Enacting the action research cycles

Profession, Teacher

Exercise 1. 1 Enacting the action research cycles 1. In my position as an elementary school teacher, we are seeking to identify students who consistently display behavioral or academic deficiencies in an effort to provide intervention strategies to help them to be successful learners. 2. Identifying students who need intervention and remediation in the classroom is critical to the community, the school, the classroom and the individual. Students who become disengaged in the learning process due to difficulties often get labeled as " at risk". At-risk students, who are not placed in proper safety nets early, often become subject to absenteeism, academic failure, retention, and many times, dropout; which is a national problem (Easton, 2007). 3. In every school across the nation, there are students who are at-risk. As early as kindergarten, differences in students' learning styles and academic abilities are apparent. Factors that influence these differences are previous formal schooling experiences, parental involvement, and exposure to basic language, math, and reading skills. Therefore, the question was not " Do we have students that are at-risk? " But rather, " Which students are at-risk and what interventions do we need to implement to provide additional support to the student and the regular education classroom teacher? " To answer this question, my principal, assistant principal, resource teachers, and classroom teachers collaborated and created an RTI (Response To Intervention) committee. The committee's purpose was to create a plan that every teacher could use to: identify at-risk students, implement suggested strategies, collect data on student progress, involve parents, and monitor student progress continuously to reevaluate the effectiveness of each students' interventions. 4. The RTI committee decided that having an RTI

coordinator whose sole responsibility was to facilitate all RTI related meetings for teachers and parents was imperative. Our principal hired a special education teacher who'd recently retired from our school to serve in this capacity. Once the RTI coordinator was in place, an action plan was put into place. Each teacher was given a copy of RTI Success: Proven Tools and Strategies for Schools and Classrooms and each grade level were assigned a chapter to present to the staff during monthly staff meetings. This book offered a tremendous amount of information regarding implementing effective RTI strategies for at-risk students. The RTI coordinator compiled a list of factors that identified at-risk behaviors for all teachers to look for amongst their students. These factors included: any behavior that negatively impacted a students' ability to focus in the classroom, consistently receiving 1s or 2s on their report card (A 1 means that the student is showing little to no progress toward meeting the standard and a 2 means that the student is showing progress toward meeting the standard.), and receiving failing scores on national or district tests or benchmarks. As students who met any of these criteria were identified we began the RTI process with them. The RTI process requires the teacher to identify the students' specific areas of weakness, collect baseline data, set goals, implement strategies for each goal, monitor the progress every six weeks, and present all of the data to the RTI coordinator, administration, and the students' parents. 5. There were numerous outcomes from the RTI plan implementation; some good and some not-so-good. The good outcomes were: we now had a process in place, we were clear on how to identify those students who were at-risk, parents were involved, and we could see the positive effect that the interventions and

safety nets were having on students' performance. The not-so-good outcomes were: too much of the RTI process added more work for overloaded teachers who found that implementing the strategies were very time consuming (many teachers began to refer to RTI as the Road To Insanity), teachers were ill prepared to present data at RTI meetings with the RTI coordinator, administration, and the parents, and that the selection of activities which could be used for different strategies was too vague. 6. To review the RTI implementation, the RTI coordinator and administration developed a survey for parents and teachers to fill out concerning their thoughts about the RTI process. After the data from the surveys were compiled, the RTI committee reconvened to discuss the results of the survey and the RTI process itself. Because there was so much " negative" teacher feedback concerning the RTI process, the committee opened up to allow all teachers who desired to be a part of the committee to do so. 7. To address the outcomes and concerns brought forth by the parents and teachers, the committee implemented several new aspects to the RTI process. To assist teachers with the time factor of implementing the strategies and collecting data, administration gave each teacher an allotted time for a teacher's assistant. The teacher's assistant primary job would be to pull the students who were in the RTI process aside and teach the skills and collect the data, either one on one or in small group settings. Other safety nets were also implemented including a program called Math Masters, which assists students in math in the morning, outside of the classroom, and implemented by teacher assistants. To help teachers be better prepared for their RTI meetings, the RTI coordinator created a schedule which is emailed to

teachers weekly that has the time of their RTI meeting, the student's name that they are meeting on, and a list of artifacts to bring to the meeting. The list of activities that can be used for different strategies was streamlined. Many activities that teachers implement now were taken from the RTI book that was given to each teacher to read. 8. A. As I look back at the context of this issue, I believe that we are off to a good start implementing an RTI process that will be effective for our students, teachers, and parents. Assisting students who have been labeled at-risk is a top priority within my organization. We are identifying gaps in student learning and addressing them promptly with effective strategies. B. Utilizing an action research process in an effort to implement an effective RTI program for at-risk students has proven to be helpful. Collecting data, using that data to construct different strategies to assist students, creating an RTI committee to oversee the entire process, and going back to the drawing board when new outcomes evolve is critical to the success of our RTI program. Putting a team together that understands exactly what is at stake and what practices are in the best interest of our students is also critical to the process. Our team worked well by brainstorming different strategies, collaborating on new ideas, and being honest about what they thought would be effective and what would not. I have learned that implementing a plan utilizing the action research process is time consuming, yet effective. You actually save more time in the long run because you are consistently reviewing the outcomes and making necessary revisions throughout the process. C. There were some existing premises that challenged the way that I and the team addressed some of the issues in the RTI process. I personally am an " old school"

teacher who believes that some of the strategies that we utilize are too new age. Many of the older teachers on the team had to challenge some ideas that they thought about discipline and age appropriate activities. Collectively we had the challenge of putting strategies in place for students to meet standards that we feel are way above their heads. We are giving our children too much to learn too soon. Unfortunately, we cannot change the curriculum and therefore, we must do all that we can do to get all of our students to meet and exceed the standards that have been set forth.