



Response to Intervention

What is it? Why do it? Is it worth it?

by W. David Tilly III, PhD, Coordinator of Assessment Services, Heartland Area Education Agency, Johnston, Iowa

Helping kids! That's the informal answer most of us give to the question of why we got into education. Far too often, though, this passion-fueled idealism gives way to cynicism, frustration, and skepticism as we are confronted with all of the "new initiatives," "bright ideas," and "reforms" that seem to be mandated on a weekly basis at the state and federal levels. I must confess to frustration at times.

However, I remain extremely optimistic about the future of our kids—they seem to be resilient despite us. And I am especially hopeful about one particular movement that has started to take hold across America. That movement is called Response to Intervention or Rtl. In fact, I am greatly encouraged, for reasons I hope will become clear as this article unfolds.

I wrote in another publication that Rtl is likely the single best opportunity we have had to improve education for all students with disabilities—and students without them—that has occurred since the passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act in 1975. This is a bold and perhaps biased statement. For many years, I've watched students with disabilities being placed in programs that did not result in positive change. We are all on the constant lookout for something better for our kids. Rtl practices offer the opportunity to create that something better.

What Is Rtl?

Lest I end up sounding like some sort of educational zealot, let me explain. First off, Rtl is not an instructional program, a curriculum, a strategy, or an intervention. It is not an educational revolution or fad. Indeed, it is more about evolution than it is about revolution. Rtl, stated simply, has three general components: (1) it is a logical structure for allocating precious instructional resources efficiently and targeting them specifically to student

needs—all student needs; (2) it is a commitment to use the best findings from our current and emerging knowledge base (scientific research) as we go about our instruction; and (3) it is a commitment to use a logical, decision-making framework to guide our instruction (this has been variously referred to as data-based decision making or the problem solving method). Let me expand on each of these a bit.

Resource Allocation Structure

Rtl is implemented by bringing together several components in a single school. The collaboration and coordination that is required is the good news—and it is also Rtl's biggest challenge. Even within any single school district, there are notable differences from site to site: the available resources, the teachers, their backgrounds, the history, the politics, the culture, the curriculum, and the students are all going to vary to some degree. Any initiative that is not sensitive to and respectful of these variations is doomed to failure—how many packaged programs can you think of that have not worked because they failed to consider these variables?

One of the biggest challenges in improving results for our students involves giving them what they need. Unfortunately, the historical structures in our schools have gotten in the way of that happening. In many cases, we have organized our resources by categorical program or funding stream (e.g., Title I, special education, English language learners, talented and gifted, etc.). But knowing that a student qualifies for Title I assistance, for example, tells us absolutely nothing about that student's specific learning needs. However, most Rtl systems adopt what is called a tiered model of service delivery. The basic model reflects much of what we all know about reality: in any group of students within our school, instructional needs will vary. Tier 1 represents the largest group of

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students, those who are educationally healthy and remain so through instruction in the general education (some call it "core") curriculum. We also know that some smaller group of students, depicted in Tier 2, will need something supplemental (also referred to as "strategic instruction") to their core instruction to support their learning and raise their achievement to proficiency or above. Finally, we also know that there is an even smaller group of students, Tier 3, who will need intensive instruction if their learning is to be appropriately supported.

Some argue that we already have a tiered system: we had general education, Title I, and special education; so how is this different? The answer is that in the tiered system, resources are not allocated based on broad generalities like economic condition or the catch-all "learning disability." They are allocated and specifically matched to exact needs that students have demonstrated based on their performance on efficient diagnostic assessments.

RTI Marches Forward

by Raina Chick

Since last spring, I have had the opportunity to serve, with Sandy Plocharczyk of the NH School Administrators' Association, as co-chair of the NH Department of Education's statewide Task Force on Response to Intervention. The statewide RTI Task Force was initiated by the Department to provide leadership to New Hampshire school districts for RTI implementation and includes members who represent a broad range of stakeholders. We have been working toward the development of a plan that can guide the understanding and effective implementation of RTI as an instructional model for all New Hampshire students. It is our hope to have completed an initial draft in January, 2009. We have established four goals to guide our work. The NH RTI Task Force will...

1. define and articulate salient components of RTI;
2. articulate the integration of the Department of Education's systems, initiatives, and processes;
3. collect data about the status of RTI in NH school districts;
4. develop a professional development plan and resources for school districts.


It would be an understatement to say that this is a large and complicated assignment. Of central importance, however, is the concept that RTI systems in New Hampshire will be integrated into other, established initiatives. Our vision is that RTI includes models and strategies that can be useful to districts in planning for improved outcomes for our students. These models for addressing behavioral and academic goals are related to our needs for school improvement. While there are clear implications for special education eligibility determination and service delivery, the implementation of

Response to Intervention models within general education systems contributes to a more robust instructional foundation for *all* students.

The task force has adopted a definition of RTI that was included in the manual, Response to Intervention: Policy Considerations and Implementation, published by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 2005. The authors include George Batsche, Judy Elliott, Janet Graden, Jeffrey Grimes, Joseph Kovalski, David Prasse, Daniel Reschly, and Judy Schrag, coordinated by W. David Tilly III. They define RTI as:

“Response to Intervention (RtI) is the practice of (1) providing high quality instruction/intervention matched to student needs, and (2) using learning rate over time and level of performance to (3) make important educational decisions. These three components of RtI are essential.”

School psychologists are often in positions that allow us to assist other educators in understanding the research and conceptual basis of RTI; participate in curriculum or improvement committees to focus on systemic changes; select appropriate assessment techniques for universal screenings and for progress monitoring; and assist problem solving teams in matching interventions with student needs. It is an exciting time.

The RTI Task Force welcomes and appreciates your thoughts and input. Please email me at rainachick@yahoo.com with questions or comments. 

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Editor's Voice

Six-Word Truth about Quintile 5:

Statewide averages blur 60,000 kids' realities

by Betty Lenehan

In the last issue, I shared with you a clever literary fad—the 6-word memoir. (You remember.. Not quite what I was planning. Birth childhood, adolescence, adolescence, adolescence, adolescence. Learning disability. MIT. Never give up.) The fascination of the 6-word memoir resides in all the richness that is left *unsaid*. but when it comes to global statistics, what is lost or left unsaid is *precisely* the weakness. This fact is illustrated by the recently published NH Children's Alliance's Kids Count Data Book 2008. Kids Count reports that national comparison statistics show that New Hampshire kids as a group fare well on indicators of child well-being—enumerating one of the lowest teen birth rates in the country, fourth best teen death rate, high median family income. *Yet, statewide averages do **not** tell the whole story. In our state of plenty, 60,000 children are being left behind.* The analysis divides our state's communities into 5 Quintiles. Children living in families in 27 cities and towns, which make up the *Quintile 5* communities....

...face an accumulation of disadvantage across a range of indicators: from family economics, where more than four in ten elementary-school aged children rely on the free and reduced-price lunch program, to education where children attend schools with large achievement gaps, to health where they suffer disproportionately from child abuse and neglect. Most of the data show that the disparity among quintiles is not getting better, or if there are signs of improvement, significant disparity still exists.

If you don't have a copy of the Kids Count New Hampshire Data Book 2008, visit the website of the Children's Alliance at www.ChildrenNH.org and read more about these 27 towns (you may live or work in one of them) and the disparities that exist between the opportunities for their children and those for kids who live in other NH communities. The realities of Quintile 5 towns are obscured when presented as part of statewide statistics. This project of the NH Children's Alliance is an excellent example of targeting the needs of families and children through rigorous research and data analysis. It outlines critical understandings for NH's school psychologists and educators. ☒

School Psychology
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Scientific, Research-Based Strategies

In RtI systems, many, many different strategies can and are being used with groups and individuals. These strategies all share a set of characteristics. First, they all respect the rights and the human dignity of children and their families by responding to the uniqueness of specific, individual needs. Second, to the extent possible, they have scientific research supporting their effectiveness. Just as the FDA protects consumers from hucksters and ineffective medical treatments, the RtI principle of using research-based practices protects us from wasting time and protects our students from being subjected to ineffective practice. One caveat, however, is that there are many areas in education where we don't have definitive research on what works best. In these circumstances, we have to implement promising practices, monitor the effectiveness of the strategies, and modify our implementation based on the results we get. And third, the strategies that are part of RtI implementations work. If they do not, they are systematically rejected and replaced.

Decision-Making Framework

One important component of RtI systems is that they are self-correcting. Though we wish it were otherwise, in education we cannot predict with certainty whether any instruction, strategy, or intervention is going to work with an individual student before we try it. While we do have research-based strategies and those things we believe in and that work for some, if we are honest with ourselves, we know that nothing works for everyone. As such, we need to have in place for all students a system that gives us feedback when they are learning and that helps us make good instructional decisions when they aren't. That's specifically what the problem-solving method does within an RtI framework—it provides a structure for using data to monitor student learning, in an instructionally relevant way, for groups and individuals so that good decisions can be made. Stated simply, when we use data to make decisions about our instruction, we make better decisions.

Where Did RtI Come From?

The answer to where RtI comes from is multifaceted. Many of the practices that are used as a part of RtI implementation

(e.g., curriculum-based measurement, formative evaluation, learning strategies, peer tutoring, direct instruction, behavior analysis, lots of research-validated reading strategies, etc.) have their own longstanding and rich foundation in research—in many cases, over 30 years worth. So, in one regard, RtI practice has been around for a long time. But there is the part of RtI that puts all of these practices together in a logical and rational way that can work in schools; this was developed in public schools, not in the research literature. The earliest school-based implementations of what has grown to be known as RtI (in various sites in Pennsylvania, Minnesota, and Iowa) have been working on implementation for only about 15 or 20 years (a little longer in the case of Pine County, Minnesota). One of the special things about RtI is that our field-based people are working closely with our researchers not only to figure out what works but also how to make it work. This latter part has been missing from too many attempts at improving our system, and it's finally begun happening.

RtI has been described as a system structure that is designed to allow the optimally efficient delivery of effective practice in schools. One very exciting dimension is that RtI doesn't tell you what to think; it tells you what to think about.

Do We Have to Do This?

In the IDEA '04 statute (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, amended in 2004), RtI is offered as an option for schools, not a requirement. But it's critically important for all educators to remember the following: RtI has evolved in the last 15 years or so through a confluence of (1) understanding that what we have been doing isn't getting us as far as we need to go in terms of student outcomes; (2) understanding that there are some relatively new, effective practices out there; (3) recognizing that, in order to make this all work, we can't tinker around the edges—we have to take on the whole system at once and reengineer it around teaching and learning; and (4) good, bad, or indifferent, understanding that we are now living in the age of accountability. More of our students must do better more of the time. RtI is a very reasonable way to do

this. RtI as a concept currently lives in the IDEA '04 statute under the section related to identifying specific learning disabilities (SLD). This placement has caused some to think that RtI is about identifying students with SLD. While it is true that data collected in RtI systems can be used as one component of a comprehensive evaluation for special education eligibility determination, this was never RtI's purpose, which has always explicitly been to improve instruction for students. Anything else is tangential.

Is It Worth It?

RtI is not a panacea. It will not wash the dishes or mow the lawn. In fact, it's a heck of a lot of work (I'm a transplanted Californian living in Iowa; this is one of my new Midwestern words). It also makes a huge difference in learning. The data coming out of implementation sites across the country is generally positive. A majority of the research data being published is supportive. It seems like we may be on to something here that has the potential to create for kids the kind of life-changing results that we all got into this for in the first place.

W. David Tilly currently serves as coordinator of assessment services for Heartland AEA 11, an effort that serves 55 public school districts and 36 accredited nonpublic schools. Dr. Tilly has also served as a consultant for assessment, research, and innovation at the Iowa Department of Education. His particular focus was on Iowa's Renewed Service Delivery System (RSDS), which foundationally changed the way that special education is conceptualized and delivered in Iowa. With Dr. Tilly's guidance, Iowa has been refining and implementing a Response to Intervention/problem-solving model for approximately 15 years.

Dr. Tilly works regularly with states, school districts, federal offices, and national organizations on improving educational results for all children. He is also the author or co-author of 24 publications, mostly focused on education innovation, systems change, and improving educational results. His research and policy interests include Response to Intervention, educational innovation, and improving educational results. ☐

Psychology in the 21st Century Department

Editor's Note: *The Protocol occasionally receives announcements about research initiatives and new tools available to school psychologists. While we do not vouch for the usefulness of the programs described below, we thought NHASP members might be interested in exploring some of the computer-based cognitive behavior therapy tools that are currently being developed. We welcome your comments!*

Opportunity #1

The *Protocol* has received notice of an opportunity for school psychologists to try out a new interactive web-based program designed as a First Line Intervention for use by helping professionals to assist children from ages 8-13 to **improve their self-regulation of mood and behavior**. It is currently being used by several types of mental health professionals and school counselors and there are now over 650 Beta testers of this program in 29 states. The program's developers are receiving positive feedback about the success of the program, but would like to hear more.

The name of the program is Challenge Software. At their website www.cpschallenge.com, you can view the short tutorial explaining the program, which is now free to use. Click on "Request Beta Invite" on the login page and you will be issued a username and password so that you can look at the program more closely and use it with the children you work with.

Challenge Software has been developed by Brad Chapin, a licensed psychotherapist and Director of Community Based Services at Horizons Mental Health Center in Hutchinson, Kansas. He can be contacted at brad.chapin@cpschallenge.com

Opportunity #2

The Oregon Center for Applied Science (ORCAS), a public health research organization that develops interactive multimedia programs, has developed an educational program, *Blues Blaster*, designed to help prevent depression in youth ages 11 to 15. The project has received funding by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). ORCAS is currently recruiting youth to participate in a research study to help evaluate the efficacy of the program and asks NHASP members to help identify interested participants.

The Blues Blaster program is adapted from an empirically validated intervention. It includes six cognitive behavioral therapy modules, interactive and educational games, and additional content related to youth depression. Youth who participate in this research study will have the opportunity to learn new skills to help them feel better more of the time.

Three hundred youth will be invited to participate in the paid evaluation of this new program. Qualified youth must be 11 to 15 years old, be able to understand written and spoken English, have access to a computer with internet, and have some symptoms of mild depression. The youth will be asked to view the program online and complete several assessments online and over the phone. Qualified youth will receive up to \$120 for their participation.

If you are interested in getting additional information about this project, please call 1-866-822-0226 or email Nicole Holt at nholt@orcasin.com. For more information about ORCAS, visit their website: www.orcasinc.com.

Organizations providing recruitment assistance for this project will receive free access to this evidence-based program after it has been evaluated.

Establishing a Positive Classroom Climate: Teacher Tips for Managing Group Behaviors

At a recent behavior-management workshop, teachers shared their *best* ideas for managing student behaviors in the classroom. Here are six tips that they offered:

1. Set firm but fair behavioral standards at the start of the school year. Teachers who set firm, reasonable expectations for student behaviors send the message from day one that they expect the classroom to be a place of respect, civility, and learning. As one instructor noted, "First impressions are everything. Students need to know the behavioral boundaries in the classroom—and they can only know them if you show them!"

2. If you teach with others, make sure that all members of the instructional team use consistent discipline practices. Nothing confuses students more than having various members of a teaching team impose different behavioral expectations and consequences. When teachers on a team are inconsistent in how they respond to student misbehavior, the result can be angry and frustrated students. Be proactive. Hold team planning meetings early in the school year to reach agreement on what kinds of negative student misbehavior warrant consequences and what those consequences should be. Write up the results of that discussion as behavior management guidelines. Then monitor to sure that team members follow the plan consistently! (You may want to go a step further and share your behavioral guidelines with your students.)

3. Classroom rules: Keep 'em short and sweet. Classroom rules tend to be most effective when they are few in number (e.g., 3-5) and stated in positive terms whenever possible (e.g., "Work quietly at your desk" rather than "Don't disturb other students!"). Teachers also find that students are more respectful of rules when they have had a voice in coming up with them. Finally, remember to post rules prominently and review them occasionally to 'remind'

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How to Master the Craft of School Psychology

Ginny Harvey's new book both readable and useful

Professional Development and Supervision of School Psychologists: From Intern to Expert

by Virginia Smith Harvey and Joan A. Struzziero, Corwin Press, 2008

Playwright Edward Albee once said the title of a play tells you all you need to know about the plot. He made this statement on the Dick Cavett show. (For the younger readers, Cavett was a very big deal on TV in the 60's prior to his product-pitching days.) I tend to agree with Albee, especially with regard to this wonderfully written and comprehensive book by NHASP's own Virginia Smith Harvey and her co-author, Joan A. Struzziero. The title implies that this book helps out with the professional development and growth of young school psychologists, e.g. *from intern to expert*. In fact it goes well beyond that. Its multi-layered concerns, its structure, and its attention to every conceivable contingency inherent in supervision makes it immeasurably helpful to both supervisors and interns.

With great aplomb, the authors address two of the central challenges entailed in life as a school psychologist—or maybe of any profession. How to master our craft (the easy part) and how to remain engaged, creative and energized after mastery has ostensibly occurred (the hard part).

By stressing the importance of evidence-based training, clinical/interpretive skills, and the juxtaposition of roles, feelings, and relationships comprising supervision, Harvey and Struzziero (a fellow *paisan* unless that's her married name) offer a teaching piece for both interns and experts. The sheer depth of this book makes it a go-to manual - though it is so well written than the word 'manual' might be too rigid. With regard to texts, it lies in the best possible literary domain. Something

you can read now, and something you can refer to for the duration of your career.

It is encyclopedic, though not as dry as that sounds either. The authors use vignettes to introduce ethical and clinical issues throughout the book, which breathes life into the formal discussions on ethics and school systems. The writing is down-to-earth and the topics of discussion will ring the bell of every school psychologist who's ever come down the pike. *Examiners who write to please parents... examiners who describe a child as a set of scores... barely discernible but tangible boundary violations between staff and students... perceived incompetence in a colleague ... when and how to deal with these problems in a reasonable but ethical way*—it's all there!

While I recommend this book highly, there were a few points on which I disagreed with the authors. They did not espouse, but did reference the notion that licensed school psychologists without doctorate degrees should, by virtue of APA and NASP opinion, be supervised on an ongoing basis. Certainly peer review is an essential part of any professional's growth and development, regardless of his/her

level of experience, and peer review is built into the ethical standards of most states. On the other hand, the idea of spending several hours a week talking one-to-one with a PhD about issues with which one is thoroughly familiar seems a bit much. After several thousand administrations of the WISC-IV what is there to talk about? Furthermore, I would assume any agency granting licensure to master's level psychologists while still requiring on-going supervision will have created an untenable paradox. It raises the question of what licensure implies in the first place.

Other minor drawbacks (in this opinion) were the occasionally non-fluid descriptions of the supervisory relationship as outlined in the book, and the requirements on time regarding supervision sessions for interns. The authors refer to APA and NASP opinions that this should consist of four hours a week. If only that were possible. Once again, having been both supervisor and supervisee, I fear this could lead to some serious "what do we talk about now" dead time.. It isn't just a whimsical concern. Too much time in supervision can lead to superficial conversations to fill in the gaps or worse, some sort of therapist/

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Take Strides to Make a Difference

NASP 2009 Annual Convention

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patient relationship, where the personal life of either or both becomes grist for the mill and can produce an unhealthy drift in the relationship.

To the authors' credit, they also recognize this and ultimately lean toward the 'as-needed' model, which they deftly label *supervision accessibility*. Also, bear in mind that despite these minor criticisms, writing a comprehensive teaching piece on supervision requires address of all things that could go wrong (or right) in a supervisory relationship. In other words for this to be considered a text, they had to cross all the t's and dot all the i's.

My overall opinion is this: Anyone—repeat *anyone*—in our field will find this voluminous book (530 pages, 8 x 11 format) useful. It is no wonder the book, published through Corwin Press, was co-sponsored by the National Association of School Psychologists. I like the fact that it is written in a predominantly humanistic tone because one unchanging aspect of supervision is awkwardness. Why? The roles! On one hand, the young Turk (or Turkess, if you prefer) is fresh out of school and arguably more versed in recent theory than the seasoned pro. A certain haughtiness results from that. On the other hand, the seasoned pro sees the professional immaturity of the intern as clearly as a tattoo on the arm of Dennis Rodman. Both spend as much time trying to sort out the didactic yet collegial elements of their respective roles as they do discussing students' behavior and learning problems.

It's not easy, as the authors point out. Having a book with such structure and depth ameliorates much of that problem. It shows you how to navigate those rough interpersonal waters. I enjoyed it, will use it, and my only regret is not having access to it in my earlier supervisory experiences.

Bob DePaolo is an occasional contributor to the Protocol. He is a school psychologist in Gilmanton, and lives in Hooksett, NH. ☒

Making a Difference, Getting All Children Ready to Learn

November 10 – 14, 2008

Simple Suggestions Go A Long Way

Clearly raising awareness about what we do is critical. Luckily it is also pretty easy. School Psychology Awareness Week is one opportunity to concentrate activities across the country, but anything suggested here is worthwhile any time, and ideally good communications should occur throughout the year. And don't reinvent the wheel. Use the downloadable and adaptable resources under School Psychology Awareness to get started at www.nasp.org/communications.

Display the We Make A Difference poster

The poster enclosed in the October issue of *Communique* is an easy way to convey this key message and to raise your visibility in your schools. The poster does not reference school psychology week intentionally so that you can keep it up all year. (A limited supply of extra posters is available upon request.)

Participate in the Difference Maker on Behalf of Children program.

We are asking NASP members to identify one or more school staff members who, either through their own efforts or by encouraging the efforts of others, make an exceptional difference in the lives of students and families. This could be a teacher, administrator, coach, community provider, or even parent mentor, any individual who stands out in your mind as going above and beyond the call of duty to help students achieve their best. The goal is to publicly recognize their special contribution to students' positive outcomes, highlight the

importance of meeting the needs of the whole child, and foster continued collaboration. Program details are available online with the School Psychology Awareness Week materials.

Disseminate the Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach document.

Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach: Excellence in Education for the 21st Century is NASP's national education policy document, released in August 2008 for inclusion in the national debate over how best to help all of America's children achieve their fullest potential. Promoting *Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach* is an excellent way to raise awareness of the policies necessary to ensure excellence in education by lowering barriers to learning and teaching. We encourage NASP members and others to disseminate *Ready to Learn, Empowered to Teach* as part of the effort to shape education reform in the coming months.

Let others know you appreciate their partnership in your work.

NASP is making available a downloadable note card and an e-postcard for you to use. Send a thank you note to a colleague. Send a note to your administrator commending your colleagues' work. Write a brief note to a parent. Give small 'comfort' items to colleagues saying "thanks", such as herbal tea or chocolates.

Create your own webpage.

Many school districts allow personnel to create a webpage to post information relevant to parents and students. NASP has created a set of

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A Dialogue Concerning Two Sciences

by Robert DePaolo

Okay, I admit it. The title is a rip off from a book by Galileo that was considered heretical and led to his imprisonment by the Catholic Church. I hope this article doesn't entail similar consequences, although it does challenge certain assumptions within the psychological community and I'm sure some will wince during the reading.

Let me begin by saying the field of psychology has become more empirical in recent times. Let me add that there remains a slight problem with how psychologists address certain behavioral phenomena. Without belaboring the point, some of the concepts on which psychologists rely contradict principles that govern other fields of study, for instance physics and biology.

For example, we continue to adhere to the notion that behavior is a function of its consequences. This suggests a retroactive scenario that violates the principle of cause and effect—no physicist would ever suggest the formation of galaxies caused the Big Bang, and no physician would ever presume that the act of sneezing is what causes the common cold.

As awkward as that may be, there is an even more interesting psychological principle that contradicts the functions of the physical world. It is the idea of positive reinforcement. While most psychologists swear by the maxim that positives are the best motivators, nature sees things differently. All other systems in nature—including the one that governs the human body (homeostasis)—operate by negative feedback loops. The

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behavior and adaptations of such systems are driven by two processes. First, the detection of an error, such as the presence of a foreign body in the

blood stream or the heating up of the body beyond its usual 98.6 degree standard. The second step involves error correction (also known as stability-restoration or *cybnernetics*), which in these cases would involve activation of immune system and various cooling mechanisms such as sweating and increased thirst.

In the final analysis, the question asked by Freud in his masterwork, Civilization and its Discontents, needs to be asked again...*Are humans a part of nature, and if so, why wouldn't we operate in the same way that other biological and physical systems do?*

Given the empirical drift within the field of psychology over the past few decades, which is probably both good and bad (i.e. eye blink studies are endlessly fascinating and replicable in the laboratory but I can't think of a single new, interesting theory or clinical approach deriving from the data-driven zeitgeist), it might be time to take it all the way—that is, to finally drop the transcendent stuff and view ourselves in a natural context. If we're going to be 'scientific', well then, let's start with the premise that our behavior conforms to known bio-physical laws.

On the other hand this would entail change, and the question might be asked as to whether revisions in thinking might undermine many of the principles we've lived by our entire professional lives? The good news is that the change wouldn't be profound.. Perhaps it would only involve some tweaking—especially with regard to the pervasive 'positives' notion. For example, a re-statement of that principle in more bio-physical

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terms would be that positives do not

teach or motivate unless they offer some sort of correction or error reduction function with respect to the recipient's psyche. In other words, for positives to work, there must be either some *state of deprivation* (e.g. person has not been praised in a while and craves attention), *need for relief* (e.g. person fears being criticized or harassed), or *need to reduce uncertainty* (e.g. person has no sense of how skilled or unskilled, likeable or unlikable he or she really is and seeks closure). Under those conditions, positive reinforcement can be said to both work and obey the laws of nature.

The ultimate question in that regard would of course revolve around technique. Issuing constant praise would have to be considered inappropriate, because there would be no uncertainty, no duress, no perception of an error in need of correcting—that is, the kid who always does a "good job" has no errors to correct. Unfortunately nature seems to have arranged it so that some degree of irritation must precede adaptation, learning, and growth (Jung said it far more eloquently). In any event, *reinforcement parsimony* would be the new methodology. That implies that the kids have to sweat a little bit before making gains—socially, emotionally, or academically.

Another issue has to do with behavioral criteria. Reinforcing easy behaviors would, despite its ubiquity in shaping procedures, preclude the build-up of uncertainty, duress etc. and, in effect, offer little in the way of true error correction. This implies that the mantra "... *make sure the student experiences success...*" might not serve that student well. In effect teaching and/or treatment would obey

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Two Sciences *Continued from* *page 8*

the same principles of homeostasis—specifically that there must be enough irritation to foster a corrective action, but that the error must be correctable. If either the immune system or the learner's motivation and skills become overwhelmed, the outcome is usually not a good one. And so there is a learning threshold implicit in nature's scheme of things: there must be enough conflict to prompt learning, but not enough to make it impossible. It's a far cry from the humanism many of us have been practicing in recent times. I am going to refer to this, rather arrogantly, as the *teaching equation*.

Taken to its logical endpoint, this would lead to a tougher mentality among teachers, parents, and coaches. It would lead to the rather frightening idea (at least in this day and age) that creating some degree of irritation and anxiety which is then 'correctable' through behaviors that in turn lead to positive reinforcement would comprise the new methodology. I suppose this might seem a bit cruel to some, or at least anachronistically non-supportive. It might even be hard for us (including this writer—who throws out positives every time a student scratches his nose without drawing blood) to accept. Then again there is always the possibility that human beings do operate outside the bounds of nature. I don't think we do, but to avoid accusations of heresy I will, like Galileo, hold out that possibility.

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Making a Difference *Continued from page 7*

brief information materials in *html* format that NASP members can use to easily create your own webpage. Just cut and paste the copy. We plan to add a new topic each month that you can feature on your page. Visit www.nasponline.org/communications/webpage/ for suggestions, instructions, and available topics.

Incorporate key messages.

Remember—Children achieve their best when they:

- Are physically and mentally healthy
- Feel connected, respected, and safe
- Receive social, emotional, and behavioral support
- Maintain positive relationships
- Are expected to succeed and challenged to do so
- Have problem-solving skills and believe they can overcome challenges
- Receive quality instruction that meets their learning needs
- Receive recognition for building on their strengths

Follow the "recipe" for communications success:

- Be relevant. (Relate issues to state/local context and choose an issue people care about, e.g. school safety, suicide prevention, behavior, substance abuse, crisis, resiliency, gang participation, stress)
- Pick your main message. State it at the outset. *Example: "Bullying is*

unacceptable, preventable behavior that undermines student's well-being and academic achievement."

- Back it up with 2-3 key messages and how the issue creates a barrier to learning
- Provide personal examples and stories to put a "face on the message."
- Offer specific 'solution' suggestions.
- Encourage people to seek additional information from their local school psychologist.
- Refer people to the NASP website for further information, www.nasponline.org

Encourage your district to post Success in School/Skills for Life resources.

NASP offers schools a free online resource kit as an information service for parents. The Success in School/Skills for Life kit includes 2-4 page handouts on a variety of issues affecting children and youth. Examples include back to school transitions, study skills, ADHD, bullying, stress, and bus safety. Schools can download the fact sheets to their website at no charge. Individual fact sheets may be reproduced for one-time use by school professionals or affiliated organizations (e.g. PTA). Many handouts are also **available in Spanish**.

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Don't forget to check out our website at
www.nhaspweb.org
for the most up to date information on
upcoming meetings, conferences and more!

You or your school webmaster can register to <http://www.naspcenter.org/resourcekit/index.html> (see sample Letter to District Leaders)

Talk to your building principals.

Offer to chat over coffee one morning to discuss any particular issues or concerns they may have and how you can be a resource. Be prepared with a handout or fact sheet that may be useful to them and help them understand your services. Provide suggestions on researched-based programs to address an issue or sources for additional information (e.g. helpful websites).

Get together informally with a group of teachers.

Host a brownbag lunch on a topic of common interest related to mental health or curriculum in the school. Brainstorm ways that you and your colleagues can work together to improve communications and problem solving. Agree to facilitate discussions and find resources to look at best practice in the area of concern. Offer to make it a monthly or bimonthly opportunity, but start the sessions near School Psychology Week. Be sure to share any outcomes from the meetings with administrators.

Make a presentation to your school board.

Address how your services reduce costly problems and improve outcomes—if possible within the context of an important issue, like reducing dropout rates. Try to schedule it now so that you can have a few minutes on the agenda in November. ☒

students that you really do value appropriate behaviors!

4. Get to know your students from the beginning. Students are less likely to misbehave or act disrespectfully toward the teacher if they have a positive relationship with him or her. Teachers can get a jumpstart on getting to know their class as individuals by making up a simple survey for students to complete at the start of the school year. By asking students to Teacher Tips for Managing Group Behaviors Copyright 2002 by Jim Wright (www.interventioncentral.org) 2 answer items such as “What privileges or rewards do you prefer?”, “List some learning activities that you enjoy”, and “What instructional topics really interest you?”, teachers can get interesting insights into their students as well as discover what topics, activities, or rewards are likely to motivate them.

5. Be a role model. Teachers should never forget that they are powerful behavioral role models for their students. Because they shape student behaviors by their own example, teachers should hold themselves to the same standards for civility and respect that they expect of their students. If a classroom rule states, for example, that “In this classroom, we use a respectful tone of voice”, the rule applies equally to students *and* teachers. To quote one teacher with whom we talked, “In the classroom, teachers should aim to treat others consistently, fairly, and respectfully. We are mirrors for our students!”

6. Put together a classroom crisis plan. No teacher likes to imagine that a crisis will occur in his or her classroom, for example, a student suddenly becoming physically threatening. However, instructors who *plan* their responses to possible crisis situations are much more able to respond quickly and appropriately if and when such events occur. You can take charge of crisis planning by becoming familiar with your school’s crisis plan, talking with staff whose rooms are near yours about how you can mutually help one another out in the event of a crisis, and teaching your students how *they* should respond (e.g., by evacuating the classroom in an orderly fashion) if a crisis situation occurs.

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HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL Two-Day Conference on School Mental Health

TREATING STUDENTS K-12

January 30-31, 2009

Park Plaza Hotel

Boston

Panels throughout the conference will address prevention, assessment, and treatment for stress, bullying, violence, substance abuse, and other risk-taking and disruptive behaviors. Topics will range from executive functioning deficits, gay/lesbian issues, Asperger’s Syndrome, to psychopharmacology. Featured speakers include: Ross Greene, Ph.D., Nancy Rappaport, M.D., and Jerome J. Schultz, Ph.D. For more information, go to www.cambridgecme.org.

On Spirituality

by Audrey Myerson O'Neill

Call it a computer fringe benefit. We no longer get as many questionnaires from degree candidates doing thesis research and faculty seeking publication. I tried to answer those if they were at all clear. The last one, from an assistant professor at a mid-Atlantic state university, was on Spirituality and School Psychology. I spent far longer writing her a letter than it would have taken to fill out the questionnaire.

Spirituality has become a code-word for religion. That is not its first meaning. Several dictionaries give first, *having the nature of a spirit rather than being material*. Meanings referring to religion, if given at all, are farther down the list; yet this has become its most popular use. When music or film stars are described as being spiritual, this does not mean they are uninterested in material things, but that they draw inspiration from past or present religious background.

An article (Miller & Thoresen, 2003) in a section of *The American Psychologist* on Spirituality, Religion, and Health, says many people take spirituality to mean *connection to something greater than themselves*. That is my favorite definition. Miller and Thoresen warn that most research does not distinguish between spirituality and religion.

The questionnaire gave a variety of examples of spirituality including creativity, working for social justice, and spending time with nature. So far so good. It never mentioned work. St. Benedict said "To work is to pray." It sounds better in Latin where it rhymes, *laborare est orare*. Despite these disclaimers, the questions became more and more religion-loaded. One

asked whether I pray with my students.

I do not pray with my students. If their parents—sensible people who send them to catechism class for that—ever heard that I did, they would march to the supe's office and demand my resignation, my head, or both, and rightly so.

The last third of the questionnaire was a long series of items about my personal religious beliefs, behavior, and knowledge, ostensibly "related to service delivery." The *American Psychologist* articles focused on the effect of patients' spirituality and religion on their health, but this questionnaire focused on the psychologists' religion.

No one would call me religious; yet if St. Benedict was right, *laborare est orare*, I have spent my whole life praying. After we toured the newly remodeled Plymouth State University library, the director called to us, "Come back and see us." My husband called back, "She has to. It's her church."

The questionnaire touched a nerve. I came of age in the conformist postwar era when psychological science was used to support a repressive status quo, as described in William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*. Organizations were considered not only justified but cutting-edge scientific in refusing to hire minorities because their employees did not like them and did not want to work with them. Discrimination was thought to oil the wheels of business and industry. The questionnaire brought visions of returning to a time when a school psychology applicant might be told, "No religious participation? Oh, we're

sorry. Our district is into spirituality." As Huckleberry Finn said in the very last lines of the book, "I can't stand it. I been there before."

To what extent does personal religion affect my work? It very seldom comes up. One 8th grader expressed in drawings and follow-up interview a craving for religious participation, which I encouraged her father to arrange. I have served parochial schools with satisfaction on both sides, and always enjoyed spending the day in that unaccustomed quiet atmosphere.

What has become of the research? The questionnaire was dated 2001. No results have yet been published, but it can take a very long time to break into print. Stay tuned.

References:

- Miller, W. R. & Thoresen, C. E. (2003). Spirituality, religion, and health: An emerging research field. *American Psychologist*, 58, 24-35.
Whyte, W. H. (1956). *The organization man*. NY: Simon & Schuster.

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Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

—William Arthur Ward

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Deadlines for Submission

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<u>Deadline</u>	<u>Issue</u>
January 15	Winter
April 15	Spring
July 15	Summer