

Research Topics in Responsiveness to Intervention:

Introduction to the Special Series

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Abstract

This introduction to the special series provides an overview of the December 2003 Responsiveness-to-Intervention (RTI) Symposium, hosted by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD). RTI refers to individual, comprehensive student-centered assessment models that apply a problem-solving framework to identify and address a student's learning difficulties. This introduction presents the rationale for the symposium, participant selection, and key questions that provided the underlying framework. Further, we introduce the 14 symposium papers featured in this special issue. The papers represent the high-quality, thought-provoking presentations and subsequent discussions held during the RTI Symposium. Finally, in light of anticipated changes in specific learning disabilities (SLD) determination as indicated by the recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; P.L. 108-446), we briefly describe the NRCLD's research, dissemination, and technical assistance efforts related to the assessment and identification of students with learning disabilities.

In this special series, responsiveness to intervention (RTI) is examined from the perspective of researchers and school-based personnel who were convened for a topical symposium hosted by the National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (NRCLD). The NRCLD, established by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), sponsored the 2-day symposium focusing on topics associated with RTI in December 2003. RTI refers to individual, comprehensive student-centered assessment models that apply a problem-solving framework to identify and address a student's learning difficulties. The symposium was intended to foster thoughtful discussions regarding multiple-tiered intervention models and their potential value in relation to the determination of specific learning disabilities.

The presenters, discussants, and participants assembled for the symposium represented the wide diversity of individuals with a vested interest in specific learning disabilities (SLD) de-

termination issues. Stakeholders including representatives from the 2001 LD Summit and six federally funded Regional Resource Centers, members of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), and various advocates, K-12 instructional staff, researchers, and state-level education officials brought their collective and considerable expertise to the discussions.

Presenters and follow-up discussants offered insights related to RTI implementation in both school settings and research sites. These presentations and subsequent discussions highlighted a wide range of views and the complex issues associated with RTI models and SLD determination with which the field is currently grappling.

The six symposium sessions were organized around central questions that were addressed from numerous vantage points. In this special issue, we share selected papers presented during the six sessions. The papers are representative of the high quality of RTI research and practice currently under way in our field. For sessions one through

five, we share a presenter's paper and the subsequent discussant's paper. For session six, we share three presenters' papers and a subsequent discussant's paper. The lead authors of the selected papers for these questions are listed below.

1. How should screening for secondary intervention occur?
Deborah Speece (presenter) and Barbara Foorman (discussant)
2. How should secondary intervention be formulated?
Debra Kamps (presenter) and Daniel Reschly (discussant)
3. What are the feasibility and consequences of RTI?
Michael Gerber (presenter) and Margo Mastropieri and Thomas Scuggs (discussants)
4. How should "unresponsiveness" to secondary intervention be operationalized in an RTI approach to learning disabilities (LD) identification? (to appear in a future issue)
Frank Vellutino (presenter) and Donald Compton (discussant)

5. How many tiers are needed within RTI to achieve acceptable prevention outcomes and patterns of LD identification?

Rollanda O'Connor (presenter) and Doug Marston (discussant)

6. What are alternative models to LD identification other than RTI?

Jack Fletcher, Kenneth Kavale, and Margaret Semrud-Clikeman (presenters) and Evelyn Johnson (discussant)

The recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; P.L. 108-446) and forthcoming federal and state regulations promise much change in approaches to SLD identification. The new IDEA 2004 (P.L. 108-446) statutory language includes the following:

(6) Specific Learning Disabilities.

(A) In General.

Notwithstanding section 607(b), when determining whether a child has a specific learning disability as defined in section 602, a local educational agency shall not be required to take into consideration whether a child has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability in oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skill, reading comprehension, mathematical calculation, or mathematical reasoning.

(B) Additional Authority.

In determining whether a child has a specific learning disability, a local educational agency may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures described in paragraphs (2) and (3). [614(b)(6)]

Because of the significant implications of such changes, we believe that stakeholders sharing information and perspectives will promote positive advances in the learning disabilities field.

NRCLD was funded to conduct research, provide training, disseminate synthesized research-validated information, and provide national technical assistance on issues in the area of iden-

tification and assessment of children with learning disabilities. We remain committed to improving the quality of assessment and SLD identification decisions for students. To this end, we have undertaken a number of projects in addition to the RTI Symposium to examine the issue of SLD identification and provide technical assistance, staff development, and dissemination to a wide variety of stakeholders. These projects are designed to help the field understand policies, practices, and prevalence of SLD identification as well as to identify best practices for its specific components, such as responsiveness-to-intervention methods. Our research thus far has resulted in a number of materials as well as a growing library of relevant information as described in the following four major NRCLD activities.

NRCLD researchers are conducting two large-scale, longitudinal studies to enhance understanding of learning disabilities and how alternative approaches to SLD identification affect who is identified. These studies (in the areas of reading and math) also seek to determine benchmarks for important goals in reading and math.

In addition, NRCLD is conducting focus groups with six constituency groups: parents, general education teachers, special education teachers, diagnosticians/psychologists, directors of special education, and principals. The focus groups are providing a greater understanding of issues related to current SLD determination practices at the local level and are helping us design technical assistance strategies for adopting new SLD determination models on a large scale.

On a national level, NRCLD researchers are investigating state and local SLD determination policies, practices, and prevalence. This baseline information provides a starting point for considering how to evaluate the effectiveness of alternative SLD determination models. Initial work in this area has resulted in the report *And Miles to Go...: State SLD Requirements and Authoritative Recommendations* (Reschly, Hosp, & Schmied, 2003), in which prob-

lems with the current approaches to SLD identification are highlighted and recommendations for continued research are outlined. The full report and related documents are available on NRCLD's Web site, www.nrclld.org.

NRCLD also is working with the nation's six regional resource centers to identify school sites that have effectively implemented RTI models, models that evaluate student performance and match the intensity of instruction to student needs. The research design is intended to provide detailed descriptions of the participating sites and, as appropriate, comparisons among the sites and between the groups of students who are assessed.

In addition to the symposium papers featured in this special series, all papers and PowerPoint slides from the symposium may be found at the following Web site: <http://www.nrclld.org>.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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