

The RTI Model and Ramifications for eLearning Using the iPad®

by Penina Rybak MA/CCC-SLP, TSHH

About the Author:

Penina Pearl Rybak, MA/CCC-SLP, TSHH, Founder/CEO of Socially Speaking LLC, presented at *Closing the Gap* for the first time in 2012. She earned her degree from New York University in speech-language pathology. She has provided services to young children with special needs in a variety of settings: home-based early intervention, center-based therapeutic preschool classrooms, self-contained school-age classrooms, and private practice. Penina participated in the 1995- 2000 New York State TRAIID Project, which worked to improve communication options in special education, by implementing Apple™ technology in the classroom. She recently spearheaded “*The Boardmaker Initiative*” for Mayer-Johnson™ at a charter school in NY. Penina specializes in the developmental integration of iOS Apps and play, into social communication strategies for young children with special needs, particularly those with Autism. Visit her social media sites for more information, including her LinkedIn Profile: Penina Rybak, and her website: www.SociallySpeakingLLC.com.

WHAT IS RTI?

The Response to Intervention (RTI) Model was officially recognized in 2004, upon the reauthorization of the IDEA, and the prominent implementation of the “No Child Left Behind” Act of 2001. It is an educational strategy that has slowly gained momentum in schools across the country. Professional development and methodical accountability are becoming more widespread with the advent of recent technological advances. We are also seeing an increase in integration of assistive technology (AT) into classrooms for a variety of students. It is becoming more routine for teachers to use lessons involving Smart Boards and computer tablets, such as the iPad from Apple. It is hoped that the future synthesis of AT use and RTI will help students progress.

RTI is a proactive, collaborative approach between parents, teachers, related service providers and administrators to foster learning and target students who are “falling through the cracks” academically. The RTI framework has been adopted by many educators. It emphasizes the importance of early detection/ intervention, monitoring progress and structured teaching that caters to the child’s interests and specific needs. This three- tiered instructional model is geared towards identifying students at risk for learning difficulties, addressing the evaluated student’s specific learning style, strengths and learning differences, and implementing a collaborative approach to treatment.

FAQ: WHAT ARE THE BASIC PRINCIPALS OF RTI?

- 1 All children can learn and “tap into” their potential
- 2 Quality assessment drives instruction

- 3 Quality teaching drives differentiated instruction
- 4 Positive behavioral support enhances learning and peer relationships in class
- 5 Team collaboration is crucial for the student's academic success

PRINCIPALS OF LEARNING TO REMEMBER FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF RTI

- ☑ Personalized student assessment and management plans/lessons help cater to the child's interests, determine specific goals and methods for intervention, and build camaraderie and optimism in class
- ☑ Learning styles in children tend to fall into three main categories: visual/auditory/tactile corresponding to the Theory of Multiple Intelligence
- ☑ Learning in children tends to stem from either analytic or global (gestalt) thinking using multiple intelligence
- ☑ Learning in children must take into account that Multiple Intelligence has eight categories where student abilities can be tapped: verbal/linguistic; logical/mathematical; visual/spatial; tactile/kinesthetic (body awareness); musical/rhythmic; interpersonal (pragmatics, social skills); intrapersonal (executive functioning, metacognition, introspection) and naturalist (diverse environments, outdoors preferred).

FAQ: WHY HAVE MANY SCHOOL DISTRICTS IMPLEMENTED RTI?

A: Five Outcomes of the Use of RTI:

1. It promotes early detection through screenings at least three times a year
2. It promotes teacher designed differentiated instruction (lessons) targeting the specific student's strengths and weaknesses
3. It promotes "assessment driven instruction," i.e., collaborative teamwork provides a "checks and balances" approach, where techniques that aren't working are analyzed, discussed and dropped from that particular student's Management Plan
4. It promotes ongoing staff professional development for the entire team so that curriculum trends and teaching methods stay current and of high quality
5. It promotes positive student interactions based upon personal learning styles, preferences, interests and strengths, i.e., lessons are geared to the student's unique "inner landscape" to enhance motivation, self-esteem and mutual respect



THE RTI PYRAMID AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR SPECIAL EDUCATORS

The RTI framework hinges on the idea that when providing lessons in school, purposeful grouping yields results; academically, socially and emotionally. At tier one, purposeful grouping is done in the “least restrictive environment,” i.e., the teacher uses information gleaned through screenings and informal assessments to plan lessons for all around the children’s learning style, interests, strengths and weaknesses. A buddy system, or peer pairing, and other positive behavioral supports are put in place to help the students develop their own self-reliance, self-monitoring and executive functioning skills. Grouping students according to deficit/need/ability in a tier one setting has been shown to be less effective because it negatively impacts the student’s self-esteem; it causes parental concern about the social stigma their child may experience; and it doesn’t always allow the student to vary his/her interests and learning style, leading to a lack of diversity within the lesson and the group. At tier one, the two most important team members are the teacher and parent(s).

The RTI framework mandates that smaller, more intensive grouping be conducted for tier two students as a “pullout service” within the school day. That is usually because tier two students have been found to have deficits in specific academic areas, such as reading or math. They, therefore, need to be provided with group instruction that caters to the specific deficit while appealing to the child’s multiple intelligence, learning style, interests and behavioral/ pragmatic (social) needs. At tier two, the team expands to include the reading specialist, possibly the school psychologist, speech-language pathologist and occupational therapist, just to name a few.

The RTI Model intersects with the standard special education model, and the implementation of the individualized education program (IEP) at tier three. Students in tier three are usually given intensive one-on-one learning opportunities to “fill in the gaps,” such as individual speech therapy on a weekly basis. They may attend smaller classes, with a smaller teacher- student ratio.

They may still be given group instruction over the course of the school day, but the group dynamics and goals may differ than tier one and two. For example, the concepts of circle time and centers have been cherished times of the day in special education, self-contained classrooms for decades. These are two sacred times of the day when the child with special needs is introduced to purposeful grouping, given the opportunity to start to develop specific academic and social skills that will enable the gradual transition from a “me” to a “we.”

THE RISE OF eLEARNING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RTI

Assistive technology integration into educational curriculums has become much standard practice in schools across the country. Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) in special education has been recommended since the '90s, when special educators began integrating assistive technology (AT) into therapy sessions and special education classrooms across the country. CAI has gained momentum since the 2004 IDEA revisions federally mandated a behavior plan as part of an IEP. eLearning is widespread today, thanks to the nature of technology as both an intrinsic reinforcer and a gateway of information via the Internet. The subsequent spurring of the digital age and recent ease of technology integration using portable computers, such as the iPad by Apple™, have made eLearning a viable, even preferable option for many special educators and service providers in schools today.

Research shows that children with special needs, particularly Autism, appear to be “visual learners.” They can greatly benefit from CAI-based lesson plans to facilitate self-regulation and language development, involving “whole body” learning, emphasizing the visual modality. Word of mouth and popularity of eLearning, using the iPad in particular, is growing rapidly. The iTunes app industry is the fastest growing form of commerce in the world today. Parents, children and special educators are all increasingly lauding and using the iPad as a creative, customized, intuitive and fun educational tool. It is being collaboratively used more frequently to implement lesson plans, address IEP goals and utilize behavioral strategies to foster self-regulation.

The clinical implications for using RTI within eLearning, such as integrating iPad use into lesson plans, include collaborative goal setting, with student input, if applicable, and “activating prior knowledge.” The latter is also known as accessing episodic memory using the following:

- Cues appealing to a child’s learning style (auditory/visual/tactile), such as visual supports
- “Wh” questions that facilitate the development of problem solving and executive functioning
- Advanced organizers, such as outlines containing target vocabulary, to facilitate the access of semantic memory, development of time management skills and overall reading comprehension skills

The process of eLearning involves active student participation, is usually self-motivating and immerses the student in multi-sensory learning experiences engaging one or more of the five senses. It is no wonder that advocates of the RTI model have embraced integration of AT into group instruction and classroom learning! Also, the flexibility that RTI promotes is inherent in the very use of AT, which, by nature, is individualized and flexible when dovetailed with the

student's curriculum. Furthermore, the very nature of the iPad's user interface, the way the home screen operates, allows the RTI team to seamlessly transition between lesson plan apps for the student and note-taking and assessment apps to document progress etc. This is all done while simultaneously empowering the tier one and two student, to have a say in his/her goals, have students from all three tiers access episodic memory to use the AT, and have students from all three tiers problem-solve; how to successfully navigate the "user interface" of the iPad, etc.

Aren't these the very outcomes we advocate through the RTI approach?

Finally, the very repetitive nature of AT devices, such as the iPad, provide intrinsic reinforcement and practice trials. Every student in every tier of RTI instruction can thus develop better attention spans, and retention of learned material over time and self-esteem. These are all byproducts of RTI implementation, which we educators strive for on a daily basis with our students, *no matter what their challenges!*

I feel that the integration of AT, such as the iPad, in those settings already using RTI, begins with the service provider first becoming more comfortable about using technology, and then implementing it while thinking "outside the box" and what the Big Picture is, namely, the student's behavioral, academic and AT needs.

To that end, I designed my Socially Speaking™ App for iPad, to be an interactive App, that gives AT a "human touch", by tailoring it to both the user and the child being documented. My App was designed with the principals of RTI in mind, including best practices concerning AT. It caters to the service provider's varied caseload, need for "assessment driven instruction" and need for positive interactions based upon the child's interests and individual learning style. The Socially Speaking™ App thus gives the user opportunities to use the iPad's multi-app interface, to customize lesson plans with goals and personal photos/ graphics, giving the child's team common ground/language, better perspective and an easier time documenting future IEP goals. My Socially Speaking™ App is both an assessment protocol/screening tool for social skills development and a lesson plan template to help track the young child with Autism and other special needs.

This is the very essence of RTI: updating baseline data, determining starting points for remediation and succinctly documenting the team's approach to materials and techniques.

The long-term ramifications of RTI implementation in special education need to be further studied and documented. The benefits of AT integration into IEP lesson plans, particularly in special education, have already been documented extensively. It is only a matter of time before we see journal articles on the efficacy of treatment and overall learning outcomes of the most famous, yet recent, "new kid on the block" AT device, the iPad® from Apple™.

Dr. Dave Edyburn wrote about the value of using AT to enhance learning in his famous 2007 article for Closing The Gap, before the iPad was even a household name. He wrote, "When a task is too hard to be completed successfully, students get frustrated and disengage. When a task is too easy, students get bored. Learning occurs when the challenge level of a task is 'just right.' I refer to this phenomena as the 'Goldilocks Effect.' A critical function of teaching is to find the level of challenge that is "just right" for each student."

I agree with Dr. Edyburn's insights. I maintain that integrating the iPad into lesson plans does just that. I maintain that our use of AT, such as my Socially Speaking™ App for iPad, to design lessons where students will then use other AT and apps to learn, is what RTI is all about!

Implementation of the RTI model into special education strategies which many of us already use, (such as visual supports and positive behavioral support), allows for an even more seamless integration of AT and eLearning. This, in turn, facilitates a child's self-concept and overall academic performance, in today's rapidly changing world and evolution of technology.

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APPENDIX

Helpful Websites on RTI

RTI Action Network (www.rtinetwork.org)

U.S. Dept. of Education/IDEA (www.idea.ed.gov)

National Center on RTI (www.rti4success.org)

National Research Center on Learning Disabilities (www.nrcl.org)

Council for Exceptional Children's RTI Blog (www.cec.sped.org)

Council for Exceptional Children- Learning Disabilities (<http://teachingld.org>)

Intervention Central (strategies by subject) (www.interventioncentral.org)

National Center on Student Progress Monitoring (www.studentprogress.org)

Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (www.pbis.org)

Learning Styles & Multiple Intelligence (www.ldpride.net)

Learning Styles Assessment (www.learning-styles-online.com)

Personal Thinking Styles (www.thelearningweb.net/personalthink.html)

Literacy Works Tools for Assessment (www.literacyworks.org/mi/home.html)

Reading A-Z Resources (www.readinga-z.com)

Research Institute on Progress Monitoring (www.progressmonitoring.org)

Teachers & Technology (rubrics, lessons) (www.4teachers.org)

Teachology (rubrics, lessons) (www.teach-nology.com)

Promising Practices Network (www.promisingpractices.net)

What Works Clearinghouse (www.ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/)

Scholastic Teachers (www.teacher.scholastic.com)

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

“A Parent’s Guide to Response to Intervention,” by Susan Bruce (www.wrightslaw.com)

“Response to Intervention-A Primer for Parents,” by Mary Klotz (www.nasponline.org)

“A Parents’ Guide to RTI,” by Candace Cortiella (www.nclld.org)

About Closing the Gap

Assistive technology can change lives, and Closing The Gap is a multi-faceted resource committed to helping you discover *how*.

<http://www.closingthegap.com>

Founded over 25 years ago by Budd and Dolores Hagen, parents of a child with a disability, Closing The Gap provides professionals, parents and consumers, with the information and training necessary to best locate, compare and implement assistive technology into the lives of persons with disabilities.

Through our annual international conference and online magazine, Closing The Gap provides practical and sound content, technologies, and a network of professional support, to help participants and subscribers gain the insight, knowledge and skills needed, to make informed decisions and effectively and immediately evoke change.

Closing The Gap's Annual Conference has an international reputation as a leading source for information on innovative applications of assistive technology for persons with disabilities. The CTG Annual Conference builds on a tradition of providing a comprehensive examination of the most current uses of technology, by persons with disabilities, and the professionals who work with them.