

**Tribute to Siegfried Engelmann  
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When I first thought about what to say about my father's legacy, I thought I would describe the lasting impacts he's made through the institutions he founded, such as the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI), in terms of the number of teachers and trainers trained, the number of schools served, and the number of students taught with DI.

I also considered discussing the numerous publications he authored and their lasting impact.

But when I saw this wonderful photo that Jerry Silbert found showing Zig with some kids at a school in Chicago in 1970, I knew I wanted to discuss what may be Zig's most lasting impact – the example he provided of truly putting kids first! As other speakers have indicated, he put kids first throughout his career by designing instruction so each learner could be successful every day. This involved observing students to determine what skills and knowledge they lacked to be successful, designing instruction that addressed knowledge gaps systematically, observing students again to see if they actually learned what was intended, and, if they did not, repeating the process of redesigning instruction and observing kids until all of them were successful.

Owen talked about Zig's favorite quote. My favorite quote of Zig's is: "If the student hasn't learned, the teacher hasn't taught." The responsibility of students learning lies with the adults, not with some characteristic of the students. And the responsibility doesn't stop with the teacher. Zig understood that many factors of students' success, such as schedules, grouping, materials and schoolwide behavior management, are out of the control of teachers. He espoused "nested responsibility," which applies to the adults who control critical factors outside of the teachers' control. So school and district leaders are responsible for setting up the teachers for success, and DI trainers and coaches are responsible for ensuring that teachers have the skills to teach students effectively and efficiently.

In the early years, my father visited schools himself to ensure that children were successful. He was gone literally half the time we were growing up as he crisscrossed the country. At the reception after the service, there will be a basket of keys to hotels where he stayed while he visited schools. You can imagine that each key represents at least one school with hundreds of kids where he did his utmost to ensure they were all successful.

When he wasn't traveling, he and his colleagues devised ways to ensure students were successful – through field tests of new programs and monitoring implementations remotely through data. If the feedback he received indicated that the program or the implementation needed to be changed, then it was changed.

My father often said that he could gauge the quality of a DI implementation by just walking through a school. He said he could go through the front door, walk through the halls without looking in classrooms, walk out the back door and tell you how well DI was being implemented there.

I never tested his assertion that he could do this, but I believe he could. As he told me, DI implemented correctly has a certain feel to it. It has a definite rhythm, a crispness and an uplifting tone. All students answer together for choral responses, and they usually answer correctly the first time. Teachers correct the few errors that occur – quickly and positively. Students respond virtually error-free on individual turns, and the teacher draws students out efficiently and clearly on open-ended questions. The teacher reinforces the kids for hard work periodically, and they move on fluently to the next task.

To my father, the sound of a well-implemented DI school was more enchanting than ocean waves crashing on rocks or any other sound of nature, more harmonious than the music any symphony could ever play. It was the sound of hundreds of children learning, working hard and having fun. It meant they were going to be successful – not just today, but the next day and the next. And he was aware of what that meant for them, their future and for their families.

This attitude, this mindset, may be his greatest legacy – even greater than the instructional programs, the expositions on instructional theory or the institutions he created to help bring his vision to reality – that all children regardless of their grade, age, performance level or past history, should receive instruction each day that lays the groundwork for them to be successful in their lives.