



Video

FULL DETAILS AND TRANSCRIPT

## Progress Monitoring at Tier 2

Carol McDonald Connor, Ph.D. • September 2009

Topic: Response to Intervention in Primary Grade Reading  
Practice: Progress Monitoring and Differentiation

### Highlights

- Dr. Carol McDonald Connor discusses the importance of ongoing progress monitoring and data-driven decision making in tailoring Tier 2 instruction.
- Frequent progress monitoring and regrouping are essential in RtI.
- Tiers are permeable and flexible. Students should be moving fluidly between the tiers as their response to interventions and learning needs change and evolve.
- Dr. Connor provides guidance on assessing foundational reading skills at each grade level, including the use of formal progress monitoring measures and informal curriculum-embedded approaches.
- Dr. Connor provides advice on how to select progress monitoring measures and develop data-driven decision-making rules.
- Students who are not making adequate progress in Tier 2 interventions need more intensive instruction. Dr. Connor explains how to increase the instructional intensity for students needing Tier 3 interventions.

## About the Interviewee

Dr. Carol McDonald Connor is an associate professor in psychology at Florida State University and the Florida Center for Reading Research. Her research examines the links between children’s language and literacy development, with the goal of illuminating reasons for the perplexing difficulties children who are atypical and diverse learners have developing basic and advanced reading skills. Most recently, her research interests have focused on children’s learning in the classroom, from preschool through third grade. These studies indicate that the effectiveness of specific instructional activities depends on the language and reading skills children bring with them to school; child characteristics-by-instruction interactions. Recently awarded the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (2008), the Society for Research in Child Development Early Career Award (2009), and the Richard Snow Award (2008), she is the principal investigator on studies funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the Institute for Education Sciences, and the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development.

## Full Transcript

I am Carol McDonald Connor, and I am an associate professor at Florida State University in the Department of Developmental Psychology.

Teachers ask me all the time, “Why do we have to do progress monitoring? Why is it important? We’ve screened the children; we know how they’re doing.” And what we tell them is that children vary greatly in their response to the instruction they get in the classroom from the teacher and also the small-group interventions that teachers or other professionals might be doing as part of Tier 2. If we don’t do ongoing progress monitoring, we won’t know (1) when a child is doing very well and they can be moved out of Tier 2 or (2) they’re not responding to the intervention that’s supposed to be helping them.

An important thing to remember about RtI [Response to Intervention] is that these tiers are permeable, they’re flexible, and that children should be moving between the tiers. We don’t want to fall into what we call the “tracking trap.” That means that children are put in Tier 2 and they are left in Tier 2 all year long when Tier 2 may not be the best place for them. This happened in the old days where children were put into the blue bird group, for example. And even if they were showing great progress, they stayed in the blue bird group because our expectations for them were low. The idea with RtI is our expectations for all children are high, regardless of where they’re starting out. And all it means when a child is starting below grade level, for example, is that we have to work that much harder to get them to grade level by the end of the school year by frequent progress monitoring and by regrouping, so that children are grouped according to the skills we want them to improve on. All children are going to make the kinds of progress we want them to make.

### ***Monitoring Important Reading Skills***

The important thing when we think about progress monitoring is that we're monitoring the skills that are important for the child at the grade level. As you move from kindergarten through the grades, the basic skills are really important in terms of phonics, phonological awareness, and fluency. As you move up the grades, fluency becomes increasingly important. We want these decoding skills to become automatic, so that children are reading without thinking about "How do I sound out this word?" As they continue to move up, the vocabulary and the comprehension and the writing skills become increasingly important.

Frequently, the school district will have access to progress monitoring measures. There are many, many good measures out there that assess phonological awareness, letter name, letter sound, oral reading fluency, non-word reading, which is a great way to measure decoding.

There are fewer vocabulary and comprehension progress monitoring measures, but there are a number of informal measures that can give really important information. One way to do this is to have children read text that is slightly above their comfort zone, slightly difficult for them. Don't give them any help, don't give them the words, and see how they go about reading this text. What do they do when they get to a word that they don't know? Do they look at the teacher and say, "Tell me"? Do they try to sound it out? Do they look at pictures and try to guess? All of these are good indications of what's breaking down when a child reads and so what we need to help them with.

### ***Increasing Intensity at Tier 3***

What do we do when we have a child that just isn't making the kinds of progress we would hope even though they're getting Tier 2 interventions? In that case, it's time to think about moving them to even more intensive Tier 3 intervention. Frequently, in Tier 2 we are using fairly scripted off-the-shelf interventions and they may not work for some children. Tier 3 allows us to offer much more individualized, tailored, intensive interventions that really should be able to help these children. We typically encourage the very best professionals to provide the Tier 3: the reading specialist, the literacy coach, the speech language pathologist. And it is likely that these are the children that will need to be referred for special education. What we're hoping is that by providing this intensive Tier 3 intervention, they won't need special ed, that this level of still general ed, Tier 3 intervention, will be enough to keep them off and out of special ed.