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**Book Review: RTI with Differentiated Instruction, Grades 6 - 8: A  
Classroom Teacher's Guide, by J. O'Meara (2011)**

Hope E. Wilson

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## **BOOK REVIEW**

**O’Meara, J. (2011). *RTI with Differentiated Instruction, Grades 6-8: A Classroom Teacher’s Guide.***

**Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press**

Hope E. Wilson, PhD

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## **BACKGROUND**

As school districts across the country move toward Response to Intervention (RTI) as a standardized way to meet the diverse needs of students in the classroom, Jodi O’Meara’s book provides practical and relevant information for middle level (grades 6 through 8) teachers on best practices for incorporating RTI and differentiation into their instruction, assessment, and pedagogy.

### ***Response to Intervention***

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a three-tiered process that many school districts across the country have adopted to primarily meet the needs of struggling students. In the first tier, students’ needs are met through differentiation and appropriate classroom practice within the typical classroom environment. In stage two, students receive more direct and intensive instruction in a separate classroom setting; this stage of RTI is meant to be short-term and skills-based. The third tier of RTI involves more intensive work with students individually or in small groups on a longer-term basis. The foundation of RTI is on-going assessment that is used to inform teachers’ instructional and curricular decisions.

### ***Differentiation***

Differentiation is the practice by which teachers modify classroom practice to meet the diverse needs of students within a classroom. Teachers differentiate product (how the students show what they have learned), process (*how* the students learn), and content (*what* the students learn) by differences in students’ learning styles, interests, and readiness levels. RTI and Differentiation share the common foundation of on-going assessment, and differentiation is a crucial component of tier 1 interventions in RTI.

## **BOOK SUMMARY**

This book “is written in through the eyes of a teacher and focuses on classroom application rather than the forms or processes of DI [Differentiated Instruction] or RTI initiatives” (O’Meara, 2011; p. 2). The book provides a general overview of both differentiation and RTI, and then addresses each tier of RTI with specific classroom practices, including curriculum and instruction, assessment, classroom environment, and problem solving. The appendix of the book contains a set of resources designed to help teachers and RTI “problem solving teams” to address the diverse needs of students in classrooms.

## DISCUSSION

The strength of the book lies in its practical and clear descriptions of differentiation and RTI. For teachers and practitioners who have little background knowledge of RTI, this book provides a solid introduction as to how it affects classroom teachers in the middle grades. The author also makes a clear case for the importance of differentiation within the context of the RTI framework. This book is most suited for educators with little or no experience with RTI, and provides a foundation of knowledge about both (DI and RTI) approaches.

O'Meara addresses the needs of students who struggle with particular topics in a discipline (i.e., those with low readiness levels, students who are learning the English Language, students with special needs, and gifted students). With such a breadth of diversity within the classroom, this text does not provide depth on the unique needs of any one group of students. That said, most of the discussion in the book is devoted to students with low readiness levels, as clearly this is the population of students that RTI (particularly tiers one and two) is directed toward.

The sections of the book addressing gifted learners feel more like an afterthought than an integral component of the narrative. In much the way that gifted programming is handled in many of our nation's schools, gifted learners are given consideration in this text without emphasis on the fundamental importance of their distinct needs. Rather than being integrated throughout the book, gifted students are addressed in separated sections. Thus, while it is laudable that gifted students are considered in this book, especially since RTI efforts target the needs of students who typically struggle with the curriculum, O'Meara provides only a surface-level explanation of the need for differentiated curriculum and specialized programming for more able students.

In conclusion, this book provides foundational knowledge about differentiation within the context of RTI for teachers and practitioners of the middle level grades. However, many teachers will find the information provided to be less comprehensive than is needed to apply this information to best classroom practice for gifted learners.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Hope E. Wilson completed her doctorate in Gifted Education at the University of Connecticut. She has previously served NAGC as the R&E Network Awards Co-chair, coordinating the dissertation award and the research gala, the Arts Division Newsletter Editor, and on the Development Committee. She was awarded Graduate Student of the Year by NAGC. Hope is a co-author of Letting Go Of Perfect: Overcoming Perfectionism in Kids (2009, Prufrock Press). She has been published in the Journal for the Education of the Gifted, Gifted Child Today, and the Journal of Advanced Academics. Her cartoons are a regular feature in Teaching for High Potential. She is currently an assistant professor at Stephen F. Austin State University, and has previously been the assistant editor for the Journal of Advanced Academics. Her research has included gifted identification, acceleration, academic self-concept, and arts integration for gifted students, using HLM and SEM, as well as qualitative, methodologies.*