Episode 3: The Forgotten Experiment

Zig Engelmann gets the chance of a lifetime: Put Direct Instruction to the test in one of the largest education experiments ever conducted. The results could have changed the direction of American education. Instead, they're contested — and ultimately cast aside.

S2 EPISODE 3

Episode Length	Listen to the episode	Read the transcript
31:17	Apple Podcasts • Spotify • soldastory.org	Printable Transcript
Additional Materials	• Article: Critics called Direct Instruction rigid and joyless. Former students remember something very different • Video: The biggest education experiment you've never heard of	

Before Listening	• Have you heard of Project Follow Through? If so, what do you know about it?
While Listening	Listen for what Project Follow Through was trying to accomplish and what happened.
After Listening	*From all perspectives:* Project Follow Through showed: ➢ On average, Direct Instruction outperformed all the other models. ○ Direct Instruction did especially well on its primary goals: math, reading and spelling skills. ○ Direct Instruction did well on things like abstract reasoning and problem-solving. ○ Of all the models, Direct Instruction had the highest scores on measures of self-confidence and how kids felt about school and learning. ➢ Like the other models, the Direct Instruction results varied across school sites. • Do these results surprise you? Why or why not? • Why do you think Direct Instruction works well for children? ○ Why is Direct Instruction off-putting to some adults? Gene Glass said: "The best education starts with the interests, the motivations, the curiosity of the children. Sit down with the child, find out what the child is interested in. Let the child bring his own book, the book he loves. See if he can read. See if he understands."

	• What did you think when you heard that? • Do you view education more like Zig Engelmann or Gene Glass? Why? • Why is it hard to reach consensus about what actually works in education? Zig Engelmann explained that people who object to Direct Instruction might think: "Direct Instruction is at odds with my model of the mind and learning, which is built around discovery. If I accept data showing that (Direct Instruction) works, I will have to acknowledge that discovery and my model of learning is flawed." • Have you ever reconsidered a belief about teaching and learning? What happened? *From the student perspective:* • What are some different ways your teachers have taught you? (For example: Letting you figure things out on your own, teaching you step-by-step, having you work on projects?) • Which ways of teaching have helped you learn the most? Why? • Why do you think students taught with Direct Instruction might have liked it?
Wrap Up	Project Follow Through was intended to follow through on the promise of Head Start and to find out: *How could school become a more powerful tool for helping kids get out of poverty?* • What do you think (or hope) might happen now that people are learning about Project Follow Through?
Extend	***Activity 1*** Read what students from Project Follow Through had to say about their experience in the article, Critics called Direct Instruction rigid and joyless. Former students remember something very different. • What surprised you? ARTICLE In the podcast, we heard about Gene Glass's reaction to Direct Instruction: "He watched a lesson for about 10 minutes. And he didn't like it. It seemed to him like the kids were being tormented. That was his word. Glass: I think performance and achievement and outcomes depend so much on things other than shut up, sit still. Gene Glass had nothing good to say about Direct Instruction." • What do you make of the differences between how students described Direct Instruction and how Gene Glass reacted to it?

Activity 2

Read Why America's massive educational experiment didn't transform schools.

ARTICLE

- What surprised you?
- How would you explain why the results of Project Follow Through were not disseminated?

Even though Direct Instruction came out on top, the government gave more money to the programs that hadn't worked so schools would have more options.

- What options would you want schools to have when it comes to instruction?
- What would you like to happen now?