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Dramatic Changes in Reading Instruction

In a nationwide survey of U.S. school administrators in 2009, 73 per cent of the respondents indicated that their school district had already implemented RTI in some form; the vast majority of that number indicated that RTI had initially been implemented in reading (Spectrum K12 School Solutions, 2009). The recent emphasis on RTI procedures, which are primarily focused in reading, represents a dramatic redesign of general education. Clearly, all teachers will need to become quite fluent in this new approach.

Since 2000, the concept of differentiated instruction, first described by Carol Ann Tomlinson in 1999, has refocused and revitalised the instruction provided in primary and middle years general education classes. Educators have long recognised that effective instruction begins with the organisation and operational expectations within the class (Marzano, 2007). In that sense, Tomlinson's thoughts and suggestions for differentiation of instruction represent a fundamental shift in how teachers structure their teaching (Tomlinson, 1999; Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006). Gone are the days when reading instruction consisted of round-robin, individual oral reading of the same basal story, paragraph by paragraph, while students sat in rows of desks. Differentiated instruction does not look at all like that picture from the 1950s reading classroom. In that sense, it has already drastically restructured reading education.

When differentiated instruction is coupled with RTI, students in the general education class receive not only classwide instruction tied to their individual learning styles and needs, but also intensive, supplemental intervention targeted to their specific reading problems.

RTI in Reading

Research has consistently indicated that between 20 and 25 per cent of students have some difficulty reading during the early school years (National Reading Panel, 2000; Podhajski, Mather, Nathan & Sammons, 2009). Furthermore, because reading is the basis of instructional achievement in school over the long term, these difficulties have implications for overall school success (Katz, Stone, Carlisle, Corey & Zeng, 2008; NRP, 2000).

Early results on the efficacy of RTI procedures in reading strongly indicate that the reading problems of many students are reduced or eliminated through participation in specific, targeted reading interventions delivered in progressively intensive instructional tiers (Bhat, Griffin & Sindelar, 2003; Fuchs et al., 2001; Abbott, Walton & Greenwood, 2002; Denton, Fletcher, Anthony & Francis, 2006). The difference seems to be the increased intensity of the interventions.

What Is RTI?

RTI may be defined as a set of systematic, increasingly intensive educational interventions that are designed to target an individual student's specific learning challenges and to provide a supplementary intervention within the context of the general education class; the intervention is aimed directly at that student's reading problem in order to assist his progress through school (Bender, 2009a; Boyer, 2008; Bradley, Danielson & Doolittle, 2007; Davis, Lindo, & Compton, 2007). One reason behind the emphasis on RTI is that the federal government now allows it to be implemented as one component of the eligibility determination for students suspected of having a learning disability (NASDSE, 2006). However, that is a secondary concern of the larger RTI efforts (NASDSE, 2006), and one should not infer from it that RTI is a special education issue. On the contrary, almost all RTI efforts take place in general education, before a child is deemed eligible for special education assistance (Bender, 2009a; NASDSE, 2006).

RTI is a set of systematic, increasingly intensive educational interventions designed to target an individual student's specific learning challenges and to provide a supplementary intervention within the context of the general education class.

Typically, RTI models are described in terms of pyramid of intervention tiers, each representing a more intense level of instruction (Bender & Shores, 2007; Kame'enui, 2007).

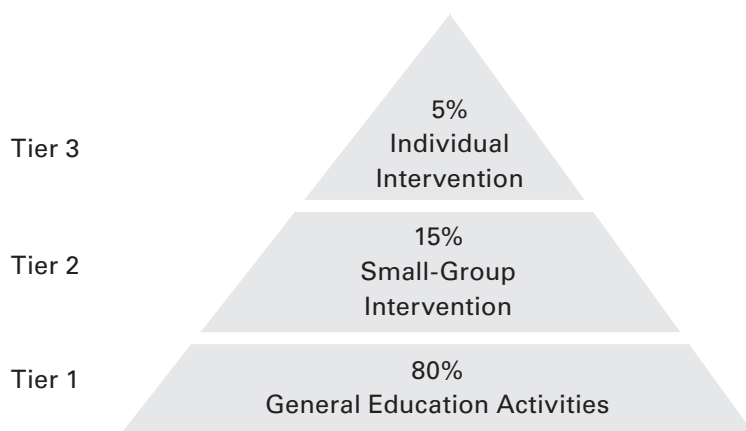


Figure 1.1: Three-tier RTI pyramid.

Tier 1 is instruction provided for the entire class. This level of basic instruction in the general education class typically is sufficient in intensity to meet the needs of 80 per cent of the students (Boyer, 2008; Bradley et al., 2007; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). Other students will progress to the higher, more intensive tiers of instruction. The general education teacher provides all Tier 1 instruction, which consists of both whole-group instruction and differentiated individual or small-group instruction, based on the needs of the students.

In 21st century classrooms, however, the general education teacher also undertakes universal, individual screening to identify students who are struggling in reading (Bender, 2009a) as well as students who may need more intensive, supplemental instruction at the Tier 2 level.

Tier 2 interventions involve supplemental, targeted interventions for small groups—perhaps 20 per cent of the class—that are struggling in reading in the general education class (Boyer, 2008; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Thus, in a typical class of perhaps twenty-five, one might expect that five or six may require Tier 2 supplementary instruction; most of those (perhaps 15 per cent of the class) will have their needs met by Tier 2 intervention, coupled with ongoing Tier 1 instruction. Again, in the original RTI model, the general education teacher delivers this level of targeted, intensive instruction for both these levels of struggling students (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007).

Tier 3 is very intensive, highly specific, often one-to-one instruction, designed to meet the needs of the remaining 5 or so per cent of the class (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). In some schools, this level of instruction takes place after a child is identified as needing special education services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). In others, however, the Tier 3 intervention is required *prior* to any eligibility decision for special education

to assessment administration. Teacher's guides, resources for activities, story books, sound and word cards, and lesson plans with specific steps for lesson implementation are included. Other supplementary materials include sound blending cards, CDs of songs and poems, and various manipulatives.

The What Works Clearinghouse (2009a) and the Florida Center for Reading Research (2007) have both documented the efficacy of *Read Well*. Unlike many curricula currently available, this one has been shown to be effective for English learners (Denton, Anthony, Parker & Hasbrouck, 2004), and this is critically important in numerous schools today. Because many English learners struggle to meet reading goals, a curriculum that is proven to work with that population can be a real advantage as schools strive to meet rigorous reading standards. Based on these strengths, many educators around the world are using *Read Well* as one curricular component of the RTI process.

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RTI Case Study: Early Literacy

As we have noted, most general education teachers have the responsibility for both Tier 1 instruction and Tier 2 intervention; thus, it is important that they provide a balanced literacy program at Tier 1, such as the guided reading program described in chapter 2 (page 27) for all emergent readers in the class. Furthermore, such differentiated instruction must be founded on the reading areas also described previously. Such differentiated instruction provides a critically important basis for all RTI efforts, and any Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions that may be required should flow seamlessly from the differentiated instruction provided in Tier 1.

Differentiated instruction provides a critically important basis for all RTI efforts, and any Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions should flow seamlessly from the differentiated instruction provided at the Tier 1 level in the general education class.

This section presents a case study in RTI for early literacy skills based on both the reading areas described herein and the Tier 1 differentiated instructional program for guided reading that was described in chapter 2. Our major reason for presenting it is to show how all components of the RTI process should work together to benefit students who may be struggling in early reading.

Ms Higgins's Year Two Class

DJ, a year two student, is having difficulty reading. His teacher, Ms Higgins, provided direct, systematic phonics instruction for DJ in a small group while students in other groups worked in various literacy stations. Thus, DJ received guided reading instruction from Ms Higgins in a homogenous guided reading group for several weeks at the beginning of the year.

However, Ms Higgins noticed that DJ was having difficulty completing decoding activities during the guided reading instruction. She also noted that he had difficulty completing various activities in the literacy centres set up around the room. In some cases, he was unable to read the directions found at the centres and could not complete several activities that others in the class successfully completed. She believed that this was related to his inability to decode words independently.

As is common in most primary classrooms, Ms Higgins administered several universal screening assessments three times each year, including one early in the academic year. These included the mCLASS assessment described previously and an information phonics assessment Ms Higgins developed. Specifically, the

Typically, universal screening assessments are completed a minimum of three times each year by each general education teacher for every student in the class.

mCLASS assessment measured DJ's ability to decode, read fluently, retell important content and answer comprehension questions on a brief reading passage. Ms Higgins used the informal phonics inventory to determine which specific phonics errors each of her students made. This level of specificity can help determine the types of instructional activities DJ and

the other struggling students might need. Ms Higgins used the data from these two universal screenings and then noted these problems in an RTI documentation form, as shown in figure 3.1 (pages 75–80).

The universal screening data demonstrated some type of reading problem for DJ. For example, the mCLASS results, presented in figure 3.2 (page 80), revealed that his reading level was at least one year behind the recommended starting level for year 2.

Ms Higgins began the mCLASS assessment with a book at level 8 (*Porter the Pig*, fig. 3.2). As the student results show, DJ was able to read this book with only 87 per cent accuracy. Ms Higgins decided to try a level 7 book (*Dinnertime*, fig. 3.2), which DJ was able to read with 96 per cent accuracy. At that level, DJ was also able to successfully retell the story and answer the comprehension questions.

Student name: <i>DJ Siers</i>	Age: 7	Date: 12/04/2008
Initiating Teacher: <i>Ms Higgins</i>	School: <i>Apex Primary</i> Principal: <i>Reginald Williams</i>	Year: 2
<p>1. Statement of student difficulty and summary of Tier 1 instruction (add supporting evidence):</p> <p><i>DJ consistently has trouble reading and writing high-frequency words in our year two class. When reading aloud, I have observed that DJ uses only his basic understanding of initial sounds as well as short vowel sounds to decode words. He is unable to apply any irregular vowel rules to decode words (for example, oi, and silent-e- and r-controlled vowels), and this hinders him from being able to blend words and decode unknown words on a year two level.</i></p> <p><i>His scores on a universal screening assessment conducted five weeks into year two likewise documented a problem. In my instruction at the Tier 1 level, I use a story-based reading instructional series, coupled with a running record computerised program called mCLASS, which presents many reading selections in various levels. At the beginning of year two, students should be able to score a 93 per cent or higher in reading accuracy on an mCLASS level 12 story. As shown in figure 3.2 (page 80), DJ was able to complete only a level 8 book with 87 per cent fluency, indicating a reading skill level somewhere around the beginning to middle of year one. I did not administer the retelling and comprehension assessment, but dropped back to a level 7 book, which he completed with 96 per cent accuracy in fluency. He also succeeded in retelling the story and answering comprehension questions at that level (see fig. 3.2).</i></p> <p><i>I developed an informal phonics inventory that I use as a universal screener and progress-monitoring tool. These words come from our year two spelling list, and I selected this list to show eight common phonics errors. This informal assessment indicated that DJ had difficulty with digraphs, consonant blends, double vowel sounds, e-controlled vowels and multisyllabic words.</i></p> <p><i>These data suggest that if DJ can decode words in a story enough to read fluently, then his comprehension is not a problem. Also, after noticing DJ's trouble with fluency and decoding, I spoke with his year one teacher, who reported similar findings from the previous year. Although DJ knew all letter sounds, including short vowels, he was unable to apply any other phonetic rules when reading. DJ also had significant trouble on his P-1 sight word list, again suggesting a problem in decoding.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ms Angela Higgins, 12/04/2008</i></p>		

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