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FOREWORD

Teaching Needy Kids in Our Backward System is written by Siegfried (Zig) Engelmann, who has been a maverick in education for 42 years. His work is not highly recognized by the educational community because it has different roots. Unlike the traditional scholarly approach that is referenced to written reports and accounts, Engelmann's theories and practices derive from teaching kids, trying to accelerate their rate of learning, and using performance data to draw conclusions about how kids learn, what kinds of practices are effective, and which are hoaxes.

Zig's emphasis on acceleration stems from facts about the kids Zig has worked with the most, lower performers. He argues that if they can be taught faster than lower performers have been traditionally taught, they will be higher performers, and they'll have the broader set of life opportunities that are available only to those who do well in school.

Zig insists that we should not blame kids or their families for student failure. He wrote,

We will take you where you are, and we'll teach you. And the extent to which you fail is our failure, not yours. We will not cop out by saying, "He can't learn." Rather, we will say, "I failed to teach him. So I better take a good look at what I did and try to figure out a better way."

The book *Theory of Instruction*, written by Zig and Doug Carnine, ends with a similar appeal:

On the level of society: Let's stop wasting incredible human potential through unenlightened practices and theories.

On the level of children: Let's recognize the incredible potential for being intelligent and creative possessed by even the least impressive children, and with unyielding passion, let's pursue the goal of assuring that this potential becomes reality.

More important than rhetoric are Zig's achievements. He showed that there was a cure for school failures—an educational parallel to a cure for cancer—and he showed how schools had to change to provide this cure; however, his programs and his research are often scorned by what he refers to as a backward system.

His latest book reveals his passion, philosophy, some of his major achievements, and his frustrations, through a montage of personal experiences. His

rationale for the format is, “I want the reader to know that we are human, that we are not dumb, and that we tried as hard as we knew how. We showed what could be done, but our work failed to convince even one major school district to do it, even though it would be far less expensive than what they are doing now.”

The most extensive demonstration that Zig and his colleagues provided was in Project Follow Through, the largest educational experiment ever conducted. Experiences in Follow Through occupy center stage in *Teaching Needy Kids in Our Backward System*.

Zig’s care and concern for children is evident throughout the book. The reader will understand why many frontline educators consider Zig the most important educator of the last 100 years.

Jerry Silbert, colleague