

IRA Commission on RTI:

Meeting the Needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

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U.S. schools are rapidly becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. For example, between 2000 and 2005, the population of English language learners (ELLs) increased from 3.8 million to 4.5 million, with the largest number of ELL students in urban cities across the U.S. Data by the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center (EPERC) show that “60% of the nations’ English Language Learners are concentrated in 20 metropolitan areas... (p. 6). Spanish is spoken by 75% of the ELL population with some 100 other native tongue languages constituting the other 25%. The instruction these children receive, according to 2006-07 Title III data, includes dual language and two-way programs, transitional bilingual programs (instruction in native language to support English development), structured English immersion programs, as well as content-based English as a Second Language support provided in English-only programs. The majority of the states (36 of 48) participating in the survey reported providing English-only as well as programs that provide native language and instruction.

In this document, we discuss multiple issues that we consider essential when considering how to implement RTI in culturally and linguistically diverse schools. First, we provide an overview of culturally and linguistically responsive assessment and instruction procedures that should serve as the foundation for RTI. Then we outline progress monitoring and assessment procedures that should be the cornerstone of effective RTI models. Next we convey principles of high quality, appropriate classroom instruction and differentiation to meet the varying needs of diverse students. Then we portray issues related to systemic change and school-wide implementation of RTI. Finally, we suggest elements of relevant expertise that should be shared by all educators who work in culturally and linguistically diverse settings.

The Foundation for RTI: Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Assessment and Instruction

The foundation of RTI should be culturally and linguistically responsive assessment and instruction procedures that are appropriate for meeting students’ needs across tiers or types of support in RTI. This idea of being “culturally and linguistically responsive” is an essential one, and not just a way to pay lip service to a more sociocultural perspective than was promoted by Reading First and No Child Left Behind. All instruction already is culturally

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language, and emphasizes cultural relevance^{iv}. Students participate in authentic literacy activities in a supportive learning environment while also experiencing the explicit instruction needed to gain important skill and strategies. This instruction should include frequent opportunities to practice reading with a variety of rich materials in meaningful contexts. For example, in Ms. Larson has learning centers set up in her room with authentic tasks, such as a friendly-letter writing center, where students write a letter to a soldier stationed overseas, or a center where students read books and complete book reviews for their classmates to read^v. A focus on the complete literacy event does not mean that traditional skills are unimportant. "Rather these skills are situated within a holistic context that is intimately linked with goals and conditions of reading."^{vi}

Culturally responsive literacy instruction requires choosing relevant multicultural literature and other reading materials to which the student can personally relate (including youth culture). Students benefit from “windows, bridges, and mirrors,” windows so that they can see into other worlds, mirrors so that they can see themselves reflected in what they read, and bridges to connect the two^{vii}. Culturally responsive literacy programs also tap into community resources that promote children’s literacy, such as by inviting volunteers from the community to serve as reading tutors or even just “listeners” while students read. Another is to invite parents and others in the neighborhood to share their expertise or “funds of knowledge” about various topics^{viii}. For example, in one effective model, local elders help in the schooling of American Indian youth^{ix}. Programs should also focus on developing partnerships with parents, sometimes including home visits, so that teachers can better understand the multiple and varied literacy practices already in the home and so that parents can enhance home literacy experiences.

Whether a teacher is culturally and linguistically responsive has a lot to do with not only what s/he teaches, but also how, and on the relationships he or she builds with students. We know a lot about the characteristics and dispositions of culturally and linguistically responsive teachers and culturally relevant instruction from observation studies in the classrooms of highly effective teachers (for a classic example of teachers of African American students, see Gloria Ladson-Billings’ *“The Dreamkeepers”*^x). Culturally responsive teachers are knowledgeable and skilled in implementing effective instructional practices. They also demonstrate their care, respect and commitment to each student’s learning abilities, desires, and potentialities. They have high expectations and are relentless in their quest to help all students do their best. They help students find relevant connections among themselves, the subject matter, and

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As we've known for decades, good instruction starts with good assessment. Assessment is the cornerstone of the Response-to-Intervention (RTI) model, whereby ongoing assessment is the platform from which to meet students' needs. Creating the appropriate assessment system to meet students' needs is a challenge for any school or district, but an especially important challenge when serving culturally and linguistically diverse students, who are in need of tailored and appropriate instruction. The utility of any assessment depends upon the extent to which it provides valid information on the essential aspects of language and literacy that can be used to plan appropriate instruction for the population of interest. There are two important positive consequences of effectively implementing the RTI model.

1. The model places an emphasis on the timely identification of children in need of different or more intensive instructional approaches. That is, districts are to design a system that links assessment with instruction, which very clearly defines daily instructional content and supports (Tier 1) and then seeks to identify those learners who, with intensive effective instruction (Tier 2), develop age-appropriate skills and those who continue to struggle and are in need of further assessment and intervention to address their significant difficulties (Tier 3). For at-risk learners, including many children who are linguistically and culturally diverse, a sound and appropriate RTI model holds great promise.
2. An emphasis is placed on *school contexts* with higher rates of children in need of targeted instructional attention to promote their literacy skills and academic development, rather than just focusing on individual children. This creates the opportunity and the need for conversations about school-level models of prevention of difficulties to meet the needs of diverse populations of learners. This is especially important for schools with high numbers of linguistically and culturally diverse students; rather than focus on individual students, emphasizing their difference in relation to a majority culture norm. Given that linguistic and cultural diversity, appropriate opportunities-to-learn, and student success are strongly linked, applying the RTI model has shows real potential for designing tailored and effective learning environments.

There are five main issues to consider when designing and using an RTI assessment system for students who are linguistically and culturally diverse: 1) The importance of multiple measures; 2) The multi-dimensional nature of language and reading; 4) The importance of academic language for school success; 4) The role of progress monitoring in an RTI framework; 5) The way in which the information will be used and who it is shared with.

measures are very important in any RTI model, but especially when the model is used with linguistically and culturally diverse students.

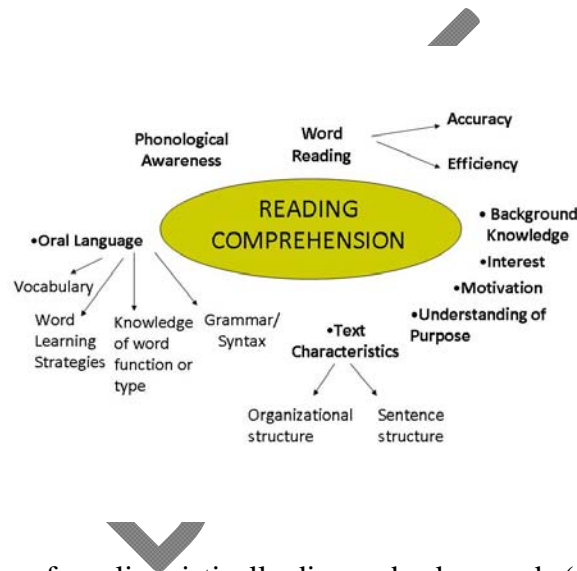
- **Different assessments—even in the same language or literacy domain—capture somewhat different skills and knowledge.** This is because of the assessment format, the background knowledge required for the items, and the way the skill of interest is defined. Therefore, multiple assessment methods provide a comprehensive view of the student in relation to different learning outcomes.
- **Second language acquisition is an uneven developmental process.** Some skills might develop more quickly than others; for example some linguistically diverse students with good vocabulary knowledge might still have difficulty with grammar (see below for more on this). We need to avoid thinking about students' profiles in broad terms, such as "low" language skills or "low" literacy ability, and instead generate an understanding of children's skills—their strengths and their weaknesses—in specific domains of language and literacy, in order to inform instruction and intervention efforts.
- **Different assessments serve different functions.** Taking a developmental perspective—one that focuses on the individual child—the purposes of assessment include screening, problem solving, diagnosis, and progress monitoring. From an accountability perspective—one that focuses on a group or system or institution—the purpose of assessment is primarily to assess performance against certain set standards, expectations, or benchmarks. Generally speaking, particularly within an RTI framework, which takes a developmental approach, an assessment that has been designed for one purpose (e.g., screening) is not suitable for another purpose (e.g., diagnosis). However, it is important to note that states and districts undoubtedly use assessments for other purposes for which they are not designed, particularly in the domain of serving linguistically diverse students. For instance, there are districts that routinely use an English Language Development Test for initial placement, annual monitoring, and reclassification of students, as well as to inform decisions about interventions for struggling learners. Given the psychometric properties of the test and the complexity of the language proficiency construct, a single assessment cannot possibly serve all of these four purposes well. A test designed strictly to identify whether a learner is above or below the redesignation threshold is likely to be insensitive to fine distinctions such as those between beginning and early intermediate students. This same test will provide little or no information on which to base interventions

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students’ proficiency levels, in a broad sense, they are not fine-grained, nor are they curriculum-based, and thus are not designed to inform instruction; these are assessments for classification purposes only. In addition, it’s important to note that, although changing, many of these language proficiency assessments do not adequately emphasize the complex academic language needed for reading comprehension success.

2. The multi-dimensional nature of language and reading

Assessment within an RTI framework should reflect the multidimensional nature of *language* and *literacy* learning and the diversity among students being assessed. While typical early literacy screening batteries focus on print awareness, phonological awareness, and letter-word identification, they often do *not* include measures of vocabulary knowledge, oral language proficiency, and/or listening and reading comprehension. Therefore, classroom teachers—and those who support them—need training on language and literacy development in the context of a kindergarten RTI model that includes a comprehensive assessment system, which includes measures of oral language and vocabulary.



The great majority of children from linguistically diverse backgrounds (representing many different native languages) develop word reading skills that are equally as accurate and fluent as their classmates—developing their foundational skills to age-appropriate levels—without any significant delays. However, these same children often need significant support to develop English vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension skills. This is an important profile to keep in mind when designing effective RTI assessment frameworks and Tier 1 instruction.

In selecting an assessment battery, particularly when the goal is to identify a student’s developmental profile in

In the domain of vocabulary, as is the case with many native speakers, linguistically diverse students' often have receptive vocabularies that are much larger than their expressive (or productive) vocabularies. In addition, a student might have a broad, but not very deep, vocabulary, such as only having one meaning (the common one) for words that have multiple meanings. Making these distinctions and working towards this understanding is important when using assessments with linguistically diverse students.

As previously mentioned, it is also important to keep in mind that second language acquisition is an *uneven* developmental process. Some skills might develop more quickly than others; for example some linguistically diverse students with good vocabulary knowledge might still have difficulty with grammar.

Just as teachers differentiate their instruction, assessment must focus on capturing subtle shifts in English proficiency levels and assessments that focus on providing diagnostic information, such as running records or miscue analysis may provide needed data to capture comprehension skills and provide windows into oral reading fluency

The fluency-comprehension disconnect

Also, recent research^{xivxxvi} tells us that for linguistically diverse students—faced with the challenge of reading in a language in which they're not typically fully proficient—text-reading fluency is *not* a reliable indicator of reading comprehension. For example, across four studies conducted with linguistically diverse learners and/or low-performing learners from primary grades through to 6th grade, text-reading fluency scores were in the average range yet the mean score for reading comprehension was well below average. These findings reinforce the need to supplement text-reading fluency measures with assessments of vocabulary for effective screening and/or progress-monitoring in the domain of reading, particularly with urban and low-performing students.

Assessment of basic skills must be complemented by assessment in the domains of language, vocabulary, and reading comprehension, to guide tailored and appropriate instruction in these areas

basis (this might be weekly, monthly, or every 6-10 weeks). Progress toward meeting the student's goals is measured by comparing expected and actual rates of learning. Based on these measurements, *teaching is adjusted as needed*.

The purpose of progress monitoring is to ensure that instruction is adjusted to meet the needs of individual students and/or classrooms of learners—use it to find what works!

- Determine whether students are *benefiting* appropriately from an instructional program
- Identify students who are not demonstrating adequate progress
- Build more effective instructional programs and plans for the children who are not benefiting
- Compare the efficacy of different forms of instruction and design more effective, individualized instructional programs.

Procedure for Progress Monitoring^{xvii}:

1. Conduct initial screening assessment; determine which students are suspected to be at-risk
2. Assess students regularly (Progress Monitoring)
 - Disconfirms risk: responsive students remain in Tier 1
 - Confirms risk: unresponsive students move to Tier 2.
3. Compare student performance to an established goal
4. Use results to determine if an instructional change is needed or goals need to be increased

Important Questions about Progress Monitoring & Linguistically Diverse Students^{xviii}

- A. Does our student assessment data suggest that that most students are being appropriately served?
 - When most students are not thriving, this is a systemic issue; general education instruction is likely ineffective or inappropriate.
- B. Are most linguistically diverse learners making progress in general education?
 - Teachers and school leaders can use CBM data to determine when it is necessary to adjust instruction for linguistically diverse students who are struggling
 - Teachers and school leaders can use data to determine when it is necessary to adjust instruction for *all*

important for districts and school staff to undertake their own comparisons and analyses to determine how their population of ELLs students is faring and what the typical patterns of growth and development are.

- E. Do we have a working sense of how linguistically diverse students' performance is influenced on particular measures by individual and classroom characteristics? Do we examine their error patterns?
- The similarities between a student's native language and English will influence their language and reading abilities, particularly in the areas of phonological awareness and phonics. For example, students who learn to read in Spanish will likely segment at the syllable-level rather than the phoneme level. For these learners, weaknesses in phoneme segmentation are explained by experiences in the native language.
- F. Where possible and appropriate, are we using native language measures to further understand our students' skills?
- For Spanish-speakers, particularly those who have or are receiving native language instruction, there are two progress monitoring assessments available—AIMSweb and IDEL (version of DIBELS).
- G. Have we considered dynamic approaches to assessment within the RTI framework?
- One way to be sure that opportunities-to-learn are both appropriate and tailored to the needs of the student is to conduct assessment that involves teaching and assessment.

4. Using and Sharing Assessment Information

An assessment-based system raises important questions about how the results will be used. To be sure, assessment is a way of gaining some understanding of the child in order to make informed decisions to support and promote their academic success. Any assessment data collected should be used expressly to support student learning, whether it be to inform constructive discussions about classroom-level instruction or student-level supplemental supports.

Each assessment used may serve one purpose and function well, but it is unlikely that one assessment can serve many purposes well, especially for linguistically diverse learners. Once collected, this data must be interpreted by someone with knowledge and expertise in second language learning. When any decision is being made about instructional support services for a given student, educators with expertise in second language learning and parents must be involved and active

- Different assessments—even in the same language or literacy domain—capture somewhat different skills and knowledge. This is because of the assessment format, background knowledge required for the items, and the way the skill of interest is defined for measurement.
- 2. All RTI assessment strategies must reflect the multi-dimensional nature of language and reading**
 - Screening batteries should sample from the entire range of language and literacy skills needed for academic success. While many screening batteries focus on print awareness, phonological awareness, and letter-word identification, they often do *not* include measures of vocabulary knowledge, oral language proficiency, and/or listening and reading comprehension. This is particularly detrimental for linguistically diverse students, many of whom develop age-appropriate word reading skills but need support to further develop their language and comprehension skills.
 - 3. The purpose of progress monitoring is to ensure that instruction is adjusted to meet the needs of individual students and/or classrooms of learners—use it to find what works!**
 - Teachers and school leaders can use CBM data to determine when it is necessary to adjust instruction for linguistically diverse students who are struggling
 - Teachers and school leaders can use data to determine when it is necessary to adjust instruction for *all* linguistically diverse students (or English Language Learners)
 - When most students are not thriving, this is a systemic issue; general education instruction is likely ineffective or inappropriate.
 - 4. When any decision is being made about instructional support services for a given student, educators with expertise in second language learning and parents must be involved and active members of the decision-making process, with access to bilingual staff who can assist in the event of a language barrier.**

Classroom Literacy Instruction for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

In this section we discuss elements of classroom literacy instruction for culturally and linguistically diverse students. We use a metaphor of yarn to try to explore how research-based strategies are needed to teach ELL students we can keep in mind the idea that ELL students may not respond similarly to instruction because of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, thus intervention practices must be adapted further to meet their needs. In using the

teachers. Although reading and writing are two different areas of instruction they are strongly linked as related areas through comprehension. The purple yarn thus represents overall comprehension in domains of reading and writing.



Another way to think about this is that language arts instruction should integrate different *literacy domains*. In these domains, all the traditional language arts (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are interrelated and complement one another. Teachers should try to include each domain in every literacy lesson using various literacy strategies and activities drawn from research with culturally and linguistically diverse students (see Table 1)^{xix}. It also is important to help students make connections between school learning and their experiences in their homes and communities^{xx}

Table 1
Domains of Literacy

Domain	Strategies and Activities
Oral language (listening and speaking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build background knowledge (preview-review) • Frontloading of vocabulary using visual cues, TPR, realia • Modeling and practicing book-based sentence structures • Sentence transformations through guided dialogue • Language experience approach • Reading aloud • Storytelling using wordless picture books • Traditional songs, chants, rhymes in the students’ home language and in English
Reading Fluency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeled reading • Shared reading with patterned language books

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reciprocal teaching • Scaffolded retelling (modeling and explicit teaching of text structure, connectors) • Literature circles (select quality literature in which the children can see themselves) • Text sets (set of books around a topic, can include different genres) • Reading responses incorporating art, music, drama, poetry
Word work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phonemic awareness (segmenting, blending, syllabication, onset-rime, initial/final sound) in meaningful ways • Phonics • Sight words from books read • Dictation by the teacher or peer
Cross-language connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word wall with cognates • Teach similarities and differences between L1 and L2 (syntax, spelling, text structure, punctuation) • Preview/review using students' L1 • Bilingual books (point out similarities and differences between the two languages)
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeled writing (activities using the language experience approach) • Guided writing • Interactive writing (dialogue journals, peer editing) • Collaborative writing (story retellings, modified patterned language books, recipe book, script for readers' theater) • Independent writing (literature logs, pen-pals, self-correction) • Author's chair
Connections to home and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling (family and neighborhood stories) • Autobiographies and personal narratives • Books created in the home language (written, audio-taped) • Write letters to family members who live far away

needs. The goal of much instruction and intervention for most ELLs should be to increase their opportunities to develop their language and comprehension skills. To do so, it is important to reiterate that intervention and differentiation are not restricted to only three static tiers (core instruction, classroom intervention and then finally special education or ELL pull-out intervention), but that flexible groupings occur within these tiers and also that these tiers may overlap and serve learners simultaneously. Differentiated instruction to support the learning of ELL students is the intended goal, to be accomplished with the recognition that ELLs may respond in different ways to various types of research-based literacy practices. The use of research-based strategies can be utilized with small groups of mixed L1 levels, but no single process will work for all children.

Differentiated instruction refers to when the teacher personalizes instruction to support the learning of students with diverse interests, skills, and learning styles^{xxi}. Differentiated instruction refers to how a teacher goes about responding to students' diverse learning needs^{xxii}. Teachers must know their students well and understand their learning preferences, academic needs, interests, varying levels of background knowledge, and readiness, and react responsively. The intent of differentiated instruction is to maximize each student's growth by providing support within his or her zone of proximal development^{xxiii}. For example, in focused literature study during core instruction, differentiation for ELLs might feature students reading text in their native language (L1) and then participating in literature study groups, bringing their ideas and point of view from reading in their native language to practicing their English (L2) oral language skills in authentic contexts^{xxiv}. This also sends a message to the ELL student that their native language and their ideas are valued as they acquire oral English proficiency.

Differentiated instruction for ELLs should be responsive to their language and literacy needs, and build on their culture, home language, and interests. Examples of such instruction include: Modeling (read alouds of relevant multicultural literature, chants, songs, poems); explicit instruction (frontloading of vocabulary, sentence structures, sentence transformations); scaffolding (Total Physical Response, visual cues, realia); guided dialogue between the teacher and the students to extend and refine vocabulary and language structures, as well as lots of opportunities to practice meaningful reading and writing activities (language experience, storytelling using wordless picture books).

When teachers consider research-based practices for ELLs they need to look at which reading strategies may serve as "tandem strategies" for teaching both native and non-native speakers. It is these tandem strategies (e.g., writing

When selecting intervention materials, it is crucial to establish the population validity of the research used to support the efficacy of the interventions, or, in other words, to find out for whom the materials were developed and designed^{xxvi}. Most research-based interventions were not developed for culturally and linguistically diverse students. And those that were validated with ELLs may have been tested with only a sub-set of ELLs, such as Spanish-speaking students. The flexibility to adjust standard “out of box” programs often suggested as add-ons to standard core basal instruction makes differentiating a possibility for only some ELLs. That is, when commercial intervention programs feature differentiated teaching techniques for Spanish-speaking children, the teacher’s challenge is to use this intervention with children whose native language is not Spanish, especially when this language is not alphabetic. This requires added understanding of the unique linguistic needs of ELL students, reinforcing the importance of teacher training and specialists focused on instructional planning for ELLs^{xxvii}.

Decision Points when Students Struggle with Reading

What should teachers do when their culturally and linguistically diverse students are struggling? What if some students really do have learning disabilities (LD)? How can teachers tell which students should receive additional interventions or who to refer for an evaluation for possible placement in special education? A useful rule of thumb is to look at how many culturally and linguistically diverse students are struggling. If most students are making little progress, the teacher and school administrators should first focus on improving classroom instruction and making sure it is more culturally and linguistically responsive to students’ language and learning needs.

How should classroom teachers adjust instruction when their culturally and linguistically diverse students are making little progress? Effective teachers need to be keen observers of children and should have a wide repertoire of instructional practices at their fingertips in order to match instruction to a particular child’s needs. They must feel empowered to make changes in their materials and instruction to meet students’ needs. Instructional approaches that demand one particular pathway are inappropriate because they lack the flexibility needed to meet the widely varying needs of diverse student populations. This is problematic because when reading instruction is scripted or a program insists on a pre-determined sequence of what is to be learned and how it is to be learned, the responsibility to adjust falls on the *child* to match the curriculum. The child who cannot meet the program where it begins and stay in step soon falls behind. For example, English language learners typically need more support with oral language and vocabulary

their ELLs are struggling because of a deficit in phonological awareness when they face these obstacles. Similarly, some letters may look the same but have different sounds, such as Spanish and English vowels. Although the process of learning to read in English is facilitated when students are already literate in their first language, unfamiliar phonemes and graphemes make decoding and spelling difficult.

Also, many factors affect ELLs' reading comprehension in English, such as their oral English proficiency, fluency, vocabulary knowledge, the ability to use comprehension strategies, variations in text structure, differences in background knowledge, interest, and motivation. ELLs benefit from additional oral language instruction. Teachers should realize that many words and phrases can be quite confusing for ELLs, such as prepositions (e.g., "on," "above"), pronouns (e.g., "she," "they"), cohesion markers (e.g., "therefore," "however"), words with multiple meanings (e.g., "bat," "light"), figurative language such as similes (e.g., "swims like a fish") or metaphors (e.g. "his stomach was a bottomless pit"); and idioms (e.g., "to know something inside out")^{xxx}.

Optimal literacy instruction takes these important differences into account. It also is culturally and linguistically responsive, as noted earlier, accounting for the influence of culture and experience on cognition and learning, behavior and communication, language development and motivation. Some LD diagnoses of ELLs are made not because the students have internal deficits of some kind, but rather because they have not received an adequate opportunity to learn^{xxxi}. Another way to think about this is that the children do not have disabilities, but have been in "disabling contexts." Many culturally and linguistically diverse students are provided with too few and insufficient opportunities to develop their language and literacy skills, particularly in the domain of reading comprehension. Prior to referring a student for evaluation of a reading disability or for more intensive interventions as part of RTI, teachers should consider the types of language and literacy instruction to which the child has had access. The following questions may guide teachers as they reflect on their language and literacy instructional practices:

1. Have I developed a strong, positive relationship with the child and his/her family?
2. Do I personalize instruction? Do I value the child's linguistic and cultural background? Do I connect classroom learning to the child's daily experiences?
3. Do I give enough attention to affect, interest, and motivation?
4. Do I pay sufficient attention to the development of oral language?

6. Do I adjust instruction to provide students with additional support when they do not seem to understand (e.g., explicit instruction at their level, more opportunities for meaningful practice)?
7. Do students have frequent opportunities to read books that are at levels they can read and understand on their own as well as experiences with a variety of children’s stories that provide “windows, bridges, and mirrors”?
8. Do I focus more on the content of students’ responses than the form when checking for comprehension and provide multiple and varied ways of demonstrating learning?
9. Do I collaborate with and receive support from the Reading Specialist, the English as a Second Language Specialist, and others with relevant expertise?
10. Is the school climate a positive, collaborative, supportive one for teachers as well as students and their families?
Do I receive sufficient support from school administrators?

When the answer to at least most of these questions is “yes” and most culturally and linguistically diverse students in the class are progressing, yet a few continue to struggle, then the teacher, resource teachers, and/or RTI problem-solving team should look more closely at what is going on with those individual students and consider that they may need additional support. Both students’ rate of progress in comparison with that of similar peers and also whether students are reaching learning goals, or benchmarks, should be considered. Interventions should be explicit, responsive to students’ needs, personalized, and relevant.

How Can Literacy Coaches Help Promote ELLs Success?

In supporting differentiation in the classrooms of ELL students literacy coaches can help teachers by explicitly modeling research-based practices such as those listed above^{xxxii}. Coaches may serve a unique role because they can align their instruction and professional development to the needs of the ELL student^{xxxiii}. The coach has the ability to try out research-based practices with many students in a school and discern the best practices to fit the culture of the school. While all literacy practices may not work with all students and especially ELL students, coaches can support the development of comprehensive literacy assessment profiles, which classroom teachers can utilize to plan instruction, which is diagnostic in nature rather than punitive. Diagnostic conversations are a next step for teachers to consider as they work with literacy coaches in discerning which literacy teaching practices are most appropriate for ELL students. The inquiry process of ongoing progress monitoring also supports teacher understanding when students

5. What did the teacher understand about the use of research-based strategies, such as, repeated readings or story frames to support the differentiated instruction for ELL students?
6. How might classroom teachers use leveled text as a measure of oral reading fluency rather than standard CBM practices of words per minute read accurately?

Need for Systemic and Comprehensive RTI Models for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

Schools and school systems that are predicated on continuous improvement and responsiveness to the changing needs of new generations of students work to deepen their understandings of race, class, gender, language, culture, and democracy and develop practices that promote the success of all students. (Klingner, Artiles, et al., 2005)^{xxxiv}

In this quote from the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESt)'s position statement, the authors make an urgent plea for taking a systemic approach to school change to decrease the literacy-learning gap in the United States. Many culturally and linguistically diverse students underachieve in basic reading, writing, and oral communication skills. Therefore, literacy development and the building of skills have needed to be a priority for many years but have continued to remain in the shadow of public education. This issue is important for Native English speakers as well as English Language Learners (August & Siegel, 2006; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). National scores reveal that many students score below basic and far below basic on most standardized tests. On a national level, reading scores at the 4th grade level have only increased 4 points while the scores in the 8th grade reading scores have averaged the same (NEAP, 2007). Overall, our students are not necessarily getting the proper training, education, and access to resources needed for them to become academically successful in school classrooms across the country, particularly in language and literacy.

The solution to this problem is to enact a comprehensive, systemic approach to language and literacy assessment and instruction that provides support for all K–12 students. A systemic approach means to develop and follow a set of structurally inter-related steps to raise the level of understanding by all involved based on shared concepts, principles and rules (Benner 1997). In other words, there must be short and long term plans for increasing the academic learning of students. The most direct way to accomplish this endeavor is by using RTI principles.

We believe that RTI can be an effective and appropriate curricular and instructional approach to improve the

School-level leaders should work closely with district and school administrators to identify important stakeholders and key leaders to facilitate systemic change.

Part of the systemic change process should involve completing local self-assessments that require reflection and dialogue about fundamental assumptions, practices, and relationships, both within school systems and between school systems and the outside world^{xxxv}. Teachers and other school personnel are able to engage in sustained, thoughtful, continually improving and reflective practices if the school organization is able to provide a milieu or environment that supports professional practice. The key to systemic reform is the coherence and alignment of activities across and within levels. “Schools can make a positive and significant difference for students when educators account for the complex interaction of language, culture, and context, and decisions are made within a coherent theoretical framework”^{xxxvi}. When implementing RTI, school leaders must: (a) coordinate curriculum and assessment considerations, (b) address teachers’ professional developmental needs, (c) attend to school climate issues, and (d) orchestrate and respond to multiple (often contradictory) reforms^{xxxvii}.

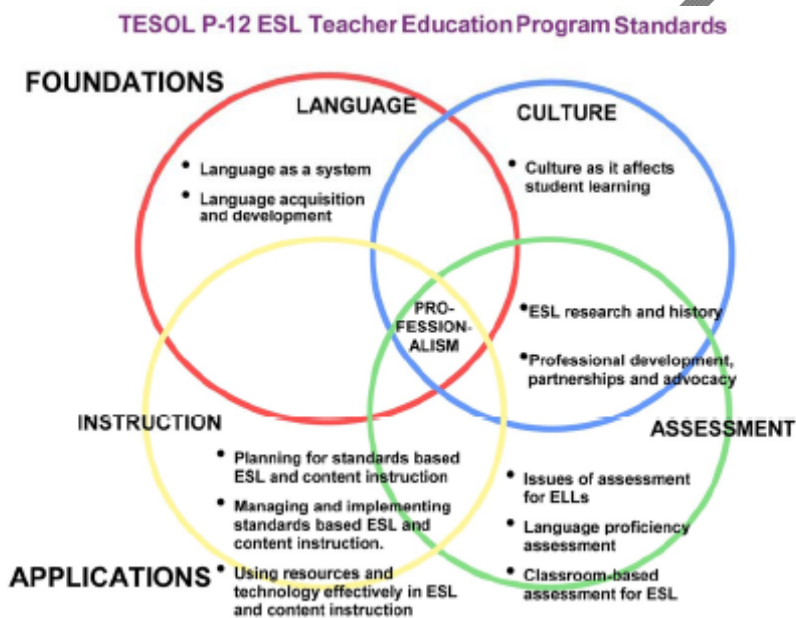
Need for Enhanced Expertise by All Educators Who Work with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

We emphasize the importance of teacher expertise in facilitating RTI and preventing language and literacy problems in diverse student populations. Teachers who work with culturally and linguistically diverse students must understand and be knowledgeable about:

1. Language and literacy development,
2. How to use assessment tools and techniques,
3. How to use effective instructional practices,
4. The second language acquisition process,
5. How learning to read in a second or additional language is similar to and different from learning to read in a first language,
6. The central role of culture in learning and how to be culturally and linguistically responsive to students,
7. How to differentiate instruction to meet diverse students’ needs, and
8. How to use assessment procedures that are sensitive to cultural differences and provide an accurate portrayal of students' strengths as well as their learning needs, including authentic assessments^{xxxviii}.

those pre-service teachers who planned to teach English language learners and/or in diverse settings enrolled in classes focused on diversity. Times have changed, and now all teachers are likely to teach English language learners at some point in their teaching careers^{xi}. More universities are now offering classes in how to teach in diverse settings; yet an isolated class here and there is insufficient. It is unlikely that teacher education programs will focus enough on preparing teachers who have the expertise needed to work in diverse settings until state departments of education require all teachers to demonstrate competencies related to teaching culturally and linguistically students before they are granted licensure. State requirements affect the coursework required by teacher education programs^{xii}. Yet too few states require these competencies.

TESOL and NCATE recommend standards for teacher education programs. Though literacy teachers do not need to develop all of the competencies required to be an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, as described by TESOL, the standards do provide a framework for thinking about the different dimensions of expertise that are important. The figure below illustrates the conceptual framework for these standards. The interlocking rings represent the five domains of the TESOL/NCATE standards and demonstrate the central importance of teacher professionalism and the connections between professionalism and standards related to language, culture, pedagogy, and assessment.



In-service teacher preparation. On-going comprehensive RTI professional development for in-service teachers is another avenue for helping teachers develop the competencies needed to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Yet teachers implementing RTI are not always provided with this professional development. For

The crux of an effective RTI model should be to alter and adjust daily instruction to meet students' needs, prior to special education referral.

Schools need ongoing and embedded professional development for all educators involved in the RTI process. Ongoing professional development might include monthly workshops for new and veteran teachers, the establishment of a community of learners study group, continual conversations about how to deal with teacher turnover, and common planning time for curriculum and instruction. Professional development should be context-specific and provided by professional developers with appropriate preparation and skill to support school and district personnel. Meaningful professional development focuses on teachers' needs to use differentiated instruction based on assessment results to meet students' needs, explicit instruction with lots of practice—with and without teacher support and feedback, and including cumulative practice over time.

Professional development should provide teachers with the support they need to implement instructional practices that have been validated with culturally and linguistically diverse students similar to those they are teaching and also help them develop the attributes and dispositions that characterize culturally responsive teachers. Some of these attributes include^{xliii}:

1. helping students bridge their home and school cultures;
2. demonstrating their care, respect and commitment to each student's learning abilities and desires;
3. helping students make connections among themselves, the subject matter, and learning tasks;
4. explicitly teaching skills and cultural capital;
5. holding high expectations and being able to challenge and simultaneously support students;
6. feeling a strong sense of responsibility for all students, including students referred for or already placed in special education.

Teachers need to learn how to teach in culturally responsive ways that enhance students' opportunities to learn and reduce the likelihood they will underachieve and be referred to special education. Professional development programs should include experiences intended to help teachers understand the central role of culture in learning and think deeply about their views of culture. This development of self-awareness is an important part of the process of becoming culturally responsive. On-going discussions with others about diversity and what it means to be culturally

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