

# Response to Intervention as a Structuring Benchmark for Organizing Services for Students at Risk and With Learning Difficulties in Reading: A Multiple Case Study in Three Elementary Schools

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Although Response to Intervention (RTI) is viewed as a promising model for preventing learning difficulties in reading, several authors have highlighted the challenges associated with its implementation in educational settings (Barrio et al., 2015; Fuchs & Vaughn, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2012). After a decade of implementing this model in the United States, researchers insist on the need for more studies on the practical issues related to the implementation of this model (Barrio et al., 2015; Simonsen et al., 2010). The purpose of this article is to present the results of a multi-case study on the roles of teachers and remedial teachers in the context of the implementation of the RTI in reading in three elementary schools. It focuses more specifically on the organization of services based on the different evaluation and intervention procedures associated with the RTI. The results indicate the presence or emergence of a data culture in the three sites studied. It was possible to observe that RTI evaluation and intervention procedures are viewed as structuring benchmarks for organizing and planning services throughout the school year for first and second Grade students at-risk and those already struggling with reading difficulties.

**Keywords:** *Response to intervention, special education, general education, teaching reading, service delivery model, learning disabilities*

## Introduction

For several decades, the right of every child to free education in the least restrictive environment has increasingly been recognized in Quebec (Education Act, RLRQ, 1997). Most recently, the vision of inclusive education has been integrated in the policy on educational success (Ministère de l'éducation et de l'enseignement supérieur [MEES], 2017a). In this context of inclusion, the services offered to students with learning difficulties by special educators in the school setting are called upon to change (Dubé et al., 2021; Rousseau et al., 2017) and it becomes essential to better define these services. In recent years, several challenges have been identified with respect to the services for students with learning difficulties offered by special educators. A recent study conducted with 134 special educators in Quebec revealed

that 75% of them were dissatisfied with the organization of services (Granger et al., 2021). In the next paragraphs, some of these challenges will be presented.

A first challenge concerns the frequency and the quality of interventions deployed. Brodeur et al. (2008) have drawn a portrait of special educators' practices and they note that intensive interventions are often focused on reviewing what was already received in instruction; these interventions are therefore not intensive nor preventive in nature. In addition, the number of students with learning difficulties encountered by a special educator is often excessive, making it difficult to devote enough time to each student (Brodeur et al., 2008). Over the past 2 years, major challenges have been added with the growing number of students requiring special education services combined with the significant staff shortage (Turcotte et al., 2021). The current situation therefore makes the organization

and planning of the special educator's work even more complex.

The second criticism concerns the service model advocated by most special educators. At the moment, while there are different models for organizing services, most intensive interventions take place outside the classroom (Gaudreau, 2010; Tremblay, 2012). Pull out services have some benefits according to Klingner et al. (1998), because they include individualized or small group attention to students with learning disabilities, thus increasing academic success. The small ratio allows the special educator to adapt their teaching to the needs of their student, to maximize the attention of the latter and to ensure that content is mastered before continuing with the next (Dion et al., 2008). Despite the fact that this type of intervention is essential for many students with special needs (Tremblay, 2012), this service model is subject to several limitations, including: (a) it can have a stigmatizing effect on these students, (b) the students lose instructional time in class, (c) there is little transfer of skills learned outside the classroom, and (d) the lack of collaboration between the general educator and the special educator means that the interventions are not consistent with each other (Saint-Laurent et al., 1998). Tremblay (2015) adds that this service model can result in a loss of class time for students, as the general educator must manage absences by scheduling catch-up periods. Giasson (2004) raises another issue relating to this service model, specifically in reading. She observes that meetings with special educators often take place during the reading period in class, which deprives students struggling in reading of valuable instructional time. And yet, these students need to devote more time to reading than other students to perfect their learning (Allington, 2009; Giasson, 2004; Shanahan, 2021).

The third concern is the role of the special educator. It is apparent that the role of this school actor varies greatly from one school to another (Association des Orthopédagogues du Québec [ADOQ], 2018; Granger, 2021; Office des professions du Québec [OPQ], 2014). The results from the study by Granger et al. (2021) show that the profession of special educator is still poorly defined. This lack of understanding of the role and functions of special educators has a significant impact on the optimization of the services offered (Granger et al., 2021). It is possible to assume that this variation between schools sometimes causes inequities or access difficulties for students for whom these services are essential to their success. In this context, it becomes important to address the issue of organizing special education services. According to Dion et al. (2008), this aspect has been neglected by the scientific community. Indeed, these authors note that scientific knowledge on the content to be taught to prevent learning

difficulties is developing rapidly, but this is less the case regarding the question of the organization of services. Dion et al. assert that these questions must nevertheless be resolved: "Otherwise, breakthroughs in research will not translate into more effective practices and prevention may remain wishful thinking" (Dion et al., 2008, p. 155).

In an inclusive context, ministerial educational policies emphasize the importance of early, rapid, and continuous interventions (MEES, 2017). Response to Intervention (RTI) represents a "systems approach to the delivery of educational services that aims to prevent learning difficulties and provide, as quickly as possible, each student with the support they need to reach their potential in school" (Desrochers, 2021). Several authors therefore insist on the importance of redefining the role of special educators in the context of the implementation of RTI (Mitchell et al., 2012; Swanson et al., 2012). RTI sheds light on how services are provided to students with difficulties at each tier of intervention (Brodeur et al., 2008).

It appears as a reference framework in ministerial documents in Quebec about literacy instruction and behavior interventions and support (Ministère de l'éducation et du sport [MELS], 2011, 2012; MEES, 2017b) and it is establishing itself in a growing number of school boards (MEES and RÉCIT, 2020). To date, RTI has been mainly associated with reading instruction at the elementary level (Desrochers, 2021). Although this model has the potential to structure special education services, studies are needed to better identify how it can be operationalized in practice and in what ways it can contribute to optimizing service delivery.

## Reference Framework

### RTI

RTI is a model for organizing services and interventions that aims to meet the needs of all students in an inclusive manner, while paying particular attention to those who are experiencing difficulties (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation [CSÉ], 2017). The National Center on Response to Intervention (NCTRI) has defined RTI as follows:

Response to intervention integrates assessment and intervention within a multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and to reduce behavioral problems. With RTI, schools use data to identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions depending on a student's responsiveness, and identify students with learning disabilities or other disabilities (NCRTI, 2010, p.5).

The assessment and intervention processes are therefore at the heart of the model. Assessment processes include two forms of measurement: universal screening and progress monitoring. Universal screening measures are performed with all students in the class or school (Justice, 2006; NCTRI, 2010; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007). They are taken at three different times during the school year (i.e., early fall, early winter, and late spring; Desrochers et al., 2016; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007). Hintze and Marcotte (2010) report that these screening measures first provide an overall assessment of the quality of the teaching in the regular classroom. These measures would also help identify students for whom this teaching is not sufficient to ensure learning progress (Hintze & Marcotte, 2010). Progress monitoring measures assess student performance in order to quantify improvement in RTI (Hintze & Marcotte, 2010; NCTRI, 2010). At the same time, they make it possible to assess the effectiveness of the intervention (Dion et al., 2011; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007; NCTRI, 2010). Fuchs and Fuchs (2007) explain that student performance is assessed on a weekly basis, which identifies “non-responding” students and allows special educators to more effectively individualize their interventions to better help students overcome their difficulties (Dion et al., 2011; Hintze & Marcotte, 2010). From a RTI perspective, the school actors base their decisions on the data resulting from the universal screening and the progress monitoring measures at each tier of intervention (NCTRI, 2010). Data from these assessments can quickly determine whether students are responding to or need another type of intervention. They also make it possible to regulate teaching and guide differentiated instruction (Desrochers, 2016).

Intervention procedures are structured around a multi-level prevention system. Tier 1 is associated with universal instruction offered to all students in the class and is performed through high-quality teaching based on research knowledge (Desrochers et al., 2016; McIntosh et al., 2011; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007). According to Laplante et al. (2010), this instruction must provide explicit and systematic teaching, and focus on skills highly associated with success. Tier 2 corresponds to additional interventions aimed at the 20 to 30% of students for whom universal interventions have not been sufficient (Vaughn & Klingner, 2007). The interventions are more systematic and are performed in small homogeneous groups of four or five students (Desrochers et al., 2012; Laplante et al., 2010; Vaughn & Klingner, 2007). Tier 3 concerns students who did not respond to the additional interventions. Interventions are intensive and adapted to individual needs (Fuchs et al., 2012; Laplante et al., 2010). They are done in small groups or individually (Desrochers et al., 2012).

## **The Roles of General and Special Educators in RTI**

There is a growing body of research examining how RTI is implemented in schools, including examinations of the roles of general and special educators (Alahmari, 2019; Bester & Conway, 2021; Gomez-Najarro, 2020; Haager & Mahdavi, 2007; Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2012; Richard, 2020; Silva et al., 2020) and these roles have an impact on how the services are organized. One of the elements that emerges from these studies is the fact that the division of roles between the general educator and the special educator has not been clearly established (Haager & Mahdavi, 2007; Bineham et al., 2014). The lack of clear linkages of general and special education can undermine the efficacy of this approach (Bineham et al., 2014). Other studies highlighted that substantial changes are being made, particularly related to the connection with teaching and assessment practices, as well as with the organization of services, which generates training and support needs, especially for the general educators (Bester & Conway, 2021; Bineham et al., 2014; Haager & Mahdavi, 2007; Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015; Richard, 2020). Regarding the role of the special educator, there seem to be elements to clarify. Within Tier 1, the special educator could intervene as a consultant with general educators to implement universal supports. However, the special educators can feel ineffective in this work since most have not received training to exercise this type of function (DeVore et al., 2011; Saint-Laurent et al., 1995). In addition, the support offered in class can lead to discomfort, or even anxiety among general educators, particularly due to fear of judgment and fear of feeling observed (Rousseau & Thibodeau, 2011; Rousseau et al., 2014). Additionally, the work of the special educator is also often not clear within Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. The results of a study of Mitchell et al. (2012) indicate a very small difference between teaching methods used by special educators at Tier 2 and Tier 3 levels. In this context, the distinctions between these two levels of interventions deserve to be well defined in order to better guide the work of the special educator.

### **Purpose**

This research was designed to provide answers to the following question: When implementing the RTI in reading in elementary schools, how do the roles of general educators and special educators interact? More specifically, the research objective of this study is to define the roles of the general educators and the special educators in the context of implementing the RTI in reading at the elementary level. This article will focus on the assessment and intervention procedures used to organize services for at-risk and struggling students in reading.

## Methodology

### The Participants

The multi-case study was targeted as the research method to conduct this research. Cases were selected using a purposive sampling procedure. Each case consisted of a dyad, which included a general educator and a special educator. The three dyads (D1, D2, and D3) were selected using four recruitment criteria: (a) The dyads must work in the same elementary school implementing RTI in reading (for this criterion, consultation was made with researchers experienced in accompanying school boards in RTI implementation), (b) They must collaborate during a regularly-scheduled weekly basis, (c) They must work together on the teaching and learning of reading with first or second grade students, and (d) They must come from three different school boards.

The first dyad (D1) has been working together at the same school for 10 years. Their school, which has 156 students, is located in an urban and multi-ethnic environment. The general educator has been teaching in first grade classrooms for several years. She teaches in a general education setting, but she did her initial training in special education. The special educator has 23 years of experience. She works 3 days a week at the school and offers special education services at all grade levels. In their school board, RTI is implemented in the vast majority of schools.

The second dyad (D2) has been working together at the same school for 2 years. Their school, which has 270 students, is located in an urban and multi-ethnic environment. The general educator has been teaching first grade at this school for two years. She is starting out in the profession. The special educator has worked at this same school for several years. She works five days a week at the school and provides special education services at all grade levels. RTI is implemented in a progressive and structured manner throughout the school day.

The third dyad (D3) has been working together, at the same school, for 8 years. Their school, which has 155 students, is located in a rural area. The general educator has been teaching in second grade for eight years. His class consists of eleven students. The special educator has several years of experience and has been working in this same school for 13 years. She works 5 days a week at the school and offers special education services for preschool and the first cycle of elementary school (first and second grades). RTI is an integral part of the school board documents about the special education services but it is not implemented in a formal and systematic way.

### Instrumentation

Data were collected from a variety of sources (see Figure 1). The use of multiple and varied sources of information to collect data is one of the main quality criteria of a case study (Albarello, 2011; Gagnon, 2012; Roy, 2009).

**Figure 1**  
*Data Sources*

Semi-structured Interviews	Documentary Analysis	Direct Observation	Logbook
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 interviews with the general educator -special educator dyad</li> <li>• 1 interview with the general educator</li> <li>• 1 interview with the special educator</li> <li>• 1 interview with the school principal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documents produced by the researcher</li> <li>• Documents produced and/or shared by participants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observations of the general educator in the context of their choice</li> <li>• Observations of the special educator in the context of their choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impressions</li> <li>• Timeline of events</li> </ul>

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with general educator and special educator. The interviews aim to obtain a description of the responsibilities, tasks performed by general educators and special educators in the context of the implementation of RTI in reading, as well as the organization of services favored by the school environment. They also aim to learn more about the collaborative practices adopted by the dyad. The documentary analysis was based on recording grids generated by the researcher to better identify the participants' practices between the data collection meetings. The participants use this tool to record their tasks related to RTI in reading from a list of tasks divided into four key roles (interventionist, collaborator, diagnostician and manager) and it was adapted from the existing "Role observation instrument" developed by Mitchell et al. (2012). The participants also shared documents that they considered relevant (e.g., teaching materials, tools designed by school actors, reference frameworks, etc.). Direct observation sessions were aimed at studying the practices of general educators and special educators. These direct observation sessions are analyzed using the same conceptual aspects as the recording grids (interventionist, collaborator, diagnostician and manager), to ensure triangulation. Impressions, feelings, as well as events deemed important by the researcher were also noted inside a logbook.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted during one school year, between December and May. During this period, the

researcher visited each of the sites three times to conduct the interviews and observation sessions. Data were also collected in the absence of the researcher through the recording grids. A corpus integrating the collected data from all sources (i.e., verbatim, observation grids, recording grids, logbook) was compiled using NVivo software to facilitate coding and analysis (Roy, 2009). A mixed coding method was chosen to build on the concepts inherent in the study, while allowing space for emerging codes (Gendron & Brunelle, 2010). A thematic tree was drawn up based on the main themes addressed in the interviews and observations. Emerging subtopics were added throughout the coding process. An in-depth analysis of each case was performed, followed by a cross-case analysis to identify trends, similarities, and differences (Albarello, 2011; Merriam, 1998).

## Results

In this section, results will be presented in two parts. First, the results related to the assessment procedures will be provided and results related to intervention procedures will follow.

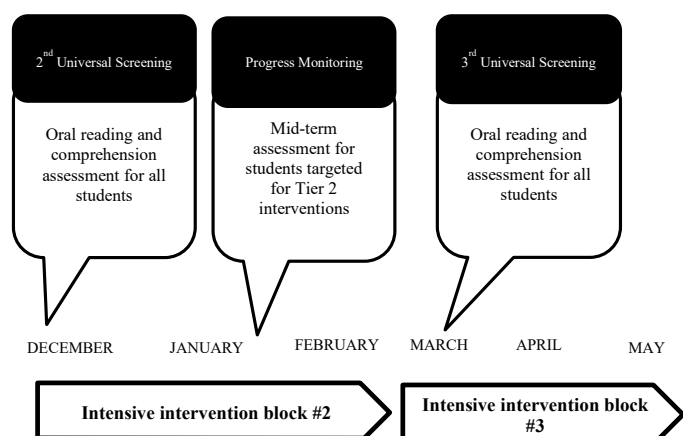
### Results Related to the Assessment Procedures

The results about the assessment procedures will be presented for each dyad. These data came from a variety of sources (observation, recording grid, interview, documentary analysis), which allowed triangulation.

#### Dyad 1 (D1)

In D1, assessment procedures that are part of RTI (universal screening and progress monitoring) were used through out the school year, such as illustrated in Figure 2. These assessment procedures give a structure to the services provided to students at risk and with learning difficulties in reading.

**Figure 2**  
*Temporal Structure in Relation to Evaluation Processes (D1)*

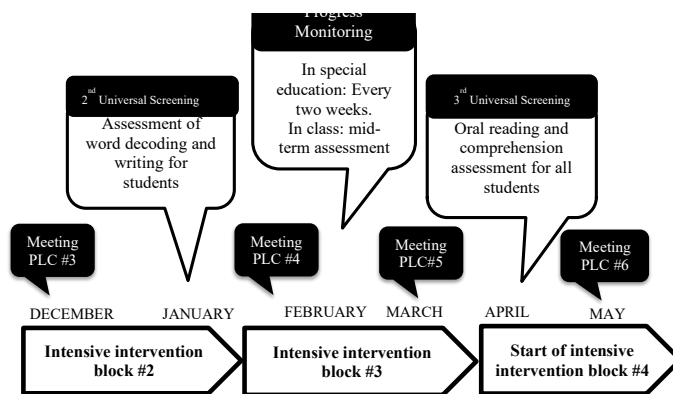


D1 structures the services deployed during the school year based on blocks of intervention. A block of intensive interventions consists of approximately eight weeks and begins following the analysis of the results from the universal screening. The first universal screening operation took place in September. The second was performed in mid-December, and the last was done in mid-March. The data from the universal screening measures allow the general educator and special educator to make decisions about interventions for students at risk and with learning difficulties in reading. The benchmarks established in the universal screening tests are used to guide decision-making. Specifically, they use this data to form the intervention subgroups. A subgroup of students with the greatest learning difficulties is seen by the special educator during the intensive intervention blocks. Another subgroup made up of students at risk is seen by the general educator. Between the two universal screenings, a mid-term assessment was administered to the students targeted for tier 2 intervention to monitor their progress. This measurement allows both general educators to adjust the formation of the subgroups. During the block of intensive interventions, it may happen that students change groups. To guide them in these decisions, the general educator and the special educator rely on their observations or on the results of the mid-term assessment.

#### Dyad 2

Figure 3 shows the operationalization of the assessment processes used in a RTI perspective for D2.

**Figure 3**  
*Temporal Structure in Relation to Assessment Processes (D2)*



The school year is structured around blocks of intensive interventions delineated by universal screening operation. Following each universal screening test, decisions regarding students at risk and struggling with reading are made in

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)<sup>1</sup>. The PLCs are composed of the principal, the three first-grade general educators, the special educator, and school professionals. Six meetings are planned during the school year. In these meetings, team members discuss the screening tools and the results, as well as the interventions in the classroom and in special education for students at risk and those with learning difficulties in reading. The benchmarks established in the screening tests are used to guide decision-making. At-risk students are those who have not reached the grade-level expectations but are approaching it. They are targeted for the Tier 2 interventions in class. Students with learning difficulties in reading are even further from the grade-level expectations and they receive Tier 2 interventions in special education. During the intensive intervention blocks for students in Tier 2 interventions, a clear procedure is established to assess student response to these interventions. For at-risk students, the general educator performs progress monitoring only once halfway through the intervention block. For students with learning difficulties, progress monitoring is conducted every two weeks using tools developed in a co-development group with other special educators.

### ***Dyad 3***

In the D3 school, students are not systematically evaluated through an assessment process such as universal screening or progress monitoring. However, the general educator and the special educator monitor each student in the class at three specific times during the school year. This exercise is called “class profile,” and it provides a snapshot of the strengths, needs, and difficulties of the students in the class. It is an evolving document, developed by the educational consultants, on which we find the image of the pyramid frequently associated with the RTI. Each student is categorized in an intervention tier according to their ability level for learning and behaviour based on general educators’ observations. It is reference tool for planning assessment, instruction and special education services. The class profile is then presented and discussed with the school management. Apart from this procedure, no measure is implemented to assess all students on specific skills, as proposed in the RTI.

### **Results Related to Intervention Procedures**

The results about intervention procedures will be presented for each dyad. These data came from a variety of sources (e.g., observation, recording

grid, interview, documentary analysis), which allowed triangulation.

### ***Dyad 1***

As mentioned previously, the school year is structured around intervention blocks for D1. Each of these blocks is designed according to the different tiers of intervention. Table 1 lists the intervention procedures used at the different tiers.

During the intervention block, universal interventions (Tier 1) are intended for all students in the class. The general educator uses the program *Apprendre à lire à deux* (Dion, Borri-Anadon, Vanier, Potvin, and Roux, 2005), a French adaptation of First-Grade Reading Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (Fuchs, Fuchs, Svenson et al., 2001), which is a word-recognition teaching program structured around tutoring activities by peers. The program allows students to practice identifying letters and words, and reading short texts with immediate and individualized feedback. The sessions take place three to four times a week for the duration of 10 minutes. Students also work on word identification and comprehension through learning centers that integrates play-based learning and multiple means of action, three to four periods of 45 minutes per week. The general educator also uses a workbook for her reading instruction periods.

At Tier 2 of intervention, intervention sessions are offered to three subgroups of students with difficulties three times a week, in addition to Tier 1 interventions. The periods are split into two 30-minute sessions, allowing the special educator to see two subgroups of 3 students. The service is provided outside the classroom. During this time, the general educator works with another subgroup. Leveled material is used by both general educators. However, the special educator tends to add manipulative materials with students with greater learning disabilities. The third tier of intervention has not been added, as the special educator states that she does not make a clear distinction between Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. In addition, she specifies that this type of intervention is deployed very rarely in their school.

### ***Dyad 2***

The school year is also structured around the intervention blocks for D3. Table 2 describes in detail the content of these different intensive intervention blocks.

At Tier 1, the general educators’ interventions aim at solidifying word identification processes in the first months of the year. Code instruction is taking less and less

<sup>1</sup>The professional learning community is defined as a mode of operation schools that relies on the collaboration of all stakeholders and encourages staff to collectively undertake activities and reflections to continuously improve their knowledge, their skills, in order to obtain better academic results among students (Leclerc and Labelle, 2013).

**Table 1**  
*Description of Intervention Procedures According to Tiers (D1)*

<b>Tier</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> block of intensive interventions</b>
First tier of intervention <i>For all students</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning center to work on understanding and identifying words (3 periods of 45 minutes per week).</li> <li>• Peer tutoring program (3–4 periods of 10 minutes per week).</li> <li>• Teaching Letter-Sound Correspondences (LSC);</li> <li>• Use of a workbook.</li> </ul>
Second tier of intervention (in class) <i>For students at risk</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A subgroup of 3 students is participated for 30-minute sessions, 3 times a week.</li> <li>• Skills worked: phonological awareness, word identification and fluency.</li> <li>• Leveled material based on a reading training program developed by the school service centre.</li> </ul>
Second tier of intervention (in special intervention) <i>For students with learning difficulties</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two subgroups are participated in special education outside the classroom (period split into two 30-minute sessions).</li> <li>• Skills worked: phonological awareness, word identification and fluency.</li> <li>• Leveled material based on a reading training program developed by the school service centre.</li> <li>• Handling material.</li> </ul>

space as the school year progresses. The comprehension instruction is based on reading strategies. The general educator and her colleagues in the same grade work with 12 strategies to be taught explicitly in a flexible grouping project in collaboration with the special educator. Teaching comprehension also focuses on story recall and the use of children's literature albums. At the second tier of intervention, the general educator plans her intervention sessions when the other students in the group are in learning center. The general educator works with a subgroup of three at-risk students, two to three times a week. Tier 2 interventions provided multiple means of action and integrated play-based learning to gain motivation. She also uses a variety of materials such as magnetic letters, erasable boards, alphabet books, etc.

The Tier 2 interventions, conducted by the special educator, targets three subgroups of three students struggling in reading and focuses exclusively on phonemic awareness and the mechanisms of identification and production of written words, and it was in addition to Tier 1 interventions. The service is provided outside the classroom. During the intervention sessions, short

activities are sequenced and repeated from one session to the next. As the students complete various tasks, the special educator provides prompt, individualized feedback to each student. She uses different materials such as magnetic letters, erasable boards, visual aids, etc. Students also have a small notebook in which they write words and syllables.

### ***Dyad 3***

In the D3 school, the school year is divided into intensive intervention blocks of approximately 6 to 8 weeks each. Table 3 provides a brief description of the interventions performed at each tier of intervention.

At the first intervention tier, especially at the beginning of the year, the general educator sees LSCs that were not seen in the first grade. Starting in January, she pairs teaching the sound of the week with spelling regularity. Comprehension teaching is linked to reading strategies. The general educator also works on comprehension and vocabulary through enriched stories from the Cap sur la prévention project (Lefebvre & Fortier, 2012). Before the winter break, she did an intensive 10-week block of enriched interactive reading.

**Table 2**  
*Description of the Intervention Procedures According to the Tiers (D2)*

<b>Tier</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> intensive intervention block</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> intensive intervention block</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> intensive intervention block</b>
First tier of intervention <i>For all students</i>	- Explicit teaching LSCs and reading strategies (flexible grouping project with other classes and the special educator). - Use of a workbook. - Story reading and teaching recall. - More time is given to writing in the 4 <sup>th</sup> block.		
Second tier of intervention (in class) <i>For students at risk</i>	- 2–3 sessions of 60 minutes per week, in learning centers. - The skills worked on are sound fusion and segmentation and knowledge of LSCs.	- 2–3 sessions of 60 minutes per week, in learning centers. - The skills worked on are knowing the LSCs, and the reading and writing of little words.	- 1 session of 60 minutes per week, in learning centers. - The skills worked on are knowing the LSCs and the reading and writing of little words.
Second and third tiers of intervention (in special education) <i>For students with learning difficulties</i>	- 3 sessions of 30 minutes per week. - The skills worked on are sound fusion and segmentation and knowledge of LSCs.	- 8 to 9 sessions of 30 minutes per week. - The skills worked on are sound fusion and segmentation and knowledge of LSCs.	- 8 to 9 sessions of 30 minutes per week. - The skills targeted are reading words, reading sentences, and writing two-syllable words.

In this dyad, the general educator does not undertake Tier 2 interventions in a formal and systematic way. That said, she provides additional, even individualized, interventions to students experiencing difficulties learning to read in her classroom. To facilitate these interventions in small groups, the general educator must make sure that her other students work independently. To do this, she draws inspiration from the Daily 5 program (Boushey & Moser, 2015). Indeed, the program proposes that the students complete five different activities simultaneously

in a learning centers (e.g., read to self, read to someone, word work, listen to reading and work on writing) while the general educator works with a subgroup of struggling students. As the school year progresses, the students become more independent, making it easier to deploy additional interventions.

Regarding the interventions at the higher tiers, it is worth mentioning that interventions conducted by the special educator in a subgroup are at Tier 2. When she is questioned about Tier 3, the special educator states that

**Table 3**  
*Description of the Intervention Procedures According to the Tiers*

<b>Tier</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> intensive intervention block</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> intensive intervention block</b>	<b>4<sup>th</sup> intensive intervention block</b>
First tier of intervention <i>For all students</i>	- Teaching LSCs and comprehension strategies. - Enriched interactive reading program for 10 weeks, 2–3 times a week.	- Teaching LSCs and spelling regularity every day. - Teaching comprehension strategies. - Reading in small groups.	- Teaching sentence comprehension strategies (creating a mental image). - Daily 5. - Literary backpack.
Second tier of intervention (in special education) <i>For students at risk and with learning difficulties</i>	Interventions aimed at identifying words with a subgroup of 5 students.	Interventions aimed at word identification and fluency with a subgroup of 5 students	Interventions aimed at sentence understanding with a subgroup of 5 students.

it is very rare for this type of intervention to be offered. The service is mostly provided outside the classroom. The content targeted during these interventions varies during the school year. In the first months of the school year, the goal was above all to develop word identification strategies. Fluency and understanding were added during the school year. During the intensive intervention’s sessions, it was possible to observe that the special educator was using material from various sources. She uses short, colourful, engaging texts. She also integrates technology into her interventions through various applications on tablets or the interactive board.

### Discussion

#### Assessment Processes from an RTI Perspective

The results of this research shed light on the organization of services for at-risk and struggling students in reading from the perspective of the assessment and intervention processes that are central to RTI. In terms of assessment processes, the results reveal the presence or emergence of a data culture in the three sites studied. The use of various assessment procedures, such as universal

screening and progress monitoring, testifies to this. It has been possible to observe that these data collection methods become structuring benchmarks for organizing and planning services intended for students at risk and with learning difficulties in reading throughout the school year. They encourage the dyads to take time for formal and concerted regulation which guides decision-making for the block of interventions to come.

It was also possible to observe that the establishment of this data culture is supported by collaborative practices, including the professional learning community. More specifically, in one site, PLC helps support teams in the data-based decision-making process. Although the RTI and the PLCs are two distinct approaches based on different theoretical foundations, they are very easily associated in this school setting and are perceived by practitioners as being inseparable. The question of the linkage between the RTI and PLCs is also one of the concerns of certain researchers. Helman and Rosheim (2016) suggest that schools should integrate and even unify these two approaches into one cohesive school-wide plan. Otherwise, the effort, time, material resources and professional energy expended to achieve these separate initiatives reduce

the effectiveness of both (Helman & Rosheim, 2016). In terms of the organization of special education services, this method of collaboration facilitates the deployment of indirect service since it allows the special educator to see several general educators at the same grade at the same time.

The results also show the presence of significant variation in the use of assessment procedures. Even if the three dyads claimed to work in an environment implementing RTI, it was possible to note discrepancies in the use of the assessment procedures. For instance, universal screening, which represents another essential component of the RTI, was part of the practices in two sites. Progress monitoring, which is an essential component of the RTI, was formally and systematically implemented in only one site. In another site, there was a mid-term assessment for students targeted for Tier 2 interventions. However, progress monitoring is supposed to assess student performance on a weekly basis (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2007). This variation in special education practices has also been reported in other writings (OPQ, 2014; ADOQ, 2018; Granger et al., 2021). These data corroborate with the study of Silva (2020) who surveyed school psychologists to evaluate the extent to which RtI and data-driven practices are implemented. The results show that most participants reported that their schools do not regularly engage in best practices for progress monitoring. This situation can also be explained by the lack of professional development opportunities, leadership support, and tangible resources noted in some studies about RTI implementation (Bester & Conway, 2021; Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015).

### **Intervention Processes from an RTI Perspective**

The results of this study clearly show that the tiers of intervention associated with RTI become a structuring benchmark for organizing services for all students. Interventions are planned according to the different tiers of intervention, which makes it possible to organize services in a preventive and proactive manner for all students in the class, while providing for intensification for those at risk and in difficulties in reading. One observed change relates to intensive block operation. Rather than intervening with the same group of students throughout the school year, special educators and general educators intervene for a limited number of weeks (e.g., 8 weeks) on a targeted skill. As a result, the composition of the groups changes over the course of the school year. The special educators meet with subgroups of students three times a week. This result reveals an improvement in the provision of special education services in these three sites compared to the portrait painted by Brodeur and collaborators in 2008. This way of organizing services brings a more inclusive vision

and puts the general educator at the heart of the process. The results of this research therefore testify to the paradigm shift from an approach based on classifying students and expecting failure, to a proactive and preventive approach for all students (Grosche & Volpe, 2013).

Another important finding from this research is the crucial role of the general educator in the deployment of interventions. The advent of the RTI, and more broadly of the trend for inclusive education, brings new responsibilities for general educators. General educators now have a greater responsibility to provide services to struggling students. In a context of implementing the RTI, this responsibility is operationalized through Tier 2 interventions. In the three sites studied, it is possible to observe this transformation in a concrete way. Indeed, all three general educators work with subgroups of students who are at risk or have learning difficulties. This transformation has a significant impact on the organization of services. In fact, the deployment of Tier 2 classroom interventions led by the general educator makes it possible, among other things, to increase in intensity of services or the number of students served. This practice optimizes teaching time since students do not have to move around. These findings provide insights into how to best use resources to ensure academic success for the greatest number of students. However, general educators who implement these targeted interventions may need the support of the special educator. Haager and Mahdavi (2007) remind us that general educators face many professional challenges when implementing Tier 2 interventions, from classroom heterogeneity to lack of time to plan, organize and deliver more specialized instruction. These authors add that some general educators do not feel equipped to offer such more targeted interventions, which leads us to reflect on the advisory role special educators can play in this regard.

Despite the presence of various methods of organizing services, the results of this research reveal that most services in special education are deployed outside the classroom in the three settings studied. Although this modality has several limitations (Giasson, 2004; Saint-Laurent et al., 1998; Tremblay, 2012), the dyads have found ways to proceed that can reduce the effects of some of these drawbacks. Indeed, in this study, the pull-out special education services are often combined with a differentiation instruction strategy that modifies the learning environment in the classroom, such as flexible grouping, learning centers, small group instruction or daily 5. This modification of the class structure during the pull-out interventions can reduce the risk of stigmatization because all the students move through a station during this period and it ensures that the students targeted for

these services don't lose instructional time. This reaffirms the importance of combining differentiation instruction strategies within RTI implementation (Jones et al., 2012; Whitten et al., 2012).

Finally, the results obtained also indicate a low presence of Tier 3 interventions. First of all, the three special educators state that they rarely reach Tier 3 interventions. This rarity can be partly explained by the fact that there appears to be confusion regarding the understanding of the Tier 3 interventions. This observation is consistent with the results obtained by Mitchell et al. (2012) in a qualitative study on the role of the special educator in the RTI. The results from this study indicate that special educators do not quite understand how Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions differ. Like the current research, Mitchell et al.'s (2012) study reached this conclusion based on observations and interviews with special educators. Some explanatory hypotheses are put forward. On the one hand, the distinctive characteristics of Tier 3 interventions are numerous and differ, according to the authors, on the theoretical level, which can hinder the construction of a common understanding. On the other hand, the deployment of Tier 3 interventions relies on the successful implementation of the first two tiers of the model. Some recent studies have shown that RTI implementation brings several challenges (Alahmari, 2019; Bester & Conway, 2021; Gomez-Najarro, 2020; Meyer & Behar-Horenstein, 2015; Silva, 2020), so it may be complex to implement this type of intervention.

### Two Levels of Planning to Organize Services from an RTI Perspective

Considering the results obtained, it is possible to identify two levels of planning contributing to the organization of services for the three dyads as presented in the Figure 4.

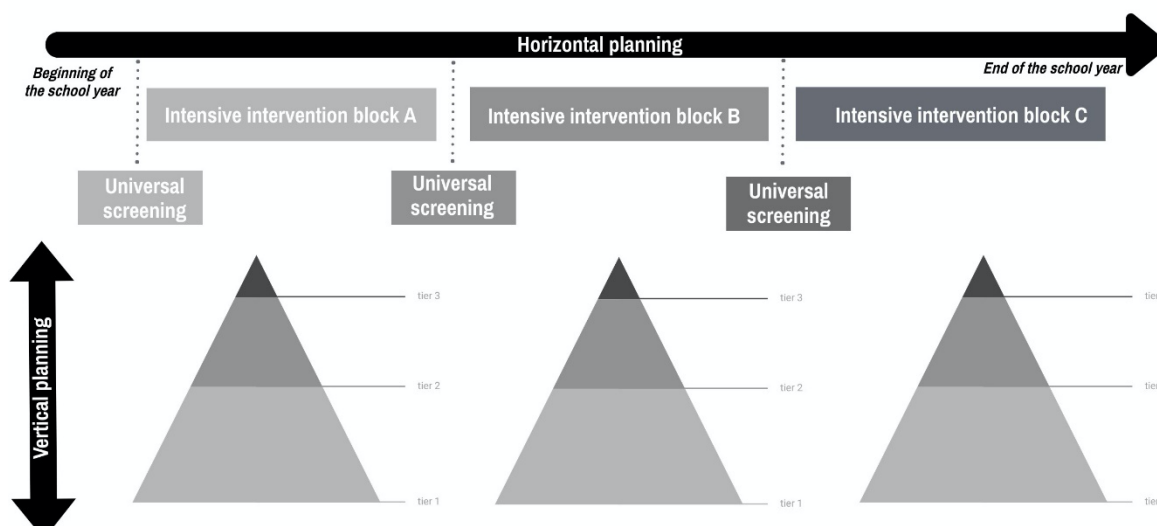
On the one hand, there seems to be a horizontal planning built around a temporal structure based on intensive intervention blocks punctuated by assessment processes allowing a moment of formal and collaborative regulation. These moments of regulation lead the dyads to decision-making concerning the services offered to students at risk and those struggling in reading, based on data in an RTI perspective. On the other hand, there is apparent vertical planning. Rather, this planning is aimed at scaling up interventions from the different tiers associated with RTI. It allows for more detailed planning of universal, targeted, and specific interventions for each of the intervention blocks. These two levels of planning can contribute to building a coherent and rigorous organization of services to meet the diverse needs of students.

### Conclusion

#### Limitations

The main limitation in this study is related to the sampling. Indeed, during data collection, it was possible to observe that a dyad was working in a school setting that was not implementing the RTI with fidelity. It was therefore not possible to check all the components of the model in

**Figure 4**  
*Levels of Planning to Organize Services from an RTI Perspective*



this school, including universal screening and progress monitoring. The other two dyads worked in schools where the implementation was much more advanced, which provided much richer data, especially in terms of assessment procedures. However, for the advancement of knowledge, it is interesting to note that the understanding of the RTI varies from one setting to another and that this undoubtedly affects the fidelity of the implementation. Another limitation is related to the collection of data. For administrative reasons, it was not possible to start data collection from the beginning of the school year. The first data collection was performed in January. This change in schedule did not affect the quantity, and quality of data collected. However, by starting the collection in September or October, it would have been possible to enrich the documentation of the context. It could have been interesting to study how roles and collaborative practices evolve over the school year.

### Implications for Future Research

This study has several interesting findings, particularly regarding the intensification of interventions, which should be further investigated. In this regard, it would be useful to define more clearly Tier 3 interventions to better identify what distinguishes them from Tier 2 interventions. Tier 3 interventions have multiple distinctive characteristics, and their theoretical foundations differ among authors, making it difficult to develop a common understanding. Further research is also needed to study the role of the general educator in the organization of services for students at risk and struggling in reading, as well as in other subjects. In this study, we found that implementing the RTI adds new responsibilities related to Tier 1 deployment, Tier 2 classroom interventions, and universal screening and progress monitoring measures, which adds complexity to general educators' work. In these three dyads, the organization of services is closely shared between the general educator and the special educator, which contributes to the optimization of these services, and the use of differentiation instruction strategies seemed to limit the stigmatization of students with learning difficulties. While several positive outcomes have been observed, it is appropriate to question the best ways of supporting general educators as they undertake these new responsibilities. It is therefore recommended that further studies be conducted on how to support general educators who implement RTI-based evaluations and interventions. In this sense, other ways of organizing services such as co-teaching and collaborative consultation should also be investigated, as proposed by Murawski et Hughes (2009). It would also be wise to examine the role of the special educator within the PLCs to better understand their

function and their contribution and to what extent this collaboration modality can contribute to the optimization of the service offer. Finally, as the results show little and varied use of progress monitoring, it could be relevant for research to focus on training and resources about this essential component of RTI to improve data-based decision making and ensure appropriate supports for all students.

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