

Chapter 8

Leveraging Professional Development to Prepare General and Special Education Teachers to Teach within Response to Intervention Frameworks

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the role professional development (PD) plays in preparing teachers to teach within Response to Intervention (RTI) frameworks, and how future PD efforts might be leveraged to strengthen the preparation of general and special education teachers to coordinate instruction and teach more effectively within multi-tiered instructional systems. This chapter highlights two PD approaches that directly address these issues. Prime Online and Project InSync are two PD innovations that have specifically addressed how PD can be designed to support general and special education teachers in deepening their shared knowledge and improving their ability to enact coordinated instruction across instructional tiers within RTI frameworks.

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INTRODUCTION

Response to Intervention (RTI), a framework for improving instruction for all students, particularly those with academic and behavioral needs (Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, & Saunders, 2011; Detgen, Yamashita, Davis, & Wraight, 2011; Zirkel, 2011). RTI, also referred to as Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), involves a tiered instructional approach to prevention and intervention, and has evolved, in large part, as a result of concerns about the over-identification of students with disabilities due to poor instruction and inappropriate curriculum (e.g., Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2006; Lennon & Slesinski, 1999). According to the National Center on Response to Intervention [NCRI], effective prevention depends on high quality general education core instruction (i.e., tier 1) that is designed based on ongoing collection and analysis of student data and empirical research on instruction (see <http://www.rti4success.org/>). When tier 1 instruction is insufficient for supporting student learning, as determined through progress monitoring and data analysis, then students receive increasingly intensive academic and behavioral supplemental support according to their documented need in tier 2 instruction. General education teachers typically provide tier 2 instruction; however, if despite that support students continues to struggle, according to ongoing data collection and outcomes, then students receive tier 3 instruction, which is usually provided by the special education teachers. As students progress through the tiers, the instruction becomes more intensive and tailored to students' individual learning needs.

For each tier to promote student learning, instruction must focus on critical content, and evidence-based practices (e.g., Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006; RTI Action Network, 2009). For example, in a recent large scale efficacy trial, Gersten and colleagues (2015) found that students receiving instruction in tier 1, performing at the 35th percentile or lower, made significant gains on a standardized assessment after receiving teacher directed, systematic, small group instruction with extensive teacher feedback on whole number concepts and operations delivered in small groups, they made significant gains on a standardized assessment, and the effect size was moderate (effect size, $g = .34$). Other studies reveal that for teachers to use evidence-based supplemental instruction alone is insufficient without instructional coordination across tiers, as students remain in tier 1 while also receiving supplemental tier 2 or tier 3 instruction (Fuchs et al., 2008; Wonder-McDowell, Reutzel, & Smith, 2011). Moreover, when teachers provided evidence-based tier 1 instruction and supplemental instruction that was coordinated across the content taught, evidence based practices (EBPs) used, and assessment administered, students at risk for reading and mathematics failure made greater academic gains than when such instruction was absent. The studies described here and numerous others have shown that when RTI is implemented effectively, the approach can improve outcomes for students at risk for academic failure, reduce inappropriate identification for special education services, and improve the academic achievement of both struggling learners and those with learning disabilities (for a review see Klingner et al., in press).

Due to RTI's success as a research-based approach to identifying students with learning disabilities (LD), and supporting students who struggle to achieve, RTI was legitimized in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as one approach that may be used by states to identify and serve students with disabilities. State education agencies across the country interested in improving the education of their students with disabilities and preventing the inappropriate identification of students are undertaking efforts to implement RTI. In 2011, Zirkel found that 46 states had language about RTI in their laws or guidelines. Further, in an implementation study conducted nationwide, 49 states were found to have some type of RTI commission, task force, or internal working group (Bradley, Daley, Levin, O'Reilly, Parsard, Robertson, & Werner, 2011). Clearly, states see the importance of RTI

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