RTI Roundtable - Issue #17

Using Collaborative Strategic Reading as Response to Intervention in Early Childhood Education

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This issue of **NASET's RTI Roundtable series** was written by Sarah Al-Sharif from Ball State University. Response to intervention (RTI) is a set of strategies and tools used by a teacher to help students who are facing difficulties grasping a lesson or skill. Collaborative strategic reading (CSR) is also an important tool in early childhood education. By using CSR, the child can learn how to work collaboratively with his or her fellow classmates. Since CSR involves collaborative learning, children in early childhood education will be able to understand the concept of learning together and come to appreciate the role of others in collaborative learning. After collaborative reading, children prepare questions to ask when they do not understand a concept. This paper illustrates the effectiveness of using CSR as RTI in early childhood education.

Abstract

Response to intervention (RTI) is a set of strategies and tools used by a teacher to help students who are facing difficulties grasping a lesson or skill. Collaborative strategic reading (CSR) is also an important tool in early childhood education. By using CSR, the child can learn how to work collaboratively with his or her fellow classmates. Since CSR involves collaborative learning, children in early childhood education will be able to understand the concept of learning together and come to appreciate the role of others in collaborative learning. After collaborative reading, children prepare questions to ask when they do not understand a concept. This paper illustrates the effectiveness of using CSR as RTI in early childhood education.

Introduction

When students struggle with reading, teachers can use various strategies to assist students in improving their reading and comprehension skills. One effective strategy is called Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR). Before I illustrate this strategy, it is important to explain the concept of "Response to Intervention" (RTI), which is a process used by educators to teach students who are having difficulties grasping a lesson or skill. Response to intervention works in that the teacher uses various methods of intervention with struggling students to help them grasp crucial concepts (Bradley& Danielson &Doolittle 2005).

To discern the appropriate method of intervention for struggling students, the teacher will use various measures of progress to obtain the most suitable and proven method of intervention to help the student (Bradley et al, 2005). In some cases, there might be no response to the initial interventions used on the student. If this occurs, then more intensive interventions will be applied to help the student learn the skill.

It should be noted that response to intervention is not only for children with special needs or a learning disability, but for all children (Bradley& Danielson &Doolittle 2005). The response to intervention process was implemented in the 2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Improvement Act (IDEA), 2004). IDEA is a landmark piece of legislation that works to help students with learning disabilities. At first, the legislation was used to identify children with disabilities, but later, the legislators added amendments to the Act that ensured that response to intervention was not only used to identify children with special needs, but also to help all struggling students (Haager& Klingner&Vaughn, 2007). When an intervention is used regardless of ability or disability, the student in the intervention must be tested to see if there is progress.

In the event that no progress is shown, the teacher works with parents to decide on another, more intense intervention that might boost the child's performance (Haager, 2007).

As such, the response to intervention process is divided into three sections to identify the children's needs. They are as follows as defined by (Haager, 2007):

1. Tier 1- This initial approach comprises most of the students at a whole-class level. As a result, Tier 1 interventions include the most common strategies used to conduct interventions. It is also known as the primary level.
2. Tier 2 - This section comprises of a few students. In this section, the interventions become a more intensive since the children at this stage are considered at risk, and their performance must be monitored closely to see if their work deteriorates or improves. This section is also known as the secondary level.
3. Tier 3- This section also compromises a select few students. In this section, interventions are considered the most intense and heavily impactful on the students.

Although special education children and children with disabilities are typically associated with this section, some of the children in Tier 3 intervention are not in any special education programs. Also, this tier is known as the tertiary level (Haager et al, 2007).

I hold that RTI should have an extensive focus consisting of special education approaches for students with learning challenges. It should be made clear that RTI contains an informative transformation plan whose objectives include the use of interventions for all students, with more emphasis being put on students who are struggling, and the RTI should be executed by both the special and general education teachers (Haager et al, 2007). There are several things I did not know about RTI, but I am now very knowledgeable on the subject. This knowledge affected my selection of Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR) as a fruitful RTI method.

Collaborative Strategic Reading

CSR is a strategy of learning which students learn to read together cooperatively on an assignment or school work, thus improving their comprehension. By using collaborative strategic leaning, children can write down questions after reading a text, thus forming logs of clues. These logs will help students to learn much more thoroughly during the cooperative learning process, thus giving the students tools that could be used in evaluating their progress as well as their classmates' progress (Kligner& Vaughn&Arguelles, 2004). By using this method of learning, flexibility in the classroom is ensured since learning is done collaboratively with the whole class involved, which makes this method easy to implement.

This flexibility in turn brings about more motivation among the students to teach each other, hence it is more likely that there will be active and lively learning in the groups. This makes CSR an excellent study guide as it helps teachers in recording progress for all children (Kligner, 2004).

Justifications

There are several reasons as to why I choose the CSR strategy as an ideal early intervention and RTI method within early childhood education. First, it is important to note that response to intervention comes first since children must be screened before they engage with collaborative strategic reading. Response to intervention is a decision-making process that is systematic and based on evidence; it is designed to screen students that may need support, to give support that matches their needs, and to provide a method for evaluating the instructional approach's effects. Response to intervention also has the ultimate goal of meeting educational needs and maximizing growth and learning for all students (Greenwood, 2013).

Collaborative strategic reading works at these same goals: CSR equips students with the skills to use comprehensive strategies in cooperative work. It can also be very efficient if it is applied to the students early enough, ideally with students from 4 to 6 years of age (Gresham, 2005). Research shows that most children who engage in CSR exhibit the highest levels of engagement in matters to do with education and are equipped with skills to assist each other in solving academic problems (Gresham, 2005). In addition, from my reading about Collaborative strategic reading, I found that CSR gives every child an opportunity to contribute and express their thoughts to a group. This makes them feel comfortable and accepted since they can come up with decisions that are supported by the rest of the group members (Mckeown, 2009).

However, most teachers recommend CSR because it improves students' grades. The groups they form are the main sources of improved reading comprehension, vocabulary, and cooperative skills. Since comprehension skills are improved and the child can learn new vocabulary, CSR creates a direct, positive relationship to their grades (Vaughn et al., 2011). Working as a group helps build team work, which is essential in later schooling and in the professional realm. Children who are taught to work together from young ages preserve the skill as they age. Team work is often visible in the various games that children involve themselves with, all of which are driven by the skills their acquired from CSR. Children also get to learn a lot of new things from their colleagues due to the experiences they share with each other. CSR also gives the children a window to appreciate one another and find out the strengths and weaknesses of the group members. Once teachers discover the strengths of each individual, they can offer them problems that pertain the field and expect positive results (Zoghi, Mustapha, Maasum, 2010).

CSR Strategies

CSR is divided into four learning strategies (Vaughn et al, 2011). Under the "Preview" strategy, students are grouped according to their different reading levels. This ensures that everybody is comfortable in their group. Then the students will read the passage to get a preview on what the comprehension involves. They do this in the shortest time possible. This fast pace spurs their interest in the subject matter. They should be able to identify bolded areas, the heading, and the pictures if any are provided. This will help them to get a rough idea and to be able to predict what they will learn and to comprehend what they will read.

With Understanding, students evaluate what they comprehend and what they do not understand. As they read the passage, there are sections that they understand and continue smoothly from into the next passage, and there are sections that they are unable to decipher. Through monitoring what they can understand and areas of difficulty, students grow as self-evaluators. The teacher will use various clues to help them identify areas for growth and to improve comprehension. When students try to Get the Idea, the aim is to help the student to put what he or she has understood into their own words. This helps them to internalize the important points through their own understanding.

The educator should also ask questions concerning the paragraph. Implementation of systematic instructions that assist in teaching accuracy, comprehension content, and fluency is also very important since it is only then that students will be able to improve their comprehension. Students learn the "Conclusion" strategy by formulating and asking questions with their classmates, thus students use each other's knowledge to improve their own while also helping them retain information more thoroughly. This helps the teacher to know each student's level of understanding as they monitor the student groups.

From my reading, research in CSR has gleaned that students with exceptionalities are to be given reading instructions that consists of different subject matter and reading that captures different attention demands when compared to the reading instructions offered to students in general classrooms. These unique reading methods comprise several stages using collaborative strategic reading. The reading material contains pictures that are related to the subject matter to give students a better picture of the content. To ensure the students are aware of the subject matter for their comprehension, the educator should request that students paraphrase the passage. Vocabulary should also be checked, and the students should be entitled to methods that help them troubleshoot any vocabulary in the comprehension material that they do not understand. This can also be done using CSR strategies.

Response to Intervention and Collaborative Strategic Reading

Response to intervention is focused mainly on helping students succeed in school. This is achieved through improving their ability to follow instructions given to them by a superior. Improving behavioral practices is also a focal point for RTI. This is achieved by first gathering information about the student to help in deciding on the instructions to be used. It is crucial that in providing interventions, work is backed up by evidence and that progress is monitored.

By monitoring progress using RTI, the teacher can address learning difficulties in early education (Gresham, 2005). In early childhood education, the child's brain is nimble and malleable. Thus, by using various interventions to help the child to learn fundamental information and skills will boost the child's entire education journey.

Although a lot of interventions may be necessary since the child is just starting education, early intervention is crucial (Barnes & Havlacher, 2008). Children do vary in their ability to grasp and comprehend. But in response to intervention, the child will be guided by the teacher since the child cannot read by themselves. After much intervention, questions are prepared to monitor the child's comprehension or mastery of skills. If poor interventions are used on a child in his or her early education, then the child is bound to have problems in comprehending later in their educational career (Barnes & Havlacher, 2008). CSR gives students with disabilities an important sense of confidence that they might otherwise be lacking. Confidence comes in once the students are given routinely-changed leadership roles in the group; they notice they can make positive resolutions for the group and enhance the comprehension of all students.

Collaborative strategic reading is also an important tool in early childhood education. By using CSR, the child can learn how to work collaboratively with his or her fellow classmates. Since CSR involves collaborative learning, children in their early childhood education will be able to understand the concept of learning together and appreciating the role of others in collaborative learning. In CSR after collaborative learning, children prepare questions to ask when they do not understand a concept. This will help the beginners to learn how to be keen and attentive in class while monitoring their own learning (Vaughn &Klingner&Swanson, Boardman&Roberts& Mohammed, 2011). Through the use of CSR, the child can write what he or she understands in their own words. Through this effort, children will be able to comprehend much better by jotting important points in their own words, thus making sure that they retain the information. The children can later share their points with each other, thereby developing a sense of responsibility to help those who have not understood something clearly (Mastopieri & Scruggs, 2005). CSR also ensures that the students prepare their own questions and answer each other. This helps in grasping the main points and improving their teaching skills by explaining to each other what they do not understand (Vaughn, 2011). RTI has impacted my philosophy by underscoring the scientific, objective approach to securing learning outcomes. For instance, RTI emphasizes the importance of screening through the use of scientifically researched questions to ensure that the questions are applicable to every individual without a disability and that they are easy to handle. The questions are also not biased on the strengths and weaknesses of any individual; that is why they are thoroughly researched scientifically. The three tiers have also had an impact on my philosophy since they present a clear-cut set of objectives and strategies to follow that are relatively easy to comprehend (Vaughn, 2011).

A child should be carefully scanned to check whether they are fit to join others in the general curriculum or whether they must be admitted to special education facilities. I am also happy to understand that RTI is best applied at an early stage since it is only then that the effectiveness of the model can be fully felt.

When children are young enough, screening helps them get the help they require early enough, which boosts their overall performance in class and in extracurricular activities. Despite the common-sense approach to RTI models, failures to properly integrate RTI protocol have disadvantaged many students who have been made to continue learning in general classes when they are supposed to be in the special education classes (Vaughn, 2011). Most systems end up neglecting their intended purposes; most of the time, these failures are because of very small issues like leadership.

Through this knowledge, I am hoping that I will be able to personally address these issues to ensure that all students needing special education get it at no expense (Vaughn, 2011). I have also learned of the importance of teachers in the system where RTI is implemented. They are the major drivers of students' fate. Significantly, it is the educator who is responsible for teaching the students how to conduct learning groups (Vaughn, 2011). The teacher educates them on the roles and gives them necessary tools to maintain a smooth learning group. In using CSR as an RTI method, CSR would eventually transform from learning groups to invention groups in the later lives of the students; thus, the problem of unreliable instructors can be somewhat mitigated. If students can stick together for longer periods and get to internalize each other's strengths weaknesses and abilities, then they can use their brainstorming skills that they used when they were getting solutions to vocabularies and comprehensions to come up with invention ideas. These invention ideas may be creating an original idea or to improve on an existing idea. The invention ideas might be generated through either studying or brainstorming on a problem that has persisted for some time (Vaughn, 2011). This invention aspect of CSR has really impacted my knowledge, and I look forward to ensuring I implement the model in the education system back in my country Saudi Arabia where I hope to instruct future teachers.

With respect to learning about RTI and CSR, I think I am more equipped than I was before dedicating study to the topics. The concepts of early intervention are primary to every bachelor's student taking education classes since they are the individuals who are supposed to implement them or, perhaps, to teach others these principals. The laws concerning individuals with disabilities and early intervention services are quite different in Saudi Arabia when compared to the ones in the USA. What the laws share is the prioritization of the needs of the persons with disabilities (Vaughn, 2011).

However, I am willing to propose legislation similar to American disability law in Saudi Arabia with the essential goal of ensuring that all students are treated equally regardless of their mental stature. Response to intervention is one concept that has been absent in the Saudi Arabian education system. Most educators fail to correctly identify students who require special attention. This ignorance leads to students being led into classrooms where the same resources cannot reasonably be given in an effort to produce equitable results. I would urge the government of Saudi Arabia to increase the number of institutions that serve people with disabilities and ensure that the resources that are in the few institutions are maximized. RTI is also important in that it informs educators about the capability of every student, therefore making him or her know how to treat every student with respect. I will make sure that all my undergraduate students grasp these concepts because they will be the actual implementers of these essential models. CSR is also an important concept that I have learned from my master's course. I seek to ensure that it is also fully implemented since I believe it to be the greatest driver of positive results, not only in early education, but also in the entire education system. I have seen group learning work with my postgraduate classmates, and it is undoubtedly a positive driver to the best academic results. I will be very keen when coaching my students on when and where to use CSR due to the results I anticipate it will give.

As a professional, I have seen CSR work, and I have also come across many articles that support the implementation and use of CSR. I will also try and use CSR on my bachelor's students when going through a comprehension to see its effectiveness in the university stage. I will do this by first training students on their roles and guidelines that follow the implementation of each strategy. I also plan on further implementing what I have learned by walking into early education facilities and training the educators in the facility on the effectiveness of RTI and CSR.

I will do this after taking a permit from the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia, and I am hoping that many more may follow me in this. By summing up the experience I have as a lecturer and the knowledge I have gained as a student, I am hoping I will be able to fulfill my duties and pour out my knowledge to those that need it. I plan on writing a book on the importance of RTI and CSR in today's education system. The book will be a result of research to show how effective our education system can be if CSR and RTI were implemented.

Cooperative Reading

Cooperative reading is a method of learning that is aimed at stimulating the love of reading. It is a supportive and structured way of reading in which students are highly engaged in reading since they can choose what they want to read. It is commonly done by reading novels with their classmates in school. Through this, students can have a say and express their opinions on the various forms of literature (Meng, 2010). The novels used for reading are a collection of current novels -- popular and classical. They also vary in terms of complexity in understanding to accommodate students' range of abilities. When the students learn through cooperative reading, they get to choose the different type of novels that they want to read based on their tastes and preferences (Meng, 2010). By learning this way, they get to read to each other, listen to the readers, read for themselves, understand the words, and work on their writing techniques (Meng, 2010). After finishing reading, they do a written assignment to test themselves on what they read. The assignments are also based on their reading roles (Meng, 2010).

The benefits of cooperative reading according to Meng (2010) include the following:

1. Cooperative reading improves students" reading skills and strategies utilized in cooperative reading result in enhanced comprehension, the ability to predictions, summarize the context, the decode words, read to understand, and it also creates natural improvements on students' language.
2. Cooperative reading necessitates taking short notes. Through these short text notes, students will jot down important and major points and themes of the story they are reading. This will help them answer questions given to them later in the process.
3. Students will develop a higher interest and motivation in reading since cooperative reading is enjoyable. This is achieved through being given a chance to discuss the novels with their classmates and engaging in cooperative reading and learning.
4. Through cooperative reading, the students support each other and coach themselves. This ensures everybody is included in the discussion and understands the lessons (Kligner, 2004, p. 292).

Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal teaching is a learning activity in which the student acts as a teacher (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). This activity is often done in small group reading discussions. First, the teacher shows the students how it is done, then the students will implement what they have been taught by teaching themselves. Reciprocal teaching uses four strategies to ensure effective learning. These strategies are summarizing, questioning, predicting, and clarifying. Before the teaching starts, the teacher will show them how to go about the process, and then the students will practice their different roles (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). This is done by first putting the students in small groups. This will ensure total inclusivity. Then the students are categorized into their different roles based on the four strategies.

Therefore, in each group there is a summarizer, a questioner, a predictor, and a clarifier. After that, the students will read the given comprehensions. When reading, they take short notes to help them get the main points, events, and theme of the story. This practice will also help them prepare for their roles (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). The summarizer will point out the key areas. The questioner will prepare questions on areas not clearly understood, on conflicting information, and on concepts learned to test their understanding. The clarifier will answer the questions asked to the best of his or her knowledge. Last but not least, the predictor will pose predictions on the next part of the story or next events (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994). After that, the roles are interchanged with the next reading task and the routine of summarizer, questioner, clarifier and predictor is used to help all students comprehend the lesson. The teacher's role during this process is to guide and direct the students to nurture their teaching ability. Benefits of reciprocal teaching are that it keeps the students actively involved, and students monitor each other. It also ensures total understanding by asking questions during reading, and it also encourages students to be independent in the thinking process to understand the context by themselves (Rosenshine & Meister, 1994).

Jigsaw Reading

This method is derived from a jigsaw puzzle, which is a game in which the participant places small pieces together that eventually form a picture. In jigsaw reading, texts and paragraphs are divided into small manageable parts. By dividing students into small groups, instructors subdivide the small parts of text among the groups and let them work on them independently. After much reading and understanding, instructors bring students together to discuss what they just learned as a whole class. By doing this, students will get the whole picture of the complete story after each of the group's shares their parts (Meng, 2010). The teacher needs to prepare the students for a jigsaw lesson, which is simple: he or she should take a wide topic and subdivided it into small texts that are understandable. Then by dividing the class into small groups of pupils, the teacher will give each group a small topic to study. Instructors can allow the use of reference materials to enhance understanding. The teacher should go around guiding and directing the groups. After a while, teachers bring the class together and let them discuss their parts, thus creating the whole image and understanding it better (Meng, 2010).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning activities entail dividing a class into small groups of students and assigning them work to do as a group. What makes cooperative learning different is that the group members must work together in a cooperative and understanding environment with one another to ensure success. In cooperative learning, the success of the group is pegged to the individual success of each group member (Meng, 2010). Cooperative learning can be used for all types of tasks. It can be either simple tasks or even complex tasks such as projects and proposals. It can also be used for various settings, which may include small to large classes or even online classes. As long as proper structuring and allocation of cooperative learning activities are used, then success of the whole group is assured (Meng, 2010). CSR also yields positive outcomes for both the average and above average students (McKeown et al., 2009). The Four Comprehension Strategies (Vaughn, 2011, p.947) for CSR are described below.

In the first stage, called "Previewing", students only preview the whole passage without reading any section. The goals that accompany previewing include: (a) Students can learn much from the passage in a short period which is usually 2-3 minutes. (b) Students can activate their background knowledge on the topic. (c) Students are also able to make predictions on the context that they are going to cover (Kligner, Vaughn, Arguelles, 2004). Previewing motivates the interest of the students in the topic and engages them in active reading.

 "Clicking and Clunking" is the next strategy and is applied by students while they are reading each section of passage. The main idea behind the strategy is to ensure that the students can monitor their comprehension in reading and identify the onset of breakdowns in their understanding. Clicks are the sections that make sense to the reader. Once the reader is faced with a concept that appears nonsensical, there is a "Clunk" -- there is breakdown in the comprehension. It is also a clunk when a student does not know the definition of a word.

Students learn how to apply the next strategy, "Get the Gist", through the identification of the central idea in a text given a context. The main path to getting the gist is telling the students to elaborate in their own words on the most important point of the text. This strategy ensures understanding of context and is also a memory refresher of the section covered. In teaching the students to grasp the gist, identification of the most important place, thing or person from the text is the most crucial element. Students are taught to provide the gist in the shortest time possible ensuring there is enough meaning. The students are asked to write their gist as groups, then the various groups read out their gist aloud to create room for comparison and correction from other groups (Vaughn, 2011). Students apply the final strategy, or how to "Wrap Up" by coming up with questions followed by answers on what they have learnt and by reviewing the key ideas. The aim is the improvement of understanding, knowledge and memory by the students on what they have just read. The best way in ensuring the students can ask questions is teaching them the following: what, where, who, when, why, and how.

Research Synthesis

Per, "Using Collaborative Strategic Reading" by Janette K. Klingner & Sharon Vaughn, collaborative strategic reading equips students with the skills to using comprehensive strategies in the event of cooperative work. It can also be very efficient if it is applied to the students early enough. Research has shown that most students who are actively involved in collaborative strategic reading have better results than those who fail to actively get involved in CSR.

The children's results are boosted by the collaboration they have in their coursework and the assistance they give to each other in times of educational difficulties (Vaughn, 2011).

Also, according to this article, collaborative strategic reading also gives the teacher sufficient time to get closer to their students and learn their difficulties and strengths. There is also the possibility of promoting confidence in students, and especially the disabled, by following the roles that each student assumes in the various groups (Vaughn, 2011). CSR also equips children with additional skills besides vocabulary and comprehension skills. These skills may include public relations management since they must relate to the groups regardless of their backgrounds or the amount of knowledge they have. There are also some more skills gained, such as learning to work as a team, which is essential in their lives in education and beyond (Vaughn, 2011).

Conclusion

Collaborative strategic reading equips students with the skills to use comprehensive strategies in the event of cooperative working. It can also be very efficient if it is applied to students early enough, ideally between four and six years of age (Zhogi, 2010). Most children who engage in CRS exhibit the highest levels of engagement and are equipped with skills to assist each other in solving academic problems. They also help each other in understanding a text, in understanding word meanings, and the main idea of a passage among other sets of instructions that they work together on (Zhogi, 2010).

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