

Zig Engelmann Tribute
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I first met Zig in 1971. I had just finished a two-year education program at the University of Minnesota during which, I survived not being kicked out after I complained that I was not learning how to teach. Fortunately, towards the end of the program, I met an ed psych professor, who gave me several books Zig had written, "Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Preschool" "Concept Learning" and Give Your Child a Superior Mind," I was floored upon reading these books. At last I had found something that dealt with the details of how to teach. Upon finishing the program, I knew I was not prepared to teach So I bought a train ticket to Eugene, Oregon planning to spend time learning from Zig before becoming a teacher, I wasn't quite sure where Oregon was, but I knew it was to the west.

When I got to Eugene, I called the University, found where Zig's office was and knocked on his door. I lucked out. There was a spot for me in their program. A week later, I was in the Engelmann Becker Master's program at the U of O, taking courses taught by Zig and doing a practicum in a first-grade classroom learning how to teach the Direct Instruction programs and occasionally being coached by Zig.,

After my second year studying with Zig, He asked me if I wanted to accompany him on a trip to Vancouver British Columbia where he had been invited to work at a residential home for autistic children. It was an amazing experience observing Zig. During the week, he worked with the most problematic kids in institutions and schools throughout the city and produced student behaviors that no one had deemed possible. One of the children in the residential home was named Jimmy. He was 8 years old, His parents lived in the Northwest territories of Canada. Jimmy had almost no language and had been virtually unteachable, totally unresponsive to his teachers' and parents' directions. His mother had just brought Jimmy to the residence and she observed as Ziggy worked with him, teaching him about how to use the words yes and no.

Here's an excerpt from a letter Jimmy's father wrote about what happened. "Susan, my wife phoned from Vancouver. But how do you explain

over the telephone what happened. Just after one day, Jimmy could say yes and no and he knew when to say yes and when to say no. After just one day, and for five years we have lovingly explained to him, we told him, we yelled, we hit, we did just about anything within the range from loving care to desperate anger to get him to say, yes or no. And that man did it in just one day.”

Jon Palfreman, an award-winning producer of Frontline documentaries had the opportunity to interview Zig on a number of occasions and study Zig’s work, Jon told me that he is convinced that if Zig had had concentrated his efforts on kids with special needs, Zig would have been a national and perhaps internationally renowned educator. His contributions to the field would have been widely admired, and he would have been acknowledged by the field as an educational genius to be long remembered for his amazing contribution.

But fortunately for all of us here and for millions of kids at-risk Zig made a choice to devote his major efforts to improving the education of children of poverty. He wrote over 100 educational programs. And when I say he wrote, I mean he wrote every word, every story, every correction procedure. He analyzed kids’ errors to see how the program had to be improved and examined each lesson multiple times as teachers, editors and publishers gave him feedback. He fought like a gladiator against demands that might lessen the instructional integrity of the programs. Not only did he write programs, but he developed techniques for teaching the programs. Zig together with Wes developed a school wide assessment system that still to this day can serve as a model to ensure that no children slip through the cracks.

So, from all of us who have had the joy of working with kids and seeing them be successful, Thank You Zig.