
Introduction

Differentiated instruction (DI) has been in the forefront of educational forums for many years now. Yet the challenge to meet the needs of the diverse learners in our classrooms continues to grow. The educational system, as well as the educators within the system, has embraced the idea that students learn in different ways and have different strengths and needs. However, the avenues for addressing this idea are constantly evolving. Programs, curriculum materials, frameworks, and strategies have been developed to assist in reaching all learners. One of the most powerful frameworks to support this idea and ensure that there are no students who fall through the cracks, and whose needs are not met, is the Response to Instruction/Intervention (RTI) framework.

Together, the initiatives of DI and RTI move toward meeting the needs of all learners. They are supports for each other with a common goal. They are not parallel initiatives, nor are they a yin and yang. They are meshed and woven together as two separate frameworks and practices. In some ways they look the same in a classroom; however, each brings certain characteristics that strengthen the other. Most important, both have the same intent—to provide and foster a system in which students are challenged and supported in reaching their highest potential as students and citizens.

There is already a great deal of literature on DI and emerging literature on RTI. So what makes this book different from others? It is intended to examine these two topics and their relationship to each other from the eyes of the classroom teacher. There are vast implications for these initiatives, and many of them fall onto the shoulders of the classroom teacher. While there is existing literature on these topics, little of it speaks to teachers in a practical how-to format. This book provides classroom teachers with direct, clear, and practical strategies and systems to assist them in simultaneously implementing DI and RTI. It examines the two frameworks and practices in relationship to all learners, including those in general education, those identified as English language learners, those identified in special education programs, and even those in gifted programs.

Part I of this book begins by clarifying the definitions and implementation practices involved with both DI and RTI. After establishing a clear

definition of RTI, Chapter 1 presents the definitions and practices related to the approach. It also addresses the critical principles of RTI and the implications of the possible changes in practices of the classroom teacher. Following that, Chapter 2 looks at DI along with the 10-step process of differentiation. In Chapter 3, RTI and DI are merged together to examine commonalities and differences.

Part II is dedicated to Tier 1 of the RTI model. Because this tier impacts all teachers, it receives the most attention. Tier 1 represents the core instruction that is provided by the classroom teacher. This is the stage at which DI first takes place. Chapters 4–6 delve into what happens in the classroom with regard to instruction, assessment, and the environment. Each of these components contains elements of both RTI and DI; they are intertwined throughout. This part of the book examines what goes on in the classroom to effectively implement both practices. Since the framework of RTI is more definitive, it is the structure used as the skeleton for discussing both, although each is as important as the other.

In Part III, Tiers 2 and 3 are addressed through the eyes of the classroom teacher. Therefore, the chapters in this section are not about how to establish a schoolwide system for providing the supports and services at these tiers. Instead, these chapters address how a teacher in a classroom can best provide services and collaborate with others to recruit supports and services at Tiers 2 and 3. The tiers are not addressed in terms of systems and processes, but instead in terms of practices and implications. Strategies and methods of curriculum, instruction, and environmental supports as well as accommodations are all considered. The emphasis is on what to do to support students within the system rather than the system itself. Finally, the problem-solving team is addressed again through the eyes of a classroom teacher. This includes what to expect and how to prepare information to share with the team.

The book is written through the eyes of a teacher and focuses on classroom application rather than the forms or processes of the DI or RTI initiatives. These approaches are not about completing forms or lesson plans. Those actions may be involved, but they are done as a means to an end rather than the end in itself. Examples and practical suggestions are provided to illustrate and support implementation.

Each chapter concludes with questions to consider. These are designed for both self-reflection and professional discussion. They provide a venue for further investigation or consideration. They are not intended to be a quiz, but rather a means of encouraging deeper conversations at the application level. The intent is to guide possible next steps for teachers to move forward and grow professionally. After all, that is the intent of the entire work!

I hope you enjoy this journey through this exploration of RTI and DI. As a teacher, you will be able to see glimpses of your classroom in the examples and ideas. You will see how your efforts to meet the many needs of students are aligned to these larger frameworks. You will gain insights regarding your classroom and your practices. You may discover answers to old questions and develop brand-new questions as well. Welcome, teacher.