

Response to Intervention: A Success Story

Response to Intervention (RTI) is solidifying itself as a means of universal instruction in the New York City Department of Education. RTI is a general education framework that involves research-based instruction and interventions, regular monitoring of student progress, and the use of this data over time to make educational decisions.

In the RTI process, service delivery is divided into three levels, or tiers of support, with the intensity of interventions increasing with each level.¹⁻³ In a preschool classroom at P.S. 15 in Manhattan, a tier-1 intervention group improved student access to the school curriculum and overall participation in academic activities related to school performance, as evidenced by pre- and post-test performance on assessments and clinical observation.

I was fortunate to lead this tier-1 group in collaboration with the pre-K classroom teacher, Donna Fiscina, and with the support of the RTI team and school principal at P.S. 15. Once a week for 35 minutes per session, I provided pre-writing skill instruction using *The TV Teacher: Strokes, Shapes and Scenes* DVD, multi-sensory instruction and increased opportunities to participate in fine-motor activities.

Progress monitoring in tier 1 uses universal screening assessments to show individual student growth over time and to determine whether students are progressing as expected. The team then follows a problem-solving process to determine interventions for at-risk students that will work within whole-class instruction. The classroom teacher in collaboration with the OT implements the interventions; observations are conducted to ensure the fidelity of the classroom instruction, and the teacher and OT periodically review the progress of students.^{2,3}

We screened all 18 children in the classroom in September 2012 using the Beery-Buktenica Test of Visual Motor Integration (VMI), the Draw-A-Man Test,



Students participated in a tier-1 Response to Intervention group for pre-writing instruction.

and the first-name writing task. In this baseline assessment, five of the 18 students scored below average expectations on the VMI and were unable to copy age-expected shapes from models; 13 students were unable to write their first names; and seven students were unable to draw a face or person.

RTI lesson plans included “how to hold the pencil/crayon” instruction. Increased opportunities to practice fine-motor skills were added to choice time activities, including play dough letter stamps, lacing cards and cutting play dough. The TV Teacher *Strokes, Shapes and Scenes* DVD introduced a top-to-bottom approach to drawing lines (vertical, horizontal and diagonal), shapes (circle, cross, square and triangles), and using all of these forms to draw scenes.

Each session focused on two strokes or shapes using multi-sensory mediums for practice, including whiteboard and marker, crayon and paper, sand, and shaving cream. The children became fond of the TV Teacher term “choppers” in refer-

ence to the tripod grasp.

Following 12 sessions, the remaining 17 students’ skills were reassessed using the pre-screening assessments including the VMI, Draw-A-Man Test, and first-name writing task. One student had been discharged from the class since September.

Results revealed that all of the 17 students scored at or above average on the Beery-Buktenica VMI. Twelve of the 17 students could write their full names, and the other five students’ abilities to write their names were emerging, with at least the ability to write three of the letters of their names. Thirteen of the students could draw a person with age-expected details, and the other four students’ skills were emerging, including the ability to draw a face with facial features.

Upon observation, the children are actively using the acquired skills in their daily drawing and writing samples, and eagerly engaging in fine-motor tasks with greater ease than they did in September.

Although this tier-1 intervention has decreased in frequency to every other week, the classroom teacher uses the instructional materials daily during lessons or during allotted time for pre-writing instruction, and to provide tier-2 intervention to small groups as warranted.

Overall, the experience was positive for me as well as the teacher and, most importantly, for the students. The students appear to have a more positive attitude toward participating in fine-motor, drawing and writing tasks, which makes the pre-writing RTI intervention a success! ■

References available at www.advancweb.com/OT or upon request.

Mary Primarti, MS, OTR/L, is a senior occupational therapist and evaluator for the NYC Department of Education. She graduated from New York University in 2007 and has worked with a wide range of students in the NYC school system and in her private practice.