



Teamwork is the Secret to Implementing RTI

As a classroom teacher, I was not quite clear what Response to Intervention (RTI) was. It was just something else that I was required to do to meet the needs of my students, but could I do it successfully? The first thing I had to do was define what RTI was not. I used the What Works Clearinghouse provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/). The clearinghouse clarified for me that RTI was not an instructional program, educational initiative, or the first step to special education placement. So, what was I supposed to do now? I still had students who were not meeting the standards and needed intensive help with the mastery of grade level content.

Initially, I tried cooperative workgroups. You know—think, pair, and share! But because the students did not have peers who could model the level of proficiency that they needed to emulate, this strategy did not work well. When I looked at my class, I realized that only one to five percent of the students were on grade level. About 15 percent of them needed specific supports to meet the standards, but the rest of the class was failing. I told myself that I needed an intervention plan that would reduce the percentage of the students who were failing and increase the students who were performing at grade level.

I needed to answer these questions:

1. What were my students' learning styles?
2. What level of achievement was needed for students to experience immediate success?
3. What reasonable and measurable objectives could be written to produce the kind of growth that would build students' self-esteem and empower them to continue the journey toward academic success?
4. What prerequisite skills would the students need to have to master the content?
5. What summative, formative, or authentic assessment data could I use to determine which deficits should be addressed immediately?
6. What building level personnel were available to support me with this process?

In the school district where I work, students are required to take formative assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. The test identified the students' current levels of functioning, the specific skills that needed to be addressed immediately, and the skills that students should work toward.

Teachers cannot meet the burden of proof for RTI alone. It requires a team effort. That is the most important lesson that I learned about RTI. I met with the guidance staff, school psychologists, literacy coach, and a special educator to determine if there were specific skills sets that I needed to learn to meet the needs of my students. The teams looked at the answers to my questions and helped me to develop a plan of action for the students. The school psychologist looked at the data and identified some prerequisite skills that the students needed. The literacy coach provided specific balanced literacy strategies that developed listening, writing, speaking, and reading comprehension skills. The special educator provided insight into teaching using the various modalities for the students in the classroom. She suggested mixing the types of instructional delivery—verbal, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile.

The secret to implementing RTI is this: it is not a process that teachers should be expected to carry out alone. It requires a team effort. When the team works together, students' lives are significantly changed by the thoughtful interventions that are deployed to meet their educational needs.

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