Triple R Teaching

Hello! Anna Geiger here from Reach All Readers, and this episode is going to kick off a

students who need it.

Today I want to really define some terms, talk about what MTSS is, and share the assessments that we use within that model.

MTSS stands for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and it is a framework for implementing the science of reading. Just because you have a great science of reading-based curriculum and you have good teachers, it does not mean that your core instruction, the instruction you give to everybody, is going to be enough for all of your students.

We all know that even when you give that good instruction to everyone, there's always someone who needs extra help, extra support, or, we could say, an extra dose of instruction. MTSS is the framework for making sure everyone gets what they need, which may be different levels of intensity.

A lot of schools attempt MTSS, but it's not always implemented properly. The three things a strong MTSS system will have include a collaborative problem-solving model, an assessment system, and then the three tiers of instruction.

A collaborative problem-solving model is the idea that when you want to solve an issue, no matter what that might be, you're going to have a team of people come together to work on that.

I know when I was a classroom teacher I would go next door and sometimes ask advice from the teacher there, but I didn't really see myself as part of a whole school team. I kind of thought of myself as a little island, I was responsible for my kids; they were responsible for their kids.

But with an MTSS system all teachers see all students as belonging to everyone, as in we're all responsible for their growth. We're all responsible to make sure those students reach grade level benchmarks.

You might wonder, "Well, how can that be? I'm not teaching her students." Sometimes there's a team effort across a grade level to teach different tiers of instruction, and we'll get to that in later weeks.

First, let's go back to the second element of a strong MTSS system and that is an assessment system. MTSS uses data-based decision making; we make decisions about what we teach based on the data. There are four types of assessments that we can talk about.

The first one is screening. Screening, sometimes called a universal screener, is usually given three times a year: beginning, middle, and end. Sometimes you see BOY - beginning of year, MOY - middle of year, and EOY - end of year, that's what those refer to. You may have heard of universal screeners like DIBELS 8, Acadience, and FastBridge. Those are examples, and the nice thing about universal screeners is they don't take long to administer. You can usually assess each child in under ten minutes. The things that you assess them on are different depending on their grade and what part of the year you're in. We won't go into that now, but I'll be talking about that later on in this series.

The point of a screener is to figure out who is at risk, so who is not meeting benchmark for a specific skill. Benchmark is the minimum score that students should be at in order to be on track to be an adequate reader. It's not great, but it's okay. It's really important to know who's on track because if someone's not on track, then we can prevent possibly reading difficulties in the future by giving them extra support now. Screeners should be given at the beginning of kindergarten and onward.

Now let's say you've given a universal screener and you see that someone is below benchmark, and you're trying to figure out why. Why are they not reaching the benchmark score for this particular assessment?

That's where you go and use a diagnostic assessment to dig a little further. A diagnostic assessment may help you find out, for example, what specific phonics skills they are lacking, or, if you can get your hands on a good comprehension assessment, you can figure out where the gaps are there, or a phonemic awareness assessment. It really helps you dial in to figure out exactly the issue.

You don't have to give a diagnostic assessment to everyone unless you're differentiating your Tier 1 phonics instruction and you want to find out where your students are along your phonics scope and sequence.

Progress monitoring is the third kind of assessment, and that's what you're going to do with students who you're giving special intervention to.

Let's say I give my whole class the screener, and I find out this group of children is struggling. I'm going to give them a specific intervention for six weeks, maybe it's going to be working on phonemic awareness and we're going to be doing a specific thing related to that, or maybe it's going to be working on blending so they can blend sounds into words. Whatever it is that I'm working on, I'm going to have a specific goal for that period. I want them to reach a certain score on this progress monitoring assessment so that every week or every other week I'm going to see how they do on it.

A progress monitoring assessment comes with your universal screener. If they scored well below benchmark in something on Acadience, you could use the progress monitoring tool for that particular skill.

Let's say that they are struggling with nonsense word fluency; they're not able to sound out words using their phonics skills and they only got X number of words correct per minute on the screener. When you do the progress monitoring you're going to be testing each week to see if the number they get correct goes up, and you're going to mark that on a graph because you want to see if the intervention is working. If you're spending all this extra time with them and they're not really making progress, well then you need to change what you're doing. That's progress monitoring.

There are also outcome assessments which are given usually at the end of the year to see how well your overall instruction served your students.

Finally, MTSS has three tiers of instruction. I want to be clear about that, we're not talking about three tiers of students; it's three tiers of instruction. Tier 1 is that core instruction that everyone gets, and this should be a total of 90 to 120 minutes every day of that literacy instruction. That can include decoding work, spelling, language comprehension through read alouds, and writing. I'm not saying it's 90 to 120 minutes of phonics, it's everything included in your literacy block.

Now here's where some people are confused. I think some people think that everything in Tier 1 is delivered whole class, but that's simply not true. You can do some things in whole class and some things in small group.

My preference is to do whole group for things like language comprehension, so that would be reading aloud, teaching sentence structure, writing, and so on, but I personally prefer to do differentiated small groups for those foundational skills like phonemic awareness and phonics only because I've always seen that kids are all over the map in those skills. I feel that they can be moved more quickly to mastery by dialing in on exactly what they need to know versus teaching the whole class a phonics skill and then differentiating after.

Now there are plenty of teachers I respect and I've interviewed on the podcast that do a whole class phonics lesson. I would never want to say that what they're doing is bad or inappropriate. I just would encourage you to think about what might be the most effective and efficient way to get your students up to grade level phonics skills, and that may be dialing in on specifically where their gaps are to start the year.

Okay, so I'm doing Tier 1, but I know from my universal screener that some kids are quite behind. In addition to that whole class phonics instruction or the differentiated instruction, I'm going to give them Tier 2 instruction.

We like to call this a double dose. If you're using small groups for your Tier 1 phonics instruction, these kids would get a second small group. It would probably be even smaller and it could be with a different teacher, and it's going to be focused on one particular thing, and you're going to do progress monitoring as they receive that intervention.

It might be something where you say we're going to do this for six weeks, this specific thing, and we're going to see if it brings improvement. It's not saying that the child is in Tier 2 all year; it's that we're going to work on the specific thing for this period of time and see how it goes. If they make progress, great, they could possibly be moved out of the intervention, or it might be time to work on something else that they need practice on.

Tier 2 instruction is typically given three to five days a week for about 20 to 45 minutes per session. The bare minimum would be three days a week, 20 minutes each time.

Now what if you're doing Tier 2 intervention with someone, so they're still getting Tier 1

and then they're also getting Tier 2, but they're not making the progress you'd like to see in Tier 2? The other kids in their group are making progress, but they are not. Then you might want to switch them out of Tier 2 and put them in Tier 3.

Tier 3 is even more intensive; it's typically every day of the week for 45 to 60 minutes per session. If we want to talk about percentages, in a strong MTSS system where Tier 1 instruction is good, we can expect about 80% of kids to not need Tier 2 or Tier 3. If your Tier 1 is good, then you should expect that only 20% of kids would need additional intervention. Then we would expect that about 15% of those remaining 20% will have their needs met in Tier 2, and just 5% will need that Tier 3.

If you're in a situation where you find that way more than 80% of your students are below benchmark on that universal screener, you're going to be overloading your Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports, right? So maybe only 30% or 40% of your students are meeting benchmark in a particular skill. What you do not want to do is overload your Tier 2 and Tier 3 because you won't be able to keep up, right? It's very difficult to have that extra instruction for so many students.

Instead, you want to make that Tier 1 instruction strong. Think of Tier 1 as the primary way to prevent reading failure. We want to reduce the number of kids who need Tier 2 and Tier 3 intervention.

We're going to talk more about MTSS next week with Dr. Stephanie Stollar, who is really a pro at MTSS and helping schools implement it. I'm looking forward to speaking with her next week. Then in the following weeks we're going to be looking at how to differentiate Tier 1 instruction. We'll also be talking more about how to intervene, so what to do for kids who are scoring below benchmark on particular skills.

You can find the show notes for today's episode at reachallreaders.com/episode145.

That's all for this episode of Triple R Teaching. For more educational resources visit Anna at her home base, reachallreaders.com, and join our teaching community. We

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