



PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENGAGE ALL STRUGGLING READERS

A Multi-Tiered Instructional
Approach Using Hi-Lo Books

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About the Authors



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Orla is a member of the Council for Exceptional Children, the National Association of School Psychologists, and the Massachusetts School Psychologists Association where she has previously served on the board. She is a proposal reviewer for the International Council for Children with Behavior Disorders conference and the co-author of numerous publications on MTSS and Response to Intervention (RTI). Prior to joining the Collaborative, Orla was a school psychologist in the Alexandria City (VA) Public Schools, the Quincy (MA) Public Schools, and at McLean Hospital. She received her PhD in curriculum and instruction from Boston College.



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Claudia Rinaldi brings 20 years of experience to the field of education as a professor, educator, researcher, national trainer, and technical assistance provider in school districts. She currently serves as chair of the Department of Education at Lasell College in Newton, MA, known for their innovative online teacher preparation degree programs that concentrate on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and school-wide multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS). Claudia focuses her work and research on the implementation of comprehensive school reform efforts using evidenced-based models including Response to Intervention (RTI), Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, and MTSS. In particular, her experience engages educators on how to improve systems and instructional practices for students with reading difficulties or disabilities and English language learners.

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Before joining Lasell College, Claudia was an assistant director at the Urban Special Educational Leadership Collaborative at Education Development Center, Inc.; assistant professor in the Teacher Education, Special Education, Curriculum and Instruction program at Boston College; and before that, in the Department of Special Education at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. She received her PhD in learning disabilities and reading from the University of Miami (FL).

Introduction

When students don't learn the way we teach, let's teach the way they learn.

—Ignacio “Nacho” Estrada

In 2013 the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported that 33% of the fourth graders tested were reading at basic proficiency, with basic “denoting partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills.” Thirty-two percent of the fourth graders tested were reading below basic proficiency; these students struggle to understand what they read on a daily basis. In eighth grade, 22% of the students tested were reading below basic proficiency, and 42% were at basic proficiency.

We all have students who struggle. Many strategies and techniques have been developed over the years, but how can we use a coordinated approach to support all students in our classrooms: struggling learners, average students, gifted students, English learners, and students with disabilities? How can we leverage the best of research and the best of practice and make it work for the neediest students? How can we really engage students with content that draws them in and hooks them on learning?

As a teacher and a school psychologist, we have been where you are today. We have sat with students who struggle, and we have struggled ourselves. Why isn't anything working? Or is it? What can we do next? Should we do something different? How do we know what our students really need?

Let's begin by establishing some questions that we will address in this book:

- What is tiered instruction, and can it inform the way I teach?
- Is this something with a new name but not really a new solution?
- How can I develop a method that makes sense every year?
- How can I really differentiate for students in my class?
- How can I teach all the variety of learners in my classroom?
- What types of materials really work with all my students, and how can I use them effectively?

These are questions that most teachers have every year. These are also questions that many administrators hope teachers are in the process of answering as new students walk in their classrooms year after year.

What is new in this book? Can it really help? The purpose of this book is to provide teachers and administrators with feasible and effective strategies that can help all types of learners in your classrooms. It will provide you with the latest research-based methods that are creating change and improving student outcomes around the nation. We will present it in an understandable way that can easily be adopted in your classroom tomorrow.

Specifically, the goals of this book are to:

- introduce a multi-tiered instructional model for reading comprehension.
- integrate research-based strategies using hi-lo books for increasing reading fluency and comprehension skills of students who are struggling, are English learners, or have disabilities.

Let's begin with some common assumptions:

- We value all families and cultures.
- The first teachers are parents.
- All students can learn.
- All students don't learn the same way.

- All students can read and comprehend.
- All students should enjoy reading.
- As teachers we must strive to reach all learners.
- As teacher we must learn about each of the students in front of us each year.
- As teachers we value the strengths of each student.
- As teachers we are committed to figuring out what works for each of our students.

The following terms can help build a common language among those reading this book and can serve as an easy guide for looking back to definitions.

Struggling learners: students who have difficulty keeping up with classmates of the same age in a developmentally appropriate learning environment

English language learners: students who are not proficient in English

Students with disabilities: students who have been identified as needing special education services through an Individualized Education Plan

Research-based practices: instructional practices that are supported by research

Differentiated instruction: approach that recognizes that all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students, are different and bring varying background knowledge, readiness, language, and interests to the classroom (Hall, 2002). As such, teachers must adjust—or differentiate—their curriculum and instruction for students who struggle and for students who excel.

Hi-lo books: high-interest, low-readability fiction and nonfiction books that appeal to struggling or reluctant readers

Universal Design for Learning: planning instruction proactively to both remove barriers to learning and to challenge and engage all types of learners in a typical classroom, including English language learners and students with disabilities

Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 1, we will introduce you to a framework called a multi-tiered system of support and its components, and we will describe how it and other initiatives in school districts work in concert with tiered instruction. You will learn how you can differentiate reading comprehension for a range of learners within this model using research-based strategies and innovative reading materials.

In Chapter 2, we describe how to use different types of data to learn about your students. We suggest that qualitative and quantitative data can help you develop an instructional approach that is effective and engaging. And we ask you to begin to think about profiles of struggling learners, English language learners, and students with special education needs. We also provide you with examples of instructional delivery models and a 90-minute reading block that is balanced and engaging.

In Chapter 3, we introduce and explain six reading strategies that you can use today to begin to improve your students' reading skills. We know that your classrooms are diverse and that you are challenged to meet the needs of your student population. You want a toolkit of strategies that are effective and feasible. But you also need strategies that can be used in a variety of formats, like pairs, small groups, and teacher- or paraprofessional-led groups.

In Chapter 4, we will examine individual case studies of students and look at what type of progress makes sense over time. We will provide you with questions to guide your instructional planning and intervention processes and described how hi-lo books can be used to support students' learning. We present how to monitor students' progress and make predictions about whether students will approach grade level or the end-of-year expected benchmark. Finally, we provide you with questions to consider if students are not on track, and how to know when to change an intervention approach to make it more effective.

Finally, in Chapter 5, we conclude this book by providing ways to monitor your own high-quality Tier 1 (core) instruction to ensure that it is differentiated, engaging, and balanced, and to ensure that it meets the needs of most students in your class.

What Is a Multi-Tiered System of Support?

A Look Inside the Classroom

Ms. Cuellar is a fifth grade teacher at an urban elementary school in the northeast U.S. She has been a regular education teacher for 4 years and has 24 students in her classroom this school year. According to school records and her observations, three-quarters of her students receive a free lunch and are low income.

The makeup of her class is 14 boys and 10 girls; 15 of the students are bilingual, with Spanish as their primary language at home. Some students in her class receive English as a second language (ESL) support and special education services during the school day. Her school district requires that schools use reading assessments 3 times per year. This school year Ms. Cuellar and her colleagues have been told that they will be implementing tiered instruction as the main intervention in reading and English language arts, but she is not sure how to implement tiered instruction. She also has not received professional development in this area.

Here are some questions that Ms. Cuellar and her colleagues have been discussing:

- How do I begin to focus on English language arts and reading instruction when I have so many subjects to teach?
- What is tiered instruction and intervention?
- What are interventions? And who does them?
- What does tiered instruction mean in reading?
- Are we going to get literacy materials? And will we get professional development so we know how to use the materials?

Tiered Instruction

Each year brings new students with unique needs. While these needs span the academic, social, and emotional spectrums, we know that the ability to read is the primary factor in determining future success. As you think about planning and instruction in your classroom, it is critical that you know how to ensure your students become better readers in measurable ways. One of the most research-based strategies to achieve this is tiered instruction.

Tiered instruction refers to a common practice in schools today that provides different levels of intensity of instruction. This includes classroom instruction along with additional instruction. In the past, additional instruction may have been reserved for tutoring sessions or given only to special education students. More recently, educators have begun looking at additional instruction as a timely intervention to prevent students from falling behind.

An intervention is instruction that supplements and intensifies classroom curriculum and instruction to meet student needs. It is provided to any student who demonstrates that they need more help to master a concept. An intervention can be academic or behavioral. All interventions must have (a) a plan for implementation, (b) evidenced-based pedagogy, (c) criteria for successful response, and (d) assessment to monitor progress.

Interventions have become part of a system of school change in the U.S. that is called Response to Intervention (RTI). Initially, many schools implemented RTI as a targeted program with intervention specialists pulling aside identified students to provide additional instruction. Now RTI has evolved into a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS). The most notable change with MTSS is that schools are encouraged to implement intervention instruction throughout the day in every classroom. If the school implements intervention instruction as a whole, resource allocation of personnel can be shared among the staff in more strategic and preventative ways.

A second aspect of MTSS is the focus on the whole child. In other words, teachers look at the context of the school, instruction, and academic and behavioral engagement when developing interventions. About 94% of schools across the U.S. are doing some aspect of MTSS (Spectrum K12 School Solutions, 2011). A cornerstone of this approach is collaboration among teachers to meet the needs of every student.

MTSS integrates research-based educational and psychological innovations from the last few decades to support students in more effective, preventive, and responsive ways, particularly in the area of reading development. Instead of waiting for kids to fail and then testing them for special education qualification, teachers provide them with supports as soon as they exhibit difficulty grasping a concept.

In this chapter, we will introduce you to MTSS and its components, and we will describe how MTSS and other initiatives in school districts (e.g., Universal Design for Learning, inclusion, and Common Core State Standards) work in concert with tiered instruction. You will learn how you can differentiate reading comprehension for a range of learners within this model using research-based strategies and innovative reading materials (e.g., high-interest, low-readability books; or simply, hi-lo books).

MTSS is a way for schools to organize how instruction and intervention can be delivered. Tiered instruction focuses on innovative instructional practices that have been shown to improve student achievement, especially in the area of reading. Joined together through an MTSS framework, these innovations are more powerful than if they were adopted independently in a classroom or even a group of classrooms in a school. The innovations that comprise MTSS include (a) teacher collaboration, (b) school-wide use of data to inform instruction, (c) inclusive instructional practices, including Universal Design for Learning, and (d) the Common Core State Standards, including standards-based assessment.

What Are Hi-Lo Books?

Hi-lo books offer struggling readers access to well-written and compelling fiction and nonfiction across all grades. These books present age-appropriate content—something that will grab a student's interest (i.e., high-interest)—at a readability level that is accessible (i.e., low-readability). Most hi-lo books appear no different from trade books, removing the stigma of “baby” books. Great hi-lo titles will give students what they need to become successful, independent readers. A great resource for hi-lo books is <http://www.strugglinglearners.com>.

Teacher Collaboration

Let's examine these innovations in more detail. *Teacher collaboration* refers to a practice where teachers with various levels of experience, expertise, and professional training address instruction and problem-solve how to remove barriers to learning in order to improve student outcomes in reading. This process happens during common planning time where groups of teachers come together to plan for individual students. The most effective

collaborative sessions include all teachers and specialists who work with the selected students.

Data-Based Decision Making

Data-based decision making refers to the use of reading data, formal and informal, that is used in collaborative meetings to drive instructional planning for all students. Together, data-based decision making and teacher collaboration can result in a culture of shared responsibility for student achievement (Rinaldi, Higgins Averill, & Stuart, 2011). One type of data that this book will present is curriculum-based measurement.

Curriculum-based measures (CBM) are a key piece used in data-based decision making. CBMs are quick assessments that allow teachers to pinpoint students' basic reading skill levels. Knowing students' reading abilities allows teachers to better understand what students need to access grade-level curriculum, particularly in the content areas of social studies and science. CBMs are brief, valid, and reliable indicators of reading abilities needed to be successful at each particular grade level. Usually they are conducted in less than five minutes and are administered individually.

With CBMs, teachers can track the grade level students are reading at and how much they improve over the year. Using CBM results, teachers can document student progress and plan appropriate instruction and intervention. For example, in kindergarten, students must know the names of the letters of the alphabet and each unique sound, or phoneme, in order to become a successful reader. In seventh grade, students must be able to read accurately, fluently, and with inflection in order to be reading at grade level and have high reading comprehension skills. In both of these examples, there are CBMs that provide teachers with an indication of whether a student is at grade level and how much progress the student is making throughout the year.

Many schools administer CBMs to all students at the beginning of the school year to establish students' baselines. This allows teachers to quickly identify students reading significantly below grade level or students who are not English speakers. Tiered interventions can be established immediately for these students. CBMs can then be administered weekly or at given checkpoints during the school year. The frequency is up to an individual teacher or school. CBMs administered throughout the year allow teachers

to monitor student progress and growth and make changes to intervention instruction as needed.

Inclusive Educational Practices

Inclusive educational practices occur when students with and without disabilities learn together in the regular education classroom with appropriate supports, planning, instruction, and curriculum materials. *Inclusive practices* refer to the ways educators address the needs of all students by determining their instructional levels and providing instruction at that level. In schools implementing inclusive practices, both regular and special education teachers receive professional development on differentiating curriculum and addressing the needs of students, with a particular focus on students with disabilities.

One very prominent way that inclusive practices occur in classrooms is through the use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL means planning instruction proactively to remove barriers to learning. UDL challenges and engages all types of learners in a typical classroom, including English language learners and students with disabilities.

UDL principles offer a blueprint that is flexible and customizable to meet the individual needs of each student using the “what,” the “how,” and the “why” of learning for planning and delivering instruction. These three principles help teachers plan instruction by addressing how curriculum will be presented to the wide level of students in a typical class, how evidence of learning can be demonstrated, and how engagement can be developed in order to increase student outcomes. For more information on UDL principles, visit the CAST website (<http://www.cast.org>).

Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) provide a consistent expectation of what K–12 students should be learning in reading, English language arts, and mathematics. Although all states have had grade-level standards for education, the CCSS represents the first time the U.S. has published a common guide for establishing and assessing instructional goals.

Most states have adopted the CCSS and are transitioning from existing state standards and state assessments. One of the main goals of the CCSS is to provide a high-quality education for all students in the U.S. In reading

and English language arts, the CCSS has defined the basic reading and critical thinking skills that students at each grade level should be able to perform in order to be college and career ready. The biggest change in English language arts is how the CCSS addresses the complexity of texts that students read, the type of texts that students should be reading, and the connection to writing.

In the area of basic skills, these standards are very similar to the state standards teachers are familiar with. Some of the standards dealing with complexity may be surprising. For example, in kindergarten, with prompting and support, students will compare and contrast adventures and experiences of characters in familiar stories. While in fifth grade, students are expected to independently and proficiently read and comprehend literature, including stories, drama, poetry, nonfiction, and graphic novels.

A Plan for Tiered Instruction

These innovations will be addressed in more depth in subsequent chapters. Each one will help you better teach your students to read and comprehend text. Keeping in mind that there are various definitions for these terms within the research community, this book provides general definitions and shows how these innovative practices are being integrated within MTSS.

As you read this, you may feel overwhelmed thinking about all of these innovations and how to make them work together in your classroom to meet the needs of all your students. All teachers face the challenge of helping students who struggle to learn. Some may be learning English as a second or third language. Some may have been identified as having special education needs. Some may have fallen through the cracks in earlier grades. How can you use these innovations to improve the academic achievement of all of these students?

Learning who your students are and what prevents them from accessing the grade-level curriculum is the key to success for everyone. As you plan your reading and English language arts instruction, knowing what interventions your students will need is essential in structuring time, space, and materials to help them. According to the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (Batsche et al, 2005) and others' statistics, approximately 15%–25% of students in today's classrooms will need some sort of supplemental support to access core grade-level curriculum and

another 5%–15% will need intensive supports. It is important to note that if you are teaching in a high-poverty urban school district, this number may be higher. Many students will require intensive interventions.

Looking at your classroom through the lens of tiered instruction makes it easier to see that you will have students all along a continuum of needs. Using educational data to identify where each student falls on the continuum and to plan appropriate instruction is what this book is all about. As you read through the five chapters, you will learn how to plan for tiered instruction, how to pinpoint your students' basic reading skills the minute they walk into your classroom, and how to continuously monitor their progress so that you know when to use targeted curriculum materials (e.g., hi-lo books) that support reading outcomes.

Does this sound too good to be true? Perhaps. But the truth is that tiered instruction and intervention works for students of all backgrounds and skill levels. When you pay close attention to how you are implementing your curriculum and instruction, how your students are responding, and how you use the resources within your school and district, you can address the needs of all of your students.

The point is not to “wait for our students to fail.” Instead, we must use the tools that tell us with a good degree of certainty which students are at risk. Then we must provide those students with the skills and practice they need to be successful.

A Look Inside the Classroom

Ms. Cuellar has 24 students in her fifth grade class in September. By October, she recognizes four students who are not making the progress that other students are. In an effort to help one particular student, Samuel, who is significantly below grade level, Ms. Cuellar refers him to the school's child study team. At the child study team, her colleagues—who do not know the curriculum she is teaching and may or may not know Samuel—suggest that she try several strategies. The meeting ends, and no one has told her how to implement any of the strategies. No one has said what to do, how often, for how long, how to know if it's working for Samuel, or when to make a decision about what to do next.

Statistics on Reading Outcomes

- Research has found that children who did not read well by the end of third grade are four times less likely to graduate from high school on time than proficient readers. On top of this, a poor reader who lives in poverty is 13 times less likely to graduate on time (Hernandez, 2011).
- One-third of fourth graders in the U.S. failed to demonstrate even “partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills” necessary to read and understand grade-level text as measured by the NAEP reading test (Denton, retrieved from the RTI Action Network, <http://www.rtinetwork.org>).
- For some groups of students, reading failure rates are higher than their same-age peers; 52% of African American students, 51% of Hispanic students, and 49% of students in poverty all scored below basic in the NAEP reading test (*Ten things you should know about reading*. Retrieved from <http://www.readingrockets.org>).
- Serious reading problems can be prevented when students in the primary grades are provided with quality classroom reading instruction along with additional small-group intervention when needed (Denton, retrieved from the RTI Action Network, <http://www.rtinetwork.org>).

In other words, the meeting ends and there is no real action plan. There is no guidance to ensure that research-based interventions are implemented with fidelity. Nevertheless, Ms. Cuellar feels that the process was somewhat helpful and goes back to her classroom to try out one of the strategies, even though she's not quite sure what she should be doing. She tries the strategy for a couple of days one week and a couple of days the next week, but Samuel is still having a lot of difficulty reading. She is discouraged and refers Samuel for a special education evaluation.

As Samuel and Ms. Cuellar wait about 40 days for the evaluation to occur, he continues to sit in her classroom receiving instruction she knows is not working for him. During the special education evaluation, it is determined that Samuel does not meet eligibility. Ms. Cuellar is referred back to the school's child study team. Once again, the team provides her with limited information and supports on how to help Samuel. Ms. Cuellar goes back to her classroom feeling frustrated about the entire process.

Samuel's reading skills do not improve, and his grades reflect this. Two months have passed. Samuel is falling further behind.

You Are Not Alone

A tiered instructional approach can change Ms. Cuellar's challenge from one of frustration and discouragement to one of collaboration and continuous learning. Tiered instruction is based on the premise that students will need multiple levels, or tiers, of instruction (e.g., small-group instruction, additional time, specialized curriculum) as part of their system of support in schools. This means that schools expect that a certain percentage of students, generally 15%–25%, will need additional strategic supports, and that about 5%–15% of those already receiving strategic supports will need *additional* intensive supports.

Tier 1, Or Core Instruction

We can all agree that access to the regular core education curriculum (Tier 1) is vital for all students and that we understand that some will need additional or supplemental supports through an organized framework such as the one described here. And if the data indicates that a student needs more support, then that student will get additional intervention time in a second dose (Tier 2) or a third dose (Tier 3).

Why is Tier 1 so important? Tier 1, also known as core instruction, is the only time the students will receive the holistic richness of the curriculum aligned with the high expectations of the CCSS. This means that in Tier 1, or core reading instruction, teachers provide the basic skills needed to master the mechanics of reading (e.g., concepts about print, phonemic awareness, alphabetic knowledge, phonics and decoding, spelling, and fluency) and the knowledge-based skills to understand and draw meaning from text (e.g., concepts about the world, ability to understand and express complex themes, vocabulary, and oral language skills) (Lesaux, 2013).

A Look Inside the Classroom

Remember Ms. Cuellar's frustration? Let's look at how intervention can work with an MTSS approach.

Ms. Cuellar has 24 students in her fifth grade class in September. Her universal screening assessments have indicated that four students are not responding to the instruction and intervention. She begins to monitor their progress using CBMs. They are not making the progress other students are.

At her weekly grade-level meeting, Ms. Cuellar and her colleagues discuss these four students, including Samuel. Ms. Cuellar brings Samuel's universal screening reading data taken in September plus the progress monitoring data from October to the meeting. Because these meetings have a structured protocol that guides collaborative problem-solving and discussion, Ms. Cuellar knows that she will present the progress monitoring data points and will also share information from a diagnostic reading comprehension test she administered. She knows her colleagues, who are teaching the same grade-level curriculum, will partner with her in finding an instructional approach that works for Samuel.

At the meeting, she summarizes that Samuel scored on the low range of decoding skills. The universal screener and progress monitoring tool also showed poor reading fluency when compared to students in his grade at this time of the year. Ms. Whitney, another fifth grade team member, offers to bring Samuel to the school's intervention block, called "SUCCESS time," for 20 minutes, 3 times per week for 6 weeks. During SUCCESS time, Ms. Whitney is working with a small group of four students on decoding and fluency with hi-lo books. All of the students in the intervention block are at the same instructional reading level as Samuel.

The team documents their planning conversation and summarizes the intended intervention delivery sessions for the next 6 weeks. They decide to review Samuel's progress in 6 weeks and determine the specific follow-up date, which they put on the calendar. During this meeting, the grade-level team collaborates to review data, discuss curriculum and instruction, and develop a measurable action plan with a clear progress monitoring schedule to improve Samuel's reading that leverages the supports that the school has implemented (i.e., the intervention block).

The MTSS Framework in Action

As discussed, MTSS is an approach to prevention and intervention that uses instructional data to guide problem solving and planning within a tiered system of support. This approach, based on research, expects that 75%–80% of students will benefit and respond to a strong Tier 1 (core) reading curriculum using the CCSS as a basis for a high-quality education (Batsche et al, 2005; Pavri, 2010).

Teachers collaborate to address any barriers to the implementation of Tier 1 (core) instruction until most of the students are benefitting. The framework also expects that 15%–25% of students will need *additional* strategic short-term intervention, called Tier 2 (Batsche et al, 2005; Marston, 2005; Pavri, 2010). This short-term intervention focuses on the area of deficit in basic reading skills (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary). Tier 2 occurs in 20-minute segments, 3 times per week for 12–17 weeks. The goal of this Tier 2 intervention is to increase the number of students responding or benefitting from Tier 1 (core) instruction.

The framework also addresses the remaining 5%–15% of students who will need intensive intervention in addition to Tier 1 (core) and Tier 2. This *additional* intensive intervention, known as Tier 3, is delivered in a smaller teacher–student ratio of 1:1 or 1:3 for at least 50 minutes, 3 times per week, with progress monitoring occurring weekly. The goal here is to ensure that students are getting exposure to Tier 1 (core), Tier 2, and Tier 3 supports anytime they are needed.

Figure 1 is a graphic that represents the MTSS framework in reading and how it addresses the main components of tiered instruction: assessment, instruction, and intervention. This example also provides a practical application that identifies how materials can be used within each tier of support.

In looking at Figure 1, you see that the triangle represents all students receiving Tier 1 (core) instruction within a differentiated instructional approach using the principles of UDL and the expectations of the CCSS. You also see how differentiated instructional materials, like hi-lo books and emergent readers, can support Tier 1 (core) instruction at the Tier 2 level of support.

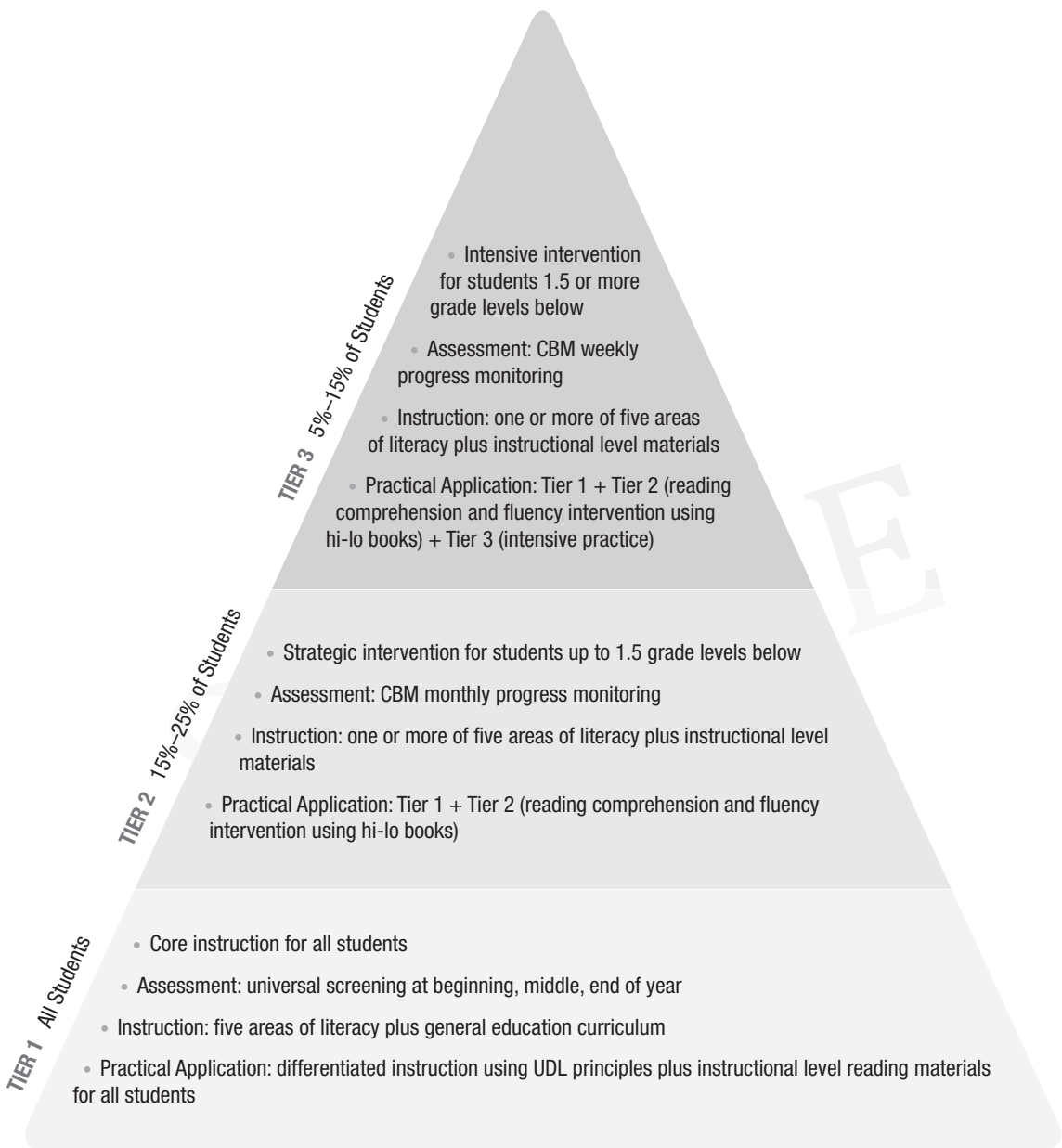


FIGURE 1 The MTSS Framework in Reading and Language Arts

In Tier 2, the instructional intervention responds to the identified area of reading difficulty and the instructional level of the students. Students meet in small groups and receive direct instruction of skills, immediate corrective feedback, and the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills in a strategic and targeted way. As this intervention is delivered, there is a clear action plan that outlines frequency of delivery (e.g., 20 minutes, 3 times per week), a schedule to monitor progress (e.g., monthly fluency probes using CBM), and instructional materials (e.g., hi-lo books) that can change as the student makes progress in the instructional level.

In Tier 3, the frequency of the instructional intervention is increased (e.g., 50 minutes, 3 times per week), and the intensity of delivery is increased.

What Is Differentiated Instruction?

Although a strong reading curriculum will provide the foundation for effective instruction, teachers cannot simply follow the script from the teacher's manual. Doing so would neglect the unique needs of all students. Teachers need to adjust, or *differentiate*, their curriculum and instruction for students who struggle and for students who excel.

Differentiated instruction recognizes the ability of students at or below grade level and assumes that all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students, are different and bring varying background knowledge, readiness, language, and interests to the classroom (Hall, 2002). Teachers can differentiate Tier 1 (core), Tier 2, and Tier 3 reading instruction for students who struggle by:

- using assessment data to inform the scope and sequence of the specific skills and strategies being taught.
- providing explicit instruction that includes modeling of skills and strategies and offers clear descriptions of new concepts.
- providing opportunities for independent practice with a variety of instructional materials that increase confidence, comfort, and skill level (e.g., using hi-lo books).
- increasing opportunities for practice in flexible groupings with teachers and peers.
- providing a balance between teacher-selected and student-selected tasks and assignments—giving students choices in their learning.
- providing “just-right,” engaging texts at students’ instructional reading levels (e.g., hi-lo books).
- providing corrective feedback that calls clear attention to student mistakes and offers student opportunities to try again.
- varying expectations and requirements for students’ responses by allowing for varied means of expression, alternative procedures for completion, and varying degrees of difficulty.
- monitoring students’ understanding of key skills and strategies and re-teaching when necessary.

A Look Inside the Classroom

In the case of Ms. Cuellar, the RTI framework guarantees that Samuel will receive targeted intensive instruction *in addition* to the rich and differentiated curriculum he receives in Tier 1. Because all decisions about instruction are informed by data, Ms. Cuellar feels relieved to know that if after 6–8 weeks the data indicates that Samuel is not responding to his Tier 2 intervention, the action plan will be adjusted. Further, Ms. Cuellar will not be alone in trying to figure out how to support Samuel as the year continues. Because the MTSS model includes regular structures for collaborative problem solving, Ms. Cuellar and her grade-level team members will share responsibility for Samuel’s achievement. Together they will develop a plan that responds to his areas of need.

Finally, let’s not forget that Ms. Cuellar has 23 other students, some of whom are English language learners, some of whom struggle like Samuel, some of whom already receive special education services, and some of whom are performing well above the fifth grade level. The MTSS framework guarantees that all of these different learners will participate in a rich and differentiated Tier 1 (core) curriculum. When assessment data indicates that some of these students may need more strategic or intensive support, the collaborative problem-solving structure enables teachers to share expertise and develop clear action plans for the delivery of Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions that respond to each student’s unique challenges.

Summary

In this chapter, we introduced you to a framework to address instruction called MTSS. We described how many innovations and current instructional practices fit within the model and can be integrated to provide more effective instructional support to students who are struggling, who are second language learners, or who have a disability. We began to explain how schools can capitalize on and refine existing structures to develop practices that enable teachers to carry out strong and responsive reading instruction. These structures include collaboration, data-based decision making, inclusive practices, and CCSS.

By now you should be starting to develop an understanding of the basic features of MTSS, but you may still be feeling a little overwhelmed. How

do you provide tiered instruction effectively? What does it actually look like in a classroom? In upcoming chapters, we will provide more detail about how this actually works in the classroom.

You will learn more about Ms. Cuellar, her colleagues, her student Samuel, and other students in her class. We will provide you with more detailed information on how to teach reading more effectively using research-based practices. We will offer examples of how curriculum and instructional materials are used effectively to support diverse learners in your classrooms. Whether your school has MTSS in place or not, tiered instruction will help you address the needs of all your students.

SAMPLE

PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENGAGE ALL STRUGGLING READERS

A Multi-Tiered Instructional Approach Using Hi-Lo Books

Take immediate action to raise your students' reading achievement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reports that 65% of fourth graders and 64% of eighth graders are reading below or at basic proficiency. Starting now, say no to these dismal statistics.

- Learn how to implement the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework
 - Use educational data to identify each student's strengths and weaknesses
 - Plan appropriate core instruction, plus Tier 2 and 3 strategic interventions
 - Six targeted reading interventions are included
 - Learn how to continuously monitor student progress
 - Instantly boost reading achievement in mixed-ability classrooms
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