Using Bookshare to Support Instruction

Reading to Learn vs. Learning to Read

Prepared by the American Institutes for Research in collaboration with Michael Kennedy and Bookshare.

The purpose of this video is to describe how Bookshare can be used to support instruction across the tiers of response to intervention framework or multi-tiered system of support to provide access to text for students with print-based disabilities.

Bookshare is an online digital library service that helps people with print disabilities obtain a broad spectrum of print materials at the same time as everyone else. Access to the Bookshare library is free for eligible U.S. students through an Office of Special Education Programs grant. Bookshare is not for everyone, just those students and individuals with print-based disabilities. If you have questions about whether a student is eligible for Bookshare, visit the YouTube channel to watch *Who is Eligible for Bookshare*. Go to [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and search Bookshare.

As defined by the National Center on Response to Intervention, response to intervention, or RTI, integrates assessment and intervention within a school-wide, multi-level, or tier prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. In the RTI model, schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, and adjust the intensity and nature of those interventions based on student responsiveness. The four essential components of an RTI framework are screening, progress monitoring, a multi-tiered prevention system, and data-based decision making.

The multi-level prevention system is made up of an increasingly intense levels or tiers of instructional support, typically described as tier one or the core curriculum, tier two or secondary interventions, and tier three or intensive intervention. Imagine a pyramid, with tier one or the core curriculum at the bottom, tier two or secondary interventions in the middle, and tier three or intensive intervention at the top of the pyramid.

Bookshare books and features within compatible assistive technology can be used to support the core curriculum or be embedded within [slide change] tier two and tier three interventions.

Bookshare supports can be utilized to ensure that eligible students have access to the core curriculum in a timely manner and in formats that meet their needs.

An example is the use of Universal Design for Learning, or UDL. UDL is a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. Universal Design for Learning principles support students in three ways, by providing multiple means of representation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple means of engagement.

UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for everyone. It’s not not a single one size fits all solution, but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.

The features offered by Bookshare and compatible assistive technology fall under the category of multiple means of representation.

For example, under this category there is a UDL checkpoint for offering alternatives to visual information. Offering alternatives to visual information is an important way of ensuring all learners have equal access to information especially those with visual impairments. Bookshare features can assist in the creation of Universally Designed Core Instruction that accounts for the needs of diverse learning profiles of eligible students. For more information about UDL, please visit [www.cast.org](http://www.cast.org).

Bookshare books and supports can be incorporated into interventions delivered at the tier two and three levels.

Although Bookshare and compatible assistive technology tools have the potential to provide powerful instructional support, it’s important to recognize the limitations of a service like Bookshare when delivering reading instruction.

Bookshare and compatible assistive technology software are a service that provide access to texts, but it is not an intervention program. Bookshare tools do not explicitly teach students to read, although they can support the development of reading skills by providing access to text [switches to new slide] through a variety of built-in and add-on supports.

It is important to recognize that services like Bookshare highlight the tension that exist between explicit instruction in reading skills and [switches to new slide] providing struggling readers with access to texts.

This tension is sometimes popularly summarized as “learning to read,” versus, “reading to learn.” Educators must find a balance between explicit reading instruction and providing a student with access to texts for struggling learners, particularly students with disabilities. Unfortunately there is no set formula for finding the appropriate balance.

In addition to supporting the development of reading skills, Bookshare also supports development of content knowledge. Therefore, Bookshare provides access to texts in social studies, science, math, and other subjects to ensure that students with print disabilities have the same opportunities for the development of content knowledge as peers without disabilities.

Some teachers may be reluctant to utilize resources such as Bookshare, because they feel as though they’re giving up on teaching reading skills.

But, it is especially important that students with print disabilities are afforded the opportunity to access the same context text as their non-disabled peers.

Because think of a graphic illustration with Reader Performance on the y-axis, and Grade Levels K through3 on the x-axis. As students progress through the early elementary school students who lack foundational skills for reading struggle to perform because they do not have the skills to gain new knowledge through independent reading, which creates a straight horizontal line of low reading performance. Students with solid foundational skills in reading continue to grow and success as they acquire new knowledge through independent reading, which creates an upward, positive slope of increasing reading performance. This phenomenon is called the Matthew Effect, which can be summarized by the age old phrase, “the rich get richer, and the poor get poorer.”

Students who lack foundational skills in reading struggle to perform in school because they do not have the skills to gain new knowledge through reading. Students with solid foundational or basic skills continue to grow and succeed as they acquire new knowledge through reading.

It is important to reiterate that Bookshare is not intended as a substitute for basic reading instruction or as a reading intervention. And basic reading instruction should not be discontinued, even though a student is using Bookshare. Instead Bookshare can be used to support students with print disabilities and ensure that they gain access to curricular content, master IEP goals, and achieve academic standards.

Additional resources on RTI, intensive intervention, and Bookshare are available at the following websites: The Center on Response to Intervention: [www.rti4success.org](http://www.rti4success.org), the National Center on Intensive Intervention: [www.intensiveintervention.org](http://www.intensiveintervention.org), and Bookshare: [www.bookshare.org](http://www.bookshare.org). For more information, please contact Bookshare at [www.Bookshare.org/ContactUs](http://www.Bookshare.org/ContactUs).

This project is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (Cooperative Agreement #H327D120002). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education.