Response to Intervention and Literacy Development

Peter Johnston
Reading Department,
The University at Albany

To develop a productive RTI approach, we have to rethink:

- *What we think we’re doing* (foreground prevention with good first teaching, not identification).
- *How we think about literacy* (motivated set of practices engaged in by people in communities).
- *How we think learning occurs* (foreground engagement and social practice).
- *How we respond to learning problems* (shift gaze to context and interaction not just student).
- *How we think about and use research/evidence* (careful generalizing from average to case).
- *How we think about assessment* (see below).

RTI requires formative progress monitoring:

- Assessment is not formative unless it improves learning (student and teacher).
- Formative assessment is about arranging for the most important information to become available.
  - Collaboration
  - Choice, wait time, invented spelling, context that invites trying
  - Discourse focusing on process
  - Most important info is engagement
- Formative assessment depends entirely on teacher expertise: knowledge, perspective, stance and skill.
- “Assess the situation” - shift gaze to
  - Context for learning
  - Interactions
  - Materials
- We can’t allow assessment to make us lose sight of the fact that literacy is fundamentally social and profoundly complex

Instructional Reflection – Insist on Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions about Students</th>
<th>Questions about Teaching Practice</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Were the students engaged in their reading/writing?</td>
<td>1. What am I doing to support engagement?</td>
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<td>2. Did they read appropriately challenging texts (normally guaranteed by question 1)?</td>
<td>2. What else did I do to support independence?</td>
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<td>3. Did they make productive choices?</td>
<td>3. How am I encouraging conversations among students about texts?</td>
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<td>4. Did they approach reading/writing as a meaning making enterprise?</td>
<td>4. Is my talk a small part of the conversation and does it emphasize causal processes?</td>
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<td>5. What did they do when they encountered difficulty?</td>
<td>5. Was the support that I provided on puzzling words appropriate for these students at this point and how was it directed towards independence?</td>
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<td>6. Do they construe word solving as “doable”?</td>
<td>6. When students misidentified a word in reading, did I wait long enough for them to notice that an error had occurred?</td>
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<td>7. Did they use both meaning-based and code/text-based strategies in mutually supportive ways?</td>
<td>7. What do I need to learn more about concerning these children’s reading processes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Did they monitor their own comprehension?</td>
<td>8. How am I linking reading and writing in mutually supportive ways?</td>
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<td>9. Did they engage others productively along the way? What were the qualities of their conversations about the texts?</td>
<td>9. What am I doing to create a learning community and distribute teaching among class members?</td>
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<td>10. Did they use reading and writing in mutually supportive ways?</td>
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</tbody>
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Assessing /Teaching to Increase Student Learning and Reduce Learning Disabilities – Remember:

- Literacy must *minimally* be addressed as a meaning-making problem-solving activity of personal significance – an engaged and motivated activity requiring the child to be in control and thus self-regulate.
- Learning occurs in communities in interactions.
• Assessments must focus the teacher’s attention on the child’s processing and provide a history for problem solving.
• Teaching requires close attention to the child’s literate interactions and engaging the child at critical points in ways that keep the child in control of processing and expand the child’s use of resources.
• Particularly for children experiencing difficulty becoming literate, improving the child’s learning requires examining (through data) and improving the teacher-child interaction and shared meaning-making. In particular, the following interactions reduce the pace of children’s reading development:
  o Failing to ensure children are satisfyingly engaged in literate activities.
  o Teaching for words – getting them right rather than self-monitoring and confirming.
  o Teaching for dependency – short wait time, teacher controlled.
  o Confused focus – drawing attention to non-essential elements (Johnston/Phillips & Smith).

**RtI as Prevention**

Perspective: The central intent of the law is to reduce the number of children becoming LD by improving the quality of instruction.
• Difficulty is viewed as malleable and contextual, not permanent.
• Emphasizes ensuring appropriate instruction by qualified personnel – optimizing instruction to prevent the need to classify children as LD.
• Central concern is providing the means and context for improving teaching (and teacher expertise).
• Assessment must be informative about qualities of learning and teaching - it must be formative.
• Instruction is not appropriate or evidence based unless the evidence says it is effective for this child (with this teacher).
• Although there are differences in children’s facility with language processing competencies that make it harder for some children to acquire literacy, given appropriate instruction, children with the most limited competencies have almost all (98-99%) been taught to read on par with their peers (Al Otaiba & Torgesen, 2007; Clay, 1990; Vellutino et al., 1996).
• In the process of learning to read, these children’s language processing competencies improve (Vellutino & Scanlon, 1996).
• By shifting attention to the qualities of instruction (particularly the interactions), 75% of the students who still have trouble (the bottom 1-2%) can be brought into the normal range in 26-30 weeks. (Phillips & Smith, 1997)

**Problems with Approaching RtI as Identification/Measurement**

Perspective: The central intent of the law is to provide a better way to identify children with LDs.
• Based on a belief in permanent disability.
• Measurement priority requires standardization first and foremost (e.g. in timing, interventions, assessments). This results in unresponsive teaching.
• Standardized interventions shown to be effective on average in one setting will be effective with each new child in any new setting if implemented with fidelity. In any intervention study, there are students who do not progress, or worse.
• Interventions come in degrees of intensity or dosage. If a child is not improving, increase the intensity. But, increasing the amount of instruction that is not working is often not the best option.
• If an intervention package is delivered with fidelity and it is not successful with a child, the intervention is still considered effective because it is scientific and research based. The child becomes suspected of having an impairment (LD, treatment resister, chronic non-responder). Watch for this trait oriented language.
• Literacy development can usefully be approximated by words read faster and more accurately.

**Problems with Narrow Interventions (check the measures used in research studies).**

“Given that [state tests] require a much broader range of knowledge and skill than the word-level tests used to estimate success rates in this review, it is likely that poor and minority students, in particular, will not achieve the same success rates on them as for the simpler tests that assess only word reading accuracy…. Another limitation of current research is that we still know little about how best to support the development of vocabulary, conceptual knowledge, reading comprehension, and thinking skills or how to address motivational or behavior management issues.” (Al Otaiba & Torgeson, 2007)(p. 220)