



RTI Roundtable - Issue # 19

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: DO WE HAVE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING?

This issue of NASET's **RTI Roundtable** was written by Christine J. Briggs, Ph.D & Donna E. Wadsworth, Ph.D. Many students receive Response to Intervention (RtI) services during the regular school day in order to scaffold their learning and determine if additional, more intense interventions will be needed. The goal for RtI is to determine if instructional support can be delivered within a classroom setting before a student is considered for special education services. Many schools schedule an RtI time within the school day when all students receive support at a specific time. But to what extent do all of the stakeholders hold a shared understanding of what is RtI and its purpose? This study examined administrators, traditional teachers, teachers of the gifted and special education teachers' understandings of RtI, a Likert scale instrument with one open-ended question was administered to the participants to learn what is currently understood about RtI. Data was analyzed to determine frequency of responses and themes of understanding about RtI.

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Abstract

Many students receive Response to Intervention (RtI) services during the regular school day in order to scaffold their learning and determine if additional, more intense interventions will be needed. The goal for RtI is to determine if instructional support can be delivered within a

classroom setting before a student is considered for special education services. Many schools schedule an RtI time within the school day when all students receive support at a specific time. But to what extent do all of the stakeholders hold a shared understanding of what is RtI and its purpose? This study examined administrators, traditional teachers, teachers of the gifted and special education teachers' understandings of RtI, a Likert scale instrument with one open-ended question was administered to the participants to learn what is currently understood about RtI. Data was analyzed to determine frequency of responses and themes of understanding about RtI.

Introduction

One of the root goals of the educational process is to support students in their development and reaching their potential through the learning experiences presented during instruction. In order to work toward this goal, interventions and practices are often developed to fill learning gaps and create plans to meet the individual learning needs. Response to intervention (RtI) represents one action used in schools to support and meet the needs of learners. But do all the stakeholders understand the purpose of this intervention? Do the stakeholders have a shared understanding about this tool and how it is to be used? This shared understanding is an important component to insure consistency of use to best help students grow. In order to better understand the shared understanding of RtI, an examination of how this tool is used in schools on a regular basis and what is the shared understanding about RtI was explored to determine if the all stakeholders know what and how RtI is to be used.

Literature Review

Response to Intervention currently touches all students, grade level functioning students, those with learning challenges and those who are gifted or have gifted potential. It is important to understand the original, intended goals of RtI and how the expansion of this intervention should be implemented with consistent fidelity to meet the needs of the different populations found in schools.

Why was RtI developed (History)?

The RtI process was established to provide documentation of interventions used to support student learning prior to considering screening and comprehensive testing to determine if special education placement is warranted. As Congress began its hearings for the reauthorization of

IDEA, discussion of interventions and evaluation of students with learning disabilities developed. The RtI initiative partially evolved from a movement within education to become proactive rather than reactive. A student should not have to experience dramatic failure before being referred for evaluation and should have the opportunity to learn through possibly different, high quality evidence based instructional interventions (Martin, RTI Action Network).

IDEA 2004 regulations provided school districts both funds and encouragement to develop early intervening services for struggling students K-12 with primary emphasis in early grades. (A Primer on the IDEA 2004 Regulations, CEC.).

RtI is not a part of the law but rather was introduced through regulatory notes as a method to help in the identification of students with learning disabilities.

Interpretations of traditional child-find requirements and the introduction and implementation of RtI (IDEA, 2004) have created a complex environment of misconceptions, legal disputes, and how all the regulations might address the intervention needs of students (Martin, RtI Action Network). For example in January 2011 the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) issued a memorandum to state directors of special education that “the use of RtI strategies cannot be used to delay or deny the provision of full and individual evaluation... to a child suspected of having a disability...” (Memorandum to State Directors of Special Education 56 IDELR50 (US Department of Education. Office of Special Education Programs, January 21, 2011). Specific guidelines or monitoring has seemingly appeared or been considered only as problems or legal issues arose.

What is RtI

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a tier approach to guide the identification of students with learning and behavioral needs. The use of high quality instruction within the general education classroom setting provides struggling learners with interventions increasing in intensity and accelerates the rate of learning (www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti). These interventions can be delivered by a number of different people such as general education teachers, special education teachers and specialists. Progress must be closely monitored to assess the learning rate and student performance level for each student. The results of the student’s progress impact educational decision making as to service options to support student learning.

In 2007, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) released a position paper on RtI specifically addressing the needs of gifted students with disabilities. This opened the conversation for gifted education to be included in the RtI dialogue. The emphasis of this paper was the recognition of twice-exceptional learners (2E) and meeting their unique educational needs; gifted and learning disability. This is where the strength-based model for identifying gifted potential emerged. Within this model, the tiers take on different attributes in how to scaffold the needs of 2E learners and those with gifted potential.

RtI Components

Some of the key components that must be included in the RtI process include:

- High quality, research-based instruction in the general education classroom
- Ongoing student assessment to monitor student progress in comparison with the peer group
- Tiered instruction is included to provide differentiation based on student needs
- RtI requires inclusion of the parents with progress reports, what instruction and

interventions are used, and the academic or behavioral goals for the student

(www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti).

RtI Tiers

The intervention process consists of tier of instructional delivery. Tier I refers to all students receiving high-quality classroom instruction by qualified personnel. Students not demonstrating progress within the Tier I services are move to Tier II.

Students are assessed on a periodic basis to examine academic and behavioral baselines and identify those needing additional support.

Students identified for Tier II services have not made adequate progress within the general education classroom Tier I instruction. Tier II provides an increase in the intensity of instruction based student' levels of performance and rates of progress (Fuchs, Fuchs and Vaughn, 2014). These services are typically provided in small group settings in addition to instruction in the

general education classroom. In the early grades interventions tend to be in the areas of reading and math. A longer period of time may be needed for Tier II but should not exceed a grading period. Students who continue to show little progress at this level are moved to a more intensive intervention in Tier III.

Students receiving interventions at Tier III level have not achieved the desired progress in response to the other levels of intervention. Tier III includes individualized, intensive interventions targeting student deficits. If students still do not achieve progress levels desired, they are referred for comprehensive evaluation for eligibility for special education services. Parents have the option of requesting a formal evaluation to determine eligibility for special education at any point during the RtI process (www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti).

Progress Monitoring for RtI

Response to Intervention (RtI) is not a federal mandate for determining eligibility for any disability but a method for districts to help determine eligibility. In 2004, Congress initiated a conversation with the premise of providing high quality instruction and keeping track of student progress in the classroom so they can meet high standard expectations (Dexter & Hughes, 2008).

One benefit for using RtI is the ability to directly address student' learning needs, not waiting for them to fail and make instructional decisions to address these needs (Dexter and Hughes, 2008). Progress monitoring in the RtI process involves the assessment of student progress or performance in content areas for students demonstrating the need for additional scaffolding to avoid failure (2008).

When a student is identified as having an achievement risk, their progress should be monitored in relation to classroom instruction as part of Tier I services (Fletcher, Lyon, Fuchs, & Barnes, 2007). In order to determine student improvements, it is suggested that progress monitoring occurs at a minimum monthly but ideally it should be done weekly or at least biweekly and measured as a comparison of the students expected learning rate and actual learning rate (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2008). Students not responding to instruction at the Tier I level move to Tier II for more intensive instruction.

Positive outcomes obtained through progress monitoring include students learning at a more rapid rate as the instruction is tailored to their learning needs, teachers making more informed instructional decisions based on data, student improvement is documented for accountability, communication with parents concerning student growth improves, student expectations are higher, which results in a decrease in special education referrals (Fuchs, Compton, Fuchs, & Bryant, 2008). In order to have successful monitoring of students' progress to the learning interventions used in the RtI process, measures need to be short and easy to administer by the classroom teacher, special education teachers, or school psychologist (Fuchs, & Stecker, 2003). Progress monitoring is vital to determine if students are benefitting from the typical instructional delivery, identifying those not making adequate progress, and designing interventions to prompt students growth and success (Dexter & Hughes, 2008).

Exceptional Learners – Expanding RtI

When considering RtI for gifted, twice-exceptional (2E), and those with gifted potential, the Council for Exceptional Children (2007) outlined practices required to meet the needs of children demonstrating these qualities. The suggested gifted potential RtI model includes having high quality classroom instruction, nurturing all students to achieve and excel. Recommendations also include providing multiple opportunities for students to explore, develop and demonstrate their interests, strengths and talents (Blanco, 2010). In addition, in order to discover students' potential and advanced abilities, opportunities for their potential to emerge must be in place (Gentry, 2009). As for the gifted RtI model, universal screening is recommended as an essential component including the use of above level assessments to allow for students to demonstrate advanced abilities. This differs from traditional RtI that focuses primarily on grade level expectations (Blanco, 2010). Instruments used for universal screening must capture student strengths and advanced abilities in different educational domains as well as reflect culturally sensitive practices.

For students with gifts or gifted potential, Tier II interventions should provide enrichment opportunities to explore core curriculum (at or above grade level) in greater depth or at an accelerated pace, differentiating instruction. Robinson, Shore, and Enerson (2007) state that almost 50% of the general curriculum can be eliminated or compacted with no impact on academic achievement in test scores for reading, math concepts and social studies. In addition to

differentiation at the Tier II level, outside resources such as community mentors or internships are used as needed.

Tier II interventions for 2E or English Language Learners (ELL) students require more collaboration with other school specialists; Special Education teacher and ELL/Bilingual specialist as these student require dual differentiation that considers all the student's abilities and learning challenges. Dual differentiation requires meeting the needs of students with two contradictory sets of learning characteristics through nurturing strengths and compensating for learning needs (Baum, Cooper, & Neu, 2001). So 2E and ELL students may receive two types of Tier II support, one to meet their needs for accelerated learning in there area of strength and one to supply support in areas where the child is struggling and did not improve within the Tier I interventions, For example, a student who is proficient in math and needs learning experiences that accelerate or enrich them in this area but is struggling with reading may receive Tier II interventions in the area of reading.

Tier III RtI strategies are used when a student needs greater intervention than what is offered in Tier II. For example, Coleman & Hughes (2009), suggest that with parental input, nomination for gifted identification may be considered for those students who need more than the acceleration or enrichment offered in Tier II. Some suggestions for interventions for advanced students for Tier III level may include intensive acceleration such as grade-skipping, early advanced placement (AP), or early college entrance.

Summary

The RtI process requires the provision of an intervention that meets the learning needs for each child. A child who has an area of strength in a content area, should be challenged through an intervention that accelerates or enriches their learning in the content strength areas. For areas needing support and address weakness, the intervention should reflect a strategic plan with the goal of impacting the student achievement level in this area. RtI is not just for remediation but also can serve as an opportunity to accelerate and enrich learning for a student needing more.

Question

In looking at the literature review and the Response to Intervention process, there are many interpretations of what it is and how it should be implemented. This leads to the question about where is the consistency and fidelity in how RtI is used?

Methodology

Participants

Participants were selected for this study as they are educators in schools in the Southeast region of the US and work in one of the following roles; administrator, traditional classroom teacher, gifted education teacher or special education teacher. A survey to determine the level of understanding about RtI and its process was examined for participants providing written consent. Participation was voluntary and consent was granted for all the participants.

Intervention

To acquire information about the level of understanding held by school stakeholders on the topic of RtI, a survey was administered to determine what they knew about RtI and how it was used at their school (See Appendix A). The survey consisted of 4 Likert scale questions and one free response question as to the use of RtI in their school setting. Using a 1-5 scale the following questions were posed:

In my experience...

1. RtI is usually used to identify students for special education and/or behavioral services.
2. RtI is successfully implemented in my school.
3. Responsibilities concerning the roles and goals of RtI are clearly defined and understood by all stakeholders (Administrators, teachers, parents, and students).
4. Data points are routinely reviewed to transition students through RtI tiers and/or the exiting process to reflect student growth.

The opened ended question asked

How is RtI implemented at your school? Include the entering and exiting process and data points used for this decision. Describe your responsibilities for this implementation.

Eleven doctoral candidates in Educational Leadership Exceptional Learners Course gathered survey data from two schools each for a total of 22 schools, and included four individuals serving in different roles within the school; administration, general educator, special educator and gifted educator (See Table 1)

TABLE 1

RtI Intervention Participant Demographics

Role	Degree Level	Experience	Gender
Administrators (N=24)	24 Masters Degree	7-31 Years	22 Female/2Male
General Ed. Teachers (N=30)	7 Masters Degree 1 Ph.D. 18 Bachelors Degree 4 No Response	5-30 Years	28 Female/2 Male
Special Ed. Teachers (N=16)	5 Masters Degree 9 Bachelors Degree 2 No Response	1-35 Years	15 Female/1 Male
Gifted Ed. Teachers (N=11)	9 Masters Degree 2 No Response	2-39 Years	10 Female/1 Male

Analysis

To determine the level of understanding of the participant groups for the RtI survey, data for each participant role was analyzed and then compared to responses from other educators completing the survey. Frequency of responses for each of the Likert scale questions was evaluated and the open-ended question on the survey was analyzed using open coding, to label concepts, defining and developing categories based on the properties of the responses to identify patterns and trends and axial coding to identify relationships between the codes or themes for each of the education roles (Creswell, 2012). Double-coding, two researchers coding the same data set, was used to aid in the clarity of themes as well as serving as a reliability check (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Results

The survey results documented participant' responses on a 5 point Likert Scale

The Likert Survey was designed to determine the level of perceived understanding by four types of educators using a 1-5 scale with 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD); 2 = Disagree (D); 3= Neutral (N); 4 = Agree (A), & 5 = Strongly Agree (SA) (See Tables 2-5)

TABLE 2 *Question 1: RtI is usually used to identify students for special education and/or behavioral services*

Role	SD	D	N	A	SA
<hr/>					
Administrator					
(N=24)	3	8	5	4	4
(12%)	(33.3%)	(20.8%)	(16.6%)	(16.6%)	
General Ed Teachers					
(N=30)	2	5	9	9	5
(6%)	(16.6%)	(30%)	(30%)	(16.6%)	
Special Ed Teachers					
(N=16)	1	3	3	5	4
(6%)	(18.7%)	(18.7%)	(31%)	(25%)	
Gifted Ed Teachers					
(N= 11)	1	2	4	3	1
(9%)	(18%)	(36%)	(27%)	(9%)	
<hr/>					

Agreement that RtI was used to identify students for special education or behavioral intervention services ranged from 33.2% for administrators to 56% for special educators. More administrators disagreed (35.3%) with this purpose for RtI than any other group studied.

TABLE 3 *Question 2: RtI is successfully implemented in my school*

Role	S D	D	N	A	S A
Administrator					
(N=24)	1	4	6	9	4
(4%)	(16.6%)	(25%)	(37.5%)	(16.6%)	
General Ed Teacher					
(N=30)	1	7	9	9	4
(3%)	(23%)	(30%)	(30%)	(13.3%)	
Special Ed Teachers					
(N=16)					
1	4	4	4	3	
(6%)	(25%)	(25%)	(25%)	(18.7%)	
Gifted Ed Teachers					
(N=11)	1	1	4	3	2
	(9%)	(9%)	(36%)	(27%)	(18%)

Perhaps it is not surprising that administrators had the highest percentage of agreement (53.1%) as to the success of RtI in their schools. The other three groups had 43 to 45% agreement as to its success.

TABLE 4 *Question 3: Responsibilities concerning the roles and goals of RtI are clearly defined and understood by all stakeholders (Administrators, teachers, parents, and students).*

Role	S D	D	N	A	S A
Administrator					
(N=24)	1	7	5	9	2
(4%)	(24%)	(20.8%)	(37.5%)	(8.3%)	
General Ed Teachers					
(N=30)	5	9	5	8	3
(16.6%)	(30%)	(16.6%)	(26.6%)	(10%)	
Special Ed Teachers					
(N=16)	2	4	4	4	2
(12.5%)	(25%)	(25%)	(25%)	(12.5%)	
Gifted Ed Teachers					
(N=11)	2	1	4	2	2
(18%)	(9%)	(36%)	(18%)	(18%)	

As to the understanding and clarity in assignment of roles and goals within RtI less than 50% of each of the groups agreed that roles and responsibilities were clearly delineated. Administrators had the highest percentage of agreement about clarity at 45.8%.

TABLE 5 *Question 4: Data points are routinely reviewed to transition students through RtI tiers and/or exiting process to reflect student growth*

Role	S D	D	N	A	S A
Administrator					
(N=24)	1	7	5	9	2
(4%)	(24%)	(20.8)	(37.5%)	(8.3%)	
General Ed Teachers					
(N=30)	2	8	6	9	5
(6%)	(26.6%)	(20%)	(30%)	(16.6%)	
Special Ed Teachers					
(N=16)	1	2	2	7	3
(6%)	(13.3%)	(13.3%)	(46.6%)	(20%)	
Gifted Ed Teachers					
(N=11)	0	1	6	2	2
(0%)	(9%)	(54.4%)	(18%)	(18%)	

Responses to the question regarding regularity with which RtI data point were reviewed and movement of students along or out of invention presented more diversity in responses. Over 66% of the special education teachers agreed that this review occurred at their schools while only 36% of the gifted teachers agreed that data points were reviewed regularly and guided student movement. Administrators and General Education teachers were either neutral or disagreed as to this review process.

Question 5 was an open-ended question asking for a free response to the following question:

How is RTI implemented at your school? Include the entering and exiting process and data points used for this decision. Describe your responsibilities for this implementation.

Analysis was conducted using open coding and axial coding to identify patterns and themes to identify ideas and understandings across the four educator roles represented in the study (Creswell, 2012). Themes were identified for each of the educator roles.

- Administrators indicated they conduct monitoring at their schools (identification process), schedule of RtI times, and provided various descriptions of RtI
- General Educators shared they found limited RtI at the high school level, (“at the high school level it is spotty at best” & “don’t know specifically why students are assigned to RtI”), they shared that they didn’t have any role in RtI process, and there was a variety of descriptions in how RtI was used.
- Gifted Educators indicated their school offered interventions, they had no role in the RtI services, and they offered enrichment during the RtI time and expressed confusion as what were the procedures for RtI.
- Special Educators shared their school offered a variety of ways RtI was being implemented and a variety of ways as how it is determined who will receive RtI services, different programs offered different data collection intervals (10 days to 12 weeks), and “RtI is used as a holding place in our school” and “RtI is used as homeroom”

Conclusions

Based on the results from the survey from educators across the twenty-two different schools represented, there appears to be an inconsistency in the understanding of the purpose of RtI. Responses about the process were varied with secondary educators being the least informed. The process of identifying students to receive RtI services (Tier 2 and Tier 3) showed inconsistencies as to how a student can be recommended and determined eligible for RtI services. The majority of the schools represented in the study reported using a packaged intervention program that may or may not address individual student needs as well as a lack of clarity of the faculty responsibilities in the implementation of the RtI process. Finally, there was no data reported as to

how these different schools/programs were using student strengths and above average abilities to serve students with gifts and talents or those with gifted potential.

Implications

Based on the findings there is a need for specific guidelines as to the purpose and process of using RtI so a uniformed understanding can be achieved across educator roles. To gain this shared understanding, professional development needs to be offered to all stakeholders as who is to be served through the RtI process. More information and support is needed to improve the uniform understanding as to the purpose of RtI intervention as a tool to prevent the need for special services and as a screening process for SPED services. In addition, the decision makers in schools must recognize not all students need to receive RtI services, as it is not a whole school event. These decision makers must also recognize the importance of moving students toward exiting from RtI services when the students achieve their goals as RtI should not be a life sentence. There is a need for continued assessment to determine student future learning needs and a greater emphasis should be placed on identifying the specific problem a child is having when going to tier II. This could require pupil appraisal representative, the educational diagnostician, or instructional coach/interventionist to serve as consultants to make specific recommendations on how to intervene.

Educators serving students at the Tier I level must systematically use assessment data to determine classroom instruction. This use of data is necessary to scaffold students demonstrating learning challenges and must be employed with fidelity and documented to avoid the “wait to fail” situation. Tier I must provide alternative pathways for students to engage in content which cannot happen with scripted lessons and pacing guides that do not allow for curricular change.

Future Research/Recommendations

Based on this study, additional research is needed to expand what is happening in schools with regard to RtI intervention and gain fidelity in the implementation of RtI tier services. More opportunities for stakeholders to learn how to effectively exit students from RtI services when they meet their goals are needed. At the same time the use of individualization within RtI services to scaffold students as one size fits all does not address students learning challenges is required. While no specific data was collected with regard to twice-exceptional learners (2E), more research is necessary as how to serve this group who may require access to more advanced

work while still needing support in areas of challenge.

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RTI Network website <http://www.rtinetwork.org/about-us/position-statement-on-determination-of-specific-learning-disabilities>).

Appendix A

What is the View of RTI in Schools? Survey

Demographics

ID number:

Years in Education:

Role at the School:

Male/Female

Educational History (degrees earned):

1=strongly disagree

2=disagree

3= neutral

4= agree

5=strongly agree

In my experience:

Q1: RTI is usually used to identify students for special education and/or behavioral services.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Q2: RTI is successfully implemented in my school.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Q3: Responsibilities concerning the roles and goals of RTI are clearly defined and understood by all stakeholders (Administrators, teachers, parents, and students).

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Q4: Data points are routinely reviewed to transition students through RTI tiers and/or the exiting process to reflect student growth.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Q5: How is RTI implemented at your school? Include the entering and exiting process and data points used for this decision. Describe your responsibilities for this implementation.