16
Monitoring Response to General Education Instruction

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The purpose of this chapter is to describe a critical component of the response-to-intervention (RTI) process: monitoring student response to general education instruction. First, we discuss the importance of the role of general educators in monitoring students' response to intervention. Second, we provide the conceptual framework for an RTI model within which general educators play a critical role in identifying students at risk and monitoring their progress during classroom-based instruction. Third, we describe specific approaches for each of the steps included in this model. We then illustrate this process using a case example from research. We end with a summary of recommendations for general educators, and emphasize the need for further research if RTI is to be adopted as part of the special education identification process.

16.1 Importance of Monitoring Student Response to General Education Instruction

Current educational reforms place increasing emphasis on the role of general educators in ensuring that *all* students progress toward high academic standards. Provisions of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002) stress that schools must work to close achievement gaps, placing heavy emphasis on evidence-based instruction, early intervention, and accountability. Under NCLB, schools must show that all students are making "adequate yearly progress" as determined by state-defined measures of academic achievement. Schools that do not meet accountability standards may face tough sanctions.

The recent reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA, 2004) aligns closely with these standards-based reforms. IDEA also emphasizes early, preventative intervention and accountability. Further, IDEA allows local education agencies to use RTI in place of traditional discrepancy models for identifying students with learning disabilities. This approach involves early identification of students at risk, progress monitoring, and implementation of increasingly intensive levels of intervention when best practices in the general education classroom do not appear beneficial. Only those students who do not make adequate progress despite intervention continue on to special education referral.

If schools and districts are to adopt RTI as a way to address student learning difficulties, then general educators must be prepared to play a pivotal role in this process. They will likely work with a team responsible for administering and using screening data to identify students at risk of academic failure, implementing instruction to maximize those students' likelihood of making progress in the general classroom, and monitoring students' progress to evaluate the effectiveness of instruction and decide when a student may be in need of more intensive intervention. All of this will require general educators to make data-based decisions using sound assessment practices, implement effective classroom instructional practices with integrity, and differentiate instruction for students at risk of failure.

16.2 Conceptual Framework

A major assumption of RTI is that it is necessary to establish that academic difficulties experienced by the child cannot be attributed to lack of effective instruction (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998; Heller, Holtzman, and Messick, 1982; Vellutino et al., 1996). Therefore, it is critical that the child has the opportunity to profit from generally effective instruction. If many students in the general education classroom are not making progress under existing instructional conditions, then a necessary first step is to put into place instructional practices that are beneficial to most students. However, if most students in the classroom are thriving academically, then one can infer that the instruction is generally effective and that the child who is not making sufficient progress requires more intensive or individualized instruction to address specific academic difficulties. Continued difficulties despite more intensive, individualized instruction targeting critical skill areas may indicate that a child requires special education services (Fuchs, 2003; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998; Vellutino et al., 1996).

Two general models of RTI have emerged from this assumption (see Fuchs, 2003). One model conceptualizes RTI as response to intensive, preventative intervention. In this model, students identified as at risk are immediately placed in a specialized intervention program provided in small groups by a specialist (e.g., Torgesen et al, 2001; Vellutino et al., 1996). Those who continue to perform at low levels or make very little growth despite intervention are deemed unresponsive to intervention and are candidates for special education.

The second RTI model is rooted in general education (Fuchs, 2003; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998; Speece, Case, and Molloy, 2003), in that high-quality general classroom instruction is provided to students at risk before the decision is made to implement more intensive intervention. This model relies on three critical assumptions. The first assumption is that academic outcomes vary across learners, such that some students will make more progress and achieve at higher levels than others. Hence, low-performing students may not necessarily be unresponsive to instruction: they may just fall at the lower end of the continuum of academic ability. This leads to the second assumption: If lower performing students are making good progress within general education instruction, then they are probably benefiting from that instruction. In such a case, no alternative interventions would seem necessary because it is unlikely that different instruction would yield better growth. On the other hand, in an environment in which most children are progressing, a low-performing student who is making little or no progress can be assumed to be unresponsive to general education instruction, and alternative instructional methods may be warranted.

The third assumption is that, if low performers are demonstrating little or no growth and a majority of their classmates are also demonstrating little or no growth, the adequacy of the general instruction should be questioned and steps to improve the overall quality of this instruction should be taken. Only when most students are making progress can decisions about individual responsiveness be made. In this chapter, we focus on monitoring student response to instruction as conceptualized by this second model, because it emphasizes effective instruction for all, reserving resources for more intensive instruction for students who are not benefiting from general instruction.

In the RTI model described in this chapter, progress monitoring occurs within increasingly intensive "tiers" of intervention, which should help establish whether a student's academic difficulties can be attributed to an underlying disability (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006). Tier 1 consists of general classroom instruction that at least reflects sound teaching practices, and at best consists of evidence-based instructional programs implemented with integrity and supported by strong professional development (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a). Tier 2 is provided to students for whom Tier 1 is not beneficial, as evidenced by inadequate growth within a set period (e.g., 8 to 10 weeks). Tier 2 is more intensive, in that it is provided in small groups, is conducted more frequently or for longer periods, includes explicit instruction targeting specific skill areas, and/or is delivered by a specialist (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a). Subsequent tiers are implemented with students for whom Tier 2 does not effect sufficient progress, are even more intensive, and may lead to special education referral or are provided *within* special education.

16.3 Approaches to Monitoring Response to General Education Instruction

Specific steps in the RTI process include (1) screening students to identify those at risk of failing to meet important academic standards, (2) monitoring those students' response to general education (Tier 1) instruction and (3) identifying students in need of more individualized or intensive (Tier 2) intervention. After identifying children in need of more intensive services, specific interventions within Tier 2 are selected and implemented, and response to the interventions is monitored. Within each of these steps, general educators play an important role that should be supported by special educators, school psychologists, and administrators. Below, we describe specific components of each step.

16.3.1 Step 1: Screening

In the proposed RTI framework, general educators are responsible for screening students to identify those at risk of failing to meet grade-level expectations (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a). Screening allows schools to quickly identify problems and intervene early, which increases the likelihood that academic difficulties will be successfully remediated (Juel, 1988; Francis, Shaywitz, Stuebing, Shaywitz, and Fletcher, 1996). Screening approaches vary, and may include the use of high-stakes assessments, standardized achievement tests, or other assessment tools, such as general outcome measures shown to predict achievement in important academic areas. Below, we briefly discuss each approach and the criteria for determining risk status.

16.3.1.1 High-Stakes Assessments

One screening option is for schools to use results obtained from high-stakes state or district assessments. High-stakes assessment data may be useful for at least two reasons. First, many of these tests have reasonable technical adequacy (e.g., Minnesota Department of Education, 2003). Second, the data are already available, as they are typically collected at the end of the school year. End-of-year data might be used the following fall by the next grade-level team. For example, fourth-grade teachers may use end-of-year third-grade test results to screen their incoming students.

Potential downfalls to using end-of-year high-stakes assessment data include the possibility that not all students will have taken the test in the spring. New students to a district may enter with results from different tests with different normative groups. Moreover, student skill levels may change over the summer in different ways (Cooper, Nye, Carlton, Lindsay, and Greathouse, 1996). For example, the effects of one student's summer experiences, such as hours of daily academic tutoring, could be positive academic growth, whereas the effects of another student's summer experiences, such as hours of daily video gaming, could be negative academic growth, or regression. For these reasons, screening data collected at the beginning of the school year may be a better choice. An alternate form of an end-of-year high-stakes test could be given to all students at the beginning of the school year; however, development of technically adequate alternate forms is resource intensive.

16.3.1.2 Standardized Achievement Tests

Alternatively, some norm-referenced standardized achievement tests, such as the *Woodcock–Johnson Achievement Battery–III* (Woodcock and Johnson, 1989) and the *Wechsler Individual Achievement Test–II* (Psychological Corporation, 2001), are reasonable choices for their technical adequacy and direct assessment of multiple skills within an academic domain (Fletcher, Francis, Morris and Lyon, 2005). However, a potential drawback to using standardized tests is that they are expensive, are often individually administered, and can require a substantial amount of training and time.

16.3.1.3 General Outcome Measures

Another screening alternative is the use of general outcome measures that sample a broad range of skills related to a given academic domain (Deno, Fuchs, Marston, and Shin, 2001) providing a global index of student proficiency (Deno, 1992). One of the most well-known, well-researched general outcome measurement approaches is curriculum-based measurement (CBM; Deno, 1985). CBM employs standardized administration and scoring methods that yield accurate, meaningful information about

student performance (Fuchs and Deno, 1991). Researchers have demonstrated criterion validity of CBM with widely used standardized assessments and state standards tests (e.g., Crawford, Tindal, and Stieber, 2001; Hosp and Fuchs, 2005; Marston, 1989; Stage and Jacobsen, 2001), as well as test–retest, alternate-form, and interrater reliability (e.g., Marston, 1989). Because CBM can produce a broad dispersion of scores across students of the same age, with rank orderings that correspond to important external criteria, it is a good candidate for use as a screening tool.

Another benefit of using CBM for screening is that it can be administered with relative ease and efficiency. For example, in reading, a 1-min timed oral reading task has been demonstrated to be a reliable and valid indicator of overall reading proficiency (Marston, 1989). CBM is also designed to be administered repeatedly, using alternate forms of equivalent difficulty (see Deno et al., 2001). Thus, CBM can be administered multiple times during the school year. A benefit to collecting screening data multiple times during the year is that schools may "catch" students who were not initially identified as at risk but who, as the year progresses, fail to make adequate growth and thus require more intensive intervention.

16.3.1.4 Criteria for Risk Status

In addition to selecting screening tools, criteria for risk status must be established. Currently, there is not a consensus regarding what these criteria should be. One approach involves using normative data to establish a percentile below which risk status is determined. For example, all students scoring below the 25th percentile may be considered at risk (Fletcher et al., 2005; Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a). A potential problem with this method is that, by definition, there will always be students who fall in the lowest percentile, and will thus always appear at risk, regardless of their performance level (Torgesen, 2000).

Alternatively, absolute performance levels, or benchmarks, may be used to determine risk status (e.g., Good, Simmons, and Kame'enui, 2001). For example, third-graders who score below the reading benchmark of 70 words read correctly per minute at the beginning of the school year may be considered at risk. Benchmarks may be based on national or local data, and can be determined by using inferential statistics to calculate scores that predict later success, such as meeting end-of-year academic standards or passing high-stakes tests (Hintze and Silberglitt, 2005; Good et al., 2001).

16.3.2 Step 2: Monitoring Progress to Tier 1 Instruction

16.3.2.1 Implementing Tier 1 Instruction

Within an RTI model rooted in general education, it is the responsibility of general educators to ensure that generally effective instruction is in place before a student may qualify for special education services (Fuchs, 2003; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998). In other words, the student must have received high-quality, evidence-based classroom instruction, referred to as Tier 1 instruction. We suggest the use of an evidence-based core curriculum, supplemented as needed with additional evidence-based strategies or programs.

A core curriculum is comprehensive, covering all necessary grade-level skills in an academic area. It contains lessons that meet short-term objectives that align with overall curricular goals, and thus meets the grade-level needs of the majority of students. Schools or individual teachers may also choose to implement supplemental instructional programs to emphasize critical skills addressed in the core curriculum. Supplemental programs should align with core curriculum objectives, provide students with practice or application of critical skills, and be supported by scientific evidence of their effectiveness.

"Evidence-based" refers to a practice for which scientific evidence obtained through research has shown positive effects on student outcomes. A school should consider adopting core curricula and supplemental programs that have undergone rigorous research and shown positive results. Peer-reviewed journals are a good source for identifying such practices. Within peer-reviewed journals, some studies more appropriately test instructional practices than others. Studies that use a group design with random assignment to intervention and comparison groups are currently considered the gold standard (e.g., Gersten et al., 2005). In determining whether to adopt a particular instructional program, schools should also be especially attentive to the population of students on whom the program was

evaluated, as well as the context in which it was implemented successfully (Klingner and Edwards, 2006). Just because a program is empirically supported does not ensure that it will be equally effective across different schools, classrooms, and students. Thus, attending to information about participants and settings included in the research should be central to decisions about which programs to implement.

Examples of instructional programs that do have substantial empirical support include direct instruction programs that emphasize student acquisition of basic academic skills, such as reading and math (Carnine, Silbert and Kame'enui, 1990; Stein, Silbert and Carnine, 1997). In addition, there is substantial support for peer-mediated instructional programs such as classwide peer tutoring (Delquadri, Greenwood, Whorton, Carta, and Hall, 1986) and peer-assisted learning strategies (PALS; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, and Simmons, 1997) that are designed to enhance critical skills and concepts taught in reading, mathematics, spelling, and content areas. Comprehensive reviews such as the report of the National Reading Panel (2000) and databases such as the What Works Clearinghouse (US Department of Education, 2002) provide summaries of other such programs that schools may consider using. Finally, schools can learn about core curricula and supplemental instruction from other schools with good academic outcomes. Morningside Academy is one example of a school where research-based instructional practices are applied system-wide and student achievement levels and growth rates are high (Johnson and Street, 2004).

16.3.2.2 Fidelity of Tier 1 Instruction

Once evidence-based, Tier 1 instruction is in place, the integrity with which it is implemented, or fidelity, must be monitored (Fletcher et al., 2005). If Tier 1 instruction is implemented poorly and several students in the classroom fail to progress toward grade-level expectations, then the assumption that generally effective instruction is in place is compromised. To assess fidelity, an outside observer directly observes specific, operationally defined teacher and student behaviors based on a task analysis of the instructional program. This task analysis might take the form of a checklist of all components that should be included in the lesson. Operational definitions minimize subjectivity, such that multiple observers can independently observe instruction and agree on the behaviors that occurred. Lead teachers, administrators, and school psychologists are all good candidates for conducting fidelity observations. Fidelity observations would ideally include immediate feedback and follow-up coaching or mentoring activities for teachers (Fletcher et al., 2005; O'Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham, and Beebe-Frankenberger, 2003).

It is important to note that initiating and maintaining change in the beliefs and practices of educators is complex, and it may take several years to fully implement and observe the benefits of evidence-based practices (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998; Stanovich and Stanovich, 1997). To increase the likelihood of good implementation fidelity and sustainability of such practices, schools should ensure that appropriate professional development and support, such as adequate training and follow-up, team planning, and mentoring, are in place (Gersten, Chard and Baker, 2000; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2003). When fidelity is low, it is important to examine why this low fidelity is occurring and to determine the best ways to support teachers in improving their implementation (Klingner and Edwards, 2006).

16.3.2.3 Progress Monitoring

Implementation of Tier 1 instruction is not only a means of providing all students in the general education classroom, including those at risk, with presumably effective instruction, but is also an important assessment component within an RTI framework (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2006). Once Tier 1 instruction is in place, students identified as at risk should be monitored regularly to determine responsiveness to general education. Students who do not make sufficient progress in Tier 1 move on to Tier 2. The current recommended time-period for monitoring response to general education instruction is 8–10 weeks (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, and Hickman, 2003).

Different approaches have been used to monitor student response to instruction. Some have used standardized testing. For example, Vellutino et al. (1996) used pre- and post-intervention performance on the Woodcock reading mastery test–revised (Woodcock, 1987) to estimate at-risk student responsiveness. Students who made the least

progress were identified as needing more intensive intervention. A drawback of using standardized tests is that most are not sensitive to growth made in very brief periods, and indeed were not designed for this purpose.

Others have used measures designed specifically for progress monitoring, such as CBM, to monitor student progress on a frequent basis (e.g., McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, and Compton, 2005; Speece et al., 2003; Vaughn et al., 2003). As described earlier, researchers have established CBM's technical adequacy as a general indicator of students' overall proficiency in core academic domains. CBM is also useful for documenting progress over brief periods (Deno et al., 2001). Multiple CBM probes of equivalent difficulty can be administered repeatedly (e.g., once per week), yielding a reliable estimate of growth (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Walz, and Germann, 1993). Currently, CBM is viewed as one of the more promising and viable approaches to monitoring students' response to instruction (Fuchs, 2003; Speece and Case, 2001) because of its capacity to model academic growth and inform evaluation of instructional effectiveness (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998; Vaughn and Fuchs, 2003).

Whereas CBM has a well-established empirical basis for monitoring student progress, it is important to note that it is not necessarily "RTI ready." Historically, special education teachers have used CBM to set long-term goals, monitor student progress toward those goals, assess the effectiveness of instruction for individual students, and make instructional changes when needed. This use of CBM data has been demonstrated to result in improvements in student achievement (e.g., Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, and Stecker, 1991). However, RTI requires that progress monitoring data be used to make high-stakes decisions that can determine the course of a child's entire school career. For this reason it is critical that CBM, or other progress-monitoring tools, are technically adequate for making such decisions in relatively brief timeframes. Thus, whether CBM is appropriate for making high-stakes decisions in a relatively brief time period, as RTI would require, remains an important question.

One major concern that has been raised is the amount of measurement error associated with estimating growth across brief intervals (e.g., Hintze, Shapiro, and Daly, 1998; Jenkins, Zumeta, Dupree, and Johnson, 2005). For example, Jenkins et al. questioned the assumption that oral reading passages drawn from a pool of grade-level passages are truly "equivalent" and suggested that measurement error introduced by varying passage difficulties could compromise estimates of student growth across short time intervals. There is some evidence that exerting tight control of passage readability (Hintze and Christ; 2004) or even using identical passages (Jenkins et al., 2005) can reduce this measurement error; however, whether this reduction in error is sufficient for accurately estimating response to instruction requires further investigation. Moreover, error associated with other variables, such as within-student variability, may also compromise accuracy in estimating response to instruction (Jenkins et al., 2005). Thus, while CBM is promising in many ways, we recommend caution in its use for RTI decisions.

16.3.3 Step 3: Identifying Students in Need of Tier 2 Instruction

Researchers have operationalized response to instruction in various ways. Fuchs (2003) identified three general approaches: the final status approach, the growth approach, and the dual discrepancy approach. Researchers who have used the final status approach defined inadequate response as performance below a given percentile (e.g., the 16th percentile) on a given measure (e.g., Torgesen et al., 2001; Vellutino et al., 1996). Researchers who have used the growth approach defined inadequate response as no growth (e.g., Berninger et al., 1999) or limited growth (e.g., Vellutino et al., 1996).

There are some conceptual problems related to these two approaches (Al Otaiba and Fuchs, 2002). For example, although a child's performance level may be very low, they may be making important growth. Using a final status approach without considering growth could mask the student's responsiveness to instruction. Likewise, using growth alone ignores information about a child's performance relative to meaningful educational benchmarks. A child may be making steady progress, but may still be performing at such a low level that they will not likely reach an adequate performance level in a timely manner.

An alternative to final status and growth-rate-only methods is the dual discrepancy approach (Fuchs, 2003; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998), whereby students

who are discrepant from their peers in both performance level *and* growth rate would be considered in need of more intensive instruction. Researchers have provided some evidence that this approach discriminates well between readers who do and do not respond to instruction (e.g., Burns and Senesac, 2005; McMaster et al, 2005; Speece and Case, 2001). Others are testing its utility by comparing it with alternative procedures, like median split, normalized, and benchmark scores (see Fuchs, 2003). Continued research is needed to determine the best approach to gauging responsiveness to instruction.

Criteria for adequate performance levels and/or growth rates should be set a priori. Currently, there is not a consensus on grade-level performance and growth standards (Deno et al., 2001). School districts can begin by establishing criteria that are correlated with end-of-year high-stakes test results. Expected levels and rates, when calculated by individual districts, will vary. As further research is conducted and published in this area, national norms may be established.

16.4 Case Example

To illustrate the application of steps in the RTI process described above within a school context, we included a case example to show how: (1) screening data were used to identify students at risk; (2) Tier 1 instruction was implemented and student progress was monitored; and (3) progress monitoring data were used to identify a need for Tier 2 instruction.

Recently, McMaster et al. (2005) reported a study of students' response to first-grade PALS (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005b), an evidence-based classwide peer-tutoring program focusing on critical beginning reading skills. Some of the students identified as unresponsive to PALS received Tier 2 intervention in the form of a standard tutoring protocol (other students either continued in PALS or participated in a modified version of PALS; see McMaster et al. (2005) for specific details). Figure 16.1 illustrates the progress of four at-risk students who participated in this study.

16.4.1 Screening

At the beginning of the study, students were screened using a rapid letter naming (RLN) test, a good predictor of future reading achievement (Torgesen, Wagner, and Rashotte, 1997). Students' RLN scores were rank-ordered, and the rankings were confirmed by the students' teachers. The eight lowest performing readers in each class were identified as at risk and four average-performers were identified in each class to serve as a comparison.

16.4.2 Tier 1 Instruction and Progress Monitoring

Tier 1 instruction (PALS) was implemented three times per week for 35 min per session. PALS activities include letter-sound recognition, decoding, sight word recognition, and fluency building. Teachers pair higher performing readers with lower performing readers. The higher reader is always the tutor or "Coach" first, and the lower reader is the "Reader" first. For each activity, the Coach provides prompts, praise, and corrective feedback to the Reader. After completing each activity, the students switch roles.

For the first 2 months of PALS, the at-risk and average-performing students' progress was monitored weekly using CBM word identification probes. These probes were equivalent forms of 100 sight words selected randomly from Dolch word lists. The number of words read correctly in 1 min was recorded for each student. Performance levels and slopes on the CBM probes were calculated for each of the at-risk and average readers.

16.4.3 Identification of Students in Need of Tier 2 Intervention

After 2 months of PALS, students were identified as needing Tier 2 intervention if they were dually discrepant from their average-performing peers. In this case example, dual discrepancy was defined as a CBM performance level and slope that were both approximately one standard deviation (SD) below average. Figure 16.1 displays the growth rates of two at-risk students during the first 2 months of PALS. Student B was eventually *not* identified for Tier 2 intervention. Although her CBM performance level was well below average, her growth rate was similar to that of her peers. In contrast, Student C's performance level and slope were 1.25 SD and 1.17 SD

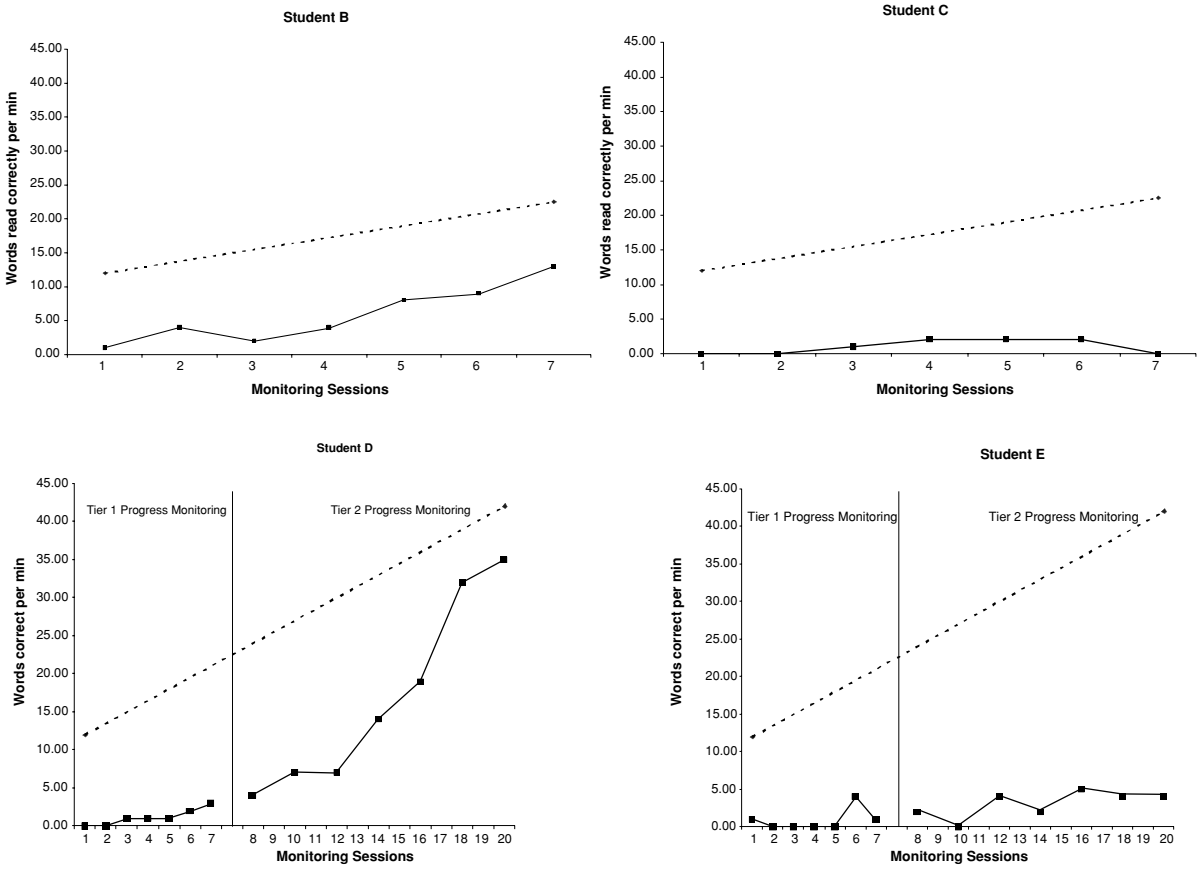

FIGURE 16.1. Case example: CBM performance of at-risk students during Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction. Student B was identified as responsive to Tier 1, and Student C was identified as unresponsive. Student D was identified as responsive to Tier 2, and Student E was identified as unresponsive.

below average, respectively. Thus, Student C qualified for Tier 2 intervention.

The Tier 2 intervention consisted of tutoring three times each week for 35 min per session, but adult instead of peer tutors were used. The tutors were trained to teach students to mastery. The student determined how many sounds and words they needed to master and then charted this goal at the end of each lesson.

As shown in Figure 16.1, following 13 weeks of tutoring, Student D was performing at a level of 0.58 SD below average, but his growth rate was 0.24 SD *above* that of his average-performing peers. Because he no longer demonstrated a dual discrepancy, it appeared that he was responding to Tier 2 intervention. In contrast, following Tier 2, Student E's performance level and slope remained well below those of his average peers (1.36 SD and 1.05 SD below average on level and slope, respectively). His low performance and growth indicated that he continued to be unresponsive to Tier 2. In an RTI model, this student would continue to receive Tier 2 intervention, and eventually be referred to special education if Tier 2 continued to fail to improve his performance.

16.5 Summary of Recommendations

In this chapter, we have described a process whereby general educators work in collaboration with school-based colleagues to monitor student response to general education instruction within an

RTI framework. We hope that, from our description of this process, two things are clear. First, many of the components we have outlined require further investigation. Second, monitoring response to general education instruction within an RTI framework will require a significant shift in the role of general educators. This new role will include:

1. *Identifying students at risk using technically sound screening measures that are predictive of relevant academic outcomes.* In selecting screening measures, practitioners should consider the efficiency with which measures can be administered and scored. Ideally, measures that can be given several times during the school year should be used, to catch students who may emerge as at risk later in the year. Current recommendations for identifying students at risk are either the bottom 25th percentile (Fletcher et al., 2005; Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a) or students performing below a grade-level benchmark (Good et al., 2001; Hintze and Silberglitt, 2005).

2. *Implementing Tier 1 instruction using evidence-based core curricula and supplemental instructional programs.* This instruction should be implemented with fidelity and supported by strong professional development and support.

3. *Monitoring progress to Tier 1 instruction using tools that are sensitive to growth in brief time intervals.* Ideally, progress monitoring would occur weekly for 8 to 10 weeks during Tier 1 instruction (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a; Vaughn et al., 2003). Whereas CBM is currently recommended as a promising progress-monitoring tool, caution should be exercised in selecting this or any other approach, as further research is needed to establish the utility of such measures for RTI purposes. Likewise, the most appropriate criteria for judging response to instruction are still under empirical scrutiny.

4. *Selecting, implementing, and monitoring progress within Tier 2 intervention.* Students for whom Tier 1 instruction is not sufficient receive more intensive, individualized intervention. Tier 2 is distinct from Tier 1 in that it is provided in small groups, is conducted more frequently or for longer periods, includes explicit instruction targeting specific skill areas, and/or is delivered by a specialist (Fuchs and Fuchs, 2005a). Again, student progress is monitored regularly. Students for whom Tier 2 is not beneficial receive increasingly intensive intervention and are eventually referred to special education.

16.6 Conclusion

At the heart of RTI is the assumption that a student should have sufficient opportunity to learn, and that this opportunity to learn should be systematically evaluated, before the student is identified as learning disabled (Fletcher et al., 2005; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1998). Opportunity to learn should begin in the general education classroom, where, if the teacher implements evidence-based instruction with integrity, most students will progress toward important academic standards.

To implement an RTI model rooted in general education, general educators will play a critical role. They must be prepared to make data-based decisions and to differentiate instruction using evidence-based practices. School psychologists, special educators, and administrators should play a key role in working with general educators to establish appropriate screening measures, progress-monitoring tools, criteria for determining risk status and responsiveness to instruction, and appropriate Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction. Practitioners in these roles must have solid problem-solving and communication skills, depth and breadth of knowledge about the strengths and limitations of RTI, and a commitment to staying abreast of current research and implementing best practices in special education referral and identification processes.

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