

## The Leader's Role: RTI in Early Childhood Settings

By: LuAnn Shields Published: June 20, 2011

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/rti-blog/entry/1/152>

*LuAnn Shields has retired as the Principal of the Prairie Children Preschool, Indian Prairie District #204, in Aurora, Illinois. She is now the Lead Educational Consultant with Leadership Results, Inc., in Aurora, IL where she works to support school districts and early childhood programs with implementing a high performance model for teaching and learning. She can be reached at [luanns@leadership-results.com](mailto:luanns@leadership-results.com) and 630-936-2921.*

This blog post is a tribute to the work of very talented staff dedicated to improving the instructional outcomes for young children and their families. It is also a celebration of staff members who embrace a service-oriented approach in their day-to-day work with young children and their families.

Additionally, this is an opportunity for me to pause and reflect on what structures and expectations have been put into place to ensure continuous improvement, as well as how we have evolved through the phases of implementing the structures and expectations that ultimately strengthen instructional practices.

Two questions come to mind when contemplating the preschool as a learning community:

1. How do you go about creating a culture of contentment and trust in the midst of uncertainty ... moving through change processes?
2. What is necessary to ensure that all staff and/or service providers are making meaningful connections when it comes to classroom application of new learning, so that initiatives such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and problem solving take root?

Question 1: Let's begin with creating the culture of contentment and trust in the midst of uncertainty around change processes. As leaders, this is what we all desire. We know that many hours of a leader's time are devoted to moving initiatives forward that are part of the school improvement process. This culture of contentment and trust provides the cornerstone for a flourishing program of learning and activities.

From my own experience, this looks different for me today than it did in 2003 or 2004. As part of an instructional change process, the RtI and Problem Solving initiative has influenced not only how we think about teaching and learning, but also how we define ourselves as instructional leaders within a collaborative team process.

During the early phases of our work, giving staff a voice was a positive first step in defining what we value

as instructional leaders of young children. Engaging all stakeholders in a process of gathering input and feedback through surveys, meeting with individual teams, connecting on a regular basis with the building instructional leadership team, and developing smaller groups to address core issues around instruction is essential. Just telling staff “my door is always open” is not enough. Staff benefit from having time to meet—in small group settings outside of the larger group meetings—to participate in open and honest dialogue around student learning. In building the culture of contentment and trust, it’s essential to accept and/or consider this input and feedback from staff. Be mindful if you are using time and energy to gather staff perspectives with respect to student learning and staff’s own learning; then be genuine in your intention to honor the feedback and make needed changes.

Through a process of acknowledging the perspectives of staff members and pausing periodically to recognize the unique contributions of individuals, the movement from fear of the unknown to an increased comfort and willingness to engage in activities around new learning about evidenced-based instructional practices becomes a reality. Over time, as mechanisms for increased communication are put into motion and structures for expanding leadership capacity are established, staff will see themselves as valued in a process and begin to take ownership for not only their own professional learning, but also the learning outcomes of students.

Question 2: How do we ensure that all staff and/or service providers are making meaningful connections when it comes to the classroom application of learning, so that evidenced-based instructional practices are taking root?

Through the years, the professional learning of staff has shifted to a more comprehensive approach around research supporting the work of professional learning communities. Embracing the concepts that are grounded in a culture of collaboration, student learning, and a focus on results has been pivotal. These principles have guided us toward systems of communication that support staff in serving as “coaches” for one another. In addition, utilizing a problem-solving model to address building-level initiatives provides the foundation for overall decision making that is based on clearly defined targets, school-wide data, a focused plan for continuous school improvement, and ongoing evaluation of instructional practices.

By building on the collaborative team process within the structure of a professional learning community, we have been able to narrow the focus and closely monitor our progress with essential target skills for preschoolers. We needed consistency across the program with regard to instructional delivery. At this point, members of our instructional leadership team have taken the lead with various areas of focus, pulling in staff across the program to engage them in decision-making processes.

Through this progression of letting go, I have experienced firsthand the power of arousing the leadership capacity within the staff. I have learned that the “fingerprints” of leadership are rooted in the ability to find contentment by trusting and empowering those around you.

## A Teacher's Perspective on RTI in EC/Preschool Settings

By: Megan Hafer, M.S.Ed. Published: March 7, 2011

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/rti-blog/entry/1/119>

*At the time the article was written, Megan Hafer was employed as an Early Childhood Education / Early Childhood Special Education teacher at Prairie Children Preschool (PCP), a blended community preschool operated by the Indian Prairie School District # 204, Aurora, IL. She is now a Learning Support Coach at the Ann Reid Early Childhood Center (ARECC), a blended community preschool operated by neighboring Naperville School District # 203. She can be reached at [Mhafer@Naperville203.org](mailto:Mhafer@Naperville203.org) (630-420-6899).*

As an Early Childhood (EC) teacher I have had an opportunity over the last several years to learn about the process of implementing RtI in the preschool classroom. I have taught for nine years in an inclusive classroom, teaching a combination of typically developing children, children with special needs, and at-risk students. I have seen firsthand how many children benefit from our core curriculum and instructional practices and how more intensive intervention is necessary - and essential for some children - to develop strong skills. In addition to participating on my school's Instructional Leadership Team, I have obtained a graduate degree in Early Childhood Leadership and am currently pursuing a degree in Educational Administration. My educational and experiential background has provided me with an opportunity to view the RtI initiative through the eyes of an aspiring administrator as well as a teacher. We know that RtI is essential to achieving student outcomes in the EC/preschool setting. Now, as educators, it is our job to work together to find a way to put it into action.

### Why do we need to implement RtI in the EC/preschool setting?

The answer is quite simple. We are in the midst of a shift in the world of early childhood education. This educational shift is urging teachers to move from creating an environment of incidental learning to an environment that promotes more intentional teaching. This change may be evident by changes taking place inside and outside the classroom, such as modifying the planning process to focus first on selecting the skill that needs to be taught and then selecting the lesson/activity to teach the skill, or by providing more structured, skill-based learning activities at the classroom centers. While the students still engage in play during center time, the presence of skill based activities throughout the classroom is becoming much more evident. All students receive instruction from the standard core curriculum, otherwise known as Tier 1 instruction. However, research shows and all teachers know that there are students who need more intensive instruction than others to achieve expected student outcomes. This intensive instruction can be delivered through Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. Through implementation of the RtI initiative we have an opportunity to provide the support and differentiated instruction needed to facilitate student success at the EC/preschool level.

### Where do we start?

RtI at the EC/preschool level currently looks different than what we see at the elementary and secondary

levels. One of the differences is the greater number of research-based curriculum programs available for Tier 2 intervention at the elementary and secondary levels. Elementary and secondary education allows for more direct instruction through Tier 2 intervention programs. There are very few intervention programs available that are appropriate for the EC level. However, that doesn't mean that we can't start the process with what we currently have available. We can start by taking steps to provide Tier 2 intervention by modifying skill-based learning activities that are a part of the Core Curriculum. The first step to prepare for implementation of RtI is to develop specific skills related to the curriculum that are expected outcomes for all children who attend your EC/preschool program. Specific skills should be selected from all areas of development (language arts, math and science, social emotional, physical development and health) and should align with both the Core Curriculum standards and the Illinois Early Learning Standards. These skills then become the foundation from which to measure student achievement and progress. Developing specific skills as part of the core curriculum provides consistent expectations for instruction and student learning, as well as a guideline for data collection/assessment of students. This allows us to monitor student progress and provides an indication of which students are not responding to Tier 1 instruction and may be in need of more intensive Tier 2 instruction. If we can gain an understanding of each student's learning style and rate of learning, we can pass this information along to the elementary schools and help them be better prepared to provide appropriate instruction at the Kindergarten level.

## How do we implement RtI in the EC/preschool setting?

The RtI process begins with a change in the way teachers think about planning for instruction and data collection/assessment. In the past, teachers collected data as a way to assess student learning. However, the process often stopped there. Now, RtI provides us a means by which to take things to the next level. Implementation of RtI encourages teachers to use their data to drive their instruction. More specifically, analyzing student data is now a tool that can be used to plan for instruction at all tiers. Based on student data, the teacher can identify skills that need to be taught as part of the core curriculum as well as skills that may need to be taught to specific students through more intensive tiers.

## How are our program staff members creating changes to use data to drive instruction?

Our first step towards using data to drive instruction was to increase consistency of instruction across the program. We started a transdisciplinary process of selecting specific "target skills," which align with the Illinois Early Learning Standards and Creative Curriculum checklist, with the support of Lynette Chandler from Northern Illinois University. These "target skills" became the focus of our core curriculum. By narrowing our focus for instruction and data collection/assessment based on our "target skills" we were able to achieve more consistent instruction across the program. We also created a system for consistent data collection/assessment on the "target skills" using common assessment forms and a data-binder. In addition, staff participated in staff development for training around the problem-solving process provided by the Illinois ASPIRE (Alliance for School-based Problem-solving & Intervention Resources in Education)

state-wide initiative, funded through IDEA. We then began putting the problem-solving process into practice and supported staff with the use of professional learning communities. Working together in Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) has encouraged teachers and related service staff to work together to analyze student data, identify instructional needs at the classroom level, and implement tiered instruction as needed.

## Is RtI appropriate at the EC level?

This is a question that is often asked of EC educators, and an important one at that. When changes take place in education it is important to weigh the risks and benefits, in order to determine what is best for students. In my opinion, RtI is and can be very beneficial to many students. As a teacher, I have always been aware of the students who were achieving curriculum expectations, those achieving beyond expectations, as well as those who were struggling to achieve. I have always differentiated my instruction to provide additional support to the students who were struggling, as well as additional support to the students who achieving beyond expectations. However, now with the implementation of RtI I am provided with additional resources, research and support from related service providers to help me analyze my data, implement Tiered instruction, and monitor the progress of students. I don't believe that RtI requires me to engage the students in "skill and drill" type activities, but that through intentional planning for Tier 1, Tier2, and Tier 3 instruction I can provide appropriate skill based learning activities to help each child receive the support they need to achieve the expectations.

I think it is important to recognize that implementation of the RtI intervention model at the EC/preschool level is an on-going process. Each year our school makes improvements in our efforts to put practices into place that ensure that teachers are using data to drive instruction. These are exciting times for the field of EC, with increasing acknowledgement of the importance of learning in the early years. We have an opportunity now to align our practices with those of the elementary and secondary levels, and implement use of the RtI initiative to ensure that each student is receiving the differentiated instruction needed to achieve success in school!

## Insights Regarding the Implementation of RtI in Early Childhood Settings

By: Kristy Herrell, SSP, NCSP Published: May 2, 2011

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/rti-blog/entry/1/135>

*At the time the article was written, Kristy Herrell was a school psychologist with the Indian Prairie School District, #204 in Aurora, IL. She continues to provide support for the MTSS/RtI model in a nearby school district while pursuing doctoral studies in Leadership and Education Policy.*

I am a school psychologist in my third year at Prairie Children Preschool (PCP) in Aurora, IL, an inclusive early childhood program operated by the Indian Prairie School District # 204. Previously, I worked for a special education cooperative and serviced early childhood classrooms throughout many districts. When program leaders implement change at the system level, the change process will encounter many peaks and valleys. Systems level change requires not only a shift in procedures and expectations but also a shift in philosophy and thinking processes. Both are essential in order for sustained and lasting change to occur. Systems and expectations must be in place to maintain this philosophical shift. In this blog entry, I will describe some starting points around the link between assessment and instruction to promote discussion and talking points rather than outlining a complete guide for RtI implementation. Let's take a look at two applications of the assessment process that need to be considered in creating an RtI initiative.

## The Problem Solving Process – Identifying Problems

Within any system, people must be provided with a common way to think about solving problems. The four steps of the problem solving process described in the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) RtI document, *Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation*, can provide practitioners with that framework. The first step is to identify the problem. If we do not have common ways to identify problems, then it is very easy to get stuck at this step and have difficulty moving forward. I have engaged in many discussions at the building, team, and child level in which problem identification was particularly challenging. In my opinion, this is due to the nature of assessment with young children, the infancy of the development of General Outcome Measures in early childhood (e.g. a quick assessment that is predictive of a broader skill), and the larger changes occurring in education (e.g. accountability, high stakes testing, etc.). The struggle lies in coming to common agreement around the data sources that will be used to drive instructional decisions, which is the primary purpose of assessment. Therefore, a vital first step in the RtI implementation process is to develop a common assessment process throughout the program so that staff can begin to discuss problems with a common language.

At PCP, we redesigned our data collection process for monitoring classroom progress so that we have common discrete skills in each developmental domain, aligned with the Creative Curriculum objectives, that are aligned with the Illinois Early Learning Standards (IELS). Each teacher keeps an assessment binder with sections for each individual student where protocols for gathering information on student progress on the discrete skills are kept. The binder also includes information from a variety of other assessment sources including curriculum-based measurements (Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs), Preschool Numeracy Indicators (PNIs)), portfolio items, and evaluation tools tied to specific curricula. Instructional decisions are guided by the synthesis of these data sources. This gives staff a common place to start talking while reviewing data and allows for problems to be identified more consistently. Requiring this type of data collection has spurred healthy debates over how we can identify problems reliably and what types of data are going to be considered valid for specific decision-making purposes in our program. It's not that there is a lack of data collected to help identify problems in early childhood. Actually, the opposite is true. There is an overwhelming amount of data and choosing the most essential pieces and arranging them for easy access and decision-making is challenging. The key is to find ways to assess students reliably with tools that have been validated for specific purposes in ways

that are not overwhelming to staff and students. On our journey at PCP, we have made leaps ahead in this area, but still have a ways to go.

## Collaborative Inquire/Collaborative Learning

Not only is it valid to have a common assessment language and process, it is also vital to have a system in place that allows teachers and support staff time and a set of procedures to discuss the link between assessment and instruction. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were introduced into the school district a few years ago as a school improvement initiative. This offered an opportunity for PCP staff to focus on melding the process of collaborative inquiry around ways we link assessment to instruction into our evolving RtI practices. This type of inquiry and learning allowed us to create a foundation and structure for teachers and support staff to grow together professionally. There are other collaborative inquiry models in the literature besides PLCs. So, implementation of collaborative learning can occur under many titles. We use PLCs in our school to be consistent with the district's initiative. Using our experiences, our data, our examples, and our students, PLCs have provided a structure for internal professional development. PLCs provide the structure for us to learn within the context where the acquired skills need to be applied.

The first year of implementation was a struggle. So during our second year, we created a survey to help us identify the problems. The problem-solving process is not only applicable for student-oriented problems but also can and should be used to identify systems-level issues. By doing this, administration and staff in leadership roles modeled how this way of thinking can be used at any level. After reviewing and analyzing the problem, we created an action plan that included the development of a core group of staff members who were viewed in leadership roles within their collaborative group. This core group engages in collaborative inquiry to learn about the core principles of PLCs and ways to gauge students' responses to instruction. Then, they bring their learning back to their own collaborative group and vice versa. The learning that occurs in each collaborative group also guides the learning of the core group. Within an RtI framework, PLCs provide the necessary means to engage in embedded professional development around the provision and evaluation of differentiated instruction that is driven by the needs of our staff and our students.

In summary, a strong foundation for assessment and collaborative inquiry are essential in an RtI framework.

## Embedding Professional Development in Early Education / Preschool Programs to Move into MTSS/RtI Practices

By: Robin Miller Young, Ed.D., NCSP      Posted: June 2012

<http://npdci.fpg.unc.edu/blogs/response-intervention-early-childhood-rti-ec>

*At the time the article was written, Dr. Robin Miller Young was the Student Services Coordinator at Prairie Children Preschool (PCP), an "RtI" and "PBIS" award-winning preschool in the Indian Prairie School District (#204), Aurora, IL. She*



*is now an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL. She can be reached at [RobinMillerYoung@gmail.com](mailto:RobinMillerYoung@gmail.com) (630-452-1178).*

Teachers and other professionals who are already working in early childhood settings have unique professional development (PD) needs that must be considered in order to move into successful implementation of MTSS/RtI practices. For these colleagues, the PD activities need to build consensus around the beliefs, attitudes and values of moving into RtI practices, increase knowledge such as information on evidence-based assessment tools and interventions, and increase skills for applying this new knowledge, such as collaborative, data-based decision-making for specific individual children and groups of children. Program leaders also need to know how to rearrange and align program structures, plus design and integrate new structures if necessary, so that RTI practices can be established and institutionalized, to support their staff in moving successfully through the change process, and to communicate new performance expectations and methods for holding staff accountable for meeting those expectations. Addressing these staff learning targets with well-designed and motivating PD activities will support implementation of the MTSS/RtI key components outlined in the DEC/NAEYC/NHSA Position Paper (<http://www.naeyc.org/content/frameworks-response-intervention>).

Across the country, there are many early childhood and preschool programs that are well on their way toward better meeting children's needs with MTSS/RtI practices; additionally, many programs are just now beginning to ask "What is MTSS/RtI?", and "How might MTSS/RtI look in a Pre-K program?" Those preschools and Pre-K programs that are experiencing success have generally started with the same first steps:

Step 1: Create a leadership team. In 1998, we instituted a Building Leadership Team (BLT) that addressed operational issues; then, in 2006 we made the decision to change the purpose of the team and now we are now an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Our mission is to serve as the stewards of sound programmatic, curricular, instructional and environmental decision-making so that all children can achieve essential learning targets. We changed our membership, our agenda, and our meeting norms to reflect this changed mission. Specifically, we use the four steps of the data-based, collaborative, problem-solving process to (a) identify areas of program strengths and problem(s); (b) analyze the reasons for the problem(s); (c) put strategies in place matched to the program need(s); and (d) evaluate the impact of the strategies. Sounds like MTSS/RtI at the system level, doesn't it?!

Step 2: Learn about MTSS/RTI applied in early childhood settings. The purpose of this step is to get to know the specific practices in an MTSS/RtI model and to start building consensus on the need to move to an MTSS/RtI model. Building consensus means helping staff members, family members and other stakeholders understand that the program culture and operational procedures are going to change, and you value their input on the change process as well as in developing the proposed program components. Activities for your team might include watching webinars and webcasts such as the one at



the RTI Action Network (<http://www.rtinetwork.org/professional/forums-and-webinars/forums/rti-national-online-forum-implementing-response-to-intervention-in-early-childhood-settings>), one developed by Dr. Lynette Chandler (Northern Illinois University) (<http://ec.thecenterweb.org/resources/response-intervention-prekindergarten>); and various webinars on the Brookes Publishing Company's website (<http://www.brookespublishing.com/resource-center/webinar-series/rti-in-early-childhood/fall-series/> and <http://www.brookespublishing.com/resource-center/webinar-series/rti-in-early-childhood/>). There are also a variety of resources listed on an Annotated Bibliography located on the Center for RtI in EC website (CRTIEC) (<http://www.crtiec.dept.ku.edu/resources/>) and an article in the milc newsletter by Amanda VanDerheyden (<http://community.benchmarkemail.com/users/milcstaff/newsletter/November-2011-Newsletter>). Additionally, team members can also go to visit other schools and programs that have already started a journey into MTSS/RtI to see the practices "in action" and to have some one-on-one conversations with other practitioners about their journey. If visiting is not possible, a telephone conference call or a video-call, like Skype, can be arranged to connect with other leaders and practitioners in the field.

Learning more about MTSS/RtI and then having discussions around critical program issues would be good second steps in the in-service process for teachers and other professionals who are already working in early childhood settings.

## The Benefits of Collaboration: University Faculty and Preschool-based Professionals Working Together

By: Lynette K. Chandler, Ph.D. Published: February 6, 2012

<http://www.rtinetwork.org/rti-blog/entry/1/180>

*At the time the article was written, Dr. Lynette Chandler was a Professor of Education at Northern Illinois University, DeKalb IL where she chaired the Department of Early Childhood and Special Education (SEED). She has retired from NIU and is now a Professor Emeritus of the university; also, she is actively engaged in research and consulting work with a variety of clients. She can be reached at [LChandler1@niu.edu](mailto:LChandler1@niu.edu).*

As a young professor, I remember attending a conference session in which a speaker talked about conducting research and working with staff and children in a local preschool program, and I immediately thought two things. My first thought was "Wow, I want to do that," and my second thought was "How do you get to do that? How do you make that happen?" I asked the presenter how he made it happen and he said "Visit programs, meet program staff, and just ask." Happily, I did that and I have had many opportunities to work with children and staff in early intervention and preschool programs. My most recent collaboration has been with Prairie Children Preschool (PCP) in the Indian Prairie School District # 204 in Aurora, Illinois.

In the past few months, you have read some very insightful blog entries from staff at PCP. These narratives have chronicled their journey to develop a Response to Intervention (RtI) program that addresses early literacy, math, and social-emotional skills and positive behavior. I was privileged to be part of this journey. My entry is about the advantages of being part of the systems change process that occurred within PCP.

I started to work with the PCP staff in 2005 after receiving copies of the Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs) from the University of Minnesota. Our first collaboration was to develop local norms for the IGDIs and to begin to use IGDI data to identify children who might benefit from additional instruction and support in early literacy. At the same time, administrative and teaching staff members were in the process of revising the program's vision, mission statement, and associated practices as part of the school improvement plan. I was able to participate in program assessment, conversations with staff, and planning meetings, which led to new program goals to a) adopt a shared understanding of developmentally appropriate practices developed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and recommended practices developed by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children, b) establish a reasonable number of program-wide outcomes for children at the 3- and 4-year-old levels, (c) include outcomes for preacademic skills in order to better prepare children for kindergarten, and (d) use data to make decisions about instruction for individual children and groups of children.

One of the unique contributions that I was able to bring to the table as an early childhood general and special educator was current information from both NAEYC and DEC and the perspective that the philosophies and approaches of these two organizations could be blended to meet the needs of all children regardless of cultural, linguistic, and ability diversity. I was able to participate in a series of professional development workshops, collaborative team meetings, and readings of current and recommended practices that led to a revised vision and mission statement and the adoption of intentional planning and teaching, the use of adaptations and individualized supports to meet the needs of individual children, shared expectations for student outcomes, and the use of data to identify children and drive instruction.

This led to the development of Project ELI (Early Literacy Initiative). Several teachers and other staff expressed interest in developing more intentional strategies to assure that they were addressing early language and literacy skills for all children. When we developed Project ELI, RtI was not a common term or practice for preschool, although tiered instruction was something that we frequently discussed. So, we asked for volunteers to help develop and then pilot an early language and literacy assessment and intervention program. Nine teachers of 4-year-olds and one teacher of 3-year-olds volunteered, as did several speech-language pathologists.

Together, we reviewed and selected early literacy curricula and resources, conducted classroom assessments of the early literacy environment (using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation [ELLCO] assessment), made classroom changes based on ELLCO outcomes, and developed an IGDI assessment schedule and procedures for using IGDI data to identify children who were at risk. We also adopted a core early literacy curriculum and developed and implemented

classroom-wide teaching strategies for all children (Tier 1) and additional teaching strategies and curricula for children who were identified as at risk (Tier 2). Each classroom team adopted the Creative Curriculum for Preschool (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002) approach for literacy as the Tier 1 curriculum and many adopted the Sound Start curriculum for Tier 2. However, each team also used additional Tier 1 and Tier 2 activities and strategies to meet the needs of children in their own classrooms. This individualization across classrooms greatly increased our collective knowledge as teams met monthly to discuss positive outcomes and present new resources and effective activities and teaching strategies. They also discussed individual children during these monthly meetings, as well as questions and concerns. This truly was the start of the problem-solving process that continues as a specific initiative and integral component of the PCP RtI program.

After the pilot of Project ELI, we began the process of integrating early literacy practices in each of the PCP classrooms; in education reform terms, this is the “scaling up” process. At the same time, new program-wide curricular and instructional initiatives were and continue to be developed and refined, including recent efforts that promote early math skill development and positive behavior intervention and supports. The PCP has developed a model for systems change that respects the views of all stakeholders and involves staff at all levels in designing, implementing, and evaluating new initiatives and practices. Indeed, the impetus for several new initiatives has come from staff and some of these new initiatives are being developed and championed by staff. So, why should higher education faculty be involved in the schools? What are the advantages? Of course many of the obvious reasons exist. My involvement with this program has informed my teaching, led to presentations and publications, and expanded my knowledge of systems and systems change and leadership strategies necessary to foster systems change. The teachers at PCP opened their classrooms to me. The good practices I saw during the day became part of my teaching that night or later in the semester. I was able to incorporate the perspectives and roles of different team members into my teaching and to introduce new curricular resources and materials to my students. I was able to have PCP staff (Megan Hafer, a PCP teacher; Robin Miller Young, student services coordinator; and Lisa Snow, school psychologist) talk to my classes about RtI and the various initiatives with which they were involved. There is nothing like having the people who are working in the schools talk to prospective teachers!

I gained new knowledge as I read and blended current literature for presentation to and discussion with PCP staff. I was able to collaborate with staff in real-life activities such as designing Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction, analyzing data, engaging in problem-solving meetings, and identifying program-wide expectations for all children across developmental domains. I have had many opportunities to provide, with colleagues from PCP, presentations about Project ELI and RtI at professional conferences and to publish results of our work. I was privileged to spend time in each of the pilot classrooms and to document effective and innovative practices that each teaching team used. These were later summarized in the *Young Exceptional Children* journal (Chandler et al., 2008).

As a single-subject researcher, I often have a limited view of the system in which I conduct research. I am familiar with the staff and children in whose classrooms I work, but I may have limited knowledge about global issues and initiatives that may be having an impact on the entire program. Being part of the PCP systems change initiatives has allowed me to learn about the complexity of the systems change and

practices that will facilitate the change process. Many of the lessons learned and effective practices were identified by LuAnn Shields and Robin Miller Young in their blog entries. I am using these lessons learned and practices within my own department as we embark on program revision and the systems change process.

Finally, involvement with PCP has confirmed my belief that change is not, and should not be, driven solely by issues that are identified and research that is conducted by university faculty. We all are aware of promising programs and interventions that have been developed by university researchers that are not acceptable to staff or are not feasible for staff to implement in classroom settings. When university faculty and school-based professionals collaborate, they are more likely to address issues that are most important to educators and families and to develop individualized and program-wide interventions and changes that are acceptable to those who must implement them and that can be implemented with fidelity.

In closing, I return to my question: Why should higher education faculty be involved in the schools; what are the advantages? For me, there clearly are many advantages. Our partnership makes me a better university faculty member. It informs my teaching and provides numerous opportunities for learning and research. I have learned as much, if not more, from the staff at PCP as they have learned from me. Rather than asking why higher education faculty should be involved, maybe the real question should be "How could they not be involved?"

#### References

- Chandler, L., Miller-Young, R., Nylander, D., Shields, L., Ash, J., Bauman, B., ... Summers, D. (2008). Promoting early literacy skills within daily activities and routines in preschool classrooms. *Young Exceptional Children*, 11, 2–16.
- Dodge, D. T., Colker, L., & Heroman, C. (2002). *The Creative Curriculum for Preschool*. Washington, DC: Teaching Strategies.
- McCormick, C., Throneburg, R., & Smitley, J. (2002). *A sound start: Phonemic awareness lessons for reading success*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Young, R. M., Chandler, L. K., Shields, L., Laubenstein, P., Butts, J., & Black, K. (2008, March). Project ELI: Improving early literacy outcomes. An early literacy and language initiative that works. *Principal*, 14–20.