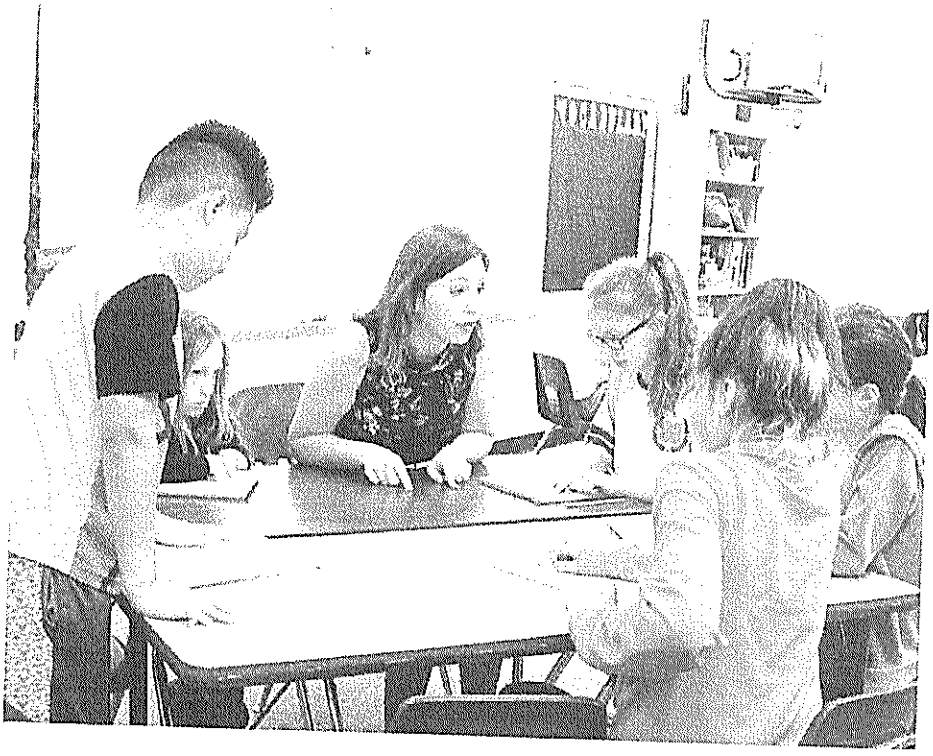
CHAPTER 7

DATA-DRIVEN PROBLEM-SOLVING PROCESSES



When gauging the successes of our CLD students, we have to look well beyond a score on a standardized test. It is important to take into consideration their experience with their L1 and L2, their confidence with English, and their support system at home as well. It has been beyond valuable to have a data dialogue where all stakeholders can be involved who are invested in the student—classroom teacher, ESOL teacher, intervention teacher, etc. Sometimes that dialogue paints a better picture of a student than a graph full of data. When we know all the factors that influence students on a day-to-day basis, it makes it easier to problem solve and figure out how to meet their needs.

Chelsea Johnson, Elementary Reading Specialist. Reprinted with permission.

Chapter Outline

Learning Outcomes

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- Detail the purposes and models of Response to Intervention (RTI).
- Gather data needed to inform interpretation of assessment results.
- Hold informed conversations with administrators, colleagues, and parents about tiers of support available to CLD students.
- Engage in problem-solving processes to address student learning needs.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment is a teaching tool, calibrated chiefly by its appropriateness for the intended group and purpose. Effective use of assessments to measure learning requires teachers to understand, and have taught to, the specific skills and knowledge students need to perform each task. But teaching techniques alone cannot ensure that every student will learn what is taught.

Consider the quarterback on a football team. Mere mastery of the physics and execution of the perfect pass cannot guarantee the ball will be caught. Top quarterbacks understand that the health, psychology, prior training, and motivation of their *receivers* factor into each player's ability to perform under particular circumstances. These quarterbacks respond quickly to missed connections by making changes to their delivery, redirecting team supports, and structuring subsequent plays to the receiver's strengths.

Effective teachers are like winning quarterbacks. Their ability to deliver content successfully reflects not only professional mastery but also the degree to which they understand and respond to what each individual student brings to the game. The focus of this chapter is on the power that insights gathered via preinstructional assessment (Chapter 3) have during response to intervention and other data-driven, problem-solving processes. These types of processes are key to the advancement of both the teacher and the student on the field of educational achievement.

RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION

> Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multilevel prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems. With RTI, schools use data to 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 or other disabilities. (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010, p. 2)
>
> *Source:* National Center on Response to Intervention (March 2010). Essential Components of RTI – A Closer Look at Response to Intervention, p. 2.

Response to intervention (RTI) is a relevant topic of any text that examines the relationship between assessment and instruction. RTI reflects newer perspectives and practices in the way schools identify and respond to students who are not learning as expected within the *core curriculum*, or general instruction provided all students.

Despite these efforts, nationwide data continue to show that far too many capable students are not acquiring the skills necessary for academic success (Aud et al., 2011; IES, 2015). Although some students enter school with a degree of academic disadvantage (Burkam & Lee, 2002; Hart & Risley, 1995, 2005, Weisleder & Fernald, 2013), it benefits educators to examine instances in which exposure to formal instruction *increases* rather than closes the educational gap.

These phenomena are not limited to isolated cases. Indeed, entire groups of students may "fail" when they are provided with poor curriculum or instructional methods. Situations such as these are beyond unfortunate; they violate the educational rights of all students, exceptional and nonexceptional alike. More insidiously, patterns of student (school) failure can reinforce notions that entire groups of students are inherently less capable of learning than others.

RTI is a conglomerate of practices based on the alternate premise that most students *do* learn well when provided high-quality instruction and close monitoring of educational progress (Echevarria & Hasbrouck, 2009; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007). *In its ideal*, RTI combines systematic, proactive, and responsive elements to improve patterns of student achievement across entire schools and districts.

RTI approaches encourage examination of both the instructional inputs and achievement outputs associated with individual and group learning within the "core." RTI models require that instruction be (a) evidence-based, (b) delivered with fidelity, and (c) consistently informed by dynamic measures of student progress (Bender & Shores, 2007). Frequent assessments of targeted skills provide teachers the information required for timely instructional adjustments to ensure that all students receive the supports necessary to maximize individual success (Hale et al., 2010). RTI speaks so explicitly to the power of *evidence-based* instruction that RTI was included among the criteria schools may utilize to determine a student's eligibility for special education (reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004). Preventative support structures, such as RTI, along with assurance for supports to meet culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) student needs, also are promoted in the updated Every Student Succeeds Act (2016).

RTI represents an important shift in the requirements necessary to identify and assist students with a possible learning disability. Previous criteria for determining disability focused on finding a significant discrepancy between the student's overall ability (measured IQ) and performance on standardized tests of

academic achievement. As discussed throughout this text, however, factors other than an innate disability can contribute to student achievement, and overreliance on discrepancy models is one of the factors frequently associated with disproportionate referral and placement of CLD students in special education (De Valenzuela, Copeland, Qi, & Park, 2006; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006).

In addition to overidentification at the point of evaluation, adherence to discrepancy models can actually prevent struggling students from receiving the support needed to close emergent achievement gaps before they widen. RTI represents a move away from wait-to-fail models that disregard student struggles until gaps become large enough to merit diagnoses as a disability (Fletcher & Vaughn, 2009; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003). It has been anticipated that through more rapid response to concerns and eligibility based on student response to research-based methods, fewer students overall will require special education support (Fuchs & Deshler, 2007).

RTI has greater potential to promote systemic improvement than previous models where focus on assessment and placement (in special education) did little to expand teachers' abilities to assess, interpret, and respond to students' learning needs with targeted and timely supports. Whereas test results provide a score, well-implemented interventions facilitate the cycles of learning, assessment, and modification necessary to determine when, how, and *under what conditions* the student *does learn*. RTI models invite us to think as much about the responsiveness of our instruction to the student's learning, as the student's response to our instruction (Hamayan, Marler, Sánchez-López, & Damico, 2014; Hiebert, Stewart, & Uzicanin, 2010). Teachers who begin to problem solve in this manner not only become more adept at distinguishing disabilities from differences in individual students, they often become more capable and responsive teachers of students overall. This is particularly important with CLD students for whom lack of appropriate teaching methods can seriously affect opportunity to learn.

Some districts frame self-assessment, improvement plans, and instructional practices around *multitiered systems of support (MTSS)*. MTSS structures frequently include RTI, but the terms are not synonymous. Both are considered preventative, but MTSS models tend to be more comprehensive, with attention to varied or multiple *tiers of instructional support*. These support structures may involve nonacademic areas such as social-emotional development and behavior, or system goals (e.g., professional development, learning culture, and parent involvement). Although distinctions exist, the bulk of information and examples in this chapter applies to the data we employ to assess—and assess within—either of these proactive/responsive systems of supports.

assessment FREEZE FRAME 7.1

Whereas test results provide a score, well-implemented interventions facilitate the cycles of learning, assessment, and modification necessary to determine when, how, and *under what conditions* the student *does learn*.

What Does RTI Look Like?

Well-designed RTI models include a number of components that enable and support student learning. Central to each is the assurance of high-quality classroom instruction, delivered with fidelity by collaborative and knowledgeable staff who involve parents in supporting the child's educational experience. Students' progress is monitored closely via universal screenings and data derived from student responses to targeted intervention.

RTI models commonly reference a triangular pyramid of tiered supports. Most models delineate three or four tiers, with the largest or core level representing the

effective educational practices provided to *all* students. The premise and promise of RTI is that a well-implemented instructional core successfully meets the needs of 70% to 80% of students across settings and populations. When fewer students demonstrate expected growth within the core, schools should examine the following:

- Scope and coherence of curricular content
- Appropriateness of the instructional methods
- Fidelity of implementation
- Validity of data for CLD students
- Correspondence with more authentic or alternate demonstration of skills

Because the proportion of students with innate learning disabilities is generally similar regardless of demographic, it is reasonable to expect that the majority of students, regardless of background, will experience success within a *relevant* and *responsive* core.

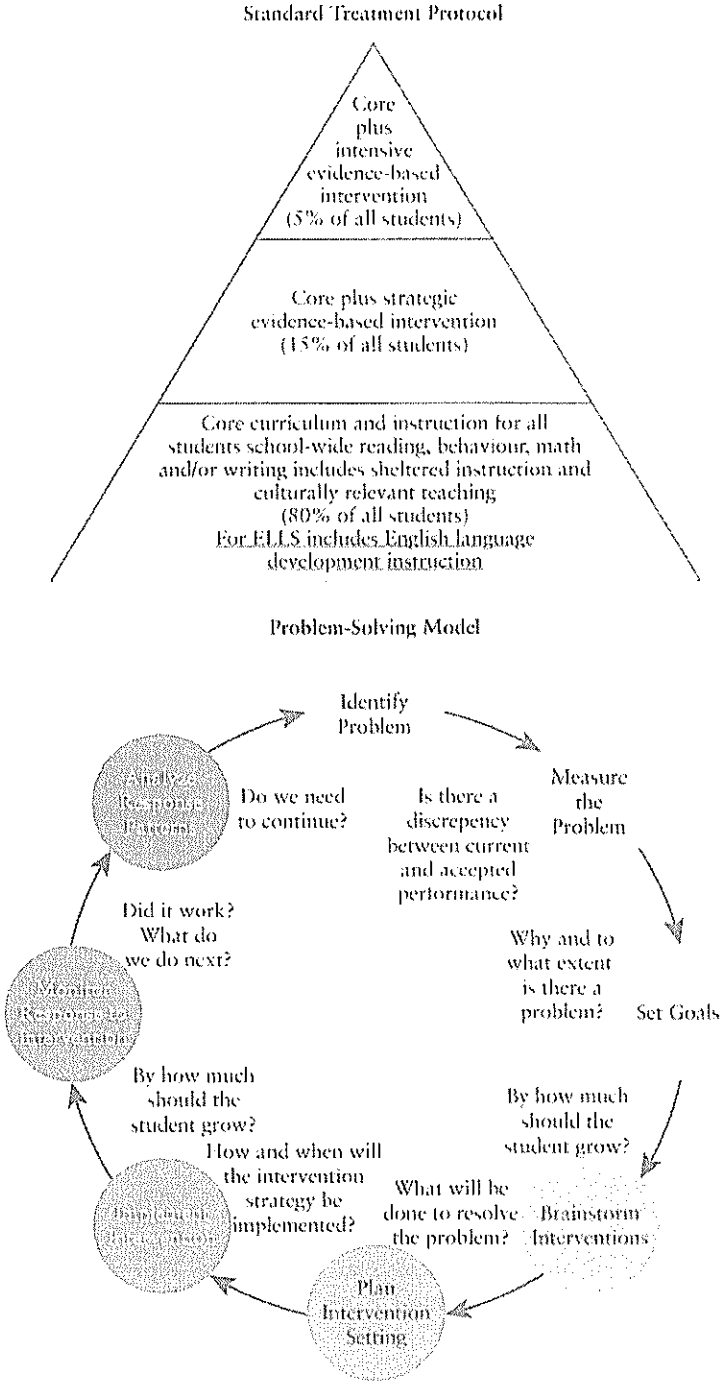
RTI structures differ among states, cities, and districts. There are two major types of RTI models, employed either separately or in tandem within a framework of supports. The first is referred to as a *standard treatment protocol*. Within this model, the same research-based treatment is provided to all students at each level, with progress measured against set indicators or benchmarks of achievement. Students who do not meet these criteria receive an additional research-supported treatment of more intensive supports. Literacy models that track student achievement using benchmark and progress monitoring systems, such as AIMSWeb (Pearson) and DIBELS or IDEL (University of Oregon), are examples of standard treatment protocols commonly used in schools today.

Although the models are not mutually exclusive, the *problem-solving model* differs from the standard treatment protocol in several respects. Chief among these is that problem-solving models focus on more individualized interventions and contextually based assessment. Methods outlined for problem solving foster detailed consideration of the experiential or external factors that may be influencing a specific student's achievement (Hamayan et al., 2014). Individualized interventions that prove effective for numerous students may then become incorporated into the core as levels of necessary differentiation for all, rather than as indicators of individual need.

In discussing problem-solving and standard treatment models of RTI, Catherine Collier (2010) notes that the graphics used to describe them (see Figure 7.1 for examples) lend insight to potential weakness or cautions of each. In the multitiered models, student movement between tiers may be based upon universal or larger scale criteria that are not appropriate for CLD students. Although placement within the tiers is ideally fluid (students return to core settings once skill-specific needs are met), the potential exists for the ascending tiers to be misinterpreted as unidirectional steps toward special education.

Conversely, problem-solving models are frequently depicted as circular to represent continuous cycles of instruction, assessment, analysis, and instructional refinement. Although this representation effectively reduces consideration of the process as a path to special education, ongoing treatment outside the standard can fail to illuminate how, when, and *if* the student can be successful within the core. These models are not mutually exclusive, and many schools strive to employ elements of both.

Figure 7.1 Models of RTI



Sources: J. E. Brown, A. Sanford, and E. Lolich (2010, April 29), *RTI for English Language Learners: Appropriate Screening, Progress Monitoring and Instructional Planning*. Webinar presentation by the National Center on Response to Intervention. C. Collier (2010), *RTI for Diverse Learners: More Than 200 Instructional Interventions*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press). Page 5. Reprinted by permission.

Tiers (Not Tracks) of Instruction

Consideration of the appropriateness of a measure for students became the topic for prekindergarten teachers attending a workshop about the new *universal screener* for use in their school.

Mr. Mantri: Well, I think I understand the intention and, yes, it makes a lot of sense to find out early which students need more help than others, but . . .

Ms. Ordaz: Will paraprofessional allocations and class size be adjusted for classes with more low students?

Ms. Lowell: I don't consider my students "low," but I do worry that a lot of their scores will be. Many of them have never even been exposed to the pictured items they'll be asked to quickly name. Others could easily do that task in their home language—but not in English.

Mr. Mantri: That's what bothers me, too. I understand that rapid automatic naming predicts reading success and it's important to have an early indicator of who may need more attention. But for many of our students, this screener won't be measuring how quickly students can name pictures. It will be measuring their exposure to English.

Ms. Ordaz: Isn't English vocabulary necessary for reading in English? It seems to me that regardless of why they have trouble, it will show us which ones need more help for whatever reason.

Mr. Mantri: What happens if 75% of our students don't make benchmark? Will this screener tell us who needs *which kind* of help?

The teachers in the vignette are asking excellent questions. As mentioned in Chapter 2, it's just as important to understand the reliability and validity of screening tools as diagnostic measures.

Take a few minutes to think about (or discuss) the following:

- Is the picture-naming task a *reliable* measure of students' ability to name pictures in English? (In other words, does it accurately portray the student's ability to name specific *English* words?)
- Is it a *valid* measure of rapid automatic naming? (Does the task distinguish between students who score poorly due to word retrieval and those who simply do not yet know the words?)
- What might it indicate if 75% of Mr. Mantri's class does fail to meet the fall benchmark? Will we be able to answer this question on the basis of screening data alone?

Typically, Tier I of a standard treatment protocol refers to the general or core instruction available to all students. At this level, evidence-based practices and quality resources combine to meet the academic and behavioral needs of *most* students. Of key importance for educators of CLD students is whether the instructional and assessment methods used for RTI are research-based as effective and appropriate for students of all demographics in that setting (Sanford, Brown & Turner, 2012). Attention to appropriateness for CLD students is critical given the (a) predominance of instructional practices touted as research-based for all students that have not specifically been determined as effective for English learners, (b) biased methods used to assess skills, and (c) dissimilarity of peers to which they are compared (Brown, 2013; Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Klingner, Hoover, & Baca, 2008; Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009). Where such assurances have not been examined and/or cannot be made, RTI runs the risk of misidentifying students by the same faulty criteria as the discrepancy formula it seeks to replace (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009).

RTI models reflect the realization that *some* students may require more intensive support to make expected gains in particular areas. It is important, however, for schools to understand the variables that can influence student performance on screenings, and consider alternate probes and core-level accommodations before referral to more intensive tiers of support.

Teaching Tips:

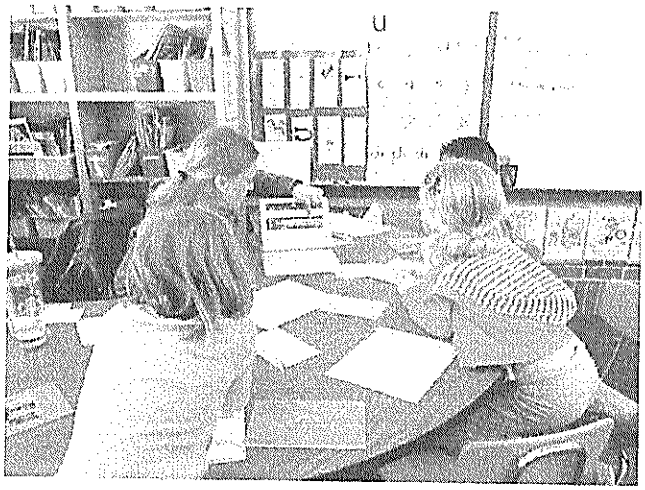
- Review screening data from the teacher's lens.
  - Do the results reflect the student's performance on formal and informal classroom tasks?
  - Do observations by any other staff indicate the student demonstrates targeted skills under differing conditions?
- Review screening results with the child in mind.
  - Does this student *typically* perform well under the conditions in which the skill was screened?
  - Do anecdotal notes indicate the student was unwell or under stress at the time of screening?
- Identify other sources of data that exist or can be gathered to corroborate the student's need for additional support with specified skills.
- Determine scaffolds that will support this student's ongoing participation in a differentiated core.
- Monitor look-alike or alternate indicators of data that demonstrate student growth with the targeted skill.
- Advocate for multidimensional sources of data when identifying the most beneficial settings to advance student skills.

The goal is to ensure that each student is allowed to engage in the core setting for the maximum time possible, while still meeting his or her individual needs. Indeed, recent research has found that among students with similar academic profiles, those who remained in the core setting made greater progress than those receiving the designated intervention (Balu et al., 2015). Further research is needed to understand what's happening when additional "help" serves to hinder rather than strengthen achievement.

Typically, students identified as making insufficient progress within a well-designed and well-implemented core are referred for more targeted levels of instruction in specific areas of need. At any given time, 15% to 20% of students may require Tier II supports for some aspect of the curriculum while continuing to participate in the universal core. An often-cited benefit of Tier II interventions is that they typically are provided in smaller group settings. Each student's progress is monitored more frequently, with probes administered every 1 to 2 weeks. Data points plotted to determine students' rate of growth reveal their response to the intervention. Poor student responses require reassessment of the intervention and a refinement of the methods used with an individual or group of students. Just as with the core, instructional techniques utilized in Tier II need to be effective for the intended group(s) of students, delivered with fidelity, and *responsive* to the learner(s) for whom it is designed.

For many students, early attention to specific needs results in a resolution of difficulties such that they can continue successful participation in an enriching core with minimal additional supports. Student participation in either tier of support is understood to be need-specific and fluid—never a form of (re)designation or tracking. This labeling/tracking may occur overtly, through assignment to leveled classes, or through the more insidious use of scoring terminology to describe a student or group (e.g., "She's below basic," "Most of my class is red").

SNAPSHOT from *CLASSROOM PRACTICE* 7.1



In this picture, Mrs. Thomas is working with a small group of 2nd-grade students to provide them with added support during their reading time. This kind of a guided intervention enables teachers to provide targeted instruction that is responsive to students' individual academic needs.

Jessica Thomas

Voices from the Field: 7.1

Two years ago, our building switched to a push-in intervention model. We saw huge success with this change and I believe a large part of that success was due to the fact that reading intervention became a part of the homeroom class. Classrooms were no longer a revolving door of students leaving for 30 minutes here, 20 minutes there, and the transition times it took to get to a new location. Our push-in model cut down on the time it took for students to get to reading intervention and allowed them to start working sooner. The push-in model also allowed the planning and intervention process to become more of a collaborative effort between the classroom teacher and innovation specialists. Reading aides and specialists could hear what was going on during classroom instruction and intervene, almost immediately, around that instruction for Tier II interventions. It really took on a "class within a class" feel, which took away the shame that sometimes came with "going to reading." Since all students were working with small groups, and rotating through teachers, aides, and specialists, they felt successful in their own classroom. We were also able to intervene around more students as the transition time from room to room was cut down. There was a bit of push back in the beginning. Teachers were worried that it would be too distracting to students. What we found was that the students transitioned more seamlessly because they weren't leaving the classroom. This kept the focus on reading, the strategies fluid, and the messages the same.

JoAnna Euston, Elementary Instructional Coach

As noted in the conversation between Ms. Ordaz and Mr. Mantri, such thinking can begin to impact school culture and decisions unless data discussions are structured to invite deeper consideration of the results (Datnow, Choi, Park, St. John, 2018).

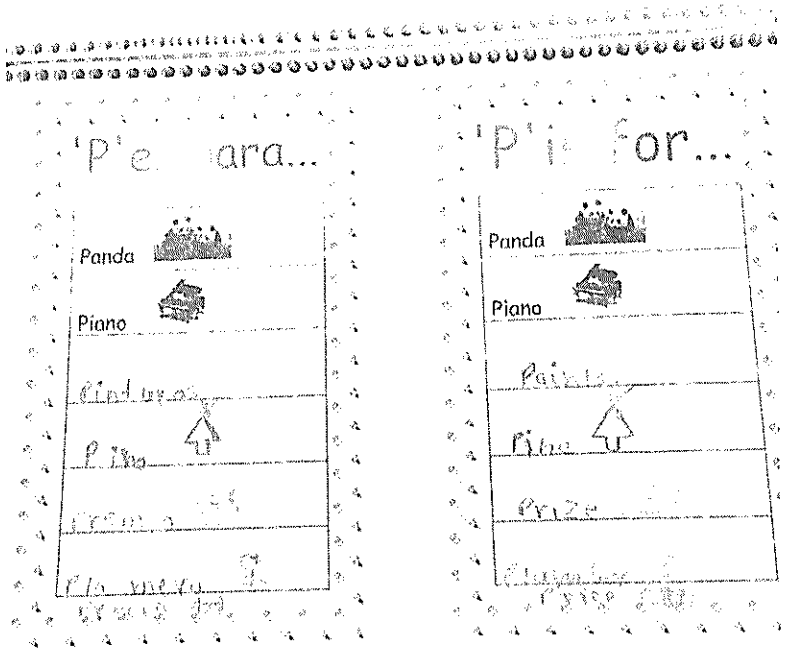
When discussions are a regular part of data review, trends may be noted that foster ideas for strategic improvement to ongoing practice. This process serves not only to empower teachers, but also to reduce the noise created by responding to each perceived "deficit" by adding a new program or pullout to the curricular routine.

Bringing Focus to the "Data Daze"

The new principal at Roosevelt Elementary, Ms. Drake, was surprised by how many teachers described their students, and the school in general, as "low." This was done in a manner that suggested inherent ability, rather than specifically defined need or skill. To be honest, fall screening data was alarming. Per protocol, Ms. Drake was now required to help staff "drill down" on those multicolored graphs.

Slides presente d during this Data Day's meeting confirmed that Roosevelt's reading triangles were indeed "upside down" (see Figure 7.2). This meant that the majority of students scored in red or yellow, with fewer scoring in the green. There was no perceptible cohort scoring "well above."

Figure 7.2 Reading Data



Despite having had time to reflect, Mrs. Ryan blurted, "That's just Roosevelt. We do the best we can with what we get. Have you seen the neighborhood?" Heads nodded. Another person added, "What if the red kids got extra vocabulary homework or we use their recess time for fluency drills?" Mrs. Ryan countered, "I've been here 20 years and it just feels like we're working harder and cramming more into each day, but little changes." Ms. Drake realized this may be a systemic challenge, and likely the reason she was assigned to Roosevelt. What an opportunity to make a difference! She truly believed most people do strive to feel successful, but numbers alone couldn't tell any of them why they weren't achieving desired outcomes at their school.

In addition to screening, there also were demographic data. When Ms. Drake asked about the percentage of students in special education, teachers shared that this had become a district concern, and "now nobody can be referred." Ms. Drake reassured staff that problem solving around student needs actually was *not* a special education process. There may be students whose needs lead to that consideration, but their first step would be "looking beyond these darn triangles!"

Out of the corner of her eye, she caught another teacher's eyes roll and declared, "Let's stop talking and do some walking." Ms. Drake asked teachers to submit the names of students who may benefit from further attention. She clarified, "These should be students whose needs aren't being met in the accommodated tiers. These are students who stand out, even when provided extra support.".

By week's end, 4th-grade teachers had submitted more names than 1st-grade through 3rd-grade teachers combined, so they would be the 1st grade-level group to meet. There were far too many referrals to represent exceptionality or to explore each in-depth. However, every child's success mattered, so they would be trying a new approach. Ms. Drake also invited the ESL teacher, counselor, learning coach, and speech pathologist to this grade-level, problem-solving meeting. They would have 1 hour.

Ms. Drake had prepared a few slides to keep the conversation moving. The first was a photo of nurse Jen's office on a typical busy day. More than 80% of her visitors return to class after a short assessment (e.g., temperature reading, sugar level reading, observation) and the indicated "treatment" (e.g., medication, water, listening ear). "Why is the student returning to the classroom important?" Ms. Drake asked. "Students need to be in class to learn," Ms. El-Amin chimed. "Exactly," the principal replied. "It's like our model of MTSS. There are really only a few students who need something very different, but we don't ignore the rest."

To start the problem-solving process, classroom teachers were given a few minutes to jot down up to three primary concerns they had for each student they had come to discuss. Examples were provided regarding the level of detail for this step (e.g., "Sara has trouble answering questions about stories" is more informative than "Sara doesn't understand").

As teachers read aloud concerns, teammates probed details such as, "Were these student-read stories, or does that also happen after hearing *you* read?" This helped the group reach consensus on how to list the emerging themes. For example, Sara's name was added to those of Ian, Josue, Carmen, Jamari, Stephanie, Ixchel, and Kendra on the chart labeled, "Answering Questions after Listening." There was an even longer list for "Answering Questions after Reading," with many of the same names appearing on it. Two teachers commented that they were not sure if those who couldn't respond to reading prompts might have done better orally, so they made a note to follow-up with informal probes to find out. Mr. Vu had a great resource with scaffolded tasks that he

was willing to share. All agreed that seeing how each student performed with different response options would add a lot to their understanding of who needed what, and even more importantly, who already *knows* and *can do* when provided an alternate probe.

Another theme emerged that reflected concerns such as, "I never hear him speak," "She doesn't use complete sentences," and "They just don't respond. Crickets!" By the 30-minute mark, chart paper lists revealed common themes around "Speaking in Sentences," "Answering Questions," and "Retelling Stories or Events." Everyone noted the connection to *oral language*, which could also, of course, impact *fluency, vocabulary*, and *comprehension*. Two charts had only one name. The speech language pathologist and counselor would be following up in advance of more individualized problem solving related to those concerns.

Returning to the emergent themes, Ms. Drake drew a frame around each titled skill. She asked the group to reflect on current practices, resources, or routines. Acknowledging full plates and wariness to add-ons, she asked, "Are there any tweaks that could be done to get more power, more language use, and growth from what we *already do*?" They took a few minutes to note individual thoughts before sharing. The ESL teacher opened by saying, "Perhaps this is my lens, but I feel like classes are too quiet. The scripted response drills we've adopted to increase engagement . . . well, it's not the same. How many of you studied a foreign language in high school, aced every pattern drill, but never learned to speak?"

"I agree," said Mr. Vu, "language, words, and sentence structures don't really 'stick' until you're using them for a real purpose. This could be asking your question, sharing your thoughts, or simply requesting that your steak be 'just the right amount of pink.'" Others laughed and nodded. Ms. Drake summarized, "Do we believe that increasing the students' opportunities to talk, to truly converse, has value?" "Yes," said Mr. DeJong, "but I don't know what that would look like without losing control, or having it look to others that way. Previous principals frowned on noisy classrooms."

"Well, if that noise is students talking about what they're thinking, learning, or creating," said Ms. Drake, "I've got your back. My role is to advocate for what *we* collectively decide has the most leverage with *our* students. That will be our focus. Let's plan to meet again next week. In the meantime, write down any ideas or strategies you feel might add power, not work, to our day. This could include how to rethink a particular structure, like what happens during partner shares, or a simple prompt we all can use to cue higher level or more elaborate responses throughout the day—even in gym. Send your thoughts to Gayle. She'll compile them for discussion next week. We'll decide what is doable and how we'll know it is working. We are not ignoring 'the triangles,' but that data alone couldn't guide us to the discussion that we had today."

The meeting adjourned with 5 minutes to spare. Mrs. Ryan lagged behind. "You know, Ms. Drake, when we started today, I thought this would be a waste of time. That's what I used to feel whenever the outcome wasn't testing for special ed. We didn't know what else to do. Today we turned our resignation about student needs to a focus on how we can add traction to what we already do, instead of just spinning our wheels. Is this what you meant by 'accommodated tiers?'" "That's precisely it," Ms. Drake answered with a smile.

Grade- or subject-level problem solving may be most appropriate when many students demonstrate difficulties within an RTI/MTSS framework. Instead of negating concerns as "typical," educators are encouraged to notice themes that emerge from descriptions of actual students. This will foster more authentic and focused discussions around proactive adjustments that presume everyone's *ability* rather

than *inability* to succeed. This process also helps to focus resources on gathering the information necessary to problem solve around the strengths and needs of individual students who stand out from their peers. The following process outlines the steps for group problem solving.

Group Problem Solving

Materials:

- Lists from teachers (see "Before Meeting")
- Chart paper (or documents to project)
- Markers
- Blank paper (for teachers to make notes)

Directions:

1. Before Meeting
   - Identify the grade or subject level with a high rate of special education or problem-solving referrals.
   - Invite teacher representatives and support personnel with insight to, and impact upon, that group.
   - Ask teachers to bring a list of students they either referred, or feel are not benefitting from current supports.
2. During Meeting
   - Set up chart paper or projected document for lists that will be developed.
   - Explain time limit and purpose (i.e., to determine if themes emerge from discussion of individual needs).
   - Have teachers write down one to three concerns for each student they have come to discuss.
   - As each teacher shares, invite clarification and consensus about how that student's concern is described and/or whether it is already represented on an existing chart.
   - When all individuals have shared, invite individual reflection on any emergent themes.
   - Share thoughts. Seek consensus on one or two themes.
   - Ask participants now to reflect on current supports, routines, or practices. What adjustments might leverage greater opportunity to authentically use or develop skills?
3. Follow-Up
   - The facilitator, coach, or team leader consolidates ideas for follow-up discussion. Teachers determine adjustments or suggestions they feel will add power to every child's day.
   - As a group, answers are developed in response to the following questions:
     - Is professional development desired?
     - How and when will we reflect on or measure the impact?
     - Might this professional development or instructional change benefit other grades or teams?
   - Continue individualized problem solving around the more unique needs of students that also surfaced during this process.

Additional Notes:

This activity can be repeated as often as desired throughout the academic school year. For actions taken, follow-up within the first 6 to 9 weeks is needed to gauge implementation and allow for reflection.

As noted earlier, such problem-solving approaches can exist within or in addition to the standard treatment protocol to assist staff in identifying and responding to individual needs. These processes can also result in instructional insights that improve the core, thereby reducing the numbers of students who fail screeners for reasons unrelated to true ability or skill (Hamayan et al., 2014).

INDIVIDUALIZING FOR CLD STUDENTS

Within weeks of beginning 1st grade, Joaquin was referred for intensive literacy support. Teachers understood that family mobility and emotional upheavals had interfered with his participation in kindergarten, but things had stabilized and he'd become "no different than others" by midyear. Still, he failed to master all letter sounds by May and remained behind peers when school resumed. Tiered literacy interventions (e.g., scripted small-group instruction, drills) and "visuals" (i.e., marketed letter/picture charts) did not result in the rate of growth necessary to close his emerging achievement gap. Teachers began to suspect "processing" or "memory problems."

Staff at Joaquin's school had recently received training on "MTSS for Individual Students." Although designed to replace the *preassessment* process for special education (SPED), district presenters emphasized that an individualized problem-solving approach was different. It should not be considered the "road to SPED" but rather a process to determine the conditions under which the student (and teacher) experience greater success. As such, the teachers of any student, even a student already receiving special services, could benefit from this process when needed.

In the past, Joaquin's teacher would have struggled with referral. She didn't want to overidentify CLD students, but what if Joaquin had a true exceptionality? Wouldn't ignoring it be just as bad? She decided to submit his name for the problem-solving process (PSP). Prior to the meeting, one of the child study team members visited to gather details. They talked briefly about Joaquin's strengths, needs, interests, and family. How did his parent describe him? The newly created PSP form requested much more personal (biographical) information about the student. There also was a place for individual and contextualizing group screener data.

The first PSP meeting about Joaquin included several Child Study Team members, the ESOL teacher, administrator, and after-school supervisor, Mr. Aragon. He also saw Joaquin daily and had a good relationship with his mother. The PSP form was prefilled with available background information and projected on the wall. They showed Joaquin's school picture while talking about his interests and family. Mr. Aragon added that Joaquin loved having "fun homework" (e.g., coloring or counting page), but his mother had expressed worry that, speaking little English, she couldn't be of much help with his reading.

The bilingual speech language pathologist (SLP) often tried to observe students coming up for PSP discussion. Visiting class, she involved Joaquin in a short game with peers that revealed he could name far fewer pictures in English than in Spanish. This suggested that English proficiency factored in his ability to benefit from the

picture accommodation assumed to cue his association of letters with sounds. These new insights inspired the PSP team to develop more refined interventions targeted specifically to Joaquin.

The first intervention involved sending home a small packet of sticky notes preprinted with multiples of several unmastered graphemes. Parents were asked to lead Joaquin on a hunt around the house modeling the sound and placing sticky notes on objects determined to begin with that sound. They stuck a printed "p" to the door (*puerta*), a container for straws (*popotes*), and a shelf for plates (*platos*). They added "s" stickies to the chair (*silla*), couch (*sofa*), and salt (*sal*). They placed "m" stickies on the table (*mesa*), jam (*mermelada*), and even one on the sleeve (*manga*) of Mami! Joaquin found it great fun to review and add letters daily. His mother made it even more fun by hiding a candy next to "something that begins with 'ssss,' 'mmm,' or 'p.'" When this skill was probed in class 4 days later, Joaquin demonstrated 100% visual recognition and sound association for the letter/sounds worked on that week.

Joaquin's rapid learning under these conditions led the SLP to also provide parents a bilingual alphabet book to record pictures (drawn or cut out) and Spanish words beginning with the sound associated with each letter. Pages were divided into two columns, one for home words and the other for English words. Parents were encouraged to help Joaquin discover when English letter sounds (i.e., *z*) did not exist in Spanish words. Where possible, spaces in both columns were prefilled with pictured cognates (*pantalones/pants*) to provide student and teacher shared referents to anchor letter-sound associations.

Use of this tool to build sound/symbol association and phonemic awareness (sound discrimination, blending, etc.) was modeled by the SLP. Telephone support was provided daily the first week.

Although given 4 weeks to complete home sections, Joaquin returned his book in two. The teacher was thrilled. She reported back to his PSP team that she and Joaquin had reviewed the letters, sounds, and corresponding Spanish words for the class. Peers loved listening for the sound in unfamiliar words and suggesting English words he could choose for the other column. Within a few short weeks of probing and responding to Joaquin's skills, it became apparent that his needs were largely situational and his assets were immense. When provided with this more targeted and authentic scaffold, Joaquin made rapid gains.

The teacher determined that *all* her students could benefit from what was originally developed to meet the almost unrecognized needs of *one*. She looked forward to adding more student-created bilingual ABC books to sit among the reference shelf materials in her classroom.

As this scenario demonstrates, educators frequently can increase the academic achievement of CLD students simply by carefully observing for, and building on, the skills and resources each already brings to class. The multitude of factors surrounding the learning of CLD students requires educators to think reflectively about the root issues of any perceived delays in learning.

As teachers explore a CLD student's history, the following questions may yield information that proves particularly relevant to the problem-solving process:

- *How is the "behavior" or perceived "delay" exhibited in the primary language or home environment?* In general, genuine behavioral, language, and some learning disabilities are also evident to family members, who note differences in this

child compared with her or his siblings and peers. When parents or guardians are consulted (e.g., through home visits), they often provide wonderful insights into their child's learning patterns, knowledge bases, and background experiences. Such insights greatly enhance a teacher's capacity to check potentially inaccurate assumptions about learning and language acquisition capacities.

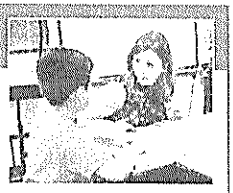
- *Is English achievement at an expected level given the student's stage of English acquisition?* A student's ability to participate in and benefit from instruction is invariably affected by his or her proficiency in the language of instruction, especially if accommodations are not consistently used to increase content comprehensibility.
- *Does the student's language acquisition history appear to account for strengths or weaknesses in the primary language?* If a student's opportunities to use and maintain her or his first language have diminished due to English exposure, she or he may experience some degree of first language loss before fully acquiring the second language. When such a student is assessed in both languages, neither language may appear strong, and this can be misinterpreted as an indication of an innate language delay or a learning disorder.
- *Is L1 achievement consistent with the amount and time period of L1 academic instruction?* Careful consideration of the amount and type of native language instruction is necessary to determine whether the student's current learning patterns are consistent with prior academic experiences.
- *How does the student respond to scaffolded or mediated learning?* One of the most critical sources of information is anecdotal and product evidence of how the student responds to sheltered or other forms of accommodative classroom instruction provided at a level consistent with the student's previous academic and linguistic experiences. CLD students who demonstrate grade-level or expected learning under these conditions may indeed have significant academic needs but are unlikely to have a learning disability. Many students, however, have not been given an opportunity to learn and benefit from sheltered or accommodative instruction. When such needs-based instruction has not yet been attempted, teachers and other educators must carefully guard against erroneous assumptions about the students' learning capacities.
- *Is the team that facilitates interpretation and processing of provided information, made up of or informed by diverse individuals, parents or guardians, and family and community members who understand the student's language and culture?* Multiple lenses are needed to consider the student's strengths and potential challenges under differing educational conditions. The home perspective is especially critical for insights to the most authentic interpretation of factors that hinder or enable learning performance.

A well-developed problem-solving process that includes consideration of these questions may reveal that a student's current difficulties can reasonably be explained or accounted for on the basis of her or his prior opportunities to learn.

INTENSIFIED NEEDS (FEW OF THE FEW)

Although the majority of students' needs can be met within Tiers I and II, a relative *few* (3% to 5%) may require even more intensive levels of support to show gains. At this level, intervention support is delivered to even smaller

ACCOMMODATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICES 7.1



Throughout a child's journey through the educational system, various data are collected as a means of shedding light on his or her aptitude, progress, and potential. But what is *data* and how does it relate to what we want to know about the child? Data is simply information. It can take many forms (e.g., observation), but it often is reduced to numbers for easier management. Numbers, however, don't always tell enough of the story.

For example, how long can a person tolerate sun exposure without getting sunburned? This question presumes a lot but most adults could probably provide an answer based on experiences from their own lives. Let's say we ask 100 people this question and their responses range from 15 minutes to 4 hours. Granted, a few might say they "always" or "never" burn, but those are considered outliers; as a result, we exclude them from the study.

If the amount of time this *normative* sample can be in the sun without burning averages 90 minutes, can we be confident this is an appropriate benchmark for all? Will any be "burned" by this assumption? Might reactions also vary by time of year or geographic location? What other factors could impact an individual's response to sun?

As with skin reactions to the sun, RTI measures are best considered within an individualized context. Whenever we drill down on static indicators such as numerical data, we run the risk of missing critical interactions and insight to the big picture.

Multiple lenses are necessary to bring into focus a larger *systemic* picture, or bigger picture of any one child. If we consider the four dimensions of the learner's biography, key factors to consider include:

Sociocultural Dimension
- Internal or situational stressors
- Parental involvement in problem solving
- Classroom climate (collaborative vs. competitive)

Cognitive
- Background knowledge (home, community, and school)
- Enrichment vs. remediation
- Varied ways to show learning

Academic
- Prior education
- L1 instructional support
- Instructional approach
- Skills present in home/community contexts

Linguistic
- L1 proficiency level
- English proficiency level
- Adequacy of language accommodations
- Opportunities to access all language assets while learning ■

groups with more frequent probes of progress. The purpose of these assessments is to ensure that the instructional methods and materials align with students' needs. Nothing is gained educationally by merely documenting interventions that don't work.

RTI models vary somewhat with regard to the most intensive tier(s) of instruction. It may be that Tier III includes both students without disabilities and those with special needs, or Tier III (or IV) may be reserved only for students with identified exceptionalities. Special education students should be assigned to the most appropriate and least restrictive tier of instruction for each curricular area based on individual need rather than on predetermined influence of (dis)ability. Although a well-designed model of RTI leads to more appropriate determination of students in need of intensive supports, RTI is, above all, a continuum of general

assessment FREEZE FRAME 7.2

Nothing is gained educationally by merely documenting interventions that don't work.

education supports designed to *prevent* school failure in the larger population of students.

Figure 7.3 summarizes key aspects of each tier of RTI instructional support (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Collier, 2010; Echevarria & Vogt, 2010; Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2011).

Figure 7.3 Key Aspects of RTI Tiers of Instruction

Tier I (All Students)

- Research-based curriculum and methods with evidence of effectiveness for the target population(s)
- English Language Development (ELD)/English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) is a component of core instruction
- Culturally responsive instruction to access, assess, and build on background knowledge
- Strategies and materials appropriate for English learners
  - Sheltered, academically rich, English language instruction
  - Peer collaboration
  - Native language instruction
  - Visuals, realia
- Teaching for transfer
- Universal screening of academics
- Progress monitoring compares English learners with English learning peers
- Informed interpretation of student performance
- Explicit instruction in—and contextualized opportunities to use—phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension

Tier II (Some Students)

- 20–30 minutes in addition to core program
- Data-driven (multiple sources)
- Evidence-based curriculum and methods (e.g., sheltered English language instruction, native language instruction)
- Culturally responsive instruction to access, assess, and build on background knowledge
- Small group (three to five students)
- Systematic and explicit instruction that targets skill building, transfer, and authentic use
- Progress monitored with comparisons made to true peers; results/interpretation triangulated across settings

Tier III (Few Students)

- Appropriateness of Tier I and II evident by progress of most true peers
- 45–60 minutes in addition to core program
- Delivered by educators who can pinpoint specific needs of individual students and respond in culturally responsive ways
- Data driven (multiple sources and types)
- Culturally responsive instruction to access, assess, and build on background knowledge
- Strategies and materials appropriate for English learners (e.g., sheltered English language instruction, peer collaboration, native language instruction, visuals, realia)
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate assessments inform interpretation of need
- Special education support, as necessary, and as supported by detailed description of, and plan for, conditions under which student skills *grow*.

PROBLEM SOLVING VERSUS REFERRAL FOR SPED

Jaime is currently in the 7th grade. He came to the United States and entered school in the middle of last year. Teachers have become concerned that, despite occasional translation support from a Spanish-speaking paraprofessional, he is still nowhere near grade level. Jaime is not even able to work successfully with his peers on 3rd- and 4th-grade-level material used in tiered reading and ESL.

The reading teacher has expressed the concern that Jaime should be in special education, but the ESL teacher, Mrs. Jaeger, thinks that he is "bright." She has observed him during his unstructured time with other Spanish-speaking students and has noticed that Jaime usually takes the lead in organizing games. He also appears quick with responses that make his friends laugh. Tension has developed between these teachers because of their different perspectives on Jaime's inherent abilities. However, each agrees that Jaime is not able to work anywhere near grade level in either Spanish or English, so he is referred to SPED.

The school's bilingual social worker accompanies Mrs. Jaeger to Jaime's home to find out more about his family and school history. This is always an important component of the evaluation. Jaime's mother reports they had lived in a rural part of Mexico where access to education was inconsistent and offered to all children simultaneously, regardless of educational level. When asked, his mother estimates that Jaime had been in school about a total of 10 or 12 months before coming to the United States. Her answers to additional questions and the perceptions she shares of her child indicate that she does not see him as very different from other children his age that she had known in Mexico.

This information helps the evaluation team understand Jaime's case. It explains many of the perceived problems, even his difficulties with learning material in Spanish. They now know much of the prior instruction provided had not been at Jaime's learning level, regardless of language, so his lack of achievement is not conclusive evidence of an innate learning problem.

An informal probe of Spanish literacy skills reveals that Jaime does have the critical foundations of literacy in his primary language. These and other assessments indicate that Jaime is able to read and comprehend in Spanish at the early 2nd-grade level. Although consistent with his educational history, Jaime's skills are not enough for him to have benefitted from the higher-level translated texts and supports used with other newcomers. Had teachers known this information sooner, they would have better understood his inability to perform academic tasks, despite what were initially considered adequate supports.

A student interview also reveals Jaime has developed functional literacy from environmental print and is proud of his ability to write words such as *Walmart*, *Wendy's*, *open*, and *closed* without a visual model. Using an early elementary probe of English reading, teachers also discover Jaime is beginning to transfer Spanish literacy skills to his new language by phonetically spelling *naf* (*knife*), *forc* (*fork*), and *spun* (*spoon*). Given this more detailed description of Jaime's skills, which includes statements about what he has mastered and can demonstrate, the team is able to develop much more appropriate interventions to better promote his learning and language acquisition.

Occasionally, a student—such as Jaime in this scenario—will stand out as having atypical difficulty with classroom material. Responsive teachers modify their lessons and the manner of delivery to find "keys" for opening different learning doors. Many also benefit from consultation with others. Effective

teacher assistance or problem-solving teams have members with insights and expertise in pertinent areas such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), special education, behavior, and literacy. Family members and students themselves also provide invaluable information and insight. Without these perspectives, the ideas and recommendations provided may reflect common approaches for most students but may not be appropriately tailored to the specific needs of *this* CLD student.

In Jaime's case, what barriers or presumptions delayed attention to his needs? Would Jaime have stood out during a subject- or grade-level problem-solving process? Had the staff members participated in more individualized problem-solving discussions prior to referral for SPED (see Figure 7.4), the following proactive measures might have been taken:

- Data from Jaime's educational history would have prompted academic probes and revealed the inappropriateness of standard newcomer materials for him.

Figure 7.4 Informed Problem-Solving Discussions

- Use methods such as those described in Chapter 3 (e.g., records review, interview, observation) to gather preinstructional assessment information in the following areas:
  - Educational history (e.g., type, language, and consistency of instruction)
  - Primary language proficiency (e.g., developmental milestones, language use patterns within the home, current use/proficiency levels, evidence of L1 loss)
  - English proficiency (e.g., amount/type of prior exposure, current use/proficiency levels, academic performance in language-laden settings)
  - Acculturation (e.g., time in country, cultural learning norms) (refer to Chapter 4)
  - Medical history (e.g., vision, hearing, chronic mental or physical illness)
- Develop a profile of student skills based on information and evidence obtained through preinstructional assessment.
- Accommodate the delivery of instruction (e.g., first language support, sheltered English, modified instructional level) to *maximize the student's ability to participate and engage* in the curriculum.
- Monitor the student's response to comprehensible instruction provided:
  - At appropriate learning levels (regardless of age/grade)
  - With attention to differences in learning processes
  - Under individual and collaborative conditions
- Employ varied means to assess student learning in context. Identify the conditions in which the student *does* learn. Seek evidence of applied skills and learning in other contexts. Use this information to continually inform and adapt instruction so the student can experience both success and challenge with the curriculum.
- Continue effective interventions that can be supported within the accommodated tiers.
- Keep refining, adjusting, and documenting the types and intensities of supports needed in other areas until the student experiences success.
- If the amount of support exceeds what can be assured via a responsive general education program, that data is needed to help determine eligibility and need for special education.

- Information about Jaime's skills and interests would have informed the development of relevant, engaging tasks that were at his learning level (e.g., Wendy's menu language and mathematics).
- Bilingual paraprofessional support might have been used to bridge Jaime's prior knowledge and new concepts.
- Jaime's Spanish proficiency would have enabled him to participate orally in higher-level content discussions with heterogeneous cooperative groups that included at least one other bilingual student.
- Formative assessment to monitor Jaime's participation in, and success with, modified and accommodated instruction would have more accurately revealed his true learning capacities.

Use of RTI to support referral for special education hinges on the preinstructional and formative assessments that add critical information to presumptions of experience and static measures of universal "growth." A student like Jaime who has received limited education in his native country may be very unlikely to experience classroom success even when instructed using lower grade-level content and when provided native language support. Without an awareness of a CLD student's experiential, educational, and language acquisition history, a teacher might easily compare this student with cultural and linguistic peers who are performing well under the same conditions and mistakenly suspect the presence of a learning disability. Thus, it is extremely important to examine all aspects of a student's past and present language, learning, and social experiences for their ability to explain or nullify current assumptions about learning and language acquisition abilities.

Although previously discussed in Chapter 3 as best practice for all CLD students, *preassessment* is also a term that can be used in special education to denote the process of gathering the specific information needed to decide whether special education considerations, including evaluation, are warranted. Whereas general education preassessment strives to gather information to inform *forthcoming* instruction, special education preassessment, or prereferral, looks at similar data for its ability to shed light on *current* learning or behavioral concerns.

In the authors' view, a robust problem-solving process provides all the information and insight of typical preassessment processes, but in a more timely manner and without the presumption of disability. The goal of special education prereferral is to determine what the student knows and can do and whether knowledge and performance are consistent with what one would expect based on that student's educational and experiential history. A problem-solving process tends to go farther in helping a team determine the methods and/or adaptations that enhance success in either a general education or special education setting. Thus, we move away from the dichotomous "place" or "nonplace" decision and toward a deeper understanding of what truly helps the student learn. Discussion of assessment related to students determined to have special educational needs is further addressed in Chapter 8.

assessment FREEZE FRAME 7.3

Without an awareness of a CLD student's experiential, educational, and language acquisition history, a teacher might easily compare the student with cultural and linguistic peers who are performing well under the same conditions and mistakenly suspect the presence of a learning disability.

SUMMARY

Response to intervention (and similar proactive frameworks) are designed to ensure prompt attention to student needs and educational access for all. Data gathered via point-in-time probes measure student progress toward benchmarks of anticipated growth. Such data can depict the "health" of a system (school, grade, student) but may afford little insight to the nature of the needed remedy or instructional change.

As discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 determination of what students *know* and how each may *connect* with a lesson are among the most powerful tools in any teacher's instructional toolkit. This information (data) enables educators to maximize the conditions and opportunities for cognitive, social, linguistic, and academic growth. These are also the spaces in which both teacher and student discover "what works." In recent years, there has been increasing pressure to base assessment of "what works" and consequent educational decisions, on data derived from periodic, decontextualized screeners.

Screeners do provide an important layer of information that can be monitored and charted over time. They tell us a lot about students' attainment of targeted skills under the specific condition of each probe. Data graphics provide a snapshot view of each student's, or groups' response to instruction received—or interaction with the language, technology, or cultural presumptions of the test. Although there is value to screening tools, there are limitations to broad interpretation of results. As the saying goes, "When your only tool is a hammer, every problem is a nail."

Screening data can only be *the* hammer to drive instructional decisions when all students are seen as nails from the *same* box. Fortunately, students (and teachers) come to us with varied strengths, edges, and angles, all of which can be leveraged to secure the learning fit. Problem-solving processes facilitate attention to multiple sources of data, contextualized by the student, and interpreted in light of teaching practices we can then adjust with more appropriately customized tools.

A small percentage of students might need higher levels of support. The support provided learners across RTI tiers increases to accommodate higher levels of need. For all students, equitable access to the core curriculum is essential. Students' access to culturally and linguistically responsive instruction and assessment is critical to decisions regarding placement in—and movement among—RTI tiers.

The problem-solving process enables all those who work with a student to share information that is relevant to determining actual need for specific educational supports and services. Oftentimes, the challenges a student is experiencing in a given setting are to be expected, given the biographical history of the student and the (mis)alignment of current supports to meet his or her learning needs. In all instances, a depth of knowledge surrounding the student, as well as insights into classroom factors that promote or hinder success, enable educators to make informed decisions that result in timely, effective student support.

KEY CONCEPTS

Multitiered systems of support (MTSS)
Problem-solving model
Response to intervention (RTI)
Standard treatment protocol
Tiers of instructional support
Universal screener

PROFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS ON PRACTICE

1. Discuss the pros and cons of the standard treatment protocol (e.g., RTI) for addressing the instructional needs of CLD students.
2. Discuss potential benefits of group (grade level) and individual (student specific) problem-solving processes for CLD students.
3. Discuss what is meant by the *accommodative* core?

QUESTIONS FOR REVIEW AND REFLECTION

1. Why are RTI models considered proactive?
2. How might determination of the conditions under which a student experiences *success* lead to more proactive instructional supports?
3. Briefly describe two characteristics shared by standard treatment protocols and problem-solving models?
4. How do problem-solving models differ from standard treatment protocols?
5. What are the advantages of universal screening? Describe at least two.
6. What are some cautions to consider when interpreting screening results?
7. What sort of questions should be asked when insufficient numbers of students demonstrate growth within the core curriculum?
8. Why do the authors discourage reference to students or student groups by tier or intervention designations?
9. Why is it important to consider intervention groups "fluid"?
10. How might group and individual problem-solving processes increase the appropriateness of referrals for special education?