

RtI

for Gifted Students

A CEC-TAG Educational Resource

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Table of Contents

Preface	ix
Mary Ruth Coleman and Susan K. Johnsen, Editors	
Chapter 1: Response to Intervention for Gifted Learners.	1
Claire E. Hughes, Karen Rollins, and Mary Ruth Coleman	
Chapter 2: State RtI Models for Gifted Children	21
Karen Rollins, Chrystyna V. Mursky, and Susan K. Johnsen	
Chapter 3: Remembering the Importance of Potential: Tiers 1 and 2	43
Mary Ruth Coleman and Sneha Shah-Coltrane	
Chapter 4: Addressing the Needs of Students Who Are Twice-Exceptional.	63
Daphne Pereles, Lois Baldwin, and Stuart Omdal	
Chapter 5: RtI for Gifted Students: Policy Implications	87
Elissa F. Brown and Sherry H. Abernethy	
Chapter 6: Assessing Your School's RtI Model in Serving Gifted Students	103
Susan K. Johnsen	
Chapter 7: Challenges for Including Gifted Education Within an RtI Model.	119
Claire E. Hughes, Karen Rollins, Susan K. Johnsen, Daphne Pereles, Stuart Omdal, Lois Baldwin, Elissa F. Brown, Sherry H. Abernethy, and Mary Ruth Coleman	
Chapter 8: RtI Online Resources	129
About the Editors	135
About the Authors.	137

Preface

Mary Ruth Coleman and Susan K. Johnsen,
Editors

This book is part of a special series from The Association for the Gifted (TAG), a division within the Council for Exceptional Children. All of the contributing authors in this volume provided articles for the *Gifted Child Today* (Summer 2009) special issue on Response to Intervention (RtI); these were used as the foundation for this book.

RtI for Gifted Students focuses on the topic of Response to Intervention, particularly ways of serving gifted learners within the RtI process. In this book we have tried to balance theory, practice, and policy to present a well-rounded view of what we know and need to know about the implications of RtI for gifted learners.

The opening chapter, “Response to Intervention for Gifted Learners” by Mary Ruth Coleman, Claire E. Hughes, and Karen Rollins, offers an overview of RtI models and principles, a tiered approach to supports and services, and how gifted students and students with high potential who have not yet been formally identified might fit within different tiers of instruction. Tier 1 instruction generally includes a validated, evidence-based program that is used with all students. Students who show advanced progress with Tier 1 instruction receive collaborative interventions—Tier 2. Tier 3 instruction is for those students who need comprehensive interventions and most often involves referral to specialized services. The

chapter also emphasizes the importance of early intervention to ensure that problems are prevented and strengths are not diminished.

The second chapter, “State RtI Models for Gifted Children” by Karen Rollins, Chrystyna V. Mursky, and Susan K. Johnsen, describes emerging state models that have included gifted education. One of the state models, Wisconsin, is described in detail; short summaries are provided for the other three: Colorado, Ohio, and Utah.

The third chapter, “Remembering the Importance of Potential: Tiers 1 and 2” by Mary Ruth Coleman and Sneha Shah-Coltrane, addresses the importance of nurturing potential within gifted education and describes the *U-STARs-PLUS* model. This model is centered in the K–3 regular education classroom and services all students with high-end learning opportunities, hands-on/inquiry-based science instruction, dynamic assessment, and a systematic whole-class-to-individual observation of potential.

Within the fourth chapter, “Addressing the Needs of Students Who Are Twice-Exceptional” by Daphne Pereles, Lois Baldwin, and Stuart Omdal, take a close look at how the use of RtI, which began as an alternative approach to identifying students with learning disabilities, works for students who are twice-exceptional. This chapter shares a case study to illustrate how RtI might impact a child who is twice-exceptional, showing the possibilities for earlier supports and services to set children on a trajectory for success.

Next, we examine policy issues in the fifth chapter, “RtI for Gifted Students: Policy Implications” by Elissa F. Brown and Sherry H. Abernethy. This chapter offers solid guidance for decision makers faced with the implications of using RtI approaches with gifted students. The authors, who are state consultants, describe potential RtI components for gifted policy development and the implementation of RtI within North Carolina.

The sixth chapter, “Assessing Your School’s RtI Model in Serving Gifted Students” by Susan K. Johnsen, provides a way to determine if a school’s RtI model would provide for gifted and talented students by examining the overall model, how student progress is monitored, tiers of service, curriculum and instructional practices, and collaboration. This

chapter provides specific questions to ask and the knowledge and skills associated with gifted, general, and special educator roles.

In the seventh chapter, we take a look at the remaining challenges with “Challenges for Including Gifted Education Within an RtI Model” by Claire E. Hughes, Karen Rollins, Susan K. Johnsen, Daphne A. Pereles, Stuart Omdal, Lois Baldwin, Elissa F. Brown, Sherry H. Abernethy, and Mary Ruth Coleman. These challenges include RtI as systemic change, implementing RtI in schools and classrooms, and specific implementation issues for twice-exceptional students.

Finally, we provide an annotated listing of websites that have resources for implementing Response to Intervention. These sites provide a wealth of materials that include assessments, activities, lesson plans, behavior management techniques, research, and much more.

We hope that this book will be useful to the field as we explore together the possibilities of RtI for gifted learners.

CHAPTER 1

Response to Intervention for Gifted Learners

Claire E. Hughes, Karen Rollins,
and Mary Ruth Coleman

The Response to Intervention (RtI) model is sweeping the country, changing the way children's educational needs are recognized and met. RtI was introduced through special education legislation as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) and offered an alternative approach for identifying students with learning disabilities (Bender & Shores, 2007). Its impact today, however, has moved well beyond this initial goal (Council for Exceptional Children, 2007). RtI is designed to bring together information about each child's strengths and needs with evidence-based instructional approaches that support the child's success (Kirk, Gallagher, Coleman, & Anastasiow, 2009). Although RtI is still an emerging practice, it hinges on a collaborative approach to recognizing and responding to the needs of each child. This collaborative approach requires educators to think about the child first and match the supports and services to his or her strengths and needs. The allocation of resources follows the supports and services, promoting synergy rather than increasing fragmentation, as the needs of the child increase. In other words, within the RtI model, when the child's needs are the most intense, educational resources can be combined to

provide greater support. This use of resources differs significantly from traditional approaches where, as the needs of the child intensify, the supports and services become more separate and rigidly codified with clear boundaries delineating the allocation of resources.

A comprehensive approach to RtI addresses the needs of all learners, including learners who need additional time, support, practice, and/or more intense direct instruction to meet with success *and* learners who need more challenge and a faster pace of learning to meet with success. This comprehensive approach encompasses all learners and helps educators remember to address students' strengths as we work to meet their needs. When students with gifts and talents are left out of the framework, their needs are not addressed, and they often do not make the academic gains they are capable of accomplishing. This is particularly true for students from low socioeconomic (low-SES) backgrounds who may need early support to prevent academic declines (Wyner, Bridgeland, & DiIulio, 2007). Within a comprehensive approach to RtI, attention is given to maintaining academic progress for all learners at the highest possible level.

MODELS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The strategies used to address learners' needs (for both curriculum enhancement and for additional support) fall into two major approaches: the use of standard protocols and the use of a problem-solving process. Each approach has different implications when used for addressing the needs of students with gifts and talents.

THE STANDARD PROTOCOL MODEL

The standard protocol model requires the use of scientifically based classroom instruction for all students using the same curriculum, the same program, and/or the same management strategies; regular administration of curriculum-based assessments; and frequent comparisons of students to expected or normal growth (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2005). Standard protocols that address learners' needs are identified and defined ahead of

time so that they are “ready on the right” when teachers see students with specific sets of needs. Because standard protocols are well-defined interventions (they may even be scripted), it is relatively easy to help practitioners use an intervention correctly with large numbers of students. The goal of standard protocols is to ensure that all learners receive optimum instruction to help them make appropriate progress.

Fuchs and Fuchs (2005) described an elementary school that used a standard protocol RtI model for students with reading difficulties. For screening, each first-grade student was administered a curriculum-based measurement word identification fluency assessment (CBM-WIF) in September. All students in Tier 1 instruction received a validated reading curriculum program. To ensure that the reading program was implemented correctly, the school’s lead reading teacher observed each first-grade teacher’s classroom quarterly. The teachers kept records that monitored each student’s progress. Students who were not learning approximately 1.75 words per week then received Tier 2 instruction. In Tier 2, students received 45 minutes of instruction four times each week in groups of one to three from tutors who had completed training. The lead reading teacher also observed these tutors and provided corrective feedback. Once each week, the lead reading teacher met with all of the tutors for one hour to examine the students’ CBM-WIF graphs and to problem solve about students whose progress was inadequate. Tutoring sessions then focused on specific areas of student weakness that included phonological awareness, letter-sound recognition, decoding, sight word recognition, short story reading with highly explicit instruction, and self-regulated learning strategies to increase motivation and goal-directed learning. In this model, the third tier was referral to special education, which included a comprehensive evaluation phase. Across all tiers, teams empirically set decision rules to plan changes based on past research with specific interventions.

When we think of the needs of students who are gifted, we must reframe the standard protocol interventions so that they offer additional enrichment, challenge, and enhancement for learners with strengths in the targeted area (e.g., reading, as in the case above). For students whose progress monitoring data indicate a strength in reading, standard protocols might include:

- curriculum compacting to release students from additional direct instruction and guided and independent practice on skills where they have shown mastery;
- selection of advanced reading material on the students' independent reading levels that allow them to keep reading logs with key questions in their journals;
- participation in seminar discussion with other students who are reading the same level material; and
- learning opportunities that allow students to explore their interests in more depth.

In summary, the standard protocol RtI model uses a high-quality, research-based, standardized curriculum in Tier 1; monitors students to identify those who need additional support or enhancement to meet with optimal success; provides for collaboration among special and general educators; and refers to specialized services in Tier 3 if the student needs additional support for success (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2008). Although the standard protocol is used primarily for children who may need additional support for success in reading, it should also be used with children who are advanced in reading if the standard curriculum can be differentiated.

THE PROBLEM-SOLVING MODEL

The problem-solving approach relies on a system of increasingly intensive interventions that are planned and implemented by school personnel to provide an effective program for a particular student (Deno, 2002; Mellard, Byrd, Johnson, Tollefson, & Boesche, 2004). The four-level problem-solving model generally involves (a) identifying the problem, (b) designing and implementing interventions, (c) monitoring the student's progress and modifying the interventions according to the student's responsiveness, and (d) planning the next steps. Because each child's needs are addressed individually, professional expertise and collaborative consultation are essential for success.

The Minneapolis Public Schools used a three-stage problem-solving model (Hegranes, Casey, & Marston, 2006). The problem-solving steps