

*Classroom Observations, Demonstrations  
and Providing Inservices*

# Coaching Level B: Manual



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## Zig Engelmann on Mastery

"The basic assumption that drives specific details in this manual is that the job of instruction is to induce mastery at a relatively high rate. **The key is mastery.** Students do not benefit from exposure; they do not benefit from working on something or struggling with it—unless they achieve mastery. Everything that is mastered serves as a building block for further learning. Everything that is not mastered is mislearned and serves as an impediment to the learning of skills and concepts that are related to the mislearned concept.

Our goal is to induce mastery as fast as we reasonably can. And if we do it, we will not merely accelerate students; we will change them. We will make them smarter because we will increase their capacity to learn new material. If we do it the right way, we can start with low performers in kindergarten and by the end of fourth grade have virtually no low-performing students.

But these changes will happen only if we direct all our efforts to achieving mastery as fast as we can comfortably achieve it. Note that this requirement does not mean that we turn the school into a sweatshop or that we push students beyond very comfortable placement. As soon as we push too hard, we actually reduce the rate at which students are able to achieve mastery. The ideal setting is one in which the students are challenged, in which they work hard, and in which they are placed appropriately and receive plenty of reinforcement for showing off what they can do."

All the details in the National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) sites are designed to facilitate mastery, both of students and teachers (\*). Unless we train teachers to be highly competent, students will not meet performance projections. The goals of the Direct Instruction (DI) implementation are to focus on the student, train teachers to achieve mastery, monitor mastery, make the rate and quality of mastery very visible, provide schedules and procedures to enable all qualified teachers to achieve mastery, and celebrate academic achievement.

Therefore, the **goals of coaching** are to:

- ◆ Focus on the student
- ◆ Train teachers to achieve mastery
- ◆ Monitor mastery
- ◆ Make the rate and quality of mastery very visible
- ◆ Provide schedules and procedures to enable all qualified teachers to achieve mastery
- ◆ Celebrate academic achievement

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(\*) "teacher" refers to anyone who implements DI programs, whether paraprofessionals, classroom teachers, school counselors, parents, or others.

# Introduction to the Coach's Role

In a DI implementation, the coach is the key person who assists the teacher in bringing students to mastery. The role of coach could be carried out by a principal, project director, implementation manager, building coordinator, grade-level peer, or cross-grade level peer. Coaches share responsibility for students and teachers being successful by assisting the teacher to achieve a classroom environment where students are learning rather than mislearning. The coach is a teacher of teachers, a guide, a model, and a helper. The coach is not an evaluator. Instead, the classroom teacher and the coach work together to achieve and celebrate the successes of the students, to identify problems that prevent or delay successes, and to construct solutions that will solve the problems. Problems always refer to student performance that is less than desired. Solutions always reference what the teacher needs to do to solve the students' problems.

Coaches and teachers must have a very special attitude about problems. Statements that identify student performance problems are not statements of blame. It is important to treat problems simply as indicators of what must be changed to treat such problems with urgency. Remedies must be implemented right away. The longer things are not as they should be, the more difficult it will be to change them. If problems are solved as soon as they occur, progress will be satisfactory and both the number and severity of the problems will diminish as students progress through instructional sequences. Unless teachers and coaches focus on identification and resolution of problems, however, this goal will not be achieved. The longer students are confused about how to perform a mathematical operation, for example, the further "over their heads" the students will be and the more elaborate the remedy will need to be. Thus, in a DI implementation, coaches and teachers must have a problem identification and solution orientation.

## A. Responsibilities of Coach Level B

During the first year of a NIFDI implementation, Level A coaches identified problems in a timely manner, presented solutions to teachers that were suggested during conference calls or in coaches' meetings, and followed-up after solutions had been implemented to make sure problems had been solved. First year coaches did not construct remedies or do interventions in classrooms. Level A coaches participated in conference calls and worked with teachers to implement solutions. The main difference between first year coaches (Level A) and second year coaches (Levels B/C) is that first year coaches examined student performance mainly by looking at written records and talking with teachers. Second year (Levels B/C) coaches spend more time observing and working in classrooms while children are present. However, the themes that guide both first and second year coaches are the same: The themes are to: (a) keep the focus on student performance, (b) identify problems and explain them in enough detail to permit someone else to specify a reasonable solution, and (c) work with teachers to implement solutions that will successfully solve problems.