Introduction

Reaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students

In the United States, the last few decades have seen an increase in schools' efforts to meet all students' educational needs. One category of needs that has received considerable focus is the effective diagnosis and support of students with disabilities. Many students are benefiting from this additional attention placed on special education services; however, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students' needs are often left unmet by the interventions implemented in school districts throughout the United States (Hoover, Baca, & Klingner, 2007). In some instances, students' cultural and linguistic differences are mistaken for learning or behavioral disabilities. In other instances, these cultural and linguistic differences actually mask a student's disability. Despite significant advances in the understanding of effective teaching practices for CLD students, including limited English proficient (LEP) and English language learners (ELL), the transfer of research to practice remains scant (Bui, Simpson, & Alvarado, 2007).

One of the primary proponents for the effective diagnosis and support of students with disabilities is the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The reauthorized IDEA leads states away from discrepancy and checklist screening and guides them to employ a more effective method to identify specific learning and behavior disabilities (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). As a result of this legislation, most states have begun to implement intervention models involving problem solving with progress monitoring.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Two of the most popular models of problem solving with progress monitoring are response to intervention (RTI) and response to instruction and intervention (RTII). Although not mandated, most districts are now using some variation of RTI and RTII models to identify and address learning and behavior problems.
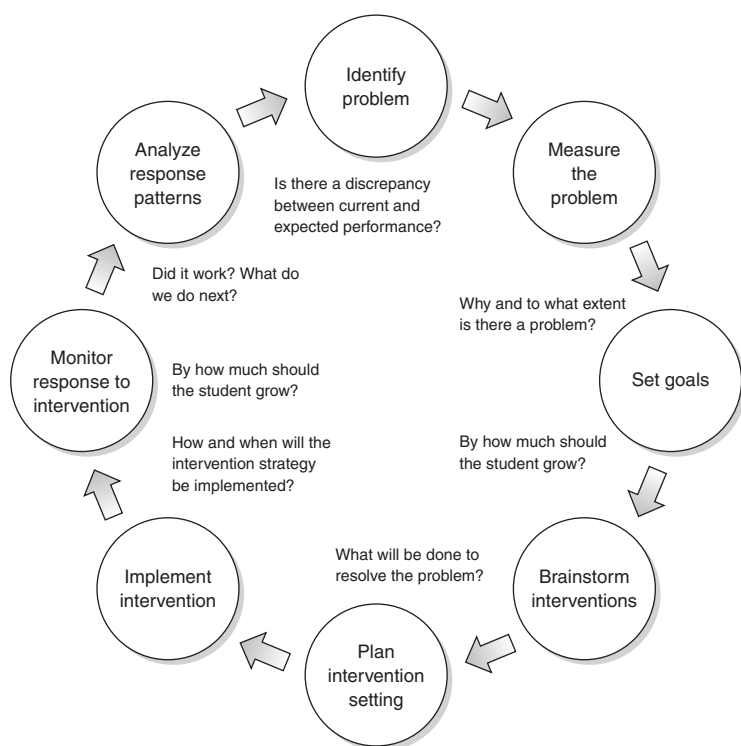
Figure 1   Problem Solving and Monitoring Process

In current instructional intervention models, such as RTI and RTII, an instruction and intervention implementation team composed of instructional personnel, rather than specialists, forms the body of educators responsible for working with the target student. Their focus is on problem solving and instruction, not on formal evaluation—though most of the models include a range of progress monitoring in their implementation (see Figure 1). The team meets for differing lengths of time, depending on what intensity of instructional intervention they are using for the target student. At the beginning stage of services, most of the interventions occur within the general education classroom. The stages of instruction and intervention in RTI or RTII models are commonly referred to as *tiers*, representing the layers of variation in intensity. RTI and RTII models usually have three or four tiers.

At each stage, or tier, the team assists the classroom teacher with differentiation of instruction and monitoring of student progress as part of the problem solving process. At the first tier for culturally and linguistically diverse learners, the focus is on building a foundation for learning, and differentiation occurs within the core curriculum program and may include bilingual assistance or instruction. At the second tier, there is usually more focus and intensity of implementation (e.g., small groups or pairing of the target student with peers for short specific instruction) and more progress monitoring of target CLD students in comparison with their CLD peers. At the third tier, the team assists with strategic intensive intervention and monitoring over a fixed period of time, typically six to eight weeks and no longer than twelve. There is an intensive focus at this level for CLD students to comprehensively document the degree to which the students' language and culture are contributing to their learning or behavior problems.

Although CLD students can be referred for special education at any point it is determined that their learning and behavior problems are not due to cultural or linguistic differences and are beyond the capacity of general education personnel alone, in problem-solving models such as RTI and RTII, this usually does not occur until the team has completed two or three tiers of strategic instructional intervention. At the end of this period, the team makes a decision about whether to proceed with a formal referral to an evaluation team or whether the interventions have resolved the learning and behavior problems

seen in the student. The team may decide a formal referral is necessary if they have seen no evidence of a successful, positive response to selected problem-focused interventions, if the level and intensity of intervention necessary for the student to succeed are not sustainable within the general education program, or if there are still a number of unanswered questions about the student at the end of these tiered instructional intervention periods. The team may decide a formal referral is not warranted if they have seen considerable improvement in response to the focused interventions or if they have determined that social, cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic issues are the primary factors contributing to the student's learning or behavior problems.

RTI and RTII problem solving with progress monitoring models are frequently depicted by a triangle, with levels or tiers indicated within the shape, such as that shown in Figure 2.
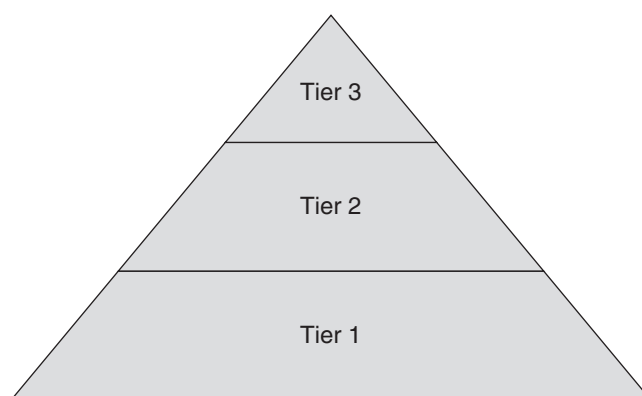

Figure 2   Three Tier Problem Solving Triangle

Research on the efficacy of intervention models such as RTI and RTII for culturally and linguistically diverse learners is sparse and inconsistent. Nevertheless, RTI and RTII programs have been used to answer the common CLD question: Is this learning and behavior problem due to an undiagnosed disability, or is it due to the student's limited English proficiency or cultural differences? RTI/RTII and problem solving models for CLD students must address more than just academic performance in reading and mathematics. When using RTI and RTII problem solving and progress monitoring with CLD students, especially nonnative English speakers and those with limited English proficiency, complex learning and behavior issues must be addressed as well. Addressing these concerns for culturally and linguistically diverse students can be very challenging in today's schools, and many schools struggle to find the personnel and resources to address them appropriately (Bui et al., 2007).

One response to this challenging situation is an intervention model developed by the author that uses RTI and RTII methodology as its foundation but also addresses and monitors the process of facilitating resiliency, maintaining effective instruction, and implementing the intensive interventions that are critical in the instruction of and intervention for culturally and linguistically

diverse learners. This process is called the Pyramid of Resiliency, Instruction, Strategies, Intervention, and Monitoring (PRISIM; see Figure 3). There are seven steps to the dynamic PRISIM process of separating difference from disability to assure that diverse students with special needs are not dispropor-tionately identified (either under or over) for special services and to ensure that all students with special needs have those needs met in the most appropriate manner.

Step 1. Building and Sustaining a Foundation for Learning

- Gathering information about incoming students to determine their diverse needs and strengths. Utilizing this information to connect stu-dents and their families to available resources in the community.
- Using the information and prescreening to place students in an appro-priate initial instructional environment.
- Assisting the student's family's access to resources to facilitate their sup-porting and assisting of the CLD student in the school.

Step 2. Establishing and Supporting Resiliency

- Gathering information about students' educational resiliency (i.e., what skills and strengths the diverse students bring with them that will facili-tate achieving to the best of their ability).
- Providing differentiated learning support to all learners that promotes and sustains resiliency in a developmentally appropriate manner.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of these strategies and instructions by a problem solving with progress monitoring approach (e.g., RTI or RTII).
- In programs using the tiered RTI or RTII model, this step coincides with Tier 1.

Step 3. Instructional Intervention and Differentiated Instruction

- Screening to determine what diverse factors contribute significantly to emerging learning and behavior problems in order to identify learning and behavioral strategies that may effectively resolve these problems.
- Providing differentiated learning support and instruction to students who have specific learning and behavior needs.
- In programs using the tiered RTI or RTII model, this step coincides with Tier 1 and Tier 2

Step 4. Intensive Intervention and Progress Monitoring

- Designing and implementing an intensive instructional intervention plan with specifically targeted progress monitoring to determine the stu-dent's response to intervention.

- Implementing a sequence of specific individualized interventions to identify the capacity of a CLD learner to participate effectively in your school's programs.
- Identifying specific areas of concern in the CLD student's response to intervention that warrant further evaluation and monitoring.
- In programs using the tiered RTI or RTII model, this step coincides with Tier 3.

Step 5. Resolution or Referral

- Reviewing and analyzing the information gathered during the progress monitoring part of the problem solving process to determine if the student requires additional screening and assessment (formal referral) or if sufficient progress has been documented to take the student out of the intensive individualized intervention and place them back in less intensive instructional settings similar to Step 2 or Step 3 settings.
- In programs using the tiered RTI or RTII model, this step coincides with the decision to stop Tier 3 interventions and move on to Tier 4.
- The intervention team reviews all instruction and intervention up to this point and makes data-based decisions on whether to continue intensive individualized interventions, to return the student to a less intensive group intervention setting, or to begin a formal evaluation and assessment procedure.

Step 6. Integrated Services

- Determining a student's special individualized instructional needs and outlining a monitoring and service plan.
- If special education and related services are appropriate, the student is served in a program that meets the student's unique instructional needs and an individualized plan of instruction or individual educational plan (IEP) is developed. The IEP must include language and culture accommodations that reflect the interaction of the student's unique and special needs, as well as the student's specific language, acculturation, and culture needs.
- In programs using the tiered RTI or RTII model, this step is sometimes incorporated into Tier 4.

Step 7. Maintaining and Sustaining Programs Serving CLDE Students

- Verifying qualifications of bilingual personnel and paraprofessionals involved in the comprehensive service structure for culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional (CLDE) students, as described under current US federal law.
- Continuous monitoring and dynamic service placement across all tiers.
- Building and sustaining the most effective elements of such problem solving with progress monitoring programs across all levels of instruction.
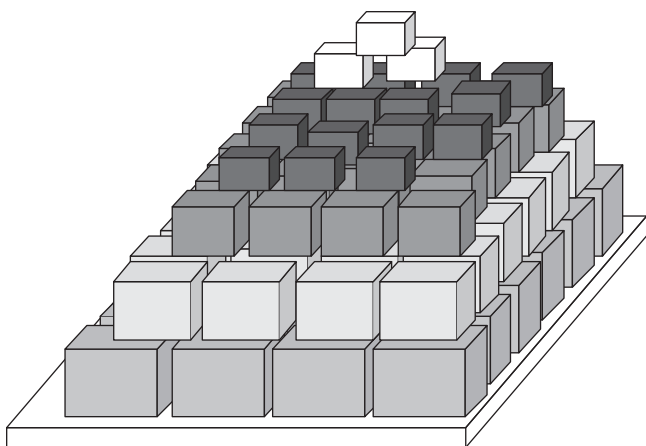
Figure 3 Pyramid of Resiliency, Instruction, Strategies, Intervention, and Monitoring

In the PRISIM pyramid of success model, based on problem solving with progress monitoring, the tiered interventions and prevention strategies are extensive within each layer of learning-strategy building blocks.

A pyramid shape made up of many building blocks and several layers illustrates the PRISIM pyramid problem solving model. The pyramid of interventions is built from many specific strategy blocks. Each block represents a specific strategy or approach, which may or may not be effective for an individual student. As various intervention and prevention approaches are used with individual students, they fill in that particular tier of the pyramid. The intensity of intervention and instruction increases as students advance from one tier to the next. Moreover, as the intensity of services increases, the number of students served at each tier decreases and, thus, the number of strategies employed at each progressive tier also decreases. This is shown by the decreasing number of blocks going up the pyramid. In some school districts, students will be moved upward until their needs are met and then moved back down to a lower tier to solidify the problem resolution. Not all students return entirely to Tier 1; some may need to continue on Tier 2 differentiation their entire school career.

Problem solving and process monitoring models such as RTI or RTII seek to move emphasis away from formal evaluations in order to more effectively identify students' specific learning and behavior disabilities. Unfortunately, as most versions of the models currently employed by school districts were developed for native English-speaking students, CLD students continue to be frequently misdiagnosed and their needs are left unmet (Hoover et al., 2007). For culturally and linguistically diverse students, problem-solving models must address more than academic performance in reading and mathematics, which is the focus of many RTI and RTII models. The PRISIM model demonstrates one way RTI/RTII processes can be modified and expanded when using problem solving and progress monitoring to separate difference from disability for CLD, ELL, and LEP students (Collier, 2008b).