

Chapter 4

RTI and Reading at the Secondary Level

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ABSTRACT

Response to Intervention (RTI) provides a framework for effective prevention and intervention to students who have difficulty reading at all achievement levels by using a school-wide, tiered system. RTI is the means for helping struggling students become successful readers before they have a chance to fall behind. Using evidence-based reading strategies within multiple classrooms such as the inclusive classroom or the resource classroom provides students with learning disabilities the opportunity to succeed in all content areas while applying these reading strategies. All teachers can use these strategies to assist the at-risk and struggling reader make progress. The purpose of this chapter is to share research, resources, and reading instructional methods appropriate for students at the secondary level that can help them meet their academic needs.

INTRODUCTION

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a delivery and evaluative process in which educational resources are focused on struggling students to assist them in reaching their potential. The philosophy behind RTI is the belief that all students have the right to be instructed so that they might use their strengths to improve their weaknesses. Response to Intervention has redefined the instructional and intervention reading explicit practices assisting at-risk students in all classrooms across the nation. According to Vaughn and Fletcher (2012), the RTI model using the universal screening process during Tier 1 paired with progress monitoring and curriculum-based measurements assists teachers in data-driven decisions for appropriate lesson plan intensive interventions to address students' academic Readers Theater needs. Providing differentiation in reading instruction for at-risk students with multiple levels of scaffolded explicit and direct reading instruction and interventions will meet their academic weaknesses. The implementation

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of the RTI process requires teachers to incorporate highly qualified data-based instruction based upon ongoing student assessment, tiered instruction, and parent involvement consistently to form a comprehensive reading plan with a carry-over from school to home.

Archer, Gleason, and Vachon (2003) reported, “Secondary students read between the 2.5 and 5.0 grade level due to their difficulties with fluency and multisyllabic words” (abstract). Fluency and multisyllabic words are skills learned during the elementary level. Reading instruction at the elementary level teaches students how to read by using word recognition strategies, incorporating decoding skills, and emphasizing fluency, which leads to improved comprehension for students who cannot read sight words or decode unknown words to understand what they are reading (Beringer et al., 2010; Cirino et al., 2009; Swanson & Hsieh, 2009). “Decoding and fluency are the critical foundation on which all other reading skills are laid” (Archer, Gleason, & Vachon, 2003, p. 89). Vaughn and Fletcher (2012) stated, “Adolescence is not too late to intervene. Consider the type of reading problem (word level, text/background knowledge level) and focus on the treatment to meet the students’ needs” (p. 245). Secondary students reading below grade level have insufficient skills in the areas of vocabulary and decoding skills. These are those elementary skills not mastered during the formative years and now continue to make reading fluency and reading comprehension problems at the secondary level (Vaughn & Fletcher, 2012).

Secondary grade-level students are expected to read and decipher meaning by building upon comprehension strategies, which is the focus of instruction at the secondary school level (Swanson & Hsieh, 2009). Reading critically is an attribute students at the secondary level must acquire. Secondary English teachers are not expected to teach students phonics and decoding skills; rather, they focus on higher-order thinking skills related to literature studied (Swanson & Hsieh, 2009).

Edmonds et al. (2009) discussed the effects of elementary interventions on secondary school student abilities and outcomes in reading. Research completed by Edmonds et al. indicated that elementary interventions being employed are not preparing students for the rigor expected of students at the secondary level. When students have not gained this knowledge at the elementary level and move forward to the secondary level, reading problems are compounded. No longer are the students contained within a single classroom all day with one teacher assisted by a resource teacher who can pull them aside to provide additional reading instruction to help close reading achievement gaps; instead, the student changes classes and is now responsible for grade level content with some assistance from the resource teacher. Very little time is allotted for additional reading instruction to fill missing reading skills not learned at the elementary level; therefore, secondary reading and content teachers are searching for strategies to assist in meeting the needs of these students to close the achievement gaps in all content areas.

COGNITIVE STRUCTURES

Unsuccessful and struggling students have underdeveloped cognitive structures. Cognitive structures are those mental tools, processes, and patterns of thought used to take in information, use it, store it into short-term memory before making a connection, and place it into a file for long-term memory storage and retrieval (Garner, 2007). Cognitive structures include recognition and memorization of constancy, classification, spatial orientation, temporal orientation, and metaphorical thinking. Using these mental tools will allow students to process, store, use, and make connections with new classroom material to retrieve later for demonstration of knowledge on assessments. Points to remember regarding cognitive structures and students using these strategies are (a) students are individualistic, and finding the right

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