



The National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) is dedicated to providing school districts with a thorough training program in the Direct Instruction (DI) methodology for teachers (and paraprofessionals) and comprehensive technical assistance for schools to achieve an optimal implementation of Direct Instruction. The fundamental purpose of implementation is to significantly improve student academic performance over current performance levels.

NIFDI services are interlocking components. Every component addresses a specific aspect of the implementation. Without any one component, the overall effect on students' learning suffers. NIFDI's primary interest is working with schools to develop fully realized Direct Instruction schools where all children succeed. For this reason, NIFDI does not generally provide the components separately. An exception is made for pilot programs that have potential to build toward comprehensive implementations of DI.

Training

Assessment Training

Assessment training of staff and placement testing of students in the (DI) programs are important first steps in implementing any model of DI. The individual assessment results allow for the grouping and placement of students in specific DI programs. Assessing and placing students in late spring allows DI to start on the first day of school. This initial assessment also provides a basis for ordering specific levels of the DI programs in reading and language and the to determine which levels of the programs teachers need training in. Since the instructional skills used to teach different DI levels and programs are vary greatly, it is vital teachers be trained in the specific program levels that they are going to teach.

Based on the size of the school, assessment training and student testing is usually scheduled for three to five days in the late spring. A group of six to 10 staff members are trained to administer and record the placement test results. Testing staff need to be excused from school duties to have time to test students during the school day. After the initial training, the NIFDI trainer monitors individual testing to ensure that results are reliable and to answer questions about unique student responses. School staff members continue to administer the tests until all students have been tested—even if the trainer from the NIFDI has departed.

The placement tests appear in the Teacher's Guides that are available through SRA/McGraw-Hill. Most tests take approximately five minutes to administer although this may vary greatly from student to student based on the child's skill level. Tests are administered to individuals and/or groups depending on the program and level being tested. For example, the Level 1



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Reading Mastery test is administered to individuals only while the Level 3 Reading Mastery Test has both an individual and a group component.

NIFDI supplies materials for the trainer (overheads and handouts) and a master set of placement tests for all levels of the DI programs to be used at the school. The school makes the appropriate copies from the master set for each student continuing at the school. Completed placement tests are shipped to NIFDI, which analyzes the protocols and forms student lists for the initial homogeneous instructional groupings.

Preservice Training

A common misconception is that DI programs are easy to teach because they are composed of scripted lessons. Nothing could be further from the truth. Mastering the instructional skills needed to teach DI programs is difficult. Preservice is the start of the learning process for teachers, teaching assistants and administrators to master these skills.

A thorough and timely preservice training in DI methods ensures all teachers are prepared to start teaching DI effectively the first day of school. Within a few weeks of the start of school, a preservice training in DI methods lasting three to five days is provided on site to teaching personnel (teachers and assistants) and administrators. The preservice training focuses on the application of DI techniques through simulated practice. Preservice participants are given a program overview and are shown the rationale behind the lessons. More importantly, they learn the instructional skills needed to teach the specific exercises they will use with their students during the first few weeks of school. Participants learn DI presentation techniques (following the script, quick pacing, signaling) and monitoring and correction techniques (part-firming and delayed testing). They also learn additional procedures for assessing, placing and motivating students. Teachers receive individual feedback from the NIFDI trainer during preservice, and teachers are assessed by the NIFDI trainer on DI techniques on the last day of the session.

Sessions are offered for different levels of the program as the techniques for different levels differ radically. For example, the first level of the Reading Mastery program involves formats for rhyming and phonemic awareness that are not needed in higher levels of the program. For this reason, it is critically important that students are assessed accurately in the spring and teachers attend the sessions on the specific program levels they will be using with their students.

A preservice training can be shared by more than one school if the schools are in close proximity to each other. NIFDI can also arrange large-scale trainings involving hundreds of teachers. Regardless of the size of the trainings, session sizes are kept small so trainers can devote sufficient attention to each participant.



In-Service Training

Throughout the year, NIFDI provides staff development through in-service training sessions for schools implementing DI. These in-service sessions resume where the preservice training leaves off by preparing participants to teach formats that appear later in the program and expanding on techniques covered during preservice. The NIFDI Implementation Manager initially conducts the in-services. The building coordinator and grade-level coaches (with the support of the NIFDI Implementation Manager) begin conducting training sessions after they have completed the first level of the coaches' training program and gained some experience teaching the DI programs.

In-service sessions can involve just the teachers or aides teaching a specific level of a program, or they can involve the whole staff. The sessions may focus on a specific technique or format for a small group of teachers, such as a rhyming format, or on a more general topic for the whole staff, such as motivating students. In-services can last anywhere from 30 minutes to a whole day depending on the topic and the number of staff members participating. As with the preservice training, in-service training sessions usually focus on the direct application of DI techniques through simulated practice to ensure that teachers and aides can perform these techniques in their classrooms.

Session topics are based on student and staff needs, not a predetermined schedule. Sources for session topics include classroom observations by the NIFDI Implementation Manager and the building's coaching staff, teacher reports of student problems and student performance data. Although there are some reoccurring in-service topics such as using specific praise effectively, teaching to mastery and providing appropriate think time for students to respond to tasks, the in-service sessions for each school are unique and designed to address problems specific to each situation.

Coaches Training

Building leadership capacity through the development of peer coaches is one of the keys to achieving high levels of success with a schoolwide DI implementation. Peer coaches can provide much needed support to teachers and administrators when consultants from the NIFDI are not on site. NIFDI consultants provide the bulk of coaching the first year of implementation, after which coaching responsibilities begin to shift to school-based coaches.

Ideally, a teacher at each grade level is trained to become a peer coach. Peer coaches are selected the first year of the implementation by the school's leaders--with NIFDI input--based on how well they implement DI techniques, how well they communicate with peers and whether



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they are willing to take on peer coaching responsibilities. Peer coaches have the potential to be extremely effective because they teach the same programs as their peers. This enables them to develop an expertise in specific levels of the programs and establish a close rapport with their peers because of shared experiences with DI.

Under the NIFDI model, coaching is non-evaluative. The focus is on student performance and student behavior. Peer coaches reinforce what's working well and ask their colleagues to change only those teaching behaviors that make a difference with children. With peer coaches, teachers know that they can turn to a close colleague with problems and questions, which helps foster a collaborative atmosphere in the school.

Peer coaches receive four levels of NIFDI coaches' training over the course of two to three years. The first level, which is usually scheduled during the first year of implementation, focuses on analyzing student performance data. During this stage, the peer coach's primary role is to identify and describe problems of student performance in enough detail to permit the building coordinator and NIFDI personnel to implement an appropriate solution. The next two levels of training prepare peer coaches to perform 5-minute and extended observations of instruction with students present. The last level of coaches' training prepares coaches to lead grade-level meetings focusing on student performance and participate in data analysis and problem-solving sessions with the rest of the school's leadership team.

Coaching

In-Class Coaching

In-class coaching helps prepare teachers to become master DI teachers. It is intended to improve teachers' mastery of DI techniques at the same time that it builds teachers' confidence in their abilities to effect positive changes in student performance. Coaching involves observing teachers instructing groups, providing specific feedback on what was observed, demonstrating parts of lessons and modeling entire lessons.

Two levels of consultants from the NIFDI provide the bulk of coaching the first year of implementation: an Implementation Manager (IM), who comes on site between two and four days a month (depending on the size of the school) and a Project Director (PD), a senior DI expert, who comes on site less frequently. Both consultants participate in the weekly phone conference calls. Teachers who participate in the NIFDI coaches training series assume coaching duties in subsequent years.



The NIFDI coaching visits are non-evaluative. The focus is on student performance and student behavior. Coaching visits are designed to provide useful feedback to teachers and the building coordinator about what's working well for students and what needs improvement. NIFDI consultants reinforce what's working well and ask staff to change only those teaching behaviors that make a difference with children. The orientation of the coaching visits is that learning problems should be solved jointly between NIFDI and the school.

By its very nature, the coaching process has the potential to be disruptive to the classroom. NIFDI strives to minimize interruptions and thereby maintain the flow of teaching as much as possible. Before entering the classroom for the first time, NIFDI consultants meet with teachers to explain the coaching process. When possible, the process is also explained to the students. After each visit, NIFDI consultants provide written feedback on what they observe and what they recommend. Common problems that NIFDI consultants observe become the focus of in-service training sessions.

Virtual Visits

Coaching is an essential element to achieving high levels of success with a schoolwide implementation of Direct Instruction. Coaching improves teachers' mastery of DI techniques at the same time that it builds teachers' confidence in their abilities to effect positive changes in student performance.

Schools that have already received extensive on-site support can benefit by arranging remote coaching over the Internet with a consultant from the NIFDI. With the proper hardware and software requirements in place, NIFDI consultants can observe teachers instructing groups remotely and provide specific feedback on what they observe. Except for demonstrating lessons or parts of lessons, these "virtual visits" can provide full coaching support to teachers.

Virtual visits can be used to target specific instructional problems, student behavior problems or specific classrooms. A virtual visit for as short as 15 minutes can be effective and far less costly than bringing in a consultant.

In addition to hardware and software requirements, virtual visits require a peer coach or building coordinator to operate the laptop and position it where the presentation book, the teacher and most of the children's faces are visible. With remarkable clarity, the technology enables the NIFDI consultant to provide feedback to the coach through audio and text messages in real-time!



Off-Site Support

Data Analysis

Individual student performance in DI programs is dynamic. Some students outperform other students in their group. Other students have problems learning specific skills or concepts. An effective DI implementation adjusts instruction to facilitate student learning by providing more practice and support for students who are struggling and by moving students who find their current placement too easy to higher instructional groups. Knowing where and how to adjust instruction requires data. Schools implementing DI with the support of the NIFDI assure optimal student success by making decisions based on observational data generated by NIFDI consultants or trained school coaches and student performance data on student mastery and progress through the DI programs.

The NIFDI data analysis system provides a comprehensive look at the performance of all students in all DI subjects every week across a school implementing DI. The system requires relatively little effort on the part of teachers to record and submit the data for review by the NIFDI consultants and the school's leadership team. To record student progress through the programs, each teacher records the lessons covered by each instructional group (s)he teaches on lesson progress charts (LPCs). To record student mastery, teachers write down on Student Test Summary (STS) charts the results by individual students of informal reading "check outs" and mastery tests, which occur every five to 15 lessons depending on the DI program. Teachers also monitor the results of daily independent work for students in the upper levels of the programs. NIFDI supplies copies of the LPCs, STS charts and independent work summary sheets for all teachers.

These data are reviewed by the school leadership team and sent to the NIFDI manager and director for review and analysis. Subsequently, a telephone conference between these parties is held to discuss the performance of groups and individual children in detail. The telephone conference helps direct the coaching efforts to the areas of greatest need.

Weekly Conference Calls

Direct Instruction programs are designed so that students master small steps daily. A successful DI implementation takes advantage of the small-step design of the DI programs by ensuring that students are taught at their current skill levels continuously. Students who are placed at their current skill level progress through the programs much faster and with a higher degree of mastery than students who are not placed at their current skill level. A weekly conference call between the NIFDI and the school's leadership team can help ensure that students are placed optimally in the programs and that problems of learning and instruction are solved in a timely manner.

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The school's leadership team and the NIFDI Implementation Manager (IM) and Project Director (PD) analyze performance data on each instructional group before the conference call. Then they discuss the performance of each instructional group, identify and prioritize problems of teaching and learning and develop specific remedies to address the problems identified. Initially, the NIFDI IM and PD take the lead on the conference calls. The responsibility of the data analysis shifts gradually to the school as the school's leadership team becomes more familiar with analyzing the data and solving instructional problems.

Every week, the NIFDI IM writes a summary of the call that describes the actions to be taken before the next call and designates who will take the actions. This conference call summary is divided into several sections that address the following:

1. the status of actions that were to be taken after the last conference call;
2. new problems identified through data analysis and in-class observations;
3. accolades describing accomplishments by students; and,
4. unresolved problems that have been discussed on several conference calls

The summary is sent to the school's leadership team and district personnel who support the DI implementation. Each week, the conference call begins with a review of the status of items discussed on the previous week's call to ensure that all problems are addressed in a timely manner and that all major accomplishments are recognized and celebrated!