

# Darla Gardner

**michelle\_andrews:** [00:00:00] Hey there, I'm Michelle Andrews and I'm your host for the Pep Talk podcast. This episode is about understanding and implementing RTI in the schools as an S L P. My guest speaker today is Darla Gardner. Let me tell you a little bit about her. Darla has been an s l P for 20 years as a school-based s l p.

**michelle\_andrews:** She sees all ages for the last 10 years. She has primarily worked with three to six year olds in her district's early childhood center. She collaborates with and educates pre-K and kindergarten teachers to provide language interventions in the classroom through r t I. It has not only enlightened many teachers, but she says it has made her a better school-based s l p as well. Darla also creates amazing s l p materials and resources on T B T under Ms. Gardenias speech room. First, we need to go over some formality, some formalities for the course by going over our financial disclosures. My financial disclosures include, I have a Teacher's Pay Teachers Boom Learning and Teacher with Medley Store.

**michelle\_andrews:** [00:01:00] Under Pep Talk, L L C I am also the founder and manager of the Pep Talk podcast. My non-financial disclosures include Speech Arcade is an in-kind sponsor for this podcast. Darla's financial disclosures include, she is the owner, author, and creator at Miss Gardenias speech room. She has an early childhood, S L P at Ennis i s d. Amazon. Affiliate links may be included in some handouts included Darla's. Non-financial disclosures include Dar Darla mentioned some books by Leslie Sullivan. And She is the owner of Facebook groups that may be mentioned. Now, here are the learner objectives for this course. Number one list a reason why we do pre-referral and interventions. Number two, give an example of tier one rti. And number three, explain what happens after tier three R ti. Okay, let's get started. Today we are talking all about r t. I don't know about you, but [00:02:00] when I worked in the school for my C F Y year, I was really lost when it came to a lot of things, but especially rti, what can or should I do? What should I not do? How do I even make time for that? We will get into all of that and more. I am so excited to introduce today's guest speaker, Darla Gardner. Hi there, Darla.

**Track 1:** Hi, Michelle. I'm so glad to be here. I'm

**Track 1:** excited to talk to you about this too.

**Michelle Andrews:** I'm so excited you're here. Darla. I gave a quick little bio, but can you tell us just a little bit more about yourself?

**Track 1:** Sure. Um, I have worked in all ages all the way up into the skilled nursing facility, but the last 10 years or so, I have been working at the early childhood level. Um, I really enjoy working with the little guys, and I didn't think that I would after working with junior high and high school for so long, But when I first came to the early childhood setting, I was completely clueless.

**Track 1:** Um, I thought, [00:03:00] wow, these, these kids have zero language, they have zero communication skills it compared to they can't have conversations like the older kids can. Um, so I quickly had to learn a lot of things about why the teachers are doing what they're doing in the classrooms, why it's so important to them that they learn how to write their name and how to, um, learn shapes and colors and all those things.

**Track 1:** And then we started working together to kinda weed out and determine the language skills that they needed for pre-academic skills. , so it was a big learning curve for me, but I was able to, um, make some good relationships with teachers and fit right into the early childhood setting. And I've been happy there.

**Track 1:** And so this is about my 10th year to be working in this setting.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's awesome. So you have lots of experience working with that area and with RTI so let's start off explaining what R t I is. Let's , define, um, what the acronym stands for. . You'll even start there for [00:04:00] just

**Michelle Andrews:** the basics. Um, go ahead and let us, let us know what that is.

**Track 1:** sure. So RTI is response to intervention and a lot of districts are now using a different acronym, which is mtss, and that is multi-tiered system of supports. Um, response intervention still falls under mtss. So I still call it R T I because that's what my district calls it. Basically, it is a tiered intervention program to target students who are at risk.

**Track 1:** It's a pre-referral intervention process. Um, in 2020 R t I shifted to M T S S. So they do work together, um, no matter what your school is calling it. I found out that I think we are all doing a little bit of both. Uh, we just might be

calling it something different. There are three tiers of r t I. Um, tier one should, it's, it's like a pyramid that you might see.

**Track 1:** Um, [00:05:00] tier one should be about 80% of your students on your campus. And it focuses on the students and helping them academically. The 80% require no specific interventions to be successful in the classroom, and that is like the majority of your students who are just sitting in the class making progress as expected.

**Track 1:** So tier two is typically 15% of students and they require some type of small group intervention. That could be academic, it could be language, but whatever it is, they're considered at risk. And they are identified by universal screeners that are done. Um, like the CLI testing and the BRI grants testing.

**Track 1:** They now have different testings for reading and for math. And then your district may do a universal screener for speech. We don't do that at my district unless they're in Head Start, but there are some districts who screen all of their pre-K and kindergarten students as they come in. And then tier three is going to be [00:06:00] about 5% of the students in your population on your campus.

**Track 1:** And those might require a especially designed instruction or a special education, um, model to be successful in the classroom. Now, what we're seeing that this year, in particular last year as well, that the numbers are different. We are seeing way more than 5% of our students, um, require special ed. We are seeing more than 15% of our students requiring tier two interventions.

**Track 1:** But this is how the, this is how it was laid out originally, is that this is what your campus should look like. And so that's kind of how we still look at it and try to target and keep those numbers about at that level.

**michelle\_andrews:** Interesting. So why do you think the numbers have increased as they have.

**Track 1:** Well, um, definitely the pandemic and quarantine had something to do with that. Our three-year-olds that are coming in right now, were isolated, you know, from like 12 to two, 12 [00:07:00] months to two years of age. Um, a lot of the parents that I talked to say, well, we just didn't get out much. We didn't go to birthday parties.

**Track 1:** I kept him at home and they're comparing their five-year-olds to their current three-year-olds who did get to go to birthday parties and things like that.

Um, I think technology has a lot to do with it that students at younger ages, kids are on technology more than they ever have been before, and. Just real basic play and using our senses, you know, to, to interact with the environment has really decreased.

**Track 1:** So a lot of vocabulary exposure has gone down, um, with tablets. Another thing I try to talk to about parents is it's not a shared learning experience. It's a passive learning experience. And so, although there are great academic apps, there are great, um, shows on, you know, YouTube for kids. There, there are great things that are teaching them things.

**Track 1:** They're not applying those skills and they're not [00:08:00] having a conversation about the information that they're learning and so they can't explore it more. It's a very passive learning situation. So I think that has a lot to do with the receptive and expressive language.

**Michelle Andrews:** Right. That makes a lot of sense. And I happen, I have a five-year-old and then a three-year-old and a two-year-old. So I definitely have one pre pre covid and then kind of two,

**Michelle Andrews:** um, right there. So I definitely even can firsthand as a mom see a little bit of, of just what the difference that made of not a lot, the not the same social experiences from such an early age.

**Michelle Andrews:** That's, that's a very interesting thing to see firsthand. And then also as an SLP, um, that's a very good point about, about probably those numbers going up. Okay. So let's, let's talk about why we do RTI. We kind of just. Briefly went over the tiers, and we'll dig into that a little bit deeper in a moment. But why do we do RTI as an SLP?

**Track 1:** Well, the main reason is to identify the difference between a [00:09:00] disability and a delay prior to the referral process because we know how long it takes to complete. A full evaluation, even if it's only speech and language, it can take hours. The testing part of it, writing the report, it also, you have timelines, the federal timelines.

**Track 1:** So you have many, many days and months to complete this evaluation. Well, during that process, what kind of intervention is the child getting? Um, if the teacher is providing the intervention in the classroom, if we've already identified some strengths and weaknesses that they need to work on and they continue to make progress and are, and are progressing rapidly, they probably don't require specialized in instructions such as speech therapy.

**Track 1:** Now, if they are not making progress, the teacher is still giving them interventions and the way I do it at my campus is I provide them with like, Um, help determining what to target on their goals, how to change their style of an [00:10:00] approach, how to cue them effectively. I don't provide the intervention myself, um, but I do support the teachers a lot so that child is getting intervention at least three times a week in their classroom and a small group or individually.

**Track 1:** Whereas if they were only in the referral process, it could be many days or weeks before they get an evaluation, before the art is held, or the i e P meeting is held and before the intervention starts, even if it's warranted, there's nothing worse than doing an evaluation and going through that entire process and the child doesn't even qualify.

**Track 1:** So what have you been doing for the child in the meantime, and what are you gonna do now? And at our campus and many, you know, many other campuses in our state, I know if you're providing R T I before they don't qualify. You provide r t i after, and you've already been providing very specific interventions according to their weaknesses.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay. Interesting. So you mentioned that what you, [00:11:00] a little bit of what you do not do. So let's get into, um, what should, uh, what do LPs do and then what should LPs not do? I know we talked about this on the phone earlier a little bit, but, um, tell me more about kind of the do's and don'ts for

**Track 1:** Okay. Yeah, so our attorneys, and you know that we have, and they're a very well known legal group in Texas for special education law. They have recommended that we do not provide the interventions, that we do not complete the screenings because we. Especially design instruction. We are a special education component.

**Track 1:** If we go in and do a screening on a kid, we are, we can't turn off our evaluation lens. So we are technically evaluating them. We haven't given them all the information that they have to have. We haven't gotten parent consent for an evaluation, so we shouldn't be doing that. If we're pulling that child into one of our speech room, um, groups, then we are providing them with specialized instruction.[00:12:00]

**Track 1:** And that is not what, you know, a general education kid should be getting. R T i MTSS is a general education program. It is not a special education program. So in tier one, you know, for like the 80% of students who, what can

we do? How are we going to be effective on our campus as the language experts, as the communication experts?

**Track 1:** And I'm talking about right now, primarily three to six year olds because I work on an early childhood campus, but this could apply all the way through elementary and middle school. So what should the teacher be doing? The teacher at tier one should be attending trainings, um, communicating with the parents at their first contact.

**Track 1:** Whenever they first meet those parents at Meet the teacher night, they should be communicating with the parents, especially about if they have any developmental concerns. They need to be getting to know their students individually, not just as a whole group class. They need to be working with those students individually at a small group and just kind of getting to know them better so they feel comfortable [00:13:00] communicating with them, and then they need to kind of start identifying some of their kids' strengths and weaknesses.

**Track 1:** Now, what are we doing as the S L P on the campus? We have to develop a relationship with the teachers. If we aren't developing a relationship with the teachers, they're not gonna trust us and they're not going to want to listen to us. Um, as far as what we are gonna offer them to work with their students, we also should be supporting this staff on our campus with training.

**Track 1:** So during that first week of school, when we come back and all of the trainings are going on, ask the principal if you can do, um, a brief training, um, a couple of brief trainings and just help get into their mind what they're looking for, get into the teacher's, um, minds. You know, this is typical language development and this is not.

**Track 1:** And then also at tier one, we are just modeling language rich opportunities in the school day. So, We might just be modeling things in the hallway with our students or stopping and talking to some of the students in the [00:14:00] hallway. Um, I have put up bulletin boards in my hallway that are like language activities for the teachers to do at.

**Track 1:** Uh, bathroom time or at recess time when they're all lining up in a common area. I have bulletin boards, um, that I hang up and the teachers use those bulletin boards for w questions for introducing vocabulary just to get their kids talking and to see how their language is and what areas they're struggling with.

**Track 1:** Basically, we just need to be a language model to others. We could be going into classrooms and reading books aloud for the teachers and demonstrating how we read a book as opposed to how the teacher may read a book or how the parent may read the book. Um, we talk about everything happening in the book.

**Track 1:** We make predictions. We talk about the vocabulary. We label part whole. You know, we, we just really do it a little bit differently than the teachers do, and it's not that they do it wrong. Um, we just have a different way of doing it as far as [00:15:00] using more language with the, with the read aloud. So that's a good thing to do that you could do for a whole class or for a teacher.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay, so if you're in there, in the classroom doing an activity, like reading a book or just, um, talking, chatting with all the kids, as long as you're not singling someone out or doing any kind of, Screening, even informal, then that's okay just to kind of be in there, be exposing yourself to the group of the, of the class.

**Track 1:** Yes. So as long as you're not targeting anyone individually, or you're not observing anyone individually without parent consent, there's no reason why you can't go in and be a guest reader in a classroom or why you can't hang up things in the hallway. That has nothing to do with, you know, providing a specialized instruction.

**Track 1:** And so, yeah, you can, you can figure out ways to insert yourself into the, the school and into the teacher's activities so that you can model just [00:16:00] a language rich environment for the teachers.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay. This might be jumping ahead, but I know, , I've heard of where you had send home a, , a form for the parents to sign. Requesting permission to screen, is that still a part of rti or is that something that's, uh, recommended or not recommended? Um,

**Track 1:** I don't do that. Screening, um, is considered an evaluation and that's kind of how, unless you do the entire class, you can't just pick out one kid. And that's why we can do the entire class with Headstart. That's in our agreement with the Head Start program, is that we will give every student in the program a speech screener, and that's why we can do the entire class.

**Track 1:** But we can't, we can't just go into a classroom and screen, you know, one child to see how they perform if it's not the entire class. I, I just thought of some other things that I had listed for tier one intervention, some other activities

that I've done. Um, [00:17:00] I sent out. Emails like for Spring for example, or for a holiday and I list or link some songs that are language rich, for example, like, and I put underneath them what it is.

**Track 1:** That's good about these songs. Cuz kindergarten and Pre-K teachers use songs all the time and they use 'em as transitions. They use 'em to get kids refocused. They use 'em to get the wiggles out. And so like the Five Little Caterpillar song, for example, for Spring, it has counting, it has plurals, it has action words, it has spatial concepts.

**Track 1:** And then there's like a lucky ladybug song that has the L, the L Sound, medial K, multi-Syllabic Words, action Words, spatial concepts. And so what I'll do is I'll send out an email with links to those songs and then I'll list underneath it what's good about these songs. So if they have kids that are in r t i working on those skills, then they can choose those songs to play in their classroom.

**michelle\_andrews:** That sounds so helpful for teachers. I bet that they're like, oh, thank you. This is a great idea, [00:18:00] Okay, so let's see. That's so tier one. Is there anything else on tier one we can kind of maybe dive into tier two?

**Track 1:** Um, I can tell one more thing that we have done on tier one. Uh, I, I applied for a grant through our education foundation and I was able to purchase enough supplies to send home with each child on our campus. And we did one baggie of supplies per month, and those supplies would be something tiny and cheap from like Oriental Trading Company or the Dollar Tree, and I would put a handout with it.

**Track 1:** So for example, one month the supplies was a stuffed bear and then a plastic fork spoon. And plate. Um, and then I think there was a little coffee cup too. And so on the parent sheet I talked about, you know, the vocabulary to work on in the kitchen and setting at the table, and then the action words to work on with feeding the bear and [00:19:00] swallowing and chewing and just gave the parents words to use to play with their child.

**Track 1:** Gave them some ideas on how to set up a play situation and to teach them how to play and how to pretend appropriately, and then how to apply that to when they sat down and ate dinner at home as well. Um, so we did several different months of activities. Another month we did a kite and a pair of sunglasses, and we talked about outside vocabulary with wind and kites and the string, and making it long and making it short.

**Track 1:** Um, We did another month where we had the microphones that you can talk into and it kinda echoes back to you. And then an animal hat, uh, like the animal hats might have been an elephant or a tiger. They were super cheap on oriental training. We bought 'em in bulk for all 300 students. And then they, the activity was to pretend that you're that animal, to talk about that animal, to do the animal sounds into the microphone, [00:20:00] and then to find books about that animal at the library or to find pictures of that animal, or, you know, things like that to apply the vocabulary into their everyday life.

**Track 1:** And so those are just a few we sent. We have enough to send home, um, every month to all of the kids. The grant was for like \$8,000 from our education foundation.

**michelle\_andrews:** That's amazing. That's such a great resource. That's, that's awesome that you did that. Um, so when the parents, , were working on these skills with their kids, was this also an opportunity for the parents to maybe, See for themselves if there was a delay or anything that they maybe should ask the school SLP about, was that, um, I know a lot of it was just great resources for language development, but was that another part of it?

**Track 1:** Well, the, our, you know, our information was on there. And if the pa, if the child is already in care or in r t I, the parent is aware, the teachers already talked to them about that. So they kind of [00:21:00] should know what their child is working on, and they could have found that area on the page or on the handout.

**Track 1:** But as far as this, it wasn't really meant for the, the parent to, to identify if there was a need. It was really just meant more than anything to promote, you know, language in the home we called it, um, experiencing and then our school name. Um, how we got them to do the activities was by doing a hashtag that they could share it on social media and then each other could see it.

**Track 1:** So it's kind of a competition at that point. So the parents are like, oh, I saw so-and-so did it with their kids. So I wanna do that too. And I'm gonna share my pictures cuz we had such a good time. You know, parents are kind of competitive when it comes to showing the pictures of their kids and their families on social media.

**Track 1:** So we had a hashtag that we used and then the parents shared. Shared that and there are some kids who didn't get to do some of the activities, and so our counselor would go around and get those kids, you know, that, you know, [00:22:00] didn't get to do the activity and she would bring them in and make a

whole group activity with them if they didn't get to do the activity with their parents.

**michelle\_andrews:** Oh, that's good. That's so creative. I love that. Okay, so let's go into tier two. What is, what is the SLPs role for tier two?

**Track 1:** Okay, so let me tell what we're not supposed to do, um, first, and that would be what the teacher should be doing. The teacher in tier two should already be conferencing with their parent. Um, they should already be the one making the contact to the parent, and they should be the one administering the screening instruments too.

**Track 1:** We have a, a simple screener that that looks at both receptive and expressive abilities. They administer that screener. It takes about 15 minutes, and then the teacher intentionally will plan and implement the lessons that they do with the kids for language. They also will collect data on the goals and bring that data to the team meeting, which we call our care meeting, and [00:23:00] then they will have the ongoing communication with the parent.

**Track 1:** It's not the SLPs job to be doing that just yet. I mean, we have 70 other kids on our caseload. We don't need to be worrying about adding these additional 70, you know, that are in rti. The teacher needs to be. Talking to the parent, having these conversations because they are with the child more throughout the day and they need to be implementing the things in the classroom as well.

**Track 1:** Um, As far as the s l P goes, we can train the teacher on how to administer the screening instruments. For instance, if it's a new teacher who's never done this before, we can train her. Um, we also can help her analyze the data when she brings the screener to me. If the teacher has completed the screener and she's like, I don't know where to start, I'll look at, at the screener and be like, oh, let's start here.

**Track 1:** As far as developmental hierarchy and then how to make the goals, how to write the goals, where they're simple, easy to implement and measurable, I can help her do that as well. I help [00:24:00] her to determine the length of time and the frequency. Usually we do 10 minutes, three times a week. You could work with this child at a small group or individually.

**Track 1:** And then I also give the teacher materials to access. I have a cabinet in my room that, um, are old materials or leftover things that I've just accumulated

over the years, but then also our dis our. Our campus has purchased some really good items from like Lake Shore Learning, um, some super duper activities.

**Track 1:** You know, very easy things that are quick games or flashcards, things like that, that the teacher can use. And she just will take 'em from my shelf and bring 'em back when she's done. They've, they're real good about that. I've never had anybody not return anything. Sometimes it's the end of the school year, but I usually get it back.

**Track 1:** Um, so I do provide them materials to access. I also have a digital, um, a Google Drive that I have put some resources in and some resources that teachers have made themselves. [00:25:00] Wanted to share with other teachers just from using Google Images and making PowerPoint slides or Google slides, and they share that, you know, with each other and then they can all access it.

**Track 1:** I have it organized according to skill, language, or articulation. They can find their data sheets in there, they can find the screeners in there. So it's just a Google Drive that they can all access to find the information that they need.

**michelle\_andrews:** Awesome. So at this stage as well, you're really a good resource for the teacher, like you're helping the teacher analyze the screener, helping the teacher have resources and, and materials to use for when the the teacher does the intervention.

**Track 1:** Right. It's all about the teacher doing the intervention and me supporting the teacher to provide that intervention. I shouldn't have any contact with the student. I shouldn't even be able to recognize the student, you know, in passing. Um, sometimes, of course there are some kids that stand out more than others and you get to know them, but there should be no reason [00:26:00] I am directly working with this student, even at tier two.

**Track 1:** Um, As far as doing a classroom observation, if the teacher really can't figure out what the problem is, I do have a consent that I get signed from the parent and I go in and do a whole classroom observation. And the parent knows that that's only an observation. It's not an evaluation. It's to help the teacher with providing interventions to that student.

**Track 1:** Occasionally, yes, parents get confused and have thought, oh, you're doing an evaluation, when does speech therapy start? And so you have to make it very clear to the parent that this is not an evaluation, that I'm not gonna be

working with your child. I'm going in to help the teacher implement some language interventions in her classroom.

**Track 1:** Um, also during the, the tier two, um, period, we're meeting every six to nine weeks on these kids and we are looking at their progress and we are determining if they're making progress on these goals. If they're not making progress, then we [00:27:00] all look at the child's information and we say, could there be a disability here?

**Track 1:** If there is a disability, then we need to move to the referral process. Um, so if we suspect a disability, then I'm going to, you know, have to get that approved or I'm gonna have to give my approval to go ahead and start that. And then we start the referral process. By this time, we already have all the parent information that we need.

**Track 1:** We already have their vision and hearing screening, cuz we've already completed all of that. We have classroom observations from the teacher and usually the school counselor will do a classroom observation is well, and so we're really ready to start that referral. All I have to get at that point is consent from the parent.

**michelle\_andrews:** Okay, so. Now we move on to tier three. What does tier three look like?

**Track 1:** So tier three is when we start the referral process, the teacher is still providing the interventions in the classroom. Even though they're going to referral, that doesn't mean she has to stop or can stop because like I I said earlier, if they don't qualify, they're gonna have to [00:28:00] continue those interventions and they should be implementing those language skills and language interventions in the classroom anyway, cuz they've already identified that as a child's weakness.

**Track 1:** Um, So I'll go through the referral process, get the consent from the parent, I'll start the evaluation, and then, you know, we'll have the I E P meeting to go over it and determine if they qualify. If they don't qualify, then we continue the R t I process. Um, we specifically target the things that I've identified in the evaluation are missing from the child's, um, language abilities or their articulation abilities.

**Track 1:** And then we keep them in the care process because sometimes after they get into first grade, they've left our campus and they need to see that these

kids still are struggling a little bit and requiring a little extra help in the classroom.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay. Yeah, that was my next question, is that what happens after tier three, if they don't qualify for services, and also if they do, does the teacher continue R t I until speech starts? [00:29:00] Is that kind of the transition to it? If they do qualify?

**Track 1:** Yes. So we would, we would start speech and then also at that ARD meeting, we would determine do they need special education support as well? Like does the, the special education teacher need to come in and work, you know, more closely on those language skills with the child in the classroom to kind of relieve the teacher of some of those things that she needs to do, you know, with her, with the other kids in the class.

**Track 1:** Um, Or just to provide them with more, um, exposure to their IEP goals. A lot of times our special education teacher will go in and work on the language IEP goals that I have made just as it applies to their academics. So, for example, in math skills that they don't know, more and less if they don't know equal and same and different, you know, some of those things are early language concepts that that's why they're struggling in math.

**Track 1:** And so we can provide some more support and the teacher needs to give us that information at the ARD meeting so that we at the [00:30:00] I e P meeting, so that we can put all those things in place and, and get all the interventions necessary for the, for the child.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay. So if the child does not qualify for services, Does R t I continue or what's the next step?

**Track 1:** Yes. R t I continues until they go into first grade, and then they know that they're coming with some kind of need above and beyond what the other kids in the classroom might have.

**Michelle Andrews:** Okay. So it, so the child goes to a different school, or even if it's a different situation where the child even moves school at a different time.

**Michelle Andrews:** That information would be with the child in their file or something and they

**Track 1:** Mm-hmm. . It just follows them.

**michelle\_andrews:** school.

**michelle\_andrews:** Okay. So it sounds like a, well, it sounds like it is. RTI is a lot of working with teachers, working with the special education team. It sounds like it's a lot of collaborating. , And a lot of time that you are supporting teachers, how do you fit that into your schedule? Give us [00:31:00] some insight on how you make that work.

**Track 1:** Sure. So some of the ways that I motivate the teachers to do RTI is, like I said, by reading aloud in the classroom. Um, I brag on them a lot with like success stories. Like, oh, miss so-and-so got this to work with their child, or Look what she made and, you know, that kind of thing. Um, I also share their ideas whenever they create resources, I.

**Track 1:** Can provide visuals for their centers. I make those hallway transition time opportunities. I, um, we can apply for the grants every year. So also, I also, in addition to those things that I like to do, they make me happy and they make me feel like I'm being, um, you know, useful and helpful outside of my speech room.

**Track 1:** But I also attend the care meetings. And sometimes those care meetings can be an all day event because if you have, you know, 20 teachers on your campus and we're all getting 15 minutes, giving them 15 minutes a piece to go [00:32:00] over the kids in their class, they have concerns about that can be an all day event.

**Track 1:** So some of the ways that we have made time to do that is at the beginning of the year we go ahead and schedule our care meetings based on when the universal screeners are taking place on their campus. So, If they know the, the testing window is open for this screener during these weeks, we're going to schedule our universal screener.

**Track 1:** We're gonna, you know, we're gonna know about when that's happening. Then we'll schedule our care meeting after that happens. So we have that data to look at so we know where the student is struggling, um, and that, so we go ahead and schedule all of our care meetings at the beginning of the year for the entire year.

**Track 1:** We always try to do our last care meeting the week after spring break. So we have those coming up next week. And again, it can be an all day event. So I try to use my paperwork day or my testing day, um, and make that, make

that the time that I can attend these care meetings. So that means I [00:33:00] have to plan my arts.

**Track 1:** As well, my I E P meetings a year in advance, so I go ahead and print out the dates that they're all due. I get them on the calendar. Of course, they have to be flexible because, you know, things happen, people get sick or people aren't there. But I try to go ahead and get all of my I E P meetings on the calendar at the beginning of the year as far as the recurring ones that I know I'm going to have to do.

**Track 1:** My new students. I don't know that I'm gonna have to do those. Another way that we schedule our therapy so that we have time for testing and time for meetings, we, we do sessions. Texas wants Sessions weekly, we do sessions. They actually just want it spelled out in how you're going to do it each week, how it's supposed to look so that you don't say, Nine times per month and do all nine in the first two weeks.

**Track 1:** So you kind of have to clarify, um, how, and describe how you're doing your sessions. So we do usually most kids that are your typical twice a week [00:34:00] speech kids, we put in their i e p that we're doing five sessions per three weeks. I tell the parent at the I IEP meeting, that's 15 times per nine weeks because we're on a nine week grading period.

**Track 1:** So that looks like two times the first week, two times the second week, one time, the third week, then we start again. So that gives me every three weeks I have time for paperwork and for meetings and for testing. Um, most SLPs I would say probably have a day built in or half a day built in for paperwork, testing and meetings.

**Track 1:** So, By using that paperwork, you know, and using it effectively, planning ahead and everyone knowing how important this is to your campus, your administrator, your care team coordinator, which in our campus is our. Um, our school counselor and then maybe your instructional coach and myself, then we know this is important.

**Track 1:** We wanna get this on the calendar. So I would recommend that you go [00:35:00] ahead and talk about that before school starts, next school year. You know, how often do we need to do these meetings? How often do we need to meet and talk about the kids? And, you know, the follow up meetings. We usually do the first one about the first six weeks after school.

**Track 1:** Because there are some kids that have had very little medical care, they haven't, you know, seen a pediatrician other than on a virtual visit for a few years or a couple of years. And they come into school and they show up for pre-K and they are nonverbal or they have very few words, or they have, you know, some obvious signs of another disability.

**Track 1:** And there are some kids that we need to meet on. We had a care meeting at the end of the first week of school last year or this school year, and we already put some kids in care after that first week of school because, They couldn't voice that they needed to go to the bathroom. They couldn't voice their needs and wants.

**Track 1:** And so the teachers were like, I need to put 'em in care. I need to have a goal for this. You know? And so my teachers want to put goals on their kids. They want to start targeting things specifically [00:36:00] cuz they know if they follow the developmental hierarchy, they're either gonna make progress and they're gonna get better and they're gonna kind of melt in with the rest of the class and be just like everybody else.

**Track 1:** Or it's gonna be very apparent that they need more services. And so I, my teachers really do prefer to go ahead and start care sooner than later.

**michelle\_andrews:** Yeah, that sounds like a great idea. It seems like you're such a great resource for your teachers and you, it sounds like y'all have a great relationship, but have you heard of any situations where maybe that's not the case. Maybe some pushback with

**michelle\_andrews:** teachers, maybe teachers feeling like they don't have the time for it. , I know you gave some tips on, know, , having your bulletin boards and read reading and stuff, but what about some tips on how to navigate those types of conversations? What's your insight on that?

**Track 1:** Well, that's why the administrator is an important person to have in the care meeting. Whether or not they're able to come to every care meeting, just knowing that they're on board with the process. Because I'm nobody's boss. I don't even, technically, I'm not even, you know, like assigned, [00:37:00] I'm assigned to that campus, but my boss isn't even on that campus.

**Track 1:** And so, um, having a good relationship with the principal and the care team coordinator and knowing that it's very obvious when the teachers come to the meetings, which ones are doing the interventions and which ones are not.

Um, it becomes a pattern. Esp, we've got kids. Head start three, pre-K, four in kindergarten.

**Track 1:** It becomes a pattern by kindergarten. If you have a kid who's just, who's been there all three years, but they're just now being identified as student with weaknesses, you know, in language or communication, well, who did they have for pre-K? Who did they have, you know, as a three-year-old? And then they can go back and, and train those people or ask them, do you need more help in this area?

**Track 1:** Um, can I, and then I also can provide them with additional help. The, the things that the teachers say aren't usually that I don't have the time. It's not usually, um, negative in nature and it's never neglectful, you know, as far as neglecting [00:38:00] their duties for the students. They don't feel qualified. And so a lot of what I do is.

**Track 1:** Teach them and train them and empower them and let them know that they are qualified. Just because they didn't have early language development and their degree plan doesn't mean that they can't target language skills. A lot of the things they're doing in the classroom are already so great. All you have to do is tweak 'em a little bit to add these language prompts, these language cues, these visual supports, you know, and.

**Track 1:** Sometimes just by developing a closer relationship to that teacher and making them feel proud of what they've done. Like I said, you know, giving them a little shout out, you know, Ms so-and-so is doing great with r t i, is there anything I can do to help you more? Um, our school counselor will go do the screeners herself.

**Track 1:** If the teacher is just like, I don't have time to do it, or I can't do it, you know, just having a support system in place, the administrator or principal can assign a paraprofessional to do the interventions [00:39:00] if the teacher's really struggling. There have been a lot of behaviors with the kids that are coming in with, you know, some sensory needs and some just self-control issues that they don't have.

**Track 1:** And so sometimes they're so overwhelmed by dealing with the behaviors in their classroom. They can't even think about, you know, doing these interventions. And so that's why it's helpful to have the administrator. In those meetings so she can make a decision and say, okay, this paraprofessional can come in and help you do this.

**Track 1:** Ms. Gardner, can you train this paraprofessional to work on action words with this kid? Absolutely. I can do that. They can even come to watch one of my speech sessions and then go work with kids. So just making, making that available, knowing that we're a team. It's not all put on the teacher. Yes, the intervention part is, but we're looking at the kid as a team.

**Track 1:** We want the student to be successful. We want to see them grow. And so I think just keeping that as the focus [00:40:00] and knowing that you're not out there alone. Um, you know, I've, I've seen teachers with a kid in the hallway outside of PE working with them or giving them a screener before they send 'em into pe and that's not uncommon.

**Track 1:** Or working with them with their 10 flashcards, you know, it, it's not that uncommon. So, I know the teachers just need to feel like they are capable, like they are qualified and they can provide the interventions.

**michelle\_andrews:** Okay. Have you ever done any campus-wide or district-wide trainings? I feel like you'd be great at it

**Track 1:** Yes, I have done trainings. I have a list of ways to train others. Let me get back to that cuz that was kind of under the tier one things that we can do. Um, I did, I did actually get the opportunity to train all of our elementary school teachers with their principals present the first week of school a couple of years ago on what is typical language, like what are some red flags?

**Track 1:** What are the things [00:41:00] that we see in students with language delay versus language disorder? And I think that kind of opened up the eyes of a lot of people because they just assumed that the speech therapist works on speech and articulation and. I don't think a lot of them realized how much language can affect their academics.

**Track 1:** And I gave some examples. I pulled out some of the state standards and showed them before a student can do this, here are the language, um, the language abilities they need to have, the language concepts they need to have to be able to perform this state standard. And so they, their mindset is, I have to achieve all these state standards before the end of the year.

**Track 1:** I have to have 'em on this reading level and I have to have 'em scoring this and writing their first and last name and, you know, counting to 100. Well, if they don't know the difference between letters and numbers, if they can't sort categories, they're not gonna be able to list letters and list numbers.

**Track 1:** And so just kind of making them aware of that. That's a, that's a fun training to do, to pull the pre-K guidelines or the [00:42:00] kindergarten, um, state standards. Look at 'em and talk about the language that's needed for each one of those. Um, some other trainings that I've done are. Just telling them what the SLPs role is in the school setting.

**Track 1:** Like I said, a lot of 'em don't even realize that we target language. They think we're only working on our SK and G in there. And, and so just explaining the SLPs role, what our education is, um, they think we're teachers a lot of times, and I'm not, and I can't even claim to be a teacher. I don't know the first thing about teaching a child how to read.

**Track 1:** Um, And I tell them that, you know, you can do things and you do things in your classroom that I don't do in mine. Um, and so we have to learn what each other does in order to be effective and to work together to help our students. I've also done trainings on the referral process. We usually do that. Um, the first week of school, again, we talk about r ti and the referral process for special education, [00:43:00] and we, we kind of give them that ahead of time so that the first week when they meet that kid that they think he's gonna need speech, we explain the process to them and they know what to expect and what's going to be required of them.

**Track 1:** I am talk about the difference between speech and language. And I provide developmental hierarchies for both, for articulation and language. And again, a lot of times they don't think about the receptive language, the expressive language, the pragmatic language. So just training them on those things is very helpful as well.

**Track 1:** I like to go over just developmental order of language skills by age. Um, I, you can literally read from a handout. That you download off the internet. It doesn't have to be a very well planned, you know, amazing PowerPoint presentation. Um, the easier, the better, the simpler the better, and leaving them with something in their hand that they can take back with them to their room so they can refer back to it later.

**Track 1:** It can be a 15 minute training. It doesn't even have to be something that's an hour long. Each week our teachers [00:44:00] meet for, um, they call it a PLC meeting, but it's basically a time for them to get together and plan. And so sometimes I've gone into those and just spent 10 minutes talking about something, and then if they have questions, they can email me those questions.

**Track 1:** I try not to do hallway, hallway pd. I don't like to be stopped in the hallway. You know, we're on a 30 minute schedule, 30 minutes, 30 minutes, 30 minutes, and I don't have time to talk about this in the hallway when I'm trying to go get this group and get 'em here. So I always encourage them to email me their question, email me, and I'll get back with them.

**Track 1:** Um, I talk about the difference between developmental language and academic language. That's an easy one to do as well. There are academic terms that they use that I don't even know what those words mean, and so I have to find out from them, especially with math. It seems like the math vocabulary has changed quite a bit since I was in school and so, or even since my kids were in school.

**Track 1:** So I don't know sometimes what they're talking about. So then the developmental language, um, you know, just like [00:45:00] basic concepts and things like that that they need to know. And this is what we're learning in speech and this is what you're teaching them in the classroom and how can we merge those two things together?

**Track 1:** Um, and then. With rti, a good training to do solely for RTI is how to set goals, but also how to collect data. A lot of times they don't even know, it's just very simple pluses and minuses and then, you know, ting that up at the end and always doing it the same way. So you know, your data's good and it's valid.

**Track 1:** Um, and then they collect data once a week and then they teach the other two days that they do interventions three times a week. And so just how to collect data, we take it for granted that everyone knows how to collect data and they don't. And so just teaching them how to collect data, whether I'm pretending to be the student and giving them wrong answers and right answers, that's a lot of fun too.

**Track 1:** Um, demonstrating that in front of a group, like me being the disordered child and then them being the one giving me the interventions, um, that's a lot of fun to do and they enjoy that and it's [00:46:00] very interactive. So that's just some of the trainings, the different trainings that we've done over the years.

**michelle\_andrews:** That's really cool. I bet that's extremely helpful for the teachers to hear from the s l P, like, this is how you do it, this is how you take data, this is how RTI should look, et cetera. That's, that's really helpful. When I worked at a school, um, we always had, every Wednesday there were meetings we had after school, and they don't always apply to the slp.

**michelle\_andrews:** I'm sure

**michelle\_andrews:** everyone can kind of, every school has selfie is like, yeah, I've been to some of those. But, um, yeah, it sounds like maybe that would be a good time or even before school starts to say, Hey, I wanna do a training at one of those, or, I, I don't, because I think the more that you go ahead and teach. A group of teachers at once versus having to yeah, go and tell each teacher or train each teacher, which there will be individual training on each kid.

**michelle\_andrews:** But a, a good overall, um, informative message to a bunch of 'em seems like it'd be really helpful. Awesome. [00:47:00] Very cool.

**Track 1:** so some ways to empower the parents to help with language intervention at home. I did talk about the grants that we applied for, that the parents were implementing at home. Um, but one of the things that I've done, especially this started during covid and during quarantine, I.

**Track 1:** Got on the school's Facebook page, the principal added me as, um, as a person who could post on the Facebook page. So we see great articles or just even visuals that are shared, um, infographics that we can share on the school Facebook page so that the parents see that like so many hours read to your child, you know, this many hours a week will provide your child with this much vocabulary development or screen time recommendations, things like that.

**Track 1:** Um, links to stories that are great stories, read aloud, you know, YouTube links, things like that that you can share on the school's Facebook page or social media page. Just language learning opportunities. Um, [00:48:00] Songs that are very rich, language rich, sharing those songs. And the parents always have their Facebook, you know, open on their phone so they can open that up in, in the car or at the grocery store, and they're playing a language rich song instead of one that's just a passive learning song.

**Track 1:** Um, when students are in r t i, keeping parents informed about their goals and their progress, sending home handouts about language, there are so many free handouts online. Um, super Duper has an entire page on their website of handy handouts that you can send home to tell parents about different aspects of language.

**Track 1:** Um, let the parents know if they're making progress. Ask 'em what they're doing at home to work on their goals. You know, this is all of course through the teacher and the R t I process. But those are ways, um, that you, that you can communicate with the parents. Now, if the parents are coming to the

care meetings and you're meeting the parent and they're sitting in that care meeting, get a yes from the parent.

**Track 1:** Ask the parent, can you do this with your child at home? [00:49:00] They're not gonna say no. If you get a yes, yes, I can help my child with this. Research shows that the follow through is better when you get a yes. When a parent agrees to something and says, yes, I can do this. It shows that they are really gonna do it more likely than not.

**Track 1:** Um, You can always send home handouts too. You can put handouts, you know that the front office makes 300 copies and they put it, give 'em to all the teachers. If there's something you wanna send home to three-year-olds, four-year-olds, five-year-olds, you know, ha just give 'em to the front office and say, Hey, can you put this in all of their folders today?

**Track 1:** And they'll pass 'em out to the teachers. If it's something that's really good, something you want them, you know, to read or to apply, especially over a spring break or a fall break or a Christmas break, you know, it's a good time to put something in there about things you can do at home to promote language.

**Track 1:** Um, so that some of the ways that we've also worked alongside the parents, because the parents are gonna have a lot of impact on their child at [00:50:00] home. And you want them to learn how to talk to their child, to learn how to communicate with their child while they're little, so that they can have good communication skills in their home as they get older.

**Track 1:** And for future siblings that might be coming up behind them.

**michelle\_andrews:** Right, and that's where the child is most of the time. You know, with their caregivers so that makes a lot of sense that if the parents can be on board helping with this, it can make a lot of progress.

**michelle\_andrews:** Okay. So let's do one last closing statement or pep talk. You can leave our listeners with,

**Track 1:** Sure. Um, so I hear, and I feel a lot of times I can't do it all and I'm not the only s l P on my campus. I have an S L P assistant, but the preschool age is a very busy age group to work with and it requires a lot of organization and time management skills. And those are not my strengths. Um, I have learned how to manage everything I need to do [00:51:00] so that I can add in things that I want to do on my campus because there are things that I want to do.

**Track 1:** And I heard this quote at Tisha several years ago, and it changed my approach on how I look at every day under Promise, but over deliver. And instead of always saying, when a teacher comes to me with a problem or with something, can you do this? Can you do that? Instead of always saying, oh, I can do that.

**Track 1:** Well, sometimes it's okay to wait and see if the problem can solve itself or if someone can come up with a solution for their problem by themselves. So that's when I make it known, Hey, I've got these resources. I have some visuals I can share with you. I've got them in the Google Drive. Go look and see what you can find in there.

**Track 1:** You know, that make it up to them to get the resources, make it up to them to implement them. And that's what that digital drive works really well for. Um, I can literally share something from the di the digital drive, while [00:52:00] I'm sitting in the care meeting off my phone or off my computer. Uh, so there are obstacles.

**Track 1:** To R T I and we've talked about some of those, but gaining respect and trust of your colleagues, you can overcome these obstacles. So on our I E P, we have that little box that says, you know, yes there are risks to providing this, this child with this specialized services cuz we're pulling 'em out of the classroom.

**Track 1:** But do the benefits outweigh the risks? Well, that is true for this situation. There are risks that we take and there are things that are gonna happen from us being so involved in this process. But the benefits of all the children on the campus, not only your 70 or so, you know, that you serve, that all the kids on the campus are going to greatly benefit from everything that you can provide, everything you can implement, everything you can train the teachers to do, and those are gonna outweigh the risks that you're gonna have.

**Track 1:** So, My purpose is to plant a seed in [00:53:00] people so that they can dream a little bit. So I can encourage them to dream, but I also want them to act, and I want everyone to be thinking about something that I mentioned today, one thing that they can try to do next week, just one thing that they think, I can do that, right?

**Track 1:** I wanna talk to somebody about this, I want to implement that. And now's a good time to start planning for next school year. So get with the RTI team on your campus and schedule time in months in advance that you're going to try to work together as a team and market on the calendar and prioritize it.

**Track 1:** So not having time, yes, that is a big concern, especially if you're the only SLP, but do what you can now. So can you hang up a bulletin board? Can you make something or purchase something and hang it up in a high traffic area? Is there a teacher that you can collaborate with maybe once a month? Do you have a good [00:54:00] friend that you feel comfortable collaborating with?

**Track 1:** Because if they see you in that classroom, they're gonna be like, Hey, what were y'all doing in there? Can she come to my room? You know, they think they're getting a guest reader in a couple of minutes to sit back at their desk, but really they're gonna listen and they're gonna pay attention. They're gonna see how engaged their kids are.

**Track 1:** So is there one teacher that you can collaborate with once a month? Um, does that look like planning an at risk meeting after the first grading period? When do you wanna schedule that? Could you maybe schedule one training? Per semester. Is that something you feel like you can do? So start planning now. Um, think about things outside the box.

**Track 1:** Get a high school helper from the National Honor Society to come help you hang bulletin boards or to help you cut out materials so that you can have some things ready for the teachers to work with. Um, can you get a graduate student from a nearby university to help relieve some of your therapy that you're providing?

**Track 1:** Um, they love coming and they love learning from you. And I love learning from my graduate students. [00:55:00] I learn so much more from them than I think they learn from me sometimes. So everyone has the same number of hours in a day. How you use those hours is completely up to you. You need to discern what is important and ignore what is not important.

**Track 1:** And the, the benefits from rti greatly outweighs the burden of Rti, that it will be on your day.

**michelle\_andrews:** That's awesome. Thank you so much, Darla. This whole episode has been so encouraging. And I'm not gonna lie, I didn't know a lot about rti, um, prior to speaking with you. I haven't been in the schools in a long time. I only did my CfY there, and I feel like you explain this so well I wanna go to a school and start talking about rti with people.

**michelle\_andrews:** This is a really great, episode to get out there, you know, for SLPs maybe that have been in the schools for a while, or maybe you're

transferring to the school, maybe you're a new slp or maybe you just need a refresher.

**michelle\_andrews:** I think this is really been encouraging to me and I really hope that it's [00:56:00] also encouraging to other SLPs out there listening.

**Track 1:** Great. I'm glad That's what, that's what I want to do is to make it seem like it's, it is a possibility. Something you can do in your day and something you can do on your campus.

**michelle\_andrews:** Absolutely. Thank you for listening. We hope you learn something today. All of the references and resources throughout the episode are listed in the show notes and also listed on the Pep Talk podcast for SLPs website. you want to learn more about Darla, make sure to check out her Instagram at Miss Gardenias speech room, where she shares awesome s L P resources and information. Darla, thank you again for joining me here today.

**Track 1:** Thank you for having me.