, around identity, practices, and routines. A study that focuses on the process of course and program redesign within and across institutions and departments is another area to explore. Incorporating the 2016 TPEs into programs, especially within the time-limited preparation structure in California, will mean eliminating content. Those discussions can become contentious as teacher educators lobby and negotiate with colleagues to retain content they believe essential. Finally, comparing the course design process by preparation programs to the required CCTC program reviews would be interesting. That study could provide insight into the quality of faculty involvement in each of those undertakings. It could also identify the organizational and collegial benefits or problems that arise during each type of institutional review. Those findings might provide the CCTC with information to streamline its regulatory oversight.
References


doi: 10.1177/004005990703900502

doi:10.1111/1467-9604.00157


California Department of Education (CDE). Programs advocating using of MTSS. California CC Standards; Transitional K; ELs; Student Assistance; Closing the Achievement Gap. Retrieved from www.cde.ca.gov


Retrieved from www.cde.ca.gov/be/pn/im/documents/infocibseddec05item01.doc

California Department of Education (CDE), (2008). State Superintendent’s Office,
correspondence from Jack O’Connell. Retrieved from
www.cde.ca.gov/sp/qa/documents/spp2010.doc

California Department of Education (CDE), (2008) State Superintendent’s Office,
attachment to correspondence from Jack O’Connell. Retrieved from
www.cde.ca.gov/sp/qa/documents/spp2010.doc

California Department of Education (CDE), (2009). RtI Technical Work Group,
Determining a Specific Learning Disability Eligibility. Retrieved from
www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/documents/sideligibltyrti2.doc

California Department of Education (CDE), 2009, Inventory of Services and Supports,
RtI recommended for Program Improvement School Plans.

California Department of Education (CDE), (2011). State Superintendent’s Office,
Correspondence from Tom Torlaksen Retrieved from
http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/sspiletter.asp

California Department of Education (CDE), 2013. Memorandum from State


doi:10.3102/01623737011002151


Foster, Schmidt, & Sabatino, 1970


http://www.jstor.org/stable23886508


doi: 10.1177/001440299406000402


PMID: 486080


doi: 10.1177/001440299506200202


Huberman, M., Navo, M., & Parrish, T. (2012). Effective Practices in High Performing Districts Serving Students in Special Education. *Journal of Special Education*

Individual with Disabilities Education Act of 1975, 20, U.S.C § 1400 et seq


Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, 20 U.S.C. §1401 *et seq*


Lortie, D. C. (2002). Schoolteacher (2nd ed.).


doi: 10.1177/001440297103700803


National Council on Disability, (2004). *Improving educational outcomes for students*
with disabilities. Retrieved from


Retrieved from https://eric.ed.gov/ ERIC#:EJ998226


mainstreaming effects. Exceptional Children, 47, 302-304.

doi: 10.1177/001440298104700410


doi:10.1177/001440299706300204


Leadership, 52(4), 18-21.


California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). Mission statement.
Retrieved from https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/default

California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC). Vision statement.
Retrieved from https://www.ctc.ca.gov/commission/default

California Department of Education (CDE). Programs advocating using of MTSS.
California CC Standards; Transitional K; ELs; Student Assistance; Closing the Achievement Gap. Retrieved from www.cde.ca.gov

California Department of Education (CDE). Rt² – California’s philosophy and definition


California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC), (2012). WestEd presentation.
