

Introduction to a special issue.

*Wesley C. Becker:
A Founding Father*

It is appropriate that the first issue of the *Journal of Direct Instruction (JODI)* is a tribute to the father of research on Direct Instruction and the founder of the ancestor journal from which *JODI* has evolved; however, it is terribly unfortunate that the tribute should come on the occasion of his passing. Wes Becker, one of the original developers of Direct Instruction and the leading connection between DI and the research community, died on October 29, 2000. This first issue of the *Journal of Direct Instruction* is a tribute to his work and is dedicated to his memory in the hope that the journal can carry on the project that Wes began.

In putting this issue together, we have attempted to represent and illustrate three kinds of contributions Wes made to the development of Direct Instruction. To illustrate each kind of contribution, we solicited a personal remembrance from a long-time colleague and friend who has particular expertise in the area. In each of these areas we also selected one of Wes' publications to reprint. We feel that the best tribute and fitting memorial to Wes is to encourage everyone in the Direct Instruction community to revisit his work and learn from it once again.

Wes played several critical roles in the making of what we now understand as the DI model of instruction. First, he brought the empirical,

methodological, and theoretical approach of applied behavior analysis to the development of Direct Instruction from the very early days. Wes' early applied behavior analysis research on the power of teacher attention, explicit statement of classroom rules, and contingencies on classroom behavior forms the basis of many of the management and motivation aspects of the DI model today. We selected Wes' 1968 article that appeared in the *Journal of Applied Behavior (JABA)* as representative of his work in this area and have reprinted it in this issue. Even 30 years after its original publication, this research is important and relevant. We often wonder what proportion of behavior problems in today's classrooms could be solved if Wes' work from the late sixties was more fully implemented. To more fully appreciate Wes' impact on applied behavior analysis and Direct Instruction, we asked Wes' friend and colleague Hill Walker to write a remembrance.

Project Follow Through was the context in which the first recognizable DI programs were developed, field tested, and implemented. Follow Through supported massive teacher training and many of the leading figures in the DI community learned the ropes in Follow Through classrooms. Of course, Follow Through was also the source of the strong research base on the effectiveness of DI programs. Wes Becker was the Director of the Direct Instruction Follow Through Model. His widely read and highly influential paper in the *Harvard Educational Review* illustrates this aspect of his work. For a personal reflection from another important participant in the Follow Through experience, we turned to Wes' good friend Zig Engelmann.

Wes' research expertise was not limited to small-scale behavior analytic work illustrated by the JABA article. As a critical player in Project Follow Through, Wes was centrally involved in analyzing the largest of large data sets. Project Follow Through generated huge amounts of data from hundreds of variables and hundreds of thousands of students. The analyses of these data were tremendously complicated. Wes Becker took on the task of tracking and interpreting the reams of statistics. Wes fought to make sure that the Follow Through results received reasonable and logical interpretations, and he countered many misleading claims by anti-DI researchers. In 1982, Wes and Russell Gersten published an important article in the *American Educational Research Journal* entitled, "A Follow-up of Follow Through: The later effects of the Direct Instruction model on children in fifth and sixth grades." This article is reprinted as a representation of Wes' work analyzing and interpreting Follow Through outcomes. We also asked Russell Gersten to write a personal remembrance of Wes; as he had just completed such a piece for the *Journal of Special Education*, we are reprinting that article in this issue as well.