

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS SUPPORT:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A DISSERTATION
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SCHOOL OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
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BY

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To my sons

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ABSTRACT

LOU ANN HINTZ

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS SUPPORT: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

DECEMBER, 2020

School-based occupational therapists are tasked with participating in multi-tiered systems support (MTSS) services to all students, including general education students who may be at risk for school failure. Yet, there is little information in the literature on how school-based therapists achieve this and the perceptions of teachers who engage with occupational therapists providing service within the MTSS framework. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of elementary public school teachers who are working with occupational therapists that provide support within an MTSS framework. A qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological approach was employed to answer the research question. The occupational adaptation theoretical framework guided sub-questions for this study. The researcher aligned these sub-questions to relative mastery, which occurs when a sense of efficiency, effectiveness, and satisfaction occur (Schkade & Schultz, 1992). Teacher participants were recruited through purposeful sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Teachers ($n = 13$) from four different states of the United States participated in this study. Their years of teaching experience ranged from 3 to 21 years. Data sources included verbatim transcribed interviews, survey information, and artifacts. Moustakas's (1994) structured approach for data analysis was utilized and resulted in a composite textural, structural description of the teachers' experiences. Results showed that teachers expressed positive feelings when describing

their experiences with occupational therapists who provide service through an MTSS framework. In this study, teachers were participating with occupational therapists through the MTSS framework frequently, ongoing, informally, through whole-class instruction and valued the knowledge gained from occupational therapists. Some barriers identified by the teachers were a lack of MTSS documentation, a lack of understanding of school-based occupational therapists' scope and role, and their need for more occupational therapy services within the MTSS framework. In conclusion, teachers described their experiences with occupational therapy MTSS as satisfactory, efficient, and effective.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) created opportunities for school-based occupational therapists to involve themselves in early intervening services with general education students at risk for school failure (IDEA, 2004). Before this legislation, school-based occupational therapists were limited to providing services only to those students who were eligible for special education with specifically identified disabilities. Early intervening services are referred to as response to intervention (RtI), a multiple tiered framework for building students' skills. RtI was further defined by IDEA as giving high-quality instruction and interventions that are matched to student need, frequently tracking progress in order to make changes with interventions, and utilizing data to guide decision making for students (IDEA Partnership, 2006). More recently, the term RtI has been placed under the umbrella term of multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS; Shepley & Grisham-Brown, 2019). This document will collectively refer to early intervening services and RtI services with the updated terminology of MTSS. There are a limited number of studies available in the occupational therapy literature regarding occupational therapists' involvement within the MTSS framework.

Problem Statement

Practicing school-based occupational therapists nationwide indicated district guidelines describing their role with MTSS would be helpful (Cahill et al., 2014). Yet

studies regarding MTSS remain sparse. Occupational therapists must understand teachers' perceptions and experiences with MTSS and how, why, and when occupational therapists could and should be involved. Improved understanding of the occupational therapist's role in MTSS would lead to more efficient and effective service provision and student success. This qualitative study has described the teachers' lived experiences with occupational therapy in MTSS and adds to the literature bases with ways to improve the experiences and contributions of all clinical support personnel (e.g., physical therapists, counselors, and speech therapists) within the framework of MTSS.

Study Purpose

This phenomenological study aimed to discover and understand teachers' experiences with occupational therapists who are providing services within an MTSS framework. When occupational therapists uncover information on teachers' experiences with service delivery, including MTSS, they can make decisions that will drive enhanced student outcomes. If occupational therapists have this information regarding teachers' experiences, they can provide better training on school-based occupational therapists' scope and role, primarily as related to MTSS. This study contributes to a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of effective solutions and potential barriers and supports for occupational therapists who deliver service within an MTSS framework. This information will help to guide future decision making for school-based occupational therapy practitioners.

Research Question

The overarching question for this study was, “What are the experiences of teachers who are working with occupational therapists who provide services within an MTSS framework to general education students in public schools?” The researcher developed sub-questions guided by the theory of occupational adaptation’s concept of relative mastery (Schkade & Schultz, 1992). Schkade and Schultz (1992), the original authors of the occupational adaptation theory, first identified relative mastery as an evaluation subprocess related to successfully adapting to occupational challenges. The relative mastery components of effective participation, efficiency, and satisfaction to self and others have been considered to be a means of evaluating the normative process of occupational adaptation (Grajo, 2019; Schkade & Schultz, 1992). This study’s sub-questions probed teachers regarding their perceptions of effectiveness, the use of time (efficiency), their levels of satisfaction, and their perceptions regarding the students' and parents' levels of satisfaction.

Background and Significance

Researchers have defined MTSS in school-based settings as an alternative method for providing early intervention to all children who may be at risk for school failure (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Before IDEA, occupational therapists in school-based practice were limited to serving only students with identified disabilities who were eligible to receive special education. IDEA created opportunities for the related service of occupational therapy to assist struggling general education students in hopes of

unraveling the corrosive thread of chronic school failure, which can damage children's sense of competence and mastery.

Legislators further defined MTSS as the “practice of providing high-quality instruction and interventions matched to student need, monitoring progress frequently to make changes in instruction or goals and applying child response data to important educational decisions” (IDEA Partnership, 2006, p.7). Occupational therapists have been encouraged to seize the opportunity to participate in MTSS because of their unique knowledge and expertise in supporting students' occupational participation (Ball, 2018; Cahill, 2007; Clark & Polichino, 2010; Clark & Polichino, 2013; Jasmin et al., 2018).

Research on occupational therapy's role in MTSS remains as relevant today as it was ten years ago when experts (Cahill, 2007; Clark & Polichino, 2010) held up a shining beacon encouraging school-based therapists to participate in MTSS. More recent literature (Ball, 2018; Clark & Polichino, 2020; Jasmin et al., 2018) in the field has cast the same light encouraging school-based occupational therapists to not only participate in MTSS but to use the MTSS framework as a model to guide their practice. Jasmin et al. (2018) conducted a scoping literature review on occupational therapy in preschools and recommended an MTSS framework for service delivery to guide occupational therapy in preschools. Ball (2018) encouraged school-based occupational therapists to re-vitalize their practice by moving away from traditional one-on-one service delivery to explore an alternative method. This alternative method involved assisting school administrators with the delivery of MTSS to impact all students' success. Clark and Polichino (2020) implored school-based occupational therapists to phase out the “therapy rooms” and

utilize MTSS to enhance student participation and well-being. The purpose of this study was to discover and share information regarding teachers' experiences with occupational therapists who provide service within an MTSS framework.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher conducted a literature search on studies within the library databases ERIC, MEDLINE, Ovid, ProQuest, PubMed, and Scopus. Key search terms included *occupational therapy*, *response to intervention*, and *multi-tiered systems support*. Relevant studies were chosen for this research if related to occupational therapy school-based practice, multi-tiered systems support, and published within the past 10 years.

This literature review identified key studies that elaborate upon the core principles of MTSS in the education literature. Additionally, this literature review made comparisons between the information found in occupational therapy literature and educational literature. Descriptions of occupational therapy's role in each tier of a three-tiered level of support model have been provided in this literature review. Studies were categorized based on methodologies, from quantitative studies to expert opinions on occupational therapy MTSS. The types of tiers where occupational therapists and teachers worked together within an MTSS framework were explored. The types of participants studied in MTSS were identified. Lastly, a gap in the literature on MTSS, which has been filled by this study, is discussed.

Principles of Multi-tiered System Support (MTSS) Framework

Core Principles

The reauthorization of IDEA 2004 required that students receive effective instruction with progress monitoring before entering special education (IDEA, 2004). Barnett et al., (2004) described using single-case designs focused on intervention response and intensity as a guiding framework for educational teams to meet this requirement. They illustrated how single-case designs could create data sets to help guide decisions about students' educational programming. Barnett et al. (2004) discussed how providing meaningful services before special education was necessary and required systematic decision making and documentation. This single-case design method illustrated an empirical process that could further ensure that all students are educated within their least restrictive environments.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) explained the essential features of MTSS and described the multi-tiered approaches for educators. One crucial part Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) described regarding MTSS is that at every tiered level the problem-solving process is the same. This problem-solving process included determining the extent of the problem, analyzing why the problem occurred, designing a goal-directed intervention, implementing the intervention, monitoring the student's response or progress, changing the intervention if needed, and using data to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) stated the *wait to fail* model had received a great deal of criticism, noting that low achievement is not always a reflection of disability but may reflect poor teaching. The MTSS model has the potential to help all students become

successful without waiting to fail or misdiagnosing students who have had low-quality instruction.

Many general education and special education teachers have been implementing instruction within an MTSS framework since the reauthorization of IDEA, which has changed their roles and responsibilities. Swanson et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative analysis that yielded an in-depth description of special educators' perceptions of MTSS at the elementary level of grades three through five. The researchers utilized focus groups and interviews to gather data from teachers providing math and reading instruction to at-risk general education students. Results indicated the top three benefits to implementing MTSS were access to early intervention, meeting the needs of students with unique circumstances, and the opportunity for collaborating with other professionals. Teachers' challenges were the increased number of students served in the MTSS model, which resulted in the need for additional staff, increased demands for documentation, and scheduling.

Occupational Therapy and Educational Literature MTSS Comparisons

There were parallels in both the occupational therapy literature and educational literature on MTSS. One similarity identified by the researcher is the value placed upon professional collaboration between teachers (Swanson et al., 2012) and occupational therapists working with teachers (Koelbl et al., 2016). A qualitative study conducted solely on teachers and does not include occupational therapy revealed the theme of collaboration with other staff (Swanson et al., 2012). Similarly, a qualitative study conducted exclusively on occupational therapists' experiences showed reciprocal learning

between occupational therapists and teachers and improved camaraderie with teachers (Koelbl et al., 2016).

The *Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process, 4th ed.*, (OTPF-4; American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020) guides occupational therapists and describes both the evaluation and intervention processes. The evaluation process includes determining specific problems to address and how to identify targeted outcomes. The intervention process is focused on those targeted outcomes and includes monitoring and documenting the client's progress. Similarly, Fuchs and Fuchs (2006) identified that educators should determine the extent of the problem (i.e., evaluate), design goal-directed interventions, implement the interventions and monitor students' progress during the MTSS process. Lastly, both professions of educators and occupational therapists (Koelbl et al., 2016; Swanson et al., 2012) called for future studies that investigate how MTSS affects practice and the effectiveness on student outcomes.

Tier 1 MTSS

Several models of MTSS exist in the educational setting, but generally, there are three tiers of intervention. Tier 1 interventions are typically delivered to an entire school or classroom and are rooted in evidence-based practices in academic instruction and behavioral support. Tier 1 interventions are likely to include multiple opportunities for occupational therapists to provide support, for example, assisting with campus-wide positive behavior support, facilitating social skill programs, working with students on the handwriting curriculum, and alternative classroom seating. Most students make adequate

progress with this level of support. However, 15 to 20% of general education students will require more intervention through either a different curriculum or more intensive instruction at a Tier 2 level (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006).

Tier 2 MTSS

Tier 2 interventions are targeted and usually delivered in small groups of students with similar needs. These targeted interventions may focus on specific academic or behavioral skill deficits or meet other needs as appropriate for groups of students deemed at-risk for social or educational reasons. Opportunities for occupational therapists in Tier 2 interventions could include co-teaching small groups for handwriting, instructing students in sensory strategies for more regulation, facilitating instruction in mindfulness, or teaching small group social skills lessons. Clark and Polichino (2010) cited other possible Tier 2 MTSS that may be provided by occupational therapists, including providing suggestions to teachers on assistive technology, training teachers in task analysis, and participation in problem-solving teams to support at-risk students.

Tier 3 MTSS

Tier 3 interventions are more targeted, individualized, and intensive, requiring weekly documentation and more frequent monitoring of student progress (Cahill, 2007; Clark & Polichino, 2010). Tier 3 interventions that could be facilitated by occupational therapists include suggesting handwriting curriculums, providing adaptive writing paper, identifying appropriate sensory strategies, directing fine motor activities, or instructing students on pencil grip strategies. Clark and Polichino (2010) stated if a general education student continues to be unsuccessful at this level of intervention, a referral to special

education may be the next step. Data collected from the Tier 3 MTSS process are instrumental in the special education evaluation process (Clark & Polichino, 2010).

Occupational Therapy MTSS Studies

Quantitative

Quantitative research uses numerical data to measure outcomes in research (Portney & Watkins, 2015). This literature review included quantitative studies (Cahill et al., 2014; Howe et al., 2013; Ohl et al., 2013; Zylstra & Pfeiffer, 2016) that focused on school-based occupational therapy MTSS. Of these studies, one was a survey done on school-based occupational therapists and their involvement with MTSS (Cahill et al., 2014). The researchers Howe et al. (2013) and Ohl et al. (2013) employed pretest-posttest group designs on Tier 1 MTSS; results from both studies indicated significant improvement in posttest measurement outcomes. Zylstra and Pfeiffer (2016) utilized a pretest-posttest group design with school-based occupational therapy MTSS on a Tier 2 handwriting intervention for at-risk students. Results from this study showed significant improvement in the posttest outcome measurement.

Mixed Methods

Mixed method designs blend descriptive qualitative information with measurable quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The literature search revealed two mixed methods studies, one by Randall (2018) and another by Asher and Estes (2016). Both studies explored collaborative instruction on handwriting between occupational therapists and teachers in a general education classroom. While Randall (2018) did not identify collaborative teaching as MTSS, it could be assumed to fit the definition of a Tier 1

MTSS framework. Randall (2018) utilized pretest-posttest data on measurable handwriting outcomes (i.e., quantitative data). The qualitative portion of the study consisted of collecting data on teacher perspectives. A statistically significant improvement was noted in students' posttest scores when compared to the pretest scores. Qualitative feedback revealed positive feelings from teachers ($n = 2$), although it was a small sample. Randall (2018) identified a need for future qualitative research utilizing a higher number of participant teachers to further explore their experiences. Asher and Estes's study (2016) is elaborated upon further in the section on teachers' studies.

Qualitative

When researchers want to gain a more in-depth understanding of how individuals experience certain conditions or phenomena, they employ qualitative methodology (Portney & Watkins, 2015). The search for this literature review identified only one qualitative study on MTSS related to occupational therapy. Koelbl et al. (2016) explored occupational therapists' experiences who implemented a program within the MTSS framework and found an overall positive theme of knowledge exchange with teachers. This study indicated a need for more qualitative research exploring teachers' experiences working with occupational therapists who provide service within the MTSS framework.

Literature Reviews

A scoping literature review conducted by Jasmin et al. (2018) explored occupational therapy practice in preschools. The researchers included evidence from 23 articles. Their findings indicated that occupational therapists' interventions targeted children primarily with developmental delays and addressed skills such as fine and gross

motor skills, sensory processing, cognition, social skills, activities of daily living, and play. While this scoping review did not target MTSS, the researchers concluded that service delivery should be based upon an MTSS framework or a collaborative model to ensure student inclusion and success.

Expert Opinions

Multiple articles (Ball, 2018; Cahill, 2007; Clark & Polichino, 2010; Clark & Polichino, 2020) reviewed were expert opinion papers on occupational therapy's role and involvement within the MTSS framework. Burns et al. (2011) classified expert opinions as lower levels of evidence and urged clinicians to be on alert for new information. All of the expert opinions encouraged occupational therapists to become involved with MTSS. Cahill (2007) was an early supporter of occupational therapy's involvement with MTSS and defined and described specific case examples of occupational therapy MTSS. Clark and Polichino (2010) elaborated on MTSS, identified potential barriers to MTSS, and encouraged school-based practitioners to engage in discussions regarding MTSS. Ball (2018) implored occupational therapy school-based practitioners to acknowledge legislation and evidence supporting the profession's role in more inclusive and preventative practices that an MTSS framework affords.

Most recently, Clark and Polichino (2020) identified how a systems-level practice, specifically MTSS, enables school-based occupational therapists to entwine their knowledge and skills to embed services within the classroom to promote student participation within their natural routines. Clark and Polichino (2020) provided specific examples of cases with a remedial focus compared to a participation and performance

focus. The remedial focus examples included taking the student out of the classroom and segregating them in a “therapy room” for sensory integration or pulling the student from an elective class for motor and social re-training. In contrast, the examples with the participation and performance focus illustrated how MTSS supported the student and the teacher by providing parent and teacher collaboration. Clark and Polichino (2020) state the school-based occupational therapist’s presence in the classroom during instruction is essential. The school-based occupational therapist provides education to instructional staff and parents on strategies to support engagement in daily routines. In conclusion, Clark and Polichino (2020) guided school-based occupational therapists to advocate for evaluation and intervention in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and to phase out “therapy rooms” where they exist. Many school-based occupational therapy experts (Ball, 2018; Cahill, 2007; Clark & Polichino, 2010, 2020) have provided opinions, guiding, encouraging, and imploring occupational therapists’ involvement in MTSS, indicating the need to build a literature base to support these efforts.

Tier Types Studied

Tier 1 MTSS Studies

Only two studies (Ohl et al., 2013; Randall, 2018) included in the current literature review explored occupational therapy's effectiveness with MTSS interventions. Results from both studies indicated significant improvement in measurable student outcomes. Ohl et al. (2013) examined the effectiveness of a Tier 1 MTSS on quantifiable outcomes related to visual motor and fine motor skills. Randall (2018) found that a Tier 1

MTSS collaborative teaching model between occupational therapists and teachers effectively improved handwriting measures scores.

Tier 2 MTSS Studies

Studies examining the effectiveness of Tier 2 interventions addressing handwriting for at-risk elementary students indicated improved measurable outcomes related to legibility, speed, letter name recognition, and letter-sound recall (Howe et al., 2013; Zylstra & Pfeiffer, 2016). The literature review conducted for the current study did not locate any research on Tier 3 levels of occupational therapy supporting students through a Tier 3 MTSS framework.

Participants Studied

Occupational Therapists

Cahill et al. (2014) and Koelbl et al. (2016) explored occupational therapists' experiences who participated in school-based MTSS. Cahill et al. (2014) surveyed occupational therapists nationwide regarding their involvement with MTSS initiatives and found barriers hindering participation included limited resources (67%) and lack of precedent for occupational therapy practitioner involvement (30%). Factors facilitating involvement in MTSS were supportive district and school guidelines (67%) and continuing education on MTSS (44%; Cahill et al., 2014). Koelbl et al. (2016) used qualitative methodology to explore occupational therapists' experiences participating in MTSS and found that a specific curriculum resulted in enhanced collaboration where mutual learning between occupational therapists and teachers occurred. Koelbl et al.

(2016) recommended further qualitative exploration of teachers' experiences who are receiving services from occupational therapists within an MTSS framework.

Teachers

Casillas (2010) used a qualitative design to explore the perspectives of six teachers working with occupational therapists who provided consultative services. These six teachers expressed a lack of understanding of the role and scope of occupational therapy school-based practice. While Casillas (2010) did not explore occupational therapy services within an MTSS framework, it examined teachers' experiences with occupational therapy consultation. Similar to the MTSS framework, the consultation model requires the occupational therapist to work directly with teachers.

Asher and Estes (2016) conducted a mixed methods study to explore handwriting instruction and how MTSS services impacted handwriting instruction practices. Results confirmed a continued need for occupational therapists to help educators understand their scope of practice, specifically regarding services within the MTSS framework (Asher & Estes, 2016).

Future Research

Future studies on occupational therapy MTSS could fill many gaps in the literature. There are few studies on Tier 1 MTSS (Ohl et al., 2013; Randall, 2018) and Tier 2 MTSS (Howe et al., 2013; Zylstra & Pfeiffer, 2016). Results from the Tier 2 studies indicated significant gains in measurable outcomes. Just one qualitative study explored occupational therapists' experience with implementing services within an MTSS framework (Koelbl et al., 2016). Researchers (Koelbl et al., 2016; Ohl et al., 2013;

Randall, 2018) have identified the need for more qualitative exploration of the experiences of teachers who receive MTSS from occupational therapists.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The central phenomenon studied in this research was the essence of teachers' experience when receiving service from occupational therapists working within an MTSS framework. Creswell and Poth (2018) describe five different approaches to qualitative inquiry. Phenomenology is one of the five described and is explained to be appropriate for increasing understanding of a particular group of individuals who share in a common experience. There are two types of phenomenological methodology, hermeneutical phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. Hermeneutical phenomenology is directed at the lived experience, where the researcher utilizes their own experience to interpret the texts of life. Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to bracket their own experiences and set them aside to explore others' experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers often refer to bracketing as *epoche*, which means the researcher's judgments are suspended or put aside (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The principal investigator in this study was a school-based occupational therapist with experience in MTSS. They utilized the transcendental phenomenological approach, set aside their judgment, and examined the teachers' experiences objectively.

Research Design

The transcendental phenomenological approach was the best method to answer the research question regarding understanding teachers' experiences with occupational therapists who provide service within an MTSS framework. The word transcendental

may remind many people of the 1960s and is commonly associated with hippies, psychedelia, and meditation (Martirano, 2016). However, the term's implication in this type of research methodology was that the researcher sets aside (i.e., transcend) any preconceived ideas and experiences to gain a fresh perspective of the phenomenon being explored (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transcendental phenomenology requires the researcher to consider the phenomena from different perspectives and to bring no expectations, assumptions, or hypotheses to the study (Neubauer et al., 2019). In the case of this study, the researcher had extensive experience with teachers and school-based MTSS. Therefore, obtaining information regarding teachers' experiences without biased opinions or preconceived ideas from the researcher was imperative.

The transcendental phenomenological approach employs specific sequential steps to strategically analyze data and look for units of meaning, leading to a detailed description of the essence of the experience of several individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type of qualitative research used by Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) to explore the ripple effect of mentoring includes epoche, significant statement identification, the grouping of statements into units and themes, culminating in the synthesis of the themes and the ultimate goal of a detailed, textural, and structural description of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). This method helped elucidate the research question regarding the experiences of teachers who received MTSS from occupational therapists.

The researcher did not discover any occupational therapy studies that employed the qualitative approach of transcendental phenomenology. Researchers in other

disciplines, such as family studies, social work, and music education, have utilized transcendental phenomenology (Buser et al., 2016; Cupido, 2018; Kautz, 2017). Outcomes from these studies (Buser et al., 2016; Cupido, 2018; Kautz, 2017), which explored conditions such as eating disorders, music performance anxiety, and adolescents with an incarcerated parent, yielded further insights, understanding, and implications for new interventions related to the lived experiences of specific phenomena. This researcher also gained insight and understanding of teachers' experiences with occupational therapy MTSS by utilizing this methodology.

Permission was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Texas Woman's University to conduct this research in January of 2020. The researcher provided participants written informed consent on an IRB-approved and stamped form before any interviews or survey completion took place. A copy of this two-page consent form is located in Appendix A. The written consent form included the researcher and faculty advisor's name and contact information. The researcher provided a summary of the research purpose and what the participants would be asked to do on the form. Participants were informed that they would receive a gift card incentive upon completion of the interviews. The researcher shared the most significant risks with the participants, which included loss of confidentiality and emotional discomfort. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time they chose.

Research Sample

The researcher utilized a purposeful sampling technique of teachers who have worked with occupational therapists who provide service through an MTSS framework.

These teachers were considered key informants and created an information-rich group that shed light on the research question (Patton, 2015). This sampling type allowed the researcher to find teachers from whom the researcher could learn the most from discovering and understanding their experiences with occupational therapists and MTSS.

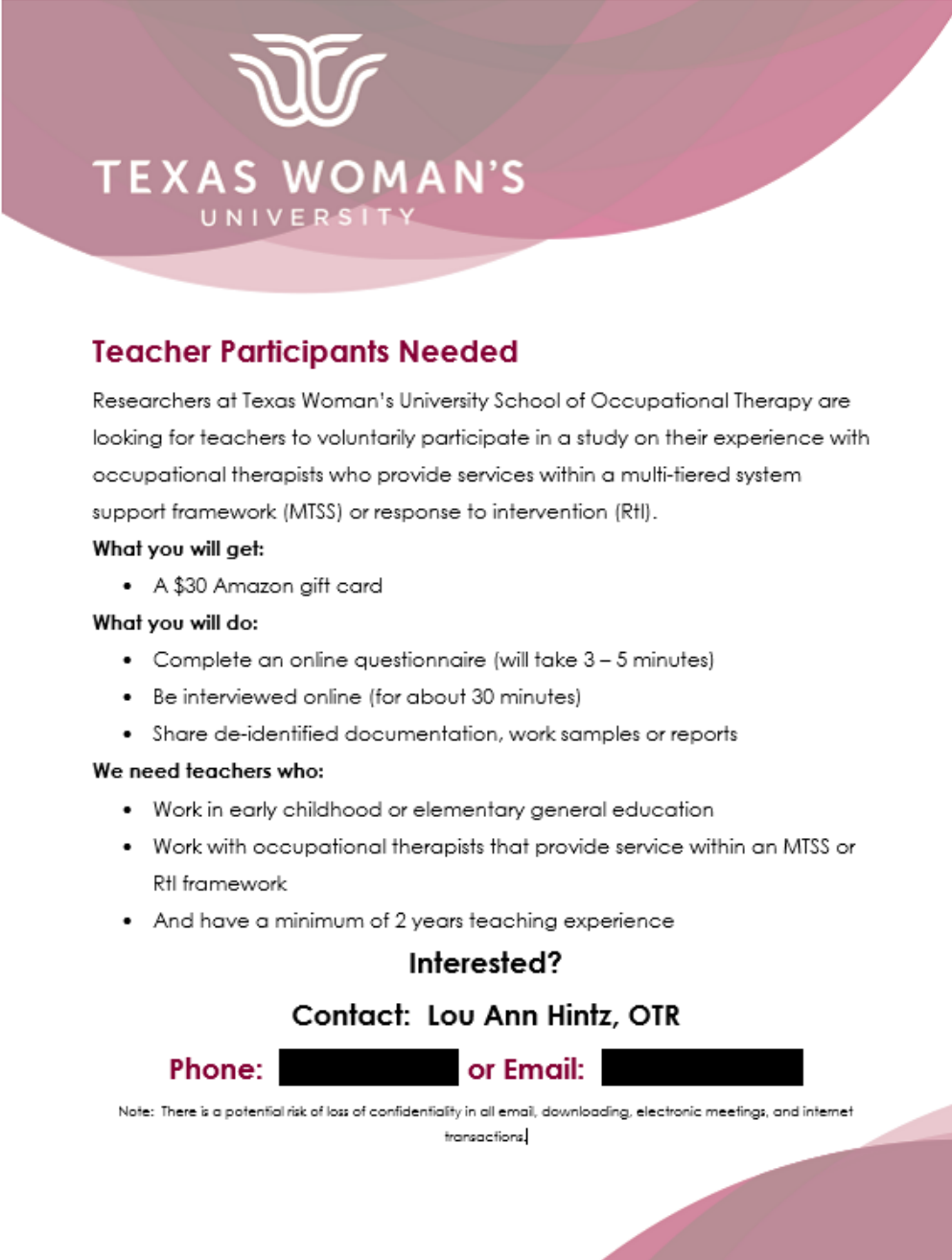
The researcher published a recruitment flyer on social media websites, including LinkedIn and Facebook. The Facebook groups that the recruitment flyer was posted on included Pediatric and School-Based Occupational Therapists, Pediatric & School-Based Therapy, Special Ed & Healthcare Discussion Group - sponsored by PediaStaff, Texas Pre-K Teachers, and Pre-K Teachers. The researcher posted the recruitment flyer on her LinkedIn page and the pages for Early Intervention Professionals, Pediatric and School-based Occupational Therapists, and Occupational Therapist Networking Group. The researcher added this statement to these posts:

If you are a school-based occupational therapist who provides support within a response to intervention (RtI) or Multi-tiered system support (MTSS) framework, could you please share my recruitment flyer with teachers? I am interested in understanding what teachers' experiences are when working with school-based occupational therapists who provide this type of support. This study is a partial requirement for completing my Ph.D. at Texas Woman's University. Thank you in advance.

The researcher shared the recruitment flyer with practicing school-based therapists known to the researcher to share with teachers through email messages. The recruitment flyer is in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Recruitment Flyer for Teacher Participants



The flyer features a pink and purple geometric background. At the top is the Texas Woman's University logo, which consists of a stylized 'TWU' monogram above the text 'TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY'. Below the logo, the text 'Teacher Participants Needed' is written in a bold, dark pink font. This is followed by a paragraph of text in a standard black font. Then, there are two sections: 'What you will get:' with a single bullet point, and 'What you will do:' with three bullet points. Next is 'We need teachers who:' with three bullet points. Below this is the word 'Interested?' in a bold black font, followed by 'Contact: Lou Ann Hintz, OTR' in a bold black font. Then, 'Phone:' and 'or Email:' are shown in bold pink font, each followed by a black rectangular redaction box. At the bottom, a small note in a standard black font is present. The flyer is decorated with pink and purple geometric shapes in the corners.

**TEXAS WOMAN'S
UNIVERSITY**

Teacher Participants Needed

Researchers at Texas Woman's University School of Occupational Therapy are looking for teachers to voluntarily participate in a study on their experience with occupational therapists who provide services within a multi-tiered system support framework (MTSS) or response to intervention (RTI).

What you will get:

- A \$30 Amazon gift card

What you will do:

- Complete an online questionnaire (will take 3 – 5 minutes)
- Be interviewed online (for about 30 minutes)
- Share de-identified documentation, work samples or reports

We need teachers who:

- Work in early childhood or elementary general education
- Work with occupational therapists that provide service within an MTSS or RTI framework
- And have a minimum of 2 years teaching experience

Interested?

Contact: Lou Ann Hintz, OTR

Phone: [REDACTED] **or Email:** [REDACTED]

Note: There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings, and internet transactions.

The researcher employed snowball sampling in addition to purposeful sampling. Snowball sampling was identified as one case leading to another as the investigation unfolds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). When interviewing teachers, the researcher asked the participants to share the flyer with teachers they knew who met the study's inclusion criteria. The researcher was contacted by two teachers after receiving the brochure from their colleagues who participated in the study.

The main inclusion criterion for teacher participants was for those who have worked with occupational therapists who provide service within an MTSS framework. Additional inclusion criteria were for teachers to have a minimum of 2 years of teaching experience in the general education setting and who have taught in either early childhood and elementary schools. The researcher excluded teachers who had not worked with occupational therapists providing support through an MTSS framework. High school teachers and teachers who have less than 2 years of experience were excluded from this study. High school teachers were excluded, given the researcher's experience that most high school occupational therapists did not participate in MTSS. Teachers with less than 2 years of experience were excluded as many entry-level teachers may not yet have a thorough understanding of MTSS and related services. The researcher also excluded other disciplines, such as speech therapists, counselors, and school psychologists from participating in this study. This study examined the experiences of teachers exclusively.

The researcher recruited teacher participants between January of 2020 and June of 2020. A teacher contacted the researcher in early February 2020 to participate. After a brief informational session, the researcher determined that while the teacher was working

with an occupational therapist, the teacher's experience was limited to special education students who were already receiving the related service of occupational therapy. The teacher was not working with occupational therapists who were providing services within the MTSS framework. The researcher decided to develop a brief pre-interview script that explained while many teachers are working with occupational therapists, the teacher participants needed in this study were teachers who worked with occupational therapists who provided services within an MTSS framework to general education students.

The sample size in this study was dependent upon data saturation. Data saturation occurs when no new information is found that leads to an understanding of the lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological studies have sample sizes ranging from one to 325 subjects (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Cupido's (2018) transcendental phenomenological study on the lived experience of music performance anxiety among singer-teachers achieved data saturation with six participants. Kautz (2017) reached data saturation with six participants in their transcendental phenomenological study on adolescents' experiences with an incarcerated parent. James et al. (2018) recruited nine participants for their interpretative phenomenological study on emergency room occupational therapists with no mention of data saturation.

Usher and Jackson (2014) stated that the researcher continues with recruitment until data saturation is achieved. They further explained the term data saturation is commonly accepted, yet researchers have various practices to determine when this happens. They suggested that researchers add two additional participants once data saturation is established to ensure no new perspectives emerge.

The researcher in this study achieved data saturation at 11 participants, where no new information was revealed. Following Usher and Jackson's (2014) guideline, the researcher added two more participants to this study for a total of 13 participants to ensure data saturation was achieved. The research participants had between 3 and 21 years of experience as teachers, and the average number of years taught was 12. They taught grades from pre-kindergarten to fourth grade. Teacher participants lived in the state of New York ($n = 5$), Texas ($n = 6$), Louisiana ($n = 1$) and Hawaii ($n = 1$). Table 1 lists demographic information for all 13 participants.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Teacher Participants

Pseudonym	Location in the United States	Grade Taught	Years of Experience	Length of Interview
Addison	Large urban district in the southwestern US	K	6	26.28
Avery	Large urban district in the northeastern US	K	12	25.55
Billie	Large urban district in the northeastern US	Pre-K	13	23.43
Casey	Large urban district in the northeastern US	4	16	20.45
Connor	Small rural district in the southeastern US	K	21	23.45
Dakota	Large suburban district in the southwestern US	1	7	25.55
Harper	Large suburban district in the southwestern US	1	17	19.23
Jordan	Large urban district in the northeastern US	K	21	32.2
Kelsey	Small district in the western US	1	3	15.34
Lex	Large suburban district in the southwestern US	Pre-K	6	19.1
Morgan	Large suburban district in the southwestern US	Pre-K	9	25.19
Nic	Large urban district in the southwestern US	Pre-K	11	30.11
Noell	Large urban district in the northeastern US	4	15	27.34

Note: Pre-K = pre-kindergarten; US = United States.

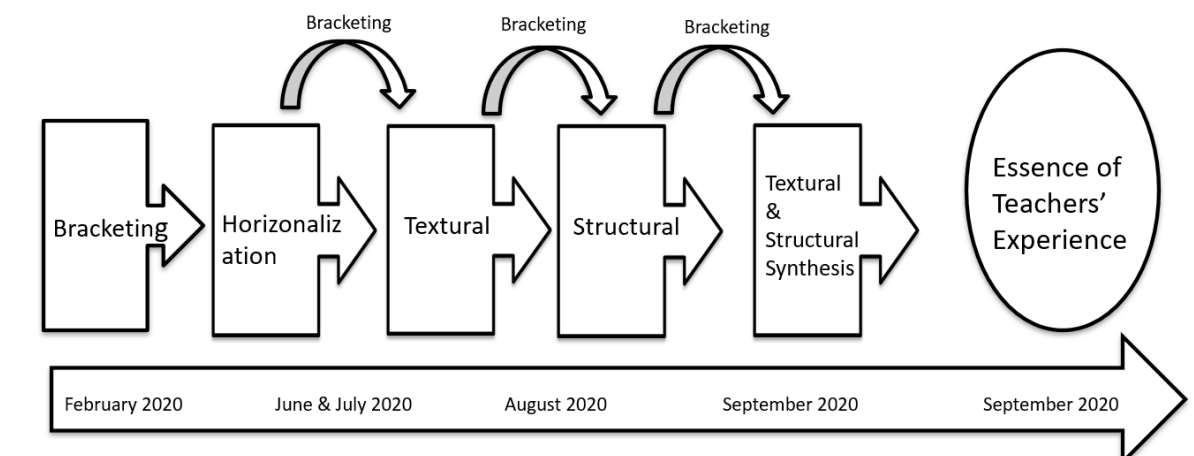
Bracketing

Creswell and Poth (2018) described bracketing as a process essential to transcendental phenomenology. Moustakas (1994) explained that bracketing is also referred to as *epoche*, a Greek word that means to refrain from judgment. The challenge for researchers who utilize this type of phenomenology is to describe things within themselves and to prepare themselves to be open to others' experiences, which may differ from their own (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing is a necessary first step and is a step that

the researcher should repeat throughout the data collection and data analysis (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019). Bracketing allows the researcher to examine their “experiences, assumptions, and biases that could unduly influence the data and analyses if not acknowledged” (Kautz, 2017, p. 563). Cupido (2018) identified this phase as serving to separate the researcher’s experience from the participants’ experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to this phase as taking “a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination” (p. 78). Figure 2 is a diagram that represents the repetition of the bracketing process throughout the research.

Figure 2

Diagram of Transcendental Phenomenology Data Analysis



Researcher’s Stance

My personal experience with MTSS began in 2003 when I attended a professional development training on school-based occupational therapy practice. In this training, I was introduced to the term RtI. The speaker defined and described RtI, which is now referred to as MTSS. This process was one where therapists could be pro-active with

students and provide teachers with strategies earlier than waiting for the students to fail. I was very intrigued by this approach and wanted to learn more about how to provide this service. While the school district I was working in at that time did not practice within this framework for related services, I would get the opportunity to learn first-hand about MTSS years later in another district.

Approximately 5 years later, I worked for a large suburban district in north Texas when the special education director guided related service providers to begin practicing within this framework. Their inspiration for utilizing this model was to help get students services more quickly and perhaps keep them from being referred to special education. During that time, some special education programs were identified as having too many students in special education. There was a concern that there may be an over-identification of students, particularly with minority students. The special education director initially undertook this initiative to reduce the number of students in special education.

The occupational therapy team did not have any guidelines on MTSS, and there was no outline to follow on how to serve students and teachers through this framework. Yet, as each semester and year went by, the occupational therapists on the team simply responded to parents' and teachers' needs for general education students. Once administrators and teachers experienced multiple successes with students through this model, they began to reach out to their campus occupational therapists. The occupational therapists responded intuitively to teachers with strategies and interventions. They found that most teachers were very willing to implement new ideas when they realized their

plans were unsuccessful. Some occupational therapists began to provide more training and in-services to teachers on various topics within the scope of occupational therapy, such as sensory strategies, handwriting instruction, handwriting curriculums, and fine motor development.

Near the time frame of 2011, the occupational therapy team developed a flow chart to guide therapists and teachers on how and when to refer a student to occupational therapy for MTSS. The occupational therapy team served many general education students through this model. Soon the occupational therapists realized that they could help special education students who were not receiving occupational therapy-related service through the MTSS framework. The occupational therapy team distributed their flow chart throughout the district of nearly 70 schools. The first step in the flow chart process was for teachers to identify a need for a student in the scope of occupational therapy.

The flow chart identified and defined the scope of occupational therapy within three categories. Those three categories were fine motor skills, self-help skills, and sensory regulation skills. While many occupational therapists in the school-based setting are addressing social skills with students, in this particular district, social skills usually were within the scope of the campus-based speech and language pathologists, special education counselors, and campus-based counselors. After identifying the need within the occupational therapy scope, teachers were directed to contact the itinerant occupational therapist assigned to their campus. The assigned campus occupational therapist then utilized their professional reasoning on the next steps to take for the student.

The itinerant occupational therapist assigned to the campus could then make decisions based on the area of concern, what interventions had been previously tried, what the student's response was, and if the student was appropriate for MTSS. Some students were not suitable for MTSS nor special education due to meeting grade-level academic measures and participation. The occupational therapists could determine whether or not the student was a relevant match for MTSS. However, some students indeed were appropriate for the MTSS approach, and some needed special education evaluation. This process of the teachers first contacting the occupational therapists allowed the occupational therapist to exercise autonomy in decision making and reasoning to best serve their campuses. District-wide, the small team of nine occupational therapists utilized this flow chart to implement MTSS.

The occupational therapy team collected data on most of the MTSS cases. They believed that many cases, including many Tier 1 parent and teacher training, did not get documented during this time. The data that was collected indicated that between the years 2012 and 2017, a noticeable trend emerged. It was noted the more cases of documented MTSS, the fewer evaluations and the number of students on caseload. This data led the team and me to wonder if this practice framework led to fewer students being evaluated for occupational therapy and fewer students on occupational therapy caseload. While my experience within my setting was very positive regarding MTSS, other districts throughout the state and nation may not have had such positive results.

It was imperative as a researcher in this study with the transcendental phenomenology that I set aside my beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about MTSS so that I

understood experiences that were different than my own. Neubauer et al. (2019) described this process as bringing no definitions, assumptions, or hypotheses, assuming a position of a blank slate, where the participants' experiences are used to develop an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon being studied. In this study, the phenomenon explored was the teachers' experiences with occupational therapists who provide service within the MTSS framework. I conducted this bracketing procedure before data collection and data analysis as guided by previous researchers (Moustakas, 1994; Neubauer et al., 2019) to not bias the results.

Data Collection

All teacher participants contacted the researcher through email and expressed their willingness to participate. The researcher sent the IRB approved informed consent form for participants to sign, scan, and return. Each signed consent form was saved in a folder and stored in a password-protected digital file. Next, the researcher contacted each teacher participant via email and asked them to complete an introductory survey deployed online. Table 2 lists the questions included in the introductory survey. A link to the survey was embedded in an email and sent to each teacher. All 13 participants completed the survey. The average time spent taking the survey was 6 minutes.

Table 2

Introductory Survey Questions for Teachers Regarding Multi-Tiered Systems Support

Question
1. What is your educational background or training? Bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctoral degree?
2. What was your major?
3. What grade level do you teach?
4. How many years have you taught this level?
5. Have you taught other grade levels? If so, how long?
6. What city, state is your school located?
7. How often have you participated in MTSS with an occupational therapist?
8. How many minutes do you typically spend with an occupational therapist during each session of MTSS?
9. What was the area of concern that was addressed by occupational therapy through MTSS?
10. Briefly describe what your experience has been like working with occupational therapists who provide service through an MTSS framework.

Note: MTSS = multi-tiered system support

The purpose of the introductory survey was to gather demographic information regarding the sample participants on their educational training, grade levels taught, years of experience, and as an additional screening tool before the interviews to determine if the teachers met the inclusion criteria for this study. All teachers who completed the introductory survey met the inclusion criteria. Once the teacher participants completed the online survey, the researcher scheduled an interview.

The researcher asked teachers to share any documentation related to or regarding their experience with MTSS. Most teachers stated they did not have any documentation.

They also shared that there were no guidelines or procedures for the documentation of MTSS with occupational therapy. The researcher encouraged teachers to send anything associated with their experience, including work samples, emails requesting MTSS, meeting notes, or examples of intervention strategies that occupational therapists had shared with them during MTSS. The researcher asked teachers to de-identify any documentation with student or parent names before sending them to protect confidentiality.

Initially, the researcher hoped that these documents would serve to support or trigger the teachers' memories about their experience with occupational therapy and MTSS. Patton (2015) stated that documents prove valuable and help to create pathways for inquiry. However, most of the teacher participants did not have any documents before the interview. Teachers typically shared what they had days later after the interview, and sometimes after a few reminders from the researcher. At this point in the research phase, the researcher replaced the term documents with the term artifacts. Artifacts seemed to be a more accurate representation of what teachers had to share regarding their relationship with occupational therapy services within the MTSS framework.

Most teachers shared artifacts. A few teachers never shared supporting artifacts or documents, even after multiple reminder emails. The researcher must note that these interviews took place from February 2020 to June of 2020 during the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic when most schools were closed, and teachers were working virtually from their homes. They did not have full access to classrooms and

records. The documents and artifacts were received, gathered, and placed in a password-protected digital folder on the researcher's computer drive.

The researcher captured the interviews with the recording technology Zoom.us, which enabled online video conferencing. The average length of an interview was 24 minutes. Table 1 includes the amount of time for each participant's interview.

The researcher informed the participants the interviews would take approximately 30 minutes. This length of time was chosen based on two factors. One factor is many public-school teachers are pressed for time, and this time is within the amount of time most states allow teachers to have as planning time within their school day. The other factor is the researcher trialed the interview questions with two teacher colleagues and found the interviews to last between 30 and 55 minutes. Before the interview, the researcher asked participants if they would be willing to continue if the interview exceeded 30 minutes. All participants agreed to continue if more than 30 minutes. Table 3 contains a complete list of the semi-structured interview questions.

Table 3

Interview Questions for Teachers on Experience with Multi-Tiered Systems Support

Question
1. What has your experience been like with occupational therapy response to intervention services?
2. How do you feel about your experience with occupational therapy MTSS?
3. What other factors, either positive or negative, have influenced your experience with occupational therapy MTSS?
4. Was this experience an efficient or inefficient use of your time?
5. What was your experience like related to the occupational therapist following up on the student?
6. Describe the referral process from start to finish? Does your district have a guideline for this?
7. What is your perception of the student's outcome regarding the area of concern addressed by the occupational therapist?
8. What is your perception regarding the student's level of satisfaction regarding the MTSS? The parents?
9. From your perspective, how can occupational therapy MTSS be improved?
10. How has your experience with occupational therapy MTSS influenced your decision to seek MTSS services in the future?
11. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Note: MTSS = multi-tiered system support

The interviews were conducted via Zoom.us video conferencing while the researcher was at a secure private location, including their faculty office, apartment, or personal residence. The teachers chose their sites, which all appeared to be within their homes. The teachers logged into the Zoom.us link with either their desktops, laptop computers, or tablets. None of the participants participated via their smartphones. They

simply clicked on the Zoom.us link, which the researcher previously sent to them at the interview's scheduled time. Site permission was not required.

The researcher and teacher participants agreed upon a pseudonym before the interview, which replaced the teacher's actual name. The teacher participant was then only referred to by their pseudonym throughout the interview. The Zoom.us interviews were recorded and downloaded to the researcher's laptop. The Zoom.us recording technology could transcribe interviews into text. However, the text from Zoom.us needed to be transferred to a Notepad document by the researcher. The text was then transferred to a Word document. The researcher carefully reviewed each verbatim transcript's text to remove the participants' real names and replace them with their pseudonym. Next, the researcher carefully read and made corrections as necessary. The researcher found some transcribed words, such as the acronym MTSS was frequently listed as the word "empty," which needed to be changed. Only two interviews needed to be transcribed verbatim due to the Zoom.us transcription technology failing. The verbatim transcripts were read and re-read by the researcher for data immersion.

Data Analysis

Survey

The researcher analyzed and recorded the data captured from the survey questions regarding teachers' educational background, experience, geographic location, and brief statements regarding their experience with occupational therapy and MTSS. The information was listed on a spreadsheet and tallied for frequencies, commonalities, and differences. The researcher used this data later during the research's trustworthiness and

validation phase to corroborate teachers' experiences from interviews and artifacts shared.

Artifacts

The researcher categorized all deidentified artifacts based on the type of information shared. The types of artifacts shared included: videos, photos (work samples), a PowerPoint (for teachers instructing students), PowerPoints (for therapists teaching teachers), reproducible visual supports, letters to parents, emails from occupational therapists to teachers with strategies, email from parent to teacher, photo demonstration of a strategy, informational handouts, and one MTSS documentation report. The researcher placed the artifacts in a password-protected computer file with sub-files labeled with each of the teachers' pseudonym.

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that documents are typically used to supplement interviews and that categorizing them is essential. As previously stated, this study will refer to documents gathered as artifacts. The artifacts were read and re-read and clustered into categories related to the research question of describing teachers' experiences with occupational therapists who provide service within an MTSS framework.

Interviews

For transcendental phenomenology, Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 79) guide researchers to "highlight significant statements" when analyzing the interview transcripts. Moustakas (1994) referred to this phase as a process of *horizontalization*. This phase allows the reader to examine the range of perspectives regarding the phenomenon. The researcher did not attempt to group these statements nor put them in order, and each was

considered to have equal worth, which is a process outlined by Moustakas (1994), and Creswell and Poth (2018). These statements were verbatim and provided information about the teachers' experience with occupational therapists and MTSS. The researcher analyzed the verbatim transcripts for significant statements related to the research question.

The researcher highlighted the significant statements and copied them into an Excel spreadsheet, which listed the pseudonyms for all participants in the first vertical column and listed the questions' themes across the top horizontal row. There was a total of 183 significant verbatim statements listed in this horizontalization phase (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) of the analysis process.

Once the researcher identified these significant statements, they were grouped into broader units or clustered into themes. These themes became the foundation for textural descriptions and the interpretation phase, which were the structural descriptions. The textural descriptions answered the question, "What are the experiences of teachers working with occupational therapists who provide service within the MTSS framework?" This process of identifying textural descriptions is described in more detail by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell and Poth (2018).

Themes related to the textural description were verbatim. This process occurred in NVivo-12, where the researcher created nodes for each theme. These were then printed, cut out, and arranged on a tabletop to allow further immersion and analysis on the researcher's part. The researcher reduced these textural themes into seven themes. The

researcher prioritized themes that had a higher frequency of repetition. These repetitions were captured in NVivo12.

The researcher created structural descriptions next. The structural description relates to how the teachers experienced the phenomenon, whereas the textural descriptions were more what they experienced. This phase of analysis is referred to by Moustakas (1994) as the *composite structural description* because it represents the group as a whole. It requires the researcher to utilize imaginative variation, including searching for the meanings that underlie the textural themes. Moustakas (1994) specified that the structural aspects include the quality of the experience, one's satisfaction towards oneself and others, judgments, assumptions, and the context of time. It also requires the researcher to consider structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts such as time, space, causality, relation to self, and relation to others. This structural concept has some similarities to relative mastery (Grajo, 2019; Schkade & Schultz, 1992), which guided this study's research questions. In relative mastery, the concepts of satisfaction to self and others, effectiveness, and efficiency are essential.

Lastly, the researcher integrated both the textural and structural themes to explain the phenomenon's overall essence (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The textural and structural themes developed from all of the participants in this study were synthesized to produce a composite textural-structural description that revealed the experience's ultimate essence for the phenomenon of teachers' experiences with occupational therapists who provide service within an MTSS framework. This composite

textural-structural description is typically a long paragraph that explains the what and the how of participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Trustworthiness

Establishing the accuracy of the findings (i.e., confirmability) was done by the researcher by utilizing validation strategies described by Creswell and Poth (2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend engaging in at least two validation strategies in any given study and describe procedures for qualitative research to be done through the point of view or lens of three groups. The three groups included the researcher's, the participant's, and the reader's lens.

This researcher validated the researcher's lens by reporting and disclosing any evidence that was a negative analysis or does not fit a code pattern. The triangulation of data sources further established credibility for the researcher's lens (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Data triangulation refers to utilizing multiple and different data sources to corroborate evidence or findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the triangulation of data occurred by examining the multiple sources of data collected for similarities and differences specifically related to the research question of understanding the experience of teachers who are working with occupational therapists who provide service within an MTSS framework. The teachers' three sources of data were the responses to the pre-interview survey questionnaire, transcribed verbatim interviews, and artifacts such as documentation, reports, or emails provided by the teachers.

The researcher contacted via email all 13 teacher participants and shared the composite textural-structural description. The researcher asked the teachers how the

description represented their experience. This process was done to achieve validation from the participant's lens. Feedback was solicited from the teachers by the researcher on the accuracy of the findings to validate the results. Creswell and Poth (2018) referred to this as member checking. It involves the researcher taking the conclusions back to the participant sources, examining how well the analysis represents their experience.

The researcher sought validation for the reader's lens (Creswell & Poth, 2018) with an external audit. The external auditor was also a school-based occupational therapist and had some familiarity with school-based occupational therapy and MTSS. The external auditor reviewed the process for data analysis. They read and re-read two randomly chosen verbatim transcripts and engaged in grouping and clustering themes for the horizontalized data. The researcher shared the composite textural description, the composite structural description, and the synthesized textural-structural descriptions with the external auditor for review. The external auditor examined both the process and the product to assess their accuracy.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

There were three sources of data for this study. The first source was the transcribed verbatim interviews of all 13 teacher participants. The second source was results from a 10-question introductory survey that gathered demographic information on the participants. All resided in the United States at the time of this study, therefore results reported here will reflect the region of the United States they worked in. The researcher included additional questions in the survey regarding the frequency and duration of MTSS and areas of concern addressed by occupational therapy through MTSS interventions. An open-ended question in the survey asked teachers to describe their experience with occupational therapists who provide MTSS. The last source of data was artifacts. The researcher asked the teacher participants to provide supporting de-identified documentation or artifacts on the occupational therapy service provided within the MTSS framework.

Interviews

Horizontalization

The researcher captured verbatim statements significant to the research question of describing teachers' experiences working with occupational therapists who provide support within an MTSS framework. These statements were copied into an Excel spreadsheet and grouped according to the research interview questions. There were 183 significant verbatim statements.

Grouping Significant Statements

The researcher then grouped or clustered the verbatim comments into themes. This process was done in NVivo12. Once the clustered or grouped themes were developed in NVivo12, they were printed out and cut apart for the researcher to read and re-read. The researcher further reduced the grouped themes to 15 themes. These themes are listed in Table 4 and described in more detail in the next research phase.

Table 4
Themes Identified from Horizontalization Data

Themes	Textural/Structural Theme
1. Teachers have positive feelings about occupational therapy MTSS.	S
2. Teachers are understanding of occupational therapists' heavy caseloads.	S
3. Things teachers would like changed.	S
4. COVID-19	T
5. Teachers find occupational therapy MTSS an efficient use of their time.	S
6. Teachers receive organized follow-up with occupational therapy MTSS.	T
7. Teachers want more occupational therapy MTSS.	S
8. Teachers find students make progress with occupational therapy MTSS.	T
9. Teachers believe parents and students are satisfied with occupational therapy MTSS.	S
10. Teachers report the occupational therapy MTSS process is informal.	S
11. Teachers respect and have confidence in occupational therapists' knowledge.	S
12. Teachers learn from occupational therapists' through MTSS.	T
13. Teachers receive a variety of intervention strategies from occupational therapists through whole-class instruction.	T
14. Teachers are utilizing support from occupational therapists through MTSS on an ongoing basis and frequently.	T
15. Teachers report collaboration is occurring with occupational therapists through MTSS.	T

Note: MTSS = multi-tiered system support; T = Textural; S = Structural

Textural Descriptions

The researcher examined the 15 themes created in the previous grouping phase. Textural themes emerged as examples of what the teachers experienced with occupational therapy MTSS. Table 5 lists these textural themes, along with evidence of the teachers' verbatim statements.

Table 5

Textural Themes with Evidence in Teachers' Statements

Textural Theme	Evidence in Teachers' Statements
COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "Our time got cut short. Now with the remote online learning." ● "I'm kind of just like in limbo right now. I've told the students the cues. I've talked to parents to teach about cues. It's really kind of hard to say. It's not really fair, because I don't have a good answer for that. Intervention right now has been very, very bleak. But in the past, I feel like with those students the outcomes have been great for my students." ● "Especially right now with not being in school, the child that she was helping me with, I was able to make sure that the parent was kind of doing the intervention at home. I have 17 kids and she is one of two parents that have actually like had done anything these last nine weeks."
Receiving organized follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "Follow-up. Really positive. They're very organized and they show up. They will check in. They'll come back. If they haven't; will make a point to say, you know what, I haven't forgotten. I'm gonna follow up with you." ● "It was great, honestly. She not only did she take time out of her day with my one specific kiddo, who I was really concerned about. She sat down me; we discussed the different activities I could do. Then she followed up with emailing me like a specific way to word our goal so that it met our criteria. Then afterwards she continued to check up on that, kiddo." ● "They were great. They definitely would address not only the kids that were on their direct caseload, but they would address issues with other kids. They would follow up with me on the progress of those kids." ● "It's been great. Our occupational therapist, she actually remembers more than I do. So, she will just randomly check in with us and make sure how everything is going. So, strategies are working."

Learning from OTs

- “When we would do the whole group activities. That would give me an introduction into kind of what is working with instruction and on how to kind of implement it.”
- “I’ve had a sensory based training for tier one and two. I’m working with general education students in the classroom and how we can integrate some of the sensory supports. So, the training was delivered by an occupational therapist to special education teachers and general education teachers. I did see a lot of the general education teachers using a lot of those techniques.”
- “She would correct the hand formation with the scissors. The next day when she wasn’t with me, I knew what to look for.”
- “She has been working with me and my learning and growth in the area of fine motor skills has improved.”
- “They tend to notice things that I don’t about students that don’t have IEPs.”
- “Everything that I’ve learned about handwriting, core strengthening, sensory integration, I learned all that from my OT. That came from when they would do the whole group activities once a week.”
- “Having that support is super helpful, but also knowing that I’m not using up a resource that is a very limited resource. It kind of helped to build my teacher toolbox.”

Receiving a variety of strategies from occupational therapy whole-class instruction

- “Definitely did it a lot in kindergarten with handwriting.”
- “Suggestions for yoga has really been a great thing for the kids, especially the younger kids. They taught them yoga when they first came in. They did the "sat na ma" and calming their bodies down. So my kids would actually use those words; when I would say, alright we're going to calm down, or alright we're going to get ready for yoga. They would implement it themselves. The kids can really relate to what they give as ideas.”
- “I've had them help me out with students who have difficulty just managing their emotional levels, their energy levels and things like that. Things that have helped the whole group. Just developing a common language for the class to use. So that even if that one child is having their melt down. The language is the same for the whole class, so they don't feel singled out. The whole class uses that language, the parents use that language at home. This support just kind of is for everyone.” “We include the whole group doing the activity.”
- “Whole class OT support once a week for about 30 minutes where all the students were able to be engaged.”
- “We do this thing where they come in and teach cursive once a week now.”

Collaborating

- “I worked with the occupational therapist to come up with ideas or maybe solutions to help me with goals that I was trying to reach with that student.”
 - “That kind of professional conferencing together is really important.”
 - “You can bounce ideas off of them, and talk to them.”
 - “We write a goal in together to see if we can track their progress.”
 - “We've had a good experience with being able to pinpoint and been successful with finding things that work for the kids.”
-

Students making progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Usually the impact is pretty apparent especially with younger kids. You see progress a lot between five and six years old. You can see growth, and a lot of that is OT.” ● “Typically, I mean they show progress. It's amazing to see some of my students. The growth between those two years was astounding with handwriting with scissors skills, just with even manipulating their jackets and things like that.” ● “With some students it's almost immediate. For other kids, it's a learning curve. Well, that didn't work well. Let's try this. And it might take until the end of the year.” ● “I mean it greatly improves them. I can definitely tell you with early intervention, especially with the fine motor strengthening, not even like writing letters, it makes a huge improvement.”
Utilizing OT MTSS frequently/ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I definitely utilize my occupational therapist on a weekly basis for all students.” ● “It was usually for push-in for the whole class, it was usually once a week.” ● “...once a week for about 30 minutes.” ● “...come in and teach cursive once a week now.”

Note: OT = occupational therapy; MTSS = multi-tiered system support.

COVID-19. The researcher identified the theme of COVID-19 as a textural theme from the verbatim transcripts. When the interviews were conducted, teachers were working from home as most of the public schools in the United States were closed due to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Working from home during a pandemic was absolutely impacting their experience with occupational therapy MTSS. The researcher found that occupational therapy MTSS had been placed on hold for most students, and basic instruction became the focus of many of the teachers interviewed.

Connor, with 21 years of experience from the rural southeast stated, “Especially right now with not being in school, the child that she was helping me with, I was able to

make sure that the parent was kind of doing the intervention at home.” Harper, with 17 years of experience from the suburban southwest, said, “I’m kind of just like in limbo right now,” regarding her experience with occupational therapy and MTSS. This experience seemed to be a shared sentiment of most of the teachers. Morgan, with 9 years of experience from the suburban southwest, “Our time got cut short. Now with the remote online learning.” In other words, the occupational therapy MTSS had stopped when the remote online learning began.

Receiving organized feedback. Most teachers reported that their experience with the occupational therapist following up on MTSS was organized and positive. The teachers associated positive feelings with this as well with statements such as “really positive.” The word “great” was noted to have been repeated three times by teachers regarding follow-up by occupational therapy on MTSS. Avery, with 12 years of experience from the urban northeast, stated, “Follow-up. Really positive. They’re very organized, and they show up. They will check-in. They’ll come back. If they haven’t will make a point to say, you know what I haven’t forgotten, I’m gonna follow up with you.” Overall, teachers reflected that the occupational therapists were invested in checking back to make sure the students were making progress.

Learning from occupational therapists. All of the teachers described learning from occupational therapists during MTSS. With 6 years of teaching experience from the suburban southwest, Addison stated, “Having that support is super helpful...It kind of helped to build my teacher toolbox.” The acquisition of skills and knowledge the teachers described mostly came about from the occupational therapists modeling instruction to

whole classes. Once the teachers saw how the occupational therapist was teaching, they could then replicate the same strategies repeatedly.

Many teachers noted that occupational therapists used specific language and songs unfamiliar to them yet had a significant and positive impact on the students. With 11 years of experience from the urban southwest, Nic said:

Everything that I've learned about handwriting, core strengthening, sensory integration, I learned all that from my OT. That came from when they would do the whole group activities once a week. They have more flexibility to work with kids through the RTI system, and they could work with some Tier 2 kiddos. That was really, really beneficial.

Two teachers described their Tier 1 occupational therapy MTSS experiences as being eye-opening. With 9 years of experience from the suburban southwest, Morgan said:

Even going to the whiteboard and having them do the motions on a whiteboard, like opening my eyes to see that using that creative piece to make the fine motor learning fun and different and a good experience, not just writing with pencil and paper, all the time.

While Lex, with 6 years of teaching experience from the suburban southwest, expressed, "She gave an after-school seminar and walked us through different things that we needed to be looking for to target. That was an eye-opener right there."

Receiving a variety of strategies from whole-class instruction. Teachers stated the occupational therapists were coming in and providing whole classroom instruction on

various methods, including handwriting, sensory strategies, emotional regulation, and arts and craft activities. With 15 years of experience from the urban northeast, Noell stated:

I don't like the idea of keeping it [OT] bottled up. We've done yoga for the whole class, figure-eight breathing, and it didn't matter which kid that was. It was in a place where any kid could go up to it. This was the everybody activity, you know, and it was nice having that. Trying to take the special ed out of OT is a huge thing. It helps everyone.

With 12 years of experience from the urban northeast, Avery said, "The great thing about the OT interventions is it's applicable to all the kids, not just the kids with needs."

Collaborating. Most of the teachers described the partnership between themselves and the occupational therapist, where they worked together to develop goals, and they worked together to find solutions. When asked what was working with occupational therapy MTSS, Jordan, with 21 years of teaching experience from the urban northeast, stated:

I think it's the collaboration piece. It's one thing to say give me a chair in the classroom. But to have a conversation about what we're noticing. This is what we can try. How's it working? Like that's the piece that's most helpful to me because then you know I can make some decisions on my own without catching you in the hallway. It helps me sort of learn how to do some things on my own.

Teachers said they found this communication and problem-solving exchange to be essential and valuable to them. With 17 years of experience from the suburban southwest, Harper shared:

I felt like the communication back and forth between the OT, and I and the parents has worked really well. Then the strategies put in place. It works well. She hears the concerns from me. She hears the concern from the parents. She works with me to put in strategies to write goals to see where we need to move forward or which direction we need to go.

Students making progress. Most teachers stated that students made progress when provided service from occupational therapy through the MTSS framework. Teachers described varying levels of progress. Some teachers used words such as “astounding,” “immediate,” and “huge improvement.” With 6 years of teaching experience from the suburban southwest, Addison stated, “I think the students made progress, but I don’t think it was sufficient progress.” While Jordan, with 21 years of teaching experience from the urban northeast, said:

Like handwriting concern or like a self-regulation concern, like you know the kid who wiggles too much on the rug or is too touchy. Usually those types of things are helped pretty significantly by the different kinds of interventions. Like the majority of times it doesn’t eliminate the need for special education. It would kind of deepen the process. Maybe the student does not need OT. That’s helped us determine like you know what OT and other services might also be needed.

Overall, most of the teachers were satisfied with the growth students experienced due to occupational therapy’s involvement with MTSS.

Utilizing occupational therapy frequently and ongoing. The researcher identified this theme based on statements reflecting how often occupational therapists

were providing support through MTSS. Many teachers stated their occupational therapist was coming into their classrooms every week. With 3 years of experience from the western United States, Kelsey said, “I definitely utilize my occupational therapist on a weekly basis for all students.” Another teacher, Billie from the urban northeast, with 13 years of experience, reported, “It was usually for push-in for the whole class, it was usually once a week.”

Composite Textural Description

Teachers stated school closures due to COVID-19 had impacted their ability to collaborate and implement MTSS with occupational therapists. Teachers reflected upon their experience before COVID-19 and said they received support from occupational therapists through a multi-tiered system support framework on a frequent and ongoing basis. They experienced occupational therapists coming into their classrooms and providing whole-class instruction with a variety of strategies. These strategies included handwriting, fine motor, hand strengthening, yoga, sensory, and self-regulation. Teachers stated they were working collaboratively with occupational therapists and learning from occupational therapists. They asserted that students make progress and that the occupational therapist's follow-up on MTSS had been organized and consistent.

Structural Descriptions

The researcher examined the remaining themes. The structural themes were related to the how of the teachers' experience with occupational therapists and MTSS and are described in more detail in this section. Table 6 lists the structural themes along with the evidence from the teachers' statements.

Table 6

Structural Themes with Evidence in Teachers' Statements

Structural Theme	Evidence in Teachers' Statements
Positive feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "I really enjoyed getting that extra piece of knowledge for myself, and extra plan put in place for the student." ● "I greatly enjoyed getting to work with the OTs." ● "I've overwhelmingly had a good experience." ● "I love my OTs. It's amazing." ● "OTs come in and make the learning so much fun and entertaining for the kids." ● "I felt very positive and well supported." ● "I'm always very excited about OT and when they come into the room."
Understanding of OTs workload	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "I feel like they're so stretched. They've got huge caseloads of students They're doing the absolute best they can. They don't have a whole lot of time in my experience for other students in kind of helping with the tiered process." ● "When they have the time. I know like my OT, some of them are carrying you know seven and eight schools. That's too big. That's just, it's just crazy." ● "I know our occupational therapist has a very tight schedule. It was her spare time when she would have to come and talk to me."
Informal process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● "While you're here for so and so, could you look at this kid? A lot of times we catch so much ahead of time, than if I had just waited for a problem to occur." ● "Sometimes I'll just ask them to eyeball a student." ● "I would pop in her office and we would kind of chat informally" ● "The OT has been available in the hallway, in an email and sometimes even by cell phone." ● "Just to have them take a look and see like might they need OT." ● "I'll just say, can you come in, take a look at this child."

Changes wanted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I do kind of wish there was more of a system that was put in place.” ● “There is not a big understanding of what occupational therapy is in society. Of what they actually do. Or an understanding of for teachers what the difference between fine motor and gross motor is. That's something that should be more instilled in the education system and taught to teachers to understand that background before becoming a teacher.” ● “Sometimes it's very, very unclear as to what exactly OTs can help with, and what they can't help with.”
Efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “It was a very efficient use of my time, because I was able to employ those skills with other students as well.” ● “Totally efficient use of our time.” ● “I would say anything that I'm utilizing from an OT perspective that helps the kids is a positive use of my time. That's not wasted time. As a teacher, you'll go to seminars to go see a new word study program or a new literacy program, that doesn't feel like a good use of your time, because it's a lot of reiteration of material. But the OTs, it just must be the ones I work with are constantly trying to bring in new ideas and new ways to help the kids.” ● “It's always been a good use of my time.”

Parent and student satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “My kids love occupational therapy, and it's usually really fun. It's different. They always have the neatest, funnest ways to kind of introduce new skills, even hard skills. Fun things to write with, fun mediums, too. Lots of songs that go with a lot of different activities so the kids really enjoy OT.” ● “Most of my students absolutely love when they see the OT come in. They're very excited. Because the OT works with everyone in the room, it's much less of a stigma of being pulled out.” ● “They bring a positive spirit to the classroom that the kids enjoy learning.” ● “Our occupational therapists at our school has actually done two presentations for parents. One for upper grades and one for lower grades on self-regulation and just different ways of working with kids as families at home. Any parent who has attended has only given really great feedback.” ● “I think that parents get very excited when their children get opportunities for extra support.”
Respect and Confidence in OT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “So that was something that I found very useful with having her to go to. I feel like she was such a valuable source to go to for a multitude of ideas. It's just so neat to see the progress that they make in PreK.” ● “They're just really smart. So I feel like they have so many ideas and have a lot of experience.” ● “I think it's irreplaceable, especially with the younger grades. I feel that it's valuable. I have a lot of respect for the OTs at my school. They're really good at what they do. So I can rely on them as a sounding board.” ● “I definitely rely on them a lot. I feel confident that if I have a question or I need something, I can go to them, and they have the answers for sure.” ● “I'm always going to reach out to the OT because that's preventative medication.”

Teachers want more MTSS

- “Basically, that more kids would be able to receive more like tier one, tier two kids, be able to receive some services.”
- “I think that OT should be more available to all the younger grades. I think it's really important that they have access and time built into their schedules to be in every classroom.”
- “Just because a kid doesn't have paperwork or an IEP doesn't mean he shouldn't have access to the best strategies and techniques. That's kind of a hole in the program that should be filled. Early intervention in the early grades. Teachers should have OT training or access to an OT for their small kids.”
- “I would love one (OT) all of my own. I would prefer everyone have access to it as an equity issue.”
- “I mean one thing would be to have more providers. You should have an OT period; a week where you have your class get OT as a whole group activity. You know, my kids get art twice a week, they'd be better off getting art once a week and getting OT twice a week. But yea, more, more OTs.”
- “More training for parents to enhance their understanding on how activities can support development.”
- “I'd love to learn more. I'd love to you know, that's not what I studied in college at all. So I love more suggestions.”

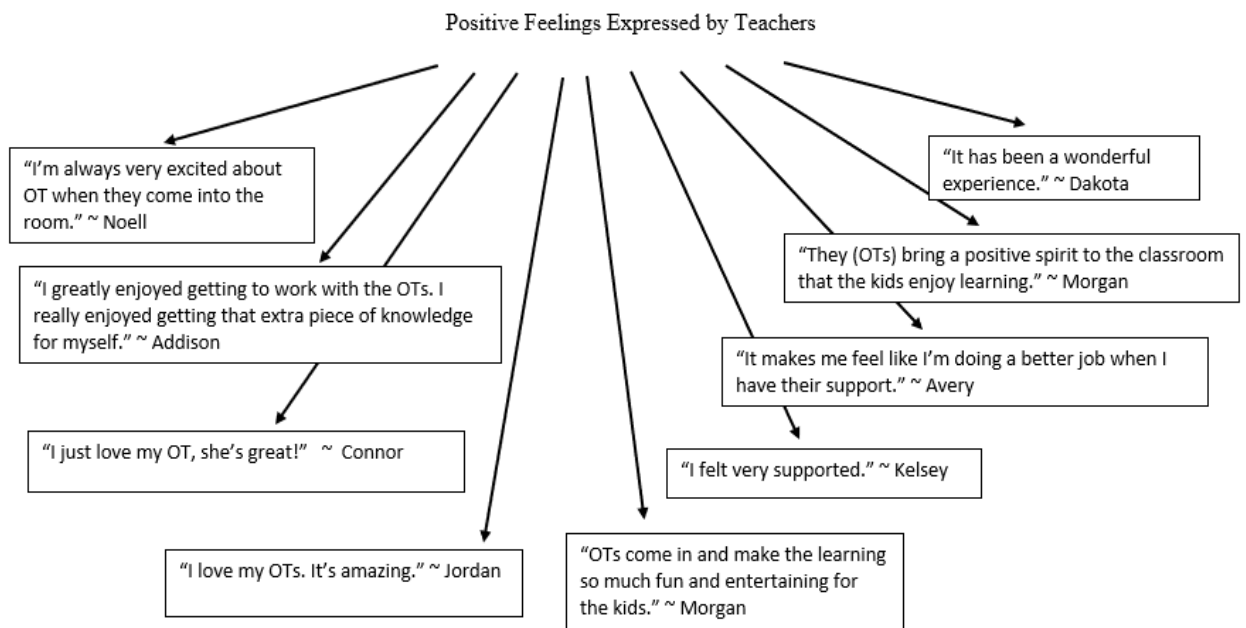
Note: OT = occupational therapy; MTSS = multi-tiered systems support.

Positive feelings. Most teachers expressed very positive feelings regarding their experience with occupational therapy services provided within the MTSS framework. Many teachers reflected that they enjoyed their experience with occupational therapy. The word enjoyed or enjoy was located in six different teachers' in the verbatim transcripts. The researcher found the word positive in eight different teachers' verbatim transcripts regarding their experience. Several teachers used the word love when describing their experience with their occupational therapist and MTSS. Other terms used which reflected feelings of positivity were “fun,” “excited,” and “supported.” Figure 3 is

a diagram reflecting various teachers' verbatim statements with regards to their positive feelings.

Figure 3

Positive Feelings Expressed by Teachers



Understanding of occupational therapists' workload. Many teachers expressed empathy towards occupational therapists in regards to their caseloads. Their perceptions were that occupational therapists are "stretched thin" and have "tight schedules." With 7 years of experience from the suburban southwest, Dakota said, "I know our occupational therapist has a very tight schedule. It was her spare time she would have to come and talk to me." Their understanding was that occupational therapists provide services to many students with more significant needs across multiple school campuses. They viewed their use of occupational therapy as a limited commodity, and they valued it very much. With 3 years of experience from the western region of the United States, Kelsey stated:

I feel like they're so stretched. They've got huge caseloads of students. They're doing the absolute best they can. They don't have a whole lot of time in my experience for other students in kind of helping with the tiered process.

Informal process. Most of the teachers described the process for contacting occupational therapists about student concerns as being casual. The researcher found the word hallway repeatedly used as teachers told how they reached out to occupational therapy for MTSS. Teachers reported that occupational therapists were approachable and willing to help. With 15 years of experience from the urban northeast, Noell stated, "While you're here for so and so, could you look at this kid?" Similarly, with 12 years of experience from the urban northeast, Avery said, "Sometimes I'll just ask them to eyeball a student."

Changes needed. Teachers overwhelmingly reported positive feelings and satisfaction about their experience with occupational therapy MTSS. Yet, when asked what could be improved regarding the occupational therapy service provided within the MTSS framework, teachers expressed the need for change in two areas. One change was in regards to having a system in place that outlines occupational therapy's role and guides the process for their involvement with MTSS. With 17 years of experience from the suburban southwest, Harper said, "I do kind of wish there was more of a system that was put in place." Similarly, from the suburban southwest with 6 years of experience, Addison stated, "There has to be kind of a set guideline. That would be helpful for someone like me who maybe doesn't know quite how a tiered system would work in occupational therapy."

The second need identified was for an increased understanding of what occupational therapists can do, in other words, the scope of occupational therapy within the school-based setting. With 13 years of experience from the urban northeast, Billie expressed, “There is not a big understanding of what occupational therapy is in society. Of what they actually do. Or an understanding of for teachers what the difference between fine motor and gross motor is.” Harper, with 17 years of experience from the suburban southwest, said, “Sometimes it’s very, very, unclear as to what exactly OTs can help with, and what they can’t help with.”

Efficient. All teachers reflected that their time spent with occupational therapy during MTSS was an efficient use of their time. Many teachers described how they learned strategies when with occupational therapists. They were then able to use these strategies with other students, creating a ripple effect of growth among students. With 6 years of experience from the suburban southwest, Addison stated, “It was a very efficient use of my time because I was able to employ those skills with other students as well.” Similarly, Kelsey, with 3 years of experience from the western region of the United States, said, “There’s a lot of techniques that the therapist helped me with that I still use in my classroom on a weekly basis. So, it was efficient.”

Parent and student satisfaction. Most teachers reported that they perceived students as satisfied with occupational therapy support within the MTSS framework because of the fun ways occupational therapists introduced skills. Teachers noted that students appear to enjoy the activities, songs, and techniques the occupational therapists bring into the classroom. One teacher explained that students were excited when the

occupational therapist came in because they worked with all students, and no child felt the stigma of being pulled out of the classroom. Another teacher, Nic, with 11 years of experience from the urban southwest, described students' experience:

The student really isn't aware of the different procedures that go into staffing their case. My kids love occupational therapy, and it's usually really fun. It's different. They have the neatest funnest ways to kind of introduce new skills, even hard skills. Fun things to write with, fun mediums, too. Lots of songs that go with a lot of different activities so the kids really enjoy OT.

Many teachers stated that parents were satisfied with the occupational therapy MTSS because parents get excited when their children get opportunities for extra support. With 13 years of experience from the urban northeast, Billie stated:

I think that parents get very excited when their children get opportunities for extra support. When they get letters about having yoga in the classroom, every parent seems to really thrive on that. The extra handwriting support, the extra ideas about how to work with children at home. Our occupational therapists at our school has actually done two presentations. One for upper grades and one for lower grades on self-regulation and just different ways of working with kids and families at home. Any parent who has attended has only given really great feedback.

Respect and confidence in occupational therapy. Most teachers expressed their confidence in and respect for occupational therapists. They are having repeated success with going to occupational therapists for a multitude of effective solutions. Teachers feel they can rely on their occupational therapists. With 16 years of experience from the urban

northeast, Casey said, “I definitely rely on them a lot. I feel confident that if I have a question or I need something, I can go to them, and they have the answers for sure.”

Another teacher Noell with 15 years of experience from the urban northeast explained:

I feel that when I have that other pair of eyes looking at my room, they tend to notice things that I don't about students that don't have IEPs. They'll notice things like the way the child sits in their chair. They'll notice all these things about a child that is not receiving services. That I didn't even think about. That I can mention to the parent, and we can use that as more information about a student to help them access the curriculum better or just be happier at school. A lot of times we catch so much ahead of time, than if I had just waited for a problem to occur. I don't see why it can't just be spread around. I'm always going to reach out to the OT because that's preventative medication.

Teachers need more MTSS. All of the teacher participants in this study stated their need for more occupational therapy services within the MTSS framework. Teachers specifically stated the need for more students to access occupational therapy at Tier 1 and Tier 2 levels. When asked what they would change about their experience with occupational therapy and MTSS, Nic, with 11 years of experience from the urban southwest stated, “Basically that more kids would be able to receive more like Tier one and Tier 2 services.” With 13 years of experience from the urban northeast, Billie said, “I think that OT should be more available to all the younger grades. I think it's really important that they have access and time built into their schedules to be in every classroom.” With 15 years of experience from the urban northeast, Noell spoke about

change, “Access to it. I sometimes would love one [OT] all of my own. I would prefer everyone have access to it as an equity issue.” Many teachers expressed the need for more occupational therapy service providers on their campuses.

Several teachers stated they needed more occupational therapists available to support teachers and parents through training. When asked how occupational therapy service within the MTSS framework could be improved, Jordan, with 21 years of experience from the urban northeast stated:

My first thought would be that training piece, like with the parents, workshops or whatever thing you could get the parents into. I think getting that outreach.

Probably likewise overall I’ve had colleagues and administrators not understanding. More training for parents to enhance their understanding on how activities can support development.

In summary, teachers asked for more support from occupational therapists for all tiers of MTSS, in the classrooms with students, through professional development for teachers and administrators, training for parents, and training for future teachers.

Composite Structural Description

Teachers expressed positive feelings when reflecting upon their experiences with occupational therapists who provide service through an MTSS framework. Teachers perceived that both parents and students experience satisfaction with occupational therapy MTSS. Teachers voiced their respect for and confidence in occupational therapists, and they view their time spent with occupational therapists as very efficient. While teachers expressed their understanding of the heavy caseloads that school-based

occupational therapists manage, they voiced their need for some changes. Teachers need better guidelines for the occupational therapy MTSS process, an increased understanding of occupational therapy services' scope, and to receive more training from occupational therapists. Lastly, teachers stated they would like more occupational therapy services and providers to create a more equitable learning experience for all students.

Synthesis of Textural and Structural Descriptions

Teachers felt positive about their experience with occupational therapy MTSS. They expressed satisfaction with their own experiences and perceived that both parents and students were satisfied. Occupational therapists were providing MTSS to teachers through informal means, frequently and ongoing. The occupational therapists were coming into teachers' classrooms and modeling various instruction and support that the teachers learned from and then carried that knowledge with them to build skills with more students. Teachers understood the limited time occupational therapists have to participate in MTSS due to their heavy caseloads. They asserted their need for change, which included more straightforward guidelines on occupational therapy's role in the MTSS process, a better understanding of occupational therapy's scope, and a need for more training. Teachers value, respect, and have confidence in occupational therapy through their experiences with MTSS, and want more.

Survey Data

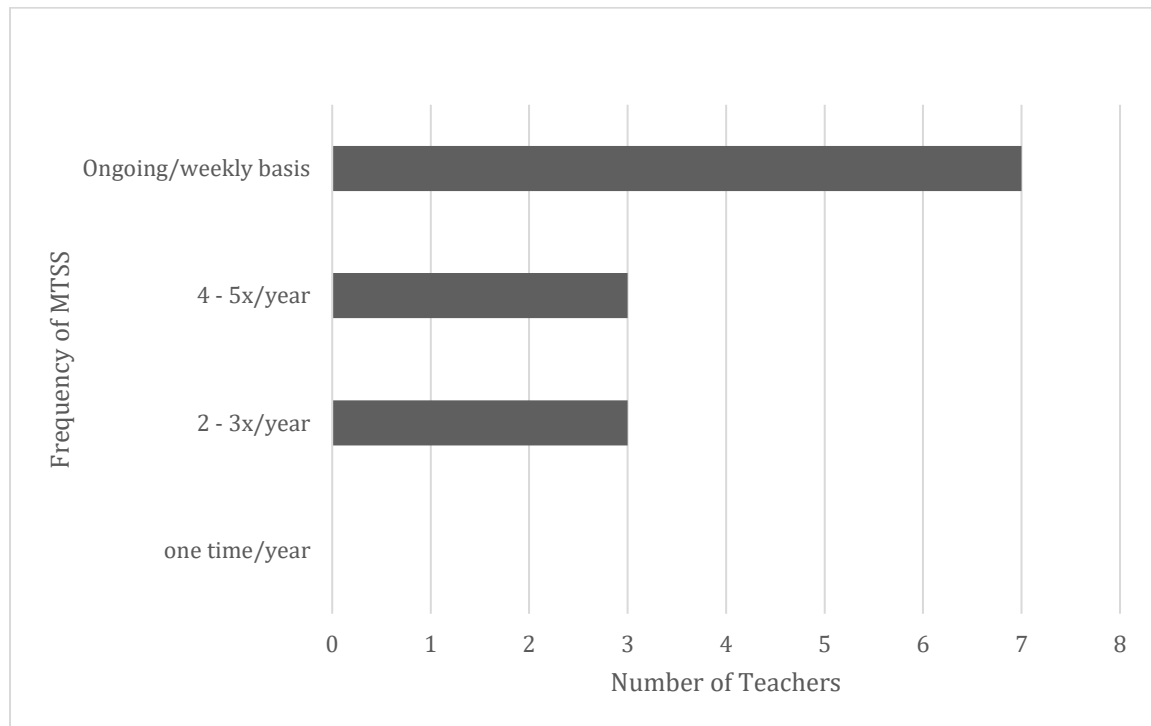
The researcher asked teacher participants to complete a 10-question introductory survey. Table 2 lists the introductory survey questions. All 13 teacher participants completed the online survey. The researcher placed settings on the survey for responses

to be anonymous so that teachers could express their opinions freely. This anonymity became problematic when the researcher wanted to associate the participant's pseudonyms with their location. After a few participants had completed the survey, the researcher discovered that the questions related to grade-level taught and years of experience were poorly worded. The researcher sent a member checking email to the participants to confirm the geographic location, grade level taught, and years of experience. Teacher demographic information is available in Table 1.

Many teachers ($n = 7$) responded they receive occupational therapy MTSS on an ongoing or weekly basis. Three teachers reported receiving occupational therapy MTSS for four to five times per year, and three teachers reported receiving occupational therapy MTSS for two to three times per year. Figure 4 is a bar graph reflecting the frequency of occupational therapy MTSS.

Figure 4

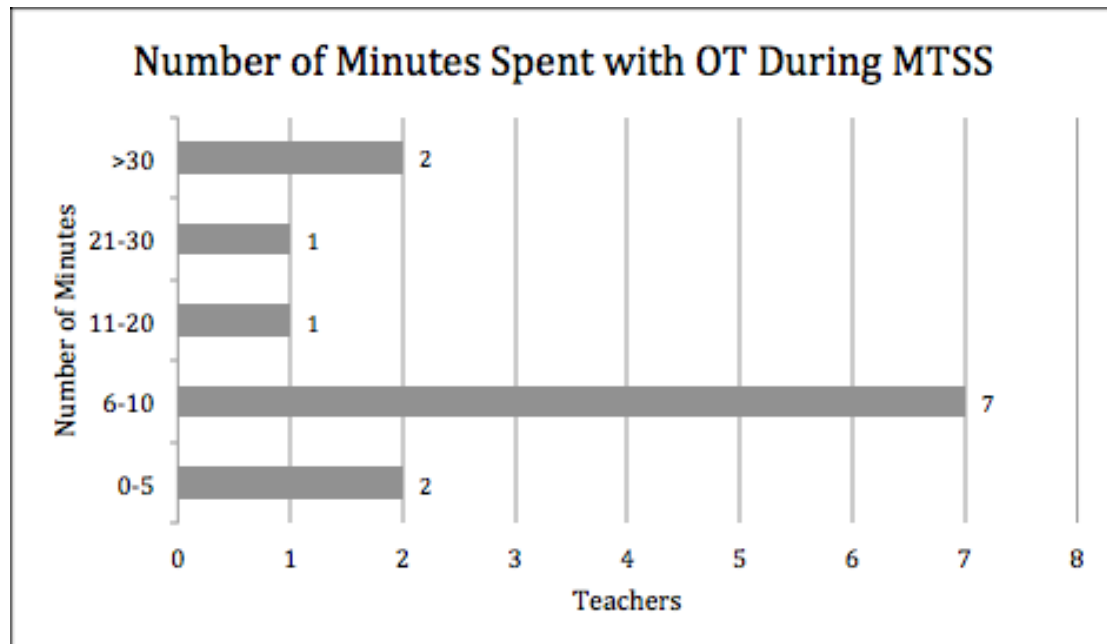
Frequency of Occupational Therapy MTSS



When asked how many minutes teachers typically spend with the occupational therapist during each session of MTSS, most teachers ($n = 7$) reported spending 6 to 10 minutes. Two teachers responded they typically spend 0 to 5 minutes, and two teachers reported spending greater than 30 minutes with their occupational therapist for MTSS. Figure 5 is a bar graph illustration of the teacher's responses to this question.

Figure 5

Teacher's responses to number of minutes spent with occupational therapy and MTSS



Teachers reported many different areas of concern that are typically addressed by occupational therapists through the MTSS framework. The most frequent area of concern, as reported by teachers ($n = 8$), was handwriting. Some teachers stated, “expressive written language,” “handwriting strategies,” “letter formation,” “implementation of writing,” “helping...with dysgraphia.” Teachers related the next most frequently reported area of concern addressed by occupational therapists were related to sensory concerns. Teachers used terms such as “ability to keep the body calm and focused,” “self-regulation,” “sensory concerns,” “sensory issues,” “sensory integration,” “body, mind awareness,” and “social-emotional regulation,” all of which are within the umbrella term of sensory integration. Other areas of concern being addressed by

occupational therapists through the MTSS framework were fine motor skills, focus and attention, dressing, pencil grip, hand strength, sequencing, mindfulness, yoga, and scissor skills. See Table 7 for a complete list and frequency of areas of concern.

Table 7
Areas of Concern Addressed by Occupational Therapists Through MTSS from Survey, Artifacts, and Interviews

Survey Area of Concern	Survey Frequency	Artifact Area of Concern	Artifact Frequency	Interview Area of Concern	Interview Frequency
Handwriting	8	Handwriting	5	Handwriting	8
Sensory	8	Sensory	4	Sensory	1
Integration					
Fine Motor	4	Fine Motor	4	Fine Motor	6
Attention and Focus	2	Self-regulation	7	Self-regulation	9
Dressing	1				
Pencil Grip	1			Pencil Grip	1
Core Strength	1				
Hand Strength	1			Hand Strength	1
Scissor Skills	1				
Sequencing	1				
Mindfulness	1				
Yoga	1			Yoga	4

The introductory pre-interview survey's last question asked teachers to briefly describe what their experience had been like working with an occupational therapist who provides service within the MTSS framework. All 13 teachers responded to this question. Table 8 lists some of the verbatim excerpts from the survey. The researcher omitted any statements from the table, which were repetitious or overlapping.

Table 8

Teacher Statements from Introductory Survey

Statements
“Typically, the classroom teacher and OT will try and speak for a few minutes (usually this happens over email or in the hallway quickly in passing as our school is big and it’s hard to find time). The OT will make materials and supplies available to the student and check in weekly to see how the supports are or are not working.”
“From informal conversations and whole class to small group or targeted interventions. It’s been collaborative and child-centered and rewarding.”
“It has been a wonderful experience.”
“Their work provides useful vocabulary to use with students and parents and gives students self-monitoring opportunities.”
“I have overall had a very positive experience working with occupational therapists who provide service through an MTSS framework. I find that it can be a little confusing at times and lacks consistency from school year to school year.”
“They are imperative to the success of my students’ fine motor growth and also for self-regulation.”
“Working with the occupational therapists in my building has been a huge benefit over the years, not only for the students for myself as a professional. I have learned many techniques and strategies in working with children who struggle academically, socially, and emotionally. They have supported me with behavioral supports as well as academic supports, and I would not know half of the things I know to support my students if it wasn’t for them! They are extremely professional, accessible, and knowledgeable.”
“Positive and helpful. Compliments and improves my practice and allows me to use interventions for all students.”

Note: OT = occupational therapy; MTSS = multi-tiered system support.

In summary, information gleaned from the introductory survey included areas of concern being addressed by school-based occupational therapists through the MTSS framework were most frequently handwriting and sensory. Teachers reported that the

MTSS provided by occupational therapists was usually weekly and ongoing and often lasted between 6 and 10 minutes. The survey revealed teacher participants were geographically diverse, being located in states across the United States. Overall, teacher participants reflected positive outcomes and positive feelings when asked to briefly describe their experience with occupational therapists and MTSS.

Artifacts

The researcher asked teachers to share de-identified documentation for two purposes. One purpose was to serve as a pathway leading to a conversation on their occupational therapy experience and multi-tiered system support. The other goal was to serve as data for triangulation to corroborate the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). When the researcher asked teachers to share documents before the interview, most teachers stated they did not have anything. There are two factors to consider regarding the lack of documentation provided. One factor is the researcher was asking this of teachers between February 2020 and June of 2020. During this time, most schools were closed, and teachers and students were participating in virtual or online instruction. The virtual education is essential to note because teachers were not in the natural settings of their classrooms and school buildings. The other factor to consider is that teachers mostly identified their experience with occupational therapists and MTSS as an informal process, leading one to believe that there may not be a formal documentation process.

The researcher did not have success with utilizing documents to create a conversation pathway due to the lack of documentation available. However, to have

another set of data for corroboration, the documents/artifacts were useful. After repeated emailing and coaxing, 10 out of the 13 teachers interviewed shared artifacts.

As guided by Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher categorized the artifacts. The researcher read and re-read the variety of artifacts as three themes emerged. These themes or categories were interventions, evidence, and communication. The interventions were artifacts, including PowerPoint presentations, online videos, and handouts with visual descriptions. The evidence category was items that included work samples. These were typically photographs taken by the teachers of work students' work samples. The last category was communication. This category included emails from occupational therapists to teachers, from teachers to occupational therapists, and from teachers to parents. The researcher will describe all categories of artifacts in more detail in the sections that follow.

Interventions

Teachers shared three PowerPoint presentations when asked to share artifacts. There were two PowerPoint presentations created by occupational therapists as presentations for teachers on sensory strategies, while one was made by occupational therapists for teachers to present to students. A PowerPoint created by occupational therapists for teachers was titled "Managing Sensory Needs in the Preschool and Elementary Settings," and consisted of four slides. The other PowerPoint created by occupational therapists for teachers was titled "Sensory Stations: Places to Recharge and Learn" and was 28 slides long. These presentations explained sensory integration, how it could impact children in the classroom, and offered sensory strategies to enhance

learning. The PowerPoint created by occupational therapists for teachers to present to students was a curriculum for social and emotional regulation and was 26 slides. This presentation included voice recordings embedded in the slides. Occupational therapists let the teachers know in the first slide that it was to be watched with the students and lasted for 10 minutes. The presentation stated the purpose was to provide teachers and students with the language, knowledge, and materials to implement the curriculum's basics on social and emotional regulation program in their classroom. The presentation included links to online videos for further education, and a link where premade classroom materials related to the curriculum for social and emotional regulation could be purchased.

Several artifacts were visual supports or reproducible graphic illustrations, including words to support children in the classroom setting. These visual supports included a chart with social and emotional regulation cues, different breathing exercises with pictures, graphical counting charts, self-massage for hands and arms, and squeezing or pressing palms together. All of these supportive intervention strategies were targeting self-regulation and promoting calmness.

The artifacts included two lists of activity ideas and suggestions related to both sensory activities and fine motor activities. Some of the sensory activities included chewing on crunchy or chewy snacks to increase attention, blowing bubbles, or blowing through straws to move light objects across a tabletop. Some of the fine motor activities included using tweezers to pick up cotton balls, placing beads on a pipe cleaner, using

clothespins, opening and closing screw-type jar lids, squeeze out wet sponges, and squeezing spray bottles.

Teachers shared documents that were related to handwriting instructional strategies. These documents included explicit instruction on how to form both uppercase and lowercase letters. The lowercase letter instructional sheets outlined a specific order or sequence for teaching the letters. Some pages included a specially lined paper with clouds on the top line, an airplane in the middle-dotted line, and grass at the bottom line. The letter instructional cues included phrases such as, “pencil on the skyline, dive down to the grass line, swim up to the plane line, over around and bump at the grass line.”

One teacher shared a document that was an email communication with a photograph of a technique the occupational therapist had previously described to the teacher. The method was to tape a colored sheet of paper to the wall and have the student cut upwards towards the ceiling. This strategy was to help the student use the proper grip of holding their thumb up while cutting rather than holding their thumb down, which is an inefficient way to cut with scissors. The occupational therapist also closed the message by saying, “See you Tuesday.”

One first grade teacher shared an intervention strategy shared with her by the occupational therapist for a student who was chewing excessively on his shirt collar during quizzes and tests. The strategy the occupational therapy recommended was an age-appropriate chew necklace, which was shaped like a shark. The occupational therapist shared a link with the teacher on where to order the item.

Evidence

The category of evidence contained four work samples and one notice of intervention services, which specifically identified the student as receiving assistance and intervention services through the RtI (MTSS) program. This document was the only formal report received from the 13 teachers interviewed. It was de-identified, but previously identified the student's name, student ID number, age, date of birth, gender, and campus location. It included the report's date, which was January 28, 2020, and was an update that could be sent to parents. The skill area listed was behavior, but the target was for the student to correctly position scissors in their hand and cut on a 4" straight line without deviating more than half of an inch. The student was identified as a pre-kindergarten student who was 4 years old. The frequency and duration of the intervention were listed as weekly for 30 minutes. The targeted end date was February 24, 2020. This report was the initial report notifying parents that the intervention was beginning and that the teacher would inform the parents of the student's progress every 9 weeks.

Teacher participants provided four work samples to the researcher, which supported their experience with occupational therapy MTSS. Three out of these four work samples were handwriting samples. The fourth sample was a cutting and coloring activity. One handwriting work sample was cursive writing on regular ruled notebook paper. It was a letter and consisted of two paragraphs and a signature. This writing sample was very readable. The next handwriting writing sample was also written on regular ruled notebook paper. It was four sentences that presented with some letter sizing problems and decreased spacing between lines and words, which contributed to the

assignment's reduced readability. The third handwriting sample was pre-writing, which included tracing of upper-case letters and coloring of shapes. The last work sample provided by a teacher participant was an example of an art and craft activity where a student had cut out different shapes to create a person, including the body, head, arms, and legs. The work sample shapes were colored, and a face was drawn on the round shape representing the head.

Communication

Teachers shared seven email communications with this researcher when asked to provide supporting documents or artifacts. Three of the email communications were from teachers to parents. Each of these emails contained intervention strategies that the teacher was sharing with the parent. The teachers explained that the idea or intervention had originated from the occupational therapist. One email was from an occupational therapist to a teacher, where the occupational therapist gave the teacher specific wording on a goal. The occupational therapist gave the teacher the words that identified the level of assistance provided and a distinct and measurable task that appeared to be a task that was appropriately matched to challenge the student's skill level.

Two of the emails were from occupational therapists to teachers and were about strategies previously provided to specific teachers. In one, the occupational therapist was clarifying handwriting instructional strategies to reduce lowercase manuscript letter reversals. The second email from the occupational therapist attached a PowerPoint presentation that included plans for creating classroom sensory stations for the whole class.

The last email was from occupational therapists to parents. In this email, the occupational therapists were letting parents know about how their child would be participating with their whole class in a social and emotional regulation program. The email included an overview of four social-emotional regulation zones to help parents recognize the color-coded regulation levels and the language associated with each level or zone. The occupational therapists encouraged the parents to learn the same terminology that their child was learning at school to begin to manage their thinking, feelings, and behaviors to avoid losing self-control.

In summary, the artifacts revealed that handwriting, sensory, and self-regulation were areas of concern frequently being addressed by school-based occupational therapists who provide support through the MTSS framework. Teachers shared artifacts related to training and intervention strategies provided by occupational therapists. Teachers shared only one document pertaining to the occupational therapist's involvement with MTSS.

Synthesis of Data

Data obtained from the interviews, introductory survey, and artifacts validated the areas of concern being addressed by school-based occupational therapists through the MTSS framework. The introductory survey revealed the most frequent areas were handwriting, sensory, and fine motor. The artifacts gathered validated the survey information finding with evidence of handwriting work samples, PowerPoints, reproducible handouts related to sensory and self-regulation, and handouts for fine motor. Furthermore, there was email communication that reflected fine motor intervention strategies and a classroom self-regulation program. The horizontalized verbatim interview

data corroborated this, with handwriting, sensory, and fine motor being the most frequently stated. Table 7 lists the areas of concern and frequency of occurrence in the data.

Teachers reported that the MTSS provided by occupational therapists was usually weekly and ongoing through the introductory survey. While the artifacts did not confirm nor contradict this, the interview data confirmed the findings related to occupational therapy MTSS being weekly and ongoing. The researcher created the theme “utilizing OT MTSS frequently/ongoing.” See Table 6 for more statements that provide evidence of this theme.

The introductory survey revealed that most teachers' amount of time with occupational therapists during MTSS was between 6 to 10 minutes. The artifacts' data may have contradicted the perception that the MTSS with an occupational therapist lasted between 6 and 10 minutes. There were a few PowerPoint presentations that not only took considerable time on the occupational therapists' part to create but required more than 10 minutes to present to an audience. The data from the transcribed interviews indicated that teachers stated their time spent with occupational therapists during MTSS was an efficient use of their time, which led to the theme of “efficient.” However, the researcher must acknowledge that this might not be the occupational therapists' perception of efficiency and time utilization. Table 6 lists the theme of “efficient” and includes verbatim statements, which are evidence of this theme.

Teacher participants reflected positive outcomes and positive feelings when asked to briefly describe their experience with occupational therapists and MTSS in the

introductory survey. The artifact data did not support positive outcomes and positive feelings, yet it did not contradict it. There was no documentation to support results, whether they were negative or positive. The lack of documentation for occupational therapy MTSS is a significant finding in this study. The artifacts themselves did not support the positive feelings experienced by the teachers. However, the teachers eventually shared the artifacts they did have. The verbatim interview data verified the finding of positive outcomes and positive feelings found in the introductory survey. The themes identified for these were “students make progress” and “positive feelings.” Evidential verbatim statements that support the theme of “students make progress” is located in Table 5. “Positive feelings” verbatim words are found in Table 6.

Some teachers responded to the introductory survey's last question with statements that indicated that the process of occupational therapy MTSS was informal. One teacher stated there were “informal conversations,” and another teacher said, “Typically, the classroom teacher and OT will try and speak for a few minutes (usually this happens over email or in the hallway quickly in passing...).” The lack of documentation for occupational therapy MTSS in the artifacts shared was a further indication of the process's informality. The transcribed interview data confirmed the informal process teachers are experiencing with occupational therapy MTSS. The theme “informal process” emerged from the significant verbatim statements. Table 6 lists the actual comments from teachers who created this theme.

The triangulation of data showed that all three data sources supported the same areas of concern addressed by occupational therapy. The themes of “utilizing OT MTSS

frequently/ongoing,” “students make progress,” “positive feelings,” “efficient,” and “the triangulation of data strengthened informal process.” The triangulation of data in this study has validated the themes which led to the composite textural-structural description.

Trustworthiness

Researcher’s Lens

Creswell and Poth (2018) guide qualitative researchers to validate their research through the researcher’s lens by the researcher disclosing any evidence that did not fit a code's pattern or was a pessimistic analysis. The researcher found two teachers who expressed what they referred to as either “mixed” feelings or “frustrated” feelings regarding their experience with occupational therapy MTSS. One teacher described how their feelings were “mixed” because they had a mixture of positive and negative occupational therapists' experiences. The statement below is their verbatim response:

I kind of had mixed feelings. In my experience, in my nine years, I have noticed that when we get like a contracting OT to come in that has their own business or service, I feel really good about that. They have ideas that are fresh. I've also had really good experience with district employee OTs. I've not had real great experience with like our region [educational service center] OTs. If we have to go through our region, I feel like that always hasn't been pleasant.

The other teacher described feelings of being “frustrated.” While they told of a very positive experience with occupational therapists that provided support through an MTSS framework, they expressed their disappointment that the support had been taken away due to funding. Her verbatim statement is below:

A little negative actually, because I feel like when you see the need for a student that has poor fine motor skills, or just really could benefit from even like sensory integration, and anything that it can provide, and you bring them to, we call it Care Team on my campus. But when you bring them to an RTI meeting, unfortunately, a lot of times they won't provide services. They definitely won't provide direct services. A lot of times we hear you need to make an accommodation within the classroom. You need to talk to the parents about skills they can work on at home. Really trying to get the services, direct services within the classroom is extremely difficult. We used to have the whole class OT support once a week for about 30 minutes where all the students were able to be engaged. Due to funding, they cut so much school funding a few years ago; that was one of the programs that they have cut, the OT employees. So, the OTs had to cut doing like whole-class activities.

These two teachers were the only ones that expressed negative experiences with occupational therapists providing service within the MTSS framework. Overall, teachers expressed compellingly positive feelings and satisfaction towards occupational therapy MTSS. The researcher must disclose any outlying negative data to establish trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While this is key information and intriguing, the researcher believes that it is not a reflection of teachers' overall experience.

Participant's Lens

The researcher solicited feedback from the teacher participants to validate the findings of this qualitative study. Creswell and Poth (2018) refer to this as member

checking and involves the researcher taking the conclusions back to the participants to judge the findings' accuracy. The researcher contacted all teacher participants ($n = 13$) via email and shared the final composite textural-structural description. The researcher asked the teacher participants how this description represented their experience. Eight out of 13 confirmed that the narrative was an accurate representation of their experience. Table 9 lists the verbatim statements obtained from the email responses of teacher participants.

Table 9
Teachers' Statements from Member Checking

Statements
1. "That sums it up."
2. "That sounds good to me. I'm so glad you did research on this topic. I'd love to see some changes:)"
3. "100% agree!"
4. "I would say that is completely accurate (in my opinion). Thank you for sharing it with me!"
5. "Assuming MTSS is similar to RTI I would concur."
6. "I think this analysis sums up my experience perfectly."
7. "Yes, that analysis absolutely represents my experience. Thank you."
8. "Yes, it does, indeed. Best of luck,"

Note: MTSS = multi-tiered system support; RTI = response to intervention

Reader's Lens

The researcher obtained feedback from an external auditor on both the research process and the findings as guided by Creswell and Poth (2018). First, the external auditor read and re-read two randomly chosen verbatim transcripts and participated in the clustering of themes from these transcripts' horizontalized data. The researcher and

external auditor shared themes. Four themes needed reconciling. The first was the theme of the “informal process” categorized as a textural theme. The external auditor believed it should be a structural theme. After engaging in lengthy discussions regarding the definition of textural and structural themes, the researcher and auditor concluded that, indeed, the theme “informal process” was a structural theme.

The second theme was regarding a verbatim quote in the theme of “receiving a variety of strategies” when it had an overlapping theme of “providing whole-class instruction.” After further consideration, the researcher combined the two separate themes of “receiving a variety of strategies” with “providing whole-class instruction” to “receiving a variety of strategies through whole-class instruction.” The external auditor suggested changing the theme “working together” to “collaboration,” which the researcher agreed with as the literature supports this term. The final theme to reconcile was in regards to “changes wanted.” The verbatim phrase, “I’d love to learn more...” fit better with the theme of “teachers want more.” The researcher agreed with this as well and made the change.

Secondly, the external auditor checked the transcripts, the table of themes, and the reflexive journal for the theme of “efficient.” The external auditor agreed with this theme and found evidence of it in three sources of data. The external auditor also checked the theme trail and connected quotes for each theme with data captured in the horizontalized data spreadsheet to verify the accuracy.

Lastly, the external auditor asked for clarification with phrasing in the composite textural-structural paragraph, which referred to desires for change in the MTSS process

and the need for more training. The external auditor questioned if this meant more training of future teachers about OT as a related service or more parent training. The researcher explained that it meant both. The researcher's perspective from the transcript data was that teachers asked for more training at multiple levels. They asked for more training for future teachers at the undergraduate level, more training for parents, and more training for themselves. The training for themselves included training on the process for occupational therapy's involvement in MTSS, the scope of school-based occupational therapy, the role of school-based occupational therapy, and intervention strategies including handwriting, sensory and fine motor. The external auditor and the researcher then agreed that the statement or theme of "need for more training" would stay the same for the composite structural-textural essence, as an explanation for this was present in the results section.

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and describe the experiences of teachers who work with occupational therapists that provide service within an MTSS framework. Prior research (Ohl et al., 2013; Randall 2018; Swanson et al., 2012) indicated a need for this type of study. Ohl et al. (2013) explored occupational therapists' experiences who implemented a specific program that was identified then as RtI but considered to be MTSS now. The researchers (Ohl et al., 2013) recommended additional qualitative research exploring teachers' occupational therapy service perspectives within the MTSS framework. Swanson et al. (2012) examined special education teachers' experiences who implemented MTSS and recommended more qualitative methods to document how MTSS affects teacher practices and instruction. However, this study did not include occupational therapy. Randall (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study with a small teacher sample ($n = 2$) and indicated a need for future qualitative research with a higher number of teacher participants. There was a gap in the literature regarding understanding teachers' experiences of working with occupational therapy services within the MTSS framework. This research study filled this gap.

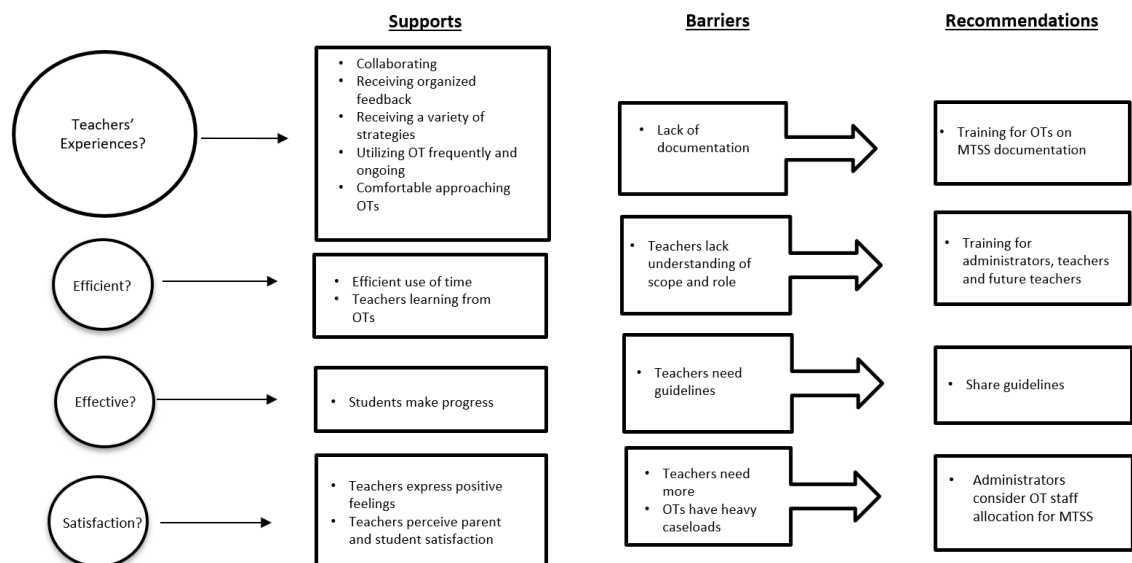
School-based occupational therapy experts (Ball, 2018; Cahill, 2007; Clark & Polichino, 2020; Jasmin et al., 2018) have urged school-based practitioners to embrace

MTSS on their campuses. While there is some information in the literature regarding occupational therapy MTSS, studies remain sparse. This study's purpose was to add to that knowledge base by describing the lived experiences of teachers who work with occupational therapists who provide service within the MTSS framework.

The overarching research question for this study was, “What are the experiences of teachers who are working with occupational therapists who provide services within an MTSS framework to general education students in public schools?” This information is significant because an improved understanding of teachers’ experiences has led to identifying ways to improve the experiences and contributions of teachers, occupational therapists, and school administrators who work within the framework of MTSS. Figure 6 is a diagrammatical representation of the findings of this study.

Figure 6

Diagram of Teachers’ Experiences with Occupational Therapy MTSS



Theoretical Alignment

The researcher utilized the occupational adaptation theory to guide sub-questions for this study. The sub-questions were related to occupational adaptation's theoretical concept of relative mastery (Schkade & Schultz, 1992), which occurs when the following factors are present: efficiency, effectiveness, satisfaction to self, and satisfaction to others (Grajo, 2019; Schkade & Schultz, 1992). Sub-questions probed teachers regarding perceptions of the use of time and resources, the interventions' effectiveness, their levels of satisfaction, and their perceptions regarding the students' and parents' levels of satisfaction.

The ultimate goal of occupational therapy with the occupational adaptation framework is to facilitate our client's ability to be adaptive (Schkade & Schultz, 1992). Grajo (2019, p. 638) used the analogy of "tools in a toolbox" to describe adaptive capacity. Assuming teachers are our clients, are they being given enough tools in their toolboxes to solve their own challenges? According to the teachers in this study, the answer is yes. When teachers were asked if their time spent with occupational therapy MTSS was an efficient use of their time or inefficient, all ($n = 13$) responded that it was an efficient use of their time and gave specific examples of why. Multiple teachers reported an efficient use of their time because of knowledge gained from time spent with the occupational therapist. One teacher even specifically used the words "helped to build my teacher toolkit."

All of the teachers ($n = 13$) who participated in this study believed occupational therapy MTSS was effective at improving student outcomes as one teacher stated, "it's

been a tremendous success.” Many teachers reported that they learned strategies to effectively build skills with specific students they had concerns with and then carried those skills over with other students, essentially building their adaptive capacity.

Most of the teachers ($n = 11$) reported feelings of satisfaction when asked to describe their experiences with occupational therapy MTSS. Considering the previous information on teachers’ perspectives on efficiency and effectiveness, one can infer that the teachers were satisfied with themselves during this experience. Teachers were asked explicitly about student and parent satisfaction, and most reported that both student and parent were very satisfied. In relationship to the students’ satisfaction, teachers used words like “fun,” “enjoy,” and “excited.” Teachers described parents as being more appreciative of having an occupational therapist involved with their child through MTSS. In summary, the occupational adaptation theoretical framework’s application yielded a more comprehensive understanding of the teachers’ relative mastery and their overall adaptive capacity.

Implications and Recommendations

Informal Process

Teachers described the process for seeking out occupational therapists for MTSS as being informal. Many of them mentioned the word hallway when discussing how they approached occupational therapists for student concerns and follow-up. Teachers seemed to be satisfied with this, as the occupational therapists seemed to be accessible and willing to help. The informal process was not an area of change that teachers requested. This casual way of seeking help is working for them. Teachers found occupational

therapists approachable and willing to help. Perhaps, this informal process for seeking MTSS from occupational therapists should not be changed.

Given this information on teachers' satisfaction with the informal process raises a question regarding whether or not school-based occupational therapists are satisfied with the informality of the requests for MTSS. Do school-based occupational therapists desire a change in the informal process, or are they happy with the informal requests? Occupational therapists' perceptions of the informal process could be an area of future inquiry for occupational therapy research.

One significant finding in this study is the lack of documentation on the process and the interventions themselves and the outcomes. The teachers had no documentation as evidence that the MTSS was occurring with occupational therapists. While occupational therapists may be documenting and not sharing their documentation with teachers, this should change.

School-based occupational therapists should be documenting their services and sharing their documentation with teachers and parents. This documentation should include areas of concern addressed with baseline performance data, interventions recommended, the frequency and duration of the intervention implementation, and the outcome. The documentation of MTSS is imperative as it shows accountability and the occupational therapy professional reasoning involved. Sames (2015, p. 206) states that "each intervention on every level is documented" in regards to MTSS (RtI). This researcher strongly recommends that all MTSS be documented. Documentation could justify to school administrators the addition of more occupational therapy providers,

which teacher participants in this study are requesting. Administrators could utilize documentation as it shows outcomes for program evaluation and effectiveness.

School-based occupational therapists should receive training to provide them with the skills and tools necessary to document their participation within the MTSS framework. This training could include guidance on creating data tracking sheets for all three tiers of intervention. Documentation templates and documentation examples could be provided to support occupational therapists who may be struggling with developing efficient and effective ways of documentation.

Changes Needed

Guidelines needed. Some of the teacher participants reported there were guidelines in place within their districts for occupational therapy's role in MTSS. Yet many teachers said that there was a lack of guidelines to inform them of the process of occupational therapy's involvement with MTSS. Cahill et al. (2014) identified that occupational therapists nationwide needed guidelines from their districts on how to participate in MTSS. This need is persisting across the nation. School district administrators need to be aware of this need and provide the necessary guidelines, support, and training to facilitate teachers and occupational therapists' process within the MTSS framework.

Given that some districts have guidelines, another solution could be for these guidelines to be shared and replicated or adapted to meet each district's needs. Practicing school-based occupational therapists who have these guidelines that are working could

share them at the state and national conferences for school-based occupational therapists who are lacking guidelines.

Scope and role clarification needed. Many teacher participants in this study stated they did not understand what occupational therapists could help with in the school-based setting. This is a lack of understanding of school-based occupational therapy's role and scope and has been identified in previous studies (Asher & Estes, 2016; Bolton & Plattner, 2019; Casillas, 2010). This issue continues to be problematic for school-based occupational therapists. School-based occupational therapists need to be articulate to both administrators and teachers the scope of their practice and their role within the school-based setting.

While the OTPF-4 (AOTA, 2020) outlines the scope of occupational therapy practice, the scope of practice for school-based occupational therapy may vary from district to district. As stated by the researcher in this dissertation's bracketing section, some school-based occupational therapy departments may have their unique scope depending upon the other services available in their district. For example, the researcher's experience was that their department was typically not involved with social and behavioral referrals. Other departments, such as speech therapy, counseling, and behavior specialists, addressed these areas of concern. These professional support services were campus-based and more readily available than the itinerant occupational therapists. Each school-based occupational therapy department needs to identify its scope and disseminate the information through district and campus newsletters and websites.

School-based occupational therapists need to be mindful of this lack of understanding of their role and scope amongst teachers. Each school-based occupational therapy team and department should strategize creative ways to target this within their districts and campuses. Once effective strategies have been determined, they could be preserved either on websites or through videos. They can then be shared repeatedly to new teachers and new administrators to enhance their understanding as this seems to be an ongoing issue.

Teachers Need More

All of the teacher participants in this study asserted their need to have more occupational therapy support through the MTSS framework. They described the variety of ways they need it. Teachers said that they need more Tier 1 MTSS training from occupational therapists to increase their understanding of how to teach handwriting, embed sensory strategies in classrooms, and help at-risk children self-regulate in whole classroom settings. Teachers voiced the need for parents to access these Tier 1 training to empower them with knowledge and skills on promoting their children's growth and development. Lastly, teachers asked for training to begin with future teachers at the undergraduate level to give them knowledge and understanding of occupational therapy tools and the school-based occupational therapist's role.

School administrators need to be made aware of the results of this study. They need to understand the positive effects and positive outcomes that school-based occupational therapists have on students and teachers through the MTSS framework. Some of the positive effects noted in this study were how teachers were gaining

knowledge and skills from occupational therapists to build their tool kits, which they then used again and again with other students.

In this study, teachers understood that occupational therapy service within the MTSS framework was a very limited commodity due to the heavy caseloads school-based occupational therapists' carry. School administrators need to examine this evidence and explore options for creating more positions on their campuses and within their districts for more occupational therapists.

In summary, the researcher examined the connections between teachers' experiences with occupational therapy services provided within the MTSS framework and occupational adaptation theory. The researcher also discussed implications and provided recommendations for the informal process, lack of documentation, need for guidelines, need for scope and role clarification, and the teachers' need for more from occupational therapists within the MTSS framework.

Limitations

Due to the nature of a qualitative study, the results are not generalizable across the United States. Therefore, readers should interpret the results with caution. This research sample may have been positively biased. Teachers who came forward to volunteer for this study all had positive experiences. There may be teachers who had less favorable experiences, yet they were unwilling to or did not come forward.

Sometimes participants do not always state the truth. It is possible the participants in this study were simply motivated to get an incentive gift card. It is also possible they

may have responded in ways that they thought the researcher interviewer wanted them to. Sometimes participants do not want to say anything negative.

This study did not gather data on the background or level of certification of the occupational therapists providing service through the MTSS framework. One teacher participant in Austin, Texas, mentioned that her service provider was a certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA), and they had a very positive experience. The teacher participant from Austin was the only teacher that mentioned the service being provided by a COTA. During the other interviews, the researcher assumed that the occupational therapists being referred to by teachers were registered occupational therapists (OTR). A limitation of the study is the lack of information regarding the occupational therapy providers' certification levels and educational background. Future studies may be needed to explore the educational backgrounds (i.e., bachelors, masters, or doctoral level) and certification levels (i.e., OTR or COTA) of occupational therapists providing service through the MTSS framework.

This researcher's background and positive experiences may have influenced the findings; despite the frequent bracketing procedure of setting aside their beliefs and experiences, it was a difficult task. At the beginning of the interviews, the researcher was not a skilled interviewer but became more proficient. As the researcher conducted more interviews, they were able to give probes to the interviewees, such as, "Tell me more about that." The possibility of biased participants, untruthful participants, and the researcher's developing interview skills could all be limitations. However, the researcher

believes the data triangulation process, the member checking, and the external audit strengthened the findings' accuracy in this study.

Future Research

This study of teachers' experiences indicated that occupational therapists successfully implement services within an MTSS framework. Future research is needed regarding how many school-based occupational therapists across the nation are successfully working within the MTSS framework and how many are not working within an MTSS framework. Would further questions be are MTSS requests informal as described by these teachers? If it is informal, are the occupational therapists satisfied with this process? How much time are they spending on MTSS? What are the frequencies and duration of their services provided within the MTSS framework? Are they documenting their service?

Future research is needed regarding effective solutions for increasing teachers' and administrators' understanding of the role of school-based occupational therapy. Mixed methods research would help explore school-based experts' opinions on solutions through focus groups or interviews. Once training has been established from the qualitative portion, training sessions could be piloted to groups of teachers and administrators. Quantitative measures could be employed to measure effectiveness. Training modules could be developed asynchronously and recorded, then delivered to teachers and administrators at their convenience.

Conclusions

This qualitative study gave voice to elementary and pre-kindergarten teachers working with occupational therapists who provide service within an MTSS framework. Before this study, their experiences with this phenomenon were unknown. Overall, these research findings will guide and inspire practicing school-based occupational therapists currently providing service within an MTSS framework or those who aspire to participate in the MTSS framework.

In this study, teachers felt positive about their experience with occupational therapy services within the MTSS framework. Most teachers described occupational therapy MTSS as an informal process where they approached occupational therapists in the hallways with concerns for students. They revealed occupational therapy MTSS as being whole-classroom instruction provided frequently and on an ongoing basis. Most teachers perceived the duration of time spent with occupational therapists as being brief and referred to the process as efficient use of their time. Teachers stated they learned from occupational therapists and then carried that knowledge to build skills with more students. Teachers expressed empathy towards occupational therapists regarding the limited time to participate in MTSS due to their heavy caseloads.

Teachers declared needs for change, including having more straightforward guidelines on occupational therapy's role in the MTSS process. Teachers conveyed their lack of understanding of the scope of occupational therapy. They called for more training related to understanding the role of school-based occupational therapists, more training to give them insight and solutions for students, and more training to empower parents with

knowledge and skills. Teachers overwhelmingly stated their need for more support from occupational therapy through the MTSS framework. They value, respect, and have confidence in their occupational therapists.

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APPENDIX A

Consent Form with Texas Woman's University Institutional Review Board Stamp

TEXAS WOMAN'S UNIVERSITY (TWU)
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title: Exploring Teachers' Experience with Occupational Therapy and Multi-tiered Systems Support

Principal Investigator: Lou Ann Hintz
Faculty Advisor: Tina Fletcher, EdD

Summary and Key Information about the Study

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Lou Ann Hintz, a student at Texas Woman's University, as a part of her dissertation. The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of teachers that are working with occupational therapists providing services within a multi-tiered systems support (MTSS) framework in school-based practice. You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a teacher who has worked with an occupational therapist who supports students through an MTSS framework. As a participant you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire, share documentation which has been de-identified, and take part in an online face-to-face interview regarding your experiences with working with an occupational therapist who provides service within an MTSS framework. This interview will be video recorded, and we will use a code name to protect your confidentiality. The total time commitment for this study will be about one hour and 15 minutes. Following the completion of the study you will receive a \$30 gift card for your participation. The greatest risks of this study include potential loss of confidentiality and emotional discomfort. We will discuss these risks and the rest of the study procedures in greater detail below.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you are interested in learning more about this study, please review this consent form carefully and take your time deciding whether or not you want to participate. Please feel free to ask the researcher any questions you have about the study at any time.

Description of Procedures

- As a participant in this study you will be asked to spend 30 minutes of your time in an online face-to-face interview with the researcher. An additional time of approximately 3-5 minutes will be needed for you to complete an online questionnaire. You will be asked to share documentation related to your experience which has been de-identified. The researcher will ask you questions about your experience working with an occupational therapist providing service within an MTSS framework. You and the researcher will decide together on when the interview will happen. You may choose to participate in any location you are comfortable with as long as you have wi-fi capability and access to a desktop/laptop computer or smart phone. You and the researcher will decide on a code name for you to use during the interview. The interview will be video recorded and then written down so that the researcher can be accurate when studying what you have said. In order to be a participant in this study, you must have worked with occupational therapists providing service within an MTSS framework, have a minimum of 2 years teaching experience, be a general education teacher, and work in an early childhood or elementary school.

Potential Risks

The researcher will ask you questions about your experience working with an occupational therapist providing service within an MTSS framework. A possible risk in this study is discomfort with these questions you are asked. If you become tired or upset you may take breaks as needed. You may also

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stop answering questions at any time and end the interview. If you feel you need to talk to a professional about your discomfort, the researcher has provided you with a list of resources.

Another risk in this study is loss of confidentiality. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent that is allowed by law. The interview will be held at a private location chosen by you while the researcher is in a private and secure location. A code name, not your real name, will be used during the interview. No one but the researcher will know your real name.

The video recording and the written interview will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. Only the researcher (who is the person who writes down the interview), and her advisor will view the video recording. A research coding partner will read the de-identified written interview for data analysis. The video recording and the written interview will be destroyed within three years after the study is finished. The signed consent form will be stored separately from all collected information and will be destroyed three years after the study is closed. The results of the study may be reported in scientific magazines or journals but your name or any other identifying information will not be included. There is a potential risk of loss of confidentiality in all email, downloading, electronic meetings and internet transactions.

Your video recording and/or any personal information collected for this study will not be used or distributed for future research even after the researchers remove your personal or identifiable information (e.g. your name, date of birth, contact information).

The researchers will try to prevent any problem that could happen because of this research. You should let the researchers know at once if there is a problem and they will try to help you. However, TWU does not provide medical services or financial assistance for injuries that might happen because you are taking part in this research.

Participation and Benefits

Your involvement in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. Following the completion of the study you will receive a \$30 gift card for your participation. If you would like to know the results of this study we will email or mail them to you.*

Questions Regarding the Study

You will be given a copy of this signed and dated consent form to keep. If you have any questions about the research study you should ask the researchers; their contact information is at the top of this form. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research or the way this study has been conducted, you may contact the TWU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 940-898-3378 or via e-mail at IRB@twu.edu.

Signature of Participant

Date

*If you would like to know the results of this study tell us where you want them to be sent:

Email: _____ or Address: _____

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