

## SECCIÓN ESPECIAL: Modelo de Respuesta a la Intervención (RtI) y Dificultades de Aprendizaje

### Response to Intervention (RtI) Model: A promising alternative for identifying students with learning disabilities?

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Until recently, in the United States, the traditional way to identify students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) was through the discrepancy model where student IQs were compared to their level of achievement. However, educators and researchers alike have questioned this model as a means to define and identify students with SLD. The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) includes the use of response to intervention (RtI) as possible alternative to the intelligence-achievement discrepancy for identifying SLD. Core components of RtI include high-quality classroom instruction, universal screening, continuous progress monitoring, research-based interventions, and fidelity of instructional interventions. In Spain, the last publication of *Ley Orgánica 2/2006*, May 3, of Education (LOE) uses the term, Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), in the chapter on students with specific needs of educational support. Some Autonomous Communities in Spain like the Canary Islands region are regulating SLD identification that adds RtI as an option to use in the eligibility process. Nevertheless, this model it is still at an embryonic stage and many issues are unresolved. While no special issue can cover all of these themes and issues, the contributions included in this monograph examine relevant aspects of this approach. Indeed, this special section is an attempt to introduce in Spain an approach that could be an alternative for identifying and intervening with students who have learning disabilities.

*Modelo de Respuesta a la Intervención (RtI): ¿una alternativa prometedora para la identificación de niños con dificultades específicas de aprendizaje?* Hasta hace poco, en los Estados Unidos la forma tradicional de identificar a los estudiantes con dificultades específicas de aprendizaje (DEA) ha sido a través del modelo de discrepancia inteligencia-rendimiento, donde se comparaba la capacidad intelectual del estudiante con su nivel de logro académico. Sin embargo, los educadores e investigadores han cuestionado este modelo como un medio para definir e identificar a los estudiantes con DEA. La reautorización de la Ley de Educación para Individuos con Discapacidades en 2004 (IDEA) incluye el uso de respuesta a la intervención (RtI) como posible alternativa a la discrepancia inteligencia-rendimiento para la identificación de DEA. Los componentes fundamentales del modelo RtI se refieren a una instrucción de alta calidad, cribaje universal, control del progreso de aprendizaje, intervención basada en la investigación y rigor en la implementación. En España, la última publicación de la Ley Orgánica 2/2006, 3 de mayo, de Educación (LOE) utiliza el término dificultades específicas de aprendizaje (DEA) en el capítulo sobre los alumnos con necesidades específicas de apoyo educativo. Algunas comunidades autónomas en España, como la región de las Islas Canarias, están regulando criterios para la identificación de DEA que añaden RtI como una opción para determinar si el alumno es o no elegible para educación especial. Sin embargo, este modelo se encuentra todavía en una fase embrionaria y son muchos los temas aún sin resolver. Si bien resulta difícil que una monografía pueda abarcar todos estos temas y cuestiones, las contribuciones que han sido seleccionadas examinan los aspectos relevantes de este enfoque. Además, esta sección especial es un intento de introducir en España un enfoque que podría ser una alternativa para identificar e intervenir a los estudiantes que tienen dificultades específicas de aprendizaje.

no longer have to «wait to fail» to receive help, it may prevent the over-identification of students for special education, and assessments that help educators plan instruction. Therefore, this model is gaining acceptance in the special education community.

In EEUU, the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act made, for the first time, the use of response to intervention acceptable as an alternative means of identifying students with specific learning disabilities (SLD). As a result of this legislation, many states have begun to quickly move toward implementation of some form of RtI (Berkeley, Bender, Gregg, & Saunders, 2009). Special educational needs or learning disabilities in Spain, as in some other European countries such as the United Kingdom (McLaughlin et al., 2006), are identified when a pupil does not learn in the ordinary classroom setting and the teacher observes a difference between that pupil and the rest of the class's attainment regarding learning in subjects like reading, writing, and arithmetic that should have been achieved according to age or grade. The identification of learning disabilities is made regardless of whether this difficulty is caused by sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance, extrinsic influences such as cultural differences, or insufficient or inappropriate instruction. Recently, however, the last publication of *Ley Orgánica 2/2006*, May 3, of Education (LOE) uses the term, Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), in the chapter on students with specific needs of educational support. In spite of this, there is no clear definition about SLD (Jiménez & Hernández-Valle, 1999) but some Autonomous Communities in Spain like the Canary Islands region are regulating SLD identification that adds RtI as an option to use in the eligibility process.

Nevertheless, this model it is still at an embryonic stage and many issues are unresolved. While no special issue can cover all of these themes and issues, the contributions included in this monograph examine relevant aspects of this approach. Indeed, this special section is an attempt to introduce in Spain an approach that could be an alternative for identifying and intervening with students who have learning disabilities.

The first two papers in this special issue provide empirical evidence about the effectiveness of the RtI model for Spanish monolingual at-risk readers as well as second-language learners. The article by J.E. Jiménez, C. Rodríguez, P. Crespo, D. González, C. Artilles and M. Afonso (2010) is a study designed to test the effectiveness of the implementation of a second tier intervention within the context of RtI for Spanish at-risk readers in the region of the Canary Islands (Spain). This study is an example of a collaboration between Canarian Universities and the Department of Education of the Canary Islands. Results indicated that children who received a second tier intervention using the PREDEA curriculum had higher scores on initial sound identification, listening comprehension, letter sound knowledge and oral reading fluency tasks compared to the control group. Therefore, the authors conclude that response to intervention would be an effective and valid approach to improve cognitive skills and reading skills in Spanish-speaking children who may be at-risk for long-term reading difficulties when learning to read in Spanish. This pilot experience demonstrates that the RtI model is a viable model that can be effectively implemented in Spanish-speaking countries and it is an alternative to expensive and resource intensive approaches. Based on the results of this study, the Department of Education of the Canarian Government has adopted RtI or tiered intervention policies as a common practice serving all students. More than

one hundred schools are currently implementing the RtI model in the Canary Islands, a welcome shift from the wait-to-fail model historically favored in educational responses to struggling readers. In the second paper written by O. Lipka and L.S. Siegel (2010) a longitudinal research is presented where the RtI model targeted the entire student population, including English language learners (ELLs) in the North Vancouver school district in Canada. Students who entered the school system in their kindergarten year were followed until Grade 7. ELLs came from a variety of linguistic backgrounds that included Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Farsi and Spanish. A number of children with reading problems decreased significantly as a result of the RtI approach.

The disproportionate representation of ELLs in special education, particularly Spanish-speaking English-language learners, has been a long-standing concern in the United States and it is examined in the next three papers. A. J. Artilles and E. B. Kosleski (2010) examine the potential of RtI models to improve educational opportunities for culturally and linguistically diverse students and to reduce their disproportionate representation in special education. They adopt a cultural view of development and learning to examine definitions and assumptions embedded in the notions of «response» and «intervention». Therefore, their contribution is an attempt to examine the role of culture in RtI and their implications for identifying and intervening with students at risk for poor learning outcomes. The main argument is that the assumptions of RtI might create blind sides for researchers and practitioners about how to design, assess, and promote learning and instruction, particularly for diverse students. Therefore, they suggest that RtI models should be based on a theory of how culture mediates learning processes. Also, a relevant issue within the context of a Response to Intervention approach is the identification of measures and procedures that screen students as at risk and not at risk for future reading failure. The paper of S. Linan-Thompson (2010) focuses on the current assessment procedures that are used to screen English language learners who might experience reading difficulties. In general, screening measures do not accurately discriminate among ELLs who score poorly due to a learning disability, lack of language proficiency, a language disorder, or lack of educational opportunities and do not take differences in language proficiency and educational opportunities into account. Linan-Thompson also examines different factors that have contributed to the disproportionate representation of ELLs in special education. As an example one of the contributing factors is student's language proficiency because determining the cause of a learning difficulty is challenging when the student has limited English proficiency. Finally, she examines different alternatives for identifying ELLs at risk for reading difficulties. The contribution by D.L. Baker, Y. Park, and S.K. Baker (2010) has also implications for implementing an RtI model in schools teaching Spanish-speaking students to read in Spanish. Their study demonstrates that a substantial percentage of the variance in Spanish reading comprehension at the end of first grade can be explained by Spanish initial status, and growth on pseudoword reading, a measure of the understanding of the alphabetic principle (i.e., the understanding that letters are symbols for sounds and that blending these sounds will help children read words). The main implications of these findings in a Response to intervention approach is that knowing how much growth on pseudoword reading can be expected of a first grader learning to read in Spanish helps educators determine the level of support struggling readers will need to master the alphabetic principle,

a foundational component of beginning reading in alphabetic languages.

Finally, S. Carreker and R.M. Joshi (2010) suggest another model, the Component Model of Reading (CMR) as an alternative to the discrepancy model and RtI. On one hand, they recognize that RtI has the potential to improve student reading achievement; on the other hand, the RtI model fails to consider the multidimensional nature of reading, that is, the cognitive, psychological, and ecological domains that may cause reading difficulties. For this reason, RtI does not seem to be the most promising method for identifying individuals with learning disabilities. Their study presents evidence of the efficacy of the CMR model. Nevertheless, they also indicate that the RtI and the CMR models present limitations because

teachers do not always have sufficient knowledge of literacy-related content to teach reading and spelling effectively. Therefore, they recommend that the body of converging scientific evidence on effective practices of teaching reading and spelling should be available to teachers to build their background knowledge for the effective implementation of the CMR or RtI model. However, to improve educational practices, researchers and practitioners need to take into account teacher's motivation, and previous teaching knowledge and skills.

I hope that you enjoy reading these papers and, even more importantly, I hope that these contributions serve as a spark for stimulating the introduction of new ways to serve to students with learning disabilities in our country.

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