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Aligning components of Recognition and Response and Response to Intervention to improve transition to primary school

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Abstract

Children face numerous transitions throughout their school career. Research has demonstrated that early transitions can positively or negatively impact future school performance. Establishing effective models to ensure carryover of instructional strategies and interventions into early elementary school can increase the likelihood children will have a smooth transition to kindergarten from preschool. Response and Recognition (R&R) is a framework for delivering a continuum of instructional strategies and interventions to meet children's' needs at the preschool level. Response to Intervention (RtI) is a framework for implementing a continuum of instructional strategies and interventions to meet children's needs at the K-12 level. The purpose of this paper is to outline the similarities and differences between the R&R and RtI frameworks and to provide recommendations of ways the two frameworks can be used to ensure a smooth transition into primary school.

Aligning Components of Recognition and Response and Response to Intervention
to Improve Transition to Primary School

Children make many transitions throughout their educational careers. For many, the first transition is from a preschool classroom, such as going from Pre-kindergarten (Pre-k) to a kindergarten classroom. Research has demonstrated that the quality of this transition is correlated with performance in the primary grades (kindergarten through 3rd grade) (Yeboah, 2002). Children who do not experience a smooth transition may struggle behaviorally and academically during these years and beyond (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Because experiences in preschool and primary environments can have such a lasting impact on student outcomes, researchers have examined specific ways to improve the transition between these settings.

When the essential components of effective transition from preschool to kindergarten and other primary grades were examined, three areas were found to be of primary importance: (a) continuity and alignment of curriculum and behavioral expectations between early childhood education programs and primary school programs; (b) connections were established between the student and his/her family, school professionals, administrators and community personnel as needed and (c) home, school, and community partnerships supported continuity between settings (Kagan, Carroll, Comer, & Scott-Little, 2006; Kagan & Tarrant, 2010; Mangione & Speth, 1998; Pinata, Cox, & Snow, 2007; Rous & Hallam, 2007). Specifically, when transition planning encourages consistency between early childhood and primary programs in terms of teaching styles, performance expectations, classroom organization and parent involvement, early learning gains can be maintained across settings (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008).

Considerations for maintaining and accelerating the acquisition of skills and behaviors are important for all young children, especially those who struggle to learn. Preschoolers at-risk

for learning difficulties may experience significant transition difficulties without appropriate

supports between the preschool and kindergarten settings (Pinata et al., 2007; Rous, Hallam,

McCormick, & Cox, 2010; Yeboah, 2002). For example, many Pre-k classrooms offer child-

directed learning centers for a large part of the daily session. In contrast kindergarten classrooms

are often more adult-directed and focus more on academic areas (reading, writing and

mathematics). These two factors often result in less time spent in hands-on activities in learning

centers.

When the components for effective transition were examined for preschool students

transitioning to kindergarten, , they were found to be very similar to those identified by

Mangione and Speth (1998) including similar policies, sharing transition information, and

encouraging continuity of services between the two environments. In addition, Wartmann and

Kindergarten (1997) and Yeboah (2002) identified the need to give specific consideration to the

needs of children who struggle to learn and implications to facilitate their transition to

kindergarten. Notably, preschoolers can be assisted to participate in small and large group

lessons similar in structure to what is implemented in kindergarten classrooms.

In recent years, changes in special education law have impacted preschool and primary

school programs. Notably, in the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Improvement Act in 2004 (IDEIA, 2004), an alternative method was included for determining

whether students qualified for special education services under the category of Specific Learning

Disability. This new eligibility process is termed Response to Intervention (RtI). RtI is defined as

the practice of providing high-quality instruction/intervention that is matched to student needs

and uses learning rate over time and level of performance to make important educational

decisions (NASDE, 2005). RtI is also designed to accurately identify students who need special

education services in the specific learning disability category without requiring a significant

discrepancy between intellectual ability and academic achievement.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how the RtI framework can improve the

transition of all students from preschool to primary school.

Response to Intervention

RtI is a framework and service delivery model that, in addition to identifying students in

need of special education services, addresses the learning and behavioral needs of all students in

primary, middle and high school (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008). The framework is comprised

of five primary components: (a) is built on a preventative and proactive approach that includes

screening processes to identify learning and behavioral needs early and corresponding action

planning for implementation of intervention as soon as children's needs are identified; (b)

implemented with a continuum of evidence-based practices to address each child's unique

academic and behavioral needs; (c) uses a problem-solving approach to guide data-based

decision making for all students; (d) ensures instruction and interventions are implemented with

fidelity, and; (e) is implemented using a systems approach impacting all academic and

behavioral areas in schools (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008). Collectively, these components are used

to determine which students' needs would most efficiently be addressed through general

education instruction and which needs would most efficiently be addressed with special

education services. For further information on RtI, please visit the National Center or Response

to Intervention (www.rti4success.com).

Effective RtI frameworks carefully match the instruction provided to each student with

the needs she/he presents. These schools use multiple tiers of instructional options, providing a

continuum of supports to address each student's needs. The instruction provided to all students is

empirically validated and is delivered with fidelity by a trained professional. Student progress is

monitored to determine the effectiveness of instruction and additional, more intensive supports

are provided to better address student's needs if initial instruction is not successful. A meta-

analytic review of the impact of RtI shows a strong, positive impact on student outcomes with

effect sizes averaging over .80 (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). Because of this and other

studies which have demonstrated the positive impact RtI can have on student outcomes (e.g.,

Burns et al., 2005; Gersten et al., 2008; Gersten et al., 2009; Marston, 2005; Speece, Case, &

Molloy, 2003; Vellutino, Scanlon, Small, & Fanule, 2006), the number of schools implementing

RtI has steadily increased (Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007; Spectrum K12, 2010).

As professionals were gaining an understanding of RtI, a framework based on the RtI

framework was being developed to address the needs of preschoolers. Coleman, Buysse and

Neitzel (2006a) proposed a framework focusing on the five components of RtI adjusted for

younger children. Specifically, Recognition and Response offers an integrated assessment and

instruction system which identifies and provides interventions for young children who require

additional supports before kindergarten entry.

Recognition and Response

In the years following the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, the law in which the RtI

system was introduced, a similar system of identifying and providing interventions to at-risk

learners, called Recognition and Response (R&R), was developed for preschoolers. R&R is an

early childhood system based the RtI model. It is used to identify and remediate early learning

difficulties at the preschool level (Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010; Coleman, Buysse &

Neitzel, 2006b). The R&R framework underscores the importance of identifying young children

with developmental delays that negatively impact performance in kindergarten, linking screening

and assessment with interventions to determine each child's progress and ongoing program

improvement through high quality instruction and targeted, specialized interventions. R&R,

similarly to RtI, also promotes the use of research-based screening, assessment and progress

monitoring practices. The framework's problem solving focus is within the context of

implementation of empirically valid curriculum and interventions (Bayat, Mindes, & Covitt,

2010; Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010).

Specifically, the **_Recognition_** component of R&R involves universal screening of all

preschoolers and progress monitoring of those who require additional supports and interventions

for learning. The **_Response_** component focuses on implementation of an effective core

curriculum, intentional teaching (Epstein, 2007; Slavin, 2000) and targeted interventions for

preschoolers who require them. The R&R framework also emphasizes the selection and use of

strategies to ensure successful outcomes (Buysse & Peisner-Feinberg, 2010). Preliminary results

indicate positive outcomes related to developmental gains from the use of evidence-based

interventions with preschool-aged children (Milbourne & Campbell, 2007; Sandall & Schwartz,

2008). For more information about R&R, please visit www.recognitionandresponse.org.

An important development in R&R is the recent draft statement entitled: *Frameworks for

Response to Intervention in Early Childhood Education: Description and Implications* developed

by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC), National Head Start Association (NHSA) and

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Together, these key early

childhood organizations emphasize the importance of instructional support to promote skills

necessary for school success. In large part, this joint conceptualization draws from the RtI

framework but it is rooted within the context of preschool-aged children. Both describe a tiered

instructional approach, data-based decision making and collaborative problem solving. R&R, as

evidenced in the draft statement, is distinct in its emphasis on the provision of developmentally

appropriate instruction and progress monitoring (see

http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/RtI_in_ECE_Frameworks_DRAFT_FOR_REVIEW_6-27-

12.pdf).

Similarities of R&R and RtI

R&R and RtI share a number of similarities (Barnett, Daly, Jones & Lentz, 2004; Bayat

et al., 2010; Coleman et al., 2006; Fox, Carta, Strain, Dunlap, & Hemmeter, 2010; Fuchs &

Fuchs, 2006; Fuchs, Mock, Morgan & Young, 2003). Each employs a continuum of

interventions and screening and assessment tools used alone or in combination to provide

evidence-based interventions and ongoing progress monitoring of children's acquisition and

mastery of critical skills. The list below further delineates the similarities of the two

frameworks:

a) Universal screening tools are used to identify children who may benefit from additional

supports at the beginning of the school year. Based on screening results, children who

demonstrate potential for learning and/or behavioral difficulties receive supports in

addition to the core curriculum (see description of Tiers 2 and 3 of RtI and R&R below).

b)   Teachers provide instruction from an age/grade level curriculum using evidence-based

instructional strategies. This is referred to as Tier 1/Universal instruction across R&R and

RtI. This high quality, evidence-based instruction, when delivered appropriately, is

effective for approximately 80% of students to achieve age or grade level proficiency.

Students identified as needing support via results of universal screening are provided

evidence-based supports that can be incorporated within the core curriculum.

c) Progress monitoring is ongoing for all children. Children who do not receive instructional or intervention support beyond the core instruction will have their progress monitored at least two additional times during the school year after the initial screening, usually sometime in the late fall or winter and later in the spring. Students who receive specialized intervention support in addition to the core instruction will have their progress monitored more frequently, depending on the intensity of the intervention being provided. Monitoring is more frequent as interventions become more intensive.

d) Students who are not able to master age/grade level skills at a sufficient rate while receiving Tier 1/Universal instruction, as demonstrated by progress monitoring, receive Tier 2/Targeted intervention. For Tier 2, teachers provide strategic support for approximately 15-20% of students by providing small-group interventions and embedding specific skills into instructional activities. Students receiving support at this level have their progress monitored a minimum of twice per month.

e) Students who do not demonstrate sufficient improvement while receiving Tier 2 interventions receive Tier 3/Intensive level interventions. At the Tier 3 level, teachers provide intensive interventions to develop specific skills, either individually or in groups of two to three students. In addition, progress monitoring occurs weekly. Approximately 5% of students require Tier 3 interventions to master age/grade level curriculum. Tier 2 and 3 interventions may be offered simultaneously.

f) Establishing family, school, and community partnerships is important in both the R&R and RtI frameworks. Engaging families in early discussions regarding their child's specific needs and strengths helps to demonstrate that their input is valuable and can inform the problem solving process about what may help their child be successful in

school. It also provides an opportunity for schools to make suggestions to the family for

engaging their child in learning activities beyond school hours. Finally, it provides the

opportunity to discuss potential community resources the family may access to address

the needs of their child.

Alignment in Action

The considerable similarities between R&R and RtI demonstrate the potential for

utilization of the frameworks to smooth the transition from Pre-k to kindergarten. These

similarities include the use of successively more focused academic and behavioral support,

interventions coupled with frequent progress monitoring, and developing family and community

partnerships. These frameworks have comparable emphases and potential for positive outcomes

for young children at-risk for academic difficulties. While it is important to indentify these

similarities, it is equally important to see where merging of these two frameworks is already

being implemented.

[Insert Figure 1 Here]

One of the primary components shared by both the R&R and RtI frameworks, currently

implemented in preschool and K-12 school settings, is the ongoing development and

implementation of effective assessment systems. Specifically, the collection and sharing of key

assessment data between school staff, as well as, parents is recommended (Coleman et al., 2006;

Jimerson, Burns, & VanDerHeyden, 2007). Importantly, both the R&R and RtI frameworks

depend on data to guide decision making to meet the unique needs of children, improve the

quality of programs and increase access to academic and behavioral supports.

There is evidence of implementation of assessment systems in the K-12 framework (e.g.,

Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007) and efforts with the preschool population targeted

in R&R (e.g., Missall, & McConnell, 2010). The Institute of Education Sciences encouraged

such merging and implementation of early childhood and K-12 data systems through their

Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems (SLDS) grant program (Institute of Education Sciences,

2012). Since 2007, this program has provided significant funding to states that choose to

develop data systems that focus on linking early care and education with K-12.

Efforts to coordinate assessment systems, a key component within both RtI and R&R,

have also been implemented in early childhood settings. The Early Childhood Data Collaborative

(2010) established 10 fundamentals to guide coordination of early childhood and K-12 data

systems:

a) Unique statewide child identifier;

b) Child-level demographic and program participation information;

c) Child level data on development;

d) Ability to link child-level data with K-12 and other key data systems;

e) Unique program site identifier with the ability to link with children and the early

care and education workforce;

f) Program site data on structure, quality, and the work environment;

g) Unique early care and education identifier with the ability to link program sites

and children;

h) Individual early care and education workforce demographics, educator, and

professional development information;

i) State governance body to manage data collection and use;

j) Transparent privacy protection and security practices and policies.

Items c (Child level data on development) and d (Ability to link child-level data with K-12 and other key data systems) appear to have the greatest potential for creating a smooth transition from early childhood education programs to kindergarten. Having a system in place in which the academic development of children is monitored over time using reliable and valid assessment tools is a critical component of both the R&R and RtI frameworks. Having a data system implemented that ensures the use of common assessment tools and provides a systematic method for sharing information from the preschool level with the K-12 system ensures educators who work with a child from preschool through the elementary school years, or longer, will base decisions on quality, longitudinal data.

A review of 2010 IES SLDS grantees shows that of the 20 states who received funding, six had developed or were developing a data system that included child-level data on development and 14 had developed or were developing a system with the ability to link child-level data with K-12 data systems (The Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2010). This demonstrates a clear movement toward a combined data collection and management system that will inform educators at the preschool and K-12 levels. Merging this key component of both R&R and RtI, with a similar desire to help all children achieve successful academic outcomes, will meet the needs of more children and provide consistency of supports as they transition to kindergarten.

Potential Positive Child Outcomes from Alignment of R&R and RtI

Alignment of R&R and RtI frameworks will help both preschool and primary school teachers better meet the needs of their students. Having alignment of assessment information in preschool and K-12 is critical to successful transition from an R&R system to an RtI system.

However, this assessment information is only of value if it is used to determine the most efficient instructional strategies or interventions to meet a child's needs.

Research has demonstrated that quality early intervention is strongly linked to positive K-12 school outcomes (Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling, & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Reynolds, 2003; Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001). However, there is potential for "fade out" of these initial positive outcomes due to lack of support in K-12 schools after a child's receipt of early support (Currie & Thomas, 2000; Lee & Loeb, 1995). The authors point to a lack of continuity in instructional and/or intervention implementation in the primary years after a child's transition from preschool. A review of programs that have attempted to overcome this lack of continuity reveals mixed results (The Early Childhood Data Collaborative, 2010). A key finding of this review was that in programs, in which the school was the primary delivery system for early and extended childhood interventions, had better continuity of services and significant positive student outcomes in reading and math. This demonstrates the impact that R&R and RtI programs, both with highly coordinated, tiered intervention systems, can have on the learning outcomes for students transitioning from preschool to kindergarten.

[Insert Box 1 Here]

Recommendations

R&R and RtI components can be used effectively to increase positive academic and behavioral outcomes, as well as improve transition from early childhood programs to K-3 school settings for all students. Table 1 provides recommendations for alignment of R&R and RtI to ensure effective transitions to kindergarten for all children including those who struggle to learn.

[Insert Table 1 Here]

Focusing efforts to align R&R and RtI assists professionals to understand the roles and responsibilities related to each model. Of particular importance is the emphasis on teachers and administrators. Administrators have the ability to impact policy change and reinforce the efforts of those who effectively put these policies into action. Teachers have the ability to follow through with implementation of effective RtI and R&R practices, using data to guide educational decisions and implementing evidence-based practices with fidelity to ensure the highest likelihood for positive impact on child outcomes. Further, both frameworks include and benefit from parental input throughout. Knowing how these frameworks impact the child and their parents allows a complete understanding of the complexity of coordinating these two systems and allows for planning and implementation efforts to bring these efforts to fruition.

A key difference between the RtI an R&R frameworks that needs to be addressed to ensure a smooth transition for all children relates to academic programming. R&R largely focuses on developmental and pre-academic skills aimed at changing developmental trajectories. RtI focuses on core academic skills in reading and math. While addressing behavior is often a function of RtI, most primary grade classrooms focus on academic skill development (Justice, 2006). When students who struggle to learn leave the preschool environment, they may need continued Tier 2 and 3 interventions focusing on the same developmental and pre-academic skills in the primary school environment. The primary school system and its teachers need to be equipped to provide those interventions to maintain fidelity across environments, which, in turn, increase the likelihood of a smooth transition and successful child outcomes.

Because parents spend significantly more time with their children than their children's teachers, building effective partnerships between schools and families is essential. Families can provide information related to detailed background information, learning and behavioral

outcomes outside of the school environment, unique family dynamics that may impact learning

and input into their child's strengths and needs. R&R and RtI emphasize fostering and

maintaining family and school partnerships. Preschools and primary schools need to continue to

find ways to encourage parental involvement and provide multiple opportunities to educate

families about the frameworks (e.g., Mangione, & Speth, 1998).

There is also a concomitant need for training of preschool and primary grade

professionals to learn about the RtI and R&R frameworks and their implementation (Brownell,

Sindelar, Kiely, & Danielson, 2010). This is necessary at the pre-service preparation and

professional development levels. Familiarization with evidence-based curricula, appropriate

screening and assessment instruments as well as specialized pre-academic, academic and

behavioral interventions is required. There must also be an emphasis on collaboration and

problem solving within Tiers 2 and 3 across both frameworks. Efforts to provide this instruction

must also be ongoing and linked to application in classroom settings.

[Insert Box 2 Here]

Conclusion

The purpose of this manuscript was to detail the potential benefits of coordinated R&R

and RtI frameworks and to provide guidance to improve transition from preschool to primary

school for all students. The R&R and RtI frameworks, when implemented with fidelity, have

demonstrated potential to positively impact outcomes for children in preschool, kindergarten and

the primary grades.

Research on transition between preschool and kindergarten suggests a need for continuity

of services to ensure success. This has shown to be especially true for students who struggle to

learn. While districts are working to fully implement R&R and RtI frameworks in their preschool

and primary schools, the 18 recommendations detailed in Table 1, can be used to ensure their preschool and primary school systems are coordinated and, thus, better prepared to meet the needs of all learners.

Transition for students is also improved where there is an increased connection between faculty and staff of preschools and primary schools. Barnett and colleagues (2004) note "Decisions need to be made in the context and setting of a child's school by persons who are knowledgeable about children, resources, and issues of how to analyze the amount of effort and intensity required to accelerate the child's academic performance or sustain appropriate behavior" (p. 77). Providing linked training opportunities in R&R and RtI models along with time allocated to have faculty and staff from both the preschool and primary school meet and discuss specific transition plans for students provides a way to improve transition and learning outcomes for all students.

Supporting the connection between the student's home and the community also helps improve the transition from preschool to primary school. Developing and nurturing family and school partnerships will provide an opportunity for sharing information about options that are available to families within the community. In addition, these relationships also allow meeting time, space, and, when needed, mediation for improved connection between the available community resources and the families involved.

The recommendations provided here are intended to increase continuity of services for all students including those who struggle to learn during their early classroom experiences. We encourage further research to examine the impact on the behavior and academic skills as a result of such coordinated R&R and RtI frameworks to continue efforts to document effective and efficient educational practices to improve outcomes for all children.

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Table 1. Recommendations for Aligning Components of R&R and RtI

Child	• Regularly screen with age-appropriate, universal instruments
	• Provide Tier 1 supports (e.g., evidence-based curriculum)
	• Assist to meet pre-academic/academic, social and behavioral expectations
	• Provide support at Tiers 2 and 3 in R&R and RtI
Parents	• Provide training regarding R&R and RtI models
	• Provide information and strategies to encourage carry-over of new skills to home (e.g., one-to-one correspondence, basic computational skills)
	• Encourage participation in problem solving and decision making as appropriate
Teachers	• Utilize evidence-based literacy/reading and numeracy/math curricula
	• Use an integrated assessment system to ensure alignment of progress monitoring and decision making
	• Participate in ongoing communication between preschool and primary school settings
	• Participate in professional development activities related to R&R and RtI (e.g., evidence-based literacy interventions)
	• Encourage parent involvement in the classroom as part of the R&R and RtI team
	• Communicate with parents with young children involved in Tiers 2 and 3of R&R and RtI
	• Work closely with other staff members involved in R&R and RtI (e.g., Reading Specialist, paraeducators)
Administrators	• Promote district-wide adoption of R&R and RtI models to ensure effective and efficient implementation
	• Align district curriculum and policies so preschool and school age expectations are aligned and understandable to parents and professionals
	• Support meetings between preschool and primary school teachers to discuss alignment of R&R and RtI efforts
	• Support professional development opportunities for district teachers and other staff members (e.g., Reading Specialist, aides)

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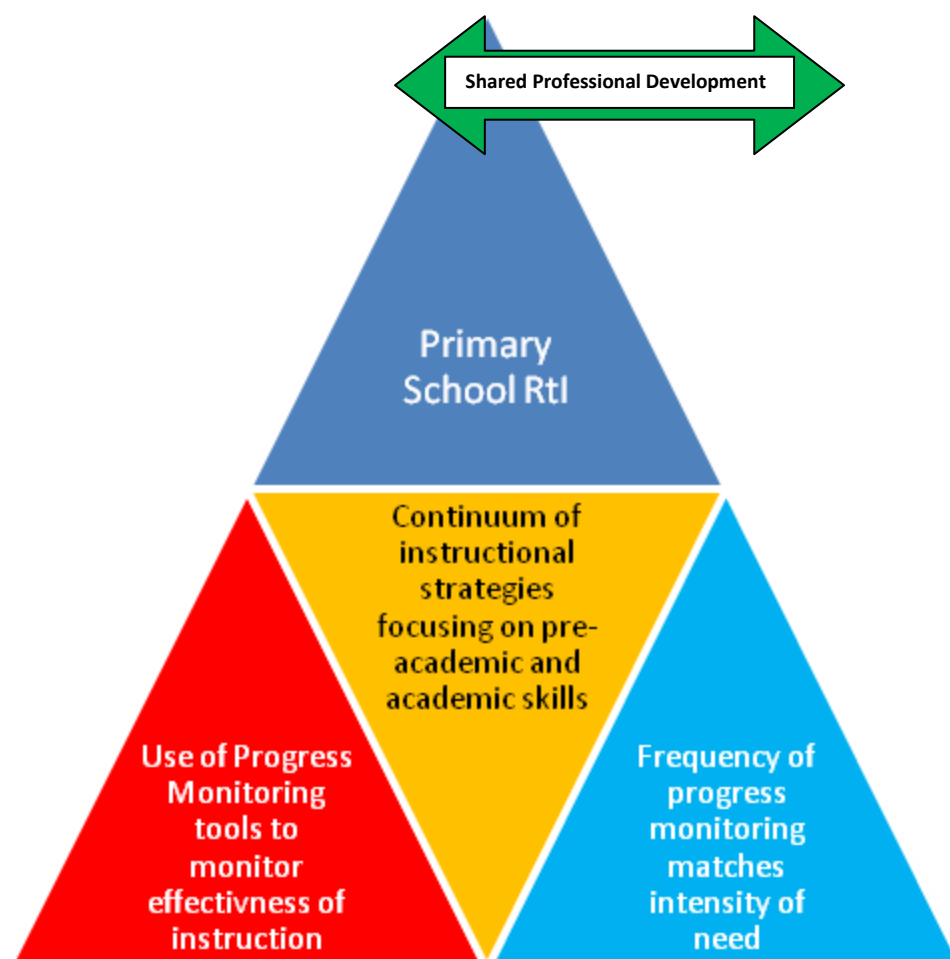51
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Box 1. Positive Outcomes from Aligned R&R and RtI Frameworks across Preschool and Primary School
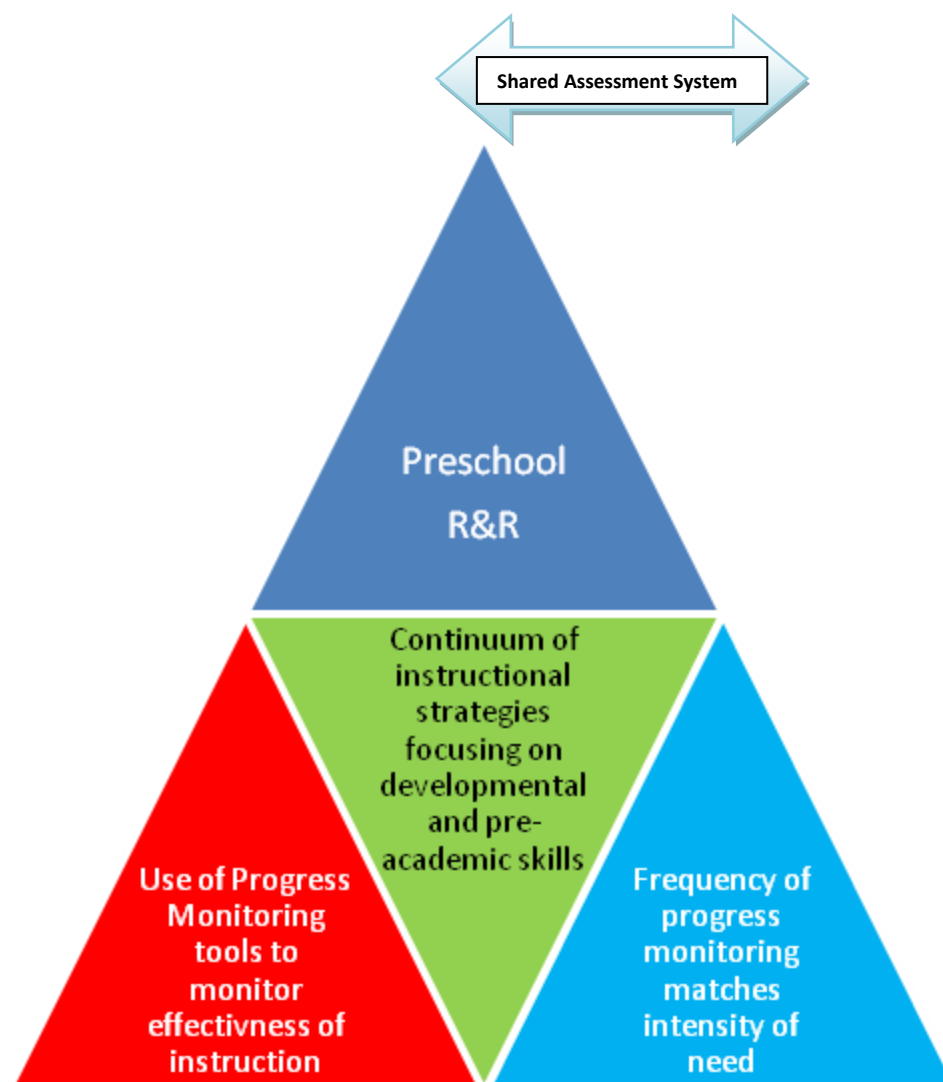
1. Better informed decision making when data is gathered and shared

2. Better integration of tiered instruction and interventions across settings

3. Increased positive child outcomes for more students

Box 2. Keys to Improving Young Children's Transition from R&R to RtI

1. Implement a system for gathering and using data across Pre-k and kindergarten

2. Have similar instructional and intervention options available across R&R and RtI as well as staff available who have been trained to implement tiered instruction and interventions with fidelity

3. Develop systems for engaging families and developing partnerships to inform the problem-solving process.

4. Provide opportunities for Pre-k staff to attend professional development trainings with kindergarten staff to encourage and ensure similar systems across environments.

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Figure 1. Graphic Representation of R&R and RtI Frameworks

Shared Assessment System

Preschool

R&R

Continuum of
instructional
strategies
focusing on
developmental
and pre-
academic skills

Use of Progress
Monitoring
tools to
monitor
effectivness of
instruction

Frequency of
progress
monitoring
matches
intensity of
need