Response to Intervention (RTI) has been heralded by many as the long-awaited alternative to using a discrepancy formula for special education eligibility decisions. Use of the discrepancy formula for eligibility decisions has commonly been called a “wait to fail model” (Donovan & Cross, 2002; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003; Mellard, 2004) because in this paradigm, students proceeded through long pre-referral, formal referral, and assessment processes prior to getting help in special education programs. By the time students received assistance, they were often too far behind to ever catch up, even with individualized support.

RTI instead focuses on intervening early through a multi-tiered approach where each tier provides interventions of increasing intensity. It includes the practice of screening all children early in their education to identify those who are not responding to classroom instruction and providing support through the use of research-based interventions at each tier while monitoring progress frequently (Batsche, Elliott, Graden, Grimes, Kovaleski, Prasse, et. al., 2005). RTI has the potential to affect change for English language learners (ELLs) by requiring the use of research-based practices based on individual children’s specific needs. All ELLs, however, need culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction no matter the educational setting. In other words, instruction and interventions must consider a student’s cultural background and experiences as well as their linguistic proficiency (in both English and the native language) in order for instruction to be appropriate. The focus of this brief is to provide an initial framework in the use of RTI that considers students’ life experiences, including their language proficiencies in their first and second language, as well as the contexts in which they are taught.

The Framework

Personalized instruction lies at the very heart of RTI in that each child’s unique needs are evaluated and appropriate instruction provided so that all children have opportunities to succeed in our schools. As evidenced by the current achievement gap as well as the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse children in special education programs, many of these students are underachieving. To ensure that RTI does not become one more discriminatory system, a framework for RTI addressing the needs of ELLs is required. This includes: (a) a systematic process for examining the specific background variables or ecologies of ELLs (i.e., first and second language proficiency, educational history including bilingual models, immigration
pattern, socioeconomic status, and culture) that impact academic achievement in a U.S. classroom; (b) examination of the appropriateness of classroom instruction and the classroom context based on knowledge of individual student factors; (c) information gathered through informal and formal assessments; and (d) nondiscriminatory interpretation of all assessment data.

**Reaction Questions:**

1. What is your understanding of Response to Intervention (RTI)?

2. From your perspective, describe how an RTI approach would address the needs of ELL students?

3. What are we doing currently in our school/district/state with response to intervention?

4. How is your school/district/state currently addressing:
   a. a systematic process for examining the specific background variables or ecologies of ELLs (i.e., first and second language proficiency, educational history, including bilingual models, immigration pattern, socioeconomic status, and culture) that impact academic achievement in a U.S. classroom;

   b. examination of the appropriateness of classroom instruction and the classroom context based on knowledge of individual student factors;

   c. information about student progress gathered through informal and formal assessments; and

   d. nondiscriminatory interpretation of all assessment data?

5. Consider someone in your role with little knowledge of ELL to implement RTI, what knowledge and skills would they need?

**Application Questions:**

1. How do we as a school/district/state move forward in the implementation of response to intervention to address the needs of all students, with a particular focus on ELLs?

2. What additional processes will we put into place to
a. create/improve a systematic process for examining the specific background variables or ecologies of ELLs that impact academic achievement in our classrooms/school/district;

b. examine the appropriateness of classroom instruction and the classroom context based on knowledge of individual student factors;

c. information about student progress gathered through informal and formal assessments; and

d. ensure nondiscriminatory interpretation of all assessment data?

3. What are the steps necessary to further develop differentiated and personalized instruction and options for demonstrating student progress based on the interpretation of data collected regarding:

a. background variables of the ELL students in our classrooms/school/district;

b. appropriateness of classroom instruction and context; and

c. interpretation of informal and formal assessment data?

4. What types of professional development opportunities are necessary to prepare practitioners, families, higher education, and other stakeholders to better understand the connection between RTI and ELLs, as well as to implement appropriate strategies?

These questions were developed by the following stakeholders working together within the IDEA Partnership:

Role: Family Member  
Location: California

Role: School Psychologist  
Location: California

Role: Special Education Administrator  
Location: Florida

Role: National Comprehensive Content Center Staff  
Location: Texas
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