

***Challenges Facing the Field Of Learning Disabilities***  
**National SEA Conference on SLD Determination**  
**Kansas City, MO**  
**April 19-21,2006**

Daniel P. Hallahan

**Refining RTI as a Component of SLD Determination**

- A. *RTI Need Not be the Only Method Used*
  - a. Multiple criteria improve the accuracy of identification decisions.
  - b. Need to consider processing deficits, the exclusion clause, and ability-achievement discrepancy.
- B. *Getting services versus Disability Determination*
  - a. Getting special education services is different from disability determination.
  - b. Narrow focus of providing services to students means that equity, accuracy, and consistency of LD determination may vary.
- C. *Issues of Training*
  - a. RTI will require an entirely different orientation to identification and an entirely new set of skills.
  - b. Are special education teachers, school psychologists, and general education teachers ready for the change?
  - c. Only 10% of reading instruction provided by general education teachers is what research shows to be the most effective grouping procedure (i.e., same-ability, small group reading instruction).
- D. *Treatment Fidelity*
  - a. Virtually no data exist on treatment fidelity and RTI.
  - b. RTI requires an extremely high degree of oversight.
- E. *Scaling Up*
  - a. When RTI goes to scale how can we ensure adequate oversight?
  - b. How can we ensure that teachers will be provided the degree of consultation and support necessary to make RTI work?

- c. Scaling up takes time – may take years before we can be confident that RTI is universally in place.

F. *Technical Issues with RTI*

- a. What method should we use to decide whether a student has been responsive to instruction?
  - i. Achievement growth or criterion level?
- b. How intensive should the “I” be in RTI?
  - i. Too intensive is expensive.
  - ii. May give the false impression that the student doesn’t need special education.
- c. Need more research on what happens to students who are responsive to treatment, and thus no longer receive supplemental instruction.

G. *Potential Loss of Intensive Instruction*

- a. The field has lost sight of how important it is that students receive intensive, relentless, iterative, individualized instruction that depends on categorical approach to service delivery.
- b. In danger losing the “special” in special education.
- c. Instead of focusing our resources on instruction; we’ve been focusing on:
  - i. Where instruction takes place - inclusion is fine as long as the student’s needs are being met.
    - 1. For many students, general education does not offer the intensive, individualized instruction they need.
  - ii. Who delivers the instruction: general education vs. special education
    - 1. Increased popularity of co-teaching in general education classroom
      - a. Successful co-teaching requires: Two teachers trained in the model, the two teachers have time set aside for planning, the teachers forge a special

relationship with special educator playing a strong instructional role.

2. Why can't special education teachers in special education settings provide instruction in the general education curriculum?
  3. Aren't there some students with LD for whom the general education curriculum is *not* appropriate?
    - a. Some students need to learn independent living skills and need vocational services
- iii. Pushing for non-categorical licensure.
1. Now there is no longer a category for mild MR – many LD students today would be mild MR
  2. More students who would be E/BD are being identified as LD

## Conclusion

- A. Need to understand how serious it is to have a learning disability
- B. There has been a major cultural shift in what it means to be an LD teacher.
  - a. Very little of job actually involves teaching
- C. Dilemma of Difference:
  - a. To recognize difference carries risk of labeling and stigmatizing students
  - b. To ignore difference runs the risk of neglecting student's instructional needs
- D. Cannot ignore the differences students with LD exhibit
  - a. Need to work toward reducing differences through intensive instruction
- E. Less focus on *where* and *when* instruction takes place
- F. More focus on the actual *instruction* and the *child* at a young age