

RTI and the Common Core Standards: Building Skill and Knowledge

By William G. Brozo, Ph.D.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative and Response to Intervention (RTI) are two new and important influences on the ways secondary classroom teachers meet the reading and learning needs of all students. The standards specify that students read increasingly complex texts so they build knowledge and skill. The goal of RTI is to employ responsive instructional practices for each student to prevent reading and learning difficulties (Brozo, 2011). *Prentice Hall Literature* is leading the way with effective instructional guidelines and practices for teachers consistent with the Common Core Standards and RTI.

It is difficult to deny that many U.S. middle and high school students are in need of special literacy supports. Taken together, these facts make a compelling case for revamping our English/Language Arts standards and instituting responsive literacy instruction for all students.

- Approximately two-thirds of 8th and 12th grade students read at less than the “proficient” level on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009)
- Nearly 32% of high school graduates are not adequately prepared for college-level English composition courses (ACT, 2005)
- Approximately 40% of high school graduates lack the literacy skills employers seek (National Education Summit on High Schools, 2005)
- About 1.2 million students drop out annually, and their literacy skills are lower than most industrialized nations (Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007; OECD, 2001)
- On international reading literacy assessments, African-American and Hispanic youth have scores that rival some of the lowest performing countries in the world (Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelczar, & Shelley, 2010; OECD, 2010).

RTI is an approach that doesn’t “wait for students to fail.” Instead, students are monitored frequently to improve the chances of early detection of those needing extra reading and learning supports (Marshall, 2006; Mellard & Johnson, 2008). Without this information teachers would not know the type and intensity of instruction struggling students would need. *Prentice Hall Literature* includes diagnostic tests, benchmark tests, as well as book and selection assessments to determine students’ needs and track their progress.



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The goal of RTI is to address the reading and learning needs of all students within the most supportive contexts schools can offer (Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2005; Daly, et. al., 2007; Johnson, Mellard, Fuchs, & McKnight, 2006). To meet this goal, students are provided differentiated and research-based instruction with increasingly intense and targeted supports (Bender & Shores, 2007; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, & Hickman, 2003).

These supports often come in the form of tiers. For example, tier 1 represents instruction and services available to all students, generally provided at the classroom level. The second tier targets short-term instruction for small groups of students who need extra help. Instruction for select groups of students may occur within and/or outside the classroom. The third tier represents the most intensive level of instruction and is usually provided in a one-to-one context. Students receive different types of support depending on how they respond to instruction at any one tier. Furthermore, interventions are cumulative, so an especially needy student may be receiving supports at all three tiers simultaneously. *Prentice Hall Literature* provides resources for meeting the varying levels of support students may need, including whole class skill development, special selection-level supports, and engaging enrichment activities.

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) has refocused attention on the goal of ensuring all adolescents are prepared for the reading and learning demands of higher education and the new global economy. Citing the failure of traditional reading

schemes to leaven achievement of children and youth in the United States—as evidenced by flat trend lines on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and a slipping in rank on international assessments—common core proponents assert that prevailing literacy curriculum needs to shift from a focus on developing reading skills and building fluency with simple narratives toward reading and writing to gain knowledge and express new understandings with complex text. Even the title of the common core English language arts standards for grades 6–12 makes clear this significant shift in emphasis: “Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects” (CCSSI, 2010).

Prentice Hall Literature ensures students have engaging and meaningful experiences with texts from a range of genres, including informational, biography, letters, speeches, and essays.

To achieve this goal, there must be an emphasis in secondary English/ language arts on developing independent skills and strategies so students can build knowledge through reading of increasingly complex

text. This new focus on literacy in the service of learning is defended on the grounds that building “a foundation of knowledge... will give [students] the background to be better readers in all...areas” (CCSSI, 2010, p.2). At least four decades of research in reading comprehension support this premise underlying the English/language arts Common Core Standards (Pearson, Kamil, Afflerbach, & Moje, 2011). *Prentice Hall Literature* helps students acquire and apply independent skills and strategies to the reading of increasingly complex fiction and nonfiction texts.

Research shows that successful reading involves the orchestration of skills and knowledge. Building a foundation of knowledge through reading a variety of genres gives students the background to be better readers. At the same time, teaching

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students the necessary skills to make meaning from these texts will help them become independent readers. *Prentice Hall Literature* balances students' skill development with exposure to texts of increasing complexity and variety.

Skillful teachers who offer the right texts in the right ways will ensure each student gains knowledge, expresses new understandings, and progresses as a reader and learner.

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