

Zig's Web

Those we touch and those who touched us – that's the real web of life. Zig's web is huge – likely touches around the world.

In 1969, I had been teaching for four years. I'd tried every reading series in the basement bookroom – carried them up the steps to my third floor classroom where I worked with 36 students. I genuinely believed every kid could learn – and if I could just find the magic key, then . . .

In May, I got a call from a former college roommate. 'There's this guy at my school who talks like you do. He says all kids can learn. But he's got a program. You should come hear him.' The next day, Thursday, I went after school. The auditorium was filled with teachers not so quietly chatting and moving about, as old friends, who hadn't seen each other recently, visited. On the stage was a big guy sitting with little people sitting in front of him. I went all the way up to the front so I could hear. The kids appeared to be about 4 years old – likely in an early admissions class. It was clear the guy had to teach – and the kids were learning. He got them to sit big and count to 10, correctly identify when something was 'on' or 'under' and make a statement using the word 'is' (which took some work) in about 20 minutes. I was impressed and wanted to know more.

The early admissions teacher said, 'This guy came into my room and asked for the lowest kids. I was sure he really wanted the highest, but he insisted on the lowest. I had never seen any of them sit in a chair for more than a minute at a time. Never heard the word is used in a sentence. Those were kids that I'd expect to be sent to trainable school.' Yet, those kids were the ones I saw on stage, with a man they did not know, sitting big in front of a noisy group, learning new skills. The 'guy' was Zig Engelmann and he'd be there the next day.

That night, I called my friend, Karen Davis, and Friday morning, we both called in sick. We followed Zig all day as he went into classrooms, observed teachers, demonstrated with kids, and discussed the what, why and how. I felt I'd learned more in that day than I had in college and my four years of trying to teach. Both Karen and Gary and I went to listen to Zig speak about his program Saturday. Gary was also impressed. At the end of the year, they moved to study with Zig. I transferred to a new school.

I had the class of 6 year olds who had no previous school experience. Initially, I used the program the new principal had selected, but it wasn't hitting the mark. I decided to try Zig's reading program, arranged to 'borrow' some materials from a school using, what was then called, DISTAR, and began. Since some schools in Baltimore and DC were using Zig's programs, consultants were periodically in the area. I'd get a call from Karen, take a sick day, and get some training. By the end of the year, ALL my students could read!

Finally, every kid I taught learned. Once it was said I 'could teach a door knob to read.' The truth was, I had an effective instructional tool that I was trained to use. And reading was just the beginning – more and more programs were written.

Now look at the length and width of that web. From Zig – thru me – thru hundreds of kids I taught – thru hundreds of teachers I trained – thru hundreds of kids they taught. But that's not all. I'm just one. Zig touched thousands who touched thousands who touched . . . Each of us has a Zig story. He connects us all. ALL kids CAN learn. THANK YOU ZIG!! Now please – those who understand the power of being in Zig's web – please press on and pass this knowledge. It must not end when any one of us walks out the door.

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