

**Early Years**  
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My story starts in 1964 with the interests of two young men, Carl Bereiter and Siegfried Engelmann. In the fall of that year, Carl had hired Zig, Phil Reidford, and me to work on his project: “Accelerated Intellectual Development in Young Children”. The four of us met every morning and talked zealously *and* at length about educational theory.

One day I brought in a Life Magazine photo of a preschooler. It showed the child in a play kitchen. The caption read, “I’m just trying to fry these damn grapes.” The picture caused much hilarity in our group, and the next day someone said, “Let’s get some children.” The rest of the team agreed. So we got to work.

We arranged for a space at McKinley Foundation on the U of I’s campus. We made decisions about *what* to teach and *how* to teach it. We gathered a group of 15 four-year-olds, and had them tested in reading, math, and on the Stanford-Binet.

*This is where Direct Instruction started.* In the morning, Phil, Zig, and I taught reading, arithmetic, and language. Small groups of five children had a daily lesson in each subject. *Whole-class activities* included art, story-telling, puzzles, and singing. In the afternoon, we met and analyzed what went well and what didn’t, to plan our next lessons. Typically, our discussions were loud and heated, but ultimately productive.

This was a magical time. The children were happy, and Zig was too. We carried on in this manner until the preschool received two offers. The US Department of Education’s Follow-Through Project wanted to use the program as one of its models. The publisher, SRA, wanted the program extended. Each offer meant we would have to further develop the program for use in the elementary grades.

The DI project was becoming known. Magazine articles were

being written (including the infamous “Pressure Cooker” story Carl recounted). Our group gave a presentation at the American Educational Research Association to a packed house. Many visitors came to Urbana to observe the DI lessons with our students.

At the end of the school year, the children were tested again. We were thrilled with their gains. Supposedly *unchangeable* IQ scores went up. In addition, most of the children scored at the first and second grade levels in reading and arithmetic--as preschoolers! We believed that a good dose of DI made those results possible.

I’d like to close my story by saying that Direct Instruction grew because of Zig’s dogged passion and his unparalleled gift for instructional design. He understood, from the very beginning, that the essence of effective education is to teach children in a way that makes their learning assured. Zig never wavered from his guiding principle: students don’t fail a program; a program fails them. Many have benefitted from Direct Instruction, but the luckiest of us have had the additional benefit of knowing Zig.