

RTI & Reading: The Primary School Essentials

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a proven research-based problem-solving process to help struggling learners succeed. The process has been most effectively applied in primary schools and is based on the premise that educators need to dialogue early and often about how to best teach every student to read. As the results of RTI implementation become apparent, more and more educators are using this process as a systematic way to address underachieving students. This reference guide is designed to provide primary years educators with critical information about reading within an RTI process, as well as practical strategies to address the major areas of reading within their general education classroom settings.



Understanding Reading

Reading is the ability to construct meaning from written text.

Reading is best taught as an integral part of a language/literacy continuum that includes systematic instruction in the five essential areas of reading (See Tier 1). The rationale for this approach comes from the research connecting oral language to reading development.

Reading and Research

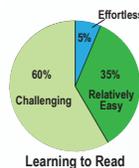
- Early language characteristics predict later reading and writing skills. Therefore, foundation year children with language disorders will display some degree of reading difficulty, especially if the language deficit is not addressed (Catts, 1997).
- About 20% of all children entering foundation year have significant difficulty learning to read, and the continuation of these difficulties varies according to the instruction available in years P-3 (Lyon et al, 2001).
- Waiting until year two or three to provide intervention to students exhibiting difficulties learning to read, results in upwards of 74% continuing to have reading problems in year nine. (Fletcher et al, 1994).

Early Intervention for Reading

Upon entering school, children may grapple with learning to read due to:

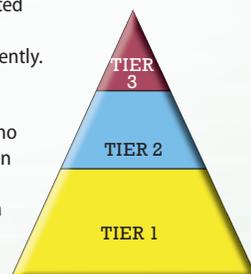
1. The substantial variability among five-year-olds in their innate talent and early preparation for learning to read.
2. An inability to respond to traditional reading programs.
3. Lack of foundational language skills needed to make the connection to sounds and letters.
4. Developmental lags due to genetics, environment, and/or brain structure or activity.

Given these distinct variations in skill level, instruction based on student need becomes essential to the acquisition of literacy.



Understanding the RTI Process

It is critically important to recognise that the RTI process is generally based on a multi-tiered model where the level of support and intervention provided to struggling readers increases as they move through the process. **Tier 1** is focused on the core instructional content provided to all of the students in the classroom where differentiated instruction is utilised and reading strategies are incorporated consistently. **Tiers 2** and 3 provide increasingly targeted and intensive reading interventions for those students who need additional support, most often provided in small groups and/or individually with the assistance of a speech therapist, reading specialist or special education teacher.



Tier 1 – Reading Instruction and the Core Curriculum

One size does not fit all when it comes to teaching students how to read; however, there are some key principles of effective reading instruction that will provide benefit to all students and prevent significant delays for struggling readers. They are:

1. Begin teaching phonemic awareness directly at an early age (in foundation or preparatory years, if children are ready);
2. Teach each sound-spelling correspondence explicitly;
3. Teach frequent, highly regular sound-spelling relationships systematically;
4. Show children exactly how to sound out words;
5. Use connected, decodable text for children to practise the sound-spelling relationships they learn;
6. Use interesting stories to develop language comprehension; and
7. Balance, but don't mix. (Grossen, 1997)

In addition, building the foundation for students to become skilful readers while making the connections between oral language and print often requires explicit/direct instruction in some or all of the following five essential areas of reading:

- Phonemic Awareness:** the conscious awareness that individual sounds strung together form words that convey meaning.
- Phonics/Word Structure:** the relationships between sounds and the letters they represent.
- Reading Fluency:** the ability to read text with sufficient speed, accuracy and expression to support comprehension.

Vocabulary/Word Knowledge: the words one knows in order to think and communicate with others.

Reading Comprehension: the ability to make sense of what is being read using metacognitive strategies (thinking about their thinking) throughout the reading process.

The interrelationship between oral language and learning to read is indisputable. This means that classroom instruction at the primary school level is most effective when organised around these five general areas. Therefore, the core curricula for reading instruction that yield the best results are those that:

- weave together all the essential components of reading;
- allow for differentiation of content;
- allocate ample time for guided practice; and
- incorporate cumulative review in order to meet the needs of at least 80–90% of the students in the classroom.

If students are struggling in any of these five areas, Tier 1 or classroom level interventions are recommended as part of an RTI process to build their language/reading skills. The following section offers an understanding of the importance of each of these skill areas to the reading process, along with techniques that can be easily incorporated into the curriculum and classroom instruction.