Journal of Curriculum and Instruction (JoCI)
May 2014, Vol. 8, No. 1, Pp. 48-66
http://www.joci.ecu.edu

ISSN: 1937-3929
doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

Using a Mnemonic Strategy to Match Elements of Response to Intervention Lessons with Performance Assessment Requirements

Brooks R. Vostal
Trinka Messenheimer
David Hampton
Starr E. Keyes
Bowling Green State University

Abstract

Performance assessments are designed to identify teachers' strengths and weaknesses and differentiate those who will positively impact students' outcomes from those who will not. One prominent performance assessment centers all documentation and analysis on a *learning segment*, a portion of an instructional unit (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2013). For preservice teacher candidates using a Response to Intervention (RTI) model for instruction, there may be a mismatch between the performance assessment and actual practice. Schools that use RTI require specific interventions that increase students' skill mastery. Because of this, teacher candidates may not group lessons into instructional units that are typical to many classroom teachers' settings and performance assessment expectations. In this article, we share the story of Kyle, a preservice special education teacher who completed a performance assessment while delivering instruction in RTI and explain his use of the DESCRIBE IT strategy (Vostal, Messenheimer, & Hampton, 2013). The strategy structured his *intervention unit* so that he could document and analyze his performance during the assessment. We draw conclusions about the implications of using DECSRIBE IT to alleviate potential mismatch between performance assessment expectations and intervention delivery.

Keywords: Teacher Preparation, Response to Intervention, Teacher Performance Assessment

Performance assessments that are grounded in the evidence of classroom teaching may provide the most direct evaluations of teaching ability (Pecheone & Chung, 2006). For preservice teachers, performance assessments have the potential to distinguish candidates' abilities to promote student learning and may be useful in assisting university faculty as they define directions for improvements in teacher

ISSN: 1937-3929
doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013). For example, the edTPA, created by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE, 2013) and administered by Pearson, is a prominent performance assessment currently being implemented in twenty-three states and the District of Columbia. It includes specific guidelines tailored to each certification area for preservice teachers and focuses on the three teaching tasks of planning, instruction, and assessment. The assessment itself centers on preservice teachers' documentation of a *learning segment,* three-to-five consecutive lessons that are typically part of a larger instructional unit.

For some teachers, an instructional unit might be centered on the content of textbook chapters, the scope of classroom activities, or district and state curriculum goals (Boudah, Lenz, Schumaker, & Deshler, 2008); while for others, instructional units may be centered on conceptual understandings guided by essential questions (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). Those teachers who deliver instruction within a multi-tiered system of support such as Response to Intervention (RTI; Lane, Menzies, Ennis, & Bezdek, 2013), however, find that their instructional units are less centered on curriculum goals and more centered on students' skill acquisition, targeted to help students access the general curriculum. This critical difference may impact the way preservice teachers conceptualize instruction *and* how that instruction can be represented in a learning segment for a performance assessment. Preservice teachers whose role is that of *intervention specialist* within RTI (e.g., special education teacher), find that the instructional units from which they can extract a learning segment are much different than the traditional units teachers enact in many general education settings.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach to instruction designed to ensure that all students receive the interventions, supports, and accommodations they need (Stecker, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2008). When students struggle to master critical skills in the general education curriculum, RTI directs both general education teachers and special education teachers to implement a series of increasingly intensive interventions to help them succeed. Within RTI, general education incorporates research-based curricula and regular administration of universal screenings (i.e., Tier 1) and uses problem-solving protocols for making decisions about which students may benefit from targeted, small group interventions (i.e., Tier 2; Ardoin, 2006; Fuchs & Deshler, 2007; Shepherd & Salembier, 2011). For those relatively few students who do not respond to the targeted Tier 2 interventions, individualized assessments and interventions are often administered through special education services (i.e., Tier 3; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). Whether in general education Tier 2 or special education Tier 3, the specific academic interventions delivered in an RTI model are designed to provide specialized, skill-specific instruction to meet students' needs.

Intervention specialists who deliver instruction within an RTI model employ a variety of research-based approaches and embrace the premise that effective instruction can best be identified across time through trial and error. They must be

ISSN: 1937-3929
doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

patient, persistent, and tolerant of ambiguity (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012) as they deliver instruction as though engaged in a single-subject experiment. Within this context, *intervention units* are not defined by predetermined activities that lead to some conceptual understanding of course content. Rather, they are defined by students' mastery of generalizable skills and structured by a decision-making process of intervention selection and intensification.

When preservice intervention specialists are placed in settings where their role focuses on intervention delivery within RTI, they need to approach performance assessments such as edTPA in a different manner than typical classroom teachers. Preservice intervention specialists faced with a performance assessment predicated on a learning segment, which in turn is predicated on a traditional notion of a *unit*, may need to justify the difference in their units from those found in other, more traditional classroom-based settings. In essence, they may discover a mismatch between performance assessments such as edTPA and their practice in systems of RTI.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate a practitioner-oriented strategy, DESCRIBE IT (Vostal, Messenheimer, & Hampton, 2013), which offers preservice intervention specialists a structure to guide intervention delivery within RTI. First, we explain the mnemonic strategy and how our teacher education program selected it. Next, we outline the steps in DESCRIBE IT and, for each step, share an example of one preservice intervention specialist's use of DESCRIBE IT during an initial performance assessment (i.e., in preparation for edTPA, but not the edTPA itself). Throughout this section, we examine the ways in which the steps of DESCRIBE IT helped this preservice intervention specialist document his learning segment. Finally, we draw conclusions about the value of DESCRIBE IT as a tool for preservice intervention specialists to overcome the potential mismatch between performance assessments and instructional delivery within RTI.

DESCRIBE IT

The DESCRIBE IT strategy (Vostal et al., 2013) was created by faculty in our program to address an area of weakness in preservice intervention specialists' preparation. Each letter in the mnemonic structures a step for intervention delivery (see Figure 1). First-letter mnemonic strategies have been shown to be beneficial for teaching students to complete a variety of process-oriented tasks (Hughes, 2011; Reid & Lienemann, 2006; Schumaker & Deshler, 2006). Strategies provide heuristics that guide learners as they tackle complex problems (e.g., essay composition, problem-solving; Rosenshine, 1995) and include a series of decisions or actions to be completed sequentially during the task (Hughes, 2011). These decisions or actions are often represented in a first-letter mnemonic. Each letter in the mnemonic typically stands for an observable step; this step starts with a verb that begins with the corresponding letter. Preservice intervention specialists can use first-letter mnemonics as a heuristic to guide

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doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

their professional practices (e.g., Friend & Bursuck, 2013, INCLUDE; Hughes, 2011, STRATEGY; McNaughton & Vostal, 2010, LAFF Don't CRY).

Recently, candidates in our *Mild/Moderate Intervention Specialist* licensure program (i.e., designed to prepare special education teachers to deliver services for students with mild-to-moderate special educational needs across disability categories) were placed in settings for their methods practicum in which their primary role was to deliver interventions as part of the school's RTI system. The coursework they had previously taken focused on classroom instruction and was insufficient for the role they were asked to take within RTI, an issue that has been discussed as a problem for special education teachers across the field (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). As we reviewed guidelines for intervention delivery and data-based decision-making within RTI, we found systems-level guidelines (e.g., Burns, Riley-Tillman, & VanDerHeydon, 2012; Newton, Horner, Todd, Algozinne, & Algozinne, 2012) and suggestions for individualized intervention components in particular content areas (e.g., Wilson, Faggella-Luby, & Wei, 2013). However, none of these provided a clear structure for our preservice intervention specialists in their initial stages of learning to deliver interventions. To fill this void, we identified steps for intervention delivery based on recommendations (e.g., Lembke, Hampton, & Beyers, 2012; Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008), and we developed the first-letter mnemonic DESCRIBE IT to facilitate our students' acquisition of these steps (Vostal et al., 2013).

In our special education teacher preparation program, we teach DESCRIBE IT to all preservice intervention specialists in the senior methods block, the semester immediately before student teaching. During this semester, they take courses in teaching literacy, teaching mathematics, conducting assessment, and developing an Individualized Education Program (IEP), along with an eight-week, full time practicum. Across the four courses, we introduce components and background knowledge for each step in DESCRIBE IT. Then as part of preparing for their practicum, preservice intervention specialists are taught to use the strategy by completing sequential steps, structuring planning, and selecting research-based interventions. Since candidates are required to submit evidence from their student teaching placement to edTPA, the methods practicum offers an opportunity for them to practice performance assessment and receive feedback from instructors on documents that represent a separate experience than their official edTPA submission on which instructors are not allowed to deliver feedback.

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DESCRIBE IT Step	Kyle's Instructional Action	Aligned with edTPA Component
Define a target skill	IEP goals and direct observation suggested that Kyle's student needed to improve oral reading fluency.	*Planning*
Elect a reliable measure	Using published information of technical adequacy, Kyle selected the CBM-Reading from AIMSWeb.	*Planning*
Summarize baseline	Kyle completed three baseline probes and graphed data.	*Assessment*
Calibrate a goal	Using published suggestions for weekly growth rates, Kyle calculated expected progress throughout the intervention.	*Assessment*
Recommend research-based interventions	Kyle identified a research-based intervention that targeted oral reading fluency.	*Planning*
Implement intervention with fidelity	Kyle planned his lessons to include critical intervention components and verified their presence during the lesson by reviewing his video.	*Instruction*
Begin progress monitoring	Using published CBM-Reading probes, Kyle documented his student's progress twice a week.	*Assessment*
Evaluate effectiveness	After four weeks of intervention, Kyle examined the data he collected to determine that his student was making progress, but was not fast enough to reach the goal.	*Assessment*
Intensify instruction	Kyle made changes to his instruction within the framework of the intervention and documented these changes in the performance assessment.	*Instruction*
Talk with your team	Kyle showed the data taken throughout the intervention to his cooperating teacher and together they made recommendations for upcoming instruction and new IEP goals.	*Assessment*

Figure 1. DESCRIBE IT strategy for instruction in RTI, Kyle's actions during instruction, and where those actions align with performance assessment components.

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Designing a Unit with DESCRIBE IT

Kyle (a pseudonym) was in his senior year of the Mild/Moderate Intervention Specialist program. He was assigned to a methods practicum placement in which he was responsible for implementing interventions in an elementary resource room for students who had been identified for special education services. This resource room served students in grades three-through-six who were at-risk for or had been identified with disabilities. The number of students in the resource room fluctuated from one to seven according to the schedule of intervention delivery.

Kyle's cooperating teacher requested that his work focus on Joe, a student in 5th grade identified with a mild intellectual disability. Joe's IEP indicated that he read at a 3rd grade level; he spent the majority of the day included in a general education class; and only came to the resource room for targeted intervention. The cooperating teacher was responsible for the resource room instruction, so Kyle's responsibilities were centered on interventions within that setting. For the performance assessment, Kyle had to document a description of his focus learner and setting in order to provide context for the choices he made about learning targets, assessment materials, and learning tasks that would make up his learning segment of three-to-five lessons. Next, we provide a summary of each step in DESCRIBE IT within the context of Kyle's RTI setting. We share the way Kyle documented and aligned each performance assessment task with information from his DESCRIBE IT lessons (see Figure 1).

D: *Define a Target Skill*

Kyle initiated his planning with the D step, which prompts preservice intervention specialists to *Define a target skill*. Target skills are essentially the same as *learning targets* (i.e., academic or functional outcomes that students achieve over time by meeting lesson objectives; SCALE, 2013); they emphasize basic skills that are generally the focus of interventions within RTI (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007). Kyle examined Joe's IEP and selected one goal for instruction, to "read a passage and increase his fluency to 70 words per minute." Based on direct observation of Joe during reading, Kyle noted that he did not follow punctuation or use expression (i.e., *prosody*) in his oral reading; therefore Kyle selected a skill that would be the most generalizable, as well as measurable, as the focus of intervention planning. Based on his student's IEP, his understanding of DESCRIBE IT guidelines, and the context in which he would teach, Kyle focused the intervention on *oral reading fluency* (ORF), words correct per minute (WCPM) read aloud.

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E: *Elect a Reliable Measure*

After defining the target skill, Kyle followed the E step, *Elect a reliable measure*, in order to decide how he would assess ORF. Targeted skills should automatically suggest specific measurement tools for monitoring students' progress (Stecker, Fuchs et al., 2008). While DESCRIBE IT could be applied to measures that teachers design themselves, the E step emphasizes *electing* (i.e., *choosing*) measures that have documented technical adequacy, such as curriculum-based measurement (CBM; Lembke, Hampton, & Hendricker, 2013). Contrary to what may be implied by their name, curriculum-based measures (e.g., DIBELS, AIMSWeb) rely on standardized probes, not tests defined by the specific curriculum used in a school. These CBM probes are often administered in one minute, with multiple forms of comparable difficulty, producing data that represent student progress over time, predicting which students will succeed on high-stakes assessments (Good, Simmons, & Kame'enui, 2001).

During his methods courses, Kyle had learned about scientifically validated measures for reading (see Wayman, Wallace, Wiley, Ticha, & Espin, 2007 for a review of these measures), and websites that help teachers identify them. For example, the National Center on Response to Intervention (2012) publishes an evaluation of progress monitoring tools, presenting reliability and validity evidence for both free and purchasable tools that may be used to monitor students' progress. Kyle elected to use the CBM-Reading probes from AIMSWeb, which have demonstrated technical adequacy and specifically measure ORF through multiple probes.[1] Using these probes, Kyle listened to Joe read from a set of standardized passages, and he calculated the WCPM as an objective indicator of Joe's ORF. Kyle noted that because the elementary classes in which Joe was included had a frequently changing schedule, the speed of administration for these probes provided another very real benefit in addition to the reliability and validity of data they produced.

Aligning Steps D and E with Performance Assessment

Steps D (*define a target skill*) and E *(elect a reliable measure)* fall squarely within performance assessment expectations for preservice intervention specialists' documentation of planning. The target skill Kyle defined in D grounded intervention planning in the student's needs and the learning environment. Step E directed Kyle to validated tools to measure Joe's skills, which Kyle could document in the planning component of the performance assessment. Because documenting interventions with reliable data is the foundation of RTI (Lembke et al., 2013), DESCRIBE IT relies on rigorous measures of student skills.

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S: *Summarize the Baseline*

Kyle administered three baseline progress monitoring probes from AIMSWeb CBM-Reading during the first week of his practicum placement. The S step prompted him to *Summarize the baseline* after administering three probes at the student's instructional level (Hosp & Hosp, 2003). Kyle then plotted data on a graph in order to have an objective view of his student's performance (Shinn, Baker, Habedank, & Good, 1993). Data across the three probes for Kyle's student indicated that his ORF on instructional level material was measured to be 76, 88, and 89 WCPM.

C: *Calibrate a Goal*

The C step prompted Kyle to *Calibrate a goal*. The median of baseline scores serves as the best indicator of a student's initial performance (Stecker, Lembke et al., 2008). In the intervention unit, Joe's median of baseline was 88 WCPM. During Kyle's preparation, he had learned to use published information regarding year-end benchmarks (i.e., typical scores that represent a likely non-risk status in reading proficiency at that grade level) or normative growth rates (i.e., typical and ambitious weekly rates of improvement for students by grade level) to determine appropriate year-end goals. Many CBM tools, including AIMSWeb, have been standardized across large numbers of students, and they provide growth rates normed with their progress monitoring materials (Lembke et al., 2013). In Kyle's performance assessment, he determined a goal by calculating a research-based ambitious weekly growth rate for ORF of .75 WCPM (Fuchs, Fuchs, Hamlett, Walz, & Germann, 1993). Calibrating this across the remaining seven weeks of his practicum placement, Kyle set a goal for Joe of 93.25 WCPM. On a graph of progress monitoring probes, he drew a line between the baseline median and the final goal to serve as a goal line on which to base intervention decisions.

Aligning Steps S and C with Performance Assessment

Before Kyle began implementing his intervention, in order to adhere to best practice within RTI, he had to assess Joe's skills. Steps S (*summarize baseline*) and C (*calibrate a goal*) occur early in the DESCRIBE IT process, before instructional procedure decisions are made. While performance assessments often require the documentation of some pre-assessment before a learning segment, pre-assessments in RTI may take place weeks before the actual three-to-five lessons of a learning segment. Even though pre-assessments in RTI may be temporally separated from the learning segment, baseline and goal calibration define the rest of the decisions made during later instruction. Therefore, preservice intervention specialists need to document baseline and goal calibration to make their case for quality instruction.

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R: *Recommend Research-based Interventions*

Based on the results of probes, Kyle addressed Joe's ORF by conducting a repeated reading intervention based on the work of Therrien and Kubina (2006) and Conderman and Strobel (2006). This decision was made in the R step, which prompted him to *Recommend research-based interventions*. Kyle's preparation in methods courses emphasized that positive student outcomes during intervention are tied to practices with the strongest research base (Cook, Tankersley, & Landrum, 2009), and he was guided to use practitioner-oriented literature to select among interventions, recognizing that a perfect one-size-fits-all intervention is unlikely (Torres, Farley, & Cook, 2012). While he weighed many factors (e.g., student needs, content area), Kyle selected an intervention based on its adherence to principles of effective specialized instruction: (a) increased content coverage, indicated by practices that increase instructional efficiency (e.g., Konrad, Helf, & Joseph, 2011); (b) optimized engaged time, indicated by practices that provide for active student responding (e.g., Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, & Marsh, 2008); and (c) promotion of high levels of success, indicated by practices that include initial guidance and prompted practice (Archer & Hughes, 2011).

Aligning Step R to Performance Assessment

Combined with the planning Kyle completed in steps D (*define a target* skill) and E (*elect a reliable measure*), step R (*recommend research-based interventions*) allowed Kyle to make the data-based instructional decisions for which he was responsible within RTI, while simultaneously providing documentation of his planning for the performance assessment. Within the planning task in the performance assessment, Kyle documented that repeated reading adhered to all three principles of effective specialized instruction. The intervention sessions focused on repeated one-minute readings and increased content coverage through instructional efficiency. That is, across the intervention unit, Kyle focused on multiple repetitions within each session. Also, the intervention provided multiple opportunities to respond because Joe actively read aloud. Finally, the repeated reading intervention promoted high levels of success because Kyle initially modeled fluent reading of the passage, and he provided structured error corrections between each reading, thus ensuring that Joe had the chance to use corrective feedback immediately.

I: *Implement Intervention with Fidelity*

Kyle next enacted the I step, which prompted him to *Implement the intervention with fidelity*. Fidelity refers to delivering interventions as they were designed, and it is used to ensure that decisions about intervention effectiveness are a result of matching an intervention to a student's need, and not the result of inconsistent implementation (Gresham, MacMillan, Beebe-Frankenberger, & Bocian, 2000). Fidelity may be just as

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doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

important as collecting data on student outcomes (Musti-Rao, Hawkins, & Tan, 2011), offering validity to instructional decisions. In order to assess the fidelity with which he implemented the ORF intervention, Kyle scripted his lesson plans. He found that the degree to which his recorded instruction demonstrated intervention fidelity offered opportunities for analysis. While there were unscripted parts of the lesson (e.g., responding to a student question, following up on a student comment), his fidelity checks prompted Kyle to plan his questions and feedback in such a way as to give him ample evidence for his commentary. Rather than checking to see if he said every word he had scripted, he focused on whether he enacted each component of the intervention, which could then be documented in the performance assessment.

Aligning Step I with Performance Assessment

Step I built on the previous steps and aligned with the instruction task that Kyle completed for the performance assessment in which he was required to document actual teaching. The repeated reading intervention selected to meet Joe's needs typically does not produce significant changes in ORF across only three-to-five consecutive lessons. Rather, the benefits of this intervention are shown over time. With that understanding, Kyle documented his instruction as it related to initial implementation of the intervention.

B: *Begin Progress Monitoring*

The B step prompted Kyle to *Begin progress monitoring.* Monitoring progress using probes from the measure elected earlier allowed Kyle to compare Joe's current performance to past performance (i.e., Lembke et al., 2013). Data from progress monitoring probes were plotted on the graph that calibrated the goal with the baseline (Stecker, Lembke et al., 2008); Kyle could use this graph to provide feedback to Joe. Generally, data should be collected over three-to-six weeks (Lembke et al., 2012; Stecker, Lembke et al., 2008), with probes administered at least weekly (Lembke, McMaster, & Stecker, 2010). Kyle administered probes for four weeks before moving to the next step in DESCRIBE IT.

E: *Evaluate Effectiveness of the Intervention*

The E step prompted Kyle to *Evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.* After multiple data points were collected, Kyle determined whether the intervention led to satisfactory progress for Joe (Stecker, Lembke et al., 2008). Progress was indicated by the relative position of data to the goal line. Data from the first four probes fell below the goal line. While the first progress monitoring probe indicated data lower than the baseline median, the following three data points were only slightly below the goal line. Using these data, Kyle evaluated that the intervention was demonstrating some effects, though not at a rate necessary for Joe to achieve the goal within the designated time.

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Aligning Steps B and E with Performance Assessment

Steps B (*begin progress monitoring*) and E (*evaluate effectiveness of the intervention*) allowed Kyle to align progress monitoring data to the assessment documentation required by the performance assessment, but these data were not enough by themselves. Progress monitoring provided data to determine whether the intervention impacted Joe's IEP goals, but the performance assessment required *daily* indications of student progress. These daily measures represent initial mastery, while progress monitoring data represent skill generalization. The repeated reading Kyle used (Conderman & Strobel, 2006) also generated daily measures for the repeated passages, which provided formative assessment data to determine instructional changes on a day-to-day basis. Progress monitoring indicated that Joe was not making anticipated progress.

I: *Intensify Instruction*

Because Kyle had planned his learning segment to overlap a key decision point in the DESCRIBE IT strategy (i.e., *Evaluate effectiveness*), he was able to document changes in his instruction based on Joe's probe scores. The second I step prompted Kyle to *Intensify instruction*. The ORF data produced during the intervention suggested that Kyle needed to make changes in order to help Joe make progress. In his methods courses, Kyle had learned numerous variables that could be altered to intensify instruction. His documentation emphasized that a few were particularly salient to this situation. The first was time allotted for instruction. Kyle documented that he increased instruction 10-to-15 minutes per day. This allowed him to increase the number of repeated readings to four each day. Another variable was the amount of judicious review to practice previously taught material and skills (Archer & Hughes, 2011). Kyle increased the review at the start of each intervention session by adding a game in which Joe practiced isolated words from the passage to be read.

Aligning Step I with Performance Assessment

Combining both I steps, *implement intervention with fidelity* and *intensify instruction*, Kyle scheduled the five consecutive lessons for his learning segment so that they would show the intensifications he made in instruction. Kyle video-recorded these five sessions and used the videos to respond to performance assessment prompts about the environment he established and the engagement with and understanding of the target skill he fostered. To find evidence for each of these, Kyle examined both his lesson plans and his videos, which were highly aligned as prompted by the DESCRIBE IT strategy. Because he scheduled his learning segment to include this critical data-based decision-making step in the strategy, instructional changes Kyle made were reflected within his performance assessment.

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doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

T: *Talk with Your Team*

The T step in DESCRIBE IT prompted Kyle to *Talk with your team*, sharing data on intervention effects with stakeholders in order to consider fundamental changes in the intervention. Ultimately, it is in these team meetings that an intervention unit comes to an end. Without a team decision, interventions are supposed to continue - though they may continue to be intensified - so that an individual intervention specialist's work maintains its integrity within a larger, school-wide RTI system. In Kyle's situation, the intervention unit ended when his practicum placement came to an end. But, by talking with his team, in this case his cooperating teacher, Kyle provided ORF data that could be used to determine Joe's subsequent IEP goals. The effects of the intervention unit were shared with the intervention specialist who would work with Joe after Kyle left the school. The structured unit and data, especially those that indicated that intensification helped Joe achieve his goal, provided important information on which to base team decisions about next steps for him.

Aligning Step T with Performance Assessment

The final step*, talk with your team,* required Kyle to make recommendations with his team about future instruction Joe would need; this process aligned with the assessment task in the performance assessment. This component is perhaps most naturally aligned with the regular work of an intervention specialist teaching in an RTI model. Making future recommendations is integral to any multi-tiered system of support. It matches best practice within RTI and expectations inherent in the performance assessment. While the performance assessment did not require Kyle to communicate future instructional planning with colleagues, parents, or administrators, this type of sharing is prompted by DESCRIBE IT. As Kyle completed step T, he expressed confidence that he had fulfilled his responsibilities within RTI, while accumulating documentation to complete his performance assessment.

Conclusion

Decisions from Kyle's use of DESCRIBE IT illustrate how the strategy steps led to an intervention unit from which he was able to extract a learning segment for analysis during a performance assessment. Performance assessments themselves can include artifacts based on candidates' planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection that showcase their content knowledge and how to teach it (Darling-Hammond, 2006). By following the steps in DESCRIBE IT, Kyle documented and reflected on the planning, instruction, and assessment required by the performance assessment in a manner that complied with his specific responsibilities as intervention specialist in a system of RTI. While instructional design and delivery within RTI are not naturally aligned with the apparent assumptions of this performance assessment (i.e., learning segments are portions of larger instructional units that focus on larger curricular goals), the

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DESCRIBE IT strategy helped Kyle organize an intervention using best practice within RTI *and* complete the performance assessment.

By developing and delivering lessons through DESCRIBE IT, preservice intervention specialists gain experience in making an analytical match between instruction and the components required in performance assessment. Intervention units within an RTI model may not include a typical summative assessment; rather, progress monitoring may extend as long as data indicate that a student is continuing to benefit from intervention. Moreover, the pre-assessment that guides initial instruction may be completed weeks in advance of a learning segment, thereby enabling a preservice intervention specialist to showcase responsive instruction. Within this context, units are defined by data-driven intervention decision-making across time, which is not the typical structure of most classroom-based instructional units.

While suggestions for content area lessons (e.g., Wilson et al., 2013) and systems-level guidelines for intervention delivery within RTI (e.g., Burns et al., 2012; Newton et al., 2012) are important to preservice training, the DESCRIBE IT strategy provides a unique heuristic that may be particularly applicable to preservice intervention specialists. The structure imposed through the sequential steps of DESCRIBE IT follows recommendations for intervention delivery in RTI (e.g., Lembke et al., 2012; Stecker, Lembke et al., 2008), and the clarity of its steps emphasizes the decisions made across the intervention in order to assist preservice intervention specialists in documenting components needed to complete performance assessments such as edTPA. As Kyle's experience illustrates, the steps of DESCRIBE IT map onto the tasks of a performance assessment.

Although DESCRIBE IT (Vostal et al., 2013) is a newly developed mnemonic strategy, initial implementation has been encouraging. Candidates in our program who participated in a qualitative evaluation of the strategy reported that DESCRIBE IT offered them a structure during intervention development and delivery that enhanced their confidence in their ability to make data-based decisions about intervention effectiveness. Currently, we are evaluating the effect of DESCRIBE IT on quantitative measures of preservice intervention specialists' self-efficacy and indicators of strategy acquisition, as well as the technical adequacy of interventions enacted as part of pre-edTPA performance assessments. This study promises to offer valuable insight into the ways that teacher candidates use DESCRIBE IT and its effect on their completion of accreditation-related key assessments. Even as we gather these data, our initial evidence, such as Kyle's case presented here, suggests that the DESCRIBE IT strategy may provide preservice intervention specialists – and the teacher educators who prepare them – a useful structure through which to define and implement intervention units and learning segments while teaching within RTI.

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doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

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Journal of Curriculum and Instruction (JoCI)
May 2014, Vol. 8, No. 1, Pp. 48-66
http://www.joci.ecu.edu

ISSN: 1937-3929
doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

Note

[1] Samples from the Reading-CBM probes from AIMSWeb are available at http://www.aimsweb.com/products/features/assessments/reading-cbm/additional-r-cbm-resources.

About the Authors

Brooks R. Vostal, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Intervention Services at Bowling Green State University. He was formerly a high school English teacher and intervention coordinator. His scholarship focuses on instructional strategies to improve students' engagement and preparing teachers to implement academic and behavioral interventions. Email: bvostal@bgsu.edu

Trinka Messenheimer, EdD, is an Associate Professor in the School of Intervention Services at Bowling Green State University. She coordinates edTPA preparations for interns in special education. Dr. Messenheimer teaches courses in literacy and seminars for preparation of edTPA. Lately her research has focused on literacy in the areas of children's literature and student teachers' literacy histories. Email: trinka@bgsu.edu

David Hampton, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Intervention Services at Bowling Green State University. His research interests include using Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) in mathematics for young children, validating classroom use of formative assessment to inform instruction, and examining the self-efficacy of students identified with Dyslexia. Email: hamptod@bgsu.edu

ISSN: 1937-3929
doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

Starr E. Keyes, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the School of Intervention Services at Bowling Green State University. Over the last 12 years, Dr. Keyes has taught elementary school, middle school, and postsecondary students. Her research interests include computer-assisted instruction (CAI), interventions for students with mild-moderate disabilities, cultural and linguistic diversity, urban education, and preservice teacher education. Email: skeyes@bgsu.edu