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Implementing RTI With English Learners

By Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Carol Rothenberg

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Implementing RTI With English Learners* by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Carol Rothenberg. *Implementing RTI With English Learners* explains how all teachers can use the response to intervention (RTI) approach to help culturally and linguistically diverse students become proficient in English.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers either to work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to better serve English learners.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to enable all English learners to access the core curriculum and achieve at high levels.

Chapter 1

Success With English Learners: It All Comes Down to Language

1. What does it mean to *know your students*? How is *knowing* your English learner (EL) students different from *knowing* your native English-speaking students?
2. Look at the roster of English learners in your classroom or school. Which of the four categories explained in the chapter do they fall into?
 - Recent arrivals with high literacy in their primary language and little or no English
 - Recent arrivals with low literacy in their primary language and little or no English
 - Students who have lived in the United States a few years (two to five) and are on track to develop native-like proficiency in English
 - Long-term U.S. residents who have little literacy in their primary language, adequate oral communication in English, and poor academic literacy skills in both languages
3. Looking at this roster, discuss with your colleagues the following issues:
 - In which category are the majority of your EL students?

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- What is the English proficiency level of most of your students?
 - How many years have your EL students been in U.S. (or district) schools?
 - What services do you provide for students in the different categories?
 - Which students are experiencing success in their classes? Why?
 - Which category of students are you most concerned about? Why?
4. This chapter describes language proficiency as consisting of three dimensions: linguistic, cognitive, and cultural. What issues have you seen in your EL students that are indicative of a lack of proficiency in each of these dimensions? In what ways do you teach these dimensions of language?
5. Identify one English learner in your class or school who does not seem to making sufficient progress. Keep him or her in mind as you read this book, and reflect on how the solutions presented throughout the book might help this particular student.

Chapter 2

Tier 1: An Opportunity to Learn

1. What are the components of the core program (Tier 1) for the English learners at your school?
2. In what ways does your instruction address the following five standards for effective pedagogy, which were identified by the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence?
 - Teachers and students producing together
 - Developing language and literacy across the curriculum
 - Making lessons meaningful
 - Teaching complex thinking
 - Teaching through conversation
3. The gradual release of responsibility model describes four phases of instruction: (1) the focus lesson, (2) guided instruction, (3) productive group work, and (4) independent practice. How does this model of instruction support learning for English learners? In what ways does your instruction reflect the key descriptors of each phase?

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4. What do teachers need to know about language in the content area? How can teachers support language learning within the content area?
5. What does it mean to teach in a *culturally responsive* way?
6. How can you define *opportunity to learn* for English learners? What are the key elements of *opportunity to learn* that should be in place for English learners in Tier 1 instruction?

Chapter 3

Using Data to Rally Resources

1. What does it mean to say that assessments are the driver of the system?
2. Chapter 2 discusses culturally responsive *instruction*. What is culturally responsive *assessment*, and why is it important?
3. What data are available at your school to analyze student progress? How are these data used?
4. How does your school screen students to determine eligibility for Tier 2? How does language-proficiency level fit into the calculation?
5. Have you used any of the assessments discussed in this chapter? Which ones strike you as useful in your classroom or school?
6. How might your school use the action-plan tools in this chapter to develop an effective progress-monitoring system or modify your existing one to better meet the needs of English learners? (See tables 3.4 and 3.5, the essential task lists for progress monitoring.)
7. What common curriculum-based measures does your school use to determine student progress? What systems are in place for teachers to discuss results and plan interventions?

Chapter 4

Tier 2: Supplemental Interventions That Build Language and Content Knowledge

1. What are some of the interventions that should be considered for English learners in Tier 2?
2. What should the relationship be between the Tier 2 interventions and the ongoing instruction in Tier 1?
3. How can Tier 2 interventions take cultural and linguistic diversity into consideration?
4. How should students be grouped for Tier 2 intervention? Who is responsible for configuring the groups at your school? Who should provide these services? Who provides them at your school?
5. How is assessment in Tier 2 different from screening or from progress monitoring in Tier 1? How are students in Tier 2 assessed at your school?
6. How does Tier 2 intervention take place at your school? What percentage of English learners are receiving Tier 2 intervention? How does this compare to the percentage of native English speakers? What does this information tell you about your school's use of response to intervention in relation to English learners?

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7. The authors describe the critical elements of guided instruction: direct explanation and modeling, questioning, and prompting and cueing. What is the role of each of these elements? How is guided instruction in Tier 2 different from guided instruction in Tier 1?
8. What is the role of language instruction in Tier 2 for English learners? What are the implications of this aspect of Tier 2 for professional development needs?
9. How can you distinguish between core and incidental knowledge? Are your department/grade-level colleagues in agreement regarding what is core knowledge?

Chapter 5

Tier 3: Intensive Interventions and Decisions About Learning Language Versus Learning Disability

Find out about the RTI model in your school or district, and analyze it by comparing and contrasting it with the guidelines and characteristics described in this chapter.

1. How does Tier 3 differ from Tier 2? Does Tier 3 include special education services? Is it supplemental instruction, or does it replace core classroom instruction? Is it individualized or small group? Does it provide, as described in this chapter, “the most”: time, expertise, assessment, and family involvement?
2. What is the process used at your school to identify students for Tier 3? Which staff members participate in decision-making? What kind of information is collected to guide the decision-making? How is the process the same as or different from the guidelines recommended in this chapter?
3. Is Tier 3 curriculum linked to core instruction, or is it a stand-alone program? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
4. Does Tier 3 instruction take into consideration the background and English proficiency of EL students? Is there a focus on oral and written language development?

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5. What are some of the difficulties in distinguishing between a normal stage of language acquisition and an actual learning disability? What are ways to address these difficulties?
6. How can you explain to others the rationale for an inclusive model for special education?
7. Since Tier 3 provides such intensive intervention, what are the advantages of referring a student for special education services? What are the differences between Tier 3 intervention and special education?

Chapter 6

Commitment to RTI: A Framework for Success

1. The authors suggest that staff members examine and analyze their own beliefs about certain issues regarding culturally and linguistically diverse students. Why is this an important step in providing the opportunity to learn for EL students?
2. Teachers' personal beliefs can be a delicate and controversial topic. How might you facilitate the analysis of these beliefs in a way that values all staff members and encourages honest reflection?
3. How might you facilitate an analysis of the ways in which the following instructional practices provide the opportunity to learn?
 - Clearly defined purpose
 - Models
 - Interaction
 - Guided instruction
 - Focus on language
 - Culturally responsive curriculum

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- Meaningful and challenging tasks
 - Metacognition
 - Student choice
4. Reflect on the key ideas presented in this book. Which do you find valuable?
- Conduct a gap analysis between these ideas and your own practice. What are the first steps you can take to implement some of these ideas?
5. Conduct a gap analysis between these ideas and the RTI model and instructional practices at your school. What are the first steps your site can take to implement these ideas?