The RTI Daily Planning Book, K–6

Tools and Strategies for Collecting and Assessing Reading Data & Targeted Follow-Up Instruction

Gretchen Owocki

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Portsmouth, NH
For David Owocki
and our splendid little Emilia
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INTRODUCTION

Each fall, as the school year begins, you walk into the classroom with a general sense of what you will teach in the area of reading. Because you have knowledge of children, curriculum, and state and national expectations, you have a general sense of what to plan for—and of what your students will learn. If you teach kindergarten or first grade, you plan for students to expand their understandings of the functions of written language; to explore books in engaging ways; and to develop insights into how letters, sounds, words, and text structures work together to make a meaningful message. If you teach older students, you plan for them to experience the bearing of deep comprehension; to expand their experiences with varied types of text; to develop strategies for working with new content and vocabulary; and to develop independence in their reading. Because you know kids and you know curriculum, it is possible for you to do extensive planning before ever meeting your students.

But having a general sense of the kinds of things that children should ultimately be doing in your classroom does not provide you with a starting point for well-tailored teaching. It is only with the assessment of your particular students that you begin to gain insight into the particulars of what and how to teach. It is only with assessment that you start to identify which students are reading with competence and engagement; which students need intensive support related to decoding or comprehending—and which students might benefit from support beyond what you have planned for the class in general.

When it’s at its best, your assessment informs the details and structures of your instruction—and it happens in a continuing cycle. You gather data. You analyze the data to identify your students’ strengths and needs. You
provide differentiated instruction that is based on what you have observed. And then you assess again, engaging in continuous monitoring to ensure that your students continually receive the types and amounts of support that are appropriately matched with their needs. If you are teaching in a setting in which a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework is being implemented, these practices are essential to the success of your program.

**An Overview of RTI**

RTI is an approach to instruction that is ultimately designed to support students who have special learning and/or behavior needs. It begins with an intensive effort to provide high-quality instruction for all students. The progress of all students is systematically monitored “to determine the need for further research-based instruction and/or intervention in general education, in special education, or both” (RTI Action Network 2009). Students who are found to be performing outside the ranges deemed acceptable receive supplemental instruction, typically provided in tiers. The amount of time and the intensity of the supplemental instruction depend on the nature and severity of the difficulties. The more severe the need, the more intensive the support.

With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, schools may use RTI data (rather than a traditional discrepancy formula model) as part of the process for determining eligibility for special education services. This practice involves the systematic implementation of a research-based intervention for the child who struggles—and an evaluation of the child’s response to it—as part of the process of determining whether special education may be warranted. If initial attempts at intervention are unsuccessful, the tiered system allows for the provision of more intensive support before eligibility decisions are made.

Providing tiered instruction for the first time within a school generally involves a reorganization of resources and schedules, but it can be well worth the effort. Tiered instruction has the potential to reach more students’ needs within the general education setting, and therefore reduce the number of special education referrals (Hall 2008). While the number of tiers used for RTI varies from setting to setting, the use of three tiers is most common (Howard 2009).
The Three-Tiered System of RTI

Tier 1

Tier 1 instruction takes place with all children in the general education program. In Tier 1, students receive whole-class and small-group instruction from the classroom teacher. While the teacher works with small groups, other children in the classroom may spend their time reading, writing, collaborating on projects, or working in literacy-based centers. The small-group meetings are a useful time to provide individualized reading instruction with texts that students find challenging but achievable. As needed, some students receive more one-on-one time than others. It is generally recommended (Allington 2009; Howard 2009) that students who receive this extra support spend their extra time reading (with teacher guidance) rather than engaging in isolated skill instruction. Part 1 of this book provides a set of assessment tools that will help you individualize your reading instruction across tiers. Part 2 provides numerous ideas for whole-class and small-group instruction, including a protocol for guided reading instruction.

Tier 1 expectations for ongoing, thoughtful assessment and individualized instruction are high, but are reflective of what many teachers are already doing. Within Tier 1, teachers are expected to implement a curriculum flexibly, in a way that attends to the needs of all students; they are expected to differentiate instruction using instructional resources that extend beyond what core programs typically offer; they are expected to offer specifically targeted support based on what they learn from classroom-based assessments; and they are to monitor all students’ progress over time (Howard 2009). In many respects, these practices do not differ from what is already happening in many classrooms across the United States, regardless of whether an RTI model is in place. Good teaching is good teaching. The resources in Parts 1 and 2 are designed to help you achieve these expectations.

Tier 1 instruction provides the foundation for the success of RTI (Gersten et al. 2008). With high-quality Tier 1 instruction, approximately 80 percent or more of the student population is expected to show adequate growth within the core curriculum (Howard 2009; NASDSE 2006).
Tier 2

Tier 2 instruction is for students who are not making adequate progress in Tier 1—as identified through universal screening and systematic progress monitoring. (See descriptions of these categories of assessment below. Part 1 contains many tools that may be used or adapted to support the monitoring process.) While RTI legislation does not require a set amount of time, in the primary grades, Tier 2 generally involves an additional 20 to 40 minutes of instruction daily, and usually occurs with a small group. Upper elementary students may need closer to 60 minutes because they are usually further behind and require more catch-up. Tier 2 instruction does not replace Tier 1 instruction but instead offers an additional layer of support.

Tier 2 instruction may be provided by the classroom teacher or a literacy specialist. In the best of circumstances, the school schedule is such that any specialist providing supplementary instruction (whether inside or outside the classroom) is available to offer instruction at times in which regular reading instruction is not taking place. For example, primary grade teachers might schedule reading instruction in the morning, while upper grade teachers schedule it in the afternoon. Supplementary instruction for primary students would then occur in the afternoon with the supplementary instruction for primary students occurring in the morning (Shanahan 2008). When instruction is provided by an outside specialist, collaboration with the classroom teacher is essential to maintaining efficiency and consistency.

Regardless of who is providing the Tier 2 instruction, the focus is on supporting and extending Tier 1 instruction—with extra time, intensity, focus, and collaboration aimed at helping the student to be successful with Tier 1. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of students are designated for Tier 2 instruction, with this number varying across schools (Howard 2009; NASDSE 2006).

Tier 3

Tier 3 instruction is generally provided outside the classroom, by a literacy specialist. This additional layer of instruction provides not only more, but also more individualized and/or intensified instruction, than is offered in Tier 2. Again, collaboration between the classroom teacher and specialist is essential, as is high-quality, specific, targeted instruction. Approximately 5 to 10 percent of students are designated for Tier 3 instruction, with this number varying across schools (Howard 2009; NASDSE 2006).
Students who do not show adequate progress with tiered instruction—and the adaptations that result from evaluation of that instruction—are considered for special education. The advantages of the RTI approach versus traditional approaches for referral to special education—and indeed for supporting all students in need—are many. Most notably, students in RTI schools don’t have to wait for support. If they show a need, they receive supplemental instruction right away, before any referrals are made. The supplemental instruction is connected to what is already happening in the classroom, ensuring coherence and consistency. And the instruction often occurs with peers in the classroom, as an expected part of the classroom day. This brings a sense of normalcy to the notion that some students need extra support.

The success of RTI depends on teachers engaging in thoughtful assessment that leads to thoughtful instruction. But teachers have to be ready—really ready—to take this on. Knowing the competencies to assess, having sound strategies for assessing them, and knowing how to match instruction with demonstrated needs are at the heart of the successful RTI classroom. The RTI Daily Planning Book, K–6: Tools and Strategies for Collecting and Assessing Reading Data & Targeted Follow-Up Instruction provides direction and support. The book and Online Resources (see the Companion Resources tab on the book’s product page on the Heinemann website to download reproducibles found within the book) provide K–6 teachers, literacy coaches, reading specialists, and school-based teams with (1) a framework for conducting reading assessment; (2) a set of tools for ongoing assessment and tracking of growth; and (3) a set of teaching strategies (small group, intervention group, and whole class) designed to meet student needs as identified through the assessments.

The Three Kinds of Assessment Called for by RTI

Three categories of assessment are generally associated with RTI: universal screening, progress monitoring, and formative observation. While data from all three categories can be useful in supporting the RTI process, the assessment tools in this book fall largely within the formative or instructional
decision-making category. The tools are designed to secure specific information for day-to-day decision making and for shaping the details of instruction and intervention.

Before we can delve knowledgeably into the formative tools, it’s a good idea to have a sense of what the other categories look like. Understanding the whole picture will help the fundamentals of formative assessment fall into place as they should.

**Universal Screening**

Universal screening takes place approximately three times per year. A key purpose is to identify students whose reading achievement (or reading-related knowledge) is significantly below what is expected and who therefore might benefit from supplemental instruction. Most schools have a universal screen in place regardless of whether an RTI model is being implemented, as they assess three times per year on competencies that are predictive of performance on state tests (Kovaleski 2009). Many tools and materials are available for universal screening. The National Center on Response to Intervention (www.rti4success.org) provides information on how to use universal screening tools, as well as an evaluation of several professionally published tools. Typically, screening tools are comprised of brief (or relatively brief) assessments that are intended to be strongly predictive of reading achievement. The tools vary in terms of how narrow or broad their predictors are; how accurately they predict which students will actually have difficulty with meaningful reading; and how much information they give teachers to inform daily instruction.

Examples of currently used universal screening tools include Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS), the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), informal reading inventories, and state reading tests. Regardless of whether your school has already adopted a screening tool, proceed with caution. Some tools have far more useful qualities than others. For example, though DIBELS is quick and easy to administer, it narrowly conceptualizes the act of reading, which tends to narrow curriculum and intervention approaches (Goodman 2006; Pearson 2006). And DIBELS has only “unconvincing” and “partially convincing” evidence when it comes to several aspects of classification accuracy, reliability, and validity (National Center on Response to Intervention), all of which are considered important within an RTI framework.

Universal screening tools do not need to be narrowly focused or quick and easy to administer. Ultimately, they should reflect the literacy perfor-
mances we most value (Howard 2009). One example of a currently used tool that can provide a broad picture of the reader is the Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) (Fountas and Pinnell 2008). While this assessment is more time-consuming to administer than some of the others (it takes 20 to 30 minutes per student), the benefit is that it provides very useful information for shaping instruction and interventions, including information about fluency, comprehension, phonological awareness, phonics, vocabulary, and text level. Similar tools include informal reading inventories such as the Qualitative Reading Inventory-4 (Leslie and Caldwell 2005) and the Analytical Reading Inventory (Woods and Moe 2007), which assess many of the same competencies as the BAS.

Regardless of the core materials chosen for universal screening, it is important that school teams consider multiple sources of evidence as they determine which students should receive supplemental services. Using one source of data is not enough to make such an important decision.

Progress Monitoring

Progress monitoring within an RTI framework involves collecting repeated measures of performance to “(a) estimate rates of improvement, (b) identify students who are not demonstrating adequate progress, and/or (c) compare the efficacy of different forms of instruction to design more effective, individualized instruction” (National Center on Response to Intervention 2009). Progress-monitoring assessments are administered anywhere from weekly to monthly.

Many progress-monitoring tools are available on the professional market, but schools can develop their own. The National Center on Response to Intervention (www.rti4success.org) provides information on how to use progress-monitoring tools, as well as an evaluation of several professionally published tools. As with universal screening tools, some progress-monitoring tools are more effective than others. The monitoring tools your team selects for reading should assess the skills and strategies that have been targeted for intervention; they should show change over time; and they should be sensitive to small changes (Mesmer and Mesmer 2008). It is also important that oral reading not be the only measure of performance considered, as some students have oral language difficulties that preclude their ability to show their true levels of proficiency through this medium (German and Newman 2007). And other students, particularly bilingual readers, sometimes read slowly to facilitate comprehension, or become so focused on comprehending that they translate meanings and syntax into their dominant language.
and end up producing many errors (Goodman, Watson, and Burke 2005). If we do not consider assessments drawn from silent reading, or at least from careful and flexible analysis of oral reading, we run the risk of providing instruction that does not match actual student needs.

Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) is often used for progress monitoring. CBM assessments are generally brief and maintain a “steady” rather than an “increasing” difficulty. They result in a quantitative value that can be charted over time. For example, second-grade students might read a second-grade-level passage every four weeks as the teacher documents words correct per minute or percentage of words read correctly. This form of assessment is intended to produce a “clean” record of growth over time on a skill that is predictive of reading achievement.

An important concept to consider with the use of monitoring tools relates to the fact that they often focus on just one or two skills—and often rely on time as part of the measure. While some isolated skills may predict certain components of reading achievement, they do not necessarily predict what overall achievement might look like. For example, strong alphabetic knowledge does not necessarily predict whether a student is (or will become) a strong comprehender. And, considering speed, it is normal for the rate of thoughtful reading to ebb and flow, with ebbs occurring especially when the content or features lend themselves to reflection or create a need to stop and think (Flurkey 2006). Related to these concerns, narrow assessment approaches can lead to a narrowing of the instructional focus. For example, if nonsense word fluency or words correct per minute are the only measures used to monitor progress, an understandable tendency would be to encourage students to focus on decoding and speed over making an effort to construct meaning.

Ultimately, tools that mirror the kind of reading we ultimately want children to engage in are most effective for progress monitoring (Howard 2009; Tierney and Thome 2006). Whatever tools you use, keep in mind that one tool does not make up the whole data set for a teacher. Progress-monitoring data are one indicator that a pattern of progress is acceptable (or not), but one tool cannot identify all of a student’s specific needs or the causes for the observed patterns. “A teacher must use other sources of information to determine what actions to take to help students improve . . . diagnostic assessments, informal classroom observations, contacts with home, conferences with school personnel, and other sources for additional information, as necessary, to make decisions about a student’s instructional program” (Hasbrouck and Inhot 2007).
Formative Decision Making

Formative reading assessment is at the heart of the daily decision-making process within an RTI classroom. It can take a number of angles, but to fully round out the RTI assessment categories, it must involve gathering the information that is needed (1) to adjust the specifics of teaching to meet individual students’ needs and (2) to help students understand what they can do to keep growing as readers.

Formative assessment requires that we observe and interact with students as they read and respond to real text—preferably the types that are used for instruction in the classroom and that ultimately reflect real-world literacies. We document the decoding and comprehending strategies they use, as well as what they have comprehended. We analyze the documentation and use it to plan next steps for instruction. Effective RTI teachers know what to look for in their decoding and comprehension assessments and have a repertoire of strategies for responding with instruction.

It is often the case with formative assessment that we also reach beyond what students do as they are reading real text, in an effort to hone in on specific needs. For example, if a student does not fare well with reading the simplest of texts (say, a one-word-per-page book with supportive illustrations), the teacher may implement an assessment of basic print concepts to determine where, specifically, to take the instruction next. If a student demonstrates a need for picking up a few high-frequency words, the teacher may give a word inventory to determine which words to use for word study. If a student demonstrates low comprehension with nonfiction, the teacher may ask for a think-aloud as the student reads. With formative assessments, we observe and document actual reading as well as implementing specific types of follow-up assessments to hone in on specific areas and concepts that might warrant instruction. We are cautious to not overuse varied forms of assessment, because most often actual reading is what gives us the most valid and useful information about the reader.

With formative assessment, effective teachers don’t stop at assessing skills and strategies for decoding and comprehending. They know that a “whole child” is doing the reading and learning, and therefore extend their observations broadly, to aim at understanding the student’s interests, attitudes, sources of motivation for reading, text choices, home literacy practices, ways of interacting within groups, situations in which learning seems to best occur, sources of frustration, and so on. Formative assessment includes an examination of the reader with consideration given to the wider context of the child’s life.
The material in the book is organized into two parts: *Assessment Practices and Tools* (Part 1) and *Instructional Practices and Tools* (Part 2). The Online Resources (see Companion Resources on the Heinemann website) provide a copy of all key reproducibles.

**Part 1: Assessment Practices and Tools**

Part 1 provides a framework for collecting the types of data that inform responsive instruction and includes a comprehensive set of tools for collecting each type. The material may be used in classrooms regardless of whether an RTI model is in use—but it is particularly useful for teachers and teams working to develop individualized instruction.

The framework guides you to collect data falling into three categories, each representing a *critical factor* affecting reading and its development:

- student backgrounds and characteristics
- text processing
- text comprehending

Teachers need detailed information in each of these categories to provide the most effective instruction possible—detail that goes beyond what universal screening and progress-monitoring tools can offer. It is only with such detail that we can provide rich instruction that ensures engaged reading as well as balanced development of the skills and processes of effective reading.

To help you use the data you collect to organize for differentiated instruction, you will find three types of supports: *rubrics*, *data charts*, and *class checklists*. Rubrics will help you identify the particular strengths and needs your students demonstrate as they participate in different literacy activities—and the extent of those strengths and needs. You can place students into groups and provide individualized support based on your rubric evaluations. Class checklists give an overview of how the entire class is doing on key skills and strategies. These are provided to help you group students for varied instructional experiences and to plan the details of instruction based on your students’ demonstrated needs. The *data charts* organize
information about children’s skills and strategies in a way that gives you a quick overview of growth over time. These are useful for conferences and for individual tracking of progress.

The Online Resources (see product page on Heinemann’s website) contain reproducible forms for all of the assessment tools.

**Part 2: Instructional Practices and Tools**

Part 2 provides a comprehensive set of strategies for teaching and differentiating instruction in each of the three critical factor areas described in Part 1 (student backgrounds and characteristics, text processing, and text comprehending). The strategies are presented in “if-then” strands that match the assessment categories in Part 1 so that you can use them to address specific needs as they are revealed through the assessments. For example, if you learn through assessment that you have students who are still developing basic print concepts, then you can turn to the print concepts section in Part 2 for strategies to support instruction. If you have students expressing difficulty decoding multisyllabic words, then you can turn to the multisyllabic words section in Part 2 for strategies.

The strategies are coded to indicate whether they are generally used with the whole class, small groups/individuals, or centers/teams. Though a big part of RTI involves creating high-quality small-group instruction, we can’t achieve full effect unless the whole day provides enriching literacy experiences.

**Enhancing Your Work Within the Tiers**

Depending on what you are doing already with your Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, the instructional materials in this book can be used as an enhancement, a supplement, or a replacement for some of the existing components.

Many teachers working within an RTI framework have access to a commercial program that guides instruction and/or interventions. Some, either through personal choice or outside influences, adhere rigidly to their scripts, lesson plans, and materials. Yet, research has offered little scientific evidence to support the inflexible use of commercial programs in an intervention design (Allington 2009; Howard 2009). In fact, recent findings on intervention provide evidence for the contrary: “effective patterns of instruction and classroom environments depend on the language, literacy, and self-regulation
skills children bring to the classroom and so differ for each student across a continuum” (O’Connor et al. 2009).

Students who demonstrate high needs in the area of reading have a variety of profiles. Based on an analysis of students who performed poorly on a statewide assessment, Valencia and Buly (2005) identified six separate patterns of need:

- **Automatic word callers** can decode quickly and with accuracy, but do not read for meaning.
- **Struggling word callers** have difficulty with both word identification and meaning.
- **Slow word callers** decode well, but slowly, and do not read for meaning.
- **Word stumblers** have trouble with word identification but are strong on comprehension.
- **Slow comprehenders** decode accurately and comprehend well, but process text slowly.
- **Disabled readers** experience difficulty with word identification, meaning, and fluency.

Children’s needs differ so vastly that a single program designed to support numerous students can only do so much. While commercial programs can provide useful direction regarding ways to organize the curriculum, offer useful resources for teaching, and be in tune with some students’ needs, they must be used flexibly. More than anything else, your students need you to use your professional expertise to unravel their needs and to plan instruction that is directly responsive.

**Creating High-Quality Small-Group Instruction**

While the success of RTI depends on the whole day being enriched with meaningful literacy experiences, it is generally thought that the small-group, individualized instruction (in all tiers) is what will foster the accelerated growth that we want Tier 2 and Tier 3 students to experience. Researchers in the field of reading have identified the following characteristics as strong contributors to effective small-group instruction and intervention. Students
are likely to have the best chance of accelerated growth when these small-group practices are in place.

1. **Students engage in meaningful reading for a major portion of the small-group session.** Teachers who are the most effective in supporting children’s literacy have been found to devote more time to actual student reading than teachers who are less effective (Allington 2002). While related activities such as word study or building of background knowledge can serve important functions, they should constitute considerably less time during the session than the reading itself. Depending on student needs, in a 30-minute session, they should spend approximately 20 to 25 minutes reading with teacher support. Of course, these practices should be adhered to outside the small-group sessions as well. Students need to read in order to develop and improve their reading.

2. **The reading material used for instruction is engaging and culturally relevant to the participating students.** Research shows a strong connection between engagement and achievement (Braunger and Lewis 2006; Guthrie and Wigfield 2000). “Only when children have a variety of materials available to read and many good personal reasons to want to learn about new ideas and concepts will they read varied genres, write for different purposes, and grow in their ability to use written language effectively” (Goodman 1996a, 224).

   Successful RTI approaches will capitalize on the notion that students who want to engage with texts are in the best position to benefit from instruction (Braunger and Lewis 2006). Engagement (and more reading) will come as a result of teachers knowing and supporting student interests. An unfortunate fact within the educational system is that we sometimes actually cause disengagement by forcing students to read text they find uninteresting and difficult.

3. **The reading material used for instruction is accessible.** Reading develops most easily when the text used for instruction is neither too hard nor too easy; when it is challenging but achievable (Clay 1991; Fountas and Pinnell 2006; Mesmer and Cuming 2009). Compelling research evidence has demonstrated that reading too-hard material produces little or no benefits, yet in many classrooms, only grade-level classroom material is used for the instruction of all students (Allington 2009). It is rarely the case in a classroom that
material designated for a particular grade level will be accessible for all students.

When working with English language learners, determining what might be accessible requires a flexible approach. With any given text, English language learners (more than other students) may need support activating background knowledge, understanding key vocabulary terms, or working with complex syntax and semantics. When their entry into the text is mediated appropriately, they can often construct meaning at higher levels than if they had not had initial support (Cappellini 2005). For example, in reading *The Curse of King Tut’s Tomb*, a prereading discussion of the terms *mummy*, *tomb*, and *pyramid* might make all the difference in what is comprehended. Or a conversation about potentially confusing syntax might help facilitate meaning. Syntactic structures that often present a challenge include: the verb *to be*, subject-verb-object order, prefixes and suffixes, adjectives preceding nouns, and auxiliary verbs (as in *I can’t go*) (Meier 2004). Support with sorting through any possibly confusing structures might make a critical difference in what is comprehended. And when selecting text, it is always important to consider that deepening comprehension in the first language while students are developing the second language can benefit the development of literacy in both languages.

Effective RTI teachers use assessment to identify the types and levels of text with which students can work successfully, and move them along a gradient as they expand their competencies. These teachers understand that the difficulty of the material used may be adjusted up or down depending on the situation. For example, when interest is high or background knowledge is strong, students, including English language learners, may find success with more difficult material. On the other hand, when new strategies are being taught or solidified, easier material may be more appropriate. Effective teachers know that no gradient is perfect for any child. Background knowledge, language knowledge, interest, motivation, and familiarity with particular text features will influence the ease or difficulty of a text for any given child (Clay 1991).

4. The reading material used beyond the session (for independent reading, partner reading, content reading, homework) offers the opportunity for success. Students need material they can read across the day—not just during small-group sessions. Usually, offering the
opportunity for success means ensuring that the material is at their independent reading level; a bit easier than the material that is used for instruction. It is with accessible material—and lots of experience reading it—that reading processes and content knowledge develop most effectively. Accessible material supports comprehension, fluency development, and consolidation of developing skills and strategies, and it also increases motivation (Allington 2009; Clay 1991; Fountas and Pinnell 2006).

English language learners often need support across the day to make text accessible. In the beginning phases, they access text and construct meaning through nonprint features such as illustrations, graphs, maps, and tables. In the intermediate phase, texts are most accessible when the content is familiar, when the instruction involves making the input comprehensible (such as by referring to illustrations, using visuals, and using gestures), and when the instruction supports children’s negotiation of complex structures and abstract concepts. At the advanced level, English language learners are expected to be able to access complex texts with comprehension but may still experience difficulty with complex sentence structures, abstract vocabulary, and low-context concept presentation (Hadaway, Vardell, and Young 2004).

5. **Group sizes are small.** A goal of RTI is that students working in Tiers 2 and 3 will make not only “acceptable” progress, but accelerated progress so that they can catch up and work successfully within the peer group. Therefore, the recommended group size is approximately 1:3, as it is “almost impossible” to find a small-group intervention that accelerates growth when more than three students are involved (Allington 2007).

Research comparing the growth of students participating in 1:1 instruction with that of students participating in small-group instruction does not show a significant difference. Therefore, group instruction could be considered most practical (What Works Clearinghouse 2009).

6. **Thoughtful assessment is used to plan, differentiate, and revise instruction.** “Thoughtful observation of children takes place in a rich, innovative curriculum in the hands of a knowledgeable teacher who demands and accepts responsibility for curriculum decision making” (Goodman 1996a, 223). The teacher focuses on collecting
a broad range of information within the areas of text processing, text comprehending, and personal factors affecting reading and then differentiates instruction to meet individual student needs. Differentiation can involve varying the amount of time spent with students, the texts and materials used, and/or the types of instructional support and experiences that are provided.

In the interest of differentiation, some students (even in Tier 1) may be scheduled to receive more instructional time than others. Teachers who are most successful in promoting literacy have been observed to spend more time with their students in need than with their students who are on target (Allington 2009). While this may raise a question of fairness, the on-target students in such situations have not shown to be at a disadvantage, most probably because the exemplary teacher arranges for their time to be well spent. In the most effective classrooms, teachers provide a variety of literacy experiences: exemplary teachers “do not give everyone in the class the same task to do; rather, they individualize assignments. Sometimes this means that students are doing very different things at the same time, sometimes it means they are doing the same thing with adjustments on a student-by-student basis” (Pressley et al. 2001, 221).

7. Teachers provide explicit instruction and scaffolding focused on the skills and strategies used by effective readers; English language learners receive explicit combined language and literacy instruction. An explicit approach focuses on the direct teaching of skills and strategies in a way that makes visible the processes of effective readers, and is recommended for use with both text processing and text comprehending (Keene and Zimmerman 2007; Villaume and Brabham 2002; Gersten et al. 2008). In general, explicit teaching involves modeling the use of skills and strategies; directly explaining what is being modeled; observing and providing feedback as students try out the skills and strategies; and student self-evaluation.

According to Lenz (2006), different students require different levels of explicitness. Some students independently develop strategies through repeated engagement in reading. Most students are likely to benefit from the teacher providing a direct explanation of the strategy and of how it will support their reading or learning. Some students require explicit description, modeling, and guided practice with feedback for extended periods of time. “Because few instructional materials or programs build in the levels of explicitness or
intensiveness required to teach strategies to all students, teachers need to focus their instructional planning and decision making on how to achieve this continuum of instructional intensity” (Lenz 2006, 263). Explicitness works best when it connects significantly with individual learners’ actual needs and takes its shape in response to what they are doing as they read. Useful explicitness “involves selecting from all the things one could teach by thinking about the learner. . . . Explicitness, then, is not a feature of the teaching itself, but is a feature of the transaction between teaching, the learner, and the material to be learned” (Bomer 1998, 11–12).

8. **Students engage in talk and social collaboration stemming from their own interests and inquiries.** Talk is a critical part of learning; it is the primary symbol system through which children construct knowledge about the world and extend their thinking beyond themselves. It is through their talk and social experiences that “children grow into the intellectual life of those around them” (Vygotsky 1978, 88).

   Research in elementary classrooms shows that exemplary teachers encourage lots of talk, both among children and among children and teachers. High-quality talk is purposeful and connected to curricular topics, but it is conversational rather than characterized by teachers doing all of the asking and evaluating and children doing all the responding (Allington 2002; Braunger and Lewis 2006). High-quality talk generally occurs as children encounter challenging concepts; have control over the direction of their explorations; and read and write about topics they find meaningful (Whitmore et al. 2004).

9. **Communication among members of the decision-making team is ongoing.** Parents, classroom teachers, literacy specialists, special education teachers, speech teachers, and other involved partners work together. The focus is on developing effective instructional practices and working toward a consistent structure and approach for those practices. Consistency is critical within tiered instruction, as it lends itself to creating more intensity in the instruction, more coherence, and, importantly, more steady growth (Allington 2007).

   To facilitate the communication process among members of the decision-making team, the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2006) recommends a basic problem-solving method involving the answering of four interrelated questions: (1) What is the problem or issue? (2) Why is it occurring? (3) What are
we going to do to address it? (4) Did our intervention work? When focusing on literacy instruction, a team might more specifically frame the questions in the following way:

- What are the student’s specific needs as identified through universal screening, progress monitoring, and formative assessments?
- What may be the source of these needs?
- What approach to instruction is warranted? What texts would be most appropriate?
- Is our approach working to create engagement with text? Is it working to create the kind of readers we want our children to become? Is it working to accelerate progress? What evidence shows all of this?

10. Students work within a classroom community that expects and values differences. Ironically, a tiered system, with its various forms of assessment and grouping, draws attention to academic differences and therefore runs the risk of convincing some students that they are incompetent, which can ultimately undermine positive achievement. RTI schools must find ways to work against this.

Within a community that learns to expect and value differences, students come to understand that they all have strengths in some areas of language and literacy and need to work to develop strength in other areas. For example, some kids have well-developed school-based literacies, such as reading stories, searching for information in nonfiction text, and synthesizing and reflecting on academic material. Some students are good with digital literacies—they may have experience with Web browsing, emailing, text messaging, or video games. Some are skilled with functional tasks such as reading grocery lists, recipes, or forms the family must fill out. Everyone has literacies and everyone has literacies to develop.

A “participatory” approach to literacy instruction (Freire 1970; Moll and Greenberg 1990; Wade and Moje 2001) values multiple ways of thinking and knowing and makes use of them in the classroom. For example, within the reading curriculum, rather than using only traditional school-type texts, multiple text types are used to support learning: picture books, reference books, chapter books, textbooks, magazines, comic books, electronic texts, and text related to television, film, visual art, and performance art—all of the texts
children might find meaningful in their lives. Text is viewed as a “cultural tool” that shapes what we know as well as how we learn. “The purpose of text use and of learning, then, is to expand the cultural tools to which students have access, not by dismissing or excluding the texts (or tools) they bring to school, but by incorporating them into the curriculum and working with students to make connections among the various texts they explore” (Wade and Moje 2001, np).

If students do not experience such broad perspectives on literacy in school, and if the focus of curriculum and assessment are so narrow that cutoff scores and text levels are all that define students’ worth as literate individuals, we can’t help but expect that negative self-perceptions, low motivation, and little satisfaction or success with school-based literacies will prevail. Working toward curriculum and assessments that develop well-rounded individuals who are skilled with a wide variety of cultural tools—and that do more than tell children whether they have “achieved” or “failed”—is critical to the success of RTI. Children must feel positive and whole in order to take the kinds of risks that are necessary for developing language and literacy.
Key Idea Map with Rubric

Key idea maps can be used as a tool for assessing student understandings related to nonfiction text. The Key Idea Map (page 158) guides students to synthesize what the piece/section was about and then provide some detail. Students can be asked to draw and/or write on the map. It is a good idea to model the use of a key idea map before using it as an assessment tool. This will help students understand what is expected.

To implement this assessment, you may use texts recommended for the Reading Assessment or texts of your own choosing. When choosing text, be sure that the segment you ask students to read lends itself to a synthesis and listing of key concepts taught. When analyzing student work, keep in mind that writing may get in the way of what you can glean regarding a student’s comprehension. Students who comprehend a text may not necessarily be able to organize their ideas about it in writing.
**Key Idea Map**

Name: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Title: ____________________________________________ Pages: ________

What did the author teach?

Explain something important about a concept that the author taught.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Level or Content May Be Too Challenging</th>
<th>Good for Instruction</th>
<th>Independent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>Does not identify main idea.</td>
<td>Synthesis partially captures overall idea of text.</td>
<td>Synthesizes the overall idea of the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining key ideas</td>
<td>Does not identify a key aspect of what the author taught.</td>
<td>Chooses and explains part of an important concept.</td>
<td>Chooses and explains an important concept.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Informational Text Maps

Informational text maps are designed to help students focus on key ideas as they read and to help them organize their thinking about information gleaned from nonfiction. The informational text maps featured on pages 256 to 265 are specifically designed to support students in identifying and summarizing key ideas. These tools may be embedded into small-group sessions as they are useful to supporting students’ knowledge building and construction of meaning.

- **Information web** (page 256): The information web is designed to help students categorically organize information that they want to remember from one or more texts. Webs are useful when students are working with text written in a descriptive format. The key idea or topic is written in the middle of the web, and specific categories for note taking are written in the blank spaces of the spokes. For example, the Lewis and Clark expedition might be a topic written in the middle of the web, with the notes being taken under the following categories: reasons for expedition, hardships, successes, Jefferson’s role, Lewis and Clark’s role, Sacagawea’s role.

- **Cause and effect map** (page 257): The cause and effect map is designed to support students in thinking through the impacts that events or phenomena have on other events/phenomena.

- **Timeline** (page 258): Timelines are useful when students need to think through information in a sequence. Students write the topic in the top box, and in the boxes below, they write dates (or sequential numbers) with key information.

- **Comparison chart** (page 259): Comparison charts are designed to support students in recording key ideas or concepts about two related topics or phenomena, and then evaluating their similarities and differences. When using comparison charts, be sure that the comparisons support in-depth thinking. The activity should challenge children and require the use of text to learn and reflect on new concepts rather than serving as a tool to record what they know already or as an act of comparing just for the sake of comparing.
• **Cycle map** (pages 260 and 261): Cycle maps offer useful ways to depict and think through continuing or cyclical relationships such as the life cycle of an insect or the causes and effects of child labor. Page 260 provides a cycle map for writing and page 261 provides a cycle map for drawing.

• **Problem and solution chart** (page 262): Problem and solution charts work well with text that describes a particular problem or issue and presents a variety of hypothetical or real solutions. The charts help students to identify and consider key issues and compare the value of the varying solutions.

• **Ideas and details chart** (page 263): Ideas and details charts are a useful tool for helping students focus in on key information and the important details that support or surround that information.
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