RTI With Differentiated Instruction, Grades K–5

A Classroom Teacher's Guide

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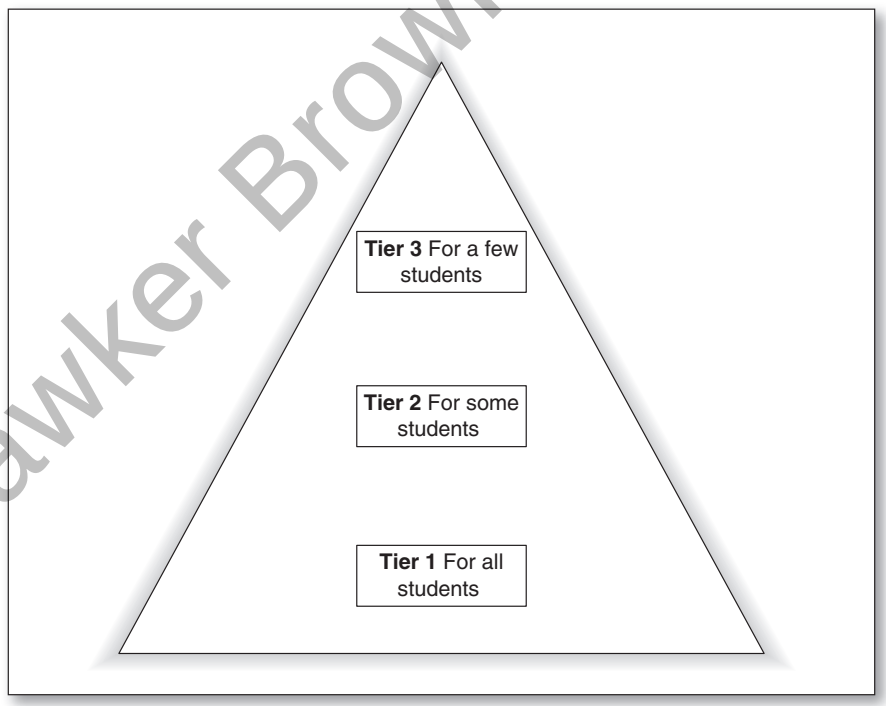
RTI creates a systematic dynamic process for instruction and intervention.

As a natural by-product, RTI provides a decision-making process based on student data. Assessment is a cornerstone of the model. Multiple levels of assessment are used to make decisions at different levels. Information from screening assessments, diagnostic assessments, and clinical assessments all have a place within the RTI system, and their place is defined. Each of these components works together to provide a framework that is systematic and streamlined in nature.

The tiers of RTI provide a structure for this process of determining the level of support that each student needs. The tiers are not indicators of the students themselves but instead are indicators of levels of support needed. Typically, the most widely used models involve three or four tiers (see Figure 1.1). At Tier 1, all students participate in core instruction and universal behavioral systems. The focus at Tier 1 is a core instruction that is high quality, research-based, systematic, and developmentally appropriate. Universal behavioral systems are schoolwide and classroom-wide systems with clearly stated expectations and consequences. These are positively stated and reinforced. Assessments most widely

Figure 1.1 The RTI Triangle for Academics and Behavior



to teach to the whole class while addressing individual needs. Through careful planning, she was prepared to meet the students where they were in relation to the expectation. Her delivery of instruction reflected careful planning, and as a result, Ms. Beal was able to meet students with a variety of needs, all working toward established desired learning outcomes.

The term *differentiated instruction* has been around since the 1950s and '60s, although the interpretations and definitions have evolved through the years. Currently, it is commonly understood through definitions that reflect principles related to the process of adapting learning experiences to meet the needs of different learners. All definitions agree that differentiation is not just a philosophy but also a practice of meeting students' needs. This practice is seen in adjustments made within three broad aspects: content, process, and product (Tomlinson, 2003). Alterations to instruction are designed to support and challenge all learners. Decision making is done through consistent assessment before, during, and in response to the learning process. The assessment and instruction are seamless.

Within these three areas of instruction, several aspects can be considered when differentiating instruction. Any one of those aspects may be adjusted to take into account the learner's ability, background knowledge, interests, motivators, learning habits, pace of work, preferred learning environment, or other factors that impact student learning. These may be considered and assessed in isolation, or multiple aspects may be considered at any one time. Differentiation requires an assessment of any number of aspects to determine who the learner is in relation to what is being learned.

PRINCIPLES OF DIFFERENTIATION

DI is responsive.

A teacher who is differentiating instruction is responsive to students and their needs as well as the context within which the students are learning. The best lesson in the world with high-level thinking required of the students is still not the best lesson if it occurs the period before a pep rally. The best lesson is one that takes into account the students, the learning objectives, and the environment.

DI is centered on students and their relationship to the learning.

DI does not start and end with the textbook or the content. It considers the desired learning outcome and the learners who will be interacting with this

Step 9: Determine benchmarks of student performance, and develop tools for ongoing measurement of progress.

After determining the learning process for students along with the classroom format, the next aspect to consider is how achievement will be measured and with what frequency. These measurements are directly related to the planned learning outcome as defined by the standard. The measures, which identify the rate and accuracy of the learning during the learning process, are known as formative assessments (O'Meara, 2010). In many cases, these assessments are done informally throughout the lesson as well as more formally at specific points in the instructional sequence. Informally, these assessments include asking questions or monitoring student performance on a particular skill through observation. They may also include the use of student conferencing, self-assessments, or peer reviews (Fisher & Frey, 2001). Providing short independent practice opportunities that are recorded or assessed using a checklist, rubric, or graph of progress is a strategy to measure and monitor growth. These frequent assessments can be easily implemented and managed through the use of technology, response cards, or electronic response systems. No matter which strategy is used for the assessment or response, the purpose is to gain information regarding how the student is learning in relation to the desired outcome or objective. These measures must be planned and deliberate in order to provide direction for instruction and supports.

Step 10: Develop criteria for the summative product or performance that accurately reflect the intended outcomes of the unit.

It is important to determine how mastery will be assessed at the end of the experience. This is the summative assessment. It is designed to provide an opportunity for a student to communicate what he or she has learned. The design must be directly aligned to the intended outcome and objectives. Whether it is a test, product, or performance, it is critical that criteria are established to clearly identify the expectations and definition of mastery. These criteria should be communicated to the students before ever approaching this assessment.

All of these steps of planning and preparation are required in order to effectively and systematically differentiate instruction. Each element builds on the other and creates a student-centered focus. It is this process that prepares a teacher to provide the responsive instruction that matches students' strengths and needs to their learning experiences.

SUMMARY

DI is a systematic process of both planning and delivery. It focuses on the student and his or her relationship to the content. It requires knowledge of the students and the ability to respond to that information. The purpose of

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Tier 1—Curriculum and Instruction

Strong, research-based programs are essential—but so is strong, quality instruction. Neither stands on its own.

QUALITY CORE CURRICULUM

One of the major premises of Response to Instruction/Intervention (RTI) is the need for a quality core curriculum to be solidly in place. One of the foundational principles of differentiated instruction (DI) is that the process starts with the standards. Both practices expect the curriculum to have a leading role in effectively meeting students' needs. It is less important which curriculum is used and more important that it has been developed with elements of systematic progression, grade-appropriate expectations, and clear, measureable outcomes. In both practices, reflection back onto the standards is essential. Many commercial programs and textbooks will provide resources to address the curriculum, but it is important to remember that the programs and materials used are the tools, and not the curriculum itself.

There are many commercial programs that are advertised as research-based systems of curriculum and tools to help provide quality instruction. These should be considered with caution and investigated. The What Works Clearinghouse (www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc), initiated by the

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The items on the screening assessment should be evaluated item by item. Each should be recorded based on performance. For instance, in the example above pertaining to addition and subtraction, the chart in Table 5.2 would be completed.

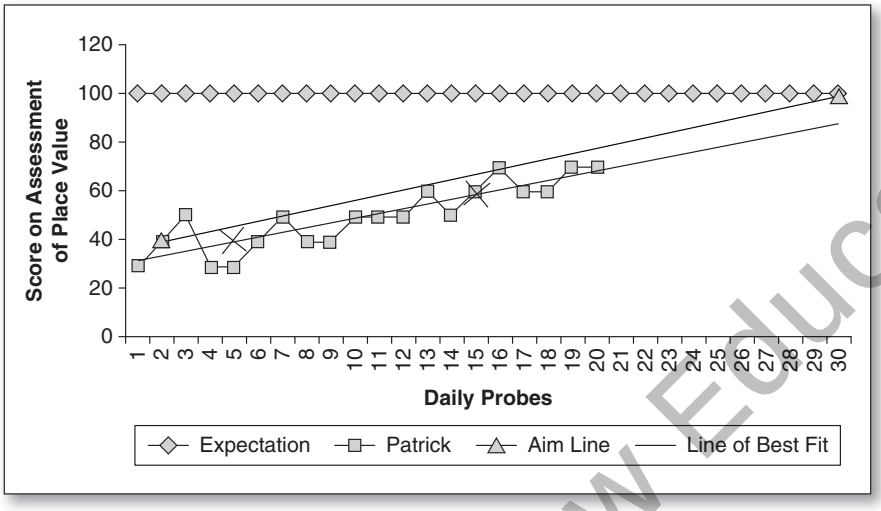
Although this takes time and a great deal of recording, it becomes useful when developing the instructional plans. It also reflects specific areas in which instruction is needed by all students and where there is great disparity in the performance levels.

After recording the results of the screening assessment, the next step is to make an overall comparison between the score on the screening assessment and the other data that are accessible for individual students. The purpose is to identify any significant discrepancies between the two results. If there are discrepancies, more information will need to be obtained for an accurate picture. However, if a student scores well on a screening instrument and also scores well on the standardized test, there

Table 5.2 Evaluation Chart for Assessment on Addition and Subtraction

	Student A	*Student B*	*Student C*	*Student D*	*Student E*	*Student F*
Calculating addition						
Calculating subtraction						
Definition of addition						
Definition of subtraction						
Concept of addition (from the pictorial element)						
Concept of subtraction (from the pictorial element)						
Concept of relationship of addition and subtraction as opposites						

Figure 8.2 Creating an Aim Line and Line of Best Fit



An aim line functions as an indicator to determine how a student is performing in relation to the performance needed to achieve the desired outcome. In Patrick's case, if the expectation were 80%, the aim line would be drawn from 40% to 80%. If the expectation were to be met after 10 weeks of instruction, the aim line would extend over 50 increments (five days each week). The aim line is just what the name conveys—a point at which to aim at any given time over the course of the learning process. It reflects the incremental performances needed to achieve the goal.

Once the aim line is created, Mrs. Walden and the data coach can begin to tackle questions about Patrick's expected performance. For this, the data coach creates a best-fit line, which is used to help predict a projected path based on existing data. This can be done using a computer or through simple calculations. The first step is to divide the graph in half so that the left and right sides have equal points. In this case, the divider would be between the 10th and 11th indicators, leaving 10 probes on each side. The next step is to look at the data on the left side and average all the data points. In this case, the average for the first 10 indicators is 40. The first point of the line of best fit will be at 40, placed midway between the start of the graph and the halfway point. In this case, it will be at Probe 5. The same process is completed for the other side of the graph. In this case, the average for the indicators is 60 and the midway point is at the 15th indicator. The second point of the line of best fit is marked. The two points marked are connected and extended to project future performance.