

foreword by Linda Hoyt

Mary Howard

RTI FROM ALL SIDES

What Every Teacher Needs to Know



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BOOK STUDY GUIDE

Book Study Suggestions

Learning is inherently social. Though as teachers we sometimes feel isolated, most of us know the benefits of taking time to engage with colleagues. It is through these conversations, or “teacher talk” as Regie Routman calls it, that we clarify and enrich our own ideas. This is particularly true when new ideas, such as response to intervention, arise in education. While there are many ways to structure a study group, it is most important to foster a climate in which teachers feel they can participate freely and safely in the ongoing conversations and exchange of ideas. Other guidelines can make book study more productive. Here are a few things you might consider.

Watch group size: You may want to kick off discussion with a general question and then break into smaller groups. Often the optimal number is four or five to ensure there is time for all to exchange ideas. The larger group can reassemble at the end to debrief.

Use study questions: Some groups find it more comfortable to start with a few questions to get conversation going. There are various ways to use questions.

- Put three or four questions in an envelope and randomly pull them out for discussion.
- Create a chart with two or three starter questions; then ask the group to generate more, tapping participants’ own personal interests and needs.
- Decide on three or four questions and divide the group according to participants’ interest in those topics. This allows for more in-depth study.
- Make copies of the suggested questions for everyone and invite discussion without deciding where to start.

Create an agenda: Make sure you have planned a beginning and ending time and *always* honor those times. Teachers are busy, so knowing how long your meetings will last is important.

Stay focused on the topic: Plan a procedure that is transparent. You might start by saying something like, “Let’s decide on a signal to use when we feel the discussion is drifting and then have everyone agree to help regain focus.”

Include everyone: Keep groups small enough that even the quietest member is encouraged to speak. Active listening on everyone’s part will help. Remember that periods of silence should be expected when people are thinking.

Share leadership: Rotate the role of discussion moderator. Identify several responsibilities of the moderator—for example, suggesting a big idea from a chapter or group of chapters, and synthesizing or summarizing at the end. Remember that in a study group, *everyone* is a learner. This isn’t the place for an “expert.”

Create a list of norms: Simple, transparent expectations often make study groups function more smoothly and increase potential for success. These might include some of the preceding suggestions, such as ways to invite a tentative member into the conversation, expectations about listening, start and stop times, and a procedure for refocusing.

Set dates for the next meeting: Always leave knowing when you will meet again and who will moderate the discussion.

Engage in reflection: Stop from time to time to reflect on what you are learning and how you might make your group’s interactions more productive.

Celebrate learning: Make sure you take time to enjoy one another and celebrate your learning.

The following questions relate to the content in each chapter. Many more ideas and suggestions are presented in each chapter.

Chapter 1

The Paths Leading to the RTI Crossroads

1. Howard uses the term *internal radar* as a way to recognize important new ideas worth incorporating. What recent important ideas/research have you incorporated into your own teaching?
2. Do you agree that by intervening early, most students will read at grade level? How might this belief affect your teaching?
3. As you consider resources for RTI, what are some guidelines you use to guide and evaluate your choices?
4. Discuss the relative importance of the five pillars (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension) the National Reading Panel report highlights, drawing on your own teaching experiences.
5. Some suggest the National Reading Panel report neglected to look at important research. What other areas/practices do you believe are important in the teaching of reading?
6. What kinds of grouping do you use in your own classroom? How do you decide on grouping structures?
7. How might you encourage and organize ways for teachers to collaborate and talk with one another to ensure increased student achievement?

Chapter 2

RTI: A Framework for Responsive Differentiated Teaching

1. If RTI initiatives focused more on creating exemplary instruction than on intervention, how might this build stronger literacy programs in your school?
2. As you consider the RTI framework, what differences do you see among the three tiers? Discuss students who you think might benefit at each tier.
3. Often the classroom teacher is left out during intervention planning and instructional delivery. Discuss why the teacher is integral to the success of struggling students.
4. Howard discusses the pros and cons of push-in versus pull-out intervention. Share your own thoughts and experiences with either or both.
5. Discuss the cycle of good teaching (Figure 2.2). How might using this cycle provide a process for improving instruction on your campus?
6. “Double dipping” is an interesting way of thinking about increased needs of struggling students. How would this concept help you better support your own struggling students?
7. Discuss how authentic assessment might offer greater insights about your students. What kinds of assessments could you design that would grow out of students’ day-to-day literacy instruction and experiences?

Chapter 3

Tier 1 Intervention: High-Quality Instruction for All

1. Consider the typical daily schedule included in the chapter. How does this schedule compare with your own? What changes might you consider in either schedule to increase students' access to high-quality literacy instruction?
2. Discuss read-aloud as an instructional practice. How might you use it with more effectiveness in your own classroom?
3. Howard references Tomlinson's work in suggesting that differentiation occurs in three ways: content, process, or product. Share your own experiences in differentiation using one or more of the three. What was the effect on students' learning?
4. Several ways to analyze students' reading are suggested in the chapter. What tools do you use to learn more about students' strengths and needs?
5. Leveling systems are often used to match students to texts. How does your school ensure teachers have access to a variety of levels and genres?
6. Whole-to-part instruction is an important concept for all learners. Discuss why it is particularly important for struggling students.
7. The gradual release of responsibility model is an important concept in RTI. How do you ensure that students have adequate modeling and support before they perform independently?
8. Howard discusses Allington's "six Ts" of exemplary instruction. Offer some examples for each from your own instruction.

Chapter 4

Tier 2 Intervention: Establishing a Coordinated Continuum of Support

1. Consider Nikolai's three questions. How can you use these questions to guide your own teaching?
2. How does using common language and strategies increase the potential for student success and achievement?
3. Think of your own "Codie stories." Share how your careful efforts made a difference for the student.
4. Consider your own resources—do you have an adequate supply of high-quality texts to support students with varied needs? How might you improve your instructional collection?
5. How might you ensure the *quality* of time spent in monitoring student progress?
6. Teachers often learn improved instructional practices from colleagues. How will you incorporate ways for teachers to share their expertise?
7. Howard discusses the need for expert intervention. How might you use the expertise in your school to provide the highest-quality intervention?
8. Howard lists a number of ways to increase instructional intensity. Discuss the list and ways you have incorporated or how you might incorporate these practices into your own teaching.
9. Using the analogy of slicing a pie, think about your own classroom instruction. How do you "slice the pie" and what changes, if any, might you consider making in your own division of time?
10. Consider the "less is more" concept. What might you eliminate to make room for more robust practices?

Chapter 5

Tier 3 Intervention: Intensifying the Instructional Support

1. What process will you put in place to decide who will deliver tier 3 instruction in your school?
2. Think of a time when you struggled with an idea or skill and someone supported your learning. In what ways did the “teacher” scaffold you? What was the effect of that scaffolding?
3. Buly and Valencia found that students who did not pass state-mandated tests had different instructional needs. Discuss how these differences might call for different instructional interventions.
4. Consider the three RTI tiers, each designed to address students’ needs. How can your school ensure that all students receive high-quality instruction initially so that the tiers are used to support students who are truly struggling?
5. The concept of continuous assessment is critical in RTI planning. How might it be used to adjust teaching and plan necessary support?

Chapter 6

Broadening the Role of Assessment in an RTI Model

1. Discuss the difference between summative and formative assessment. Share some examples of each that your school uses to monitor students' learning.
2. Howard lists some of the insights teachers learn from authentic assessments. Discuss these using examples from your own teaching.
3. Screening tools play an important role in RTI. How can you ensure these "tools" yield helpful information that pinpoints students' instructional needs?
4. What professional development might teachers need to ensure less bias in testing and more productive uses of assessment data?
5. What kinds of progress monitoring tools might your school add to gain greater information about students' strengths and needs?
6. How can you help ensure a healthy balance between instruction and assessment in your school?
7. Howard introduces some shortcomings of progress monitoring tools. Discuss how these might compromise students' access to quality instruction.
8. How might a "broader view of assessment" affect your school's assessment practices?

Chapter 7

Maximizing the Success Factors:

Making RTI Work Schoolwide

1. Consider Howard's ten success factors for RTI. What key points does your school need to address to ensure success?
2. What additional resources should your school consider budgeting for to make RTI implementation successful?
3. Coordination among the tiers is essential for student success. What support might your school create to ensure this coordination and timely action on students' behalf?
4. Consider the possibilities of RTI and the potential pitfalls. How will your school avoid the pitfalls to create a strong successful model?
5. Using the key points, reflect on a realistic schedule for accomplishing these things.