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Reproducible pages are in italics.

INTRODUCTION

We can succeed only by concert. It is not 'can any of us imagine better?' but, 'can we all do better?' The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

We can predict that despite our best efforts, some students will experience difficulties during their schooling and will require additional supports. Many educators, schools and school systems have embraced response to intervention (RTI) as a method for providing such support. This approach includes three parts (Buffum, Mattos & Weber, 2009, 2012):

1. Rigorous, differentiated Tier 1 (core) instruction for all students so that fewer and fewer interventions are necessary
2. Preventative, proactive steps on behalf of students based on predictable roadblocks to learning and progress
3. A well-designed, comprehensive system of supports for all students

In some schools, however, RTI is little more than reactive, one-size-fits-all Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for students who are perpetually underserved by core instruction. Moreover, efforts at leveraging the power and potential of RTI have been shaped by the pressures of legislation designed to address learning difficulties and adequate yearly progress (AYP). While some schools have established supports that meet the needs of all students – students with the lowest readiness levels, students who are potentially proficient or on the cusp of meeting AYP targets, and students who have achieved proficiency and are ready for enrichment – other schools have, out of expediency or perceived necessity, only focused their support efforts on students with the greatest potential to pass relevant tests and boost the school's AYP. Using RTI in this way – to boost test scores – is

shortsighted, and it risks derailing the transformative, long-term power of RTI-based systems of support in favour of short-term gain. Such prioritising of resources and supports for the students closest to achieving proficiency on tests raises ethical and professional questions as well. Is it acceptable to choose to prioritise resources for a subset of students? Is AYP even a worthy target? Does it represent a level of mastery that we desire for our students, and does it represent tertiary or career readiness or another laudable expectation?

Many well-meaning and relatively well-performing schools have applied the principles of RTI to only those year levels tested in this way, usually third year and above at the earliest in certain systems. What these schools fail to consider is that most students might attend school for three years prior to taking any tests in third year, and the most successful systems of support for students are those that recognise that prevention is the best intervention (Buffum et al., 2009, 2012). In addition, the tools associated with RTI – universal screening assessments, progress monitoring tests, evidence-based strategies and programs – are most robust and numerous in the early years. The tools of RTI are readily available in P–3, more so than in other year levels. Yet educators often devote too little attention to RTI in the early primary years.

By not implementing RTI in the early years – from the foundation year to year 3 – educators are missing a golden opportunity. This book examines why earlier supports are desirable, illustrates how RTI-based supports can be used in early years and explores what such prevention looks like in practice.

What Is RTI?

RTI is a framework for school reform (Khan & Mellard, 2008) that helps educators answer the following four questions:

1. About which students do we have concerns?
2. In what areas do we have concerns?
3. What are we currently doing to support the student and meet the student's needs? What supports will we provide in the future?
4. Has the student responded to the instruction and interventions (the supports) that we have been providing?

The fourth question is critical. The future supports schools provide to students should be based on students' responses to the instruction and interventions they currently receive. If students, at any level of readiness, are responding well to the instruction and supports they are receiving, then schools should continue to provide them. However, when a student's progress and performance are not adequate, then something different must be done; educators must provide more intensive

intervention and support – with a sense of urgency – so that students receive the level of support needed to make adequate progress.

There will always be students who don't reach targets on time, so educators must be ready. Schools must establish structures and supports so that there are fewer obstacles for students and teachers when students require more time and resources. Educators can, with a great deal of success, predict and anticipate the following:

- What skills will require attention
- What strategies and resources they can use to meet those skill gaps
- Which staff members can best be freed to provide support
- When supports can be provided
- Approximately how many students will require support
- Which specific students might need support

Early intervention is legislated in many systems and research and policy recommendations clearly state that students should receive explicit interventions early and that children in the foundation year to third year are developmentally and cognitively ready for the reading, writing and mathematics standards and skills that are most essential. This research is discussed in more detail in chapters 1, 2 and 3.

In order to achieve success, educators must continuously strive to embrace two essential practices. First, they must commit to working collaboratively and with a sense of compromise. There are no other practices in education for which there is such unanimity of support, yet a lack of collaboration among teachers continues to sabotage the efforts of schools (Barth, 1991; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Marzano, 2003). Teacher success often corresponds to the extent to which teachers within a year level or school work collaboratively, whether they collaborate to improve instructional practice or incorporate RTI practices into their classrooms.

Second, educators must collaboratively determine which of their relevant standards and skills are most critical for students to master and collaboratively reach consensus on what level of student performance will represent mastery. This is necessary if students are to think critically, problem solve and explore standards with a rigorous level of depth and complexity. As Richard Elmore notes, "You can only assure that [students master tasks of high cognitive demand] if you have a manageable number of things to teach" (2010, p. 6). The practice of determining essential priorities is in fact critical for all great organisations. As Jim Collins notes in his book *Good to Great*, "The key to success is not innovation; it is 'simplicity and diligence' applied fiercely to our highest priorities" (2001, p. 104).

In addition, Austin Buffum, Mike Mattos and Chris Weber identify Four Cs – four principles – that are needed for schools to successfully sustain RTI efforts and to ensure high levels of learning for every student (Buffum et al., 2012):

- **Collective responsibility** – A shared belief that the primary responsibility of each member of the organisation is to ensure high levels of learning for every child. Thinking is guided by the question, 'Why are we here?'
- **Concentrated instruction** – A systematic process of identifying essential knowledge and skills that all students must master to learn at high levels, and determining the specific learning needs for each child to get there. Thinking is guided by the question, 'Where do we need to go?'
- **Convergent assessment** – An ongoing process of collectively analysing targeted evidence to determine the specific learning needs of each child and the effectiveness of the instruction the child receives in meeting these needs. Thinking is guided by the question, 'Where are we now?'
- **Certain access** – A systematic process that guarantees every student will receive the time and support needed to learn at high levels. Thinking is guided by the question, 'How do we get every child there?'

An RTI system infused with collective responsibility, concentrated instruction, convergent assessment and certain access has the capability to transform schooling at all year levels, but such a framework is rarely used in the foundation year to third year. Lack of maturity, lack of developmental readiness, and lack of English language proficiency are not legitimate excuses to delay intensive supports. Virtually all learning difficulties students encounter during schooling can be efficiently and successfully addressed in the early years if educators take steps to identify students in need and determine the areas in which they require support. When educators commit to providing this support with intensity, a sense of urgency, and the expectation that schools and students will be successful in achieving the highest levels of mastery and depth of understanding, students will succeed.

A fundamental premise of this book is that prevention is the best intervention. However, no single preventative measure has the potential to be as effective as superb instruction in the early years coupled with high expectations for every student.

Why Read This Book?

This book is for educators – teachers, specialists, administrators and support personnel – who are interested in authentically translating research into practice. Educators have known what to do for years, but implementing and sustaining best practice has proven to be trickier. It's not enough to know about best practice; if it's not visible in every classroom, in every school and through student performance, then it has no impact.

This book presents best practices and strategies in reading, writing and mathematics instruction for the foundation year to year three, as well as best practices for English learners and for supporting students' social, behavioural, language and fine-motor skills. The scope is broad and practical because busy primary teachers and primary administrators and specialists are rarely at liberty to focus solely on a single content area. Moreover, theory and best intentions are little more than words if they do not lead to results in the classroom. This is a book about doing – for practitioners by a practitioner. Individual teachers, specialists, clinicians and administrators can use the ideas and resources in this book to improve their craft. Teams of teachers can use this book to collaboratively refine their practice. Principals can use this book to define and organise their work in leading and supporting their staff. Administrative staff can use this book to begin a dialogue on evidence-based supports for early education.

Chapters 1, 2 and 3 examine the key content and fundamental skills students should obtain in the foundation year to third year in the areas of reading, writing and mathematics. The examples and sample standards are American in origin, but are useful and relevant across systems. The book includes key research findings and research and policy recommendations, as well as reference to and interpretation of sample standards, derived from the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and sample tools for ensuring success. These chapters examine how purposefully interconnected teaching and assessing are organised, structured and supported in effective classrooms and schools. The chapters end with reproducible Guiding Goals checklists to help determine the next steps you will take in your classroom, school or regional RTI-based P–3 program.

Chapter 4 focuses on the critical topic of English learners. It draws on research that has shed new light on key skills and best practices that can significantly improve the supports educators provide to English learners in the early years.

Chapter 5 describes the role that clinicians play in instruction and intervention in the foundation year to third year. While psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and occupational therapists may not be in a position to provide direct services to students in these early years, they can add value to educators' efforts through professional development and structured consultations with classroom teachers.

The best schools embrace collaborative practices, identify and clearly define their essential standards and skills, and recognise that striving for continuous improvement is the necessary reality for ensuring students' continued success. They also provide students with high-quality attention and supports in the earliest years – not just when students are tested. This book presents a practical argument for this early support, and it offers tools, recommendations, and examples of effective models for educators to implement RTI in the foundation year to year three.

The Teaching-Assessing Cycle

The teaching-assessing cycle (figure 1.9) offers one way in which teachers can plan to support all students during a unit. Teams begin at the top of the cycle, completing the essential standards chart, selecting and unwrapping or unpacking essentials for the upcoming unit. They then assess prerequisite skills and provide preteaching. Consider the following scenario.

A new unit of instruction in second year is scheduled to commence in a week. The team of three teachers uses tickets out the door or exit slips to conclude the last several lessons of the preceding unit. These tickets or exit slips contain questions that assess student knowledge of prerequisite skills that are necessary for the next unit. After quickly identifying who does and does not possess prerequisite knowledge, the team of teachers sets aside a day after the end of the preceding unit and before the beginning of the following unit to preteach prerequisite skills to students in need. One teacher accepts responsibility for completing this task with students from all three classes. Meanwhile, the other two teachers complete extension activities with the remaining students – extension activities that have been previously planned through the completion of the essential standards chart. While the needs of all students lacking prerequisite skills will certainly not be met, this preteaching is a proactive response that will make a positive difference.

Differentiated, personalised and unique instruction then begins in the three classrooms, with teachers administering and analysing previously agreed-upon common formative assessments at agreed-upon dates. As the bottom of the cycle indicates, teachers use their analyses of the assessments to modify instruction for the remainder of the unit, and to provide remediation to students who have been identified as struggling midway through the unit and enrichment and extension to others. This is done similar to the manner in which prerequisite instruction was given before the unit began, with one teacher providing remedial support and the other two extension.

The unit of instruction continues, and at the agreed-upon date, teachers give an end-of-unit assessment. While this assessment is then followed by a repetition of the cycle that addresses a new set of essential standards, students who have yet to master essentials are not forgotten. As indicated in the diagram, schoolwide teams, made up of administrators, specialists and clinicians, and the teacher teams identify when these students will continue to receive support for the just-completed unit while the entire class (teachers and the rest of the students) begins the next unit.

Both the essential standards chart and the teaching-assessing cycle can apply to all content areas, in addition to reading.

Table 3.2: Summary of Sample Standards in Mathematics

Topic	Foundation	First year	Second year	Third year
Counting and cardinality	Know number names, count and compare.			
Number and operations in base ten	Work with numbers 11–19 to gain foundations for place value.	Extend the counting sequence, understand place value and use place value to help add and subtract.	Understand place value, and use place value to help add and subtract.	Use place value to perform multi-digit arithmetic.
Operations and algebraic thinking	Understand addition as putting together and adding to, and subtraction as taking apart and taking from.	Represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction within 20; understand the relationship between addition and subtraction (with simple equations).	Represent and solve problems involving addition and subtraction within 20, and work with equal groups to gain foundations for multiplication.	Represent and solve problems involving multiplication and division within 100, and understand the relationship between multiplication and division; solve problems involving the four operations, identifying and explaining patterns in arithmetic.
Number and operations – fractions				Develop understanding of fractions as numbers.
Measurement and data	Describe and compare measurable attributes, classify objects and count the number of objects in categories.	Measure lengths indirectly and by iterating length units, telling time, and representing and interpreting data.	Measure and estimate lengths in standard units and relate to addition and subtraction; work with time and money, and represent and interpret data.	Solve problems involving measurement and the estimation of intervals of time, liquid volume and mass; represent and interpret data; understand area and relate area to multiplication and addition; understand perimeter and distinguish between linear and area measures.
Geometry	Identify, describe, analyse, compare, create and compose shapes.	Reason with shapes and their attributes.	Reason with shapes and their attributes.	Reason with shapes and their attributes.

Source: NGA & CCSSO, 2010b.

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