

Foreword

Every day, teachers struggle to determine if an English language learner (ELL) has needs beyond second-language learning and cultural adjustment. With the advent of response to intervention (RtI), schools have come closer to meeting the needs of ELLs. However, because of the popularity of RtI, designed systems of assessment and intervention do not always reflect what we know about second-language and literacy development or offer culturally and linguistically responsive interventions that account for the learner's second-language status. Instead, all too often, these systems were designed for native speakers who are proficient in English and familiar with U.S. cultural norms, values, and life experiences and then applied without any meaningful modifications to ELLs. Caution must be exercised because the decision to refer an ELL to special education services may come as a result of the RtI process. Because of this possibility, each step along the way must be optimally constructed to resolve students' issues within a general education context, ultimately preventing unnecessary and unwarranted referrals or the need for more intensive and costly interventions.

Teachers apply the RtI process because they see that students are not succeeding and they want their students' needs to be met; this is a wonderful motive. However, these systems are usually not constructed for second-language learners or based on the research concerning language and literacy development of second-language learners, and because of this, fail to result in ELL success. This book exposes the myths and inaccurate assumptions behind RtI and referral processes for ELLs and proposes a comprehensive alternative that aids caring educators in reaching their intended goal: responsive, effective, and equitable education for second-language learners.

As someone who has worked in bilingual/cross-cultural special education for over 25 years and knows first hand the complexities involved in the decisions teachers must make for struggling ELLs, this practical, comprehensive, and extremely well-researched book is a welcome addition to educators everywhere.

My primary reason for recommending this guide, however, is not the diagnostic assessment component that takes place through the RtI process, important as that is. Instead it is because the fairest, least-biased, and most valid assessment means nothing without follow-up in the form of delivery of quality educational services, and that is my primary interest in recommending this book. The authors understand what matters in serving learners well and the mechanisms to get there within an RtI framework that takes into account the specific needs of ELLs.

Special Education Considerations for English Language Learners represents the integration of best practice from the fields of bilingual, multicultural, second-language, and special education. Using a research-based approach, it details a step-by-step process for serving all ELLs effectively from the start. Grounded in the paradigm of ecological assessment, the authors identify the essential information that needs to be gathered and the means of gathering that information so that educators can distinguish second-language development and learning difference. They then show practitioners how to deliver responsive interventions to learners.

Else Hamayan, Barbara Marler, Cristina Sánchez-López, and Jack Damico are deeply familiar with each of the seven learner factors that must be addressed. Where they break new ground is in their discussions of physical and psychological factors, previous schooling factors, and cultural and linguistic factors that affect student performance. They offer sound guidance for conducting comprehensive assessments and recommend effective, research-based interventions for at-risk students. This is precisely what has been missing from the field—sound and comprehensive pedagogy for ELLs who are having learning difficulties at each stage of the RtI process.

I highly recommend this volume to school-based, collaborative decision-making, and intervention-focused teams that aim to serve learners fully and well through informed practice. The many useful tools and resources offered for assessment and the templates and instructional guidelines offered to plan responsive interventions will produce satisfactory outcomes for our learners. This welcome resource will engender productive and meaningful conversations among school-based practitioners, and the subsequent actions those professionals take will lead naturally to the delivery of a rich continuum of services for all ELLs throughout the RtI process.

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