Implications of Response to Intervention for Bilingual and English Language Learners

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Context and Background

- Legal mandates for accountability for all students

- Despite more than 30 years of legislative reform, students from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds continue to be under-served in general education and disproportionately represented in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

- "Are we identifying and serving the right students?" (García & Ortiz, 2004, p. 1).
    - Students placed in special education based on factors other than a disability (Heller et al., 1982);
    - Students with disabilities who have not been identified and thus are being denied services they need (Hui, 2005; Robertson, Kushner, Starks & Drescher, 1994);
    - Students with disabilities who are misclassified and consequently not receiving services appropriate to their disability (Wilkinson, Ortiz, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006); and
    - Students who do not qualify for gifted education programs based on traditional evaluation criteria (Ford & Grantham, 2003).

- To-date, schooling as the broader "intervention" provided all students has not been responsive to the educational needs of CLD learners (Yates, 2005).

An Overview of Response-to-Intervention (RTI)

- The practice of providing high quality instruction and intervention matched to students' needs, and using data from screenings, assessments, and progress monitoring to make important educational decisions (NASDSE, 2005).

    1. Universal interventions for all students based on the core curriculum;

    2. Instructional modifications for students experiencing difficulty; and

    3. Use of collaborative problem-solving teams and/or supplemental programs when students continue to experience difficulties even with increasingly intensive intervention.

- If differentiated instruction provided by the classroom teacher is unsuccessful or when expected rate and level of performance does not occur, instructional specialists provide interventions outside the general education classroom.

- Continuous monitoring of student progress: focus on describing "responsiveness to intervention", or changes in behavior or performance as a function of those interventions (Gresham, 1991).

THE PROMISE AND CHALLENGE OF RTI FOR BILINGUAL AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Potential Benefits (What does RTI add to existing prereferral intervention models?)

- Aims to improve validity of the process for identifying and serving students with LD

- Avoids the "wait to fail" approach of discrepancy models of identification

- Emphasizes the importance of high quality general education programs for all students (includes bilingual education and ESL programs)

- Reduces the likelihood that "curriculum casualties" will be diagnosed as disabilities (student performance considered in the context of instruction)

- Provides a systematic process to implement problem-solving for struggling learners

- Offers a strategy to address educational inequities and disproportionate representation of students from diverse socio-cultural and linguistic (CLD) backgrounds

Current Limitations of Existing Models and Challenges Faced by Schools

- NCLB and IDEA emphasize reading and literacy development in English in ways that are not necessarily consistent with what we know about how children learn a second language and develop strong academic skills in their second language (English)
  - Students must simultaneously learn English and academic content without falling behind
  - Majority of the RTI research has focused primarily on reading interventions, and mainly in English
  - Different beliefs about "what works" for whom: Who decides?

- Limited intervention research base for the very populations that are expected to benefit from RTI, particularly students from CLD backgrounds
  - More than 30 years of school reform have not significantly improved the benefits of education for CLD learners
  - Inadequate attention to variables in the learning environment that influence not only student performance but educators' ability to implement interventions with fidelity
  - Many "evidence-based practices" have yet to be validated with CLD students, particularly English language learners (ELLs) and middle and high school students

- To realize its potential, RTI must be embedded in culturally and linguistically responsive practices guided by a framework that addresses the socio-political, cultural, and linguistic contexts that affect educational processes
  - Tendency to replace standardized assessment with standardized curricula and instruction
  - What are the most useful ways to operationalize the dual discrepancy component of RTI for CLD students, particularly English learners? Which discrepancies are most useful for accurate diagnoses of disabilities?

- Effective implementation will require changes at the school and district levels, needing a systemic approach to implementation.

A Systems Perspective of RTI [*Figure 1; García & Ortiz (in press)*]

- For RTI to be successful with CLD children and youth, RTI must address the socio-political, cultural and linguistic contexts that influence educational processes.
    - How are results of RTI efforts influenced, positively or negatively, by salient variables that have heretofore been neglected in RTI research (Gerber, 2005; Kavale, 2005; Klingner & Edwards, 2006)?
        - Teacher, classroom, school and community characteristics
        - Student variables such as culture (vs. race/ethnicity), and language status and proficiency.
- Facilitates coordination of school, community, and district resources to support classroom practice, which is likely to increase fidelity of implementation, that is, the implementation of interventions as originally designed to address presenting problems (Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, & Bocian, 2000).
- Finally, such a framework identifies the roles and responsibilities of educational leadership in successful implementation of culturally and linguistically responsive RTI.
- Systems framework for RTI is part of a broader systemic approach to enhancing educational outcomes for all students, driven by two assumptions.
    - Societal, federal, state, district, and local community contexts are important influences on teaching and learning processes.
    - Culture is the context of education for *all* students, not only for children from non-dominant groups (García & Dominguez, 1997; García & Guerra, 2006).
- Factors at the school and classroom levels interact with and influence each other to prevent academic failure as well as to create early intervention programs and services for struggling learners (Ortiz, 2002; Ortiz et al., 2006).
- If student difficulties persist despite efforts across the three phases, then it is more likely that problems are due, in part, to a disability, and a referral to special education may be initiated.

WHAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE FOR BILINGUAL AND ELL STUDENTS?

Validity of the Intervention for Your Students

- Has the intervention been tested/validated on students who are comparable to our student populations? (generalizability of the research)
    - Scientifically-based research
    - Other types of empirical research that utilize rigorous methodology (e.g., qualitative studies, single subject designs)
    - Description of sample in terms of native language groups, race/ethnicity, language proficiency and dominance across native language and English, school history of bilingual education/ESL services, level of acculturation, and other socio-cultural and linguistic variables.

- Do researchers report outcomes by sub-groups, in order to ascertain that CLD groups will experience similar benefits compared to other groups? If yes, for which sub-groups are these results available? (e.g., race/ethnicity, SES, language, etc.)

  - If no, what types of data would be required to monitor the effects of the intervention on various sub-groups of students in our school(s)?

  - Need systematic data collection and monitoring to ensure that appropriate decisions are being made, particularly when students do not respond adequately to the intervention

  - Do we have the necessary assessment tools, resources, and skills for this task?

Relevance to the Educational Needs and Characteristics of Bilingual and ELL Students

- How well does the intervention accommodate varying levels of language dominance and proficiency, and language development needs of struggling English language learners? In the native language? In English?

- Does the intervention reflect characteristics of culturally/linguistically responsive pedagogy and curriculum? If yes, for which groups? If no, are other interventions available?

- Will adaptations be required to ensure that the intervention(s) will be successful with the bilingual and ELL student sub-groups at our school? If yes, what adaptations can be made without losing the instructional integrity of the intervention or program? (standardization vs. differentiation)

Theoretical Foundations Guiding the Research

- What are the similarities and differences between research and theory in disciplines such as bilingual, ESL and multicultural education, and those guiding RTI intervention research? How will this affect the use of RTI interventions for our CLD students?

- What beliefs, values and assumptions about CLD students and families are reflected in the RTI research about the target intervention? How do these correspond to those reflected in the communities we serve?

CONSIDERATIONS RELATED TO IMPLEMENTATION OF RTI

- What will we have to know and be able to do, to successfully implement the selected interventions or programs? (Teachers, administrators, assessment personnel, and others)

- As a school or school district, are we knowledgeable about the research on "what works" for bilingual and ELL students? To what extent do we…
  - … Foster a school culture that builds on the strengths of students and families?
  - … Build positive relationships with students and families?
  - … Hold high expectations for self, faculty, and students?
  - … Communicate an equity-oriented vision of success?
  - … Offer flexible programs to meet the diverse educational needs of all students?
  - … Implement a culturally and linguistically responsive, standards-based curriculum?
  - … Make data-based decisions about instruction?

- … Promote a culture of shared responsibility for all students?
- … Share our expertise and collaborate with others across programs?
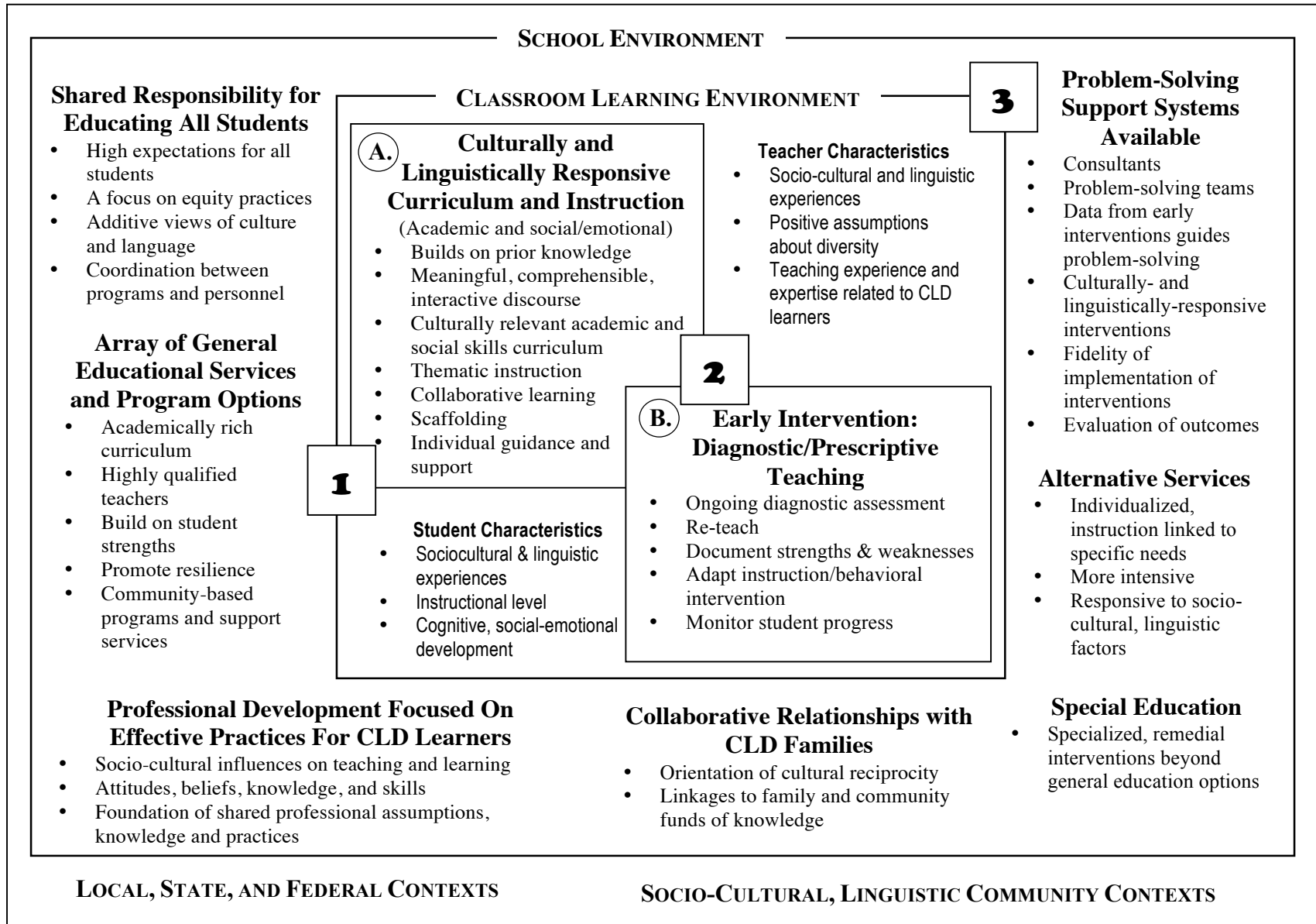- … Celebrate accomplishments of faculty and students?

- How will we ensure implementation fidelity, particularly for ELLs and other CLD groups?
  - Availability of qualified bilingual/ESL personnel
  - Multicultural preparation of general and special educators
  - Collaboration to enhance effective implementation
  - Types and levels of support teachers will need to implement the intervention

- How will we identify and address any unintended outcomes of implementing a packaged program (standardization) with CLD students?

- Given the heterogeneity present in CLD schools, which students will serve as the norm against which others will be evaluated to identify low achievers as well as slow-responders?

- How will we operationalize the "dual discrepancy" feature of RTI? The student's low achievement/inadequate progress must rule out competing factors:
  - The student has had consistent school enrollment/attendance
  - The intervention was culturally and linguistically responsive and reflects best practice
  - The intervention was implemented with fidelity
  - In spite of receiving *quality* native language and/or ESL instruction, the student's progress is substantially below expectation
  - The expected rate of progress takes into account developmental, linguistic, and other considerations such as the student's language proficiency, stage of second language acquisition, type of language instruction
  - The student's progress is below levels demonstrated by peers from comparable socio-cultural, linguistic, and experiential backgrounds, who have received the intervention
  - The problems are evident across settings, tasks, teachers, peers, or others
  - Parents report problems at home (e.g., cannot follow directions, forgets, inappropriate behavior)

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Figure 1. A framework for culturally and linguistically responsive design of response-to-intervention models.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Shared Responsibility for Educating All Students
- High expectations for all students
- A focus on equity practices
- Additive views of culture and language
- Coordination between programs and personnel

Array of General Educational Services and Program Options
- Academically rich curriculum
- Highly qualified teachers
- Build on student strengths
- Promote resilience
- Community-based programs and support services

CLASSROOM LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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A. Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Curriculum and Instruction
(Academic and social/emotional)
- Builds on prior knowledge
- Meaningful, comprehensible, interactive discourse
- Culturally relevant academic and social skills curriculum
- Thematic instruction
- Collaborative learning
- Scaffolding
- Individual guidance and support

Teacher Characteristics
- Socio-cultural and linguistic experiences
- Positive assumptions about diversity
- Teaching experience and expertise related to CLD learners

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B. Early Intervention: Diagnostic/Prescriptive Teaching
- Ongoing diagnostic assessment
- Re-teach
- Document strengths & weaknesses
- Adapt instruction/behavioral intervention
- Monitor student progress

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Student Characteristics
- Sociocultural & linguistic experiences
- Instructional level
- Cognitive, social-emotional development

Problem-Solving Support Systems Available
- Consultants
- Problem-solving teams
- Data from early interventions guides problem-solving
- Culturally- and linguistically-responsive interventions
- Fidelity of implementation of interventions
- Evaluation of outcomes

Alternative Services
- Individualized, instruction linked to specific needs
- More intensive
- Responsive to socio-cultural, linguistic factors

Professional Development Focused On Effective Practices For CLD Learners
- Socio-cultural influences on teaching and learning
- Attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and skills
- Foundation of shared professional assumptions, knowledge and practices

Collaborative Relationships with CLD Families
- Orientation of cultural reciprocity
- Linkages to family and community funds of knowledge

Special Education
- Specialized, remedial interventions beyond general education options

LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL CONTEXTS   SOCIO-CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC COMMUNITY CONTEXTS

Source: García, S. B., & Ortiz, A. A. (in press). A framework for culturally and linguistically responsive design of Response-to-Intervention models. *Multiple Voices, 11*(1).

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