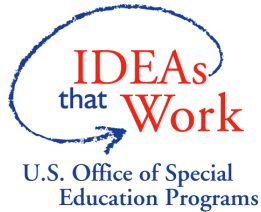




Responsiveness-to-Intervention Symposium

December 4-5, 2003 • Kansas City, Missouri

The National Research Center on Learning Disabilities, a collaborative project of staff at Vanderbilt University and the University of Kansas, sponsored this two-day symposium focusing on responsiveness-to-intervention (RTI) issues.



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Screening for Secondary Intervention

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Screening for Secondary Intervention

The focus on response to treatment is a welcome departure from the IQ-achievement discrepancy approach to classifying students as learning disabled because of the latter's "wait-to-fail" approach and statistical shortcomings. The papers discussed in this session provide cautions and suggestions for how to implement the response-to-treatment approach. David Francis' paper argues for frequent monitoring of progress rather than a single assessment time point for making reliable classifications. Debbie Speece agrees. She points to the disappointing accuracy results of early screening and argues that growth matters. Speece recommends we "view screening as a three-legged stool that incorporates not only individual differences at the screen and outcome but also development conceptualized as rate of learning" (p. 12). Joe Jenkins finds several good candidates for screening measures but no single best measure because of local differences in criterion measures and their performance levels, and in tolerances for over-identification and under-identification rates. At the local level Jenkins feels it critical that screens don't miss anyone requiring secondary intervention and that progress be monitored. These are excellent points and I'd like to build upon them by addressing three areas:

1. The purpose of early screening could be identifying students not-at-risk so that instructional objectives can be established for students potentially at-risk.
2. Monitoring progress in mastering the alphabetic principle is reflected in item-based learning.
3. Response-to-treatment is multi-level and contextualized.

The Purpose of Early Screening

It is important to understand the assumptions underlying the screens available for early reading assessment. Let's take the TPRI as an example. The TPRI came out of a legislative mandate to provide a diagnostic reading instrument for K-2 teachers in Texas. Given that the screen would be used with entire classrooms of children, we designed it to save the teacher time by identifying children who would most likely be at or above grade level on the Woodcock-Johnson Broad Reading at the end of the year so that she could spend more time giving the inventory to those students who would likely be behind half a year or more. In other words, we did not develop the screen to identify students at-risk; rather, we developed the screen to rapidly (i.e., in 3-5 minutes) and accurately identify those students not at-risk.

The students "still developing" concepts on the screen are deemed at risk only if they don't receive good instruction. Thus, the large percentage of kindergarteners deemed at risk in our validation study—56%, as Jenkins pointed out—is a signal to the teacher that she needs to instruct her students in fundamental reading concepts because they haven't developed literacy knowledge at home or in preschool. By administering the inventory to students at the beginning, middle, and end of the year, the teacher can assess the range of skills in reading domains identified in the state standards, establish instructional objectives for each child, and monitor learning across the year. We have developed more fluency probes so that teachers can monitor progress more frequently. Right now we are recommending 6 times a year in addition to

the beginning, middle, and end of year fluency assessments—that is 9 times a year. Like the other reading selections on the TPRI, these fluency probes have comprehension questions attached and students are placed in a passage based on links between accuracy on a list and accuracy in the passage. We have developed a third grade TPRI in which story placement is based on timed decoding, rather than untimed decoding. Both timed and untimed decoding predict to reading accuracy and comprehension in our passages. Neither predicts better than the other.

Monitoring Mastery of the Alphabetic Principle: Item-Based Learning

Joe Jenkins points out that screens in first and second grade that employ word reading tasks as predictors of end-of-year outcomes in reading have good specificity, that is they identify as not-at-risk individuals who later perform satisfactorily on a future criterion measure (i.e., true negatives). The way we linked word reading in the TPRI screen to achievement outcomes was to analyze our experimental word lists using Item Response Theory, then find the theta coefficient that predicted a specific cutpoint on the WJ Broad Reading—within half a year of grade equivalency. Words around that theta value were placed on the screen. Thus, we were not designing a phonics screener, but rather tapping into alphabetic knowledge associated with grade-level benchmark words. We are currently developing a decodability tool on our website (www.tpri.org) that takes oral reading errors from the TPRI passages and analyzes the phonetic coding and orthographic parsing represented by the errors. Although the narrative and informational passages are not considered part of the screen, all students read a passage for accuracy, fluency, and comprehension regardless of performance on the

screen. Teachers who administer the TPRI using a PDA tap on the words misread while the student reads the story out of the booklet. When the teacher syncs the PDA with the website, each student's reading errors are analyzed using a relational database we developed in our IERI grant. We can compare individual error profiles with “normative” error profiles across beginning, middle, and end of year and decide whether instruction on a particular spelling pattern is warranted. We can also do this for students grouped by performance levels. The website could provide words that contain the pattern for additional student practice or refer the teacher to the lesson in the state-adopted basal where relevant instructional strategies and reading selections may be found (Foorman, Francis, Davidson, Harm, & Griffin, in press; Foorman, Santi, & Berger, in press).

I call such assessment-driven instruction “item-based” rather than “stage-based” because the instructional feedback we give to beginning readers builds up orthographic representations of specific items or words. Consequently, unlike older approaches to phonics, instruction should be based on what words the student already knows, not what stage he or she is in. Furthermore, automaticity is a characteristic of words, not readers (Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2001). Thus, the question becomes, “On what words is this child fluent?” rather than “Is this child a fluent reader. By considering the kinds of words that beginning readers misread, we can start to develop a theory of learning to underlie our reading interventions. I looked at the words in TPRI stories misread more than 50% of the time by approximately 1200 first and second graders. First, I noticed difficulty with various types of syllable units: closed syllables (e.g., believe) and open syllables (e.g., later); consonant-le (e.g., scram-

bled); vowel team (e.g., Maria), and R-controlled in multisyllabic words (e.g., favorite, surprise) and in single syllable words (e.g., lures, hardly). Blends were challenging (e.g., cricket, dribbling), as well as vowel-consonant-e (e.g., faces, poles), and schwa (e.g., enemies). Errors were also frequently made on complex vowel team spellings (e.g., caught, feelers, true) and on less common orthographic patterns (e.g., gu in arguing and in lifeguard). Instructional strategies for parsing and deriving sound-spelling patterns in multisyllabic words, deriving schwa from “flexed” pronunciations, and inconsistent sound-spelling patterns in single-syllable words are typically not taught in the basals. As part of our response-to-treatment model, we need to build a theory of learning to read from item-based data.

Response-to-Treatment is Multilevel and Contextualized

Instructional environments are sets of nested relations: children within families within communities; students within classrooms within schools within districts. We now have the statistical software to handle multilevel models but a challenge continues to be that of cross-classification of students within more than one teacher. The good news is that Steve Raudenbush is working on this problem (Raudenbush, 2003). The bad news is that the Three-Tier Model requires a multilevel design today. We have secondary interventions nested within primary, core reading instruction, sometimes with the same teacher and the same curriculum, but more often with a different teacher and different curriculum. Then, we have tertiary intervention, which is a cross-sequential response to treatment at the secondary level.

Putting aside the statistical challenges of multilevel, cross-sequential designs, con-

sider the following conceptualizations of the Three-Tier Model in several of the Flagship Schools in Texas selected because of their high free and reduced lunch percentages yet high scores on the state’s third grade accountability test in reading (Denton, Foorman, & Mathes, 2003; Foorman & Moats, 2003). Note that three-tier models have existed in the area of reading for some time (e.g., Thaddeus Loft and Wesley Elementary), and generally before current emphases on multi-tiered interventions.

Cortez Elementary. The principal at Cortez is a former reading specialist who has a sense of “urgency” about making sure that all students at her school can read and provides multiple “safety nets,” including “intensive care” in her office for students who transfer from other schools and are far behind in reading. The core reading program at this school was Project Read (Enfield & Greene, 1998) and is now Open Court (SRA, 2000). The reading/language arts block is 1.5 hours and includes small-group work on Project Read or Open Court strategies and English language development for the many Spanish-speaking students at the school. Assessment occurs every six weeks; students not making adequate progress are provided a second, 45-minute period of reading instruction based on Project Read/Open Court strategies and offered tutoring before school, after school, or during recess. To build home literacy, cassette tapes of English and Spanish literature are sent home.

Willow Bend Elementary. This inner-city school is 94% African American. The principal selected a direct instruction program called Reading Mastery (Engelmann & Bruner, 1995; see sra4kids.com) and relies on his reading specialist to implement it with

quality schoolwide. In this program students are placed into homogeneously organized instructional groups and regrouped based on curriculum-based assessment. Phonics is taught directly and systematically with highly decodable books and scripted error correction procedures so that all students achieve mastery. In addition to the two-hours daily of uninterrupted core reading instruction, three teachers work use Reading Mastery to work with struggling readers on a pull-out basis in a reading lab.

Ashton Elementary. Ashton Elementary in an urban school that has adopted the comprehensive school reform model Success for All (SFA; Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996; see www.successforall.net). Because 72% of the student population is Spanish-speaking, many classrooms are engaged in a 90-10 late-exit, bilingual program. In addition to the 90-min. reading/language arts block, an English language development block is also provided. Assessment is provided every eight weeks and struggling readers are provided with an additional 90-minutes of small-group instruction or the 20-minute SFA 1:1 tutorial. After-school tutorials are also available for students in Grade 2 or above. The principal at Ashton has a “no excuses” attitude towards reading instruction. She demands high expectations from her teachers and students. She meets weekly with grade-level teams and personally goes into classrooms to model instruction. Teachers also receive instructional support from the SFA facilitator.

Townsend Elementary. Townsend Elementary is a model of what a “balanced” literacy approach can be. Core reading instruction is 90-minutes of guided reading and writer’s workshop infused with an emphasis

on the alphabetic code through PhonoGraphix (McGuinness & McGuinness, 1998; see www.readamerican.net). The principal has made literacy instruction a schoolwide priority and funds literacy specialists who support classroom teachers by analyzing assessment data, co-teaching and modeling lessons, and providing materials. These specialists run a literacy lab available to all struggling readers in the school. In one corner of the lab, a teacher works with bilingual students. In another corner, a teacher uses the Lindamood Phoneme Sequencing Program (LiPS; Lindamood & Lindamood, 1998) with students identified with speech and language difficulties. In another corner, a teacher uses Reading Recovery (Clay, 1993) infused with PhonoGraphix to emphasize mastery of the alphabetic principle.

Across these four “beat-the-odds” schools, there are common themes: strong instructional leadership and accountability; knowledgeable teachers and ongoing professional development and coaching; increased amount of time available for reading instruction; targeted, differentiated instruction; and tiers of reading intervention informed by ongoing assessment. From a multi-tier perspective, these examples do not explicitly address the link with special education. However, few students are in special education at these schools and the ones that are have disabilities emanating from sources other than instruction. The key aspect to implementation in these schools is screening for secondary intervention that is integrated with the ongoing assessment of core reading instruction.

Conclusion

Several valid and reliable screens for secondary intervention do exist. Let’s examine their underlying assumptions and make certain that we select ones that (a) accurately

identify students whose future performance is at grade-level or better, and (b) minimize missing students who develop reading disabilities. Let's make sure that the screens fit within a coherent, comprehensive reading instructional plan at the level of the school that incorporates ongoing assessment of learning. Response to classroom-level core reading will determine placement of students into secondary intervention. Special education is best reserved for students who do not respond to primary and secondary level interventions using methods like those proposed by Francis and the numbers should be small so these students can get truly "special" interventions like those in Torgesen et al. (2001). Operationalizing response adequacy will necessarily remain a localized, contextualized decision that will depend on human and material resources and the will to set high expectations for all students.

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