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# Introduction

## *Framework for Instructional Intervention With Diverse Learners*

*The biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual, and thus to feel justified in teaching them the same subjects in the same ways.*

—Howard Gardner (in Siegel & Shaughnessy, 1994)

**C**ulturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, including those who are learning English as an additional language, face tremendous challenges in our schools as do the educators who teach them. Students must overcome culture shock, acquire basic communicative competence in English, master academic language for each subject area, deal with shifts in family roles and language use in the dominant culture, and negotiate problematic concerns of identity in a social climate that is often hostile to difference. Teachers face the challenge of finding ways to ensure the academic success of these students whose educational backgrounds, home cultures, and languages are, in the majority of cases, different from their own. Most teachers are not prepared, by either their experiences or their teacher-preparation programs, to respond to the diversity they find in public schools. Although significant advances have been made in our understanding of effective teaching for CLD students, the transfer of the research to practice remains scant. This is particularly true for English language learners (ELL) with learning and behavior problems and has been magnified by the introduction of response to intervention models in most school districts in the United States.

The use of response to intervention (RTI) as an alternative means of identifying students with specific learning disabilities was made part of the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act. Although RTI is not mandated, states are authorized to choose a more effective way to identify specific learning and behavior disabilities than the older discrepancy and checklist screening (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). Because of this legislation, many states have quickly begun to move toward implementation of some form of response to intervention.

## WHAT IS RESPONSE TO INTERVENTION?

RTI is the current paradigm for the instructional intervention process discussed as part of problem solving. As currently practiced in the majority of school districts, it goes beyond a focus on learning disabilities to problem solving for various learning and behavior issues arising in the classroom setting. RTI is usually described as a multistep approach to providing services to struggling students. Bender and Shores (2007) cite research related to this model going back to the 1960s, but the RTI process remains new for most teachers and parents. E. Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, and McKnight (2006) define the RTI process as a student-centered assessment model using problem-solving and research-based methods to identify and address learning difficulties in children. Teachers provide instruction and interventions to these challenged and challenging students at increasing levels of intensity. They also monitor the progress students make at each intervention level and use the assessment results to decide whether the students need additional instruction or intervention in general education or referral to special education.

Although few education professionals disagree with the general concept of RTI and the theories behind it, some fear the implementation of RTI as currently carried out may shortchange children with disabilities as well as those with diverse language needs (Tomsho, 2007). As noted by Tomsho, the push for RTI is the latest chapter in a long-running battle over just how far schools should go to educate disabled and challenged students in regular classrooms. Some educators think RTI could boost mainstreaming to unprecedented levels by shifting resources away from separate special education programs and requiring regular-education teachers to tackle tougher learning challenges in their classrooms.

In many places, RTI is being directed at children with specific learning disabilities (SLD). Created under federal law, this fast-growing category includes dyslexia and other processing disorders that are manifested in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. SLD students account for approximately 46% of the nation's 6.1 million special education students, up from less than a quarter in the 1970s. Finally, the number of students identified for SLD services has increased 200% since 1977, creating concern in the field about misdiagnoses (Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003), such as false positives including overidentification of students with high IQs and average achievement, and false negatives such as underidentification of students with lower IQs and below-average achievement (Kavale, 2005; Semrud-Clikeman, 2005). Meanwhile, there are no standards for what the RTI process should look like or how long the various tiers of intervention should last.

RTI supporters call the traditional SLD identification of discrepancy between achievement and ability a wait-to-fail approach. They maintain that many children now in special education are simply victims of poor instruction and wouldn't need expensive special education services if they had received extra help as soon as their problems surfaced.

Under RTI, children are generally considered for special education only if they don't respond to a gradually intensifying series of closely monitored interventions. As noted by Reschly (2005), RTI is both more humane and more cost-effective to screen for problems early and intervene at younger ages than it is to attempt to treat problems after they are firmly established. Many of us who work with CLD students with various learning and behavior problems have welcomed the move away from prereferral protocols toward intensive problem solving as more responsive to our students' diverse learning needs.

Thus, RTI is commonly seen as a process that involves problem solving, progress monitoring, and ongoing evaluation of children's responsiveness to instruction and/or evidence-based interventions as a guide for instructional and eligibility decisions. The greatest benefits of RTI for limited English

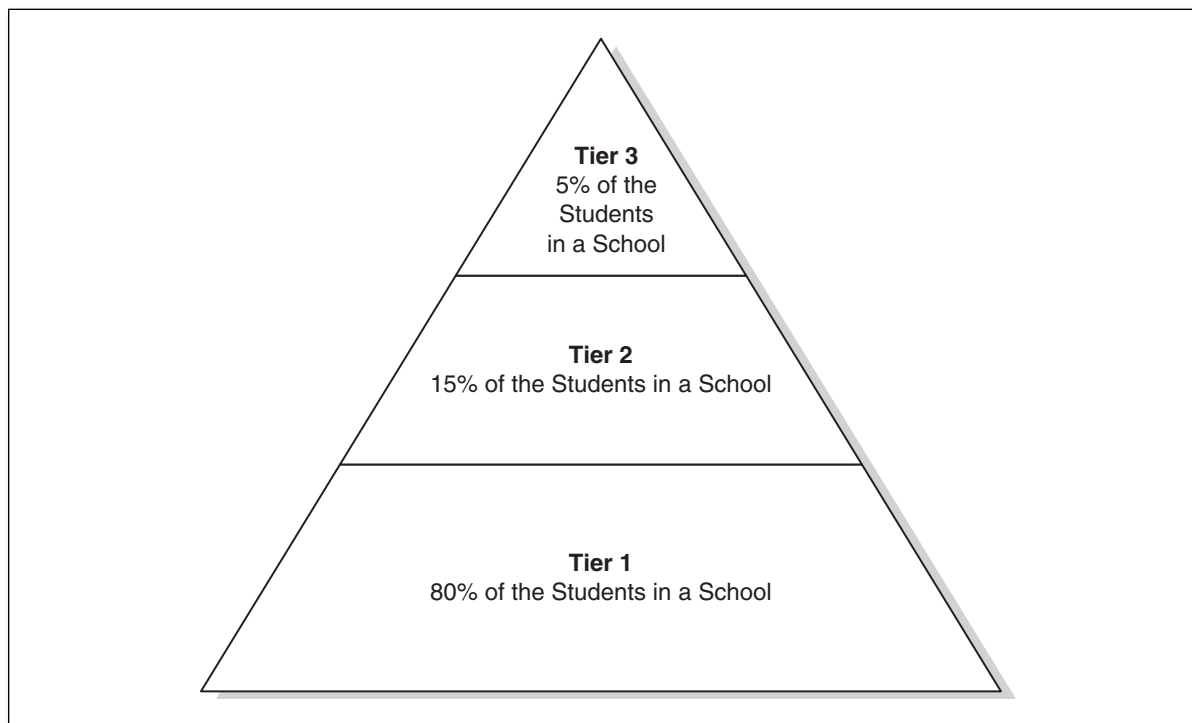
proficient and CLD students may come from its utility as a framework for guiding service delivery for those with unmet needs. The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides a legal basis for RTI. IDEA ensures educational services to children with disabilities on a national level and regulates how states and public agencies administer these services to more than 6.5 million children with disabilities in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). With the reauthorization, the law now reads that schools can “use a process which determines if a child responds to a scientific, research-based intervention” as a mechanism for identifying (and subsequently serving) those with learning and behavior problems, including ELLs and those with specific learning disabilities. RTI models have several components in common. Bradley et al. (2005) and Bender and Shores (2007) identify several core components including high-quality classroom instruction, universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and fidelity or integrity of instructional intervention. RTI uses tiers of instructional intervention for struggling students, relies on a strong core curriculum and instruction prior to intervening with individual students, incorporates problem solving to determine interventions for students, requires regular monitoring of students, and can be used to predict at-risk students and to intervene with all students who have academic and behavioral difficulties.

RTI models differ in the number of tiers or levels, who is responsible for delivery of the interventions, and whether the process is viewed as a problem-solving process that is an end in itself or as a standard protocol (i.e., a prereferral) leading to a formal evaluation for eligibility. Sometimes the process itself serves as the eligibility evaluation (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003).

An additional shift in the current application of RTI and other problem-solving models is the expansion of the model to include progress monitoring of response to instruction (RTII) as well as intervention. These RTI and RTII models are becoming more popular as the limits of RTI are being felt, particularly in districts with large emerging numbers of CLD learners.

Current RTI and RTII models are based on three or four tiers. Generally, in all models, both three and four tiers, at Tier 1, general education teachers provide instruction within the core curriculum to all students in the school. In RTI and RTII models, progress monitoring begins with measuring how students are doing in response to the general content core curriculum with particular attention paid to students identified at entry as at-risk or coming from CLD backgrounds. It is assumed that about 80% of students in a school will be successful in the benchmarked curriculum and will not need intensive further assistance (Philip Chinn, personal correspondence, August 2004). In some models, differentiation of instruction including language support is included as part of Tier 1, particularly where dual-language and two-way bilingual transition models are implemented. In others, specific differentiation for learning and behavior, particularly language transition and behavior adaptation support for students experiencing culture shock, is provided in Tier 2 (both Kansas and Pennsylvania have variations of this model). In all multitier models, Tier 2 is generally seen as the point at which focused, small group assistance begins, based on some emerging need identified through the progress monitoring done during Tier 1 instruction and intervention. It is here that reading specialists, English as a second language (ESL) instructors, and other content area assistance may be provided to struggling students in small group pullout or push in situations. In most schools with bilingual transitional or dual-language programs, English literacy development (ELD) is not seen as a specific intervention but as an essential core curriculum component of Tier 1. Emerging issues such as unusual delays in language acquisition or unresolved culture shock and transition issues would call for moving the student into a more focused Tier 2 setting for intervention.

Figure I.1 Example of the Three-Tier Model illustrates the basic three-tier RTI or RTII model and the percentage of students considered appropriate to be served at that level. Most state programs have some sort of version of this basic model. However, there is great variation in these applications.

**Figure I.1** Example of the Three-Tier Model

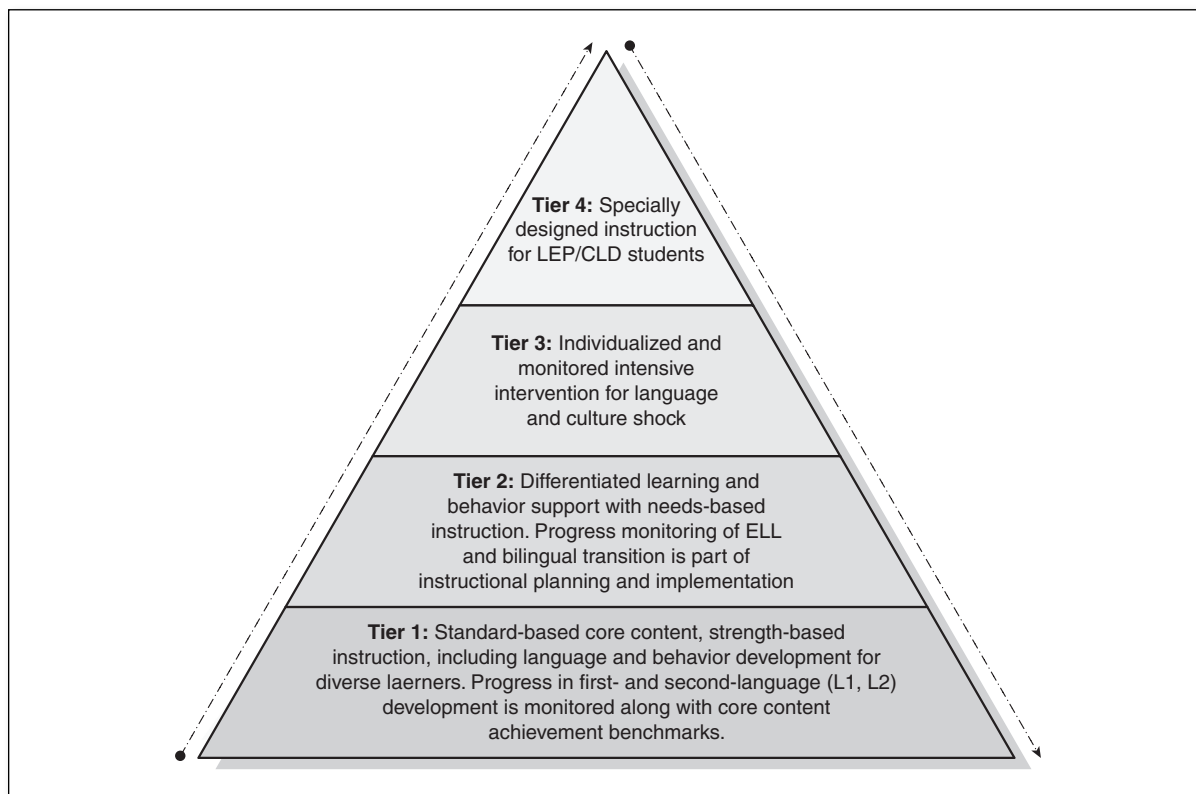
Adapted from National Association of State Directors of Special Education (2005).

In other programs, there are more levels or tiers within each tier although the common is three or four tiers. In both the four-tier and three-tier models, when students fail to respond to small group and intense, individualized interventions, they are referred for special education. Special education teachers may help develop interventions and/or plan assessments for students receiving instruction and interventions in Tiers 1 and 2. They may not provide instruction to students until Tier 3 or 4, when the student could be referred and identified for special education. In the four-tier model, Tier 4 is generally seen as the most individualized and intensive level of instruction and intervention and usually includes students on individualized education plans (IEP) and other special education or related service provisions.

Figure I.2 Example of the Four-Tier Model illustrates a four-tier RTII problem-solving model for CLD students. As students are served at the various tiers, the intensity of intervention and instruction increases as illustrated by the arrows going up the left side of the pyramid. As services move up the pyramid and intensity increases, the number of students served at each tier decreases. This is shown by the arrows going up the right side of the pyramid. In some school districts, students will be moved up until their needs are met and then moved back down to the lower tier to solidify this problem resolution. Not all students return entirely to Tier 1 but need to continue some form of Tier 2 differentiation their entire school career.

Some advocates of the problem-solving approach disagree with illustrating repeated response to instruction and intervention with a triangle, which seems to imply movement in only one direction. They prefer to use a circle to show that movement of the student and intervention process is continuous. This is shown in Figure I.3 Continuous Problem-Solving Model.

**Figure I.2** Example of the Four-Tier Model



**Figure I.3** Continuous Problem-Solving Model



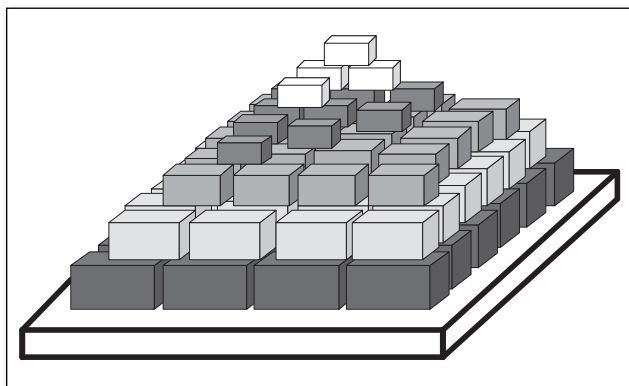
The difference between the process depicted in the triangles (Figures I.1 and I.2) versus the circles (Figure I.3) highlights an issue in the use of these models with diverse learners mentioned earlier (i.e., the idea of a standard protocol or set of prescribed steps to follow in resolving one or more learning or behavior problems versus a problem-solving model that works to resolve a continuing series of problems with no end point as part of the process). Teachers have told me of their frustration with specific aspects of both models when working with challenging CLD students.

Typically, in the RTI standard protocol, lists of interventions and instructional procedures are provided to classroom personnel to follow until the student meets target benchmarks of response to the prescribed activities. Often, a specific timeline is given in which a response is to be achieved. These are often expansions from a previously implemented prereferral process and classroom personnel are given specific workbooks or reading kits, checklists, or other guidelines to follow in the application of prescribed numbers and types of interventions to use. The materials and procedures are designed to address specific learning disability areas of concern. I have heard teachers call this “RTI in a box” along with their common frustration in following a fixed set of procedures that they see as inappropriate or ineffective with CLD learners. The strategies presented in this book are specifically designed to work “out of the box” for school personnel frustrated with prepackaged RTI interventions and provide teachers with expanded, research-based RTI and RTII options.

Although less frequent, I have also had teachers express dissatisfaction with the circular, continuous problem-solving model when used with CLD students with learning and behavior problems. On the one hand, problem solving can be out of the box and focus on actual presenting problems, including a variety of language transition and behavior adaptation issues. However, teachers have expressed frustration with what appears to be recycling or a never-ending cycle of problem solving. They have told me their ELL/CLD students with continuing learning and behavior problems never get out of the circle of problem solving into service resolution. Therefore, I recommend a blend of dynamic problem solving in a tiered RTII model and not a static triangle.

- The way I propose looking at problem solving for ELL/CLD students is to think of a pyramid of instruction and intervention comprised of many specific strategy blocks: a three-dimensional RTII structure without a fixed number of tiers per se. Each block represents a specific strategy cluster or approach designed to build on the strengths or address the needs of an individual ELL/CLD student, and each level represents a degree of intensity of focus. As various instructional and strategic approaches are used with each individual student, they fill in that particular tier of the pyramid. The complete pyramid of resiliency and intervention strategies model is illustrated in Figure I.4 Pyramid of Resiliency, Instruction, Strategies, Intervention, and Monitoring (PRISIM) for diverse learners (C. Collier, 2009).

**Figure I.4** Pyramid of Resiliency, Instruction, Strategies, and Intervention Monitoring



- The principal elements of PRISIM are the myriad strategies that comprise the building blocks. This book contains my current recommended set of strategies with the research base necessary under today’s RTI/RTII structures. As new problems with diverse learners arise, I recommend teachers keep their strategy and intervention toolboxes open, as new approaches will become necessary.

- A pyramid is only as strong as its foundation, so the more comprehensive and complete the information gathering, teacher preparation, curricula, and

system support can be, the stronger and more effective the instructional program of the school will be for ELL/CLD students, including those with special needs. The foundation of personnel, system, curricula, and comprehensive data provide a solid foundation on which the building blocks of learning are firmly established. Each block represents a cluster of strategies, core content, and settings that may be differentiated for specific strengths and/or needs of learners.

A teacher may end up using all of these strategies, but differentiate them for different student needs and issues. The instructional strategy set at Tier 1 in the PRISIM version of the RTII model will be comprehensive and geared to the larger group process and based on facilitating resiliency and learning readiness of all students. As teachers see that some students need more intensive differentiation and present some unresolved learning or behavior problems, they may move the instructional focus to smaller group interventions for particular ELL/CLD students. At Tier 2 of the PRISIM version of the RTII model, teachers may use several different approaches, of which many will be successful for the majority of ELL/CLD students. However, some of the more challenging ELL/CLD students will need even more individualization and some students will require assistance from other education personnel. At this point, students may be moved into more intensive problem solving, whether this is termed Tier 3 of an RTI or RTII model or whether it is an individualized application in the continuous problem-solving model. At these more structured points in problem-solving or tiered intervention, the student is more tightly monitored with more intensity in individual intervention.

During this entire RTI or RTII process, it is extremely important that specific cultural and linguistic issues be addressed as well as the specific learning and behavior that are part of the teacher's concern. Before school personnel can move to formally evaluate and consider placement in special education services, they must document that the presenting problems are not principally because of language and culture issues. They must document that the primary cause of the presenting problem is not because of the student's English proficiency or level of culture shock. Language and culture issues will always be part of serving an ELL/CLD student, but under the reauthorized IDEA of 2004, the team must document the extent to which these are part of the presenting problem and that they are not the most significant determining factor.

## Asking the Right Questions

These issues frequently appear in school settings as questions asked by concerned school personnel. "He has been here for more than two years, so isn't his lack of academic achievement a sign of a possible disability?" "Is this communication problem a language difference or is it a language disability?" "She was born here, so can't we rule out culture shock and language development issues?" Although illustrative of the good intentions and heartfelt concern about these students by education professionals, it is more productive to ask what information do we need and how will we use it.

## What Information Do We Need?

The information to be gathered answers specific questions critical to separating difference from disability (SDD) considerations.

- **Education:** Has the student been in school before? Are there gaps in the student's education experiences? Sufficient intensity of instruction?

- **Home language:** Are languages other than English spoken in the student's home? What languages other than English does the student speak? Is the student maintaining an ability to communicate with his or her family members?
- **Language proficiency:** What is the student's language proficiency and literacy? Is the student developing the home language at a normal rate?
- **English:** Does the student need assistance with learning English? Is the student acquiring English at a normal rate?
- **Achievement:** What is the student's level and rate of academic achievement? Is this normal for the general student population in your district/school? Specific population of the student?
- **Behavior:** Is the student's emotional stability developmentally and culturally appropriate? Are there individual or family circumstances that may explain the observed behavior?
- **Adaptation:** What is the student's level of acculturation? Is the student at risk for culture shock? Is the student adapting to our school at a normal rate?

### How Should We Use the Information?

Information about students is not valuable if it is not instructionally meaningful and does not lead to a course of action for the student's benefit.

- **Education:** Prior experience in school, whether in the United States or another country, facilitates transitional instructional models. Thus, knowing that the student has received schooling elsewhere tells school personnel they can focus on transition from one academic language foundation to English academic language (V. P. Collier & Thomas, 2007). If the student has never had a formal education experience, school personnel must start by building an understanding of school culture, rules, expectations, and basic school interaction language in the student's most proficient language before transitioning to English.

SDD concern: If the student shows little progress with adapting to school expectations and continues to struggle with acquiring school interaction language in the home language, he may have an undiagnosed disability and a full evaluation may be needed.

- **Home language:** Students who are raised in homes where English is infrequently or only one of the languages used come to us with unique strengths that can become the foundation of instruction. Research shows that they have cognitive and linguistic capacities that can facilitate learning (Baca & Cervantes, 2003). Additionally, psychological well-being is built on quality family communication and interactions (Padilla, Padilla, Morales, Olmedo, & Ramirez, 1979).

SDD concern: If the student has not acquired a developmentally appropriate proficiency in a language other than English, it may be because of family circumstances or the presence of an undiagnosed disability. In either case, this can delay English acquisition. A structured, intensive intervention in the primary home language would show whether the student has the ability to develop language and communication. If the student's communication does not improve under intervention, then a referral for a full evaluation might be warranted.

- **Language and literacy:** The student's proficiency and background in a language other than English assists in deciding the most effective instructional communicative models. It is critical to assess to the extent possible the student's proficiency in her home language/communication mode. As there are not standardized tests available for every language or communication mode, alternative measures are frequently needed (Baca & Cervantes, 2003). These can be structured sampling and observation, interview, interactive inventories, and other analytic tools (Hoover, Baca, & Klingner, 2007).



SDD concern: A student may score low on a standardized test in the home language because he has never received instruction in the language and has only an oral proficiency. Thus, low primary language and low English may look like there is some language disability. A structured intensive intervention in the primary language including basic literacy readiness would serve to profile the student's proficiency and establish whether the low score is learning based rather than something else. If the student makes little or no progress in the RTI or RTII, a referral for a full evaluation may become necessary.

- **Communication:** The student's language proficiency in English is directly related to eligibility and entry level for ESL instruction. There are many tools available for determining whether a student needs assistance with learning English (Baca & Cervantes, 2003). For initial services in English language learning for limited English proficient (LEP) speakers, school personnel should select instruments that are quick, nonbiased, and focus on speaking and listening skills. Including a literacy screening would be instructionally meaningful only for students who have received prior instruction in English.

SDD concern: Some students speak enough English to not qualify for ELL/LEP services but have such a limited classroom language foundation that they look like students with learning disabilities. Thus, English screening for ELL/LEP services must include screening for cognitive academic language proficiency and not just social language. A structured, intensive intervention in English including basic phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and other reading and writing readiness would serve two purposes: (1) profile the ELL/LEP student's proficiency and (2) establish whether the low score is learning based rather than something else. If the student makes little or no progress in the RTI or RTII, a referral for a full evaluation is necessary. Additionally, if the child has a disability, is receiving special education services, and is an ELL/LEP student, the IEP should list the ELL/LEP accommodations as part of related services. This could be bilingual assistance or specially designed assistance in English (Freeman & Freeman, 2007) in the special education setting or some other appropriate monitored intervention with specific objectives related to acquiring English. In many cases, the disabling condition is such that it seriously impacts the acquisition of English, and thus, special education personnel and ELL/LEP personnel must work together on realistic outcomes. These modified language outcomes need to be included in the IEP.

- **Cognition:** All children can learn but they learn at different rates and in different manners. All children can learn but they enter and exit at different points. A challenge of today's standards-based education models is that students who do not fit the scope and sequence of a particular school system are frequently placed in alternative instructional settings that may or may not be appropriate to their needs (Baca & Cervantes, 2003).

SDD concern: If a student is not meeting the benchmarks established by a school system even when given learning support, she may be referred to special education as having a learning disability of some sort. Sometimes special education is the only instructional alternative available in the building. It is not appropriate to place students who do not have a disability in special education even when it is the best alternative instructional setting available. Programs should be restructured to include differentiated instructional environments where any student can enter a lesson at his or her entry point and learn to the maximum of his or her abilities. A structured intensive intervention in fundamental learning strategies would establish whether the low score is learning based rather than something else. If the student makes little or no progress in the RTI or RTII, a referral for a full evaluation may be necessary.

- **Behavior:** Family and community events can be a contributing factor, and it is critical to effective instruction to explore both school and nonschool environments and their relationship to the student's presenting problem. Whether the behavior problem is because of an innate disorder, biochemical dysfunction, or a temporary response to trauma or disruption in the student's home or school environment, the student needs effective and immediate intervention and assistance.

SDD concern: Although the student needs assistance with managing or controlling his behavior, special education is not the appropriate placement if the etiology of the problem is culture shock or an event or chronic stressors in the student's home or school environment (C. Collier, Brice, & Oades-Sese, 2007). An intensive instructional intervention that facilitates self-monitoring and control in a supportive and safe environment should always be implemented first. If the problem does not appear to decrease in frequency or intensity, or if the student makes little or no progress, a referral for a full evaluation might become necessary.

- **Adaptation:** The level and rate of acculturation and accompanying degree of culture shock must be addressed in the instructional environment. All students must adapt to the school environment regardless of if they speak English; students who come into your school from homes or communities very different from the school will experience greater degree of culture shock (C. Collier et al., 2007).

SDD concern: The manifestations of culture shock look a lot like learning and behavior disabilities and unaddressed acculturation and adaptation needs can concatenate into serious learning and behavior problems later in the education experience. An intensive instructional intervention that mitigates culture shock and facilitates adaptation and language transition should always be implemented, particularly for newcomers. Most students will respond within weeks to this intervention. This positive response does not mean that culture shock may not reappear, as culture shock is cyclical and a normal part of our adaptation to anything strange to us. However, a positive response to acculturative assistance lets school personnel know that the presenting problems are because of a normal adaptive process, acculturation, which responds over time to instructional intervention. Students should have their level of acculturation measured at entry into your school system and their rate of acculturation monitored annually to assure the student is making normal progress in your school. If the student's rate of acculturation is not within normal range, it is an indication either that the program is not adequately addressing his transition needs or that there may be an undiagnosed disability of some sort that is depressing the rate of acculturation.

Although RTI and RTII are generally thought of as referring to academic intervention, most programs (93.3% according to Berkeley, Bender, Peaster, and Saunders, 2009) also incorporate behavioral intervention in the RTI and RTII model or use a similar multitiered approach to address the behavioral needs of students. All but one of the programs examined by Berkeley et al. use tiered approaches to address behavior in addition to academics. In conclusion, while RTI and RTII are seen as a positive development in assisting all learners, our principle concern is that typical RTI/RTII programs are designed for native English-speaking students with learning and behavior problems and need to be expanded and adapted for use with ELL and CLD students.

## Providing Some Context

Up to this point, I have described what is current practice or what research has established as best practice in typical K–12 schools including serving students with various learning and behavior problems. These problem-solving programs can be effective for all learners with specific modifications for use with ELL/CLD students. Problem-solving programs with progress monitoring are particularly helpful with ELL/CLD students when expanded to include instructional

<b>What RTI/RTII for ELL/CLD Students Is and What It Is Not</b>	
<b>RTI/RTII Is</b>	<b>RTI/RTII Is Not</b>
An initiative that supports general education school improvement goals for all diverse learners	A stand-alone special education initiative
Intended to help as many CLD students as possible meet proficiency standards without special education	A means for getting more ELL/CLD students into special education
A method to unify general and special education to benefit CLD students through greater continuity of services	A method for increasing or decreasing special education numbers
Focused on effective instruction to enhance CLD student growth	Focused primarily on learning disability determination among CLD students and documented through a checklist

strategies and instructional interventions directly addressing their unique learning and behavior needs (Baca & Cervantes, 2003; C. Collier, 2009). As my goal with this book is to provide direct pragmatic suggestions for implementing instructional interventions in classroom settings with ELL/CLD, I will provide examples from my teaching experience. Specific examples will precede the list of recommended interventions for each RTI/RTII level or tier of instruction and intervention. These recommended interventions are not a substitute for other content intervention that research has shown to be effective with ELL/CLD students but are to be used in conjunction with research-based academic strategies and interventions typically used with all students exhibiting learning and behavior problems. There is nothing magic about these instructional and intervention strategies; they all take extra effort and focus on the part of instructional personnel. Some teachers will be familiar with many of these but may not have thought about using them as part of an intensive, focused instructional strategy or intervention process. They are particularly effective with ELL/CLD students who are in integrated classrooms with non-ELL/CLD students of mixed ability level but are also beneficial in ELL and special education pullout settings.

Prior to becoming a special education teacher, I was a primary teacher and a beginner teacher. Beginner was the term used for students who had never been in school before and who did not speak English. These students were assigned to my classroom until they tested as able to participate in a classroom with their grade-level peers. Thus, I had mixed ages, mixed abilities, and mixed language proficiency in my classroom, and I was responsible for instructing all of my students in the core curriculum detailed in our school's scope and sequence guidelines.

Over the years, specific students with very challenging learning and behavior problems passed through my classroom doors. I will use these students' stories to illustrate the instructional intervention process.

