

“I KNOW THERE AIN’T NO PIGS WITH WIGS”

Challenges of Tier 2 Intervention

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Ten reading interventionists created a research-based, problem-solving model for Tier 2. This article describes their model and the six challenges they encountered and addressed.

Kadir, an enthusiastic second-grade African American boy, comes bopping into the reading interventionist’s classroom. His confidence in himself is evident as he explains to a guest that he is “a strategic reader.” As he talks, his body and hands move as if his words are flowing in one hand, through his body, and out the other hand:

I am a stra-te-gic read-er now. I used to not be. But now I know it has to make sense. I used to read books that rhymed, but they didn’t make no sense. I know there ain’t no “pigs with wigs.” That’s what I used to read. I used to not like to read. Now I do because I am stra-te-gic.

His interventionist asks him, “Explain to me what being a strategic reader means.” Kadir responds,

It means I read fun and easy books. It means they make sense to me. Instead of only sounding out a word I don’t know [and here he holds up his hand and “counts off” on his fingers], I ask myself, “What would make sense?” If I still don’t know, I can look at the picture. Then I can even skip the word and read the rest of the sentence. Sometimes the other words help me stop and think. But it HAS to make sense.

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His interventionist asks, "What does 'make sense' mean?" Kadir explains, "It means I have to 'get it.' It means I have to understand."

Kadir (his name, like the names of all students in this article, is a pseudonym) is one of the 200+ students seen in our district every year as part of the federally supported, general education initiative, Response to Intervention (RTI) effort. Under the U.S. Department of Education (2004) Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schools can use 15% of their special education monies to provide students with tiers of highly effective intervention before referring them to a school team for possible identification as a special education student.



RTI in Our District

For the first three years of RTI in our elementary schools, the classroom was considered Tier 1, supplemental support from a reading specialist was Tier 2, and special education was Tier 3. Each year, interventionists and principals discussed which students would receive RTI in their respective schools and whether the support would be pull-out or push-in. They used the students' results on the Measures of Academic Progress and the Dominic Reading and Writing Assessment Portfolio as a starting point for these discussions.

On average, each interventionist worked with 22 children a week, for 30 minutes each day, typically in groups of 3 or 4. Although most of the students were "pulled out" of their classroom for this support, one year, in two schools, interventionists "pushed into" classrooms for part of the day.

Our Team

For three years, we, the authors of this article (1 university faculty member, 1 district administrator, and 10 teachers), learned together about how to best provide effective pull-out or push-in Tier 2 intervention for students in grades 1 to 5. We met weekly during the school year and for three weeks each summer. During this time, we

took nine customized graduate courses from a nearby university and earned 27 graduate hours in language and literacy.

Our coursework was grounded in a sociolinguistic, sociocultural, psycholinguistic perspective. We read Halliday (1969, 1973), Lindfors (1991), Read (1975), and Woodward, Harste, and Burke (1984) on oral and written language development, and Clay (1985), Goodman and Watson (1998), and Goodman, Watson, and Burke (1987) on reading process. We read Boutte (2007) and invited her to talk to us about African American Vernacular English. We also learned about reading instruction, reading assessment, writing, children's literature, working with diverse learners, RTI, and content area reading.

Addressing Challenges

As we learned and grew together, we encountered several major challenges:

1. Naming our beliefs
2. Constructing a theory of student as reader
3. Choosing appropriate texts
4. Providing focused instruction consistent with our "What Matters" list
5. Helping students develop a generative theory of reading and of themselves as readers
6. Ensuring consistent instructional focus across stakeholders

By addressing these challenges, we improved our teaching and, consequently, accelerated our students' progress.

Challenge 1: Naming Our Beliefs

In our initial discussions about what children needed to know to progress as readers, we found it hard to "name" our

Pause and Ponder

- What do struggling readers need to know and be able to do?
- What materials should be used?
- What kind of instruction is effective?
- How can effectiveness be documented?

“We concluded that children could not progress as readers until they understood reading was a meaning-making process.”

beliefs—as one group member stated, “no one had ever asked us before.” To facilitate the process, we brainstormed a list. Informed by our studies, professional experiences, and our time together, we spent the next three years revisiting and reflecting on it.

By the end of the third summer, we were confident that our list accurately represented our beliefs about the instructional needs of students. We named it “A Theory of What Matters for Readers” (WM) list, and we use it to guide both assessment and instruction. Our goal is for all of our students to do the following:

1. Understand that reading is meaningful.
2. Believe in their ability to make sense of texts.
3. Consider reading a pleasurable event.
4. Self-monitor spontaneously and consistently.
5. Have the knowledge, skills, and strategies to problem-solve to ensure meaning.
6. Use this information flexibly.
7. Use this information independently.
8. Use this information with increasingly sophisticated texts.

We formed the WM list based on our professional experiences, as well as what we studied. For example, many of the students seen in intervention thought that reading was about saying the words

“right.” We knew this from the students’ own comments and from analyzing their miscues.

Combining our experiences with the work of reading researchers and theorists such as Pearson and Stephens (1992), Goodman et al. (1987), and Clay (1985), we concluded that children could not progress as readers until they understood that reading was a meaning-making process. Similarly, when we realized how many of the children lacked confidence in themselves as readers, Johnston (2004) reinforced our belief that it was critical for students to believe in their ability to make sense of text, and when some children

showed a lack of interest in reading, we heightened our awareness that, to progress as readers, they needed to choose to read often (Allington, 2006).

We were also aware from our reading and analysis of errors (Clay, 1985) and miscues (Goodman, 1969) that self-monitoring was critical. Finally, prior to and during our time together, we had all read many texts by teachers about skills and strategies (e.g., Ditzel, 2000; Fisher, 1995; Hindley, 1996; Taberski, 2000), and those ideas informed our thinking about the need for students to be flexibly and independently strategic.

In 2009–2010 and again in 2010–2011, we used our WM list to identify the initial instructional needs of children seen in intervention (see Table).

Instructional Needs of Children Seen in Intervention, 2009–2010 and 2010–2011

More than one-third of the children seen in intervention during those

Table Instructional Needs of Children Seen in Intervention 2009–2010 and 2010–2011

| Instructional focus | Percentage (%) of K–5 students seen in intervention with that need | |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| | 2009–2010 (<i>n</i> = 241) | 2010–2011 (<i>n</i> = 206) |
| 1. Understands reading is a meaning-making process | 41 | 28 |
| 2. Believes in ability to make sense of print | 20 | 14 |
| 3. Finds reading pleasurable | 12 | 14 |
| 4. Spontaneously self-monitors | 15 | 20 |
| 5. Has a variety of skills and strategies for problem-solving | 4 | 13 |
| 6. Uses those skills and strategies flexibly | 3 | 7 |
| 7. Uses those skills and strategies independently | 3 | 3 |
| 8. Uses those skills and strategies across increasingly complex text | 3 | 1 |

"More than one-third of the children seen in intervention during those two years did not yet understand that reading was a meaning-making process."

two years did not yet understand that reading was a meaning-making process. Seventeen percent of them did not yet believe in their ability to make sense of text, and 13% did not yet consider reading pleasurable. These percentages stood in stark contrast to our initial tendency to focus on strategies and skills with all of our students—a need we subsequently learned was shared by fewer than 9% of them.

Indeed, we learned early on that although it seems logical to begin instruction by determining what skills and strategies a student possesses (WM no. 5), for many students, instruction needs to begin "earlier" on the WM list. This is because the first three criteria (WM nos. 1–3) reflect the students' theory of reading and of himself or herself as a reader. If a teacher can answer "Yes" to the first three questions, then the child has a "generative" theory, which he or she needs for skill and strategy instruction to be effective.

Because we hold this theory about what students need to know and be able to do to progress as readers, when we first meet with our students, we seek to understand the student's theory about himself or herself as a reader. We then construct and carry out an instructional plan that is grounded in the child's theory.

To determine a student's theory, we use the Hypothesis-Test (HT) process (Stephens et al., 1996; Stephens & Story,

1999), an inquiry-based approach to assessment that involves systematically observing and listening to students, considering multiple interpretations for each observation, identifying patterns across those interpretations, and constructing and testing hypotheses.

Initially, we did not consider the instructional needs on the WM list sequential. Now we do. Starting at the top of the list, we evaluate each of our students, asking if he or she meets the criterion in question. If the answer is "Not yet," we have identified the initial instructional focus for that student.

Using these data, we then provide instruction that focuses on that need until the interventionist can answer "Yes" to that particular question. We have found that if we focus "high" on the list, we indirectly and successfully address many of the "lower" items. At the same time, we have seen that by providing skill instruction, strategy instruction, or both (WM no. 5), we can positively affect the child's theory (WM nos. 1–3). Accordingly, we sometimes provide this instruction not to teach the skill or strategy as an end in itself, but to help students like Annabelle develop a generative theory.

Annabelle was a European American female who, at the beginning of second grade, seemed to understand that reading was a meaning-making process. When she encountered words on the *Dominie* that she did not know, she used pictures 90% of the time to

generate a word that fit the passage. More than half the time, she literally ignored the words. The interventionist also noticed that Annabelle actively engaged in talking about the texts that she read to her. Using this miscue and observational data, the interventionist answered "Yes" to the question about reading as a meaning-making process (WM no. 1).

Annabelle's disposition and engagement changed when she tried to match her story with the text. When she came to unknown words, she would attempt to sound out and then stop. She would stare at the text and then look away or comment that it was "hard." Sometimes she cried. Because she did not seem to believe in her ability to make sense of the text, the answer to the second question (WM no. 2) was "Not yet."

After further analysis of Annabelle's oral reading and anecdotal records of Annabelle's reading behaviors, the interventionist theorized that Annabelle's confidence suffered because, although Annabelle was predicting based on meaning, it was hard for her to cross-check her predictions visually because she did not yet understand how words worked.

For example, once, when Annabelle was looking away from the text, the interventionist asked her what she was thinking. Annabelle replied, "I am looking for a chunk." When the interventionist asked her if she had found any, Annabelle held up both index fingers and began moving her fingers over the word, *cricket*. When she announced, "I found one, *ri*," it was clear that she did not understand what a "chunk" was.

To help Annabelle feel and be more successful as a reader, the interventionist taught her about word families and how to use them to cross-check words she had predicted using meaning. By

the end of the year, Annabelle was making predictions about unfamiliar words and enjoyed finding and using dependable chunks to confirm or deny her predictions about them. She was still reading for meaning—plus, she was newly confident and considered independent reading pleasurable. Annabelle’s Dominie reading level increased from 1.6 to 2.2 over 15 weeks (6 months’ growth in 3.75 months). Over the summer, the interventionist tutored Annabelle once a week, and she

entered third grade reading confidently and on grade level.

To some, the difference between teaching a skill to change a child’s theory versus simply teaching the skill may not seem

significant. However, we have seen that, when the skill becomes a means to altering a student’s theory, considerable growth occurs. In Annabelle’s case, by learning how to segment and blend words, she became a more confident reader.

Challenge 2: Constructing a Theory of Student as Reader

Because effective instruction is grounded in an understanding about how the student thinks about reading and about himself or herself as a reader, our first responsibility is to understand the child’s theory. Just as it was hard for us to name what we believed, it was difficult initially to remain focused on learning what a child believed—it was easier to concentrate on what we could do to “fix” the child. We soon realized that if the fix was immediately

obvious, the student would not have been identified as needing intervention services, as the teachers before us would have helped him or her in the classroom. Luis, a third-grade, bilingual, Hispanic male, was such a student.

At Luis’s first meeting with his interventionist, he told her that reading was “just something you do at school to learn.” Luis was reading approximately one year below grade level. In school, he read only when asked; at home, he did not read at all.



When the interventionist listened to Luis read and talked to him about it, he sometimes said that he knew what was happening in the story, but “couldn’t say” some of the words. He replaced most of those words using visual rather

than meaning cues—for example, substituting *pen* for *pine*. Although he understood the overall meaning of the story, he was letting go of meaning at the sentence level and was not grasping many of the details and nuances of the text.

Using what she had learned from observations, conversations, and a miscue analysis (Goodman & Burke, 1972; modification as “skinny strips” instructional tool by Stephens), the interventionist theorized that Luis was encountering many English words that were not yet in his oral vocabulary. She concluded that although he understood that texts were supposed to make sense and believed in his ability to make sense of them, he did not find reading pleasurable.

Although the interventionist was tempted to focus on increasing Luis’s

sight word vocabulary (WM no. 5), as his previous teachers had, she realized that if he chose to read on his own, this would occur naturally. For this to happen, Luis needed to find reading pleasurable (WM no. 3).

Luis’s interventionist constructed a plan. She decided to start her sessions with Luis by reading a book as he and other students in his small group followed along. Afterward, they all talked about the book. She wanted Luis (and his peers) to see themselves as active participants in the read-aloud, even though they did not do the actual reading, and to find pleasure in the experience.

She selected below-grade-level books that she thought Luis and the rest of the group would enjoy. With her help, the students read these books independently and in pairs. Eventually, Luis started taking audio books (on tape or CD) home every night. The following day, he would come to class looking for more.

Reading became a pleasurable event for Luis—one that he *chose* to engage in. In turn, he began to self-monitor—when a sentence did not make sense, he stopped and reread it. When he sometimes substituted a Spanish word that matched the meaning of an unfamiliar (English) word, the interventionist supported his efforts

“Our first responsibility is to understand the child’s theory.”

and helped him pronounce the English synonym.

To help Luis, his interventionist used data to develop a theory about him as a reader, provided instruction consistent with that theory, and continued, across a 12-month tutoring period, to gather and reflect on data, revising her theory and adjusting her instruction accordingly as he progressed. As a result, Luis's Dominie reading level increased by six months in three months' time. The following year, the interventionist continued working with Luis. He made 1.5 years of growth and is now reading on grade level.

Challenge 3: Choosing Appropriate Texts

Initially, we sought out books that some authors refer to as "just right" for our students' instructional level (for their time with us) or at their independent level (for reading independently) and sometimes went to great lengths to help students understand when a book was just right for them. Recently, we have shifted our thoughts about this. We now believe that the criterion for books in both settings is that the students consider the books fun and easy. We made this decision because we realized that students (like Hope) are more likely to read when it does not feel like "work."

Hope was a fourth-grade European American girl who began the year reading more than two years below grade level. Hope's teacher expected

her to be reading grade-level chapter books and completing story maps. However, when asked by the interventionist to choose a book that seemed fun and easy, Hope chose *Are You My Mother?* (Eastman, 1960), which is written at about a 1.5 grade level.

When Hope read the book aloud, she smiled often and laughed when the baby bird thought the steam shovel was a Snort. She made three high-quality miscues and beamed widely when she finished. The interventionist then asked her to pick other fun and easy books to take home to read. Hope picked *Green Eggs and Ham* (Seuss, 1960), grade level 2.2, and *The Wolf's Chicken Stew* (Kasza, 1987), grade level 3.2, which she also greatly enjoyed. The pleasure Hope derived from reading these fun and easy books led her to read on her own time, which was something she had not done in the past.

Collectively, we had researched high-interest fiction as well as nonfiction texts matched to grade-level standards, all of which were written below grade level and which we thought Hope and other students would consider fun and easy. Over time, using these books at home and with her interventionist increased Hope's confidence, content knowledge,

sight word vocabulary, and the sense of story structure necessary for her to manage increasingly complicated texts. In the two years she spent with her interventionist, Hope achieved three years of growth.

Challenge 4: Providing Focused Instruction Consistent With Our "What Matters" List

The students we work with have a variety of needs. For many of them, we could respond "Not yet" to every question on the WM list. It can be tempting, therefore, when working with

students in small groups or one-on-one settings, to present them with a wide range of instruction and information. We have found, however, that multiple messages simply

confuse the learner and that it is best to target instruction based on specifically assessed needs. This is the approach we took with Bonnie, a fifth-grade European American girl, who was considered to have high-functioning autism.

Bonnie read quickly and accurately, but when questioned about her reading, she often did not want to talk about it or seemed unable to do so. Bonnie's interventionist concluded that Bonnie was not yet paying attention to meaning when she read (WM no. 1). The interventionist also noted that Bonnie did not seem to believe in her ability to make sense of text (WM no. 2), find reading pleasurable (WM no. 3), spontaneously self-monitor (WM no. 4), or possess the skills and strategies needed to problem



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solve—flexibly, independently, or with increasingly sophisticated texts (WM nos. 5–8).

Bonnie’s interventionist started with no. 1 on the WM list and created a context for Bonnie in which meaning was in the foreground. Working with her one on one and in small groups, she provided Bonnie with a variety of texts that Bonnie found interesting, fun, and easy. Instead of asking Bonnie “standard” comprehensive questions about the text, she simply talked to her about what she was reading.

Soon, Bonnie began stopping when she came to words she did not know; she started looking for meaning cues in pictures, making tentative hypotheses about the meaning of words, and reading further to confirm her hypotheses. She also began making connections between the events in her life and the stories she read. Bonnie had shifted her theory—she now

considered reading a meaning-making process.

Because Bonnie had never taken a *Dominie* (she was not responsive to conversation or questions), we could not use this tool to assess her growth. However, when she went to middle school the following year, she was mainstreamed into a regular classroom because she had learned how to interact with others—first about books and then about other things that interested her. Bonnie’s teacher attributes this growth to the fact that Bonnie realized that meaning and authentic conversation were paramount. As her teacher noted, “This changed this child’s life. Remember, she didn’t hold conversations at all and by the end of fifth grade, she was a little chatterbox.”

Not only did Bonnie’s life shift, her school made Annual Yearly Progress

for special education students, which Bonnie’s teacher attributes to her sequential focus on the WM list.

Challenge 5: Helping Students Develop a Generative Theory of Reading and of Themselves as Readers

Changing the trajectory of a student as a reader would be a much simpler process if we, as interventionists and teachers, could simply tell students what to do and when to do it, and then spend time reinforcing that behavior. We know, of course, that such an approach has little chance of success.

To help a child succeed as a reader, we must create a context in which the student can construct a generative theory. Once a student has this generative theory in place, she or he almost always spontaneously self-monitors (a strategy we formerly believed we needed to teach) and readily incorporates the skills and strategies she or he already possesses or those we introduce as problem-solving tools.

Consider Kristen, a fourth-grade, African American female. Kristen was new to the school and was reading about a year and a half below grade level. After listening to her read, the interventionist realized that Kristen did not expect the text to make sense. Without any hesitation or alarm, Kristen would read passage after passage and insert nonsense words whenever she did not know a word. For her, reading was just calling out sounds. Whether these sounds made any sense at all did not matter to her.

The interventionist wanted to help Kristen understand that reading could be meaningful and that all the words that she was calling out should work together to create a story that made sense. To help her learn this, and because Kristen loved

princesses, the interventionist decided to read aloud to Kristen and her classmates the first book in the Rainbow Magic fairy series, *Crystal: The Snow Fairy* (Meadows, 2007).

During the read-aloud, the interventionist stopped, and she and all the children talked about the mean goblins and brainstormed ways the characters in the story could get the feathers back. After a couple of days, Kristen and the other children were so eager to find out what happened that they insisted on flipping ahead to see the pictures in the book. They used the pictures to generate predictions and then excitedly began reading to find out how the girls in the story got the feathers back from the goblins.

The text level of this series was manageable for Kristen, so she did not have to worry about "getting stuck" on words. She was free to read

for the sole purpose of discovering a conclusion to a story on which she had become hooked. Kristen *wanted* it to make sense, and for the first time, she started to understand that reading was meaningful.

As she read, Kristen stopped on her own when a word did not make sense and was often able to figure it out. When she came to a word that was not in her oral vocabulary or was not phonetically regular, the interventionist quickly supplied it for her so it did not interrupt her reading. This allowed Kristen to maintain meaning in the story.

As they read the subsequent books in the series, Kristen, the other children, and the interventionist continued to discuss the stories. The girls' conversations—and their many questions about the action in the story—kept their interest and curiosity alive. The books were fun and easy to read, but most important, they provided an

extended opportunity for Kristen to experience meaningful reading.

After several months, meaning became a consistent focus for Kristen. She was more confident about her ability to make sense of text, found reading pleasurable, and spontaneously self-corrected. With these things in place, the interventionist was able to help her start expanding her problem-solving skills and strategies.

Kristen's progress was typical of upper-elementary students seen in intervention. It took six months for her to change her theory of reading. In her second year of intervention, Kristen progressed rapidly, and she ended that year reading on grade level.

Challenge 6: Ensuring Consistent Instructional Focus Across Stakeholders

Often, there are differences between the instruction provided by Tier 1 and Tier 2 instructors and speech therapists. In our three years together, we worked hard to collaborate to help students excel. When we succeeded, children benefitted. Tyrek, a third-grade, African American male, was one of these children.

Tyrek was significantly behind his peers in all academic areas and was reading at approximately one and a half years below grade level. When reading books at his independent level, Tyrek understood that reading was meaningful and believed in his ability to make sense of text. However, the books in his fast-paced third-grade curriculum were written well above his independent reading level, and Tyrek struggled with them daily.

Tyrek had been evaluated for special education but did not qualify for self-contained because his IQ was above 70. He also did not qualify for support as a child labeled as learning-disabled because his IQ was in the low 70s—thus



there was no “gap” between expected and actual achievement. In our district, these children are referred to as Does Not Qualify children.

Tyrek did, however, receive intervention support as well as speech and language services. At the beginning of third grade, Tyrek’s classroom teacher, speech therapist, and interventionist met to discuss how they could help him succeed and grow as a reader. They understood that school was difficult for Tyrek and wanted to ease the transitioning between the three of them by making their instruction as seamless as possible. To accomplish this, they decided that they would “frontload content area material,” which would enable Tyrek to participate fully in class discussions. They scheduled meetings to talk about Tyrek’s progress and discuss content area vocabulary and upcoming content-related projects.

They then put their plan into action. The speech therapist incorporated content area vocabulary into her lessons, which benefited Tyrek, as well as her other third-grade students. The interventionist used this information when choosing books to use with Tyrek and his peers and when helping Tyrek select books for independent reading time. The classroom teacher provided Tyrek—and the other “below



grade-level” children in her classroom—with on-reading-level books that addressed standards-driven content, so they could all learn it. She adjusted the delivery and presentation of class materials and made study guides easier to understand. In addition, she provided pictorial representations of key vocabulary and word banks, reduced the number of multiple-choice answers, and simplified test questions.

These efforts succeeded on many levels. Tyrek made significant progress on informal and standardized measures. Most importantly, there was a noticeable shift in his self-esteem, his attitude about reading, and his belief about himself as a contributing member of a classroom of learners.

Assessing Impact

Reading interventionists administer the Dominie when they first begin working with students. Using the HT framework,

they identify instructional need from the children’s responses on the Dominie and other observations. They then provide customized instruction based on these needs.

The interventionists listen to and observe children to understand when a need has been addressed. They also pay attention to children’s knowledge of genre, relative to the Dominie. For example, before an interventionist gives a child a Dominie passage based on elves and a shoemaker, she or he would first make sure that the child understands the structure of a fable.

When the interventionist determines that students have the theory, skills, strategies, and genre knowledge to be successful on the next Dominie, they administer that assessment. They do so not to “get” a Dominie level, but to document achievement. Based on less formal assessment measures such as anecdotal records, if the interventionist

“(Reading interventionists) provide customized instruction based on (identified) needs.”

TAKE ACTION!

Publishers have been quick to provide scripted materials to be used in reading intervention. Guidelines for RTI suggest, however, that struggling readers need support from reading experts—individuals who can customize instruction based on the needs of students. To counter the push for scripted programs (sometimes delivered by individuals with no expertise in reading) and ensure that struggling readers get the support they need, we encourage you to get your voices heard by the RTI stakeholders in your district. Start by forming a professional study group, ask yourselves these kinds of questions, and then present your research-based approach for high-quality RTI in your school/district. Seek to name for yourselves:

1. What readers need to know and understand to be successful
2. The source of those beliefs. Have you always believed what you do? Do you believe what someone else has told you to be true? What research (including your own) supports those beliefs?
3. What your readers believe. Gather data about the reading beliefs of your students. Who among them understands that reading is a meaning-making process? (You can find this out by listening to them read and seeing how often they either skip words or substitute words that do not make sense). Who among them finds reading pleasurable?
4. The instructional moves necessary to help each student develop a generative theory about the reading process and about themselves as readers
5. Assessment tools that will help identify need and document progress
6. The structure that could be put in place to ensure that students have the support they need

does not feel that the child will be successful on the next Dominie, she or he reassesses the instructional plan and delays the Dominie until she or he is sure that the child will succeed.

Each year, we gather data to assess student growth and determine the impact of our approach to assessment and instruction. We accomplish this by comparing text-reading levels on the Dominie and by using a chart that equates Dominie levels with grade-level equivalencies (Stephens et al., 2007).

Reading interventionists saw 241 children in 2009–2010 and 206 in 2010–2011. Children were seen most often in pull-out, small groups for an average of 30 minutes a day, 5 days a week, over a 5-month period. We calculated months of growth by months of service. For all three years, students made approximately two months of growth for every one month of supplemental support. This pattern was consistent across all elementary schools for which one of us was a reading interventionist.

Contextualizing Our Success

Although we feel successful—because we have strong data and many success stories—we are also keenly aware that (a) we do not have a comparison group of students who did not receive supplemental support, and (b) our district is not representative of all districts. We believe, however, that what we did made a difference—and we believe this, in part, because of students like Rashad.

Rashad began second grade reading considerably below grade level and ended the year reading on grade level. In an end-of-year interview, he talked about the difference our model made for him.

Teacher: Do you feel the same or different about reading?

Rashad: Different.

Teacher: In what way?

Rashad: In a good way.

Teacher: Tell me more.

Rashad: Like a family way. A really happy way. I like reading a lot! I like to read anything!

For Rashad and the others we worked with, our data-driven, inquiry-based approach to intervention changed their lives. Our hope now is that by sharing what we learned, we become part of a larger community—all working together to make a difference for readers—and that, through our collective actions, all readers can be successful and feel “really happy” about reading and about themselves as readers.

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- *RTI in Literacy—Responsive and Comprehensive* edited by Peter H. Johnston
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IRA Journal Articles

- “Response to Intervention and the Changing Roles of Schoolwide Personnel” by Rita Bean and Jennifer Lillenstein, *The Reading Teacher*, April 2012
- “Response to Intervention (RTI): What Teachers of Reading Need to Know” by Eric M. Mesmer and Heidi Anne E. Mesmer, *The Reading Teacher*, December 2008

[Correction added after online publication July 12, 2012: the author name “Kristi Plyler” was misspelled “Kristi Plylar” in the author blurb, and “Ashley Matheny” was misspelled “Ashtly Matheny” in the byline and author blurb.]

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