Understanding Response to Intervention: A Handbook for Parents of English Language Learners

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my mom and dad. It is because of their inspiration that I am now fortunate enough to inspire others. Thank you mom and dad for your love and support, always!

To my monkeys-Max, Bella, and Gogo (and all other future monkeys) - you have to work hard for what you want. Never settle!

Grandma Sarah…Como han pasado los anos. Even though it’s been 9 years since you’ve passed, your spirit lives on in all of us!

Grandma B, your strength in raising 11 kids on your own has been a true inspiration. Because of you, I am confident that a woman can do it ALL on her own!
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Lastly, thanks to my readers. You have made this process quick and easy. You are the best!
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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION: A HANDBOOK FOR PARENTS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

By

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Master of Science in Counseling,

School Counseling

The recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) has allowed schools to use Response-to-Intervention (RTI) as an alternative to discrepancy-based models for identification of specific learning disabilities. However, there tends to be a gap between school and home communication in a child's educational choices. The development of collaborative partnerships between parents and professionals is too often unsuccessful. Parents want to understand the types of academic and behavioral support that their child is receiving, particularly when he or she is struggling. Nevertheless, parents may not always be able to grasp the educational terminology that teachers use or what those terms mean for their child. In addition, teachers may not have enough time to train parents or even explain to them the particulars of new initiatives in the school. RTI offers hope that all children will receive better and more adequate instruction in math and reading. There are important issues that parents need to be aware of. This project sets out to educate parents in the process of Response-to-Intervention.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A large number of English Language Learners are increasingly enrolling in public schools. Amongst those that are enrolled, a large portion struggle to learn or are underachieving. The demands from No Child Left Behind have put more pressure on schools and teachers to increase proficiency in Language Arts and Math by 2014; however, with such a large population of students who are English Language Learners, that task is enormous. English Language Learners are swiftly becoming a considerable part of schools throughout the United States. There are more than 5.3 million ELLs in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). According to the United States Census data (2003), in 2000 the percentage of the school age population speaking a home language different from English was 42.6% in California. In 2002, 43% of the nation’s teachers had at least one English Language Learner in their class. Furthermore, about 77% of ELLs speak Spanish as their primary language (Klinger & Artiles, 2006).

There is a disproportionally high rate of English Language Learners that are placed into Special Education classes and also a low number of students who should be placed into Special Education classes, but are not. For instance, elementary ELL students have a 27% higher probability of being identified in need of Special Education (Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, & Higareda, 2002). General education teachers find it hard to differentiate a student’s difficulties with learning to read because of their limited language acquisition. This causes the general education teacher to hesitate in referring the child for special education assessment. Many educators lack the appropriate
knowledge of district policies with regards to the timing of referrals. Educators also are not knowledgeable enough about whether English Language Learners have to acquire a certain level of English proficiency before the referral process can be initiated (Artiles, Barletta, & Klinger, 2006). It is crucial for educators to be aware of the referral process and to have the means necessary to address the needs of special education and general education students.

In addition to the disproportionate number of ELL students in special education programs, the retention and high school dropout rates are also higher among Hispanic students than White students (Rhodes, et al., 2005). Students who drop out of school face life-long problems such as high rates of children born out of wedlock, lower lifetime incomes, higher rated of alcohol and substance abuse, higher unemployment rates, higher rates of mental health issues, and increased likelihood of contact with law enforcement (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). The number one reason for such a high dropout rate is a lack of academic success, particularly in the area of reading, which is also a major reason for referral of English Language Learners to special education (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002).

English Language Learners placement into classes whether in general or special education, are shaped by policy development. Many reforms and initiatives are unfolding that make the placement of English Language Learners more complicated. Unfortunately, in states with a high number of English Language Learners, bilingual education programs have been cut from schools. In June of 1998, Proposition 227 eradicated bilingual education in California and replaced it with a Structured English Immersion model. According to Proposition 227, immigrant children can easily acquire full fluency in a new language, such as English, if they are heavily exposed to that
language in the classroom at an early age. As a result, bilingual education was taken from all children in California public schools and were taught English only. Under Proposition 227, local school districts do not have the right to design their own programs for LEP students. Districts require the freedom to create a program tailored to that region’s specific needs. Not every school is the same throughout California.

On the other hand, laws and mandates such as No Child Left Behind places a higher demand on teachers and schools throughout the United States to increase achievement in both language arts and math of English Language Learners and non-English Language Learners and with and without a learning disability. This is an enormous expectation given the limited resources and support provided to achieve this goal. The No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002 (United States Department of Education, 2002). The goal of NCLB is to decrease the achievement gap of students from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, students living in poverty, new English Language Learners, and students with disabilities. NCLB has four goals that are suppose to improve the nation’s education system: (1) stronger accountability for academic results, (2) more freedom for states and communities to decide on optimal teaching practices, (3) research based educational methods, and (4) the option for parents to choose schools.

Though No Child Left Behind Act establishes high expectations for all students, there are challenges for English Language Learners. The challenges include four major challenges. First, historically, ELLs have demonstrated low performance and slow improvement. ELL students often perform 20 to 30 percentage points lower than their non-ELL counterparts. The second issue pertaining to the measurement accuracy of
assessment instruments is the language demands of standardized tests and how they negatively influence accurate measurement of ELL students’ performance since students are tested on both achievement and language ability, not just achievement. Third, relates to the instability of the ELL student subgroup. Once high performing ELL students score proficient, lower performing ELL students face more pressure because the number of ELL students has decreased. Fourth pertains to factors outside of a school’s control. Schools are unable to control all factors related to student achievement (Abedi & Dietel, 2004)

The recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) has fostered changes that affect education for English Language Learners. Districts and states now have stronger requirements to track the disproportionate representation of English Language Learners because of the reauthorization from IDEA (Artiles, Barletta, & Klinger, 2006); however, the infrastructure for collecting placement data on English Language Learners is insufficient.

States have different screening options under IDEA 2004. States may choose to stop using the IQ-achievement discrepancy formula. They may also choose to eliminate the requirement of IQ test as part of the special education identification process (Artiles, Barletta, & Klinger, 2006). States have the option of using Response to Intervention (RTI), which will be described later as an intervention framework, as part of the identification process. With these changes, low performing students are offered intensive early interventions. Those students who are not as successful in responding to interventions via an RTI approach may be considered candidates for special education.
These new changes have the potential to change the way English Language Learners who struggle with reading are identified for special education.

**Statement of Need**

English Language Learners are vastly overrepresented in special education. The 2002 National Academy of Sciences panel concluded that the most effective means of reducing the overrepresentation of low-income, ethnic minority students is to improve the core elements of classroom instruction, particularly in the early grades (Donovan & Cross, 2002). It is crucial for schools to implement academic interventions in the early grades, especially in reading, since schools are required to have students score proficient in Language Arts by 2014 according to NCLB. More importantly, it is crucial that parents understand the process in order to make educated decision for their child.

**Purpose of Graduate Project**

The purpose of the current study is to provide a resource to parents in making the appropriate educational decisions regarding their child’s education. In order to promote quality educational and assessment practices schools need to focus on pre-referral intervention practices (Rhodes, et al., 2005). Prevention coupled with sound early intervention practices will reduce referrals for special education (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). This includes a referral process that distinguishes struggling learners from students who are likely to have disabilities. In addition, school psychologists who are qualified bilingual assessors and who use appropriate instruments and procedures for ELLs can provide accurate data about native language and English performance, as well as achievement. Moreover, they can make recommendations regarding suitable accommodations and modifications for instruction. All of these considerations are
important for ELLs to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). It is a parent’s right and responsibility to be informed of the rights their child has to receive the supports they need and to be placed in the most appropriate setting.

Population

The target population for the RTI handbook is Latino parents of English Language Learner students whose child attends a school that incorporates the Response to Intervention model as an assessment and intervention model for special education. The research shows that there is a clear need for parents to be educated beyond any information received during a brief parent conference. A more informed parent is better suited to make more educated choices for their child. There is widespread agreement that parent-school partnerships are essential to improving educational outcomes for all students (Reschly & Hosp, 2004). Research also shows that minority students are disproportionately placed into special education at disproportionate rates. The number for English Language Learners, particularly Latinos in special education is significantly higher than Caucasian and Asian students (Pugh, 2005).

Limitations of the Project

It is important to note the limitations of this project, as well as the limitations of RTI. The handbook is a resource for parents to use so they can understand RTI and the process of assessment, as well as, intervention and prevention. The parent will have to take the initiative to want to read the handbook to be better informed of decisions to be made. It does not serve as a how-to guide for the parent to move their child through the special education process.
The RTI process has the potential to limit the amount of academic failure that any student experiences and to increase the accuracy of special education evaluations. Using RTI could also reduce the number of children who are mistakenly identified as having learning disabilities when their learning problems are actually due to language and/or cultural differences or lack of adequate instruction. Information and data gathered via the RTI process can lead to earlier identification of children who are struggling academically, as well as those children who may have a specific learning disability (SLD) and in need of special education and related services.

Definitions

*English Language Learners (ELL):* Children who come from a home in which a language other than English is primarily used for communication (Gopaul-McNicol & Thomas-Presswood, 1998).

*SLD:* Specific Learning Disability comes from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

*Response to Intervention (RTI):* A problem solving model in which students’ education is supplemented with research-based interventions based on their academic need (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005).

*Tier I of RTI:* Provides comprehensive, universal, general education curriculum provided to all students in each grade level (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005).

*Tier II of RTI:* Includes those students who did not demonstrate academic progress in Tier I. Students in Tier II require more intensive and specific instruction than that provided in Tier I (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005).
Tier III of RTI: Represents those students not successful in Tier II. Students in Tier III may be referred for a psycho-educational assessment and/or require more intensive intervention (Brown- Chidsey & Steege, 2005).
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of my project is to provide a resource for parents of English Language Learners whose child is in the process of identification of special education. The literature review will cover the importance of Latino parent involvement, English Language Learners in special education, and pedagogy for better teaching methods.

*Reading Difficulties for English Language Learners*

The number of English Language Learners is significantly increasing in schools throughout the United States. English Language Learners face many difficulties in school, including acquiring the spoken language of English, as well as, the ability to read in English. Students who enter school with a primary language other than English score below proficiency on various tests of academic achievement. Over 50% score in the bottom third in reading or math (Haager, 2007). Reading programs that have a strong research foundation gives hope to such a dismal reality in schools throughout the United States. Response to Intervention can assist educators to properly identify students who are in need of special education services and students who need more intense interventions. English Language Learners are often placed into special education, however, it is unclear whether their reading problems are due to a learning disability or language acquisition (Artiles, Barletta, & Klinger, 2006).

*Latino Parent Participation in Response to Intervention*

Parent involvement in the process of Response to Intervention is critical. There is widespread agreement that parent-school partnerships are essential to improving educational outcomes for all students (Reschly & Hosp, 2004).
As the largest and the fastest growing minority group in the United States, Latinos are projected to constitute a quarter of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). The Latino population is growing at unprecedented rates in the United States, and the rate is growing even faster for children younger than the age of 18. In fact, Latinos under the age of 18 constitute the largest minority child population in the nation (Morse, 2003). What this means for public schools is that there is a larger number of Latino children with special needs meeting eligibility for and requiring special education services.

In addition to the challenges posed by their disabilities, this growing number of children face many other challenges, including communicating in two languages and accommodating two cultures (Rueda, Monzo, Shapiro, Gomez, & Blacher, 2005). More than ever, Latino families and teachers have to collaborate for the benefit of children. Understanding the concerns, needs, and priorities of Latino families with children with special needs and successfully addressing those concerns is a critical necessity.

Most Latino parents want to be involved in the educational decision-making process of their children, but may not feel invited to participate in the process or perceive hidden messages from school personnel that their participation is not valued or welcomed (Salas, 2004). Generally speaking, involving families in the education of their children is valued by schools. Parent involvement is supported by the field of special education through its basic processes, which includes parental consent, informed consent, and the establishment of an individualized education program (IEP) written for the child. Federal laws mandate a collaborative relationship between the home and the school by referring to families as “partners,” “protectors,” and “advocators” for their children (Zetlin,
Padron, & Wilson, 1996). Ideally, the family is to be considered an equal and significant partner with the school, each contributing its own expertise. Conversely, the equity and advocacy expectations for family participation in the special education decision-making process can be in direct conflict with the values and beliefs held by many families from culturally diverse backgrounds (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000). In some cultures, this can make it difficult for many families to engage the school in ways that it encourages and expects.

Latinos share a common language; however, they are a diverse group of individuals with a variety of cultural values, beliefs, ideals, and customs. Latinos can be considered distinct populations that differ in demography and history (Suarez-Orozco, 1987), however, they also share many similar cultural aspects. A tremendous importance is placed on family for most Latinos. One of the most distinctive and enduring cultural characteristics of this ethnic group is a strong sense of “familism” (Cortes, 1995). In addition, most Latinos hold formal education in high regard, which is ultimately used for economic mobility, as well as, increased levels of motivation and involvement (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). One of the countless challenges for the Latino family, is the task of parenting a child in a bicultural environment—the home culture and the culture of the larger society. Parents may struggle to help promote feelings of self-worth within the home culture while at the same time having to develop skills in the other, newer culture (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994).

Latino families react differently to having a child with special needs. In a study conducted by Skinner, Bailey, Correa, and Rodriguez (1999), most Latino mothers viewed having a child with special needs as bringing about positive transformations in
their lives. Families have also described having a child with special needs as an opportunity to grow to be good parents and valuable individuals.

Problems with Status Models

Response to Intervention (RTI) is viewed as an alternative pathway for making special education eligibility decisions. Prior to Response to Intervention students went through a long pre-referral route. By the time the students received help, typically be qualifying for special education, their skills were too delayed for them to catch up (Donovan & Cross, 2002). The IQ/achievement discrepancy model for making special education eligibility decisions is known as a “wait to fail model” (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003; Mellard, 2004), because students typically have to wait several years before they can meet the criteria to qualify for special education. In the traditional refer-test place model, students went through a pre-referral process, formal referral or request for special education assessment, and assessment prior to being considered for special education programs. Even then, many students would not qualify for special education, and if they did qualify, they were too far behind to catch up.

The RTI Model

RTI can facilitate the assessment and intervention process for English language learners in a number of ways. First, with the use of research-based practices, RTI has the potential to affect change for English language learners. When RTI is implemented properly, English language learners will have appropriate interventions, as opposed to being improperly placed in special education. Regardless of their educational setting, all English language learners need culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction, (Batsche, et al., 2005). A student’s cultural background and experiences and their
language proficiency must be considered in instruction and interventions (in both English and the native language) for instruction to be suitable. Second, RTI focuses on early identification and intervention. In this model, children receive the support or remediation they need at the first sign that a problem exists. They do not have to go through a pre-referral process to qualify for special education. Third, the use of progress monitoring allows educators to make decisions about how best to help a student based on the data gathered via formative evaluation.

Response to Intervention is a multi-tiered approach where each tier provides interventions that are gradually increased and intensified. Response to Intervention can positively impact English Language Learners in that it requires the use of research-based practices based on an individual’s needs (Artiles, Barletta, & Klinger, 2006).

At Tier I all students receive high quality, research-based instruction. Tier I is designed to provide core instructional and curricular interventions to all students within their classroom. Interventions at this level are extensions of the existing curriculum and involve minimal individual support to the student (Gresham, 2002). Students may also receive behavioral supports at this tier if needed. At-risk students are provided additional instructional support within the general education setting (Fuchs et al., 2003).

Students who do not make progress at Tier I are provided more intensive support through more intensive interventions at Tier II. Tier II interventions may be provided within the general education or students may be pulled out for their support. Students receive intervention or instruction in small group settings which may be provided by a specialist, such as a Title I teacher, reading specialist, or special education teacher. These interventions are usually provided outside of the classroom by professionals trained in the
specific area of instruction along with collaboration of the children’s families. A Tier II student who fails to reach their instructional targets may be referred for Tier III support (Fuchs et al., 2003). Depending on the model, Tier III may include assessment and placement into special education. Once a child is found eligible for special education, their instruction and supports are typically provided in a small group and/or individual format. Furthermore, these children will also have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed as part of their classification into special education. All of the interventions used within an RTI framework should be empirically-based and been shown to be effective with particular skill deficits and have a high probability of producing change for a large number of students. On the other hand, a student who makes expected progress at Tier II may be moved back to Tier I while their academic progress is being closely monitored.

As previously stated, students that need intensive individualized interventions, either in small groups or one-on-one, move into Tier III or special education. Several factors need to be considered when assessing whether or not a student should receive Tier III support. These factors include: (1) how many rounds of Tier II instruction has the student had; (2) documentation of a lack of progress from previous interventions; and (3) student success due to receiving an appropriate curriculum. The students’ home language when given the assessment also must be taken into consideration (Fuchs et al., 2003). Diagnostic assessments may be conducted in order to design instruction that will target the student’s skill deficits. Diagnostic assessment is a form of testing that is conducted both prior to and during teaching and learning to determine what existing knowledge, skills, attitudes, interests, and/or needs the student or group of students have. RTI
focuses on literacy and ELLs, with and without disabilities, are not receiving appropriate literacy instruction (Artiles & Klinger, 2006).

Benefits of the RTI Model

There are several positive aspects with Response to Intervention. First, the screening and monitoring of all students allows the comparison of students to other comparable peers in their cohort rather than to national norms (Batsche, et al., 2005). Second, RTI shifts the focus from special education eligibility to providing effective instruction to all students at the first sign of need by concentrating on student results, rather than deficits (Fletcher et al., 2004). Third, a strong collaboration between educators provides numerous opportunities for professional dialogue, and peer coaching to name a few. Fourth, is that students who are struggling can be indentified early and supported before it’s too late to catch up. Fifth, it will also reduce the number of students referred to special education.

By providing assistance earlier to struggling students, RTI has the potential to eliminate the “wait to fail” aspect of the IQ/achievement discrepancy model, where it is difficult to identify students with learning disabilities until third grade due or later due to the inability to demonstrate a discrepancy between ability and achievement when students are younger (Fuchs et al., 2003). The number of students in special education will decrease with the RTI model as it will provide the early intervention that many “at-risk” students need to catch up with their peers and avoid special education identification (Fuchs et al., 2003). Fletcher et al. (2004) report that RTI improves the academic performance of all students, documents lack of academic achievement, provides early identification of “at-risk” students, immediately provides intervention, reduces
inappropriate referrals to special education, provides better structure to the pre-referral process, and eliminates the dependency on teacher referral for the identification of “at-risk” students, which can be biased.

Challenges of the RTI Model

There is an inherent vagueness in the RTI model and large-scale implementation of the RTI model presents many challenges, especially at the secondary intervention level (Tier II). According to Fuchs, Fuchs, and Hollenbeck (2007), the assumption is that RTI can differentiate between two explanations for low achievement: poor instruction vs. disability.

Some of RTI’s challenges lie in Tier II. Compton (2006) posed many concerns regarding Tier II interventions by asking, “Which instructional approach or method, should be used?” “In which setting should it be used?” “For what period of time?” “By which type of teacher would have the greatest impact on well-defined elements of reading?” “For which children?” “For how long?” “For what reasons?” To be effective, interventions must be implemented at a sufficient intensity and for an adequate amount of time (Marston, 2005).

English Language Learners

The acquisition of developing literacy skills is a major cognitive challenge for children. Many children at any age and population will fail to obtain age-appropriate reading levels. The number for English Language Learners, particularly Latinos, is significantly higher than Whites and Asian students (Pugh, 2005).

Spoken language develops prior to the attainment of reading and writing. Brain organization for spoken language is a biological specialization, while reading is not
(Pugh, 2005). Different languages have similar neurobiological foundations; however, Valaki et al (2004) used magneto-encephalography (MEG) to compare Spanish, English, and Mandarin speakers when performing a spoken word processing task. All three groups showed left hemisphere activation patterns, but Chinese speakers showed greater right hemisphere contributions. The authors of this study attribute the differences to the increased demands on prosodic coding in tonal languages (Valaki et al., 2004). This research is significant because it helps to shed light on differentiating between reading disabilities in ELLs and congenital origins of reading difficulties (Pugh, 2005).

Differences between English Language Learners and monolingual children learning to read English are likely to become evident in areas such as rate of acquisitions. The differences in reading ability have been found through neuroimaging studies of alphabetic languages involving left hemisphere cortical regions, including occipitotemporal, temporoparietal, and inferior frontal networks (Pugh, 2005). More research will help to decipher reading disability amongst English Language Learners and monolingual students. This relates to RTI because RTI can identify students who struggle with reading ability.

Several studies have been conducted to examine the characteristics of English Language Learners identified for special education. One such study was conducted by Artiles, Rueda, Salazar, and Higareda in 2005 on subpopulations of English Language Learners in 11 urban districts in California during the 1998-1999 school years. English Language Learners who tested as limited in both their native language and in English demonstrated the highest rates of identification for special education. This study also found an overrepresentation in fifth grade through high school for English Language
Learners placed in special education. Artiles et al. (2005) concluded that more research needs to be conducted on the subgroups’ characteristics for English Language Learners, particularly for students who test as limited in multiple languages.

Barrera (2003) combined curriculum-based measurement (CBM) and dynamic assessment for assessing English Language Learners for possible learning disabilities. He found that English Language Learners with learning disabilities scored lower on all measures of academic achievement than English Language Learners without learning disabilities and bilingual students, and that they showed growth after the dynamic assessment procedures. These findings give insight on the characteristics of adolescent English Language Learners with learning disabilities.

Many educators lack the proper training and credentialing to teach English Language Learners. Arreaga-Meyer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996) observed the opportunities to learn that were given to English Language Learners in the general education class. They found minimal attention being paid to language development. Teachers did not engage students effectively. They emphasized lectures and a whole-class format of teaching. Arreaga-Meyer and Perdomo-Rivera (1996) concluded that what had the most impact on students’ academic behaviors and language use was instructional environments and teacher variables.

In one bilingual special education class, Lopez-Reyna (1996) observed the class transition from a skills-based approach to a whole-language model. The students completed worksheets and focused on discrete skills during skills-based instruction. Students focused more on making meaning and were much more actively involved in learning during the whole-language class. The students were taught comprehension
strategies and applied them. This study shows how students seem proficient in one instructional setting but not in another.

In order to determine ELLs response to intervention, Linan-Thompson, Cirino, and Vaughn (2007) examined first grade students and the use of RTI amongst English Language Learners that were identified as being at risk for reading problems. The students were provided with extensive and systematic intervention for seven months. Three different approaches were used to identify a practical means for determining RTI: benchmark, growth, and discrepancy. The study included 142 students from two sites and four effective bilingual schools in Texas. To ensure that low achievement in English was not due to a lack of speaking and reading the language, students were screened in both English and Spanish. The study found that 75% to 80% of intervention students did no pass any of the criteria. Thirteen students met the criteria when tested in 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade. The study did not yield results in the effectiveness of RTI. The results indicated that using RTI increased student performance in some areas, but not others. The gains students made were not significant enough to reduce the gap between their reading performance and grade-level expectations (Linan-Thompson, et al., 2007).

Educators and researchers have questioned if emerging readers who are English Language Learners struggle because of language acquisition or a learning disability. Artiles, Barletta, and Klinger (2006) conducted a review of literature regarding language acquisition and learning disabilities in English Language Learners. What they found is that more research is needed to facilitate an understanding of characteristics, as well as the development, and learning processes of ELLs who struggle to learn to read or who have a learning disability (Artiles, et al., 2006). More research is warranted to determine
which interventions are associated with improved outcomes for English Language Learners.

**Pedagogy**

Richardson (2003) promotes the use of Constructivism as an effective way to promote academic achievement. She states that a constructivist is one who teaches for understanding. The approach is student-centered and focuses on the goal of student’ development of deep understanding. She promotes the use of Explicit comprehension strategies using modeling and graphic organizers. Active literacy tasks where the construction of meaning occurs support this pedagogy.

Lev Vygotsky believed that the adults in a child’s life foster cognitive development in a systematic manner (Ormrod, 2003). Vygotsky identified two kinds of abilities that characterize children’s skills at various points of development. They are actual developmental level and level of potential development. In the actual development level, tasks are performed independently. In the level of potential development tasks are performed with a more competent individual (i.e., peer, teacher). Tasks that children cannot perform independently but can perform with help is called zone of proximal development (ZPD). Educators can use scaffolding, which is a support mechanism that helps a learner successfully perform a task within their zone of proximal development, as a means for teaching. English Language Learners in specific can work in their ZPD to become fluent readers, which will positively impact their reading comprehension.

Instructional strategies are effective when implemented properly. Several strategies need to be implemented to make significant gains. One strategy is that ELL students need teachers to use effective instructional techniques. Another strategy is to
engage students in interactive and engaging vocabulary and comprehension development. Lastly, providing high-quality explicit instruction in phonemic awareness and decoding is reported to be effective (Hager, 2007).

Researchers suggest that instruction should be evidence-based, explicitly taught, the curriculum should include a wide scope and sequence of reading skills. Direct instruction is a program that does just that. Gunn, Biglan, Smolowski, and Ary (2000) found that after two years of small-group instruction with Reading Mastery and Corrective Reading, the experimental group outperformed the control group in areas such as letter identification, fluency, reading vocabulary, and comprehension. These findings show that a systematic curriculum that is used for intervention for English Language Learners and non-English Language Learners is crucial (Gunn, Biglan, et al., 2000). Kamps, et al., (2007) found that the use of a balanced literacy intervention for ELLs in addition to primary reading instruction resulted in higher gains for ELLs.

**Language Support for English Language Learners**

English Language Learners possess a myriad of linguistic concerns that need to be addressed in the classroom in order academic success with reading comprehension to occur (August & Shanahan, 2006). The California Department of Education developed the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) given once a year to determine a student’s English proficiency level. The test includes listening, speaking, reading, and writing assessments. The results are used to classify students into performance levels ranging from beginning to advanced. They determine whether a student can be reclassified from Limited English Proficient (LEP) to Fluent English Proficient (FEP). In addition, the state provides English Language Development (ELD)
standards that correlate with five levels of language proficiency and are designed to supplement the English Language Arts standards.

Response to Intervention assumes that all students are provided with appropriate instruction and that all students are provided an equal opportunity to learn. This is a problem for English language Learners. Not all English Language Learners with and without disabilities receive appropriate literacy instruction. Less than 20 percent of teachers are certified to teach English Language Learners (Fuchs, 2003). Most special education teams making decisions for English Language Learners may lack training and experience in distinguishing language difference from a learning disability (Fuchs, 2003). This is why it is imperative for English Language Learners to receive instruction that is culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Summary

Response to Intervention is not the answer to the disproportionate number of minority students inaccurately placed into special education. Rather, it is a model used for prevention and intervention. RTI provides educators, parents, and other support staff true data and gives insight into what instructional strategies are working for each individual child. A well implemented, research-based RTI process promises to offer earlier, more relevant help for students at risk for learning disabilities and provide critical information about the instructional needs of the student, which can be used to create effective educational interventions. Parents may not be accustomed to approaching learning problems from a problem-solving model. They may think that a one-time decision is necessary rather than a series of decisions based on progress monitoring of performance. Parents must be part of the special education process from the start. RTI
does not replace special education, even if a child is in one of the tiers. Many students may be successful in the lower tiers of RTI and may not need further or more intensive interventions, however, some students eventually need special education placement. If parents have been knowledgeable about the process from the beginning, the transition into special education services can be easier. Educating parents in RTI may also reduce misunderstandings regarding special education decisions that can take place.
CHAPTER 3

PROJECT AUDIENCE

Introduction

The purpose of the handbook is to provide parents with easy to understand terminology relating to RTI. The handbook will also explain in a step-by-step process what their child will experience through RTI. Since research shows that a better informed parent is better at making educational decisions, this handbook will be an invaluable resource. The handbook can also serve as a resource for staff wishing to learn more about the RTI process. New teachers can also benefit by using the RTI handbook.

Project Development

When a parent has a child with a perceived learning disability, often times, parents are not well informed of their rights as parents. Quite often, they rely on the teacher or school to make the best choice for their child, when in fact it is the parent’s responsibility to ensure the most appropriate type of education for their child.

Intended Audience

The project is intended for parents that have English Language Learners students. It is designed to be an easy-to-read handbook to inform and educate parents. It is crucial that the parent and teacher communicate in order to make the best decisions for the child. The handbook can also be used for support staff and new teachers in order for them to understand the process of RTI.

Personal Qualifications

The program is intended for use by parents who are willing to put forth the effort to further their understanding of how their child will be placed into a Tier from RTI that
will provide certain interventions per stage. The program is to be used as a resource that can help parents become more aware of what RTI can do to help their child succeed in the classroom. This guide will also help parents understand that because their child is placed into a Tier, it does not mean that their child is in special education.

*Environment and Equipment*

The handbook will be an easy to read 14-page document. It will be in English and Spanish, and can easily be translated into any other target population’s home language. Unlike a presentation, the handbook provides the freedom for the parent to read at their leisure. For many parents of minority students, taking time from a busy day of work to attend a workshop/training is not feasible. The handbook will be easily available by request by counselors, the teacher, administrators, and front office. The handbook will also be accessible on-line via a school’s website. It can be downloaded, printed, or accessible via computer.

*Project Outline*

**Section 1: What is Response to Intervention?**

This section will give a definition of Response to Intervention. It will also explain what RTI is not.

**Section 2: Three tiers to RTI**

This section will explain what happens at each tier of RTI. It will also give ideas for the parent to help their child at home.

**Section 3: Additional resources**

This section will provide parents with additional on-line resources to help further understand the RTI process.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Evaluation

The handbook will first be evaluated by parents of English Language Learners. A Likert-scale evaluation will be included in each handbook and will be turned in to a member of the Student Success Team (SST). The team will collect the evaluation sheets to demonstrate the effectiveness of the handbook. The handbook will also be evaluated by teachers. Since the handbook can also be a resource for teachers, they will also complete the same Likert-scale evaluation, as well as a questionnaire about the effectiveness of the handbook for parents. The teacher will have the opportunity to comment on the effectiveness in parent education that the handbook will provide.

Recommendations

Educators and parents alike must continue on-going education regarding students with learning disabilities. RTI is generally used as a school-wide prevention model and not specifically as an approach used to identify students who have learning disabilities. In addition, schools’ use of RTI tends to be focused on the early elementary grades and limited to the academic area of reading, with some focus on early math. As schools attempt to develop RTI processes that address and strengthen other academic areas and focus on students beyond elementary school, little information or research on which to base such models is available. RTI alone is generally not sufficient to identify a learning disability. The information collected during the RTI process plays an important role in making decisions about student need and creates effective instructional plans; however,
additional information is needed to satisfy the evaluation requirements of IDEA and make a well-informed, individualized decision about each student.

The school's RTI leadership team can make educating and involving parents a part of the implementation process in the school. While the team develops and implements goals and programs related to RTI, school leaders should assess the process and conduct ongoing evaluations. The outcome will be that the school will educate and involve more parents and families in RTI. Not all parents will be active in the school or in the RTI initiative; however, the start will be a positive one.

Summary

Will English Language Learners who struggle to develop literacy and comprehension because of their limited proficiency in English improve in their assessment results? Research studies that have investigated intervention models with English Language Learners have shown positive results. Early intervention programs that combine phonological awareness and other reading activities with ESL strategies, such as Response to Intervention, may be the most promising, yet further research must be conducted. More research needs to be conducted in special education classrooms that serve culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

Parent involvement and education into the RTI process is critical. There is widespread agreement that parent-school partnerships are essential to improving educational outcomes for all students, including those with Learning Disabilities (LD).

When schools take steps to motivate parental involvement, they support parents’ effectiveness in helping their children learn. Similarly, when school systems attempt to
promote teacher and principal contributions to effective parental involvement, they support schools’ effectiveness in educating children.
REFERENCES


http://www.census.gov/popest/states/asrh/SC-EST2004-03.html

United States Department of Education. (nd.) *Office of language acquisition: Programs and initiatives.*


What is Response to Intervention? (RTI)

- RTI is a 3-tiered process of instruction that allows schools to identify struggling students early and provide appropriate instructional interventions. Early intervention means more chances for success and less need for special education services.
What RTI is NOT

- Special seating in classroom
- Shortened assignments
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Suspension
- Retention
- “More of the same” general classroom instruction

The 3 Tiers

- **Tier 3**
  Intense individual instruction 45-60 minutes/day

- **Tier 2**
  Targeted interventions for at-risk students 30 minutes/day

- **Tier 1**
  All students receive quality instruction from qualified, knowledgeable teachers 90 minutes/day
Tier 1: Screening and Differentiated Classroom Instruction

• In Tier 1, the classroom teacher delivers scientific research-based reading instruction to all students. There are five essential reading areas that are emphasized in the core reading curriculum:
  1. Phonemic awareness
  2. Phonics
  3. Fluency
  4. Vocabulary
  5. Comprehension

Tier 1: Screening and Differentiated Classroom Instruction

• At Tier 1 all students are screened on their basic reading skills. A variety of assessments may be used to determine which children may be at risk for reading difficulty.
What you can do with your child in Tier 1

- Read to and with your child every day
- Obtain a library card and visit the library often
- Ask your child about his/her school day
- Monitor and help with homework
- Ask for a conference if you notice that your child is experiencing difficulty
- Praise your child for good work and progress.

Tier 2: Intervention

- Tier 2 focuses on students who do not achieve the minimum levels of satisfactory reading performance based on screening results. In Tier 2, students receive 30 additional minutes of reading intervention in addition to the 90-minute core reading program, to small groups of 3-5 children who need help with similar skills. Your child will be taught by teachers, such as Title I reading specialists, special education teachers or contracted teachers, to work with students on specific skills to catch them up on grade level reading skills. The main purpose of Tier 2 instruction is to teach important skills that may be missing and help the child master grade level skills.
Tier 2: Intervention

Tier 2 interventions are recommended to be implemented for a minimum of two 8 to 12 week periods, but could be longer depending on student progress toward benchmarks. Some children may not need this additional support after the intervention. Other children may not respond as hoped and may need even more support, which is provided in Tier 3.

What you can do with your child in Tier 2

- Make a referral to the Instructional Intervention Team called the Student Success Team (SST)
- Attend team meetings
- Suggest intervention strategies
- Implement and reinforce specific strategies at home
- Share your observations of what helps your child to learn.
**Tier 3: Intensive Intervention**

- At Tier 3, students might receive up to an additional 60 minutes of intervention each day in addition to the general education core reading program. Instruction at Tier 3 is even more intense and explicit than at Tier 2. Group sizes are smaller, one to three students, so that individual needs can be addressed by the interventionist.

- Tier 3 services are not restricted to special education services. Some children who need this level of support may be eligible for special education because they are determined to have specific learning disabilities. Other children simply have not had the opportunity to learn, such as those with extended absences in the early grades when beginning reading skills were being taught, and need more time and support to master the reading process.
**What you can do with your child in Tier 3**

- Maintain regular communication with your child’s teacher
- Consent to evaluate your child for special education
- Actively participate in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings if your child is determined to have a disability and is eligible for special education
- Understand your rights as the parent of a child with a disability

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**Additional Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Web Site</th>
<th>Resource for Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Association of School Psychologists</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nasponline.org/index.aspx">http://www.nasponline.org/index.aspx</a></td>
<td>Provides basic coverage for parents about RTI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Center on Response to Intervention</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rti4success.org">http://www.rti4success.org</a></td>
<td>Has helpful handouts to review including <em>The ABC's of RTI: A Guide for Parents</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI Action Network- National Center for Learning Disabilities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rtinetwork.org">http://www.rtinetwork.org</a></td>
<td>Provides a variety of links, including podcasts for teachers and parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrightslaw</td>
<td><a href="http://wrightslaw.com/info/rti/index.htm">http://wrightslaw.com/info/rti/index.htm</a></td>
<td>Includes information for teachers, parents, including articles that explain RTI to parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Que es respuesta a intervencion (RTI)?

• Respuesta a intervencion es un proceso con 3- gradas de instrucción que permite a las escuelas a identificar estudiantes que estan batallando tempranamente y proeve intervenciones de instrucción apropiadas. Intervencion temprana quiere decir que hay mas oportunidades para tener exito y menos necesidad para necesitar servicios de educacion especial.
Lo que RTI NO es

- Asiento especial en la clase
- Tareas cortas
- Conferencias de padre- maestro/a
- Suspensión
- Retención
- “Mas de los mismo” instrucción de la clase general

Las 3 Gradas

Grada 3
Instrucción individual intensa de 45-60 minutos al día

Grada 2
Intervención apuntada para alumnos en riesgo para 30 minutos por día

Grada 1
Todos los alumnos reciben instrucción de calidad de maestros/as cualificados por 90 minutos al día
En Grada 1, el maestro del salón enseña usando estrategias de lectura basadas en investigación para todos los alumnos. Hay cinco áreas de lectura que están acentuadas en el plan de estudio de lectura:  
1. Conocimiento de la lectura fonética  
2. La fonética  
3. Fluidez  
4. Vocabulario  
5. Comprensión

En la Grada 1 todos los alumnos son examinados por destrezas básicas de lectura. Una variedad de examenes pueden ser usados para determinar que alumnos están a riesgo de tener dificultad con la lectura.
Que puede hacer usted para su hijo/a en la Grada 1:

• Lea con su hijo/a diario
• Obtenga una tarjeta de la biblioteca y visite frecuentemente
• Pregúntele a su hijo/a de su día en la escuela.
• Monitorie y ayúde con la tarea.
• Pregúnte por una conferencia si nota que su hijo/a esta teniendo dificultad.
• Alabánselo a si hijo/a por su trabajo bien hecho y progreso.

Grada 2: Intervención

• Grada 2 se enfoca en estudiantes que no logran los niveles mínimos de leer satisfactoriamente en los rendimientos de lectura basados en los resultados de los exámenes. En la Grada 2, estudiantes reciben 30 minutos adicionales de intervención de lectura en adición de los 90 minutos del programa de lectura, de grupos pequeños de 3-5 niños que necesitan ayuda con destrezas similares. Su hijo/a recibirá instrucción de maestros, como la especialista de lectura de el Título I, maestro/a de educación especial o maestro/a contratado para trabajar con estudiantes con destrezas específicas para poder ayudarlos alcanzar destrezas de lectura apropiadas a nivel de grado. El propósito principal de la Grada 2 de instrucción es para enseñar destrezas importantes que faltan y para ayudar al alumno lograr destrezas del grado.
**Grada 2: Intervención**

- Las intervenciones de Grada 2 son recomendadas de ser implementadas por un mínimo de dos periodos de 8 a 12 semanas, pero puede ser más largo dependiendo en el progreso de los estudiantes en sus exámenes. Unos alumnos no necesitan esta ayuda adicional después de la intervención. Otros alumnos no responden como se espera y necesitarán más ayuda que será proveída en la Grada 3.

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**Qué puede hacer con su hijo/a con en la Grada 2**

- Puede referir al alumno al Equipo de Intervención de Instrucción llamados el Equipo de Éxito para el Alumno (SST).
- Puede asistir juntas del equipo
- Puede sugerir estrategias de intervención
- Implementar y reenforsar estrategias específicas en la casa
- Comparta sus observaciones con las cosas que ayudan a su hijo/a aprender.
Grada 3: Intervencion Intensiva

- En la Grada, los estudiantes pueden recibir hasta 60 minutos de intervencion cada día en adición del programa de lectura en la educación general. La instrucción de la Grada 3 es más intensa y explícito que la de la Grada 2. Los grupos son más pequeños, uno a tres alumnos, para que las necesidades individuales puedan ser dirigidas por la intervencionista.

La Grada 3: Intervención Intensiva

- Los servicios de la Grada 3 no son restrinjidas a los servicios de educación especial. Unos alumnos que necesitan este nivel de apoyo son elegibles para servicios de educación especial porque están determinados de tener necesidades de aprendizaje. Otros alumnos simplemente no han tenido la oportunidad de aprender, como los alumnos que tienen faltas excesivas en los grados primarios cuando están aprendiendo las destrezas para leer, y necesitan mas tiempo para aprender el proceso de leer.
Que puedes hacer con su hijo/a en la Grada 3

- Mantener comunicación regular con el/la maestro/a de su hijo/a.
- Dar su consentimiento para evaluar su hijo/a para educación especial.
- Participar activamente en la junta del IEP si es determinado que su hijo/a tiene una descapacidad y es elegible para educación especial.
- Conocer sus derechos como padre de un alumno con una descapacidad.

Recursos adicionales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organización</th>
<th>Domicilio del Internet</th>
<th>Recursos para padres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RTI Action Network-National Center for Learning Disabilities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rtinetwork.org">http://www.rtinetwork.org</a></td>
<td>Provee una variedad de links, incluye podcasts para maestros y padres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wrightslaw</td>
<td><a href="http://wrightslaw.com/info/rti/index.htm">http://wrightslaw.com/info/rti/index.htm</a></td>
<td>Incluye información para maestros, padres, incluyendo artículos que explican RTI a los padres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

RTI Handbook Evaluation

Please take a few minutes and respond after you have used the RTI Handbook. Your input is greatly appreciated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I know what Response to Intervention is</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I know what Response to Intervention is not</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I know in each Tier my child will receive differentiated instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I am aware of what each Tier offers to my child</td>
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<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I know what I can do at home with my child to help my improve child</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I am likely to use the additional resources provided to further my knowledge</td>
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Thank you for your time and input. Please return to the Counseling Office.