What Is RTI for English Learners?

The extent to which students are connecting to what they are learning, how they are learning it, and who they are learning it with appears to play a central role in how well they do in school.

Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008, p. 42
Response to Intervention (RTI) is an instructional delivery model that is designed to identify at-risk learners early and provide appropriate services to them. When considering English learners (ELs), we need to pay attention to how we provide instruction (and intervention) to them, who provides this instruction, and how these students learn in order to achieve positive academic outcomes.

According to the National Center on Response to Intervention, RTI “integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems. With RTI, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities.” [http://www.rti4success.org/](http://www.rti4success.org/)

In this chapter we will unpack this definition and discuss the various aspects of RTI with special attention given to English learners.

**RTI as an Opportunity**

There is growing concern about how to best serve culturally and linguistically diverse students, particularly English learners who are encountering new, challenging content in a new language. High dropout rates—particularly among Latinos, overall poor academic performance, and disproportionate representation of English learners in special education classes (both over- and under-representation) are some of the realities that contribute to this concern. When implemented well, RTI may be an effective solution to providing the education these students need and deserve.

RTI may be viewed as an overarching conceptual framework that guides the entire school improvement process for all students. The specific purpose of RTI is to reduce the number of students who experience academic and behavior problems, including those who eventually become labeled as “disabled.” It was founded on the principles that (a) all children can learn when provided with appropriate, effective instruction and (b) most academic difficulties can be prevented with early identification of need followed by immediate intervention (Echevarria & Hasbrouck, 2009; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007).

Study of human development confirms that all individuals can and will learn under the right conditions. RTI shifts the focus away from the child having a “problem” and onto the learning conditions of the classroom and school. We want to create a learning environment that promotes linguistic and cognitive development using materials, teaching methods, and settings that will facilitate learning for each student. However, early identification of learning difficulties is key (Smith & Tyler, 2010; Tucker & Sornson, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Zhang, 2007). Alba Ortiz, an expert in the field of bilingual special education says, “RTI may help us more quickly identify other factors contributing to low performance. It’s important to respond early. You sometimes see third graders referred to special education, but once you examine their records, you realize they have been struggling with language since kindergarten. The more time passes, the harder it is to tell ESL issues from learning disabilities” (Council for Exceptional Children, 2008, p. 2).

Although you may be tempted to consider RTI the latest “new thing” schools are required to do, we suggest that it should be viewed as an opportunity to use a school’s or
a district’s existing resources, programs, personnel, effective teaching practices, and assessments in a comprehensive way to offer an optimal learning environment for all students. Well implemented RTI establishes a closer working relationship among professionals who are engaged in the education of our most at-risk students.

Historically, when students experienced academic difficulty or behavior problems, the most common response was to wait until the problem was acute enough—until students fell far behind or until some students had a long, documented history of behavior issues—and then they would be referred to special education programs. Over the past 25 years, educators have proposed and experimented with a number of alternative approaches to strengthening the academic achievement of low-performing students as well as identifying more accurately students with learning disabilities (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Marston et al., 2007). Most recently, RTI has emerged as a more effective process for serving the needs of students with academic and/or behavioral concerns than the traditional “wait to fail” or “identify-test-qualify-place” procedure. Advocates were successful in having RTI included in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) so that districts have a choice in how they attend to struggling learners (see Appendix A for IDEA Regulations).

Across the country, states and districts require elements of RTI that may vary slightly from one another, but essentially all RTI approaches contain the components seen in Figure 1.1. Some districts prefer to call the process by other names such as “response to instruction” to highlight the important role of teaching. In this example, it is called RTI2 emphasizing both instruction and intervention.

As you can see in the graphic depiction of the RTI process (Figure 1.2), RTI begins with solid, evidence-based instruction in the general education classroom provided by a highly qualified teacher with regular assessment of student progress. The whole intent of RTI is to move away from looking at poor learning outcomes as indicating there is something wrong with the student and instead to think about what the teacher needs to do to make the student successful. It may be helpful to consider the process “responsiveness of instruction” (Hiebert, Stewart & Uzicanin, 2010) which rightly places responsibility for student improvement on teaching methods, materials, grouping, pace, and so forth. In the case of English learners, we propose that the SIOP® Model (Sheltered Instruction Observation Program)...

![FIGURE 1.1 Core Components of RTI²: Response to Instruction and Intervention](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/cr/ri/rticorecomponents.asp)
Protocol) is the most effective approach to general education instruction because it has been shown to improve the achievement of English learners (Echevarria, Short, & Powers, 2006; Echevarria, et al., in press; Honigsfeld & Cohan, 2008; McIntyre, et al., in press; Short, Fidelman, & Louguit, 2009) and native English speakers (Echevarria, Richards, Canges, & Francis, 2009) when implemented with fidelity.

Sheltered instruction is a way of teaching that uses strategies and techniques to make instruction comprehensible for learners while at the same time promotes academic language development. The SIOP® Model is a lesson planning and delivery system that is comprised of 8 components, each of which reflects research-based practices that should be used systematically and regularly in the general education classroom, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Many of these practices are widely known, such as scaffolding, differentiating instruction, providing clear instructions and explanations, using repetition, creating opportunities for oral language practice around meaningful text, and so forth, but they are not consistently practiced in every lesson. The SIOP® Model is a way to ensure that best practices become habitual.

In each tier of the RTI process, instruction and intervention must be tailored to meet the unique needs of English learners. In Santa Rosa, California, SIOP® training for all teachers is part of their LEAP (Local Educational Agency Plan). Staff members at Curriculum and Instruction, Grades 7-12, say, “Having SIOP® as a key component in our LEAP means that we have committed to embed SIOP® at all levels of RTI intervention.”

In terms of student outcomes, at one middle school where SIOP® is fully implemented, the administration reports having fewer students in intervention (Tier 3), although because they have a large majority of English learners, Tier 2 is still used to provide extra time for support for those students who need it. In addition, student test scores are continuing to rise as teachers have continued to deepen their implementation of the SIOP®.

A brief description of the program is found in Figure 1.3 along with their SIOP® planning template.

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**FIGURE 1.2  A Three-tiered Model of RTI for English Learners**

In Tier 1, we are in the process of training all middle school and high school content area teachers in the SIOP® Model as well as all classroom teachers in elementary school, since so many of our higher CELDT [language proficiency] level English learners are dispersed throughout the core classes. We have trained all of our administrators using [observation] guides and have embedded language in the guides that serve to develop understanding of the SIOP® features.

Of all our strategic teachers (Tier 2) in English/Language Arts (ELA) nearly all are SIOP® trained. We hold trainings for that cohort three times per year to discuss key components of the SIOP® Model to support these students: Lesson Preparation, Building Background (specifically academic vocabulary development), Strategies, Interaction, and Review and Assessment (particularly as it relates to ongoing checks for understanding).

In our district, Tier 3 includes special education, and intensive ELA and Math classes. Currently, most of our Intensive teachers are trained in SIOP®. In addition, so are many of our Special Education teachers. We will be training more Special Education teachers as a cohort this year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SIOP Facilitator</td>
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<td>Core teacher group</td>
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<td>Resources</td>
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FIGURE 1.3  Continued

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<th>Result</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Time line</td>
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<td>Measures for data analysis</td>
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<td>Meeting format and times</td>
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**SIOP Team ACTION PLAN**

**Objectives:**

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<tr>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What steps or activities will be initiated to achieve this goal?</td>
<td>Who will be responsible for initiating or sustaining the action steps?</td>
<td>What is a realistic timeframe for each phase of the activity?</td>
<td>What evidence will you present that you are making progress toward your goal?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
As you can see in Figure 1.2, RTI is a recursive process, not a linear one. Students move in and out of intervention as needed for specific skill development in language, reading, writing, or math. For example, a student may require Tier 2 intervention in math, but also receive Tier 3 intervention in reading. The duration of intervention and the decision about whether a student is dismissed from intervention and returned to the general education classroom for 100% of their day depends on the needs of the learner. Even when students receive intervention, it is important to remember that typically, intervention is a small part of the day that focuses on building specific skills to enhance learning in the general education classroom. Intervention is skill specific, but for the majority of the school day, English learners are in general education and should be engaged in rich, meaningful discussion and activities around text. Teaching techniques are used that encourage active participation and provide students with the support they need to be successful in each lesson. Even if English learners receive Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention, instruction in their general education classroom must reflect best practice for English learners.

Using RTI as a “prevention system,” a teacher’s intent is to create a learning environment that will catch difficulties early and provide the type of instruction and modifications that will in some cases ameliorate those difficulties and in other cases support learning so that all students are successful. In either situation, the goal is maximizing student achievement and reducing behavior problems. Unfortunately, this is not always the experience of struggling students and their families. As one parent recently emailed:

If only we could get everyone who is involved in the education of our children to think about what the adults need to do to help students succeed instead of labeling children who struggle as defective and in need of fixing. My daughter has a nonverbal learning disability, which affects every aspect of her life (and mine), so I am a veteran of the special ed process. Our school district has been very good to us overall, and I am grateful for the special ed services that Cassie receives. She needs them in order to be successful in the general ed classroom. But we have encountered too many teachers along the way who seemed to feel that the onus was on Cassie to learn to do things their way rather than figuring out how they could adapt their ways to better meet Cassie’s needs.
Our focus should be on finding out what students CAN do and searching for what type of instruction, modification, or accommodation works for them, regardless of whether they have been diagnosed with a language/learning disability. Figure 1.4 shows that there are a number of misconceptions about the purpose of RTI and its function in a school or district. It is not a “new way” to refer students to special education, as some teachers have called it. Some aspects of the RTI process may be similar to conducting and documenting pre-referral interventions, but RTI is not a path toward special education placement. In fact, it can prevent students from being referred unnecessarily for costly services if what they need is specific skills development. RTI is not a classroom set aside where students are sent when they experience behavior and academic problems; it is an approach that involves all school personnel. It is a schoolwide process, and the success of students is the responsibility of everyone, not one teacher in one location. An RTI process searches for what will work most effectively for individual students; it is more than simply providing an additional period of English language development (ELD), math, or reading and it is more than a curriculum developed for “intervention.” Finally, please do not use RTI as an adjective to describe students, teachers, or classes (e.g., Mr. Cavale, the RTI teacher, or Gabriela is RTI). Using the term as an adjective relegates the responsibility for successful RTI to one specific teacher or classroom and unnecessarily labels students who receive services.

RTI is about assessing students, monitoring their progress, and providing the kinds of instruction and intervention they need to learn the skills or behaviors required to be successful in the classroom. It’s not all about intervention – it is about focusing on effective instruction.
instruction in the general education classroom, and then considering interventions if students continue to struggle. We want to prevent problems from occurring at the first sign of risk.

RTI Definition Unpacked

Multitier Approach

Although most commonly referred to as a three-tiered approach, it is more accurate to say RTI is multi-tiered because there may be more than three tiers in an RTI process (Vaughn & Klinger, 2007). Typically, the tiers represent the following: Tier 1 is the general education classroom and core curriculum that all students receive. Tier 2 provides intervention for qualified students that supplements the core curriculum and classroom practice. Tier 2 services do not absolve general education teachers of responsibility for providing modifications to ensure student success. (Later in this chapter we will discuss specific modifications and adaptations that take place in Tier 1). Tier 3 involves more intensive, individualized intervention and may or may not include students with identified disabilities who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In some models, students with IEPs receive special education services in Tier 4.

RTI should be thought of as a continuum of services that increases in intensity based on student need, and is recursive in nature; students move in and out of tiered services as needed. The number of levels or tiers offered is not as important as the use of an approach that works best for students.

Assessment and Intervention

The first sentence of the National Center on Response to Intervention definition, “(RTI) integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavior problems” illustrates the relationship between assessment and instruction or intervention. One key element of effective RTI is using assessment to measure student progress and employing the results to inform the type of intervention needed as well as direct the focus of instruction in the general education classroom (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). As Olson et al. (2007) remark, “After all, the primary purpose of assessment should always be improving student learning” (p. 117).

Identify Areas of Concern and Monitor Progress

Early identification and support for students at risk for poor learning outcomes and behavior problems is critical, especially given the fact mentioned previously that in the past, schools waited for students to fall significantly behind their peers before services were provided (Council for Exceptional Children, 2008; Gersten & Dimino, 2006; Tucker & Sornson, 2007; Vaughn, Wanzek, Woodruff, & Linan-Thompson, 2007; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Zhang, 2007). The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom. Universal screening is used to determine the performance or skill level of all students, and those who show deficits...
have a diagnostic evaluation to determine the exact nature and scope of the problem. Data for the diagnosis may be obtained from the following sources:

- End of unit assessments (from the core curriculum)
- Leveled running records
- Orthographic assessments
- Anecdotal notes (e.g., doesn’t follow directions)

Remember that any diagnostic tools or standardized assessments must consider the student’s English language proficiency. Imagine having important decisions being made about your ability and your potential success based on a test given in a language in which you are not fluent!

Even with language proficiency being taken into consideration, there will be learners who continue to struggle; they would be provided Tier 2 intervention (discussed in Chapter 4). Early intervention is critical, although some researchers have suggested that as many as 50% of first graders identified as at-risk through one-time universal screening may make satisfactory progress throughout their first grade year without Tier 2 intervention. Weekly progress monitoring for five weeks helped to more accurately identify those students who needed intervention. The researchers recommended that a combination of universal screening (to identify at-risk learners) and short-term progress monitoring (to identify students for Tier 2) be used to avoid targeting children who, given more time with high quality instruction, will not require unnecessary and costly Tier 2 services (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). This approach may be particularly useful for English learners since language acquisition requires time; some of these students may make progress over time with effective instruction and careful progress monitoring.

Interventions continue at increasing levels of intensity as needed to accelerate students’ rate of learning. Progress is closely monitored to assess both the learning rate and the level of performance of individual students. Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention is intended to be short term, lasting a specified number of weeks. Most students will be dismissed from Tier 2 services once they have acquired the skills they need. Students receiving Tier 3 intervention may need intensive support for a longer period of time, after which they may move to Tier 2 intervention for less intensive support. Some students may be dismissed from intervention and receive all instruction in their general education classroom.

It is important to remember that Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions are not designed for students who are just having difficulty in meeting grade-level standards such as interpreting tables and graphs in social studies or finding a theme in a novel. Interventions are for students who have difficulty with key skills that impact more global success in the content area.

For students who have difficulty in meeting specific standards, RTI provides an opportunity for educators to examine the general education classroom to ensure that research-validated instruction, such as the kind presented in Chapter 3, is in place and that teachers are meeting their students’ needs. Some general practices for improving students’ performance that supplement teaching include the following:

- Conferencing with a parent or guardian
- Conducting a health screening to check vision and hearing
- Moving a student to another seat or to a carrel to reduce distractions
- Allowing another student to translate using a student’s native language
- Designing a behavior or academic contract with a student and/or family
- Reducing the number of math problems or questions in any subject area for a student
- Conferencing with the student, using an interpreter if needed
- Providing the student with assistive technology
- Adjusting the level of difficulty of an assignment
- Providing sentence frames, outlines of a text or lecture, or other scaffolds
- Permitting students to complete an assignment using their native language
- Giving a student extended time to complete an assignment or take a test

These would not be considered interventions; these are part of a teacher’s repertoire for differentiating instruction as needed. These are the kinds of things “good” teachers do because they know these modifications will facilitate their students’ learning. (See Figure 1.5 to see the distinction between accommodations, modifications, and interventions.) However, it is still important to provide documentation so that a comprehensive record of the student’s education is created. The Record of Modifications and/or Accommodations (Figure 1.6) is useful for a number of purposes including:

1. It provides a record of what was tried previously, for how long, and its effectiveness with the student that teachers can refer to as they think about how to modify instruction.

**FIGURE 1.5  Clarifying RTI Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accommodations</th>
<th>Modifications</th>
<th>Interventions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use assistive technology</td>
<td>Simplify directions, providing picture support, if needed</td>
<td>Form small groups consisting of students with similar academic profiles (3–5 students, depending on intensity required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tape-record reading assignment for homework and/or review</td>
<td>Reduce number of correct responses required (e.g., math problems)</td>
<td>Focus on specific skills, e.g., fluency and comprehension</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give a test orally so student can express knowledge without writing</td>
<td>Slow the pace of instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide peer tutoring</td>
<td>Adjust the level of difficulty of an assignment</td>
<td>Select materials appropriate for student’s ability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Move the student’s seat to reduce distractions</td>
<td>Give an outline for an assignment (in the native language, if needed)</td>
<td>Provide immediate, explicit feedback on responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pair student with a partner who speaks the student’s native language</td>
<td>Provide sentence frames for oral participation and writing tasks</td>
<td>Increase intensity by lowering number of students in the group, providing intervention more frequently, and moving at a brisk pace</td>
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</table>
FIGURE 1.6 *Record of Modifications and/or Accommodations*

Teacher Name __________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modifications/Accommodations</th>
<th>K</th>
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<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<td>Access to Taped Books/Text</td>
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<td>Adapted texts</td>
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<td>Assessment by Psychologist</td>
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<td>(informal)</td>
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<td>Behavior Contract</td>
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<td>Classroom Instructional Aide</td>
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<td>Cross Age Tutoring</td>
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<td>Modifications/Accommodations</td>
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<td>Extended Time to Complete Assignment</td>
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<td>Health Screening</td>
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<td>Homework Helper</td>
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<td>In-School Counseling (Straight Talk, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kids Korner/Homework Time</td>
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<td>Language Proficiency Assessment</td>
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<td>Learning Specialist Support</td>
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<td>Modified Class Assessments</td>
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<td>Peer Tutoring</td>
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<td>Primary Language Instruction</td>
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<td>Private Tutoring</td>
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<td>Retention</td>
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<td>Small Group Reading Instruction</td>
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<td>Reading Intervention</td>
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<td>Special Classroom Seating</td>
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<td>Multidisciplinary Team Meeting</td>
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(Continued)
2. It provides a historical record for teachers in subsequent grades that might guide their instructional decisions.

3. A record of Tier 1 classroom modifications would help inform decisions if a student is considered for Tier 2 intervention.

4. The form becomes part of a comprehensive record that might be used as part of the student’s evaluation if the student is considered for Tier 3 intervention.

5. The record may be useful when conferencing with parents to show the type of things that work well or to provide an account of modifications that were provided before their child was referred for more intensive intervention.

Remember that screening and progress monitoring are done for a purpose: to make changes for those students identified as at-risk. So, we conduct screening and progress monitoring—and then do something about it. Students who make progress are moved out of groups, which creates more time for the ones who need it (Vanderwood & Nam, 2007).

**Provide Evidence-based Interventions**

Intervention in Tier 2 is the use of a research-validated program that supplements the core curriculum. We adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student’s responsiveness. As previously mentioned, RTI begins with high-quality instruction in the general education classroom, where teachers make numerous individual modifications to the instructional program in order to support each student’s achievement. Even in this context, there will be students who have not mastered the critical skills they need to perform well academically across curricular areas. Therefore, in addition to regular classroom instruction, approximately 20%–30% of learners may need additional intervention. Specific Tier 2 interventions are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 and may include small
group reading and writing instruction using text leveled for difficulty. For English learners, it is important to use interesting, meaningful materials and to make connections to what they know.

Although there is limited research about which specific interventions are effective with English learners, it appears that some of the same interventions that are used with native English speakers can be used to improve the outcomes for English learners who receive core literacy instruction in English (Vanderwood & Nam, 2007).

**Identify Learning Disabilities**

As we have mentioned previously, the under- and overidentification of English learners and other diverse students for special education services makes RTI appealing for reaching more accurate eligibility decisions. RTI, if implemented well, takes into consideration, during referral and eligibility decision-making, the classroom context including quality of instruction, (particularly with regard to early literacy), teacher qualification to teach English learners, students’ language proficiency match to materials and instruction, and other factors that have not typically been considered. (We discuss these issues in more depth in the next chapter.) Instead, school personnel have “seemed quick to attribute a child’s struggles to internal deficits or the home environment” (Klinger, Sorrels, & Barrera, 2007, p. 225).

If English learners have received high-quality instruction in general education that is research-validated for ELs (Chapter 3), if their language proficiency and sociocultural context has been considered (Chapter 2), and if appropriate intervention has been tried and well documented (Chapters 4 and 5), yet they are not making progress with appropriate intervention (and other factors have been excluded as influences on their learning), then identification of a learning disability should be considered.

As one veteran teacher commented about identifying students who have not responded to intervention, “Be sure you’ve tried everything before referring a student for testing. It is very costly in terms of money, time, and labor. The special education teacher isn’t teaching while she’s testing; the school psychologist can’t do other things when testing. You want to avoid unnecessary referrals.” Well-implemented RTI holds promise for providing English learners with adequate opportunity to learn so that we can more accurately differentiate between those who do and do not have learning disabilities.

**RTI Models**

In addition to variations in the number of tiers used to deliver RTI services, schools also use different approaches in implementation, such as problem-solving, standard treatment protocol, and hybrid approaches (Echevarria & Hasbrouck, 2009). Although the RTI components (for example, universal screening and tiered model) look similar under both problem-solving and standard treatment protocol, the approaches vary in how interventions are implemented.

**Standard Treatment Protocol**

In the standard treatment protocol, one standard intervention is given for a fixed duration to a group of students with similar needs. This approach assumes that providing the same
research-based intervention to similarly grouped students introduces a level of quality control (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2005).

For example, in Roosevelt School, students who test at the “struggling” level are automatically placed in one hour of supplemental literacy (or math) instruction. This Tier 2 intervention is in addition to general education literacy instruction. Students who test two grade levels below are placed in Tier 3, which is intensive intervention (Tier 4 is special education). Tier 3 curriculum and instruction typically supplants the core curriculum because it is intended to offer students something different to move them at an accelerated pace.

One drawback is relying on assessment results to automatically place students in Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. With English learners, some assessments are questionable and may not be accurate for this population (Figueroa, 2002; Hosp & Madyun, 2007; Ortiz & Yates, 2002; Vanderwood & Nam, 2007).

In addition, teachers may not provide adequate modifications and accommodations in the student’s general education classroom because they have come to rely on automatically sending struggling students to intervention. There is not the level of support that problem-solving teams provide to assist teachers with ideas for modifications, instructional techniques and strategies, progress monitoring, and interpreting data.

Finally, we run the risk of beginning to think of RTI as a curriculum that students are plugged into rather than considering all options for making the student successful. Ultimately, the teacher always provides the intervention, not the materials.

**Problem-Solving Model**

In the problem-solving model, a team of practitioners identifies and evaluates the problems of an individual student and designs and implements flexible interventions to meet that student’s needs. This model typically has four stages: problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and plan evaluation. This model assumes that no one intervention is effective for all students (National Association of State Directors of Special Education 2005). A key feature in successful RTI models is teachers working together and examining data as a team (Haagar & Mahdavi, 2007). This team approach offers the possibility of reducing the likelihood that student will be misplaced. The team examines data and considers lots of possibilities. Student progress is constantly monitored and the team takes the results and discusses options.

For example, in Bellevue School, when the classroom teacher is concerned about a student, he or she goes to the site-based council and discusses the student with the other members (problem identification and problem analysis) (see Figure 1.7, RTI Intervention Record). They offer suggestions for classroom modifications and accommodations that are specific for addressing the concerns about the student. The teacher goes back and tries some of the ideas suggested (plan implementation), documenting the duration and outcome. The team examines the documentation and makes appropriate decisions about how well the suggestions were implemented (plan evaluation). For some students, the classroom modifications the teacher implemented provide the support the students needed and the process ends. If student progress isn’t adequate after receiving modifications/accommodations, the team conducts further problem-solving. The student would most likely be recommended for Tier 2 intervention that supplements classroom instruction. A student who is in Tier 2 will require a detailed plan about the intervention to be implemented. For example, in addition to the core curriculum and methods already in place, a
student will meet with the teacher in a small group three times a week (frequency). During that time, they will work for 30 minutes (intensity) on phonemic awareness for a period of 6–12 weeks (duration of the intervention). This team problem-solving process continues as the student continues to experience difficulty and is used when making decisions in both general education and special education, creating a well-integrated system of instruction and intervention guided by student outcome data.

The drawback of this model is that it is time- and labor-intensive and requires a level of sophistication in terms of understanding instruction for English learners, pinpointing
appropriate intervention based on specific student need, accurate data collection and interpretation, and fidelity of intervention for it to be effective.

**Hybrid Approaches**

As mentioned, the two approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In some cases a combination or hybrid of the two approaches is used; both types of interventions may be provided within each tier, based on student needs.

Although there are several ways a school might implement RTI to best serve the needs of its students, RTI should be a schoolwide framework for efficiently allocating resources to improve student outcomes (http://www.rtinetwork.org/Learn/What/ar/WhatIsRTI) and the process must be implemented with fidelity to be effective.

**Making RTI Work**

To begin using an RTI approach or to enhance the effectiveness of the one you are currently using, there are a number of issues to consider.

First, fidelity is critical. In education research, fidelity is defined as the degree to which an intervention or model of instruction is implemented as it was originally designed to be implemented (Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, & Bocian, 2000). Fidelity in the RTI process involves:

- **Instruction**—All students, including English learners, receive systematic, research-based teaching that is consistent and effective. Many districts commit to professional development to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified for teaching content area subjects as well as understanding effective instruction for English learners.

- **Intervention**—For students who struggle, intervention is implemented with high fidelity and in the specific way the approach was intended. Intervention involves research-validated instructional techniques and implementation approximates as closely as possible the original model used in the research.

- **RTI process**—Assessments are used accurately for benchmark/screening, skill diagnosis, and progress monitoring. Data are used effectively for making decisions about placement, instruction, and program evaluation. These aspects of RTI cross all Tiers and are essential.

Second, an important aspect of effective RTI is documentation. Developing a comprehensive record of student performance—and how the school responded to assessment data—will provide critical information for decision-making. Figure 1.7 shows a sample form that may be used to document initial concern (based on universal screening and/or teacher recommendation), the kind of modifications the teacher used in the classroom with the student, and the recommended intervention, duration, and outcome. This form reflects a problem-solving approach to RTI as noted by the “RTI Site-based Council.”

Third, effective RTI requires administrative support to make it happen well. In Figure 1.8 we have provided some questions for administrators to consider for implementing high-quality RTI. Teachers and other school personnel need to be aware of effective instructional practices for all students, including the research for teaching English learners...
presented in Chapter 3. In addition, development of procedures for accurate assessment of students, and collection and interpretation of data is critical since these results will be used to inform instructional decisions. Figure 1.9 provides some questions for teachers to consider during the planning phase when developing assessments for students as well as for consideration when collecting student data. We want to create optimal conditions for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Collaboration among school personnel facilitates understanding of student data results and increases the likelihood that the results will be interpreted accurately and used effectively. As the questions for administrators imply (Figure 1.8), time needs to be set aside for collaboration.

Finally, effective RTI requires substantial professional development. Districts should create a long-term professional development plan that addresses fidelity of instruction, professional development needs, and other critical factors.

FIGURE 1.8 Questions to Consider: Administrative Support

- Are you supervising the RTI process by going into classrooms, checking lesson plans, observing instruction with English learners, reviewing data, and monitoring intervention?
- Are you using all your staff effectively by encouraging collaboration between general educators, ESL and bilingual personnel, special educators, and other specialists?
- Have you provided adequate time for teachers to discuss at-risk students? Where in the schedule could you fit that in? Is there a specific room to discuss RTI? (Not the lunch room!)
- Do you oversee the forms needed for the process? (For example, Are they updated, accessible for teachers, enough copies?) Do the forms specifically address issues related to English learners? (e.g., language development, cultural considerations)
- Are your teachers qualified to work effectively with English learners?
- Are the student assessments used appropriate for English learners?
- What kind of professional development do your teachers need? Do you have a plan that prioritizes topics? (e.g., effective instruction for English learners, understanding second language acquisition, implementing the RTI process, and how to monitor progress and interpret data)
- Have you established relationships with culturally diverse families? Have you made sufficient effort to involve them in the RTI process as valued partners?
- Are you following through on certain students who require it? Do you contact families who aren’t following through? Is someone checking on a student who has poor attendance?

FIGURE 1.9 Questions for Teachers to Consider: Preparing Assessments and Collecting Data

- Are you giving ample time for the student to complete the task?
- Would another day be advantageous for testing the student because s/he is tired or ill?
- Are you testing in a place with minimal distractions?
- Are you doing the testing yourself, or are you relying on someone unfamiliar with the student?
- Will a tester unfamiliar with the child recognize progress since that person may not be aware of the child’s English proficiency level or areas of difficulty, e.g., articulation problems?
- Is the language demand too high for the student’s English proficiency level?
- Are you repeating the directions, as needed? Are you checking for understanding? Can the student explain to you what you want him or her to do on the test?
- Does the student need the instructions translated into his/her home language?
- Have you pre-taught the vocabulary of the task you’re testing them on?
fidelity of intervention, and implementing all aspects of RTI with fidelity. Professional
development needs to be ongoing and sustained to support teachers in:

- Providing high-quality instruction and intervention
- Selecting and accurately administering assessments for benchmark/screening, skill
diagnosis, and progress monitoring
- Using assessments for decisions about placement, instruction, and program evaluation

**Final Thoughts**

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a multi-tier approach to educational decisions about the
intensity, frequency, and duration of interventions based on individual student response to
instruction. Sometimes we can get caught up in benchmarks, interventions, progress mon-
toring, and programs and we can lose sight of the individual learner. With English learn-
ers, we need to step back and look at the big picture. In the next chapter we will discuss
factors that impact learning for English learners and should be part of the discussion
whenever an English learner struggles academically or behaviorally.

**For Reflection and Discussion**

1. In the Standard Treatment Protocol, what is the drawback to relying on assessment
results to automatically place students in Tier 2 interventions? What about Tier 3?
2. The students at Cabrillo middle school are supposed to be assessed every four weeks
to make sure they are making adequate progress academically. However, due to
absenteeism, school activities, teacher apathy, and other factors, the practice isn’t
consistent. The idea of RTI is to provide a quick response to academic problems, but
these students are falling farther behind without interventions, consistent documenta-
tion, and progress monitoring. If you were a district administrator in charge of
implementing an RTI model, what recommendations would you make to the building
administration and staff?
3. Why is fidelity such a critical issue for RTI? How might you ensure that a school
staff is implementing the process with fidelity?