Episode 4: What Can You Do For My Black Children?

In a poor, Black neighborhood in Houston, principal Thaddeus Lott transforms a struggling elementary school with Direct Instruction. Soon, his students are outperforming students at much wealthier schools. The results are so remarkable, some people think it's too good to be true.

S2 EPISODE 4

Episode Length	Listen to the episode	Read the transcript
27:06	Apple Podcasts • Spotify • soldastory.org	Printable Transcript
Additional Materials	• Video: The Secret to Wesley Elementary's Success • Video: Primetime Live - Direct Instruction and Wesley Elementary (1991)	

Before Listening	• What have you heard about the link between poverty and student achievement?
While Listening	Make note of the kinds of things that students at Wesley Elementary learned.
After Listening	*From all perspectives:* Wesley served students from a predominantly Black neighborhood in Houston where many families lived in poverty. It became one of the highest-performing elementary schools in Texas. • What did you notice about what students at Wesley were learning? • What surprised you about the experiences of students and teachers? • What was your reaction to the allegations of cheating? *From a parenting or community perspective:* A pastor said of district administrators: "We understand that they would rather the best schools be in an affluent area. But the bottom line is, gold is gold, I don't care where you mined it. Even if it's in Acres Homes." • What stood out to you about the pastor's words? • How have your experiences with schools shaped your understanding of the expectations schools have for children? *From a teaching perspective:* • What aspects of the teaching environment at Wesley appealed to you? • What might you find challenging about teaching there?

	From a student perspective: • How can you tell when a teacher believes in you?
Wrap Up	• What did you take away from the rise and fall of academic achievement at Wesley Elementary?
Extend	*Activity 1* Watch the Primetime Live - Direct Instruction and Wesley Elementary (1991) program that you heard excerpts of in the podcast. The video shows Direct Instruction in action at Wesley and explores the cheating allegations in greater depth. As you watch, pay attention to the resources available at Wesley and support from corporate sponsors. • What did you notice about the resources, support and broader school district context in which Wesley operated?  At the end of the video, Principal Lott says: "We have too many people who have low expectations of students — too many people who really don't think that children in a setting like this even have the brains or ability to learn. The truth about them is that they can and that's what we've proven." The video is from 1991. • What has changed — and what hasn't — when it comes to our understanding of effective instruction? • What has changed — and what hasn't — when it comes to our expectations of children growing up in poverty?