

RTI PANEL DISCUSSION  
AUDIENCE QUESTIONS AND PANELIST RESPONSES  
May 26, 2011

The following questions were posed to the panelists but the session ended before they could be answered. The panelists kindly agreed to answer the questions in writing. The responses below represent each panelist's view, not necessarily a consensus.

- **Without blaming teachers, there is a necessity in this state (considering accountability) to follow a specific scope and sequence for each grade level. If you agree, doesn't a canned program make sense as a template? Then, do professional development to support teachers, who are on a huge continuum themselves, for supplementing reading teaching?**

**Peter Johnston:** I suppose it depends a little on what you consider a canned program. Many such programs that are associated with RTI are scripted. These actually stop teachers from thinking about their work and developing their expertise. Most packaged programs have this problem to some degree. Many packaged programs also depend on the idea that the teacher delivers knowledge rather than the idea that the student constructs it. In both senses they actually undermine professional development. I'm not saying that teachers don't need to have structure. For example, ISA and Reading Recovery have a predictable structure to the lessons but what happens within the structure depends on the student and the teacher's expertise. Starting with agreed upon practices and a learning community that gathers relevant and trusted data and has a context in which they feel able to use the data to examine their teaching, would be a much more productive investment. Investing in a well-trained coach would be a strategy for moving teachers along too.

**Donna Scanlon:** It is certainly important for teachers to have some vision of what they are trying to accomplish in a given school year. And, I think, it is useful for there to be agreement on what children should know and be able to do by the end of a given grade in school. However, in order to maximize the likelihood that children will at least meet grade level expectations, teachers need to meet the children where they are, not where the scope and sequence dictate they should be at a given point in time. (Assuming that the scope and sequence is used in this way – as it often is, e.g., "It's March so we are working on consonant blends.")

Every child is ready to learn something but, obviously, children are not all ready to learn the same thing at the same time. Strict adherence to a scope and sequence can result in instruction that fails to support the development of children who are both above and below the performance expectations for a given point in time. Teachers need to have the knowledge required to identify what children are ready to learn and the leeway to teach in a way that is responsive to their students' current capabilities.

- **The “cautions” provided about RTI are counter too much of what I have heard. Isn’t there a very high correlation between reading fluency and comprehension? If there is concern about targeting specific skills with a specific intervention and frequent progress monitoring, what is suggested instead to address and assess the needs of struggling students?**

**Donna Scanlon:**

**With regard to the relationship between fluency and comprehension:**

There is a strong correlation between reading fluency and comprehension. Some have argued that this relationship exists largely due to the relationship between oral reading accuracy and comprehension (the ability to automatically read most, if not all of the words in a text, facilitates both fluency and comprehension because one does not need to devote a lot of cognitive energy to figuring out the words). In discussing the use of fluency measures in a recently published chapter, I highlighted several problems with these measures that have come to light in recent research:

One problem is that such assessments assume that the passages utilized at a given grade level are of equivalent difficulty – but they are not. For example, Francis, Santi, Barr, Fletcher, Varisco, and Foorman (2008) recently pointed out that the Spache readability estimates used to equate the DIBELS passages were quite different than estimates derived using other readability formulas. Further, Ardoin, Suldo, Witt, Aldrich and McDonald (2005) found that readability indices have limited utility for predicting oral reading fluency. Moreover, of the eight formulas evaluated by Ardoin et al., the Spache estimates were found to be among the worst predictors of the fluency with which passages are read. The implications of these findings for assessment of progress in RTI implementations is clear - depending upon the passage used at a particular measurement point a student’s performance level may appear to have changed substantially more or substantially less than it actually has. Thus, efforts to accurately measure progress in literacy acquisition, which is the basic reason for frequent measurement of ORF are seriously undermined.

Beyond the technical inadequacies of such measures there is also serious concern about the way such measures might shape understandings of what constitutes reading competence and, therefore, influence instruction. For example, measures such as the ORF run the clear risk of sending the message, to both students and teachers, that speed is valued more than comprehension (for elaborations on these concerns see Pearson, 2006 and Samuels, 2007). Further, these measures provide

teachers with virtually no information about how to respond to and plan for students with difficulties. They simply serve to flag students who may be struggling.

In light of the inadequacies of ORF-type measures, maze measures might seem like a reasonable alternative since they at least focus on comprehension. However, early research on the cloze task which is the predecessor of the maze task, demonstrated that accurate responses did not generally require comprehension beyond the sentence or phrase level (see Shanahan, Kamil, & Tobin, 1982 for an enlightening illustration in which performance levels were unchanged when passage sentences were presented in normal versus random order.) Further, maze-type measures clearly suffer from the same problems of lack of comparability across alternate forms.<sup>1</sup>

Advocates for monitoring progress using the types of speed-based measures described above might argue that the lack of comparability across forms is compensated for by the frequency with which they are administered. Thus, it is the students' growth rate or slope that is of interest rather than their absolute performance level at any given point in time. RTI processes call for providing students who show little or no growth with more intensified and/or different interventions. However, Schatschneider, Wagner, and Crawford (2008) recently reported that slopes computed on the basis of multiple administrations of the DIBELS ORF measure in first grade did little to improve instructional decision making. Schatschneider et al. used DIBELS data collected in the context of the Reading First implementation by the state of Florida. The sample consisted of over 23,000 first graders. The analyses attempted to predict end of first grade and end of second grade reading comprehension performance using either a single measure of DIBELS ORF administered toward the end of first grade or a slope for ORF performance computed on four administrations of the DIBELS ORF given at 2 to 3 month intervals during the first grade year. Results revealed that the use of DIBELS slopes did nothing to enhance prediction accuracy beyond the accuracy obtained using a single end of year measure. Schatschneider et al. argue that their findings question a core assumption of RTI models – that growth over time should predict ultimate outcomes.

However, it is important to note that, in this study, no account was taken of the amount, type, quality, and timing of instruction or intervention

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<sup>1</sup> Those familiar with oral reading fluency and maze type measures may question the suggestion that the alternate forms are not comparable owing to fairly high alternate form reliability estimates that are provided by the test publishers. It is important to note that these reliabilities reflect the fact that individuals will be similarly ranked by alternate forms. However, their absolute performance levels (e.g., the number of words read correctly in a minute) could be very different on the two forms (see Francis et al. 2008).

that the children received during their first and second grade. All of these factors are likely to impact student progress and end of year performance. In fact, as argued above, variability in the quality and characteristics of instructional experiences are a major determinant of growth in reading skills. (Scanlon et al., 2010, pp. 144-145)

**With regard to the concern about targeting specific skills with specific interventions and assessing progress,**

I again fall back on the role of teacher knowledge and on the importance of providing comprehensive and coherent instruction. Proficient reading does not derive from a conglomeration of specific skills, each of which might be practiced up in isolation. Rather, proficient reading requires the expectation that texts will make sense and the willingness to expend the effort required to clear up points of confusion when they arise. To accomplish this, proficient readers must engage in the complex and coordinated use of a variety of sources of knowledge (e.g., word meanings, grammatical knowledge, world (background) knowledge, phonics skills, word solving strategies). If instruction focuses on just one or a few of these knowledge sources, say phonics skills, the student may come to the conclusion that decoding ability is what is valued in the reading process and this may turn the student's attention away from the meaning construction goal of reading. Further, if this hypothetical student doesn't show the desired growth in reading (however it's measured) some approaches to RTI would call for a switch to a different proscriptive "package" that might serve to further confuse the student about what reading is.

In the approach to intervention (and instruction) that my colleagues and I have been developing and testing over the last many years (Scanlon, Anderson, & Sweeney, 2010; Vellutino & Scanlon, 2002) our focus has been on teaching foundations skills (phonics and high frequency words) and word identification strategies that can be applied in the books that the students will read the same day. Our goal is to ensure that the children understand why they are learning the skills and strategies and how to apply them in a coordinated way. Further, as the children engage in reading, the teacher engages them in ongoing and collaborative discussions about the text (information or story) so that the meaning-making purpose of reading is not obscured. The teachers use detailed checklists which provide both documentation of the children's progress and clear guidance about appropriate next steps instructionally.

**Peter Johnston:** There are several points to consider here. First, a high correlation is not that informative instructionally. There is doubtless a high correlation between family income and comprehension. There is certainly a high correlation between alphabet knowledge on entry to kindergarten and subsequent reading performance. That doesn't mean that teaching all the letters will get kids to the same place because the alphabet knowledge is merely a proxy variable – an indicator of a more extensive experience with literacy.

Over the years, teachers and researchers in regular education have developed many productive methods for monitoring progress. Within an instructional frame, the central feature of progress monitoring would be that it offer instructionally useful information as well as indicate progress. For example, in this frame it might make sense to use a measure of instructionally appropriate text level, such as Reading Recovery book levels, for progress monitoring rather than a measure of reading speed on grade-level passages, even if the psychometric properties of the indicator were less adequate. Instructional book levels also make sense because for instruction to be effective, task difficulty is central, not only for the child to be in control of strategic action but also for building task persistence (Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001). Instructional book-level data can be collected without requiring children who are already at risk to waste time reading material that is too difficult for them (and acquiring problematic understandings about reading in the process). Collecting such data would also reveal when children were in fact reading texts that were too difficult—a common and counterproductive fate of less accomplished readers (Allington, 1983).

In fact, many indicators can be used under RTI. For example, just keeping track of a child's word and letter knowledge in kindergarten can be done with one side of a manila folder containing a grid with a cell for each letter of the alphabet and space to note new details about recognition, use in writing, and words known, et cetera. The folder might contain writing samples, running records, and other observations. Regular, brief reading and writing conferences provide updates, and dated samples of writing and running records in the folder provide further evidence and data. Regularly taking stock of these multiple data sources would give a more complete picture of development (McGill-Franzen et al., 2010). Checklists can also be used (Scanlon et al., 2005), particularly if they require supporting evidence.

- **How does DIBELS help us? Does it do more harm?**

**Stacy Williams:** Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) provides fluency reading probes for students in grades one through six. Materials are available in English and Spanish. Screening and progress monitoring probes are also available for students at the Kindergarten level: Initial Sound Fluency (ISF), Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF), and Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF). DIBELS are an example of a curriculum-based measure (CBM). CBM was initially conceived as an assessment tool to measure the effectiveness of a special education intervention model known as the data based program modification (Deno, 2003). This model was based on the premise that special education teachers could use CBM data to monitor and inform their instructional practices. Hence, educators could make data based decisions versus decisions driven by inference. Although, its preliminary purpose was to be used as a special education tool, general educators and school psychologists currently use CBM measures to screen and monitor students.

CBM are a set of standardized procedures that contain simple, short fluency measures of reading, spelling, written expression, and mathematics computation (Shinn & Bamonto, 1998). The DIBELS focus on the area of literacy. These standardized procedures include the following specifications: “(a) the core outcome tasks on which performance should be measured, (b) the stimulus items, the measurement activities, and the scoring performance to produce technically adequate data; and (c) the decisions rules to improve educational programs” (Deno, 2003, p. 184).

CBM was developed to serve as Dynamic Indicators Of Basic Skills or general indicators of student achievement in important areas of basic skills (Shinn & Bamonto). CBM assessments are sometimes referred to as academic thermometers. It takes the pulse of a student’s achievement and identifies where the interventionist needs to intervene. The standardized procedures of CBM allows for the comparison of student performance with-in and between classrooms. The design simplicity and the efficiency of measures make integrating this assessment within an existing assessment regiment relatively easy. As a formative assessment, CBM probes are ideal for collecting screening data and monitoring the progress of an intervention. The data generated from CBM probes can be used to inform instruction, plan intervention, predict performance on important criteria (e.g., reading comprehension), identify struggling learners, develop local, class, and school norms, and help foster clear communication between home and school about student’s progress towards their academic goals (Deno, Shinn & Bamonto).

CBM probes demonstrate good psychometric properties and have specific standardized procedures to administer and score probes. The scoring procedures differ from the traditional teacher approach in that instead of scoring the percentage correct, scores are obtained by counting the number of correct and incorrect responses made in a fixed time period. Regardless, the administration and scoring procedures are easy to learn. CBM probes are ideal for progressing monitoring because different but equivalent probes are available. The probes are time efficient, ranging from 1 to 5 minutes. Mathematics, writing, and spelling probes can be delivered during a group administration (Deno, 2003; Shinn & Bamonto, 1998). For educators wishing to learn more about CBM procedures, the CBM warehouse located at intervention central ([www.interventioncentral.org](http://www.interventioncentral.org)) is a great place to start. Additionally, the book “The ABCs of CBM: A practical guide to curriculum-based measurement” by Michelle K. Hosp, John L. Hosp, and Kenneth W. Howell published by Guilford Press.

Many of the assessments and reading programs currently being implemented in schools do utilize fluency assessments to measure literacy (e.g., the Harcourt Reading Series). The difference between these assessment approaches and DIBELS is that DIBELS is a fluency measure. DIBELS allows school districts to measure the construct of reading albeit efficiently due to the fact that it is curriculum independent. It is an excellent tool to collect universal data. However, it is not a one-size fit all assessment. It tells you that there is a problem, however it does not tell you where the problem is. For example, you may use DIBELS assessment during survey level assessment to identify the child’s reading instructional level. However, you may need to give additional assessments to

isolate the child's area of difficulty so that you would be able to design an intervention that would be effective for the student.

**Peter Johnston:** DIBELS does not help and it misdirects instruction (see my other responses for details). However, there is one other thing to consider. Al Otaiba and Torgeson, after reviewing a wide array of apparently successful interventions, noted that they were all evaluated using assessments like the DIBELS. They observed: "Given that [state tests] require a much broader range of knowledge and skill than the word-level tests used to estimate success rates in this review, it is likely that poor and minority students, in particular, will not achieve the same success rates on them as for the simpler tests that assess only word reading accuracy." Indeed this has been the outcome of interventions focused on the word level – like Reading First as well.

Al Otaiba and Torgeson note that this is a limitation of research. They also lament that: "Another limitation of current research is that we still know little about how best to support the development of vocabulary, conceptual knowledge, reading comprehension, and thinking skills or how to address motivational or behavior management issues." (Otaiba & Torgeson, 2007, p. 220). The fact that they are unaware of the extensive research on motivation, comprehension, and the development of thinking, is parallel to the instructional problem of focusing at the word level or below. Their efforts have been so focused on reading the research on word-level interventions that they have missed the extensive research on topics they now see as important. While we think of reading as a bundle of skills rather than a motivated social practice, we will fall into this trap.

- **Please define universal screenings. Name some. Do they have to be norm referenced? Is a school required to use AIMS Web, DIBELS or TPRI to "weed out" potential students in need of RTI?**

**Donna Scanlon:** Universal screening involves administering an assessment to the entire class, generally for the purpose of identifying children who are at risk of not meeting grade level expectations. The assessments listed in the question are all examples of tools that are used for universal screening. To this list I would add the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) which, like the TPRI, has a brief screening form which can be used to identify children who are at risk and a more extensive assessment that can be administered to children who fall below the benchmark for the purpose of gathering more detailed information on what the children know and are able to do (thus providing more guidance for instructional planning).

There are several other assessments on the market as well. As for any assessment used to make decisions about individual children, our biggest concern should be that the assessment is valid and reliable. In general, the longer and more detailed an assessment is, the more reliable and valid it is likely to be. Both the TPRI and the PALS win on this count from my perspective.

- **What do you think of AIMS Web as a progress monitoring tool?**

**Peter Johnston:** Dylan Wiliam observes that, “Only learners create learning, and so, when we look at the role that assessment plays in promoting learning, the crucial feature is not the validity of the assessment, or its reliability, but its impact on the student.” In my view, AIMS Web is an example of CBM, which has several problems, not the least of which is that it misdirects teachers’ instructional attention.

A little history might help. CBM has become common in RTI both because of its roots in special education and because its emphasis on measurement resonates with training in school psychology. CBM was developed by Stanley Deno in the late 1970s as a simple assessment practice for special education teachers (Deno, 1985). Initially Deno argued that the speed with which children read the words in their basal textbook was a good indicator of their reading ability because it took little time and used curriculum materials already in use in the classroom; thus such a measure is curriculum based. He also argued that because reading words quickly and accurately required children to integrate all the separate components of reading, the measure would not distort the curriculum by drawing teachers’ attention inappropriately to all the individual components (Samuels & Alt, 2011).

Using available curriculum materials and not distorting instruction are both important considerations. However, in the intervening years, it was decided that local curriculum materials would not provide the standardization required in a measurement framework, so text passages were brought from outside the classroom and standardized (Fuchs, 2003). This rendered the term curriculum based no more appropriate than for any other standardized test. Indeed, the manual of CBM AIMSweb spelling—a series of speeded spelling tests—makes this clear: “Spelling assessment lists are ‘curriculum independent’ allowing teachers to make decisions about general spelling outcomes regardless of spelling curriculum differences between teachers and schools” (Shinn & Shinn, 2002, p. 10). It is misleading to refer to such measures as curriculum based.

Monitoring progress by measuring reading speed and accuracy gained a boost when the report of the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) popularized the related but different construct of fluency and spawned numerous books on how to teach fluency. The confluence of interest has led to an excessive concern for reading speed. Comprehension has become represented by the number of words said in a given time to retell the story (Good & Kaminski, 2002) or by the number of missing words omitted from a text that the child can accurately replace. The former lacks any construct validity, and the latter is restricted to a limited view of comprehension at the phrase or sentence level. Indicators of writing development—simply counting changes in the number of words written, for example—are no more promising (Gansle, Noell, VanDerHeyden, Naquin, & Slider, 2002). These assessments focus on the most easily quantified indicators—speed and accuracy at the

word level. They distract from the engagements necessary to build children's comprehending, which often require them to actually slow down.

There has been considerable criticism of the validity of these measures (Paris, 2005), especially when viewed as indicators of fluency (Samuels, 2007) or reading competence (Alt & Samuels, 2011; Goodman, 2006). Reading speed is not necessarily related to comprehension and is only one aspect of fluency (Cramer & Rosenfield, 2008; Pressley, Hilden, & Shankland, 2005; Valencia et al., 2010). Knowing now as we do that rapid identification of words does not integrate all the components of reading (Samuels, 2007) makes relevant Deno's concern that focusing on partial indicators of reading distracts teachers from the larger goals of literacy instruction (albeit on the very measure he championed). This is a matter of consequential validity.

For audio discussions of oral reading fluency, check out:

<http://www.voiceofliteracy.org/posts/40043> and  
<http://www.voiceofliteracy.org/posts/41784>

- **Are assessments in the RTI application both reliable and sensitive? Are profiles reasonably dependable?**

**Peter Johnston:** I'm not sure what is meant here, but with regard to reliability and validity, I would point to the quote from Dylan Wiliam under the previous question. Perhaps an example of three middle school students will help. None of the three has previously passed the state test. One finally reads a novel – the first she has read – and is blown away by the experience. A few weeks later, she reads another and finds it similarly engaging. However, she does not see any significance in these events for the future. She has no plans to read anything else. Another student is reading steadily but only focuses on action books, making no inferences about people and their motives and feelings in what he reads with consequently limited understanding of the books and little development of his own self-management (the two are related). A third, Hispanic student, simply will not read. In each case, the information necessary to bring them to become engaged, successful readers, is different. Reliability is not the issue, and their reading speed is irrelevant.

- **Can you speak to the word “motivation”? Some may think this word means “fun”. Can students be motivated and challenged at the same time?**

**Donna Scanlon:** Great question. There is a whole lot more to motivation than fun – although fun is certainly motivating.

Motivation is multi-faceted. An important distinction needs to be made between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Schooling often over emphasizes extrinsic motivation (grades, certain kinds of praise, stickers, etc.) and under emphasizes the development of intrinsic motivation (an interest in engaging in an activity for its own sake). When students are intrinsically motivated, there are more likely to stay engaged and learn

more. There are a wide variety of ways that can help to increase intrinsic motivation, including:

- **Establishing Values:** The way we use language to establish the value/appeal of given activities. For example, telling a child that he needs to finish his reading before going to recess sends the the clear message the reading is a 'job' that needs to be done in order to obtain the privilege of going to recess. We could, of course, turn things around and use reading as the privilege (e.g., "If we get our belongings put away quickly, we'll have time for an extra book this morning.")
- **Student Choice:** Teachers who are overly directive and who do not provide students with some sense of control over their own learning can undermine their students' intrinsic motivation and engagement.
- **Interesting texts, challenging tasks:** Book choices need to be limited somewhat to books that are of interest to the reader but that will not be too frustrating to read. Moderately challenging academic tasks are generally more motivating than tasks that are either very easy or very challenging. Variety in academic tasks (including variety in topics and genre) tends to increase student motivation.
- **Active Engagement:** Providing students with the opportunity to react to and discuss texts with peers and with teachers deepens their interest in and motivation for reading.
- **Personally Meaningful Tasks:** Having the opportunity to read and write about things that relate to one's own life, culture, heritage and/or interests is motivating.
- **Competence and Self Efficacy Beliefs:** An individual who feels competent to accomplish a task is more motivated to engage in that activity. Thus, for example, students who experience a steady diet of difficult reading will not have a sense of competence and will not be motivated to engage in reading (which will, of course lead to a downward spiral because the less reading a student does the further behind his peers he is likely to fall). This is one of the many reasons that it is important to ensure that most of the reading that students engage in is at an appropriate level of challenge.

**Peter Johnston:** I am currently engaged in a relevant study with 8<sup>th</sup> grade students. It turns out that simply introducing these students to a range of young adult novels (edgy and complex) including verse novels, and inviting them to read what they want and respond how they want, actually gets virtually all of them reading and they choose very challenging texts because they pass books on to their friends. When they run into trouble with the text, because they are engaged, they generate strategies for solving the

problems. You could say they are motivated, but I think engaged is the more appropriate construct. Because the books are edgy, they have to talk to each other about them, so they become engaged in that way also and it changes their relationships and their behavior. While there is every reason to value fun, and even play, these students (around 200 of them) are engaged in hard work that they mostly can't stop because it is too satisfying.

The keys to students taking up challenge are engagement, an environment that doesn't focus on performance goals, and an expectation that they will become engaged. This is one of the better researched areas in educational psychology.

- **There is much research on self-regulation as being a significant contributor to academic success. Do you feel that this is an important aspect of prevention and intervention?**

**Frank Vellutino:** In my opinion, self regulation is a very important component of academic success. It contributes to such success both directly and indirectly. It directly contributes to academic success because it is an important ingredient of one's ability to pay attention to the teacher during classroom instruction, stay on task and avoid becoming distracted when studying or taking tests, pace oneself in performance and study situations in ways that lead to flexibility and better decision making, and acquiring productive study skills and academically oriented habits and behaviors in general.

Self-regulation contributes to academic success indirectly by virtue of its importance in acquiring the social skills necessary for successful and productive interactions with both classmates as well as with teachers and more knowledgeable individuals. To take an extreme but quite obvious example, the individual with poor self-regulation skills is typically the same individual who creates distractions (or worse) in the classroom that make for a less than optimal learning environment. Conversely, the individual with good self-regulation skills is not only less likely to create distractions in the classroom, but is better equipped to engage in mutually profitable dialogue with classmates and teachers that promote incidental and serendipitous learning (from each other) as well as the types of structured learning facilitated by formal instruction.

We have data which suggest that the benefits of self-regulation vis a vis academic success can be observed rather early in the child's academic career. In a doctoral dissertation currently in progress, we found that measures of self-regulation administered to 3 and 4 year old Head Start children were highly correlated with measures of social skills and both sets of measures were highly predictive of performance on a composite measure of academic success consisting of early literacy and math skills. Therefore, any form of prevention or intervention that can facilitate the development of self-regulation and related social skills should, in my opinion, be an important component of instructional planning.

**Peter Johnston:** There is indeed quite a bit of research on self-regulation and academic success and some of the research might surprise people. In order for self-regulation to occur, students must be in control. This means first, that task difficulty is crucial because when the task is too difficult, a student can't manage it. Indeed, in their meta-analysis of instructional interventions in the learning disabilities field, Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) found that, regardless of the domain of study, managing task difficulty was one of three core instructional variables that explained most of the common variance in outcomes.

Engagement is a second helpful condition. When students are fully engaged, they are much more likely to regulate their own behavior. Another condition is that they need to be given space to actually self-monitor. Direct instruction, with immediate feedback, is not very good for building self-regulation.

One perhaps surprising anchor for self-regulation is the development of social imagination (also referred to as theory of mind) – the ability to imagine others' mental behaviors. This is learned in part through imagining characters' and classmates' feelings and motives, and actually using that thinking reflexively – actually quite easily done through conversations around engaging books. Research shows that developing children's social imaginations increases pro-social behavior, decreases misbehavior, and increases self-control.

- **What are some ideas for implementing Tier II for a student, while engaging other students in the class?**

**Stacy Williams:** Interventions delivered at Tier 2 and Tier 3 may differ in size, instruction, and intensity. For example, the literature recommends small group instruction with no more than 6 students homogeneously grouped at the Tier 2 level. Additionally, it is assumed students who access Tier 3 instruction would do so at the individual level. However, providing individual support may not work best in resource strapped communities. Some school communities have delivered Tier 3 instruction to groups as small as three at this level.

Scheduling RTI interventions can be one of the most challenging activities that a local educational agency will undertake. For example, it is expected that students will be engaged in their core curriculum in addition to the academic and/or behavioral supports provided at the secondary or tertiary level. If a student is struggling with literacy, it is expected that the student would receive 90 minutes of core instruction plus 30 minutes of Tier 2 or 3 supports over the course of three to five days. What is often not stated is that the additional 30 minutes will have to be taken from other academic areas (e.g., science or social studies). As a result, school systems will have to be creative in their scheduling of Tier 2 and 3 supports. Burns and Gibbons (2008) have identified three ways in which scheduling can be operationally defined: scheduling RTI in the classroom, school wide RTI plan, or floating RTI personnel.

## **Scheduling RTI in the Classroom**

- In a given classroom, identify 20% of the lowest performing students based on screening data (i.e., whatever measures your district identifies as a screening measure).
- Group students based on skill levels.
- Provide 30 minutes of intervention in a small group setting (4 – 6 students)
- Small group instruction is only successful if students' deficits are homogenous. This grouping may be difficult if variability exists among the lowest 20% of students.

In the example below, a class wide data problem form documents oral reading fluency scores of fourth grade students at an urban school. Before identifying the lowest performing students, it should be determined if the behaviors represented document a class wide or individual problem. The class median is used to determine if oral reading fluency skills are at grade level or below grade norms. In this example, the median is 106.5, which is greater than the national average of 94 words per minute at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. Therefore, data from this class suggest that the majority of the students are being instructed at their instructional level.

Based on the guidelines provided above, 20% (i.e., 5) of the lowest performing students would be identified to receive Tier 2 supports during center activities. The five students at the bottom of the class are Neil, Andrew, Jason, Carmen, and Zyaihara. In order to determine whether or not the five students identified exhibit similar weaknesses, further evaluations need to be conducted (i.e., Survey Level Assessment). Based on survey level assessment data, we know that Zyaihara's needs are different from the other students and probably wouldn't be met if placed in a heterogeneous group. Therefore, Neil, Andrew, Jason, and Carmen would be grouped together for Tier 2 supports, while Zyaihara's needs would be met individually or placed with students demonstrating similar areas of weakness.

## **School wide RTI**

- The school decides to schedule Tier 2 interventions at a common time within the building. First thing in the morning or the last activity before students go home.
- Additional staff would be needed to implement the intervention due to the number of students needing support (e.g., Title 1 personnel, reading/math specialist, paraprofessionals, special education teachers, or school psychologists)
- Advantages: This allows for extensive grouping across grades in which true flexible skill grouping occurs. Less logistically confusing and easier for teachers to track. It allows for teachers to specialize in certain types of intervention
- Disadvantages: Extensive collaboration across grades.

## **Floating RTI (A)**

- This model involves one or two specialists working with various groups of children throughout the day.
- Easier to implement and require fewer resources rather than a school wide initiative.
- This model would require at least two dedicated teachers.

### **Floating RTI (B)**

- This model involves trained upperclassmen (e.g., 7th & 8th graders) working with students in K – 3rd grade.
- This model works best in a K – 8 setting, where upperclassmen have study hall periods.
- Identify potential student tutors based on state assessments and teacher nomination.
- Train student volunteers to implement fluency interventions for reading, mathematics, and writing.
- Training may take place before/after school or during lunch.
- Advantages: Each school can create a group of tutors that can be utilized when Tier 2 or 3 interventions needs to be implemented. Teacher would gain access to trained tutors through the Instructional Support Team process.
- Disadvantages: The time it would take to organize training materials, train tutors, and manage the program.

- **Describe some ways to fine tune teaching interactions.**

**Peter Johnston:** I suggest videotaping or audio taping your interactions with students who are being successful with you and those who are being unsuccessful with you. Transcribing can help think through some things. Working with young children, we know from the work of Phillips and Smith (1997) that the following interaction practices *hinder* children’s development:

- Teaching for words – getting them right rather than self-monitoring and confirming.
- Teaching for dependency – short wait time, teacher controlled.
- Confused focus – drawing attention to non-essential elements.

Watch for them.

You might ask question such as (some of these come from Donna Scanlon’s work):

- Were the students engaged in their reading?
- Did they make productive choices?
- Did they approach reading as a meaning making enterprise?
- Did they read appropriately challenging texts?
- What did they do when they encountered difficulty?
- Do they construe word solving as “doable”?
- Did they use both meaning-based and code/text-based strategies in mutually supportive ways?
- Did they monitor their own comprehension?

- Did they engage others productively along the way?
  - What am I doing to support engagement?
  - What did I do to support independence?
  - Was there sufficient conversation among the students about the text to support comprehending? How are they talking productively together about texts?
  - Is process talk central to the conversations?
  - Is my talk a small part of the conversation?
  - Was the support that I provided on puzzling words appropriate for these students at this point and how was it directed towards independence?
  - When students misidentified a word, did I wait long enough for them to notice that an error had occurred?
- **Describe the training in the skill sets. How will this improve student achievement?**

**Donna Scanlon:** I am not sure what this question refers to, nor whether it was directed to me. I think I touched on this in one of the responses above (in the section on targeting specific skills) and would respond to this question by referring folks to the response above.

**Peter Johnston:** Viewing reading as “training skill sets” will lead students and teachers down the wrong path. Better to view it as an engaged social practice.