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This paper shows the importance for differentiated reading instruction throughout various settings in the Response to Intervention Model. It includes a review of the literature that is current on the topic, and demonstrates possible strategies that can be used within the three tiers of reading intervention services. This paper includes a study that was conducted to monitor the growth that five students made in regard to their reading level over the course of their sixth grade school year. All five students were identified as needing additional reading intervention services, yet only three students received these services. The results of the study show the positive effect that differentiation throughout the RTI model has on students reading interest and reading level.

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The Impact of Differentiation on Reading Level in RTI

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Throughout the Response to Intervention Model

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### **Abstract**

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## **The Impact of Differentiated Instruction on Student Reading Level Throughout the Response to Intervention Model**

In today's schools, there is a large emphasis placed on the use of assessments to monitor students' academic progress. Students must meet state and district-wide benchmarks in order to be identified as working on grade level. However, all students learn in different ways and make progress at different rates. In order to frequently monitor students' progress, educators must analyze the assessments they provide regularly. The data that these assessments provide can be used to identify if students are working on grade level.

When students do not meet the benchmarks and standards that have been set for them, support services are provided in hopes of eliminating gaps in learning. These services are a part of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model and take place within the second tier. The intervention services provided within tier two range across the curriculum, however, many school districts provide academic intervention services (AIS) in reading (Jones, 2012). Within this setting, reading AIS providers teach students in a small group while focusing on strategies to support reading comprehension, oral fluency, and reading interest.

### **Researcher Stance**

The focus of this study was on the impact that differentiated instruction within tiers one and two of the response to intervention model had on students' reading level and interest in literature. I was the English Language Arts general education teacher for all five of the participants. I am currently a sixth grade teacher within this district, and am working towards earning a Master's of Science in Special Education. I worked closely with Reading AIS Providers 1 and 2, as well as with these students' families.

To measure their growth and development in regard to reading, I provided the Developmental Reading Assessment, second edition (DRA2). According to Pearson Education (2015), the DRA2 is an assessment which measures students' reading proficiency. It also provides educators with an instructional plan that will help them to meet each student's individual needs.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Overview of Differentiation in the Classroom**

Differentiated Instruction is an effective way for educators to provide learning opportunities to their students regardless of their diverse needs. Differentiated instruction is a term that has been developed by Carol Ann Tomlinson (2001) to mean “the process by which students learn, the products or demonstrations of their learning, the environment in which they learn, or the content they are learning.” (Watts-Taffe, Laster, Broach, Marinak, Connor, & Walker-Dalhouse, 2012, p. 304) Due to the increase in rigor of state-level curriculum, the number of students who require additional support with understanding and internalizing instruction has risen. One strategy that many districts have incorporated to support these students is a leveled model of instruction called Response to Intervention (RTI). Response to Intervention is an approach to support students who are at risk for learning difficulties. RTI was predicated from the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in an effort to provide children the learning supports that they need before experiencing failure (Bursuck & Blanks, 2010). This approach is a tiered program that provides instructional support for students in various settings, aimed at increasing student academic achievement (Jones, Yssel & Grant, 2012).

One content area where the RTI model has been adopted to provide personal and meaningful instruction is reading. Justice (2006) stated that “the current educational-policy climate emphasizes the need to bring ‘evidence-based progress’ to educational practices generally and reading instruction specifically” (p. 285). This means that while the Response to Intervention model may have value in all areas of a student’s day, it can be especially meaningful for reading instruction. Jones (2012) continues to address the idea that the RTI model within the reading context is used to identify reading disabilities and prevent students from failing by implementing evidence-based strategies to help the student improve their reading ability.

Providing a tiered model of instruction to meet learners’ needs based on their progress is similar to differentiated instruction because both are tailored to support the needs of a child based on their individuality. This discussion will serve as an in-depth look at several ways to incorporate effective differentiated instruction in an educational setting while following the Response to Intervention model.

This paper will provide readers with an understanding of what the Response to Intervention model is, and why is it crucial that educators include differentiated instruction within the three tiers of the Response to Intervention model. First, I will explain an overview of what the RTI model consists of. Next, the reader will be provided an explanation of the importance of differentiation within the first tier of intervention services, followed by various strategies that can be used across the curriculum to provide students with best-practices. Then, I will provide the reader with an explanation of how the RTI model is commonly used within literacy settings, and how the second tier of intervention can include differentiated strategies to individualize the learning for all students who require additional reading instruction. Following

will be three strategies that are valuable within the second tier of reading interventions, and examples of how each strategy can be differentiated to meet an individual student's strengths and needs. Finally, I will explain how the third tier of the RTI model will include intensive differentiated literacy instruction, and what the third tier of literacy instruction looks like. To support these ideas, I will provide additional strategies that can be used within the third tier to assist students with making growth interns of their literacy instruction.

In classrooms throughout the United States, teachers are faced with the task of teaching students across a wide range of abilities. According to Gilson et al. (2014), matching instruction with a students' readiness to learn is essential to differentiated instruction. Multiple articles support that the implementation of RTI requires multiple predatory steps (Bryant, 2014; Bursuck & Blanks, 2010; Jones, Yssel, & Grant, 2012). The first step is to assess students to help educators understand where their students are academically. By assessing, educators are able to screen for academic needs and begin to baseline where students would score on state, district, and grade level standards (Otaiba et. al, 2014). The second step requires educators to monitor and analyze student abilities for those who do not meet necessary benchmarks. By carefully reviewing student work samples and assessment scores, educators can find specific areas where the child requires tailored instruction. The goal of this is to ensure that students are being monitored efficiently and frequently to identify and support struggling students (Bursuck and Blanks, 2010). Once these first two steps are complete, tiered instruction can begin.

The first tier of instruction, often referred to as tier one instruction, occurs in the general education classroom. This is a setting with a minimal amount of educational supports in place due to the high numbers of students without disabilities. According to Jones, Yssel, and Grant (2014), tier one instruction is implemented through the use of differentiated instruction.

Differentiation is, in other words, personalized instruction which can be used to meet the needs of all learners in a classroom (Morgan, 2014).

Tier two instruction is designed to assist students who have been identified as “at-risk” for being below the required benchmark for the student’s grade and/or achievement level (Bryant, 2014). The authors defined “at-risk” as a student whose assessments show “poor performance,” or that they struggle to understand necessary concepts (p. 179). At the tier two level, students are provided more targeted intervention strategies to help prevent them from performing below benchmark (Toste et al., 2014). This is necessary for struggling learners so that they can be early identified as needing support and do not continue to further digress in their learning (Toste et. al, 2014). Tier two interventions take place in small group settings where instruction can be tailored to a low number of students’ needs (Jones, Ysssel, & Grant, 211). Assessment in tier two is designed so that educators can identify if students are responsive to strategies or not (Toste et. al, 2014). Although tier two can be beneficial for some students and can help for them to rise out of the at-risk level, there are still students who require more individualized, intensive instruction due to their unresponsiveness to tier three supports. The final level, tier three, is organized as individual strategies that are designed to support students with intensive needs. There are typically few students who receive tier three supports as a result of students’ responsiveness to tier two. However, for those who were unresponsive to tier two, strategies in tier three often are embedded for more extensive time throughout the day, and are either individualized or completed in very small groups (Wanzek and Vaughn, 2010). To best support the students that an educator may work with, it is best for them to know multiple supports that can be used throughout the RTI model. The following information will provide you with multiple strategies that can be used to support students in tier one, tier two, and tier three.

### **The Importance of Differentiation within Tier One**

As part of tier one instruction, teachers have to meet a wide range of students needs within their classroom due to the diversity within a general education setting. Because of students various differences, it is vital that content be presented and practiced in multiple ways, regardless of the content area. While Solis, Miciak, Vaughn, and Fletcher (2014) discussed that there is evidence which supports the idea that the RTI model can improve a child's reading ability, the RTI model is an approach to providing valuable instruction and interventions across all subjects (p. 219). Each student brings with them a unique system of internalizing and demonstrating their knowledge. This concept, as made famous by Howard Gardner (1983) in his book *Frames of Mind*, is known as the multiple intelligence theory. According to Morgan, (2006) there are eight multiple intelligences: logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, musical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. By including as many of these intelligences into the classroom, teachers can reach the needs of their learners in ways that will best suit them. This is extremely important for students so that they can best express their understanding of the content. If their personal learning intelligence is not being met within the classroom, they may be misidentified as not understanding what is being taught.

When students are learning, they rely heavily on their strongest intelligence to make sense of what is being taught to them. If a teacher is not meeting the needs of a student's intelligence, it could hinder their level of interest in the content. As a result, this could lead to a decrease in student engagement and motivation to continue learning. Additionally, when a child's intelligence is not submerged into instruction, information can become more difficult for them to understand. When a child reaches their frustrational level of learning, they release a chemical called "noradrenalin." Noradrenalin leads for a child to withdrawal from the activity at

hand, and can lead for them to demonstrate inappropriate behaviors that can also be distracting for their peers (p. 35). Because of the negative effects that can be had on a child's education if their personal learning needs are not met within the classroom, it is vital for educators to take time to know their students as individuals, and understand their personal intelligence/preferred mode of learning. To do this, differentiated instruction must be incorporated.

Differentiation is about tailoring the needs of student's abilities and learning styles to instructional and assessment approaches (Morgan, 2014). To make learning meaningful within tier one instruction, teachers must differentiate how information is provided for students, how they assess their students, and how they structure the learning environment. How students demonstrate their knowledge must suit their abilities and needs, the physical and emotional environment of a classroom must be built around a child's needs, and the content that is being taught to them should be designed to build upon their prior knowledge and interest level.

### **Differentiated Strategies within Tier One**

There are multiple strategies and methods that can be incorporated into the classroom to engage and teach all students during not just reading instruction, but across the curriculum. Including as many of these strategies into the classroom will greatly benefit a large number of students. According to Brimijoin (2005), it is essential that teachers who differentiate their instruction take frequent assessments so that they can determine if their students are engaged in their learning and meeting the objectives and goals. This allows for determining if a student has internalized the content, and if they are, they will be better equipped to transfer their knowledge when the time comes for them to complete high-stakes standardized tests. One example of an assessment that can be incorporated into all areas of study is a quick check in with students called "glass, bugs, or mud" (Brimijoin, 2005, p. 257). This strategy is designed to have students

state how well they can see out of their imaginary car, which symbolizes the content being taught. If the students are understanding the content and feel capable of meeting the lesson's goals and objectives, they would describe themselves in the "glass" stage, meaning that they can clearly see the educational road ahead. If a student is having difficulty in some areas of the lesson and would benefit from a check-in with a teacher, they would describe themselves as "bugs," or needing to take a break in their learning to clarify where they are headed. Finally, if a student is not understanding the content and needs to come to a complete stop in the lesson to re-learn a concept or a skill, the child would describe themselves as "mud" (p. 257). Using strategies such as this provides educators with the opportunity to understand where each of their students are academically so that they can drive their future instruction in a direction that will be beneficial to all learner's and their ability levels.

As students work throughout the day, it is beneficial for them to engage in various educational settings with multiple peers. One way to strategically include this in the classroom is to provide students with opportunities for flexible grouping. "Flexible grouping" is a term that includes the multiple ways that students can be brought together to learn (Connor & Lagares, 2007, p. 20). Three valuable ways to group students include: by ability, by interest, and at random. Connor and Lagares (2007) state that using each of these grouping strategies holds value in a classroom. They state that "having students collaborate in groups to apply newly introduced information and problem solve contributes to a stimulating interactive environment." (p. 20) By placing students in various settings with multiple students, they are able to demonstrate their strengths, learn from the strengths of their peers, and build relationships with diverse students, which will lead to a increase in classroom community. Also, by allowing

students to work with their peers as they explore the content, an engaging, interactive, cooperative and dynamic environment is developed (p. 20).

As previously stated, students internalize information differently due to their personal intelligence. To assist students with understanding information being taught to them, graphic organizers and visual aids can be used as a way to organize the content. As stated by Connor and Lagares (2007) graphic organizers are one way for learners to “structure information by conceptually mapping out superordinate and subordinate concepts, allowing students to see the connections between them.”(p. 24) McMackin and Witherell (2010) added to that by explaining that “graphic organizers can be designed to meet different learning levels, called ‘leveled graphic organizers.’” (p. 50) The first level includes a lot of structure and support to help students identify important information for a concept, skill or strategy, the second provides students the opportunity to organize the information or practice the skill or strategy independently, and the third is designed for students who need to be “challenged at a cognitively advanced level” (p. 50). The authors state that leveled graphic organizers can challenge students with tasks that are appropriate for their personal abilities.

The strategies provided are supported by research to be best-practice for students across the curriculum. However, when assessments taken by educators show that students are not appropriately meeting the goals that are required for state, district, or grade level standards after various differentiated strategies have been incorporated, tier two interventions begin (Toste et. al., 2014).

### **The Importance of Differentiation within Tier Two Reading Instruction**

After the implementation of evidence-based strategies using differentiation within tier one of the RTI model, there will still be students who struggle (Justice, 2006). While this is true

about all subject areas, the RTI model is regularly used to identify and prevent the continuation of reading difficulties amongst students. Justice states that “In nearly every classroom providing a high-quality first tier of instruction, at least some children will fail to keep pace with their peers to achieve adequate performance on criterion-level reading benchmarks.” (p. 289) When a student’s progress is not at the appropriate level according to specific benchmarks, that student continues the level of services available within the Response to Intervention model.

The next instructional setting for these students is tier two instruction. Tier two instruction is designed for those students who did not demonstrate the required progress as is expected in tier one (Owen, 2012). These students are placed into small groups that meet regularly throughout the school week. Within these groups, the instruction is tailored to meet each of the students’ individual learning needs. At this level, assessment is a key component to monitor student’s progress (Kerins, Trotter, & Schoenbrodt, 2010; Oakes et al., 2012). According to Oakes et. al, assessment should be done regularly using academic measures (p. 549). These can include curriculum-based assessments, formative assessments, report cards, and formal assessments. Research has shown that in tier two, assessment is needed at least two times a month while the student is receiving academic support. This is done to monitor their progress, and identify if they are making appropriate learning gains (Owen, 2012).

When a student is receiving tier two instruction, the students are placed within homogeneous groups that meet multiple times a week. The instructor of these small groups is an additional school professional aside from the classroom teacher, as the students are pulled out of the classroom to receive tier two instruction (Kerins, Trotter, & Schoenbrodt, 2010). Within these groups, children are provided an “extra dose” of instruction that should mirror the work in the classroom. This is done so that children who are struggling with their reading development

will have accelerated academic schedule with more time on task to achieve adequate reading progress by the end of the school year (Justice, 2012).

Even though students are placed within small groups, and they may have similar learning needs, the instruction and activities completed within tier two should be tailored to each student's individual strengths and needs. In other words, while the group may all be focusing on one targeted literacy skill, the strategies and focus within the activity should be designed to support each individual student. For example, Justice (2012) provides a model of what tier two intervention services for first graders may look like each time they meet. She explains that the activities that the students complete are typically rereading a familiar text, completing a phonemic awareness activity, completing a sight word activity, a phonics activity, and then completing a guided reading activity (p. 294). These activities can all be differentiated to meet the child's current independent reading level, to focus on rhyme families that the individual child needs additional practice learning, having an individualized list of sight words to focus on, completing a phonics activity that focuses on a specific area of weakness for the child, and a guided reading lesson at the student's individual instructional reading level. The needed information about the individual students should be identified through frequent and consistent progress monitoring, as previously discussed. The following section will provide examples of strategies that support differentiated learning within the second tier of the Response to Intervention Model.

### **Differentiated Strategies within Tier Two Reading Instruction**

Since tier two instruction is designed to meet the needs of small groups of students at an individualized level, the following strategies can be adapted to support the strengths and needs of each student within the small group.

The activities that are completed within tier two reading instruction should be proven by research that they are effective in promoting literacy growth. According to Kerins, Trotter, & Schoenbrodt (2010), when a student does not make adequate progress in tier one reading instruction, tier two should include opportunities to practice foundational reading instruction. This includes phonemic awareness, the alphabetic principle, and phonics (p. 289). The first skill that can be differentiated within the second tier of reading instruction is learning the alphabetic principle through the use of visuals and phonics.

Bergeron, Lederberg, Easterbrooks, Miller, and Connor (2009) found that explicit instruction in building alphabetic knowledge strongly supports reading development as it “contributes to growth in decoding, comprehension, and spelling.” (pg. 89). They define the alphabetic principle as the knowledge that written graphemes correspond to the phonemes of spoken words. Graphemes include letters or combination of letters, and phonemes are the sounds that those letters produce. One way to teach the alphabetic principle is to provide a visual to supplement and support a grapheme or phoneme. Morrison, Trezek, and Paul (2008) are quoted as finding that this provides learners with multi-sensory experiences to help make the learning more meaningful. An example of how to do this is to show that the phoneme “mmm” corresponds to the letter /m/ by placing it on a visual card with a child eating ice-cream and saying “mmm-mmm, that’s good” (Bergeron, Lederberg, Easterbrooks, Miller, & Connor, 2009). This shows the learner how the phoneme is used, and how it applies to realistic scenarios. To differentiate this for the students within the second tier of reading instruction, the visuals can include real people that they encounter throughout the day, completing tasks that the child also completes. This will build a bridge between the literacy skill, and the child’s life, making the learning valuable and real. Also, an educator can differentiate which phonemes and graphemes

the child needs additional support learning. This will depend upon their individual progress, and can vary for all students within the group.

Another literacy skill that can be used within the second tier of reading instruction and improves students' phonemic awareness is decoding and encoding. Weiser and Mathes (2011) explain that decoding skills are internalized as students learn to blend sounds of letters and recognize patterns within words. They continue to state that encoding skills are practiced when students create words using phoneme-grapheme correspondence, decoding skills, and the alphabetic principle (p. 171). To provide students with meaningful opportunities to decode and encode words using phonemic awareness and the alphabetic principle, they should be provided hands-on manipulatives. This will allow them to create and take apart words so that they can study their composition. This will also help for students to identify word families and patterns. To differentiate how children can engage in decoding and encoding activities, children can be provided with a variety of materials from which educators and students choose from. For example, students can use different sized letters, as well as letters made out of different materials. The level of difficulty can also be differentiated for students within the second tier. Students can be provided words to use as a way to scaffold the activity, or students can be challenged to find words of their own within magazines or print-rich environments from which they can decode and encode using manipulatives. Weiser and Mathes (2011) cited Adams' (1990) research, which claims that encoding and decoding instruction allows for students to practice using the alphabetic principle because they are using their phoneme-grapheme correspondence, which is what enables "skillful readers to process the letters of text so quickly and easily." (p. 190) The authors also state that "as students develop phonemic awareness and begin to grasp the alphabetic principle, their spellings of words reflect their attempts to

symbolize the phonological structure of spoken words, and as they become better spellers, this stimulates progress in their reading abilities.” (p. 172)

A third strategy that is beneficial for promoting a student’s reading progress within tier two of the RTI model is the practice of oral reading fluency while learning phonics. According to Rasinski, Rupley, and Nichols (2008), phonics and fluency are two of the most important concepts for children to understand in order for them to have adequate reading development. They found that if a reader has difficulty decoding words due to their lack of understanding of phonics, their reading fluency will suffer, which will negatively impact their comprehension of texts (p. 257). To promote a positive understanding of phonics, one strategy that can be implemented and differentiated for students is the use of a word wall. Word walls can be personalized and include the words or word families that individual students have difficulty with. By having these organized and available to students while they work, they become better equipped to identify challenging words or decode words that use these word families. Each student within the second tier of instruction can have their own word wall that they can add to and use to promote their oral reading fluency. Another way for students to promote their oral reading fluency through the use of phonics is to complete repeated readings of rhymes that include word families which are included on their word walls. This provides students with consistent opportunities to practice reading these word families and identifying words with which they are used. For this, Rapinski, Rupley, and Nicols state that students can use speeches, songs, scripts, and poetry. Not only can the word walls be differentiated within this activity, but the level of readings and passages can be differentiated to match the appropriate reading level for each student within this instructional setting.

After meaningful and differentiated interventions are implemented within the second tier of instruction, research has found that approximately two to five percent of students still do not make adequate progress in terms of reading (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006). At that point, these students are moved to an intensive intervention setting, which is also described as tier three instruction.

### **The Importance of Differentiation within Tier Three Reading Instruction**

After no gains are made for students receiving meaningful, research-based tier two interventions, they are moved to tier three. At this point, if progress is not being made, the students are labeled as non-responders (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2010). Tier three instruction is a setting that becomes much more intensive and personal, as it is the final tier within the response to intervention model. In order to provide more rigorous interventions for students who are in need, instruction within tier three must include specific characteristics. According to Wanzek and Vaughn (2010), these include, but are not limited to, instruction that is provided for a more extensive amount of time each day, as well as more frequently throughout the school week. They also suggest that instructors within this setting demonstrate “very high levels of expertise and knowledge.” (p. 306)

Other important characteristics of interventions within tier three is that they are provided in either a small group or one-to-one setting, and that the skills and strategies taught are tailored to meet the needs of individual students. This is done to guarantee that a students’ reading needs are being met. While a small group setting may be appropriate for some students within tier three, research has shown that individualized instruction in a one-to-one setting is most effective (Wanzek and Vaughn, 2010). Studies have shown that interventions provided for students in a one-to-one setting yield moderate to large changes in student performances (p. 307). These are

compared to studies of students receiving tier three instruction in a small group setting, which provided smaller effects overall (p. 307). Wanzek and Vaughn (2010) found that groups of students often reached as large as eight learners at a time, and this did not have positive effects on student progress. This is because in a one-to-one setting, instruction can be individualized to provide students with a personal education that focus on their areas of need. An additional feature of tier three instruction that is crucial to ensure that students are receiving necessary supports is that student growth and progress is frequently and carefully monitored (Wilson, Faggella-Luby, and Wei, 2013). As a result, it can be concluded that individualized, differentiated instruction is key within tier three instruction for a student to gain academic success.

Within tier three reading interventions, the focus begins to shift towards helping students make growth in regard to reading comprehension and reading fluency (Wanzek and Vaughn, 2010; Wilson, Faggella-Luby, and Wei, 2013). Within these categories, specific strategies have been proven effective for providing students with differentiated, meaningful instruction.

### **Differentiated Strategies within Tier Three Reading Instruction**

Interventions within tier three should be different than interventions provided in tiers one and two in regard to pedagogy and content (Wilson, Faggella-Luby, and Wei, 2013). While work with comprehension strategies may take place across all tiers of the RTI model, it is important that students receiving level three instruction are focused on this concept while they receive intervention services (Wilson, Faggella-Luby, and Wei, 2013; Wanzek and Vaughn, 2010).

According to Pyle and Vaughn (2012), students receiving individualized comprehension instruction within the tertiary intervention setting made significant growth with their reading ability (p. 280). This is compared to students who were receiving instruction on using

comprehension strategies within a small group setting. In order to ensure that students are provided meaningful instruction, critical reading components that benefit comprehension levels must be taught (Wilson, Faggella-Luby, and Wei, 2013). These components include prior knowledge, vocabulary, text structure, cognitive strategies, fluency, decoding, motivation, and writing instruction (p. 28). According to Wilson, Faggella-Luby, and Wei (2013), there are specific supports that can be put into place to facilitate the teaching of the eight components listed (p. 29). These include using graphic organizers to help students analyze information, breaking instruction down into small steps to be taught in sequence, providing materials and tasks that are at the appropriate level for the student, modeling behaviors and thinking skills, allowing students to answer and ask questions, as well as provide and receive feedback, teaching students to self-monitor their work, allowing students to apply the skills they learn in a variety of contexts on multiple occasions, and monitor the students' progress frequently and effectively (p. 29). To differentiate the teaching of these strategies, it is important to remember that each of these components can be individualized to the students' reading level and skill level. Additionally, as students begin to master these concepts, instructors must prioritize how frequently and extensively each component should be taught and practiced. This will be based upon progress monitoring, the last strategy to facilitate the teaching of the eight critical components.

Waznek and Vaughn (2010) found that including multiple strategies into the interventions included within the third tier is most effective for helping students make gains with their reading. They agree with other researchers who claim that reading comprehension is an important skill to focus on within tier three. However, they also claim that reading fluency is equally important in helping children make academic progress because the two are closely

associated with one another (p. 311). In other words, a student's reading fluency skills directly affects their ability to comprehend a text. One reading fluency strategy that students can use to make growth is called repeated readings (p. 311). According to these authors, a student can complete multiple readings of a passage to improve their oral fluency. The amount of times, as well as the length and level of the passage, can be differentiated to meet a child's needs. An additional way that students can complete repeated readings is to complete a continuous reading. The difference between these two strategies is that a repeated reading means that the child may take breaks in between the readings they complete, while a continuous reading is completed without any breaks. Waynek and Vaughn (2010) claim that it's important for instructors to monitor a student's progress frequently to make sure that these strategies are positively impacting their progress (p. 311). To increase student performance, these authors also found that providing comprehension activities that require students to think before reading the text, while they read the text, and after they read the text increased a student's ability to comprehend what they read. This is a strategy that they refer to as "TWA," or "think before, think while, think after." (p. 309) This can be differentiated for students' individual needs because the work that the child does before, while, and after reading should be designed around their individual reading materials, as well as at a level that is appropriate for them. Additionally, the skill being practiced before, while, and after reading should be at an appropriate level for students. This may include creating predictions or asking questions, answering questions about the text, answering questions that go beyond the text, responding to their reading, drawing inferences, or identifying information in the text to support their answer.

## **Conclusion**

For students who do not meet progress benchmarks, school districts often implement a model called “Response to Intervention” to help students make appropriate gains. This model is a continuum of services that provide students with multiple layers of support within various environments (Justice, 2006, p. 285). As a student is exposed to the strategies and interventions explained in this literature review, educators hope that their growth and progress will be at an adequate level in terms of state and district level standards. If the child has not demonstrated that the interventions are affective in supporting their progress in reading and other content areas after receiving interventions across all three tiers of the RTI model, the child may require special education services. However, if the child does respond to the interventions appropriately, they continue to work within instructional settings that support their progress.

Differentiated instruction is a critical component to providing students with meaningful educational opportunities. Based on a student’s current levels of performance and abilities, students should be provided with the strategies and skills that they need in order to excel. This instruction will provide the support needed for them to make the desired growth and reach maximum potential.

## **Methodology**

### **Context**

This study took place within my intermediate classroom which is located in a suburban district in upstate New York. The classroom is an inclusive setting with students with disabilities including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, and Learning Disabilities. The study took place during one of the sections of English Language Arts that I teach daily for an eighty minute time block.

The class involved with this study was chosen because there are multiple students who qualified for being within tier two of the Response to Intervention (RTI) model. These are students who, in the previous year, did not meet state-wide and district level benchmarks in terms of English Language Arts. Because of this, these students were chosen to receive academic intervention services (AIS) by one of two reading specialists every other day. However, due to various circumstances, not all of the selected students received AIS. This study will focus on the growth made in reading by five students, three who received academic intervention services, and two who did not.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are five sixth grade students, and two reading AIS providers. All names in the study have been changed.

Reading AIS provider 1:

Reading AIS provider 1 worked with students B and C within this study. She met with these students in a small group setting every other day. When interviewed, she provided details regarding the intervention services she provided for her students. These included working on various reading comprehension strategies such as summarizing, inferencing, developing questions, and creating predictions. She also supported the students' ability to find the theme of a text with the use of picture books.

When asked how she differentiates her instruction to support student growth, Reading AIS Provider 1 explained that she often provides one-to-one instruction within the small group. She focuses on each student's individual needs for progress, and helps for them to achieve this by supplying texts at their level with a focus on a specific strategy. She also provides her

students with opportunities to write about the texts they read with a focus on organized, clear responses.

#### Reading AIS Provider 2:

Reading AIS provider 2 worked with student A in this study. She worked with student A in a small group setting. Within the small group setting, she provided her students with opportunities for reading comprehension and fluency practice through rereading familiar texts at a lower level. With these texts they were able to identify authors' crafts, text structures, and spelling patterns. She also frequently has students participate in reader's theater and fluency plays.

To differentiate the work she does with her students, she provides individual texts at their appropriate level. While they are reading these texts, she assigns students with specific focuses and strategies to practice. Also, as students are working in their small group setting, Reading AIS Provider 1 schedules individual, private conferences with her students to discuss their progress and to help students to set appropriate goals for themselves.

#### Student A:

Student A is a female sixth grade student who received reading academic intervention services from Reading AIS Provider 2. In January of her sixth grade year, Student A was reading at a fifth grade level, approximately one grade level below benchmark. Her interest in the beginning of the year was very general, and she would often re-read familiar, comfortable texts.

Within Student A's tier two instruction with Reading AIS Provider 2, she was given an individual assignment to practice reading comprehension and fluency, and also develop a deeper interest in reading. She brought children's books home to read aloud and discuss with her five

year old brother. She also engaged in conversations and writing assignments regarding texts that were chosen by Reading AIS Provider 2 and other students in the small group.

Student B:

Student B is a male sixth grade student who received reading academic intervention services in a small group setting from Reading AIS Provider 1. In the January of his sixth grade year, Student B was reading at a fifth grade level, approximately one grade level below benchmark. He had expressed difficulty with finding books that he felt invested in.

When discussing his progress and abilities, Student B set a goal for himself that he would read eight books in four months, approximately two books a month. This assisted him with exploring literature, and his interest in reading developed. He discussed these books with Reading AIS Provider 1 during their sessions, and she used these books to build comprehension and fluency with Student B.

Student C:

Student C is a female sixth grade student who received academic intervention services in a small group setting from Reading AIS Provider 1. She expressed a disinterest in reading at the beginning of her sixth grade year, and in January she was reading at a fourth grade level, approximately two grade levels below benchmark. It was difficult for Student C to find a book that she would continue to read over a period of time.

Within tier two instruction provided by Reading AIS Provider 1, Student C began using the “notice and note” strategy. This strategy helped Student C to develop the ability to think about the text she was reading and develop meaningful comprehension. She also regularly used children’s literature to practice reading fluency and develop inferences.

Student D:

Student D is a male sixth grade student who did not receive academic intervention services because, while he did not score high enough on the New York State ELA Assessment to be considered on grade level, he scored too high to receive academic intervention services due to the number of providers within the district. He was identified as a student who would benefit from support in reading academic intervention services as a result of his test score on the New York State ELA assessment from the previous school year. Student D expressed an interest in reading when the book was an appropriate level.

To ensure that Student D was provided with English Language Arts instruction that would benefit his strengths and needs, he was provided with differentiated instructional strategies within the tier one setting (his English Language Arts class).

Student E:

Student E is a male sixth grade student who did not receive academic intervention services as a result of a personal decision made by his family. He was originally identified as a student who would benefit from reading academic intervention services as a result of his test score on the New York State ELA assessment from the previous school year. Student E demonstrated a disinterest in reading at the beginning of his sixth grade year.

To provide Student E with meaningful English Language Arts instruction that would support his strengths and needs, Student E was provided with differentiated instructional strategies within the tier one setting (his English Language Arts class).

### **Method and Procedures**

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which tier two reading instruction affects a student's reading progress and level of interest in literature. One way that I chose to measure this is by interviewing the two reading academic intervention service providers that the

students within this study worked with. Doing this provided me with specific details regarding the supports and strategies that were provided for each of the individual students that they worked with, as well as ways that these AIS providers differentiate their instruction to best suit the students' needs.

Another way that data was collected for this study was through the administering of the DRA2. This formal assessment was given to students twice throughout their sixth grade school year: once in January and once in June. The assessment measures students in their reading engagement, reading fluency, and reading comprehension using both fiction and nonfiction texts. These scores determine their current reading level. Another measure within this study is a reading interest survey. This was provided to students twice throughout their sixth grade year. The survey asked students questions regarding their current reading materials, how often they read on their own time, and how they feel as they are reading. This survey was administered twice to the students: once in September, and once in June. For both of these assessment tools, the scores from the first assessment were compared to the scores from the second.

### **Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants**

To ensure the rights of the students participating, all guardians were informed of the study and its' purposes and provided consent for their children's work and reading progress to be analyzed and discussed. To protect the identities of these students, all were provided pseudonyms. The academic intervention service providers were also given pseudonyms.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

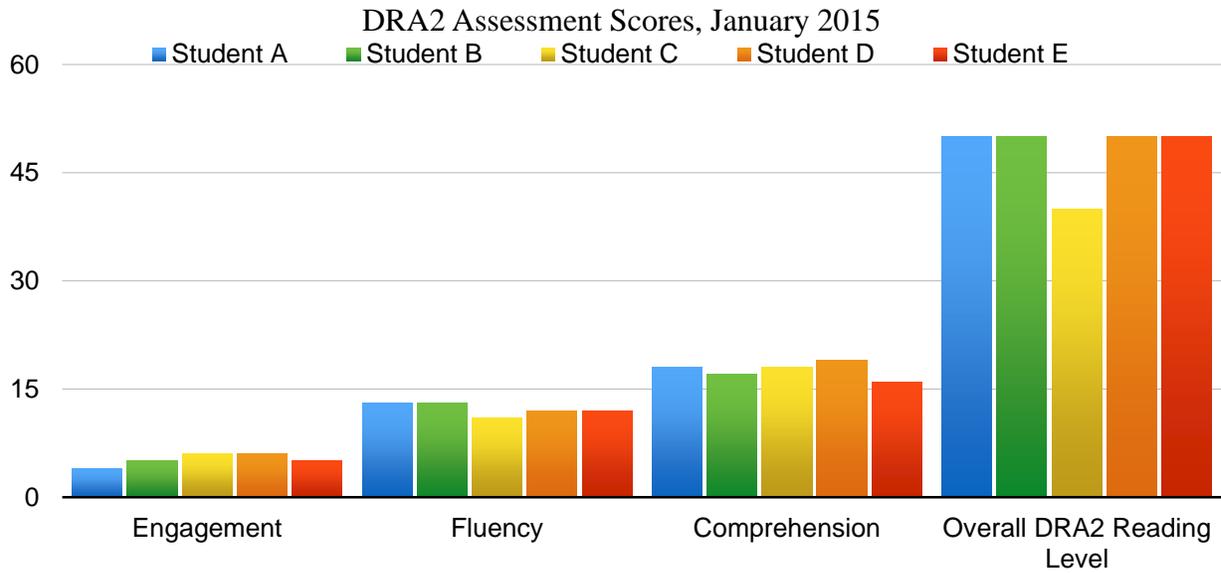
The data for this study was collected through work samples and interviews. The students within this study completed two DRA2 assessments to show their strengths and weaknesses regarding engagement, fluency, and comprehension, as well as their reading level. They also

completed two reading interest surveys which were analyzed through comparisons of their answers to identify connections between growth in reading level and reading interest.

The interviews were taken to discuss strategies and supports that are provided for students within the second tier of the response to intervention model. The answers that the AIS providers gave were reviewed and analyzed for similarities, and effective strategies.

The following table presents the data recorded using the DRA2 assessments for the five participating students. This was administered in January 2015.

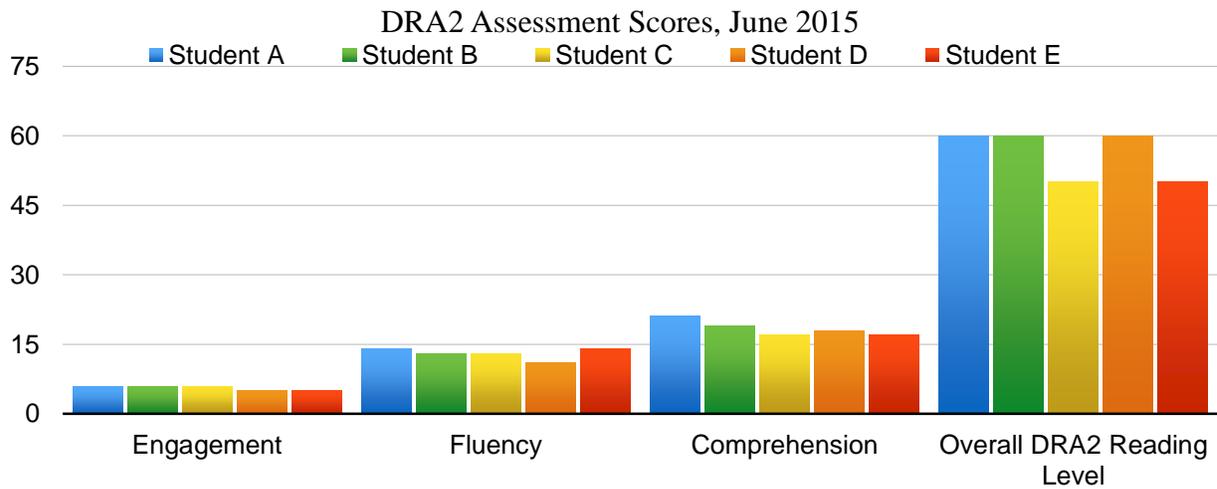
The table below presents the data recorded when the students took the DRA2 for a second time in June 2015. This assessment was used to measure the growth that students made



throughout their sixth grade school year.

Student A:

In January when the first DRA2 assessment was administered, student A was provided with a level 50 version using a fictional text. She scored four out of eight possible points on



reading engagement, a thirteen out of sixteen on reading fluency, and eighteen out of twenty-four on reading comprehension. According to the scoring guide, this placed student A at an independent reading level of 50 fiction. This is approximately one grade level below benchmark.

In June, Student A was provided with a level 60 assessment using nonfiction texts. She scored six out of eight possible points on reading engagement, fourteen out of sixteen points on reading fluency, and twenty-one out of twenty-four on reading comprehension. According to the scoring guide, this placed Student A at an independent reading level of 60 nonfiction. This is considered on-grade level for a student exiting sixth grade.

Student B:

The first DRA2 assessment provided for Student B was at level 50 using fictional texts. He scored a five out of eight points on reading engagement, a thirteen out of sixteen on reading fluency, and a seventeen out of twenty-four on reading comprehension. This placed Student B at a reading level of 50 fiction, which is approximately one grade level below adequate.

The June DRA2 assessment provided different results for Student B. For this assessment, he was administered a nonfiction text at level 60. He scored six out of eight points on reading engagement, thirteen out of sixteen on reading fluency, and nineteen out of twenty-four on reading comprehension. This growth placed Student B at an independent reading level of 60 nonfiction. This is the appropriate level for students transitioning out of sixth grade.

Student C:

Student C completed a level 40 assessment in January 2015. This assessment used fictional texts. In regard to reading engagement, Student C scored a six out of eight points. She scored eleven out of sixteen points on reading fluency, and eighteen out of twenty-four points on reading comprehension. These scores placed Student C at an independent level 40 fiction.

According to the DRA 2, this is approximately two grade levels below adequate for a sixth grade student.

In June, Student C was administered a level 50 assessment using nonfiction texts. She scored six out of eight points regarding reading engagement, thirteen out of sixteen on reading fluency, and seventeen out of twenty-four on reading comprehension. These scores appropriately showed that Student C's independent reading level grew to a level 50 nonfiction. This is approximately one grade level below benchmark.

Student D:

In January 2015 when the first DRA2 assessment was administered, Student D was tested at level 50 using fictional texts. He scored a six out of eight possible points on reading engagement, twelve out of sixteen regarding reading fluency, and nineteen out of a possible twenty-four points on reading comprehension. Overall, his independent reading level was identified as a level 50 fiction. This placed Student D's reading level one level below proficient for sixth grade.

In June, Student D demonstrated the growth that he had made over the course of the sixth grade year. He was tested using an assessment that was at a level 60 using nonfiction texts. He scored a five out of eight possible points on reading engagement, eleven out of sixteen points regarding reading fluency, and eighteen out of twenty-four points regarding reading comprehension. According to the scoring guide, Student D's assessment shows that his independent reading level is a 60 nonfiction. This places Student D at an appropriate level for the end of his sixth grade year.

Student E:

Student E completed the January DRA2 assessment at a level 50 using a fictional text. He scored five out of a possible eight points on reading engagement, twelve out of a possible sixteen on reading fluency, and sixteen out of a possible twenty-four points regarding reading comprehension. These scores placed Student E at an independent reading level of 50 fiction.

In June 2015, Student E completed a level 50 assessment again, but this time used a nonfiction text. This assessment showed a growth in Student E's scores. While he still earned five out of eight points regarding reading engagement, he increased his reading fluency score by two points to earn fourteen out of sixteen possible points. He also increased his reading comprehension score by one point to earn seventeen out of twenty-four points. Even though this assessment was completed with nonfiction texts, these scores kept Student E at an independent level 50 reading level.

### **Discussion**

The assessments collected throughout this study showed that all five participants made growth regarding their reading level over the course of their sixth grade school year. However, the levels of improvement vary for the students. Four of the five participants increased their reading level by one grade, while the fifth participant maintained his reading level, but improved his abilities to read fluently and comprehend a text.

There are many factors that led for these results to occur. As previously mentioned, three of the five participants received academic intervention services in reading while two did not. Also, all five students completed a reading interest survey to show any connections that can be drawn between a students' desire to engage in literature and a students' reading progress.

The analysis of the data shows that the three students who received academic intervention services all grew a substantial amount. While only two exited their sixth grade year reading at an

appropriate level that meets the district's sixth grade reading benchmark, all three students showed growth in the result of increasing one reading level from their January reading assessment to their June reading assessment. It can be concluded that having have differentiated reading intervention services every other day contributed to the students' reading development.

Student A:

Reading AIS Provider 2 shared during her interview that Student A required spending more time working with texts, reading them aloud in a comfortable setting, and discussing the text to help her build comprehension. To do this, Reading AIS Provider 2 created an assignment that was only given to Student A. She was to take texts at a lower level, for example children's literature, home with her to read aloud and discuss with her younger brother. This not only provided a connection for Student A between her life and literacy, but it also gave her additional practice with reading fluency and reading comprehension. These skills carried in to the classroom where I saw her create book groups with her peers, where they could read the same text and discuss it as they were reading. This helped Student A to become even more engaged with literature as well as with her peers.

Student A's June reading interest survey showed that she enjoys reading. She wrote that she reads outside of the classroom for fun, and when she is reading she feels entertained. She also recorded that she feels "confident" when reading out loud, and when asked if she enjoys this task, she wrote "yes. I read to my brother." As a result of the individualized strategies provided, Student A ended her sixth grade year reading on grade level.

Student B:

During her interview, Reading AIS Provider 1 explained that she utilized strategies with Students B that focused on his individual needs. For Student B, these included helping him to

find titles at his level, and to have individualized opportunities to read these stories with Reading AIS Provider 1 and discuss his comprehension of the text. She also required him to frequently write about the main idea and the theme of what he was reading, leading for these skills to become fluent. Eventually, he grew able to think critically about a text and write about it independently. This also became evident in our ELA class. As the year developed, Student B began sharing his ideas about texts read to his peers in small group settings as well as to the class in whole-group activities.

On his June reading interest survey, he stated that he feels excited when he is reading, and that he often chooses to read outside of school. He also wrote that he has recently finished four novels. As his ELA teacher, I recognized that he began to feel more comfortable taking risks in his ELA class, and this showed through his level of participation and his desire to share his ideas with his classmates. As a result of these strategies and opportunities provided within tiers one and two of the RTI model, Student B's reading level increased significantly.

Student C:

Reading AIS Provider 1 and I both recognized that Student C often rushed through her work to finish alongside her peers that were reading at a higher level than she was. As a result, she was not putting her best effort forward and was reading texts too quickly to develop a deep understanding.

To assist Student C with this, Reading AIS Provider 1 required her to read aloud multiple texts that were at a lower level. During her interview, Reading AIS Provider 1 shared that this often frustrated Student C, but that it was an effective strategy for her to practice reading fluency, identify the main idea of a new text, and create inferences to answer questions which reached beyond the text. She often required Student C to write about the theme of the story that she was

reading and to discuss her idea with other students in the group, and she recognized that Student C's written work did not include as much textual evidence and detail as her oral responses to her group mates.

On Student C's end of the year reading interest survey, she wrote that her mood when reading depends on the text. She also recorded that she does not often read outside of the classroom, but she had recently found a novel that she enjoys reading. She wrote that she does enjoy reading out loud. I believe that based on Student C's reluctant behaviors to engage in literature, she did not increase her reading level to an appropriate grade-level benchmark. However, the individualized work that she was provided by Reading AIS Provider 1 assisted her with increasing her reading level by one grade level.

Student D:

Because Student D was placed on a list of students to monitor closely due to his score on the previous years' New York State English Language Arts Assessment, I differentiated the instruction I provided for Student D in our ELA class over the course of the school year. One way that I did this was by providing Student D with visuals such as story mountains to help him identify significant details in the text and to organize these details in sequential order. Student D could refer back to these graphic organizers when it was time for him to respond to questions regarding the text read. Eventually, these skills became internalized by Student D and he became a more independent reader and writer.

Also, Student D had regular small group and one-to-one conferences to discuss the books he was reading. Within these conferences, I asked comprehension questions to help him monitor his understanding of what he was reading and provided him with the opportunity to ask questions about his books and think critically about the texts.

Student D's reading interest survey showed mixed emotions regarding literature. He noted that he rarely reads outside of the classroom without prompts to do so, but he feels curious when he is reading which guides him to read more. I believe that the curiosity that Student D felt when he was reading allowed for him to establish deeper connections with literature, which led for him to make the growth that he did over the course of the school year. As a result, he finished sixth grade reading on grade level.

Student E:

Because Student E did not attend reading AIS, I provided him with multiple opportunities for individualized, meaningful reading instruction over the course of the school year. I regularly met with student E in a one-to-one context to discuss literature that he was reading outside of school, as well as nonfiction and fiction texts that I had selected for him. While he showed that he could comprehend texts at a surface level, Student E showed difficulty thinking beyond the text he was reading and thinking inferentially. I provided him with graphic organizers to assist him with organizing details from the text that can be used as stepping stones for inferences, and while Student E continued to not inference accurately, his writing improved drastically. He showed that he was able to include appropriate details that accurately supported his ideas and demonstrated that he could refer back to texts read to answer prompts. However, the answers frequently remained from within the text and did not extend beyond.

It was difficult to assist Student E with finishing a book over the first half of his sixth grade school year. He regularly started a book but abandoned it after a few weeks, when he would start a new book. This trend often continued. However, the second half of the year proved to be different. Once our class began reading a book that suited his interest, Student E began reading much more frequently. He began visiting the library to look for other texts that were

similar to the one read in class, and his engagement in class increased. He began sharing his ideas and thoughts during whole group discussions, and taking risks answering questions that went beyond the text.

Student E's reading interest survey showed inconsistent emotions regarding literature. When asked how he feels when he is reading, he wrote "bored or excited." However, he stressed that he does not enjoy when he is asked to read out loud, stating that it makes him feel nervous, bored, scared, and unhappy.

Overall, I believe that because Student E found literature that he was interested in, he began to make more substantial progress towards the end of his sixth grade year. If he had been introduced to literature he was interested in sooner in the school year, I believe that Student E would have made additional growth. However, Student E did make progress over the course of his sixth grade year and showed a desire to continue to grow.

As a result of this study, it can be concluded that providing differentiated reading instruction allows for students to make growth regarding their reading level. While only three students in this study received academic intervention services, all five students received differentiated instruction within either tier one, tier two, or both throughout the course of their sixth grade school year.

The three students who received reading AIS had differentiated opportunities in small group settings, also referred to as tier two of the RTI model. They also received differentiated instruction within tier one, which was their English language arts class. While the two students who did not receive AIS services were not provided tier two services, they were provided differentiated instruction within tier one. This was done by providing frequent assessments to all students, which Brimijoin (2005) states is essential, so that I could monitor their reading

comprehension of the texts being read in class. When they demonstrated inadequate understanding of grade-level texts, I worked with them individually to discuss the literature and to provide them with comprehension strategies and graphic organizers that assisted them with thinking about and beyond the text.

If I were to create this study again, I would provide more opportunities for Student C and Student E to read literature that suited their interests. Morgan (2014) stated that differentiation means tailoring educational opportunities to meet a student's learning style in both instruction and assessments. Both Student C and Student E demonstrated that when their interests were involved with the reading process, they were able to engage with the literature and work at a higher level to comprehend the text. If I had assisted these students with finding texts that they were interested in earlier in the school year, I believe that they would have made more growth than they did.

Also, to ensure that I was providing the most beneficial opportunities for my students, I would have reached out to Reading AIS Provider 1 and Reading AIS Provider 2 earlier in the year to receive their input on how to best meet the needs of Student D and Student E since they were not receiving tier two instruction but would have benefited from it. If I had done this, I believe that I would have been able to provide additional opportunities for these two students to have received individualized reading instruction, which would have led for them to make additional progress.

### **Conclusion**

Differentiated instruction is an effective way to provide students with meaningful, tailored lessons. Research shows that when instruction is individualized for students' personal strengths and needs, they are more likely to make progress (Morgan, 2014). When differentiated

instruction is integrated throughout the Response to Intervention Model, students are likely to make growth regardless of which tier they are receiving instruction in.

The results from this study show that when students are provided with the opportunity for differentiated instruction they are likely to make growth in terms of reading level. The results also show that when a student is engaged in literacy and has a personal, emotional connection to it, they are more likely to make growth.

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