

Differentiating Instruction Within a Multi-Tier System of Supports

October 8, 2013 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

About this Talk

THE TALK HAS CONCLUDED.

SCROLL BELOW FOR QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

In this era of the Common Core State Standards, it is even more essential that educators are prepared to differentiate instruction to provide support for students in the general education context, as well for students needing more intensive support to ensure learning. Join Dr. Diane Haager, Professor in the Division of Special Education and Counseling Department at California State University, Los Angeles answered your questions about how to analyze assessments to pinpoint students' skill strengths and needs and identify evidence-based practices that will optimize reading growth.

Read more about [Diane Haager, Ph.D.](#)

Transcript



Carlos W. Phillip

What strategies can teachers utilize in grades 9-12 to provide differentiated support for students at the Tier 2 level of needs in the classroom outside of a co-teaching arrangement?



Diane Haager, Ph.D.

I have been working lately with a number of middle and high schools to get their Tier 2 instruction organized. I assume you are creating an intervention period, outside of the grade-level English/Language Arts class (an elective period, perhaps). In this case, there are a number of excellent reading intervention materials and strategies to use. Using fluency assessment and normed benchmarks, such as Hasbrouck and Tindal that go up to 8th grade level (there are no grade 9-12 norms that I know of), you can identify students who are very slow with fluency, who might have an underlying word reading difficulty (a phonics screener that goes into multi-syllabic words can help here). Such students need intensive and explicit instruction in word study skills, vocabulary and fluency (not ignoring comprehension). Other students in grades 9-12 may have word reading and fluency skills, but get really stuck with vocabulary and comprehension. They need explicit instruction in reading for meaning.



Brenda

What kind of practices and strategies are available that are not programs that have to be

Q purchased?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

For Tier 2 reading intervention, there are several online resources for teaching. The [Florida Center for Reading Research](#) has resources for teachers, [Intervention Central](#), [Reading A to Z](#) and the [National Center on Response to Intervention](#) are just a few.

Q **Hillary Wolfe**

I am interested in maintaining Common Core State Standards (CCSS) English/Language Arts competencies and mathematical practices during my small group Tier 2 interventions. Are there any resources that address intervention practices in conjunction with CCSS?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

This is an area where we definitely need more research and resources. The journal, Learning Disabilities Research and Practice, recently published a special issue on how the CCSS might impact students with learning disabilities as schools roll out their implementation of the standards. My best advice as we wait for research to catch up with this topic is to fully understand the standards and what skills students will need to meet competency and then make sure you build these skills to the point of being able to integrate them as the standards require. For example, there are standards that require students to read widely and make inferences across texts. That is a broad standard but it could be addressed in Tier 2. Once you have covered the basic skills you need to cover in intervention (e.g., decoding and fluency), you might build in time to read two or three texts on a similar topic and ask students to compare and contrast. Also, building in more non-fiction text into Tier 2 is important.

Q **Leasha**

What are some ways that teams can support high achieving students (who are not quite gifted) but demonstrate strong reading and math skills that are above their classroom peers?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

There are certainly many ways to approach this, but the simple answer is that effective instruction cannot always be delivered whole-class. It is important to use grouping strategies to allow students who need extra support or enrichment to have time to engage in appropriate learning tasks. For enrichment, this means extending beyond the lesson to stimulate thinking and reading beyond the basics. For struggling students, this would allow time for reteaching key concepts and vocabulary or building essential foundational skills.

Q **Tahanna**

What are some ways to differentiate instruction in the classroom when the curriculum is new to the teaching staff as well?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

This is an interesting question because when teachers are learning a new curriculum, the last thing they are thinking about is how to differentiate for individual students. However, we could also look at this as a golden opportunity. As we are learning the new curriculum, let's discuss and intentionally learn how to differentiate as we go, right from the start.

Q *Pam*

I work mostly with middle and high school teachers who are struggling with students who have difficulty reading in the core classes as well as the reading and language arts area. What are some strategies that they can use to help these students who are struggling to make meaning from their texts?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

There are many research-based strategies for secondary teachers to differentiate instruction across content subjects. One excellent resource is the IES Practice Guide, [Improving Adolescent Literacy: Effective Classroom and Intervention Practices](#) that is available online. I have used this in professional development with secondary teachers and they seem to find many ideas that will help.

Q *Tina McGinley*

Should a middle school aged student still have fluency checked on a regular basis (quarterly)?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

Many schools do fluency checks for all students, perhaps at the beginning of the year and mid-year. However, for students who are doing well?their state testing shows they are at or above proficiency, their grades are strong, and no teacher has raised a question about reading ability?I would say there is no need for fluency checks. I would definitely recommend fluency progress checks for any students who show signs of lagging behind. Fluency assessment is a quick way to check overall reading proficiency. It is a good indicator of basic reading proficiency.

Q *Anahi Pari-di-Monriva*

A couple of my students are really great orally however they cannot write their answers correctly and consequently get lower grades (tests, etc., factored in) than they perhaps should. How can I help them process written answers as well as their oral ones?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

Anahi, you don't specify whether their difficulties are related to a disability or their age. If so, it is really appropriate to arrange for accommodations such as the use of assistive technology (e.g., dictation software) or the ability to verbalize answers. However, that does not solve the problem of being ABLE to supply written answers. For students with written language difficulties, they need systematic and explicit instruction in writing to address their particular needs. Is it a mechanics

A problem, such as handwriting or spelling? Is it an inability to formulate sentences and ideas? There are so many ideas to explore here. You may want to scaffold their written answers to questions, such as giving a "cheat sheet" taped to their desk or in their notebooks with starter prompts typically used in this type of task that they could copy and expand on. Some of the best research on writing instruction is from Karen Harris and Steve Graham. You might want to get their book, *Writing Better: Effective Strategies for Teaching Students with Learning Difficulties*, or look up some of their articles.

Q **Brenda**

How does a middle school teacher (8th grade) differentiate reading instruction for a student that data appears to indicate is reading on a 2nd-3rd grade reading level?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

First, I would want to make sure that this student is receiving intensive reading intervention to remediate difficulties. Does this student have an IEP and receive special education services? If the student's difficulties are not attributable to a disability, then what is going on? Lack of high-quality instruction in her educational history? Is she an English Language Learner? It is important to understand her individual case. Meanwhile, as a content teacher, you have to be aware of what she can do independently and what she may need support for. A peer buddy system can help her with reading passages and materials in class. Assistive technology can help with homework (dictation software, screen readers, etc.). Also, the same type of accommodations and supports we might provide for a student with learning disabilities would help her to participate more fully. Modifying assignments and tests, for example.

Q **Lisa Franklin**

From your perspective, what are some of the key questions that parents should ask about differentiation for their student(s)? What are some effective practices that professionals can use to make sure parents understand the strategies being used with their child and how to support these at home?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

This is a great question. Parents play an important role in RTI at all tiers of instruction. As a parent, you are the greatest advocate that your child has. And, you know your child from a different perspective than teachers. I would ask questions about the child's learning strengths and needs and how to interpret the data the school collects. How is your child participating in the classroom where Tier 1 instruction is provided? As teachers, we want to make sure that parents are included as partners. Presenting data in meaningful, easy-to-understand formats, inviting comments and perspectives from home, and reassuring parents that what they can do at home is important are ideas for creating this team approach.

Q Allyson K
What empirically based methods are available for whole-word reading, which tends to work better for kinesthetic learners?

A Diane Haager, Ph.D.
I am sorry, but the idea of teaching whole word and avoiding phonics and decoding is a myth. There is no empirical basis for this. Also, there is little or no evidence that there are different learning modes (kinesthetic, tactile, etc.) that should be treated differently. High quality, explicit instruction in the essential reading skills of phonemic awareness, decoding, fluency, comprehension and vocabulary is the most effective approach for all.

Q Stephanie Chapman
Please discuss how to analyze assessments to identify skill strengths and deficit areas.

A Diane Haager, Ph.D.
We received several questions about how to use the assessments to determine students' needs. The article, [Linking Progress Monitoring Results to Interventions](#), illustrates what you are asking with two case examples of students and their data. There are three main types of assessment data that you need in RTI implementation. First, screening assessments tell you who needs intervention and perhaps further assessment. Informal diagnostic assessment is what this question is really asking about. The intervention teacher needs to know what skills each student already has (strengths) and needs. I use the Multiple Measures book from [CORE](#) in the class I teach for special education teaches at the university, but there are many informal diagnostic tools available. You need to make sure you are checking students' skill sets in the key areas of reading: phonological awareness, decoding/phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension.

Q Joyce Walker
What if the subject area teacher does not know what RTI is and refuses to differentiate and implement accommodations and modifications? Administration says you can't change someone.

A Diane Haager, Ph.D.
This is an ongoing concern expressed by many in implementing RTI. I don't have any easy answers, but I would suggest you look at the video on this website by Steve Kucic about [Multi-Tier System of Supports](#). When you have effective leadership, built-in opportunities for collaboration and professional learning, and other supports in place, teachers develop a sense of ownership for the model and readily contribute.

Q Randy
Do you recommend any particular "quick assessment" for reading that is online, graphs data

Q points, and isolates specific skill deficits for the individual student?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

There is no one magic assessment tool that does everything, but there are several tools that you can look at. The [National Center on Response to Intervention](#) has an excellent tools chart that will tell you what various tools do and how well researched they are. Also, the Intervention Central site has an [online charting tool](#).

Q **Phyllis Hallam**

What is the difference between differentiating instruction within MTSS versus RtI?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

MTSS has much to do with school transformation? creating a system that supports RTI and other needed change that results in positive outcomes for students. Creating effective school leadership, professional learning mechanisms, and opportunities for collaboration within the school are necessary for supporting an effective RTI model. Using data effectively is also essential. This website includes excellent resources about MTSS? see Steve Kukic's video, [Multi-Tier Systems of Support](#), is very informative.

Q **CN**

What are steps a school psychologist can take to help teachers recognize student strengths and weaknesses and appropriately differentiate instruction?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

With reading instruction, the standardized reading assessments that most school psychologists typically know simply give you a score? grade equivalent, percentile ranking, etc. To really know what SKILLS a student has and needs (strengths and needs), you need informal diagnostic tools. Such tools include Informal Reading Inventory (there are many commercially available), placement test from adopted reading curriculum, oral reading fluency and other curriculum-based assessments, etc. I teach a class for special education teachers on reading assessment and intervention. We use the CORE Multiple Measures tools that have informal diagnostic tools for phonemic awareness, phonics, sight words, comprehension, etc. and also use DIBELS. Collaboration between the psychologists and classroom teachers is essential. Each brings important expertise to the table.

Q **Robin Wheeler**

I am a Title 1 Reading Specialist, grades 4 and 5. With multiple assessments given students and all the data available, is it better to focus on reading strategies or specific classroom curriculum (meeting AR goals, reteaching from basal tests, etc.)?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

Does this mean that you pull students out for extra support? If so, I would put my money on using the data to determine students' strengths and skill needs and target the instruction on those specific skills. Helping students with AR goals or basal tests can certainly help them, but this does not have the laser-sharp focus on the skills they need to catch up so they can meet these goals independently.

Q *Audrey Gauthier*

How can progress-monitoring data best be used to make meaningful instructional decisions?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

There are several excellent resources archived on this website to help you. Linking [Progress Monitoring Results to Interventions](#) by Jennifer Mahdavi and myself discusses this topic with a couple of student case examples to illustrate how the data can inform what we do in intervention. Also, [Progress Monitoring Within a Multi-Level Prevention System](#) by Lynn Fuchs provides excellent information. The important point is to use the data to answer a few important questions: 1) Is the intervention working? If 3 weeks or more of progress monitoring data show a lack of progress, the intervention may not be of sufficient focus, quality, duration or intensity. 2) What particular skills does the student need to work on?

Q *Chris Griffin*

Dr. Haager, How do you feel about setting time restraints on how long a student receives support in a particular tier before moving the intensity of support up or down?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

I have always believed that the RTI system should be flexible, allowing a professional team to make decisions on a case by case basis. For some students, it will be clear right away that the learning difficulties are severe and consistent with characteristics of a disability and it is appropriate to go to referral sooner. For others, their learning difficulties may be rather persistent and an extended time in intervention is exactly what they need. Whatever the situation, your progress monitoring data and careful documentation of the intervention (what is taught, how it is taught, what modifications tried) will be very helpful data for a team to make good decisions. The bottom line is: If the intervention is helping and the student is making progress, it is not urgent to move on to a referral. If it is not working well? a non-responsive pattern to intervention? and you have tried various approaches to get it working, then it might be time.

Q *Sarah*

Is it appropriate for a co-teacher to use a replacement curriculum program during part of core reading instructional time or should they do it strictly during an intervention block? (We do not have any pull-out learning support services.)

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

A replacement curriculum is usually a more intensive approach. It means the student(s) are not responding well to the current curriculum, even with extra support and accommodations. In your case, with no pull-out services, it is important to maintain an intervention time block, no matter what curriculum you use. If you are paying careful attention to the grade level standards, and using skills assessments to make sure the intervention is targeted at the skills students need, then it really does not matter what curriculum is used as long as it is teaching the skills students need. Intervention time is usually a short time?maybe 30 minutes?and you want to use this precious time to target needed skills, using explicit, high-quality instruction.

Q *Kim Hole*

How much responsibility does the classroom teacher have to differentiate Tier 1 instruction to support the students who are also involved in Tier 2 and supported by an intervention teacher as well?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

Differentiating Tier 1 core instruction is so very important to the success of students who receive Tier 2 support. Tier 1 instruction is for ALL students?it delivers the grade level standards and expectations. General education grade-level classrooms are increasingly diverse in terms of students' abilities, backgrounds, and particular learning needs. A classroom teacher has the essential knowledge of her students and their unique learning needs to differentiate instruction. The Common Core State Standards document discussed differentiating instruction, as do most state Reading/Language Arts guidance documents. Differentiation really means providing extra support to ensure that students gain the essential knowledge and skills, or to enrich learning for those who might be advanced and can go beyond the basics. English language learners (ELLs) might need differentiation in the form of extra support with the vocabulary and language of lessons, while struggling readers might need extra support with decoding or might need extra time. Who but the classroom teacher has the knowledge of the students to determine how to adapt the lesson appropriately?

Q *Nancy Beach*

Should students continue to receive reading instruction in the general classroom setting if they are receiving reading instruction through RTI?

A *Diane Haager, Ph.D.*

See the answer to a question by Kim H about Tier 1 instruction for those getting intervention. The short answer is YES, YES, YES they should continue to receive Tier 1 instruction. This is where they get access to grade-level standards, rich vocabulary and comprehension instruction, exposure to great literature and stimulating content, etc.

Q Jeffrey Farley

How does one teach an "old dog" these new tricks? My biggest challenge is getting veteran teachers who believe that everything is okay to understand that the quantity vs. quality formula that has driven their career is not, in fact, okay. How do I sell differentiation as an essential component of their work?

A Diane Haager, Ph.D.

Data, data, data... I have seen some very resistant teachers come on board when they see students progressing as a result of intervention received. I don't think there is a single teacher out there who does not want to see their students succeed. Another thought is to start small when starting a new school-wide RTI model?start with teachers who are willing to learn, enthusiastic and hard-working. Then, when success starts happening, it can be contagious.

Q Diane Cotton

As Literacy Specialist for our District, I struggle with getting teachers out of the "teach to the middle" way of thinking. I have done data analysis with them, but they continue to insist the high and low students should have pull out intervention/enrichment. How can I get the idea across?

A Diane Haager, Ph.D.

Teaching to the middle meets the needs of surprisingly few students in today's typical diverse classroom. It seems you have tried to use data to illustrate the need for differentiation, but it is important to also try to understand it from the perspective of those you are trying to convince. Perhaps they see the data as something external?someone from outside their classroom comes in with data they did not collect to tell them that what they have been doing for many years is not working. That sounds threatening. One school I worked with created an assessment team that included the designated "RTI Experts" who went to training and knew the assessments (intervention teacher, reading specialist, etc.), but ALSO included a rotating team of classroom teachers. They used a little money to buy subs to release teachers across grade levels (K-3). Teachers took turns serving on the team. In this role, they had to administer assessments, score and analyze data, and meet with other teachers to discuss. This created a shared sense of ownership for the data. I hope this helps!

Q Stephenie Blakemore

When designing the intervention strategies for a classroom, should children be grouped by strengths or needs?

A Diane Haager, Ph.D.

I always recommend flexible grouping, depending on the purpose of the instruction at the time. In a whole-class setting, heterogeneous grouping provides an opportunity for students to use their strengths and have rich discussions. However, when it comes to intervention, it is important to use the precious time carved out for working with students in small groups to focus on their NEEDS as

A intensively as possible. Grouping students with similar needs means that teachers can pinpoint instruction to the specific skills needed and provide small-group practice and feedback as students engage in tasks.

Q **noreen ambrose**

How should the IEP be written for services? Can it be 45/90 minutes every other day, ect. How flexible can we be? Quality over quantity?

A **Diane Haager, Ph.D.**

To some extent, you answered your own question?quality is what matters. The IEP team is responsible for determining the services an individual student needs. That could be 0-100% in the general education classroom or 0-100% in special education services. Special education services are not tied to "place," meaning that they can occur in general education, special education, or other setting. The IEP team members are to use data and their shared knowledge of the student to determine what the educational needs are and how best to meet them. They are then obligated to monitor the student's progress and, if the data show that it is not working well, make changes.

Related Reading from RTINetwork.org:

- [Linking Progress Monitoring Results to Interventions](#) by Jennifer N. Mahdavi and Diane Haager
- [Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers](#) by Carolyn A. Denton, Ph.D.
- [Classroom Reading Instruction That Supports Struggling Readers: Key Components for Effective Teaching](#) by Carolyn A. Denton, Ph.D.
- [Response to Intervention: Implications for Spanish-Speaking English Language Learners](#) by Elsa Cardenas Hagan, Ed.D.
- [Response to Intervention in Reading for English Language Learners](#) by Sharon Vaughn, Ph.D., and Alba Ortiz, Ph.D.

Additional Resources:

- [Center on Instruction](#)
- [The International Reading Association](#)
- [National Center on Response to Intervention](#)
- Haager, D., & Klingner, J. K. (2005). *Differentiating Instruction in Inclusive Classrooms: The Special Educator's Guide*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Haager, D., Klingner, J. K., & Aceves, T. (2010). *How to teach English language learners: Effective strategies from outstanding educators*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Haager, D., Klingner, J. K., & Vaughn, S. (Eds.) (2007). *Evidence-based practices for response to intervention*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- Haager, D., Dimino, J., & Windmueller, M. (2007). *Interventions for Reading Success*. Brookes Publishing Company.

