MUSEC Briefings

AUSTRALIA'S INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITY

Response to Intervention

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Statement of the Problem

Traditional methods of identifying students with learning disabilities (US definition) such as the IQ-achievement discrepancy method are problematic. In addition, students who will need extra support in academic areas need to be identified early and to be given appropriate support in a way that makes the best use of available resources. More intensive intervention needs to be provided to students based on educational need rather than labels, to ensure that they do not 'fall through the cracks'.

Proposed Solution/ Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach to service delivery in schools (developed in the United States). RTI uses a system of tiered instruction to provide the appropriate intensity of intervention. This has been most commonly used in academic areas such as reading and mathematics, but RTI can also be applied in the area of problem behaviour.

The theoretical rationale – how does it work?

There does not appear to be any one set way in which the tiered instruction model may operate, but an example of Tier 1 instruction (Primary Prevention) would be exemplary initial reading instruction (ie. comprising phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and text comprehension) at the whole class level in the regular classroom. Students who do not 'respond' to this (say, the bottom 25%) are recommended for more intensive intervention. A Tier 2 intervention (secondary level) might involve small group instruction 3-4 times per week for 10-20 weeks. Students who are deemed nonresponsive to this level of intervention are given a Tier 3 intervention (tertiary level). This may involve 1:1 instruction with a special educator.

A central concept is how best to determine 'responsiveness'. The most common approach involves considering both level of performance AND slope of improvement (progress) with nonresponders being those students who are substantially below their peers on BOTH measures. Progress would usually be measured using curriculum-based measurement. As students improve, they may move back up through the levels to the regular classroom.

What does the research say? What is the evidence for its efficacy?

There is an enormous amount of support for RTI in the literature but, while it makes very good conceptual sense, there is relatively little scientific evidence about its effectiveness as yet in comparison to other models of identification and remediation.

Conclusions

RTI may provide a more reliable and equitable means of identifying students with learning problems, and for providing timely intervention in academic areas. Note that the success of RTI depends on the presence of effective, research-based Tier 1 instruction.

The MUSEC Verdict: Well Worth A Try

Key references may be found at:
http://www.musec.mq.edu.au/co_brief.aspx

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