Improving Literacy Brief

Intensifying Reading Instruction: What to Consider

When students experience difficulty learning to read, they often require intervention to target the specific areas of need (Carnine et al., 2006; Gersten et al., 2008). Dynamic and responsive data-based individualization is necessary to improve overall reading performance and close the gap between students receiving intervention and their grade level peers. When students are not making desired progress despite receiving data-based individualization, like what often happens during Tier 3 intervention in an MTSS framework, further intensification of the intervention is necessary (Austin et al., 2017; Vaughn et al., 2012; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2010). School personnel must identify ways the instruction can be intensified to increase student progress. This brief and infographic show multiple areas to consider when intensifying support.

WHAT TO TEACH

STRATEGIC INTEGRATION

Teams making dynamic instructional decisions must consider WHAT is taught during allocated intervention time. Systematic and explicit reading instruction must target one or more of the five big ideas in reading: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension.

Intervention focus needs to balance comprehensiveness across these five big ideas with emphasis on the specific literacy needs of the student (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2010). For example, an intervention solely focused on phonemic awareness, but not providing any practice in the areas of phonics and fluency building, would not be appropriate for a second grader. Similarly, for the majority of students with dyslexia, because of their specific needs, intervention will emphasize word-level reading and spelling skills with application and transfer to reading comprehension (Seidenberg, 2017; Snowling, 2013).

The instructional plan for students across the entire school day also needs to be considered when identifying which skills will be emphasized in the intervention and to what degree. Using intervention time to pre-teach skills the student will encounter during upcoming classroom reading instruction can be a powerful intensification. This technique

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requires coordination across general and special education classrooms and teachers, often facilitated by a reading specialist or coach.

It is also important to support students cognitive processing of the material being taught. Ways to support cognitive processing, including memory and self-regulation, can be integrated into intervention. For example, having students write during lessons can serve as a memory aid (Vaughn et al., 2012; Vaughn & Zumeta, 2014; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2010). Written self-monitoring checklists and frequent checks for understanding can help students learn and internalize self-regulation skills. In addition, a student who has struggled in reading for months or years may need to learn and practice how to view themselves as a successful reader. To support self-efficacy (students developing a positive view of themselves as readers), reward statement charts, goal setting, and cheer breaks can be utilized throughout instruction. Finally, through modeling, teachers should encourage students to take notice of their own improvement and help students to develop positive self-talk as skills increase.

How to Teach

Instructional Density

Instructional design and delivery combine to determine HOW intervention content is being taught. Students who receive intensification require intervention that is delivered with instructional density. Instructional density centers on the use of research-based routines and highly specified instruction that is delivered with expertise and packed with careful design considerations (Gersten et al., 2008; Vaughn et al., 2012; Wanzek & Vaughn 2010). Clarity of instruction is paramount. Lessons delivered with instructional density use explicit instruction ("I Do- We Do- You Do" format) and carefully selected and sequenced instructional examples. Students have many opportunities to respond and abundant successful practice opportunities. There are integrated pause points for teachers to acknowledge students' successes and correct errors proactively before they multiply and become ingrained habits. Also, careful attention is paid to lesson duration, how students are grouped, and how instruction is paced. Overall, dense instruction is delivered by teachers who are very familiar with the content they are teaching and can adjust the pacing and rhythm of instruction based on the needs of their students.

Assessment

Individualized instruction must be combined with ongoing assessments to inform intensification for students (Gersten et al., 2008). Daily and weekly mastery data provides

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teachers with important feedback on the student's level of proficiency and fluency with the specific skills being taught during the lesson. This can range from notes the teacher takes in real time while listening to students' responses during a lesson, to more formal unit tests administered at specified time points. The data from mastery tests provide teachers with information about which skills need to be re-taught and which skills students can complete independently. Every other week or monthly progress monitoring data helps educators track student progress toward more long-term, skill-based reading goals. Progress monitoring assessments require students to apply their developing skills to a variety of texts. Both mastery tests and progress monitoring assessments provide important data to guide decisions about intensification.

SUGGESTED CITATIONS

National Center on Improving Literacy. (2024). *Intensifying Reading Instruction: What to Consider.* https://www.improvingliteracy.org/resource/intensifying-reading-instruction-what-to-consider

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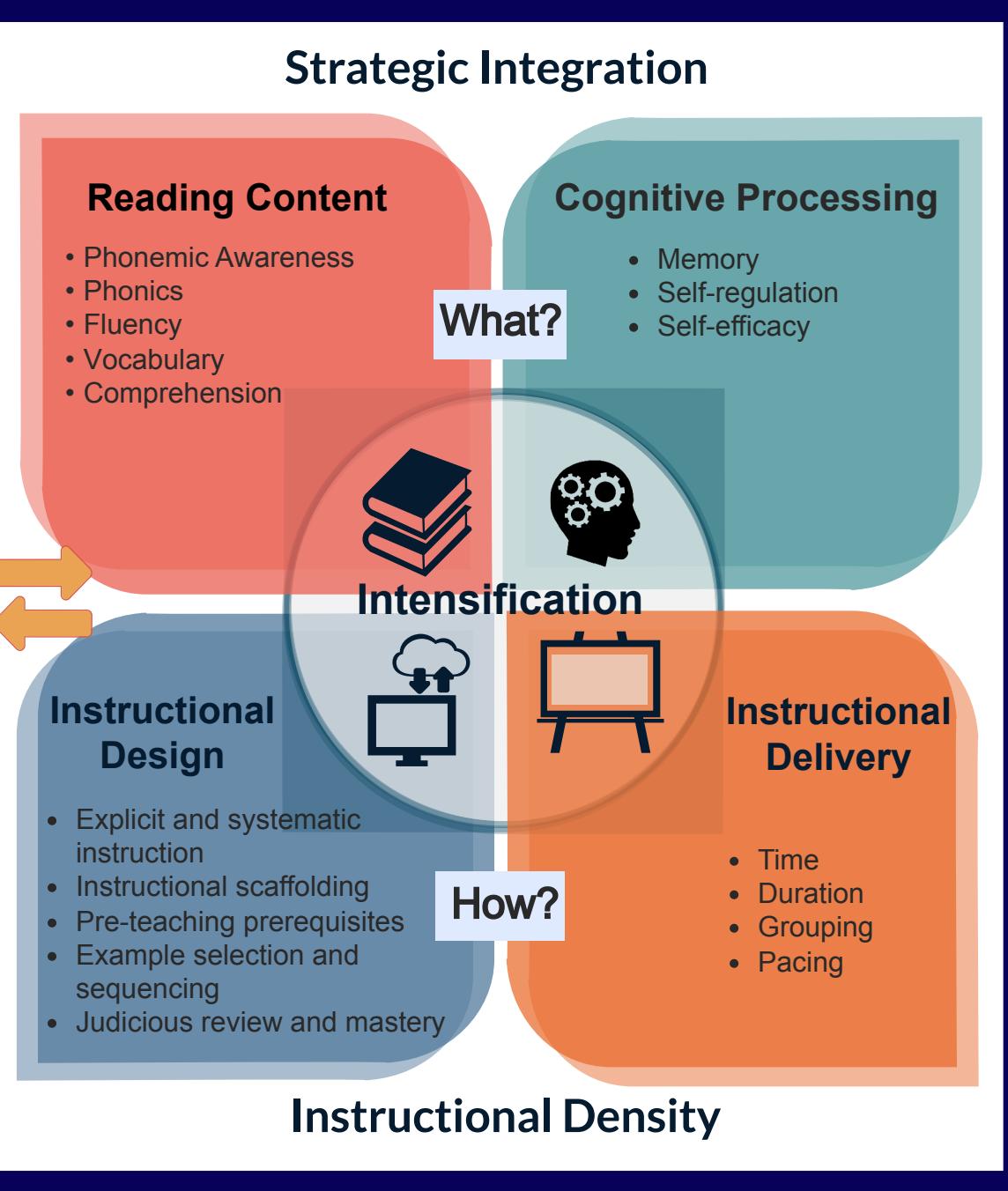
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NCIL Intensification Framework

Strategic Integration

Reading Content
- Phonemic Awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

What?

Cognitive Processing
- Memory
- Self-regulation
- Self-efficacy

Dynamic and Responsive Data-Based Individualization

Intensification

Instructional Design
- Explicit and systematic instruction
- Instructional scaffolding
- Pre-teaching prerequisites
- Example selection and sequencing
- Judicious review and mastery

How?

Instructional Delivery
- Time
- Duration
- Grouping
- Pacing

Instructional Density

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Assessment
- Daily or weekly mastery data
- Every other week or monthly progress monitoring data

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NCILiteracy@gmail.com   https://improvingliteracy.org   @improvingliteracy