DIRECT INSTRUCTION AS CORE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS

There is a common misconception that Direct Instruction (DI) programs were not developed or intended for core instruction. Often, DI is relegated to the role of intervention for low-performing students. However, as described below, DI was designed from the beginning to provide core instructional programming in reading, math and language arts. DI has been widely used and validated to be effective as core instruction for a wide range of learners. In fact, the developers of DI advocate for a comprehensive, full-immersion model using DI as the core instructional curriculum for all students—with all interventions conducted within the DI core.

DI Designed As Core Programs

Direct Instruction programs have been designed as core programs that can accommodate the full range of student learners. DI offers a unique, step-by-step approach to learning that requires placing students in the program matching their current skill level and teaching students to a high level of mastery daily. Students are provided with carefully designed, clear instruction that teaches skills at the point where students place. Students with fewer skills are placed at a lower point in the program with additional practice on critical skills as needed. Students with more skills are placed at a higher point in the program. Students can be provided with instruction on a Fast Cycle/Skip Schedule to accommodate an accelerated pace after their original placement as their rate of mastery indicates. In the DI math program, *Connecting Math Concepts: Comprehensive Edition*, additional "parallel" lessons are provided for students who could benefit from extra practice.

Direct Instruction programs are not designed to be used in conjunction with other programs. Mixing other instructional approaches in the same subject matter with DI can confuse students because of the specific strategies used in the DI programs. For example, *Reading Mastery (RM)* initially teaches students the sounds letters make, rather than the names of the letters. Students learn letter names later in the program after students have mastered the sounds. Many students, especially at-risk students, may become confused if they receive instruction in *RM* for part of the day and then receive instruction in another program that teaches letter names. This ultimately slows students' overall progress in learning to read.

Because of its design and proven effectiveness with a wide range of students (discussed below) many educational organizations agree that DI programs are appropriate as core instructional programs. From the Florida Center on Reading Research: "Direct instruction is appropriate instruction for all learners, all five components of reading, and in all settings (whole group, small group, and one-on-one)." (See http://www.fcrr.org/Curriculum/curriculumInstructionFaq1.shtm) Read more about the design of using DI as a core program at http://www.nifdi.org/15/model-components/single-program

DI Core Programs As Part Of The Comprehensive DI Reform Model

Since the late 1960s, DI programs have been incorporated into an integrated approach to reforming schools—the comprehensive Direct Instruction reform model (also called the full

immersion Direct Instruction model). Schools adopting the comprehensive DI model implement DI programs as the core programs in most or all major subject areas (reading, language arts and mathematics). This allows for students to receive effective instruction with Direct Instruction throughout the day as a means for accelerating their performance in all major subject areas. For a description of the comprehensive Direct Instruction model, see the Developer's Guidelines: http://www.nifdi.org/15/images/stories/documents/developer_guidelines.pdf

The comprehensive Direct Instruction model has been recognized by such organizations as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), the National Education Association (NEA), New American Schools (NAS) and the Coalition for Comprehensive School Improvement (CCSI). Federal funds have been used to implement the comprehensive Direct Instruction model for decades. Hundreds of schools implemented the Direct Instruction model for literacy as part of Reading First, a federally funded program focused on implementing proven early reading instructional methods in classrooms. Currently, the comprehensive DI model is being implemented in approximately 300 schools in the U.S. Over the years, thousands of schools have implemented the Direct Instruction model with DI programs used as the core programs for instruction.

To find out more about the comprehensive DI model, you can attend a session that is part of the annual National Direct Instruction conference in Eugene, Oregon: A Full Immersion Model for Implementing DI (session D5, on page 13 of the hard copy of this year's conference brochure at http://adihome.org/training-and-events/2012-national-conference). This session provides an overview of how to implement DI successfully schoolwide.

DI Validated As Core Programs
The effectiveness of DI as the core program has been validated in numerous large-scale studies. One such study was the most extensive educational experiment *ever* conducted: Project Follow Through. Beginning in 1968 under the sponsorship of the federal government, Follow Through was charged with determining the most effective way of teaching at-risk children from kindergarten through grade 3. Over 200,000 children in 178 communities were included in the study. Twenty-two different models of instruction—including Direct Instruction—were compared for their effectiveness in improving student achievement. The communities that implemented the different approaches spanned the full range of demographic variables (geographic distribution and community size), ethnic composition (white, black, Hispanic, Native American) and poverty level (economically disadvantaged and economically advantaged).

Evaluation of the project occurred in 1977, nine years after it began. The results were strong and clear. *Students who received Direct Instruction had significantly higher academic achievement than students in any of the other programs.* They also had higher self-esteem and self-confidence. No other program had results that approached the positive impact of Direct Instruction. For more information on Project Follow Through, visit: http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adiep/ft/151toc.htm

Since Project Follow Through, a vast body of research on the efficacy of DI has developed. In *An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform* (1999), a review of 24 instructional models of comprehensive schoolwide reform sponsored by five national associations of educators (the American Association of School Administrators, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Education Association), Direct Instruction was only one of two models for elementary and middle schools that received a

"strong" rating for evidence of positive effects on student achievement.

A more recent meta-analysis of research on the achievement effects of widely implemented comprehensive school reforms found similar support for Direct Instruction. The meta-analysis, conducted by Borman, Hewes, Overman in 2003, examined studies of 29 comprehensive school reform models, including the comprehensive Direct Instruction model. The authors found significantly more evidence available for the Direct Instruction model than for other models, with 49 studies and 182 different comparisons for the DI studies. Of the 29 reform models researchers evaluated, only three models were identified as having "clearly established, across varying contexts and varying study designs, that their effects are relatively robust and that the models, in general, can be expected to improve test scores." Direct Instruction was one of these three models. For the full text of the report, see:
http://www.csos.jhu.edu/CRESPAR/techReports/Report59.pdf

Examples Of DI Used As The Core Reading Program

Two examples of large-scale use of Direct Instruction's Reading Mastery as the core reading program took place in Texas and Florida. In 1997, the Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence (RITE) began the implementation of DI in six Houston area schools in an effort to provide explicit instruction for severely at-risk K-2 students. In four years, the program expanded to 20 schools. An external assessment of the program found that students in the program out-performed their peers in comparison schools and were significantly more likely to score above the 50th percentile on standardized assessments than below the 25th percentile. They also noted an increase of 14% of students passing the 3rd grade Texas Assessment of Academic Skills by the third year of the program implementation.

Another large-scale implementation of DI was an $8 million project employing DI as the core program funded by the State of Florida, including schools in Miami, where performance indicators were collected. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform reported in 2011 that the gains by students in Miami's schools clearly indicated DI's superiority to other programs used in the district. From annenberginstitute.org/pdf/Mott_Miami.pdf:

> *"In Miami, gains in the percentage of students meeting standards in schools using the Direct Instruction literacy program and receiving intensive support from People Acting for Community Together (PACT) outpaced gains in the district and in a demographically similar set of schools in third and fourth grades. The schools targeted by PACT's organizing also outpaced the district and comparison group in moving students out of the lowest achievement level."*

A study conducted by researchers at the Florida Center for Reading Research and Florida State University compared *Reading Mastery* and several other core reading programs. In the study, *Examining the core: Relations among reading curricula, poverty, and first through third grade reading achievement* (2009), the authors tracked the performance of 30,000 Florida students in first through third grades. The authors found very favorable results for Reading Mastery:

> *"Overall, students in the Reading Mastery curriculum demonstrated generally greater overall oral reading fluency (ORF) growth than students in other curricula. Also, they more frequently met or exceeded benchmarks for adequate achievement in first, second, and third grade."*

Using DI Effectively As An Intervention Only
Quite often, schools implement DI to support students who are struggling in the core program. Unfortunately, this usually requires students to utilize competing strategies, which is difficult for students, especially at-risk children. Dual-program instruction also presents problems for teachers, who must learn two different programs, two different instructional approaches and two different assessments. Administrators must monitor and provide support for the two programs. And they must develop a system developed for determining when the second program is to be used, for how long, and with which students.

Teachers and administrators may have difficulty determining when and how a second program should be used, especially when the two programs are not designed to be taught together. The cost of two programs adds unnecessary expense to school budgets because DI programs contain all of the components teachers need to be successful with students representing the full range of learners. Any diversion from the DI programs will lead to less spectacular results than a full, undiluted, comprehensive DI implementation.

For DI to be utilized successfully with struggling students, schools need to implement DI as a replacement core so that the students receive instruction in DI exclusively until they complete the DI program sequence. For example, if a student is placed into Reading Mastery, he or she needs to complete the program through the highest level, Grade 5, before returning to the regular program. Students are often not successful if they are returned to the regular program before completing the DI series, which can cause students, teachers and administrators to become frustrated.

Early identification is critical to meeting the needs of struggling students with Direct Instruction as a replacement core. Students should be identified for Direct Instruction as early as possible in the school year. If possible, students should be identified for DI in the summer before school starts. If students receive DI only after they fail to keep up in the regular program for several weeks or months once school has started, their learning will be delayed in comparison to those students who are placed directly into DI. This represents lost instructional time– instructional time students and teachers will never get back.

The National Institute For Direct Instruction (NIFDI)
The National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) is a non-profit organization based in Eugene, OR. NIFDI was founded in the late 1990s by the creator and senior author of DI, Dr. Siegfried Engelmann, for the purpose of demonstrating the effectiveness of implementing DI schoolwide as the core program in all major subject areas. Schools implementing DI with NIFDI support are required to adhere to a very specific set of guidelines to ensure the program is implemented correctly and successfully with ALL students.

NIFDI has worked with approximately 150 schools since 2000, including several large-scale implementations in Baltimore (16 schools) and Guam (24 elementary schools). *All* of the schools NIFDI has worked with have used DI as the core programs. To learn more about Direct Instruction or NIFDI, go to www.nifdi.org. To learn about visiting a model DI school to see Direct Instruction implemented as the core in all major subject areas, go to http://www.nifdi.org/15/news/154-visit-a-model-di-school. Or email NIFDI at info@nifdi.org

Additional Reading On DI

Adams, G. L., & Engelmann, S. (1996). *Research on Direct Instruction: 25 years beyond DISTAR*. Seattle, WA: Educational Achievement Systems.

Barbash, Shepard. "Clear Teaching: With Direct Instruction, Siegfried Engelmann Discovered a Better Way of Teaching." *The Education Consumers Foundation*. Education Consumers Foundation. Web. 09 Mar. 2012. <http://www.education-consumers.org/ClearTeaching.htm>.

Borman, Geoffrey D., Gina M. Hewes, Laura T. Overman, and Shelly Brown. (2003) "Comprehensive School Reform and Achievement: A Meta-Analysis." *Review of Educational Research*.

Carlson, Coleen D., and David J. Francis. "Increasing the Reading Achievement of At-Risk Children Through Direct Instruction: Evaluation of the Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence (RITE)." *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 7.2 (2002): 141-66.

Crowe, Elizabth C., Carol M. Connor, and Yaacov Petscher. "Examining the Core: Relations among Reading Curricula, Poverty, and First through Third Grade Reading Achievement." *Journal of School Psychology* 47 (2009): 187-214.

Engelmann, Siegfried. "For Readers Not Familiar with Project Follow Through." *Zig Site Home*. Web. 09 Mar. 2012. <http://zigsite.com/for_readers_not-familar_with_project_follow_through.html>.

Herman, R. *An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform.* Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service, 1999.

Marchand-Martella, Nancy E. Timothy A. Slocum, Ronald C. Martella. (2003) *Introduction to Direct Instruction*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon