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Alternative Education for Children and Youth



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The Twilight Academy: An Alternative Education Program That Works

Frank D'Angelo and Robert Zemanick

Strategies for Success: Evidence-Based Instructional Practices for Students With Emotional and Behavioral Disorders

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Response to Intervention, Collaboration, and Co-Teaching: A Logical Combination for Successful Systemic Change

Wendy W. Murawski and Claire E. Hughes

ABSTRACT: Response to intervention (RTI) is a new method of identifying students with learning disabilities. RTI's increasing implementation affects all teachers and students, in both general and special education. The authors provide educators with a practical understanding of what RTI may look like in the classroom and how co-teaching as an instructional service delivery model can make RTI more efficient, effective, and realistic. After introducing the RTI model and its role in supporting a paradigm shift for the identification of students with learning disabilities and the support of at-risk learners, the authors then highlight the important components of collaboration and review the key tenets of effective co-teaching. They provide specific examples to demonstrate how co-teaching and collaboration are critical to the systemic change required for schools interested in supporting an RTI model.

KEYWORDS: *collaboration, co-teaching, response to intervention, school reform*

THE MAXELL SCHOOL DISTRICT has just concluded its beginning-of-the-year convocation for all new and returning teachers. One of the major items of discussion was the implementation of response to intervention (RTI) that will be a district focus this upcoming year. As teachers leave the auditorium, a loud grumbling commences. Mrs. Rance, a fifth-grade general education teacher is overheard stating the following:

I'm used to having to teach everything to all kids, but now I have to make sure I'm using "scientifically based reading research" at the same time? I'm not a researcher; I just do the

All of this sounds just like what I used to do when I had my own class. I wonder if this means we're going to be losing our jobs and wind up just acting like aides in the general ed. classrooms.

RTI is a new method of identifying students with learning disabilities that many schools are adopting. It involves having multiple levels, circles, or tiers of intervention—ranging from whole-group instruction to small-group intensive intervention. Its increasing implementation affects all teachers and students—those in general and special education. The purpose of this article is to provide educators with a practical understanding of what RTI may look like in the classroom and how co-teaching as an instructional service delivery model can make RTI more efficient, effective, and realistic. To do this, we first introduce the RTI model and its role in supporting a paradigm shift for the identification of students with learning disabilities and the support of at-risk learners. We then highlight the important components of collaboration and review the key tenets of effective co-teaching. Once these concepts have been reviewed, we provide specific examples to demonstrate how co-teaching and collaboration are critical to the systemic change required for schools interested in supporting an RTI model.

Introduction to RTI

Ultimately, RTI is a method through which educators

disabilities through the use of a discrepancy model. The RTI emphasis on proactive instruction, ongoing assessment, data-based decision making, and intensive instruction greatly affects the general education teacher and classroom. Each of these components will be described.

From a discrepancy approach to an ecological approach. The shift in the identification of learning disabilities from a discrepancy-based model to an RTI model is a major change for most schools. The identification process shifts the focus from an assumption that something is wrong with an individual child to an examination of the fit between the child and environment. The new approach assumes that something is wrong with the instruction for that particular child, which needs to be considered and addressed (Batsche, 2006; Witt, 2006). Legally, the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) no longer states that the use of the discrepancy formula is the sole method used to identify students with disabilities; the use of data demonstrating a child's response (or lack thereof) to research-based interventions is now equally permissible (Stecker, 2007).

From a reactive approach to a proactive approach. The other key feature of the RTI paradigm shift is the moving away from providing specialized instruction only after a child has failed enough to qualify for services, which is reactive in nature, to using a proactive approach, which can help to prevent a problem before it happens (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007). Thus, the RTI approach emphasizes the use of intensive instruction that is designed to fill in gaps before small gaps in students' achievement result in large ones. This proactive approach requires classroom teachers to instruct all children, rather than waiting for a team to provide a label validating that a child needs special services.

Development of RTI

RTI is not a new concept (Kame'enui, 2007). The notion of providing specialized instruction to students before identification has long been a component of special education identification through the teacher support team model (also known as *student support team*, *mainstream assistance team*, and *student study team*). However, numerous challenges have been found with this earlier model, including the time it takes for students to exhibit a "large enough" discrepancy to warrant special education (Council for Exceptional Children, 2008), the lack of quantifiable differences between low achievers and students with learning disabilities (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shinn, & McGue, 1982), and the lack of stability of scores over time (Kavale, 2002). In the sites that have developed RTI as a functioning system, the use of high-quality research-based instruction, communication, and gathering of data are key aspects of their effective RTI models (Bradley et al., 2007).

Multiple models of RTI have been introduced in the literature, including the three-tier model (L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007), the four-tier model (Vaughn, 2003), the increasing circles of support (Hauerwas & Woolman, 2005), and the individual problem-solving model (Tilley, 2003). The most common across states (Bender & Shores, 2007) and the one that the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) support is the three-tier model. For this reason, this model is the focus for this article.

Description of the Three-Tier RTI Model

In Tier I of the three-tier model, all students are provided with a scientifically based program in the general education classroom and are assessed at least three times a year on an established benchmark (L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). In Tier I, the underlying assumption is that all students in the general education classroom are getting quality instruction (i.e., research based) that will be effective for approximately 80% of the students. Thus, there is a need for extensive professional development and strong understanding of scientifically based curricula and instruction by teachers before teams can make assumptions about a student's need for increased support (i.e., Tier II). This also means that the discrepancy between research and practice that often exists will need to decrease drastically as teachers become more aware of and able to use practices that are supported by research; teachers are encouraged to become action researchers in their own settings (Miskovik & Hoop, 2006). The typical learner may remain in the general classroom, thereby staying in Tier I, for his or her entire educational career; alternatively, students who are identified as needing additional support can move to Tier II at any time, as determined by the classroom teacher.

Once students fall below a predetermined point on a benchmark, they are referred to Tier II in which specific intensive instruction is provided beyond the general curriculum (L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). This means that identified students would be provided concentrated instruction that is more intensive and individually focused than that of the general reading curriculum. The number of students in Tier II, range from an estimated 25% of the student population (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2006) to 15% (NASDSE, 2007) to 7% (Mathes, 2006). Such intensive instruction is considered short-term and is provided through the collaboration between the general education teacher and a specialist. In most models, the specialist is often a general education reading specialist, coach, or instructor who is able to work with the child intensely for a short period of time (e.g., Title I teacher, special educator, trained paraprofessional; Vaughn & Roberts). Thus, the lines between special and general education are blurred. Short-term interventions have been defined by periods as short as 8

weeks (Bradley et al., 2007) or as long as 30 weeks (Mathes). Continued research is necessary to determine whether there is one optimum amount of time for intervention; at present, experts state that the amount of time varies on the basis of student need. Time spent in a small group of one to five students may also vary; students may receive 20–30 min of daily specific instruction or 45 min of instruction three times per week (Vaughn & Roberts). Ongoing assessment and evaluation, often using curriculum-based measurement (Stecker), is conducted during this time to determine effectiveness. *Effectiveness* is a relatively subjective term; goals can vary by student, but goal attainment would indicate effectiveness of the Tier II intervention for that particular student.

If a child fails to respond to this intensive instruction, it is recommended that educators (a) continue the instruction for a longer period in Tier II or (b) move the child to Tier III if limited improvement is noted. It is estimated that 5% of the school population will fall into this third, long-term intensive tier in which students may remain for months or even years. The length of the Tier III intervention is determined by the significance of the child's needs and his response to the Tier III intervention—in essence, is he or she improving? It is this third tier that becomes what is now called *special education* (L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). However, many theorists (e.g., Stecker, 2007; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007) theorize that with the RTI model, students may float in and out of the various tiers, with leaps of growth that lead to a reduction of intensity and needs as educational support increases. Thus, special education is not a separate aspect of a child's educational experience, but the long-term support in a continuum of care provided to students who are struggling and need more intensive instruction. Being able to float in and out of Tier III is an enormous change from what currently exists. It is important to clarify the difference between the current model of special education—in which 9–18% of the population (Reschly, 2006) qualify for services and students are seen as part of a separate system rather than as part of the general education classroom—and Tier III of the RTI model. RTI proponents theorize that the tier model would reduce the number of individuals labeled for special education and demonstrate more clearly that all students are first a part of the general education classroom; however, there are students who have differing levels of need who require more specialized and intensive instruction for longer periods of time (L. Fuchs & Fuchs; Vaughn & Roberts). That said, however, students who are able to achieve on the basis of the intensive instruction given in Tier III are able to move back to a Tier II or Tier I model when ready.

Role of Collaboration and Co-Teaching

For RTI to be successful, a wide array of stakeholders need to collaborate. These include administrators, parents, students, staff, the community, and all types of educators.

The focus of this article is on the collaboration between school personnel, with an emphasis on the role of teachers. Collaboration is the interaction between professionals who offer different areas of expertise yet share responsibilities and goals (Friend & Cook, 2007; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). It involves the need for parity and for all parties to participate actively (Snell & Janney, 2000; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006). Schools already require collaboration in a multitude of areas: grade-level meetings, departmental meetings, field trip organization, school site councils, consultation between colleagues or specialists, and curriculum planning—the list goes on. Educators are keenly aware of the need to work with others to obtain the best results.

Although *collaboration* is an umbrella term that includes a wide array of interactions between individuals, co-teaching is a specific instructional service-delivery model by which “two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in the same physical space” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 1). Co-teaching involves the co-planning, co-instruction, and co-assessing of a group of students with and without disabilities in the same classroom (Murawski, 2003). Simply putting two educators in the same room is neither sufficient nor necessarily collaborative. When meeting the needs for RTI implementation, teachers need to actively collaborate with their colleagues to make sure that (a) lessons are research based, (b) lessons address the wide variety of needs in the general education classroom, (c) lessons ensure access to the general education curriculum for diverse learners, (d) ongoing data collection and progress monitoring is occurring, and (e) students in Tiers II and III are able to receive specialized and more individualized instruction in small groups. Co-teaching becomes a powerful means of meeting the goals of RTI.

One of the most common concerns about co-teaching is the funding issue. How can we fund two teachers in every room? First, not every class needs to be co-taught. Second, the paradigm shift necessary for successful co-teaching in an RTI model requires administrators to look at scheduling differently. Instead of having a general education teacher with 26 students without identified special needs and a special education teacher with 10 students with disabilities (with both educators teaching in separate classrooms), an administrator with foresight would help create a schedule in which the two teachers co-teach a class of 32 students (7 with disabilities, 25 without disabilities). This would necessitate moving one student without special needs and three students with disabilities into different classes. This enables co-teachers to have a reasonable percentage of individuals with special needs (Murawski, 2008), while spreading out the other students who may not need as much in-class support.

When conducted properly, co-teaching results in many benefits for students and teachers. Teachers are able to engage in more active instruction, learn different strategies from one another, and are more easily able to differentiate in the classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2007; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Students in co-taught classes have been found to improve in academics, behavior, social skills, and self-esteem as compared with those taught solely in the special education classroom (Hunt, Alwell, Farron-Davis, & Goetz, 1996; Murawski, 2006; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Weichel, 2001). Although the research on co-teaching is limited (Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007), what is available is generally positive and continuing to grow. However, it is important to note that co-teaching is not an instructional strategy or technique per se; rather, it is a method by which educators can work collaboratively to deliver quality instruction. RTI requires special and general educators to work together to build the development of skills in all students in the tiered system.

Collaboration appears to be a ubiquitous term in education today (Friend, 2000), but its role cannot be minimized. If a primary goal of RTI is to address the needs of all learners in the general education classroom by using research-based best practices in a proactive approach, it would be folly to imagine that individual teachers can accomplish this alone. Although general educators may be well versed in the content and curriculum of their subject or grade level, the literature on the research to practice gap is so significant as to emphasize that teachers simply are not aware of, or are not implementing, research-based practices in their classrooms on a regular basis (e.g., Cooper, 2007; Penick & Harris, 2005). This should imply neither that there is not sufficient research to inform teaching practices nor that teachers are unable to implement such practices. RTI emphasizes the need to find a way to bridge that gap and accepts no excuse for educators who argue that they do not have the time, training, or inclination to use research to inform their teaching practices. However, Lane, Bocian, MacMillan, and Gresham (2004) cautioned that new practices are not likely to be implemented by educators with any fidelity if there are issues related to a lack of sufficient training, or if the suggested intervention is considered by classroom teachers to take an unreasonable amount of time or resources (personal and material). An essential component of RTI is that all students receive quality, appropriate, research-based instruction that can be observed and documented (L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Who determines what constitutes quality instruction? Many, especially novice, teachers rely on their structured programs and pacing plans to provide them with what to teach, when to teach, and how to teach. However, this does not always address the individualized needs in the classroom, nor does it educate classroom teachers about the rationale supporting

why they are doing what they are doing. Until teachers are taught the underlying principles (i.e., research) of what they are doing, they will not be able to build on that instruction appropriately for future learners. Teaching would become neither an art nor a science but rather it would simply be a group of individuals capable of following along in a textbook in front of a group of students.

However, as classroom teachers become aware of strategies that they perceive helping a variety of diverse learners, they become more willing to try new approaches. Strategies used in special education and in classrooms for English language learners (ELLs) are techniques that are based on how students learn. According to Stecker (2007), "the hallmark of special education has been the individualization of instruction" (p. 51). Most of these strategies are based on various developmental, learning style, processing, modality, or metacognitive researches. General educators need to be made aware of some of the special education and related strategies available to implement them in their classes to assist all students during Tier I. Although Zigmond (2006) cautioned that special education is supposed to be specialized, there are research-based best practices that can be implemented in the general education classroom to the benefit of a variety of learners. However, many researchers have identified that these best practices vary by school, class, teacher, and student (Conner, Morrison, & Katch, 2004; Connor, Morrison, & Slominski, 2006; Foorman, 2007). Foorman brilliantly summed it up by stating the following:

The question to ask [about beginning reading instruction] then, is not 'What are best practices?' but rather 'What instructional activities are appropriate for this student at this phase of his or her reading development to maximize achievement outcomes?' In academically diverse classrooms, teachers will need to become expert in assessing students' entering literacy levels, differentiating instruction in small groups on the basis of that assessment, and reshuffling group membership on the basis of continual monitoring of student progress. Only in this way will teachers be able to prevent instructional causalities in the general education classroom. (pp. 26-27)

Historically, special educators have been the experts on individualization, assessment, differentiation, and progress monitoring. Thus, the clearest way to have these strategies make their way into the general education classroom requires the ongoing collaboration between general classroom teachers and special service providers.

RTI and Co-Teaching in Action: What Does it Look Like?

Tier I. As previously described, Tier I addresses all students by providing them with instruction that has been tested and demonstrated to be effective with a variety of learners, especially in the area of reading instruction. D. Fuchs et al. (2007) cautioned, "Practitioners using RTI need to be concerned about the validity of their *instruction*" (p. 58).

One of the major issues with this relates to training. Many general education teachers have not received staff development in how to instruct students with a variety of learning styles and needs, nor are they typically aware of how to choose “scientifically validated curricula and academic programs that address at-risk students’ needs” (D. Fuchs et al., p. 58) much less comprehend issues related to treatment fidelity. However, special educators, Title I teachers, teachers of ELLs, and other specialized instructors have more specific training on working with diverse learners and selecting valid instructional programs with integrity. Herein lies the need for collaboration.

When schools begin to establish, embrace, enhance, and emphasize collaborative practices between educators, research-based strategies can more easily make their way into the general education classroom for Tier I instruction. This collaboration may take a variety of forms (for specific examples, see Appendix A). Special education teachers can collaborate with their colleagues by assisting general educators in their planning for instruction (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). Planning for a class collaboratively allows special educators to have input in the lesson proactively, even if they might not be there physically (Murawski, 2005). This enables special educators to coach their general education counterparts on instructional strategies that can be used with a variety of students to enable them to access the general education curriculum more effectively. Not all struggling students (with or without disabilities) need to be removed for remediation or moved to Tier II. Often, if the content is merely presented in a different way that taps into their learning styles or interests, students are able to understand what was previously a mystery to them (Tomlinson, 2005). There is a clear need for proactive collaboration between teachers who have received different instructional training and who have different frames of reference but who are able now to speak the same language regarding how to meet students’ needs (Friend & Cook, 2007; Weiner & Murawski, 2005). The more teachers can collaborate and share the strategies on which they have been trained in their respective fields, the more likely that students in the general education classroom (i.e., Tier I) will truly benefit from a strong research-based instruction. Because Tier I is a general classroom, whole-class approach, it is suggested that all faculty and staff at a school receive professional development training together, rather than identifying a few specific teachers who may be receiving kids with disabilities in their class this year. That type of attitude makes teachers think this is an *us or them* situation, rather than recognizing collaboration and RTI as mainstays of the educational philosophy. (For an example of Tier I and co-teaching, see Appendix B.)

Tier II. As clarified earlier, Tier II is designed to provide additional instruction for a select group of individuals for

whom the large group instruction, albeit research based, has not been consistently effective. For these students, a more intensive focus is required (Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). However, one of the benefits of RTI is the potential for reduced stigma compared with typical special education identification and pullout (Dupuis et al., 2006). We argue that if Tier II results in a small group of students removed from the general education classroom routinely for supplementary instruction—irrespective of label—that stigma will remain, regardless of the lack of an official Individualized Education Program or other documented label. Even if students receive the supplementary instruction from individuals other than special education teachers (e.g., school psychologists, trained tutors and paraprofessionals, reading coach; Vaughn & Roberts), students would easily recognize the select group of peers who consistently leave the class for help.

Co-teaching is the ideal answer to this conundrum. As educators with differing areas of expertise come together to jointly determine how, by whom, and what will be taught, lessons can be proactively created that will address the various needs of the classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Hughes & Murawski, 2004). Although Tier I may not require the daily input of a special educator, Tier II indicates that students need something other than what has been provided on a daily basis to the whole class. Classes with many students in Tier II may benefit from being co-taught. In terms of professional development then, schools should provide training in co-teaching techniques so that teachers are prepared to share the teaching responsibilities and use appropriate Tier II strategies. Often teachers complain that they have been thrown into “an arranged marriage” in which they are expected to jointly teach a group of students, with no previous training (Murawski, 2009). Schools’ being proactive ensures that teachers are able to glean the benefits of co-teaching stated in the literature.

A major stated benefit of co-teaching is the ability to group students and have a smaller student-teacher ratio (Friend & Cook, 2007; Murawski & Dieker, 2008; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). The same benefit has been mentioned for Tier II as a requirement for more intensive instructional intervention; student groups for Tier II instruction are suggested to be between three and six learners in size (L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; Stecker, 2007; Vaughn & Roberts, 2007). Cook and Friend (1995) identified five approaches to co-teaching, which have continued to be the primary methods for co-instruction recommended in the literature. Of these five approaches (i.e., one teach, one support; parallel teaching; station teaching; alternative teaching; team teaching; see Appendix A), three are regrouping approaches. This means that students are grouped together, rather than remaining in the traditional large-group format for whole-group instruction.

Regrouping students provides the opportunity to engage in more intensive, specialized instruction in a more natural way than pulling students out of the classroom. Previously, one of the major drawbacks to the pullout of students with special needs was that they would miss the instruction that occurred while they were gone (Rea et al., 2002). Another drawback was that there was often little communication between the general classroom teacher and the special service provider who pulled the students out of the classroom for remedial instruction, resulting in a lack of coherence and alignment of efforts. If schools remove students from the classroom for Tiers II and III, the same issues may arise. However, if two or more professional educators are in the room teaching simultaneously, they can use these regrouping approaches to their benefit and to the benefit of the students. In addition, students can rotate in and out of intensive instruction designed for short-term intervention, with less classroom disruption if the specialist teacher is already a daily part of the classroom environment. (See Appendix C for a case example of this approach in action.)

Another benefit of having a special service provider co-teach on a regular basis is that these individuals may help to provide strategies through the *problem-solving approach* many RTI schools are using (DLD, 2007; L. Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007), which allows for the creation of individualized interventions during Tier II. Special educators have also typically had more training in assessment techniques (e.g., curriculum-based, dynamic, or standardized measures). Thus, they would also be of value in helping to implement the standardized treatment protocol other RTI schools choose to use, wherein treatments are much more highly prescriptive and less individualized than those created using the problem-solving approach. L. Fuchs and Fuchs recommended that schools adopting RTI “rely on a combination of approaches with a standard treatment protocol used for academic difficulties and a problem-solving approach used for obvious behavioral problems” (p. 16). The collaboration and input of a special educator who is in the classroom on a daily basis interacting with the students would be invaluable for both of these approaches.

In addition, the provision of ongoing intensive instruction during class time to a small group of students, not to mention the need for a large amount of data collection and the training necessary to collect it effectively, is of concern to many educators as they learn about RTI (Marston, 2006; Wisconsin School Psychologists Association, 2006; see the vignette at the beginning of this article). However, it is definitely reasonable when there are two instructors in the classroom sharing the collection duties, both of whom are committed to the inclusive philosophy surrounding RTI and eager to learn the different techniques the other brings to the table. The literature on co-teaching provides example after example of educators who have found that they improved their instructional skills,

increased their knowledge of strategies, and generally became better teachers because of the collaborative nature of co-teaching (e.g., Hunt et al., 1996; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2005; Rea et al., 2002). Tier II of RTI is a clear match for this model by providing services for these students in the general education inclusive classroom. (For an example of Tier II and co-teaching, see Appendix C.)

Tier III. When a child is identified as needing supportive services for a longer period of time or as needing more intensive services than general education can provide, she or he should be referred for special education, or Tier III (Hauerwas & Woolman, 2005). It is during this referral and identification process that the power of the collaboration between teachers is exceedingly evident. If co-teachers were collaborating to provide quality instruction to students in Tier I and then ensuring that additional intensive interventions were conducted with fidelity in the short-term framework of Tier II, special education (or Tier III) would be for students who were more likely to exhibit a true positive of a learning disability (Davis, Lindo, & Compton, 2007). In Tier III, collaborative teachers can more fully provide (or suggest) individualized services for children with whom they are already familiar and for whom they already have extensive knowledge of effective and ineffective teaching strategies. Such knowledge of appropriate and inappropriate instructional strategies, knowledge of the child’s individual learning styles, and awareness of the child’s instructional needs can more clearly inform the development of the IEP. Stecker (2007) clarified the difference between Tiers II and III:

The third tier of instruction is considered to be the most intensive and is focused on individual student need. Instructional sessions may be lengthier than what is typically provided in Tier II, instruction may be delivered one on one or to very small groups of students (e.g., 1–3 students), and the intervention program may be implemented across a longer period of time. Because students who are considered candidates for Tier III already have demonstrated poor performance and academic unresponsiveness to high-quality instruction as indicated by poor patterns of growth in both general education classrooms and during more focused supplemental instruction, Tier III intervention is developed to address specific individual needs. (p. 51)

L. Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) suggested that for Tier III to have the required effect, special education would need to be reformed as well. The current emphasis on paperwork and compliance, in addition to the large class sizes (often similar to—or even greater than—general education classes), make the current special education system less likely to be able to create the level of instructional intervention needed to positively influence student outcomes for those students who are moved to Tier III. If the collaboration between special and general educators is truly highlighted and valued in a school, more students would receive their

instruction in general education inclusive classes, rather than having so many special education classes that promise small class size and individualized, differentiated instruction that cannot be delivered. When Tier III is genuinely warranted, those groups can remain small, and individualized instruction can actually be individualized. Professional development in the area of Tier III should focus on providing teachers, both in special and general education, with training in specific instructional techniques, such as the Kansas Writing Strategies, TouchMath, or any other strategy designed to help struggling diverse learners achieve at their individual levels.

On a positive note, it should be observed that under RTI, a student's achievement when entering special education should be higher than that of a student who was referred without earlier intervention because the child was receiving specialized instruction from the moment of observed difficulty rather than having to wait until the problem was great enough to qualify for special education services (Hauerwas & Woolman, 2005). This proactive approach can mean that students who ultimately receive special education services through Tier III do not have entrenched failure but rather merely need long-term assistance for success. (For an example of Tier III and co-teaching, see Appendix D.)

Cautions

It should be noted that although RTI has been found to be highly effective in remediating academic performance problems when teachers are provided training and support, it is unknown what the results would be when the resources that the pilot sites had are unavailable (Gertsen & Dimino, 2006). There is also some concern within the field of learning disabilities that we are "throwing out the baby with the bathwater" (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002, p. 155) by replacing a flawed-in-implementation-but-theoretically-sound system with another theoretically sound system that is untested on a large-scale basis (Gertsen & Dimino). Bradley et al. (2007) emphasized, "The greatest challenge in implementing RTI is the limited experience of implementing it on a large scale, across all academic areas and age levels" (p. 11).

In addition, almost all of the research on RTI has been based in the areas of reading. Because the majority (80–90%) of students identified as having a learning disability have challenges in the areas of reading (Bradley et al., 2007), this is understandable. Unfortunately, despite the large number of students with disabilities in the areas of math and writing, there are relatively few scientifically research-based intervention practices in these areas. In a May 2007 review of the What Works Clearinghouse—the United States Clearing House for effective, scientifically based research practices—there were no elementary mathematics interventions identified as having researched posi-

tive effects, and no writing interventions listed at all. This limits the scientifically based research strategies that can be implemented to provide the data needed to make decisions about student progress. In addition, there is little information on the use of RTI at the secondary level (Bradley et al.).

In addition to the cautions inherent to RTI, there are also those related to collaboration and co-teaching. It is difficult to measure collaborative success (Murawski, 2003), and it tends to be an emergent characteristic (i.e., you need some to get some; Friend & Cook, 2007). Teachers continue to resist sharing their classroom and planning processes with other teachers, and that resistance may negatively affect its effectiveness (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). Training, resources, planning time, and administrative support have all been identified as key elements to successful co-teaching (Scruggs et al., 2007). Without those key elements in place, teachers may experience significant barriers such that they will opt not to participate in co-teaching or RTI. Last, the fidelity with which any new educational practices are implemented is difficult at best; to attempt to sway teachers to embrace two new practices simultaneously (RTI and co-teaching), even though they complement and support one another so well, may be daunting to many. Despite these cautions, "the reality, however, is that policy often precedes and drives research and development" (Bradley et al., 2007, p. 11), schools are embracing RTI, and although ongoing research would help to inform applications and implications, in the meantime, teachers need strategies for the successful implementation of the RTI concept. One such strategy is co-teaching.

Conclusion

Effective teachers have "excellent classroom management, balanced teaching of skills, scaffolding and differentiated instruction, cross-curricular connections, and encouragement of student self-regulation" (Foorman, 2007, p. 25). This may be easier said than done. Yet, effective instruction is the lynchpin of RTI; if the instruction has been poor, the student cannot be identified as a student with a disability. However, because of the massive requirements of today's teachers, being able to ensure that all of the aforementioned criteria are in place in the classroom daily seems to be a monumental task. Co-teaching and collaboration offer a strong means of achieving the goals of RTI, allowing teachers and other professionals to interact in structured ways that allow flexibility of instructional options and providing intensive instruction for students at the time they need it. The already-overworked general educator—who lacks the training and time needed to provide intensive strategies, collect assessment data, and ensure differentiated instruction and cross-curricular connections—is provided another professional with whom he or she can

meet the same goals. Together, they can ensure that the general education curriculum is accessible to all students and that additional services are provided through Tiers II and III for those who need additional support. Co-teachers can implement the tiers of instruction by using the models that Cook and Friend (1995; or others) have offered in flexible and data-driven ways. In doing so, students remain active members of the classroom and do not lose instructional time in transition; there is greater consistency in academic and behavioral expectations by the co-teachers who work together regularly.

The Division of Learning Disabilities (DLD, 2007) of the CEC recognized the role of the special educator in supporting RTI. Because of the focus on instructional methods and strategies for struggling students, DLD reminded special educators that they will become integral to the process and will even become seen as the building experts. They emphasize that "*collaboration* [italics added] with other faculty and staff will be *key* [italics added]" (DLD, p. 16). Implementing RTI without collaboration and co-teaching is like moving a canoe through an eddy at the confluence of two rivers. The result is two systems trying to go in the same direction, but they both end up just going around in circles. It is far better to work together to navigate the currents and to pilot our children down the river of success.

AUTHOR NOTES

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APPENDIX A
Co-Teaching Approaches (L. Cook & M. Friend, 1995)

Approach	Description
One teach, one support	Most frequently used approach to co-teaching. The other teacher may take the primary responsibility for adaptations, classroom management, communications, charting, paperwork management, and other support as needed. These roles should change often so that one teacher is not always relegated to the position of assistant. As one teacher takes the lead in content instruction with students, the other teacher is actively engaged in the support role. The support role should involve more than just walking around and passively watching students or merely using proximity control.
Parallel teaching	Teachers break the class in half (in heterogeneous groups), and each instructs half of the class. There are three ways to use parallel teaching. The first is to teach the same content in the same way. The second is for each co-teacher to teach the same content in a different way. The third is for co-teachers to teach different content. In all cases, co-teachers have communicated and co-planned their instruction.
Station teaching	Students are rotated between two or more stations (or centers), which are manned by a teacher or assistant or are independent stations. Teachers repeat instruction to each group that comes through the station, although content or delivery can vary depending on differentiated needs.
Alternative teaching	The majority of students remain in a large group setting while some work in a small group for reteaching, preteaching, enrichment, or other individualized instruction. This approach is often misused when many teachers resort to using the small group as a de facto pullout. One of the keys to using the alternative teaching approach effectively is to make sure that the large group is not receiving new direct instruction while the small group is pulled aside.
Team teaching	The students remain in a large group setting while teachers work as a team and "share the stage" to introduce new content instruction, work on building skills, clarify information, and facilitate learning and classroom management. This approach typically involves the most trust and respect between teachers. As with all approaches, this approach should be used in conjunction with other approaches.

APPENDIX B
Example of Tier I and Co-Teaching

Mrs. Rance, the fifth-grade general education teacher in the vignette at the beginning of the present article, was concerned that she was going to be responsible for identifying scientifically based research in addition to her classroom duties. Although response to intervention (RTI) requires quality instruction, progress monitoring, and treatment fidelity, Mrs. Rance is not alone in ensuring compliance with RTI components. Using a collaborative approach, Mr. Nicholas, the school's behavior specialist, spent time observing Mrs. Rance's class and consulting with her on behavior-management strategies. His outside perspective and expertise allow Mrs. Rance to teach the inclusive class with fewer disruptions and increase her instructional effectiveness with the whole class. Mrs. Rance also attended multiple presentations at staff meetings conducted by English language learner and special education teachers on research-based strategies, and she has found these presentations helpful with her own class. Miss Annalia, the Title I teacher, has also collaborated with the general education staff to help them identify reading materials that are research-based and meet the criteria for core reading programs for diverse classrooms (B. R. Foorman, 2007). Mrs. Rance now feels comfortable in that the curriculum she is using in the classroom with all of her students truly provides the quality instruction she wants to give them. In addition, Ms. Lynwood, a special educator, has been coming in to co-teach with Mrs. Rance every day during language arts. Although finding time to co-plan was originally a hardship, they have found that it is well worth it. Ms. Lynwood and Mrs. Rance successfully used one teach, one support to show visuals during large group reading, team teaching to model and role play, and parallel teaching to ensure smaller group size during discussions. "RTI is doable," thinks Mrs. Rance, "since I've got help!"

APPENDIX C Example of Tier II and Co-Teaching

Mr. Ames, the 10th-grade English teacher in the vignette at the beginning of the present article, was overwhelmed by the concept of data collection and small group instruction. He was concerned that students who were struggling would be pulled for extra help, only to fall further behind in the content when they left the room. He also wondered about the stigma associated with pulling students for Tier II. However, once Miss Christien started to co-teach with him daily, things became clearer.

For example, during their class, a standards-based lesson was conducted on the concept of discrimination, using a grade-level novel as the basis for instruction. Mr. Ames and Miss Christien presented the lesson using team teaching (in which the class remained together as the teachers simultaneously described and modeled the upcoming lesson) for the first 10 min. Students then moved into three different centers (using the station teaching approach). One of the centers was a listening center, at which students could independently put on headphones and listen to the grade-level story read aloud. At Center 2, Mr. Ames facilitated a discussion on discrimination. Miss Christien facilitated the discussion at Center 3. Groups had been strategically created so that, when two of the three groups attended Center 3, they would read a different passage on discrimination and answer questions comparing and contrasting this reading to the other. However, when the third group (those students identified for Tier II instruction) moved to Miss Christien's station, she was able to provide them with more intensive instruction on a needed skill (e.g., reading decoding, comprehension) using the additional reading passage. (L. A. Dicker [2001] and W. W. Murawski [2003] cautioned that teachers should vary who works with which group over time, so that there is no stigma of one group always being staffed by the special service provider.)

In the aforementioned example, all students in the classroom (Tier I) would transition through the three stations. However, students in Tier II would receive alternative instruction when they reached the station that Miss Christien facilitated. This would allow them to have specific instruction on a skill that other students may not need to have, while still participating in the lesson in a meaningful way and not missing any new instruction. In addition, Miss Christien is able to help collect the requisite ongoing assessment on student progress that is a critical component of RTI. After working with Miss Christien for a few weeks and seeing RTI and co-teaching in practice, Mr. Ames was overheard making the following remark to a colleague:

You know, I can't believe I'm saying this, but I'm loving co-teaching! The kids are doing so well and love the regrouping we do. I even think we're going to start collecting more ongoing assessment data on all the kids, since it's been so helpful in telling us what is working and not working with our students in Tier II. I'm so grateful for being able to collaborate with Miss Christien—it's a marriage made in heaven.

APPENDIX D Example of Tier III and Co-Teaching

As a special educator, Ms. Patrick was concerned that she would lose her job or be relegated to classroom assistant. As she has had more experience and training in response to intervention (RTI) and co-teaching, she started to realize that this is not the case. If anything, she is now seeing her influence on students with disabilities but also on those without disabilities and on her general education colleagues.

One practical example of how Miss Patrick has helped address students with disabilities (identified as Tier III) in the class in which she co-teaches with Mr. Cody is through the use of the alternative teaching approach. Because alternative teaching involves large and small groups of students, it is well suited to RTI and Tier III. M. Friend and L. Cook (2007) stated that alternative teaching is for the preteaching, reteaching, and enrichment of instruction, and underscored the need to avoid new direct instruction while alternative teaching is being used. (Otherwise, students in the small group would be missing out on content knowledge and would fall further behind their peers.) Miss Patrick suggested to Mr. Cody that when the class had completed a chapter on the Civil War, the students could be asked to work in pairs to make a timeline of the major battles discussed in the chapter. This would be an ideal time to use alternative teaching (for the provision of additional instruction for Tier III students).

In this case, while the Tiers I and II students draw their timelines and Mr. Cody monitors them, a small group of 1-3 Tier III students may move to a table to work with Miss Patrick on a specific skill. In this way, these students are not missing out on new instruction. Because of the dynamic nature of RTI, the flexible grouping should allow for students to move in and out of the small group enough to avoid much stigma. In addition, because the alternative teaching approach is encouraged for use in other situations (not only for Tier II or III instruction) to include enrichment work for students who understood the material and are ready for compacting or instructional depth (see C. E. Hughes & W. W. Murawski, 2003), students are less likely to assume that the small group is always those who need assistance. Sometimes the small group is for students who are in Tier I. Using alternative teaching in this way, Miss Patrick feels that she is able to significantly contribute to her class. She is in class on a daily basis and is more able to link the individual instruction needed for students with special needs in Tier III with the classroom instruction and grade-level standards. She is actively engaged with students and no longer worried about feeling like a classroom paraprofessional. One day, Mr. Cody came to her and said the following:

Wow! I love the way you taught that concept today to John, Brent, and Sakim. I thought they would never learn it but you really found a way to connect the material for them. Thanks. I really learned a lot from seeing how you did that.

On that day, Miss Patrick left school with a smile on her face and a spring in her step; she loved making a difference.