

Norm/Dolores Mishelow Direct Instruction Presentation

NORM: . . . come from Milwaukee. My name is Norm Mishelow . . . for the past 33 years . . . schools, last 16 as Principal of Barton Elementary.

WOMAN: . . .

NORM: . . . yeah. I retired in June, and now I'm doing principal coaching as a consultant for the system, working with new principals, especially the schools that have direct instruction, trying to work with them and trying to get them up and running.

DPI, right now in Milwaukee there are 50 schools that are doing either a full implementation or partial implementation. And we're going to talk a little bit today about how we came about staying involved and I'm going to . . .

DOLORES: Okay. I am Dolores Mishelow, and I was with Milwaukee Public Schools also for 32 years, but I retired 3 years ago and have been since consulting with school districts trying to convince them to use DI because it works so well. And I'm just going to go right into my little overview of why I'm so involved now because it sort of ties right in.

I was a principal for the last ten years of my tenure with MPS at two different schools, well, at different times. Sherman, which I don't know if you know the Milwaukee area, 51st and Locust, and then after that, for the last four years, at 27th Street School, which is off of Bleet(?) and 27th. Both of those are inner city schools, but 27th in particular is a school that was surrounded by drug houses. I mean, we're talking about deep inner city.

When I took over that school, it had the lowest test scores in the city. What was so incredible about that situation was we also had the most money of any school in the district. We had, you name any program that you can think of, we had it. High Scope, which is extra funding for kindergarten, Title 1, P5, which is a state program which also helps with lowering class size by providing more teaching assistants.

We had four reading teachers over and above the classroom teachers. I don't know many schools that have that luxury and then still have the lowest test scores in the city. We had 23 teaching assistants. How many schools have the luxury of that, 23 teaching assistants? We had a full-time social worker, a full-time guidance counselor, and a full-time psychologist. I mean, and I could go on and on. State-of-the-art computer lab, writing for read lab . . .

WOMAN: What was the . . .

DOLORES: The enrollment was about 550. There were maybe ten buses, and then also a lot of local kids there.

What I thought was particularly interesting is that probably 30% of our children were in foster homes. So that tells you the level of dysfunction. You know, I could go on and on, but you get a feel for the background.

Okay. So when I went in there, I said, and I, you have to understand, I was coming from a school, it was Sherman Multicultural Art, so it was very holistic, whole language, everything feel good, and I totally believed in that. I also was a reading teacher for many years. I have a reading specialist license. Before I became the principal, I was the . . . coordinator in a middle school. I taught in high school. I have a really pretty broad background.

Well, I said, you know, this doesn't make sense to me, and I like . . . coming from, and I'm not coming here to leave things as is. So, folks, you need to come up with something. Well, it was really an ugly school, let me tell you. I even told the school board members, you need to close this school. It was that bad. People weren't doing anything. I thought the principal before me had gotten sick. I think he had a heart attack, and he didn't die, but he retired. You know, that would do it, wouldn't it? I would say, okay, I've had enough stress.

It was just one of those schools where everybody just knew, okay, if you don't want to do anything, just go to 27th, you know. Nothing is happening there. You can just close your door and do whatever you want. So, indeed, that was going on.

I convinced the staff just, I said, come up with something because if you don't, I will. You know, in other words, bring me some programs. Let's look at them together. Let's try something. Small group, a core group, you know, you have to have that little group, somebody that says, okay, I'm on board with you, came and said let's try DI. I really honestly didn't know about DI. I mean, I probably should have, but I didn't.

We tried it in summer school because I also said, you know, summer school is the perfect time to do it. You know, does it make sense to do the same thing in summer that's failing in the winter? If it's not working all summer, why is it going to work because it's summer? So we did it . . .

WOMAN: . . .

MAN: She's sensitive.

DOLORES: There was no . . . going on. There really was none. So anyway, everybody got real excited about it during the summer. Kids started reading. In six weeks, now, you know how, well, I don't know how many people here are familiar. Can I just see a show of hands, like just so I know who has done DI? I mean, I know Jane is, of course, but so, okay.

Well, you do know that much about it that it's a scripted program and that it's very controversial, and either people love it or they hate it. Well, you know, when we were in the situation that we were in, there wasn't any reason to not try something. You know, so there was, in the summer there was no resistance, and it was only in the kindergarten through second grade. That's traditionally what summer school is about, the little kids.

So anyway, at the end of that summer, the teachers came and said, you know what, this is so good, we want to continue it. So then we went through the battle of the

whole staff. Eventually, we convinced the whole staff, by consensus, and it was not easy, it took a long time, to do it school wide. And I'll just pass this around because I didn't bring, I do have it on a slide, but . . . graph.

At the end of the second year of full school implementation, we had the highest percentage of gains in the district. Now, you have to remember, we were starting at the lowest, so we didn't have the highest scores, but the highest percentage. And you see the red bar, and I'll just pass it around. So you can see our gains went from approximately 22% proficient in reading on the WKC, that's the test that we were using in 1998, to 72%. Okay.

And then if you look at the other bars there, language and math, and they went up also, and, of course . . . would tell you, well, why. We didn't change anything because our focus was reading. I said, I don't care if you do anything else all day. If kids can't read, everything else you're doing is a waste of time, period. People started to say, yeah. I mean, this is not rocket science . . . reading and whatever.

So anyway, we, I do want to share with you that we had two teachers in first grade who said I'm not going to do it, period. This is not my style. And I thought they were good teachers as evidenced by, I'll just pass this around so you can take a look, as evidenced by when we look at a classroom and you go in and you see there is interaction going on between the teacher and the students, the walls are filled with, you know projects. And so you think, wow, you know, and the kids are on task.

Oh, also, leading up to that, I took the board teacher, reading teachers, out of the reading position and put them in the classrooms and lowered the class size.

MAN: She was very popular.

DOLORES: I wasn't, but I also didn't care because I said, you know what, this is towards the end of my career. I've already told them to close this school. Either we're going to go forward or I'm not going to be a part of it. So I was like, I don't care, you know. I've already paid my dues and we're going, and I was able to get them slowly, you know, one by one, to come and say, you know what, this is the best thing my. You know, people, it's human nature that if nobody bothers you, it's kind of, I mean, I would probably just do whatever, you know. But if somebody gets you fired up, you really feel good and you want to go for it. So we did that.

So anyway, we had our own SAGE because you cannot be P5 and SAGE at the same time. You can't accept the double funding. So with all that Title 1 money and everything else, I just said, let's reallocate, and we did it.

So getting back to those two teachers who wouldn't do it, and I thought they were great, and at the end of the year on, you know, the reading tests, those students in their classrooms, and remember there are two of them, fully certified teachers, were right in this level, and that was appalling to me. And I had said beforehand, you know, go for it and we'll compare at the end because, obviously, we were going to be accountable.

I mean, we'll get into that because that's part of Reading First and the No Child Left Behind which has really been a push for Direct Instruction. I think that's pretty much, in a short, in a nutshell, you know, the overview of what we did at our school.

We then added all of the programs that DI has, because, you know, there's, for those of you that use it you know and those of you who don't, there are spelling

programs, writing programs, thinking programs, language programs, math programs. Our teachers wanted all of it because Direct Instruction, and we can talk about this some more later if you want us to, is a program that the strategies you can use across the board in anything.

It is scripted and, granted, if you try to transfer that to another course, you're not going to have the same script, but you use the same techniques. And I was thinking about this on the way, what is so powerful about DI, you know, you think about practice, practice, practice, that's what basketball players and athletes do, don't they? They repeat, repeat, repeat. So people say, well, you know, I don't want to teach something that is just drill and kill or whatever and, you know, you're telling me exactly what to say and there's no creativity and people will get bored and like, oh, I can't do it.

Well, our kids loved it because they see the progress immediately because it's built in . . . don't have to guess. You know, there is absolutely no guesswork in it. The tough part is the training because if you don't train the teachers correctly, then they sort of do it halfway. And along those lines, and just tell me if I'm talking too long because I get so fired up, I just want to change the world.

MAN: . . .

DOLORES: Pardon me?

MAN: I mean, you can sort of tell she's not bashful at all . . . small group . . .

DOLORES: Well, I thought, you know, if I'm going to be the principal and I'm going to convince people to do this, I need to go through the training and I need to be able to teach it because otherwise how am I going to go around and really monitor, and you do have to do that.

MAN: See, and I think that's probably one of the most important things, that the administrator is in the classroom. It's not one of those kind of things . . . go teach reading and let me know what the test scores are.

DOLORES: Which is what they were, see, everybody was doing their own thing at 27th Street. When I came, you know, they would just close the door and some people were using this, that. So there's no networking. There's no community. There's no, you know, you can't go to someone for help or anything because it's like, well, I don't know what you're doing. Just let me do my own thing.

Well, anyway, so I said, I'm a reading teacher, you know. Give me that book, you know. Give me this thing here. I can do this. So I proceeded to go in front of the class, when teachers are absent, and I'm holding up the book. And I don't know, Dennis, you haven't seen it. You actually, word, it tells you, and, Ned, what you say and move your finger and do this and that.

MAN: So that's the script.

DOLORES: This is the script.

MAN: It leaves nothing to chance.

DOLORES: There is no guesswork. But if I, think about this, if I don't practice this, I'm going to quickly read while you're out there waiting for me. Right? So I'm looking here and looking there, and the kids are, what, and I thought, oh, it was horrible. I was horrible because I didn't practice. And now, the trainer had told us all, you've got to practice, practice.

But here's the beauty of it. Then I went home and I practiced, and I got good because that's all it takes. That is all it takes. And if you think about it, I have a grandson who is a year old, and I was babysitting the other day. He was a little antsy, and he's just about to walk, so it's like, you know, you've got to watch him every second. So I put something in front of him. He did that. It was one of those things where you put a circle on top of a pole. He did it for an hour, kept doing it. That's the way we learn. Don't we learn by repetition?

That's what's built into this. Only it's not that you do it like, well, one of the things that we do in trying to convince schools is ask, and some of you may know this, like how many times does it take an average student to learn a concept. Anybody? Just throw it out. Jane, be quiet and sit down . . . you probably know too, but.

MAN: Three.

DOLORES: Okay. For an average student, I think it's, wait, there's the average, gifted, and . . . am I starting it right? It's like let's say around 10 to 12 for an average student. Is that right? They're my experts over there. For a gifted student, it's eight to ten, something like that. Okay, but now let's take our at risk students, which are the kids that we're worried about, and certainly I was at 27th Street and, you know, the schools that are having kids that are, you know, 70% below proficiency. How many times for those kids to master a concept? Just throw out a number.

MAN: Fifty times.

DOLORES: Okay. Fourteen hundred.

MAN: Fourteen hundred?

DOLORES: Does that blow your mind? Is that right? Fourteen hundred. Close?

WOMAN: A lot lower.

DOLORES: Okay. But now, here's the thing. We don't say, okay, say this word 1,400 times. It's just that, and that's what people who don't understand DI think. They think, oh, well, this is, you know, how insulting . . .

MAN: . . . come back . . .

DOLORES: But they don't do it like that. It's just that it's built in. So because the research has been done for like 40, 50 years, I mean, the people in Oregon . . . that did this and all of his cohorts, they studied and they know what they're doing, and they field tested over and over.

NORM: And I think the beauty also in this is if you have a teacher that's challenged, who starts teaching reading, I mean, I found in our school a few that were not really up with how to do reading instruction, this program was just beautiful for them. I mean, you really got into it and the test scores and . . . were going through the roof too. So it's amazing.

DOLORES: You know, we have kindergarten children who are reading first grade, second grade. I mean, nobody believes this, but if you see it, if you go to schools who they know what they're doing, they've really been trained and they keep up with it and they implement it correctly, there's no question about it.

I need to stop for a minute because I could go on for hours, but I want to share with you one thing now and then I'll let Norm tell his story because he had a totally different situation from my school, but it's incredible what he did too. I know this is not Bush country here, so I took the cover off my book because it has . . .

MAN: She didn't want to get hurt if she went around . . .

DOLORES: But I have to be honest and tell you I am a Bush supporter, so don't throw things at me, please. I really think it would help everybody here or somebody to make a copy of two chapters of this book. One is called *Dick and Jane* and it tells the research of how Bush called every, not every, but a lot of experts in the country, and I share this with Sarah.

MAN: . . .

DOLORES: Well, *Why Johnny Can't Read* is one of the chapters. That's another book, but there's a chapter, the name of the book is *A Matter of Character*. It's Ron Kessler, who, by the way, is a Democrat who voted for Bush this time, but didn't the first time.

NORM: You said you weren't going to do . . .

DOLORES: Well, it's just that I want . . .

NORM: We should . . . closer to the door.

DOLORES: These two chapters are really worth, and if you're interested in research and reform and really getting the facts about what works and what doesn't work and why the No Child Left Behind Act is so important and the Reading First grant money is sufficient for what it was outlined to do, this, he contacted the experts all over the country. And I share this because I don't know if Sarah or Jane, but they know the

people who are quoted in this book, Goodman, Reed. There's more in here, but you could read it in like 15 minutes.

So I would just really urge you, I know I shared that with you, but to get, somebody get a copy and just take those two chapters out of the book and read it, and take it to school board members, take it to anyone who is interested because that one is incredible about why and how the language does not work, why and how people ignore that fact, and why and how phonics, right, when I say whole language, it's the same as what they call balanced literacy. Now, in Milwaukee, they call it comprehensive literacy, which doesn't mean a thing.

What works is what's proven and where you can have accountability. And if you think about everything that we do in life, don't we need to be accountable? In business, aren't we accountable? Or you lose, period, everything. So anyway . . .

NORM: I know . . . final decisions . . . data, and this program also mentions . . . after every five . . . kids are tested. As an administrator, you have results right there. I know that every year I'd have monitoring conferences in my school, and the teachers would bring in shopping cart loaded with stuff they wanted to impress me with. I'd ask, well, how's reading going? And they would say, well, we're on chapter 12, which meant absolutely nothing to me.

But since we've been doing Direct Instruction, I know exactly where each child in the building is in any given day, at any given time. And the accountability, as you just mentioned, is so very important because that is part of the No Child Left Behind Act. We were fortunate, our story is a little bit different than Dolores's story. Our school is doing quite well, but we, the way we really got into it is one of my reading teachers was working with three young people who had just transferred into our building.

Barton is our K4 through 6th grade school, 550 kids, 85% free and reduced lunch. Pretty much the standard for what MPS is. It's very, very similar. And the kids, of course, came to us with all the baggage in the world, which I'm sure a lot of the kids in Madison also have the same things. And teachers kept on saying, well, that's the reason that they can't learn is because, you know, this is happening at home, and we really proved at Barton that that really isn't true.

The way we got started with it, one of my reading teachers, as I mentioned, was having difficulty with three children that had just moved in, transferred into Barton in fifth grade, and between the three of them they knew two words, I and a, and that was just because they recognized the letters. Now how they got that far before they got to us, heaven only knows.

So she was taking a university course and, very surprisingly, in Milwaukee we don't have a lot of support yet with the UWM . . . sort of coming around and . . . started coming around to seeing the great things that are happening with this. She got a hold of some information about Direct Instruction. She talked to the representative from SRA, and she started working with these three young people.

These are the kind of kids that would do anything that they could behaviorally to get out of doing reading because, obviously, how embarrassed can you be, you know. So she started with Direct Instruction. After one year, these kids were on a third grade reading level. When you . . . other kids . . . walking down the hall with a Frog and Toad

book underneath his arm. And with anybody who would listen, he would pull them aside and say, can I read to you?

Now, this was a kid that had problems galore, as far as, you know, behavioral. Once he starts feeling good about himself, and he could actually, he could read this book. And, yeah, granted, you know, we always said, do you want a cover for the book? Oh, no, no. He was very proud of the fact that he could read this book. He was sort of the grass roots that got us involved in Direct Instruction.

And then it just, you know, unlike her school where every step of the way people were saying, no, no, no, I was blessed and had the kind of staff that said, hey, that really works. Can we get involved too? And as Dolores said, the training is obviously the most important thing. You can't just pick up that book and say, you know, it's not like picking up a . . . reader and looking at the teacher's guide and coming up with a lesson. You have to have training. So it took some time.

Now, we were going to start with kindergarten and first grade, but all the teachers kept on saying, we want the training too. Now, you know, in business or in any place, if the people want it, and you say, no, you can't have it, the next time maybe when you have the money for it, they're not going to want it. So I had to sort of strike while the iron was hot. Within the first year, we were kindergarten through sixth grade. They went to trainings after school, and the tests were just an example in . . .

In the third grade, for proficient or above, it went from 68% to 88%. Fourth grade it went from 82% to 96%. Fifth grade went from 79% to 92%. And sixth grade went from 88% to 92%.

DOLORES: And didn't you have the highest scores or second in the district? Where mine was a percentage, his was the actual.

NORM: And at grades three and four, there were no children at the minimal level. Unless you see it, like Dolores said, it's not drill and kill. When we became the soul recipient of the No Child Left Behind in 2003, which was a very nice thing, no money, but it was a lot of good publicity for the school and also for the district. We just, with that program, I lost my train of thought. I just lost what I was going to say.

DOLORES: I don't know.

NORM: I don't know either. When I said No Child Left Behind, I was waiting to see if . . .

DOLORES: You need a script.

NORM: I need a script, right.

MAN: Nobody was minimal and then you . . .

DOLORES: Nobody was minimal with that program.

NORM: Oh, right. Okay, okay.

MAN: Are these scores the fourth grade or . . .

NORM: Yes, fourth grade.

MAN: WK or whatever.

MAN: . . .

MAN: Okay, go ahead.

NORM: I lost my train . . .

DOLORES: . . .

NORM: I had a thought here.

DOLORES: It will come back. It's just, it's the most powerful thing that I've ever seen in 33 years of being in the schools. And as you've heard me say, I've really kind of been around the school system. I can't say enough about it. It blows my mind that people, and in this book, in those two chapters, they talk about why they just ignore the facts, and they come right out, and school board members, superintendents, just say we don't care. We don't like it. They actually say that, even with the . . . right in front of them.

MAN: Right here in Madison they do.

DOLORES: And I know they say that here because . . .

MAN: . . . Came back.

NORM: I got it. When we got the No Child Left Behind Act, we all the sudden . . . phone was ringing off the hook from places all over the country. It was very unusual that anybody from outside Milwaukee called Milwaukee because everything you hear about Milwaukee is horrible. So we really, really, you know, got people to come. They visited the program. And one of the things that was a real telling thing about how kids focus . . . should have been doing . . .

DOLORES: Oh, this is great. I love that.

NORM: We walked in this room. The first grade teacher is going through this lesson. We're sitting in the back, and I forgot, it was somebody from Franklin, I think, sitting with me. We're sitting in the back, and we were watching the kids perform and, of course, the kids didn't even look up when we first walked in. A young man was working at his seat . . . another thing, and a whole box of crayons just . . . all over the floor.

DOLORES: Like a 100-pack box. Not like eight.

NORM: Yeah. And you would think that, you know, what would kids automatically do at first? Stop what they're doing, turn around, but nobody stopped. They kept right on going with the lesson. Of course, we looked, but the kids didn't even turn around. And as an administrator, during a reading block, which is sacred, you have no referrals to the office, you don't, because the kids are successful. They're feeling success. It hits you right there. It's an in your face program, and it works.

DOLORES: People say it's teacher centered. It's not teacher centered. It's teacher directed, but child centered, because the interaction between the teacher and the children is so fast paced. For instance, there's supposed to be like, I believe, it's 12 to 15 responses per minute. That's pretty quick. And everybody, the teacher is trained so that she knows, if you were my class right there or even around this table, I would be trained to watch every one of you and your mouths to see that you're saying it together. And if you're not responding, I know that you don't have it mastered. You're not firm. And we're trained to know how to fix you. Now, what other program has that beautiful part to it? Nobody.

It's like, oh, what should I do now. He doesn't get that. I said this . . . 15,000 times and they still don't understand it. They're still saying a or ah or whatever. But the people who wrote it, they know that. They tried it over and over. So that's why the training is so important because if I'm really the teacher, I know how to watch you and know if you're getting it, and I don't move on until you do.

WOMAN: Are you going to open this to individual questions?

DOLORES: Yeah, we're done.

NORM: Go right ahead.

WOMAN: . . . forget my question . . .

DOLORES: I'm sorry. We do get carried away.

NORM: I had like three thoughts in my head when I said that.

WOMAN: I do the same.

DOLORES: Yes.

WOMAN: So may I ask a question?

MAN: Yes.

WOMAN: And I'll put the two together. What about the child who is already reading when he or she comes to school? And what about the gifted child who, I think, I have to

look at this, and I ran the gifted program here for a number of years, and I think it sounds to me like they might be bored out of their gourd. So how does the teacher manage that on a routinized(?) . . . if that's too specific . . .

DOLORES: No. I can do it, if you want, and then if you want to jump in. Well, you know, the kids are grouped according to ability, so they obviously will be tested and find out, well, these kids are . . . there are programs that are built in for them.

WOMAN: In that?

DOLORES: It wouldn't be this kit because this is a beginning, but yes.

MAN: . . .

DOLORES: Yes. But it's a higher-level program, and there is comprehension and content area built in, but it's just a higher level. So you would have to be able to train different teachers to take different groups and so forth. And, actually, Sarah and Jane are the experts here, so we can defer to them.

WOMAN: Well, the program has a number of what we call placement . . . and so before we even do any instruction with children, we will sit down with every child for approximately three to four minutes and give them a series of placement . . . then we know exactly where they are in that sequence of skills.

I'm at Robins(?) School. Sandy is at Robins School. Last year, we had children that were in the very, you know, basic levels, but we also had children that were reading very well, and they . . . focus not on decoding, but on comprehension skills. And those comprehension skills are taught just as Dolores is saying, in a very step by step, easy to understand, sequential manner.

We had second graders who would have been like a third grade level or a fourth grade level. So every child at reading . . . goes to where they need to be. I think, we experience . . . hour and a half reading block starts, kids are put where they are not frustrated, but challenged. They're learning, and that's a very hard thing . . . teachers . . . that reality point where you are learning something that you didn't know, but you're not so frustrated that you can't get it.

WOMAN: But the same teacher is doing all five levels or two . . .

WOMAN: No. Everybody has to . . .

MAN: It's cross-grouped.

MAN: So if you have a talented and gifted fourth grader, you can still use a program like this. You can . . . there's a series in this so even for talented and gifted . . . calculus in fourth grade or something.

WOMAN: Learn about . . . and that they . . . Direct Instruction program.

WOMAN: It's really, we always say that we want to accelerate them faster, kids who are behind and kids who are ahead. So even though, you know, we always say, well, the kids who are slow, naïve learners, this program is designed to move them faster because isn't that what we want to do? We don't want to keep playing catch-up. We want to accelerate.

WOMAN: See, the total program provides a sequence of skills from the very lowest level of . . . and letter sound association all the way up to reading . . . the question is how do you figure out . . . child needs to be put into this program?

WOMAN: That's set up in . . .

WOMAN: That's the placement test. Every Direct Instruction . . . program, as Jane said, starts with placement tests. Many people describe Direct Instruction as a cookie cutter approach. You're trying to do everything the same with every kid, and so it's just . . . because built into the program is a very specific way to individualize it for each child, depending upon their skills. And this a commonly misunderstood point that makes it seem to people like it could possibly work for some children . . . when, in fact, there's a great deal of research showing that it works just as effectively for high performance students as it does for low performing students. It's just that our low performing students are in dire need of it, and the high performing students can struggle and get along somehow without that good program.

NORM: If you look on our agenda, we kind of nicely float into action for Madison and Direct Instruction in Madison. So thanks for taking this that way. While we're on that, this is a chart that Jane and Sandy put together about Direct Instruction at Latham. And it shows the number of kids in Direct, and sort of the percentage of kids.

WOMAN: Percentage of the second grade children that had . . .

NORM: Go ahead. You explain. You put it together.

WOMAN: . . . shows in 2001-02 we had approximately 25% of our children were doing Direct Instruction. So 25% of . . . figure it out. And then the next year, that increased to 40%.

WOMAN: A little over 40%.

WOMAN: And then up to about 47.

WOMAN: Okay. So, now, the green bar is the, we've followed those kids to third grade, which is the first time the Madison schools have standardized tests . . .

WOMAN: And then they go from 92 . . .

WOMAN: Eighty percent scored advanced and proficient on the test in 2001-02, and then . . .

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