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Clearing the confusion: Response-to-Intervention as a set of principles

RTI is a method of service delivery being implemented in schools. To help build communication and cohesion among the literature regarding this model, 5 principles and 5 features of RTI are outlined. This conceptualization illustrates how the principles of RTI remain the same, but that the features can vary in their appearance depending on the setting.

Definition and principles

RTI is a multi-tiered method of service delivery in which all students are provided research-based instruction that matches their academic needs. It has 5 central principles: (1) a proactive and preventative approach to education, (2) ensuring an instructional match between student skills, curriculum, and instruction, (3) use of a problem-solving orientation and data-based decision making, (4) use of effective practices, and (5) a systems-level approach (see Figure 1).

RTI is a model designed to both improve outcomes for all students and improve the identification of students with disabilities. Students are provided research-based instruction and support prior to showing deficits in academic skills (*principle 1*). To this end, schools ensure students have an effective match between their skills, curriculum, and instruction. If students struggle, they are provided additional support immediately. Therefore, there is no need for a student to have a label or designated category to receive additional help (*principle 2*). A problem-solving orientation is used, which focuses more on environmental and manipulative variables rather than within-child characteristics (*principle 3*). All practices, strategies, and assessment materials used within the model are research-based in order to maximize students' chances of success (*principle 4*), and the entire model is applied on a systems-level to ensure effectiveness and efficiency (*principle 5*).

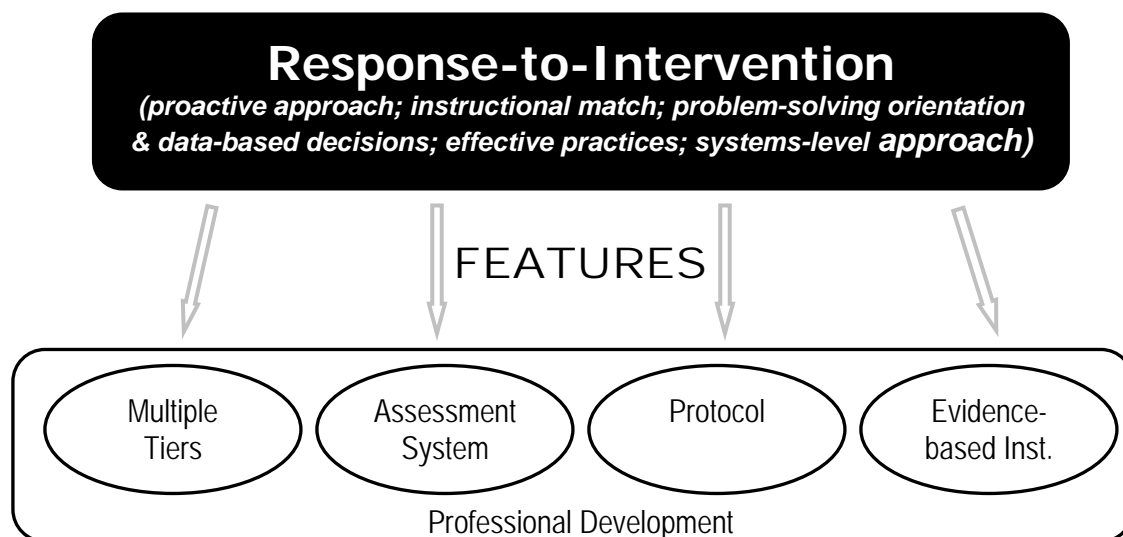


Figure 1: Principles and Features of RTI

Features of RTI

These principles translate into 5 features. Although the principles will be the same from one school setting to the next of RTI, these features will vary in their presentation. Each RTI model includes the use of (1) multiple tiers, (2) an assessment system, (3) a protocol that outlines the process, (4) evidence-based instruction, and (5) ongoing professional development.

1. **Multiple Tiers:** Each model has a range of instructional supports, the most common of which is a 3-tiered model. All students receive Tier 1 instruction from a research-based curriculum that teaches the “big ideas” of that particular academic area. Supplemental instruction is provided in Tier 2, and the most intense support is provided within Tier 3. Schools vary on the number of tiers they have, the specific curriculums and strategies they use, and the specific personnel utilized to provide the instruction within the tiers.
2. **Assessment System:** Every school that uses RTI needs an assessment system to both screen students who are at-risk for academic difficulties and to progress monitor the students’ growth and the effectiveness of their instruction. Schools have a variety of curriculum-based measurement systems to choose from when selecting an assessment system. They can also vary in the frequency of benchmarking and progress monitoring.
3. **Protocol:** The protocol outlines the specific process for each RTI model. It specifies “who gets what when”. It outlines when students move into and out of the different tiers, when a special education referral takes place, and who provides the instruction to which students.
4. **Evidence-based Instruction:** Schools implement research-based instruction at each tier within the model. They will vary in the core curriculum used, the programs and strategies at each level, and the duration and grouping of the upper tiers.
5. **Ongoing Professional Development:** Each model includes ongoing professional development. This ensures the proper implementation of the model, but it also ensures that educators and staff understand the “how” and the “why” of RTI. The professional development should include discussion on beliefs about education, the knowledge base needed to translate information into practice, and the specific skills needed to implement RTI. Models vary on the frequency of professional development and who provides it.

Reference: Barnes, A. C., & Harlacher, J. E. (2008). Clearing the confusion: Response-to-Intervention as a set of principles. *Education and Treatment of Children, 31(1)*, 417-431.