

Response to Intervention: A Pragmatic, Meaning-Based Plan for Reading

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OVERVIEW

RTI is an integrated assessment and intervention program that is designed to provide immediate instructional help for students who struggle to read, write, or do math without them having to be formally identified for special education programs. Here, students are identified for instructional help based on how they respond to classroom instruction and three types of interventions. However, because of limited resources in terms of money, time, space, and faculty; many schools are still struggling to implement RTI in ways that are (a) economical, (b) practical, and (c) effective. This article describes a meaning-based RTI plan that meets all of these criteria. This intervention is based on the neurocognitive model of reading (Johnson, 2016). According to the neurocognitive model, reading is a process of creating meaning with print in which the brain uses three cueing systems to recognize words during the process creating meaning (phonological, semantic, and syntactic). Here, instruction, interventions, and assessments all focus primarily on meaning-making. This contrasts with the phonological model of reading in which reading is perceived as merely sounding out words using a single cueing system (phonological). Instruction, interventions, and assessments from this perspective focus primarily on reading subskills related to sounding out individual words.

The goal with the meaning-based RTI plan described here is to help develop successful readers. From a neurocognitive view, success in reading is not being able to sound out nonsense words in isolation or perform any of the other myriad of reading subskills found on standardized tests. Instead, success in reading is being able to create meaning with text. More specifically, it is to be able to (a) read and enjoy narrative text and (b) read and understand expository text.

RTI proposes that three tiers of intervention be used. Each tier is described below and put in the context of a meaning-based intervention.

TIER 1: HIGH-QUALITY CLASSROOM INSTRUCTION, SCREENING, AND GROUP INTERVENTIONS

Tier 1 interventions take place within the general education classroom. It includes the following: (a) high-quality classroom instruction, (b) screening, and (c) group interventions.

High-Quality Classroom Instruction

High-quality classroom instruction refers to what is taught in the general education reading classes. Figure 1 contains a list of ten elements that should be addressed or included in any reading instruction program (Johnson, 2016). High-quality instruction also refers to the method or approach used, pedagogical strategies employed, and the specifics of lesson delivery.

High-quality reading instruction cannot occur in the absence of high-quality reading teachers (Allington, 2011, Bishop, et al, 2010; Brownell, et al., 2009; Wixson, Lipson, & Valencia, 2014). Therefore, any successful RTI program for reading is dependent on having teachers who are experts in reading instruction (IRA, 2009). To be an expert reading teacher, the teacher must have sufficient knowledge related to literacy learning, literacy theories, literacy research, literacy assessment and diagnosis, and literacy pedagogy. Keep in mind that sufficient depth and breadth of knowledge in all these areas cannot occur in four semesters of a teacher preparation program. Thus, schools must provide venues and incentives for continued professional development for teachers if RTI for reading is to be successful.

Figure 1. Ten essential elements for reading instruction

1. Concepts of print
2. Phonemic awareness
 - * *Instruction related to concepts of print as well as phonemic awareness activities should be discontinued once students are reading comfortably at the first grade level.*
3. Emotion and Motivation
4. Phonics
5. Word Identification strategies/skills: (a) analogy (word families), (b) morphemic awareness, (c) context clues – semantics, (d) sight words, (e) syntax, and (f) phonics.
 - * *Instruction related to phonics and word identification should be discontinued as word identification strategies when students are reading at reading comfortably at the 3rd grade level; however, word identification strategies should be continued as part of vocabulary development.*
6. Fluency
7. Vocabulary
8. Comprehension
9. Writing.
10. Literature or the reading of good books.

Screening

Screening in Tier 1 is used to see if students are responding appropriately to the instruction found within the general education curriculum. Screening consists of three parts: establishing a baseline, setting goals or benchmarks, and monitoring progress.

Establishing a baseline. The baseline is a measure of students' current level of reading performance. Any type of measure used here needs to be simple and pragmatic. This means it needs to be administered in large group. It also needs to be a valid indicator of students' ability to create meaning with print. Since the type of measure used will reflect the goals you set, careful consideration should be given here. The goals you set will in turn define the type of instruction and interventions that occur later. For example, if the baseline and goals are related only to mastering a predetermined set of reading subskills, the intervention will most likely consist of drill and practice on these same reading subskills. And has been shown, mastering a set of reading subskills is different from creating meaning with print (Cole, 2003; Smith, 2003).

To establish a baseline for Tier 1, it is recommended that some type of maze using graded or leveled readers be used (see Figure 2). There are several commercially prepared, norm-referenced measures of this type that can be administered quickly in a large group setting. Is this the perfect measure to use for establishing baselines? No. But it is economic, practical, and effective in establishing some sort of quantifiable baseline. As well, the maze is simple and more reflective students' ability to create meaning with print than are other standardized measures that simply quantify reading subskills. With a maze students must create meaning with whole, connected text. As well, a maze can be used to determine students' independent, instructional, and frustration reading levels. Because the vocabulary and concepts contain in the text can create variabilities in difficulty, it is recommended that two mazes be used to establish a reading baseline initially.

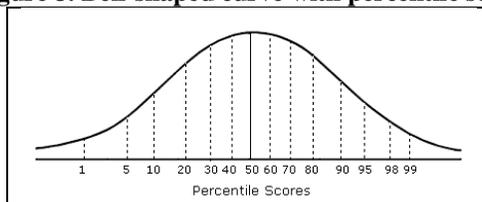
Figure 2. Example of a maze.

<p>Prairie Dogs</p> <p>Prairie dogs are small, burrowing rodents. They live in short-grass [prairies - oceans - big] and the high plains [of - in - said] the western USA and Mexico. [They - her - up] will eat all sorts [of - it - many] vegetables and fruits.</p> <p>Independent level = 85% or above Instructional level = 50% to 84% Frustration level = 49% or less</p>

Goals. The RTI goals identify where you think students should be at various places during the year. These are sometimes called benchmark goals or simply benchmarks. Again, identifying what this place is and how it will be measured must be carefully considered as it greatly impacts and defines the type of instruction and interventions students receive.

Reading grade levels or Lexile levels (based on national norms) are often used to establish goals. Keep in mind that the bell-shaped curve tells us that in any normal populations, 50% are going to be above average and 50% are going to be below average (see Figure 3). This is what average is. So while we would like all students to be reading up to grade level average, if this were to occur, grade level average would soon be what is now above-grade-level-average. The bell-shaped curve would continue to skew rightward with more students being left behind.

Figure 3. Bell-shaped curve with percentile scores.



While we cannot get totally away from using some sort of normative scale to compare students, we can be more considerate in our use of it for establishing goals. It is recommended grade level or Lexile level benchmarks be set at three (maybe four) points during the year and a maze (or two) be used to determine if students have met these. Keep it simple. Again, it is unrealistic (and statistically impossible) to expect all students to be reading at grade level average.

Monitoring progress. If screening shows that students are not making adequate progress toward established benchmarks, a Tier 1 intervention is used (see below). Once in a Tier 1 intervention, a progress monitoring system is implemented to check students' progress at shorter intervals. Under the assessment section below, some simple progress monitoring strategies are described for fluency, word identification, and comprehension.

Group Interventions: In-class supplemental instruction

Tier 1 interventions involve supplemental instruction that occurs during the day in the general education classroom. Small group, in-class supplemental instruction is usually used

here. And because a teacher is still responsible for teaching the general education curriculum, Tier 1 must be simple, pragmatic, and effective. It is recommended that variations of five elements be included here:

1. Daily sustained silent reading of books at students' independent level and below. The goal here would be reading volume. Reading volume enhances comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and word identification.

2. Daily writing. Writing is one of the best strategies for developing the syntactic cueing system as well as letter-sound relationships. The writing need not be long, but it should be authentic. That is, students should be writing and sharing their ideas.

3. Guided lessons to teach specific skills related to word identification and comprehension (see [Appendix A](#)).

4. Some sort of word work that focuses on teaching and develop the ability to employ six different word identification strategies (see Figure 4). Included here also would be analytic, synthetic, and large unit phonics instruction.

5. Fluency work using some form of repeated reading (see below).

Figure 4. Six ways to identify words during reading.

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Context clues (semantics) 2. Word order and grammar (syntax) 3. Word parts or analyzing words 4. Morphemic analysis (prefixes, suffixes, and root words) 5. Sight words 6. Phonics |
|--|

The final thing about interventions at all tiers is that they should be coordinated with classroom instruction (Allington, 2011). That is, they should reflect the types of research-based instruction and activities used with the general education reading curriculum. In this way you do not splinter or fragment students' learning experiences. Instead, the intervention builds upon and reinforces what students are already learning. Remember, RTI at all tiers is not meant to replace good classroom instruction; it is designed to enhance it.

TIER 2: TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

Students not meeting benchmarks after Tier 1 are targeted for a Tier 2 intervention. Tier 2 interventions (most often done in small group) usually occur outside the general education classroom. (Groups can be cross-graded.) Instruction here should build upon the Tier 1 intervention to the greatest extent possible.

One thing to keep in mind when students leave the classroom is that they are always leaving something. That is, they are missing something. So what is it going to be? Value-based decisions need to be made here. Again, this intervention is to supplement, not replace students' current reading instruction. In this context, it is strongly recommended that students' recess time never be used for anything other than recess. Interacting with peers is an important part of any child's social and emotional development. As well, for optimal learning to occur within the school or classroom, the brain needs the down time that occurs at recess (Jensen, 2005).

Data-Based Decision Making

RTI calls for data-based decision making throughout. This means that data needs to be collected at various points during the intervention (see progress monitoring above) and used to inform instruction. However, this also means that the specific reading intervention for each

student should be based on solid, diagnostic data. Thus, some type of measure needs to be used to identify the cause of the reading difficulty.

Standardized tests are one form of assessment that can be used to generate data. These types of measures are very good at comparing a student to a general population. That is, you can see how far away a student is from “normal” on the bell shaped curve using percentile rankings. However, standardized tests are not very effective at diagnosing reading problems. An effective diagnostic measure for reading should do two things: (a) provide students’ approximate reading grade level (or Lexile level) and (b) describe their strengths and weaknesses in each of the three reading deficit areas: word identification, fluency, and comprehension. For this to occur, some form of a diagnostic reading inventory (DRI) such as the Informal Reading Inventory should be used (see Figure 5). In the hands of a knowledgeable reading teacher, a DRI provides a rich source of data (Weaver, 2009). These are individually administered measures that should be used in Tier 2 and Tier 3 reading interventions.

Figure 5. Common diagnostic reading assessments

- Qualitative Reading Inventory, 5th edition, (Leslie and Caldwell)
- Reading Inventory for the Classrooms, 5th edition, (Flynt and Cooter)
- Classroom Reading Inventory, 12th edition, (Silvaroli and Wheelock)
- Basic Reading Inventory, 10th edition, (Johns)
- Analytical Reading Inventory, 9th edition, (Woods and Moe)
- Ekwall/Shanker Reading Inventory, 6th edition, (Shanker and Ekwall)
- Informal Reading Inventory, 8th edition, (Roe and Burns)

If a full-scale DRI is not possible, it is recommend that a miscue analysis be used. This will provide information about fluency and word identification, but not comprehension. A separate maze or story retelling chart can be used for the comprehension element (see below).

The Intervention: Targeted Instruction

The Tier 2 intervention must be administered by a reading specialist or highly qualified teacher (HQT) of reading. What is considered a HQT of reading varies from state to state; however, as described above, highly qualified reading teachers should have sufficient knowledge related to literacy learning, literacy theories, literacy research, literacy assessment and diagnosis, and literacy pedagogy.

Any HQT of reading knows that one size of instruction or intervention does not fit all. There is no single evidence-based practice, research-based curriculum, magical program, or scientifically-based teaching strategy that works best for all students (Allington, 2012). There are, however, many strategies that research has shown to be effective with certain students, in certain tasks, and in certain situations. However, the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of any strategy is dependent on how, how much, how often, when, where, and for what purpose it is used or applied. Therefore, a HQT of reading must have a variety of pedagogical tools in his or her teaching toolbox.

To use an analogy: A screwdriver is a very effective tool. But if used to pound in nails, it would not be very effective. So it is with any “research-based” strategy. As an example, direct instruction is an effective strategy for some things - but if this was used for all aspects of reading instruction, it would be ineffective even counter-effective. Any strategy used as part of RTI should be research-based for it to be used. However, care must be taken to avoid the

misapplication and over-interpretation of research that often occurs in literacy education when identifying research-based strategies.

Tier 2 consists of an intense, targeted instruction. It is recommended that Tier 2 groups meet a minimum of three days a week in order to have an impact. In terms of the duration of these sessions, do not mistake quantity for quality. Shorter bits of focused instruction are much more effective than longer bits of instruction in which students are not actively engaged. Depending on the age and level of the student, the duration for these sessions should be anywhere from 20 minutes a day for younger students to no more than 50 or minutes a day for older students.

Specific Activities In a Meaning-Based Intervention

The strategies below are all research-based and designed to address all three reading deficit areas: word identification, fluency, and comprehension. Instruction during individual sessions should be briskly-paced, moving relatively quickly from one activity to the next. Each activity is of relatively short duration (one to eight minutes). Also, most of these activities present words in some sort of meaningful contexts, thus enabling students to develop semantic and syntactic cueing systems as well as the phonological.

One note of importance: What is described here is not (nor should it ever become), a method or a program. Instead, these are a series of research-based strategies. Teachers are encouraged to adopt and adapt as needed. Brief descriptions of some of the strategies are included here. None of these strategies is particularly new or innovative by itself. The difference between this RTI plan and other programs or methods is in (a) the tempo and the diversity of strategies, (b) the meaning-based emphasis, (c) the focus on all three cueing systems, and (d) the flexibility to adopt and adapt to meet individual needs. Varied selections of the strategies below should be used within each 20 to 50 minute session.

1. Language experience activities (LEA). Each session starts with a language experience activity in which students dictate a minimum of five sentences to the teacher. Students re-read until fluent. The paragraph/story is then used for analytic phonics mini-lesson (3 to 6 minutes).

2. Word work using onset-rime. Onset-rime or word-building activities are used to develop the ability to see letter patterns or parts of words. This is the one activity in which words are presented in isolation. These are based on the 30 most-common phonograms or word families (3 to 4 minutes).

3. Cloze activities. To develop the semantic cueing systems, students are given a sentence with a missing word. The students read the sentence and are asked to guess the missing word. When shown the complete sentence, students are asked to re-read it until fluency is achieved (3 to 6 minutes).

4. Fluency activities. To develop speed of word recognition and processing, students are given a short passage in which the 30, 40, or 50 word mark has been designated (depending on their level). Students orally read their passage three times timing the duration of each. Students then record their three times on a line graph (3 to 5 minutes).

5. Word discrimination. This develops students' ability to recognize words with the target phonogram or letter patterns. Students are presented with two word choices, one of which has a word with the target. They must quickly point to and identify the target word (1 to 4 minutes).

6. Word wall riddle review. To review letter patterns or target phonogram words, students are given a simple riddle. The answer is contained on a word wall with six to ten choices. They must select an answer from the word wall (2 to 5 minutes).

7. Sentence dictation. The teacher (or partner) reads a sentence to the student containing sight words and at least one word with the target phonogram or letter pattern. The student writes the sentence. After each sentence, the student looks for and underlines words that do not look right. Then the teacher shows students the complete sentence with correct spelling. They will cross out the word and write the correct spelling on top (3 to 6 minutes).

8. Sentence replay (replay analysis). Students are presented three to six sentences on a piece of paper. Students read these out loud. They record their oral reading on an audio recorder. Then, they listen to the recording and underline any miscues. Next, they review the words and reread and record the sentences. This process is repeated until fluency is achieved with no miscues (4 to 8 minutes).

9. Word parsicle. This reinforces and develops students' ability to see letter patterns or word parts. Students are given parts of target words that contain the phonogram or letter patterns being reinforced. They are to guess the target word. With each successive guess they are given additional letter clues (3 to 6 minutes).

10. Sentence Guess-O-rama. This is designed to develop the syntactic cueing systems (word order). Here students are presented a sentence in which the words are mixed up. They are to try to guess what the sentence is. With each guess, they are provided additional word clues.

11. Maze mini-story. Maze activities are similar to cloze activities, except maze targets provide students with three choices of words, only one of which makes sense within the context of the sentences or story. The maze mini-story provides maze sentences in the context of a short six to eight sentence mini-story.

12. Reading practice. It is recommended that every session end with reading practice of some kind. Reading practice enables students to practice newly learned skills in authentic reading contexts. Small group pre-, during-, and post-reading activities are used to develop the cognitive processes related to comprehension and vocabulary (5 to 10 minutes).

Schedule

The activities above should be spread out over a three, four, or five day cycle. Figure 6 contains one suggested four-day cycle. Again, design the cycle that works best for your students. Below, I have included fluency work and reading each day. A fifth day is optional. Here, you would re-read the LEA stories from the past four lessons. Analytic phonics would be used for phonics mini-lessons. But again, daily sessions should be adapted to your students' needs and your teaching style. Select and use only those strategies that move the students with whom you are working toward their benchmark goals.

Progress Monitoring

Generally, it is recommended progress monitoring occur every two weeks. For this meaning-based intervention the following types of measures are used for progress monitoring:

- **Fluency.** Daily fluency scores are used here to document students' progress. If a more standardized form is needed, a graded reader can be used to obtain words per minute (WPM) scores at designated intervals.

- **Word identification.** Word identification is assessed using two types of measures. The first is a simple pre-, post-measure that includes sample of words containing the target letter sounds or patterns addressed during word work (see Figure 7).

Figure 6. One suggested four-day lesson cycle.

Lesson 1a 1. Language Experience 2. Onset-rime: 3. Cloze 4. Fluency work 5. Read	Lesson 1b 1. Language Experience 2. Sentence Guess-O-Rama 3. Fluency work 4. Replay analysis 5. Read	Lesson 1c 1. Language Experience 2. Word wall riddle review 3. Word parsicle 4. Fluency work 5. Read	Lesson 1d 1. Language Experience 2. Maze mini-story 3. Fluency work 4. Sentence dictation 5. Read
Day 5 Optional 1. Reread LEA from that week. a. Do analytic phonics with the LEA 2. Review target letter patterns or phonogram. 3. Play bingo with target phonogram or letter pattern words or other phonogram-related game 4. Read.			

Figure 7. Word ID assessment for AY and ILL phonograms.

___ pay	___ fill	___ hay	___ grill
___ lay	___ hill	___ rat	___ pill
___ may	___ chill	___ fray	___ drill
___ gray	___ pill	___ play	___ still

The second type of measure is a running record using graded readers. Use the same reading passage as a pre- and post-measure.

Comprehension. Comprehension can be assessed two ways. The first is a story retelling chart (see Figure 8). Here, students read and are asked to recall basic story elements related to characters, events, and settings. Points are earned for prompted and unprompted responses. The second form of assessment is a maze as described above. The maze is used as a screening device, but can also be used more often for progress monitoring.

Figure 8. Story retelling chart.

Story Retelling Chart		
Name: <u>Pat Student</u>	Grade: <u>4</u>	Date: <u>Feb. 2, 2016</u>
Story Title: <u>The Adventures of Billy Marble</u> Reading Level: <u>3.5</u>		
Context: Story read by <u>child</u> silently <u>X</u> , orally <u> </u> , Story read to child <u> </u>		
	UNPROMPTED	PROMPTED
CHARACTERS: <u>2</u> points each.		
1. Billy Marble		
2. Sally Pebble		
3. Sam the Dog		
4. Space alien		
SETTING: <u>2</u> points each.		
1. home		
2. school Bus		
3. space ship		
EVENTS: <u>2</u> points each.		
1. Ride to school		
2. Captured by space alien		
3. Escape space ship		
4. Go to math class		
TOTAL POINTS: <u> </u> /22 = <u> </u> %	<u> </u> / <u> </u>	<u> </u> / <u> </u>
Unprompted = 2 point Prompted = 1 points		
Independent reading level = 98-100% accuracy		
Instruction level = 90-97% accuracy		
Frustration level = 89% or lower		

TIER 3: INTENSIVE INTERVENTIONS AND COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION

If students are not making adequate progress in Tier 2, they are targeted for a Tier 3 intervention. Tier 3 should build upon Tier 2 instruction to the greatest degree possible. The main difference between Tier 2 and Tier 3 is that Tier 3 should be more intensive, more targeted, and specifically designed to meet students' individual needs (Swanson & Vaughn 2011). This means that the focus should be on specific deficit areas (word identification, fluency, and/or comprehension). Students not making the desired level progress in response to the Tier 3 intervention should then be referred for a comprehensive evaluation to see if they are eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (NCLD, 2016).

Tier 3 is often synonymous with special education; however, RTI was specifically designed to avoid special education labels and services. IDEA calls for Tier 3 interventions to be delivered primarily in a general education setting by a general education teacher and additional staff. But if special educators do become involved at this level, the International Reading Association (2009) recommends that literacy/reading specialists and coaches provide leadership in every aspect of the RTI. There must also be careful planning and continued communication with all parties in all phases.

The final point here in regards to special education is this: Tier 3 is where students need the most highly qualified reading teachers. But in special education settings students rarely get improved access to expert, intensive reading instruction (Allington, 2011). That is, special education teachers often do not have the expertise in all aspects of reading instruction that reading specialists and elementary education teachers have. Also, in special education programs for learning disabilities students rarely experience accelerated reading once they begin special education services (Allington, 2011; Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003). Thus, if special education teachers become involved as part of Tier 3, it should be under the guidance of a reading/literacy specialist.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Two final things to consider in regards to RTI: First RTI plans for reading call for evidence-based pedagogy to be used in each tier (Averill, Baker, & Rindaldi, 2014). This is much different from a specific program or method. Commercial programs, specified methods, and uniform approaches rarely provide the flexibility necessary to meet the specific needs of all struggling readers. Thus, it is recommended that reading curriculums and interventions be comprised of research-based strategies that enable teachers to flexibly apply them in ways that best meet the needs of their students.

And second, one of the strengths of RTI is its flexibility. It is expected that there will be wide variation in how these regulations are interpreted and implemented. However, to be successful any RTI plan must (a) economical, (b) practical, and (c) effective. The meaning-based plan describe in this article is all three of these.

Related Video Mini-lessons for Meaning-Based Intervention (MBI)

MBI Overview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8WamVRIVyo>

MBI: Day 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92tc4bSjoSo>

MBI: Day 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prgXGk4Ngnc>

MBI: Day 3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLNIKZ-b7U>

MBI: Day 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt4napWtHP0>

MBI: Fluency

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75nLTgQh_zU

MBI: Language Experience Activities

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzilPA3aeY8>

MBI: Comprehension

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fvIj2moDfbY>

RTI Comprehension, Grades 1-2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbaBwHRVQ7Q>

Cloze and Maze Used for Word ID

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dBX1D1iq5J4>

Word with Distractor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0DmNaMrXbWw>

Onset-Rime and Riddles

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiS8vvLfaic>

Reading Intervention for Word Identification

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cswNgyblm2w>

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