Introduction

The year is 1979. A third-grade teacher requests a meeting with parents of one of her students one day in October. The teacher is concerned about Kathryn. It seems Kathryn is not keeping up with the other students in third grade. Kathryn struggles with both her reading and her math. She is in the lowest reading group. The teacher keeps Kathryn in from recess for two days a week to provide her with extra time to work more slowly and more carefully. Kathryn also stays after school for extra help three days a week. The extra help she receives is based on materials that come with the reading textbooks designed to provide additional practice for struggling students. Kathryn's parents meet with the teacher and are asked to help Kathryn with her math facts using flash cards.

The teacher in this scenario was working to meet Kathryn's needs. She was using strategies and materials that she had available to her, which included the parents in supporting Kathryn's learning. Some of those elements still exist in our classrooms today. Over time, educators have addressed concerns about students with their parents. Teachers have always worked to help struggling learners. However, we have learned to approach these situations differently. Now we extend our reach to resources that exist beyond the classroom and the textbook. We collaborate with multiple professionals to consider nontraditional options. Most important, we use data to make instructional decisions and use what we know from research to select approaches to assist students.

The year is now 2011. A third-grade teacher requests a meeting to discuss Rebecca, a student about whom she has concerns. She invites a fourth-grade teacher, a teacher of gifted students, an administrator, a guidance counselor, the parents, and the teacher this student had in second grade. At this meeting she expresses concerns about her ability to challenge Rebecca. Rebecca is very bright and already knows content far beyond the third-grade curricular standards. The teacher reflects this by sharing results from Rebecca's universal screening measures along with the benchmark assessment data and standardized testing results from the past. She asks the second-grade teacher for suggestions of how to meet Rebecca's need for more challenge based on what the

teacher did for Rebecca last year. She asks the teacher of gifted students and the fourth-grade teacher for suggestions or options to provide more challenge. The administrator suggests that Rebecca attend reading in the fourth-grade class and that the teacher of gifted students pursue an evaluation and determine how Rebecca could be challenged in a program for gifted and talented students.

In the same class with Rebecca is Jerry. Jerry has been struggling in reading for the past few years. His DIBELS scores, benchmark assessments scores, and standardized results all put him in the bottom quartile for reading performance. Again, the third-grade teacher calls a meeting with some key stakeholders, including Jerry's parents. The teacher is already working with Jerry before school three days a week, and he is getting additional reading instruction that is specific to the areas of weakness as shown by his assessments. Jerry's parents are working with him at home using a research-based software program. The reading specialist suggests she work with Jerry for 30 minutes two times a week. She will implement some specialized approaches after completing a diagnostic assessment. The third-grade teacher and she will both collect data to see whether there is evidence of any improvement over the next five weeks of this trial.

Good teaching is and has always been good teaching. A teacher who cares and does what it takes to meet the needs of each student as an individual will always be a good teacher. These elements have been the same for as long as our educational system has existed. However, educational policies, practices, and processes have changed over time, and research has focused on creating more systematic approaches to curriculum and instruction. Two components that have evolved into education as we know it today are differentiated instruction (DI) and Response to Intervention/Instruction (RTI). Together, they ensure that there are no students who fall through the cracks and whose education needs are overlooked.

DI and RTI aim to meet the needs of all learners. They are supports for each other, with a common goal. They are not parallel initiatives on separate tracks but more of a marriage, where one and one become more than two. They are two separate frameworks and practices while being meshed and woven together. In some ways they look the same in a classroom; however, each brings certain characteristics that strengthen the other. Most important, both have the same intent—to provide and foster a system in which students are challenged and supported in reaching their highest potential as students and lifelong learners.

This book is intended to examine these two topics and their relationship to each other from the eyes of the classroom teacher. There are vast implications for these initiatives, many of which fall onto the shoulders of the classroom teacher. This book provides the classroom teacher with direct, clear, and practical strategies and systems to help the teacher simultaneously implement DI and RTI in a practical "how-to" format. It examines the two frameworks and practices in relationship to all learners—with

and without labels. It includes those in general education, those in English language learner programs, those in special education programs, and even those in gifted programs.

Part I of this book begins by clarifying the definitions and implementation practices involved with both DI and RTI. After establishing a clear definition of RTI, Chapter 1 presents the definitions and practices related to the approach. It also addresses the critical principles of RTI and then addresses some implications of the possible changes in practices that may result from the research. Then, Chapter 2 examines DI, along with the 10-step process of differentiation. In Chapter 3, RTI and DI are merged together to examine commonalities and differences.

Part II is dedicated to Tier 1 of the RTI model. Because this tier impacts all teachers, it receives the most attention. Tier 1 represents the core instruction that is provided by the classroom teacher. This is the stage at which DI first takes place. Chapters 4–6 look at what happens in the classroom with regard to instruction, assessment, and the environment. Each of those components contains elements of both RTI and DI; they are intertwined throughout. This part of the book examines what goes on in the classroom to effectively implement both practices. Since the framework of RTI is more definitive, it is the structure used as the skeleton for discussing both, although each is as important as the other.

In Part III, Tiers 2 and 3 are addressed through the eyes of the classroom teacher. Therefore, the chapters in this section are not about how to establish a schoolwide system for providing the supports and services at these tiers. Instead, these chapters address how a teacher within a classroom can best provide services and collaborate with others to recruit supports and services at Tiers 2 and 3. The tiers are not addressed in terms of systems and processes, but instead in terms of practices and implications. Strategies and methods of curriculum, instruction, and environmental supports as well as accommodations are all considered. Practices of data collection and methods of determining the data to collect are addressed. The emphasis is on what to do to support students within the system and how to implement differentiation and interventions rather than the systems themselves. Finally, the problem-solving team is addressed again through the eyes of a classroom teacher. This includes what to expect and how to prepare information to share with the team.

The book is designed to bring research and theory to life in the classroom. RTI and DI are not about completing forms or lesson plans. They are practices that may involve those actions, but they are done as a means to an end rather than the end in itself. Examples and practical suggestions are provided to illustrate and support implementation. The forms included are suggested aspects to be considered as school districts create their own personalized forms and protocols.

Each chapter concludes with questions to consider. These are designed for both self-reflection and professional discussion. They provide a venue

for further investigation or consideration. They are not intended to be a quiz, but rather a means of encouraging deeper conversations at the application level. The intent is to guide possible next steps to move forward and grow professionally. After all, that is the intent of the entire work!

I hope you enjoy this journey through this exploration of RTI and DI. As a teacher, you will be able to see glimpses of your classroom in the examples and ideas. You will see how your efforts to meet the many needs of students are aligned to these larger frameworks. You will gain insights regarding your classroom and your practices. You may discover answers to old questions and develop brand-new questions as well. And you will receive affirmation that good teaching practices that discerningly meet the needs of students as individuals will continue to be the best teaching practices.