Deficit, Difference, and Variability: How should we conceptualize literacy learning difficulties in the context of RTI?

Katherine Dougherty Stahl
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Meet a few children in my classroom

- Josh - broad experiences, strong language, phonological awareness and phonics difficulties
- Darryl - few home literacy experiences, resistant to reading
- Erica - capable decoder, receptive and generative language difficulties
- LaKeisha - positive attitude, poor decoding, difficulties putting it all together
Traditional Response To Student Needs

- Josh- SLD placement, removed from classroom Language Arts
- Darryl- No intense literacy service, EBD
- Erica- Speech
- LaKeisha- Title I
Origins of Differences
(Meichenbaum & Biemiller, 1998)

- Differences at the very beginning
- School systemic factors
- Instructional practices
- Stability of differences in achievement
RTI Proposal

• Tier 1: Good literacy instruction in the classroom
• Tier 2: Preliminary Intervention - Reading Recovery model in grade 1, what about later? How do we insure effectiveness?
• Tier 3: Long term, sustained, enhance classroom instruction
Some problems with the existing model

• Deficit and discrepancy: too many children fall between the cracks, intelligence tests rely on vocabulary and background knowledge

• Variability: one size fits all, overemphasis on phonics, isolated skills

• Lack of cohesiveness
The real question should be: Is there a reading problem?

- Can the child read and comprehend age-appropriate texts?
- Does the child struggle with reading and writing in the classroom?
- Do standardized measures reflect a reading problem?
• The primary purpose of reading is comprehension.
  – Understanding the text
  – Gaining new knowledge
  – Applying information
  – Thinking critically about the text
Comprehension requires:

• Language comprehension
• Automatic word recognition
• Strategic knowledge
* Open affective disposition
A Cognitive Model
(McKenna & Stahl, 2003)

- Reading Comprehension
  - Automatic Word Recognition
    - Fluency
  - Language Comprehension
  - Strategic Knowledge
    - Purposes for Reading
      - General
      - Specific
    - Cognitive Strategies
- Phonological Awareness
- Decoding
- Sight Word Knowledge
- Vocabulary
- Background Knowledge
- Structure
Darryl

- Decoding
- Sight word knowledge
- Purposes for reading
- Affect and motivation
Josh

- Phonological awareness
- Decoding
- Sight words
Erica

- Vocabulary
- Background Knowledge
- Purposes of reading
- Reading strategies
Lakeisha

• Decoding
• Sight words
• Fluency
• IRI: Vocabulary, Background knowledge, Strategy application
How can we use an RTI model to avoid old and new pitfalls?

- Find ways to meet the unique needs of ALL struggling readers
- Create ongoing cohesion between classrooms and “other” settings
- Create responsive, expert teachers
- Create independent, expert readers
Teacher Experts

- More content and pedagogical knowledge
- Monitor and adjust teaching in response to student cues
- Automated, subtle, fluid
- Include challenging, authentic tasks
- Create active learning community
Teacher Experts

• Evaluate, analyze and critique their own teaching
• Participate as partners with other teachers in professional reflection and growth
• Flexible, strategic, reflective thinkers
Tier I

• Exemplary classroom instruction
• Use of assessment to inform instruction
• Mix of whole group and small group experiences
• Mix of heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping
Tier 2

- Intense individualized or small group instruction targeted to specific student needs based on a unique diagnostic profile
- Highly trained, responsive teachers participating in ongoing conversations with the classroom teacher and other peers about each student’s progress
Tier 3

- Initiation of school special education referral process
- Possible sustained special education services
- Cohesiveness with the classroom program in providing a comprehensive literacy program for the student