

## **An Introduction to Direct Instruction –**

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### **A condensed version of the book**

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Direct Instruction (DI) is an explicit, teacher-directed **model** of effective instruction developed by Siegfried ("Zig") Engelmann in the 1960's. DI can be distinguished from other models of explicit instruction (such as direct instruction-di) by its focus on curriculum design and effective instructional delivery. Commercial DI curricular programs are typically published by Science Research Associates (see [Direct Instruction | Products - McGraw-Hill Education](#) or [www.nifdi.org](http://www.nifdi.org) for further details).

Guiding principles of DI include every child can learn if we teach him/her carefully and all teachers can be successful when given effective programs and instructional delivery techniques. Thus, ultimately it is the teacher who is responsible for student learning; students are not blamed for their failure to learn. One often hears the statement, "If the learner hasn't learned, the teacher has not taught" in reference to DI programs and instructional delivery (see Tarver, 1999 for further details).

The goal of DI is to "do more in less time"-accelerating student learning by carefully controlling the features of curriculum design and instructional delivery. There are three main components to the design and delivery of DI programs. These include: (a) program design, (b) organization of instruction, and (c) teacher/student interactions (see Marchand-Martella, Slocum, & Martella, 2004 for further details).

Program design relates to (a) *careful content analysis* that promotes generalization (teaching the "big ideas" of instruction); (b) *clear communication* (the "wording of instruction" as well as how instruction is sequenced and examples are introduced); (c) *clear instructional formats* (specifies what teachers are to do/say and what responses students should produce); (d) *sequencing of skills* (prerequisites are taught before a strategy is taught; easy skills are taught before more difficult skills; strategies/information likely to be confused are separated; instances consistent with a rule are taught before exceptions); and (e) *track organization* (activity sequences are targeted that teach skills over multiple lessons to ensure firm responding).

Organization of instruction centers on (a) *instructional grouping* (using flexible skill grouping as compared to "tracking"); (b) *instructional time* (increasing academic learning time-the time students are engaged with high success rates); and (c) *continuous assessment* (providing ongoing in-program assessments to inform instructional practice).

Teacher-student interactions include (a) *active student participation* (increasing opportunities for students to respond and receive feedback); (b) *unison responding* (increasing student responding by having them chorally respond); (c) *signals* (providing a cue to evoke unison oral responses); (d) *pacing* (promoting active student engagement with brisk teacher pacing); (e) *teaching to mastery* (ensuring firm responding over time); (f) *error corrections* (minimizing student errors by carefully sequencing instruction; when errors do occur, using careful error correction procedures-model, lead, test, retest); and (g) *motivation* (enhancing motivation through high levels of student success).

DI programs are appropriate for students with diverse learning needs, language backgrounds, "learning styles" (given that instruction includes a multi-modality approach, including auditory, visual, and tactile/kinesthetic elements), and ages. Thus, it is a misnomer that DI programs are only appropriate for students with disabilities. DI programs are used successfully with preschoolers to adults including gifted students, average learners, and those who struggle academically.

DI includes programs in

**reading** (*Corrective Reading, Reading Mastery, Reading Mastery Plus, Horizons, Funnix, Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons, and Journeys*),  
**mathematics** (*Connecting Math Concepts, DISTAR Arithmetic, Corrective Mathematics*, as well as various videodisc and videotape programs),  
**writing** (*Basic Writing Skills, Expressive Writing, Reasoning and Writing, and Cursive Writing*), spelling (*Spelling Through Morphographs, Spelling Mastery, and Surefire Way to Better Spelling*),  
**language** (*Language for Learning, Language for Thinking, and Language for Writing*), and  
**content areas** including history (*Understanding U.S. History*), **chemistry/earth science/life sciences** (videodisc/videotape programs), and **science facts** (*Your World of Facts*).

**A typical DI lesson** includes explicit and carefully sequenced instruction provided by the teacher (model) along with frequent opportunities for students to practice their skills with teacher-delivered feedback (guided practice) and then on their own (independent practice) over time (distributed practice/review). For example, if the sound /m/ appeared for the first time, the teacher might say, "You're going to learn a new sound. My turn to say it. When I move under the letter, I'll say the sound. I'll keep on saying it as long as I touch under it. Get ready. mmm. My turn again. Get ready. mmm." This teacher-modeled instruction would then be followed by student practice opportunities. For example, "Your turn. When I move under the letter, you say the sound. Keep on saying it as long as I touch under it. Get ready." (students respond). "Again. Get ready." (students respond).

**I do, We do, You do.** If an error occurs during instruction, the teacher would model the sound ("My turn. "mmm"), use guided practice ("Say it with me. mmm"), and have students practice independently ("Your turn. Get ready"). A "starting over" would be conducted based on this error; this might include starting over at the top of a column or row of sounds so that students get increased practice on the /m/ sound. The /m/ would appear throughout the lesson and in subsequent lessons to ensure skill mastery (firm responding) over time (see *Reading Mastery Plus Series Guide, 2002*, for further details).

### **Research backing.**

**Project Follow Through, (1968-1977)** DI offers a strong and well-established body of **research conducted since the 1960s**. In fact, the largest educational experiment in history (**Project Follow Through**) demonstrated that the DI model, when compared to other basic skills models as well as those that focused on affective and cognitive curricula and techniques, produced the highest student achievement levels in both basic skills and problem solving in addition to higher affective scores. A **meta-analysis** conducted by Adams and Engelmann (1996) showed that the highest effects were achieved when DI programs were in place as compared to other curricula.

**Assessments for School Reform Models.** Further, the **American Institutes of Research (AIR)**, in their analysis of 24 school reform models, noted DI as one of only three models that showed strong evidence of positive outcomes on student achievement.

The **American Federation of Teachers (AFT)** consistently lists DI as a "promising school-wide or remedial program."

### **References:**

- Adams, G. L., & Engelmann, S. (1996). *Research on Direct Instruction: 25 years beyond DISTAR* Seattle, WA: Educational Achievement Systems.
- Marchand-Martella, N. E., Slocum, T. A., & Martella, R. C. (Eds.). (2004). *Introduction to Direct Instruction*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Science Research Associates/McGraw/Hill Publishers. (2002). *Reading Mastery Plus series guide, levels K-6*. Columbus, OH: Author.
- Tarver, S. (1999, Summer). "Focusing on Direct Instruction". *Current Practice Alerts; Division for Learning Disabilities and Division for Research, 2*, 1-4.