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Reading Recovery: A Major Component of Many RTI Models

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Editor's introduction by Salli Forbes

The response to intervention (RTI) initiative is contained in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The purpose of RTI is to provide struggling readers with expert intervening instruction so that these students will not need special education placement and services. The 2004 IDEA reauthorization allows local school districts to allocate up to 15% of their funding targeted for students with disabilities to be used for general education interventions. The goal of this initiative is to significantly reduce the numbers of struggling readers who are identified as students with disabilities.

Marie Clay (1987) advanced the argument that many struggling readers are in fact "instructionally disabled" because they have not received appropriate instructional opportunities. Vellutino and Fletcher (2004) summarized research that supports this argument, stating that, "many poor readers are impaired because of inadequate instruction or other experiential factors" (p. 2). The RTI initiative is intended to provide high-quality instructional opportunities to struggling readers to minimize this problem.

Although IDEA funding is intended for students with disabilities, the RTI portion of that funding does not require that special education teachers deliver the intervention instruction. In fact, Richard Allington (2007) has called for schools to use the most-qualified and expert reading teachers to deliver the interventions.

Although there is no legal requirement to use any particular model of intervention, many districts and states are conceptualizing RTI as a three-tier model. Tier I is high-quality classroom instruction for all students. Tier II provides additional instruction for those students who need it, from either the classroom teacher or a reading specialist. Tier III is more intensive instruction delivered one-to-one or in small groups by teachers with special expertise in diagnosis and remediation of reading difficulties.

Two models of RTI are explained in this article. Reading Recovery is a major component of each model, although each model is uniquely designed for the needs of the students and teachers in each district. Both the Brainerd (Minnesota) District model and the Rio Rancho (New Mexico) Public School District model have been carefully developed with an emphasis on continuity of instructional goals, teacher professional development, and collaboration among all the teachers. The Brainerd model uses a three-tier approach in which Reading Recovery is the intervention at Tier II. The Rio Rancho model provides Reading Recovery training to special education teachers who then become 'literacy processing specialists' in their schools.

A third district which includes Reading Recovery in its RTI model is in Walled Lake, Michigan. Information about the Walled Lake model can be found in the International Reading Association (2007) document "Implications for Reading Teachers in Response to Intervention," and in the RRCNA briefing paper (Lose et al., 2007) "Reading Recovery and the IDEA Legislation: Early Intervening Services (EIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI)."

Brainerd, Minnesota

Beth Swenson and Tonya Person

The Brainerd School District has developed a dynamic districtwide multi-tiered response to intervention (RTI) model using a common literacy processing theory that links general education, Title I, special education, and administration. The model embraces an assessment tool that becomes the lens through which to view learners, allowing all educators in a team to see learners as a field of possibilities rather than a burden of discrepancy.

Brainerd uses a continuum of tools that follow the same learning theory to form a common growth model K–12. For this article, we will focus on the early intervention piece that happens K–4. Brainerd schools are K–4 in the elementary, most districts run the model K–6. The assessment tools include Clay's (2002) Observation Survey, text leveling, High Frequency Word Test (Swenson, 2007), and the Spelling Continuum (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2005), all graphed using the North Star Educational Tool (northstaret.com) graphing system. The North Star web-based data collection system creates a variety of graphs—diagnostic classroom, progress monitoring intervention, screening summary,

and districtwide summary—providing a common lens through which to view students and creating highly effective problem-solving intervention teams. The assessment tool one looks through sets the foundation for instruction. Assessment can't follow instruction; it has to be used for screening, diagnostics, and progress monitoring.

The Brainerd RTI model is a capacity-building model that allows for the formation of a complex meta-cognitive processing system in every learner, beginning in kindergarten, and flowing through to adult learning. It allows each learner to have one instructional language to learn through; every person in the child's learning life has the same goals, language, vision of possibility, and growth goals K–6. The system for thinking is laid in kindergarten, develops thinking capacity strongly in first, and deepens the thinking in Grades 2–4. There is less time spent laying a new learning foundation each year and more time spent interconnecting grade levels, allowing for the building of more-complex thinking systems over time.

Tier 1: Literacy Collaborative professional development and coaching model

The key to RTI is a strong Tier 1 model that allows for differentiation within the classroom. The Literacy Collaborative is not a curriculum, but rather an intensive professional development and coaching model that has highly trained coaches (350 hours of training the first year and continuous training each subsequent year) that facilitate professional learning communities which construct the continuum of reading, writing, word study, and thinking K–6. The continuums allow teachers to view each learner in their classroom as an individual at different places on each different continuum. The teachers learn how to collect and utilize data that allow them to teach right within each learner's zone of proximal development. Teachers begin seeing what each learner knows, what each needs to know next, and which tools to use to construct the different pathways for the steepest learning trajectories possible. The inquiry coaching and professional development model allows for adults to build a more sophisticated way of using data for problem solving around student processing over time, allowing learning to be woven constructively across all grade levels.

Tier 2: Reading Recovery

Brainerd has Reading Recovery—a research-based one-to-one intervention—as its second tier. With the strong foundation of Tier 1 differentiation and in-classroom interventions in Literacy Collaborative kindergarten, most learners have developed the foundation of a complex meta-cognitive processing system in kindergarten. Reading Recovery allows the lowest 20% of learners to engage in a one-to-one intervention that uses the same language of learning as the classroom. Instructed one on one, beginning learners are able to construct a full foundation of internal language processing systems. A highly trained teacher (115 hours of training the first year and ongoing professional development each subsequent year) constructs an individualized intervention that builds on the learner's current understandings and fills the processing holes in each learner while integrating new learning to form a complete processing system that becomes the foundation for literacy learning. The capacity-building coaching and professional development model in Reading Recovery allows for teachers to develop the ability to take a more sophisticated look at data and use it to inform instruction.

Tier 3: Leveled Literacy Intervention (small group, research based)

Seventy-five percent of all Reading Recovery learners construct an effective processing system that allows for self-extension in the regular classroom without additional intervention. The most-naive learners need to continue their construction of the processing system through small-group supplemental intervention, using the same language of learning. Small-group instruction and whole-classroom instruction involve a more-sophisticated ability to have conversations around thinking, where each individual provides a piece of the thinking and stacks thinking. Guided reading, interactive read-aloud, community writing, and most whole-classroom learning depends on a child being able to be a part of the collective thinking around the text. Leveled Literacy Intervention continues the complex reading, writing, and word study continuums, while at the same time teaches attending skills that reach those very lowest-achieving learners and continues with the learning trajectory started in Reading Recovery. Staying within the same theory of learning allows a child to construct a complete processing system rather than restarting in many different languages of instruction creating learning disabilities.

After these interventions designed to quickly close learning gaps, a very few learners (5%) will still show physiological needs for long-term interventions. The early intervention data from the first three tiers help to iden-

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tify learners who should be tested for special education and receive long-term, comprehensive remediation and support.

Problem-solving teams

Common language and common assessment tools that capture small changes in student learning allow each classroom problem-solving team to spend 1-1/2 hours each trimester to discuss and design research-based interventions for an entire classroom of children. Using this model, specialists are not assigned to classrooms permanently, but reassigned because of student growth and student need. Assigning people based on student needs allows for careful interventions based on the North Star data. Using resources wisely, fewer adults can more powerfully meet the specific needs of children. Children also are allowed to grow to independence.

Results

The pilot school in Brainerd has dropped learning disability rates by 66% since launching this RTI model. Before starting this process, Title I and Reading Recovery were life preservers, keeping children from drowning while receiving services. But once that scaffolding was removed, others continued to see some of those children as 'broken learners.' Now, children are no longer seen as discrepant, but filled with possibilities. Classrooms are no longer islands of learning; the entire school is a village surrounding each child, allowing each child to grow to his fullest potential. The coaching and staff development follows each teacher, allowing them to grow to their fullest potential as well.

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Rio Rancho, New Mexico

Jolene Reed

Since first implementing Reading Recovery 10 years ago, Rio Rancho Public Schools have been committed to the goal of making Reading Recovery available for all students in need of the intervention. Rio Rancho initially implemented Reading Recovery at each elementary school by training two teachers at each campus. Despite the district's continued dedication to quality implementation, rapid growth in student population and higher need at individual campuses prevented some students from receiving Reading Recovery. Discussion between the Reading Recovery teacher leader and the executive director of special services resulted in a solution that would ultimately benefit both Reading Recovery implementation in the district and the special education department. In addition to its core group of Reading Recovery teachers, Rio Rancho made the decision to provide Reading Recovery training to its special education personnel.

Reading Recovery training provides special education teachers with additional knowledge and expertise in the literacy acquisition process. Special education teachers who complete the Reading Recovery training are designated as 'literacy processing specialists.' During their training year, the literacy processing specialist's time is divided equally between two portions of the duty day. The Reading Recovery portion of the day entails one-to-one teaching of four general education first-grade students. The other half of the duty day is spent providing reading instruction to special education students individually or in small groups. The literacy processing specialist-in-training does not have a specific special education caseload during the training year.

Training of literacy processing specialists in Rio Rancho began in the 2006–07 school year. During that year, four specialists were trained at four of the eight elementary schools in the district. During the 2007–08 school year, these original four specialists returned to their full-time special education duties. An additional six special education teachers are currently receiving training as literacy processing specialists. Ongoing monthly continuing professional development for the four teachers who received training during the 2006–07 school year is being provided.

Training special education teachers as literacy processing specialists serves two important purposes. First, it gives special education teachers a 1-year professional development opportu-

nity. During this time, teachers learn high-level reading instruction theory and practices that will enhance their classroom teaching when they return to the special education classroom. Second, it supports general education in a response to intervention model by providing Reading Recovery as an intervention to additional students experiencing difficulty in their literacy learning.

Rio Rancho Public Schools has experienced multiple benefits from the implementation of this model including

- professional development for special education teachers, resulting in an increased understanding of the literacy acquisition process by participating teachers;
- additional staff for providing Reading Recovery as an RTI model, resulting in more students receiving Reading Recovery services;
- alignment of school district interventions; and
- support of a common vision among all staff to meet the needs of all students.

Providing Reading Recovery training to special education teachers has proven to be a win-win solution that benefits all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers, and administrators.

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