

From the Editor—

The language and reading proficiency of our children continues to receive increased attention. It seems that we are bombarded on an almost daily basis on how best to teach reading and its prerequisites (e.g., oral language skills) to our students. The 1995 publication of *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* by Hart and Risley sheds new light on the importance of the environment in shaping our children's language development. Better language skills have been tied to improved reading skills. Reading instruction is (and perhaps always will be) a hot topic in both political and educational arenas. With the publication of the National Reading Panel's (NRP; 2000) findings came increased talk about reading instruction; in particular, terms such as *quantitative versus qualitative data* and *scientifically validated and evidence based programs and procedures* and those obtained through *naturalistic, testimonial-based, or holistic* approaches have entered our daily conversations with other professionals and parents.

This issue of the *Journal of Direct Instruction* (JODI) features articles on language development and reading instruction. Three articles and one reprint are featured. First, Benner et al. investigated the effects of the *Language for Learning* program on the receptive language skills of 21 kindergarten children. The entire program was implemented across 1 academic year. Benner et al. found that those children who received the *Language for Learning* program outperformed 24 children at a comparison school who did not receive the program. Both statistically and educationally significant

effects were noted in terms of improved receptive language skills.

Second, Waldron-Soler et al. investigated the effects of a 15-week implementation of the *Language for Learning* program on the language and social skills of 16 children with and without developmental delays in an integrated preschool. Twenty children served in the control group across two preschool programs where *Language for Learning* was not implemented. Receptive and expressive language skills as well as social skills were targeted for investigation. Results showed that children with developmental delays who received a limited amount of *Language for Learning* exhibited greater improvements in each of the three skill areas as compared to the control group. In addition, improved receptive language skills and social skills for those children without developmental delays, also receiving a limited amount of the *Language for Learning* program, were evidenced.

Third, Schieffer et al. provide the first published analysis of the *Reading Mastery* program. This analysis includes an overview of the need to teach reading and describes three focal areas of reading instruction (i.e., oral language, decoding, and comprehension). Features of *Reading Mastery* are aligned with these focal areas. Finally, a comprehensive review of the published research on *Reading Mastery* is presented. Twenty-five studies were found. Overall, results indicated the power of *Reading Mastery* in improving students' reading skills.

Finally, no issue with focus on reading instruction would be complete without reference to the National Reading Panel's report (NRP, 2000). Ehri and colleagues summarize the evi-

dence on systematic phonics instruction from the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis to increase exposure to the field of reading instruction (as previously published in the *Review of Educational Research*, Volume 71(3), pp. 393–447). Findings showed that systematic phonics instruction helped children read better than all forms of control group instruction and should be delivered as part of literacy programs to teach beginning reading.

Hart, B., & Risley, T. R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experience of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

National Reading Panel. (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read: An evidence-based assessment of the scientific research literature on reading and its implications for reading instruction: Reports of the subgroups*. Rockville, MD: NICHD Clearinghouse.