

## **Scientific Community Recognizes Direct Instruction**

Press release:

At its December 9, 2002 meeting, the Council of Scientific Society Presidents (CSSP) gave its fifth annual award for Education Research that improves student learning to Siegfried Engelmann, Professor of Education at the University of Oregon and developer of the controversial teaching method called Direct Instruction (DI). Even though DI has more data supporting its effectiveness than any other reform model for at-risk schools, the approach is among the least widely-used school-reform programs. According to the Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, DI accounts for only 1.1 percent of all schoolwide reform implementations.

Engelmann's CSSP award states that he has developed "over 100 pioneering programs on Direct Instruction that opened new vistas for how educators think about curriculum and teaching of math and reading." The award continues, "His concepts have improved learning outcomes of a wide spectrum of students more effectively than many more widely utilized models and have been used for teaching over a million children."

CSSP represents over 70 scientific societies and 3 million scientists. Their member societies include the American Psychological Association, Association for the Education of Teachers in Science, National Association for Research in Science Teaching, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the Psychometric Society.

Direct Instruction gained notoriety in the 1970s as the dominant winner of Project Follow Through, the largest and most costly educational experiment ever conducted, involving over 100,000 at-risk children in grades K through 3. DI students scored highest in basic skills, cognitive skills, and

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self-esteem. DI outperformed all other models in every subject areas tested—reading, math, language, and spelling. It was the most effective program in both rural and urban schools.

Engelmann does not believe in dyslexia and has convincing evidence that if the programs he has developed are well implemented, all children learn to read by the end of kindergarten. “The problem is not that lower performers can’t learn,” he says. “It’s that these children are typically not taught effectively.” All 11 inner-city schools in Baltimore that were implemented according to the guidelines of the National Institute of Direct Instruction showed great improvement between 1998 and 2002, with all but one of the 5<sup>th</sup>-grades at least doubling their 1998 reading test scores, and one of the schools increasing by 5 times. City Springs went from 114<sup>th</sup> of 115 schools to the sixth-highest school in the district in terms of student performance. According to Engelmann, this school followed the guidelines more closely than any of the other 10 schools.

In Houston Texas, the Rodeo Institute for Teacher Excellence (RITE Program) uses Direct Instruction programs and practices with inner-city schools. Its 2002 evaluation of 8,000 students showed that over 60% of the children who went through the DI program in grades K through 2 performed above grade level on the Stanford Achievement Test, and only 15% were in the lower quarter. The children in the comparison group had only 37% of its children above grade level and 33% in the lower quarter.

DI programs are not popular with school districts, despite their consistent and impressive results. According to Engelmann, “The main complaints are that the programs require teachers to follow a script, which supposedly limits their creativity, and that the programs are boring.”

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Engelmann points out these claims have not been substantiated by research. “Good teachers become superior DI teachers. Although the program may be boring for some teachers, it is not for the students. The rate of misbehavior is a lot lower during the structured DI periods than it is during less structured times of the school day.”

At the CSSP meeting, Dr. Grover J. (Russ) Whitehurst, Director of the newly established Institute of Education Sciences, said, “Educational decisions are currently made on the basis of traditional wisdom, not on data about what actually works.” One goal of the institute is to establish a clearing-house that provides scientific data about what works. It is Whitehurst’s hope that when this information is made public, district decision-makers who don’t use approaches that work will be held accountable for their decisions.

The scientific community’s recognition of Engelmann and Direct Instruction seems to be an endorsement of Whitehurst’s position on data-based decisions.