

## **Implementing *Corrective Reading*: Coaching Issues**

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### Abstract

*Corrective Reading* is a commercially-available reading program comprised of two sets of lessons: Decoding and Comprehension. Decoding develops fluency and understanding of what is read; Comprehension teaches critical thinking skills. Each set has four levels of scripted lessons; teachers must follow each lesson's script and other features with fidelity. To ensure this, the program uses coaches. During the first year's implementation, Valdosta Middle School (VMS) used an external coach. During the second, VMS faculty served as coaches. In this study, preliminary (first year) SAT9 data are reported. Results of a survey on teacher perceptions of Direct Instruction show that after using the program for a year, faculty support the program, like the concept of coaching, and are using features of Direct Instruction in their other classes.

During 2000-2001 academic year, Valdosta Middle School (VMS) began an after school tutoring program. One component of this program included several classes of SRA's *Corrective Reading* (CR), one of many Direct Instruction programs available from SRA. During that school year, when the state department of education mandated that all middle schools in Georgia must have a reading program for all students, the faculty and administration of VMS selected CR because of the success of students in the after school program. During the spring of 2001, all the current 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders at VMS, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders at the elementary school that feeds into VMS, were given placement tests to put them into the right CR category and level.

There are two components of CR, decoding and comprehension, each having 4 levels (A, B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>, and C). As the name suggests, decoding teaches students the skills associated with decoding sounds in words, builds fluency in reading (accuracy plus speed), and improves their comprehension of what they have read. The comprehension levels (A, B<sub>1</sub>, B<sub>2</sub>, and C) develop students' critical thinking skills using content from literature, science, and social studies.

The *Corrective Reading* programs were developed specifically to accelerate student learning (Grossen, n.d., p. 14). While the program is commonly used with learners whose standardized tests results and teacher evaluations have identified as performing below average, the program has also been successfully used with general

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education students to enhance their reading skills (Campbell, 1988; Clunies-Ross, 1990; Kasendorf & McQuaid, 1987; Noon & Maggs, 1979).

The CR program is a specific example of an approach to instruction labeled Direct Instruction (DI). In general, commercially-available DI curricular materials have a proven track record for raising students' achievement and their self-esteem (Adams & Engelmann, 1996) when they are implemented exactly the way they are written, a concept referred to as *fidelity*. Unfortunately, as DiChiara (2001) points out,

DI is something of a paradox, however. It has been found, time and time again, in research study after research study, to be one of the most effective methods of instruction that has ever existed. Yet, today, to mainstream educators, DI continues to be the Rodney Dangerfield of instructional methods. (p. 7)

DI materials require that teachers employ specific techniques to signal students to respond, correct mistakes, "firming" and reinforcing correct responding, and pacing the movement of students through the materials (Smith & McKinney, 1997). Because the implementation and real-time monitoring of students' performance in classes employing DI is very different from how most teachers typically teach, before DI curricula are implemented at a school, the publisher of DI materials, SRA, provides teachers with several days of workshop training so they can use the materials correctly. Such training is critically important but often is insufficient to maintain fidelity and promote generalization, and schools are encouraged to (a) also use DI consultants to provide on-going *coaching* to DI teachers, (b) and send teachers from the school to regularly scheduled institutes sponsored by the Association for Direct Instruction to become certified coaches for specific DI programs (e.g., *Reading Mastery*, *Corrective Reading*, *Connecting Math Concepts*, etc.).

All faculty received training from SRA personnel during the summer of 2001 on how to implement CR (e.g., signals, delivering the content, coaching, etc.) (Smith & McKinney, 1997, p. 14). The program was begun at the beginning of the 2001 school year.

Initially an external consultant (a faculty member at Valdosta State University) who was trained and certified by the Association of Direct Instruction (ADI) coached the VMS teachers. Because of the issue of *fidelity*, coaching is considered an integral component of DI and in-class (i.e., real-time) feedback is superior to that done after-class (Coulter & Grossen, 1997). Teachers can add to lessons but the lessons themselves must follow how they are organized in the teacher's presentation book. This is extremely difficult for virtually anyone the first time they use DI materials, and even for those who are proficient in its use! Therefore, coaches periodically observe during lesson presentations.

During a presentation the coach typically employs standardized forms to record data on the teacher's use of signals, corrections, pacing, etc. (Marchand-Martella & Lignugaris/Kraft, 1997, pp. 54-57; McKinney & Blakely, n.d.), and may stop the lesson to confer with the presenting teacher, and may even teach part of the lesson to the students to model a component that the presenting teacher is having difficulty implementing correctly. Obviously, unless handled well, coaching can be a threatening experience for even seasoned faculty. To make coaching less threatening, faculty are immediately debriefed in real time after the session. Later that day the faculty member is given a written report that contains the same information provided in the debriefing. As

long as the coach feels that the teacher is trying (called a “can’t yet do”), no one else is privy to the results of the coaching sessions. If, however, after repeated sessions dealing with the same issue, the coach believes that the teacher can implement the program correctly but is choosing not to (called a “won’t do it”) the issue becomes one for the school’s administration to handle. All teachers can be taught how to correctly implement CR (or any other DI program), but some refuse; in cases such as this, if the program does not produce the results desired is it because of the program, or because the program is not being implemented correctly?

Towards the end of the spring, 2002, term, a cohort of VMS faculty were trained and certified by ADI as CR coaches, and took over the coaching responsibilities that the external consultant had previously handled.

The major focus of this project was to examine the perceptions of VMS teachers towards (a) coaching (external versus internal coaches), (b) their attitudes about Direct Instruction teaching methods (Bessellieu, Kozloff, & Rice, 2001), and (c) whether they are now using more DI methods in the other classes than they did before CR was adopted.

Of course, the decision to continue a program should not be based on whether one likes or dislikes it, but rather on how it affects students’ achievement. Results from the SAT 9 were only available for 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Students who scored at and below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile on the reading portion of the SAT 9 in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade showed marginally improved performance at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Additionally, when these data were grouped by teachers who the coaches judged as implementing the program faithfully versus those who did not, the results showed that the improvement was more dramatic. Still, research on CR suggests that it, like any new program a school adopts, must be given at least a few years to work. VMS officials plan to use SAT 9 data over the first 3 years of implementation to evaluate whether the program should be continued, expanded (currently students are in either a decoding or a comprehension track; ideally students should be in both), or to adopt a different program.

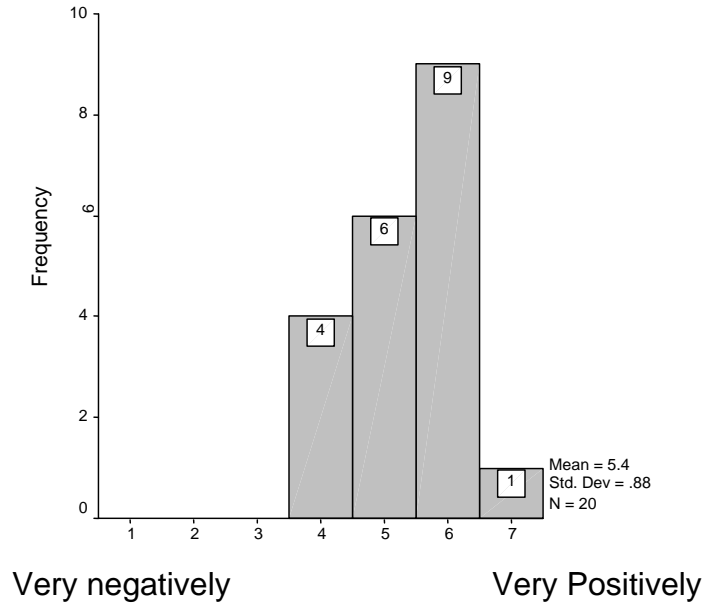
VMS maintains a web site (<http://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/VMS/CR.html>) that parents and others can visit to learn about CR, and also to see video clips for each of the four levels of the two tracks.

### Results/Discussion

During the fall of 2002, a survey form was developed and distributed to all VMS teachers who had taught CR the previous year. Thirty-seven middle-grade teachers responded (out of a pool of 46) to a self-report survey (attached as Appendix A) used to evaluate the Corrective Reading (CR) program implemented during the 2001-2002 academic year. On a number of occasions, one or more of the 37 respondents failed to complete a particular item; in those cases, the data totals for that item included only those who responded. Five items were scaled with Likert-type values from 1 to 7. Low values indicated negative or unfavorable response, whereas high values indicated positive or favorable response. One of the items (# 3) asked teachers to report on the academic performance of students. Two items (# 4 and #5) asked teachers to report in their initial impressions of the CR program and their impressions following the CR program. Two items (# 6 and #7) asked teachers to report on the helpfulness of the feedback provided by

the university consultant and the VMS faculty who assumed the coaching responsibilities. An additional item requested teachers to report on their pre-program and post-program use of Direct Instruction (DI) techniques. Below are graphs, statistics, and comments on the responses by the teachers.

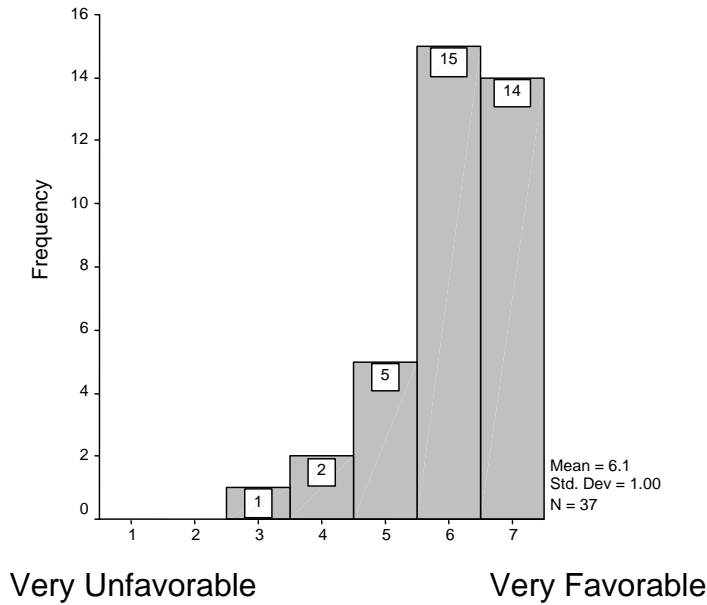
Of the 20 teachers who responded to item 3, 16 reported that student achievement in other classes had been affected positively. Four reported no effect (neutral), whereas 17 reported that they did not know if there was an effect (see Figure 1).



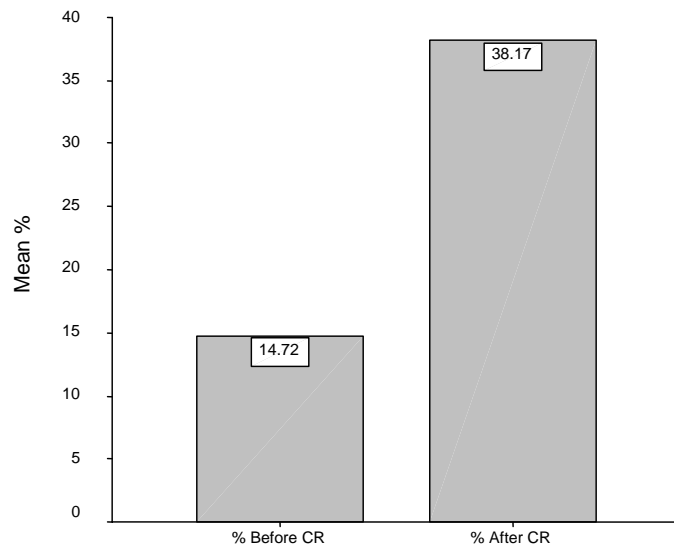
**Figure 1:** Frequency of responses to Item 3- *To what extent has the CR program affected students’ achievement in their other academic classes?*

Even before the CR program began, a majority of the teachers (N = 23) reported favorable impressions, however there were two who reported negative impressions and twelve who reported neutral impressions. This trend of positive responses left little room for improvement (see Figure 2).





**Figure 3:** Frequency of responses to Item 5- *After a year’s experience with CR, how do you now view the program?*



**Figure 4:** Response to Item 8- *Estimate the percentage of time you used DI methods in your classes before CR was implemented and the percentage of time you are now using CR methods.*

Teachers rated both the university consultant ( $M = 5.16, SD = 1.34$ ) and the faculty advisor ( $M = 5.67, SD = .98$ ) as providing favorable feedback; however, there was a slight statistical advantage for the faculty advisor,  $t(30) =$

2.33,  $p = .027$ . The effect size (Cohen's  $d = .47$ ) was slightly less than moderate (see Figures 5 and 6).

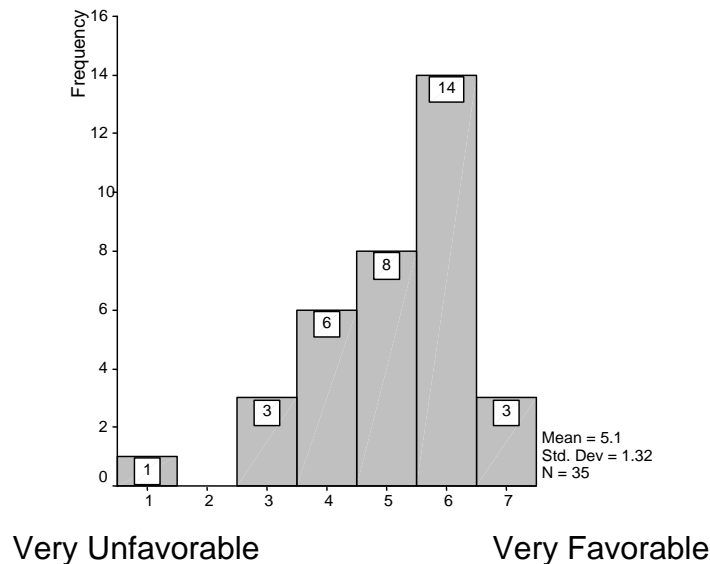


Figure 5: Frequency of responses to Item 6 - *Please rate the helpfulness of the feedback provided by the VSU consultant.*

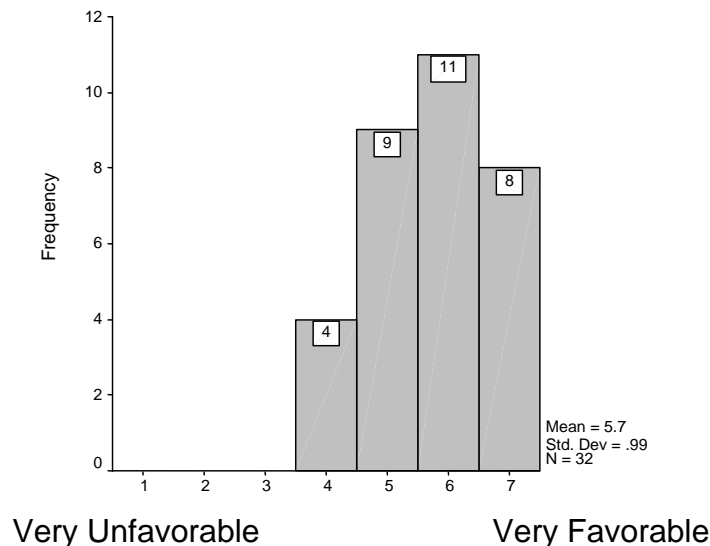


Figure 6: Frequency of responses to Item 7 - *Please rate the helpfulness of the feedback provided by the VMS faculty.*

Teachers, and school administrators whose schools use DI, recognize its effectiveness in developing and maintaining student achievement. A major drawback in getting educators to initially implement a DI program is a generally disregard for this type of approach (DiChiara, 2001) as a result of pervasive myths about Direct Instruction (Bessellieu et al., 2001). The results of the present study support findings from other research showing that once teachers learn to use DI, are properly coached, and experience first-hand its effects on student achievement, they are much more positive.

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### Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Dear VMS Faculty:

During the 2001-2002 academic year, VMS began implementing *Corrective Reading* (CR) as a school-wide program. In this survey we would like to get your perceptions of the program. After summarizing the survey's results, we will present them at the annual meeting of the Georgia Educational Research Association where we plan to highlight the VMS program. Please take a few minutes of your time to complete the survey then return it to Mrs. Richardson's office. In advance, thank you.

1. Please put a check next to the CR program you taught last year.

Decoding

A     B<sub>1</sub>     B<sub>2</sub>     C

Comprehension

A     B<sub>1</sub>     B<sub>2</sub>     C

2. How many students were in your class? \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR ITEMS 3-7, PLEASE CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT BEST REFLECTS YOUR POSITION:**

3. To what extent has the CR program affected students' achievement in their other academic classes?

Very Negatively                      **Neutral**                      Very Positively

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

**Check here if you DON'T KNOW**

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments about the students' achievement:

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4. Last year when you first began teaching a CR class were you INITIALLY

Very Unfavorable                      **Neutral**                      Very Favorable

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

Comments about your first impressions of CR:

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5. AFTER a year's experience with CR, how do you NOW view the program?

Very Unfavorable                      **Neutral**                      Very Favorable

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

Comments about your current impressions of CR:

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**Last year COACHING was done initially by a VSU consultant and later by VMS faculty.**

6. Please rate the helpfulness of the feedback provided by the VSU consultant.

Very Unfavorable                      **Neutral**                      Very Favorable

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

Comments about the coaching provided by VSU consultant: \_\_\_\_\_ -

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7. Please rate the helpfulness of the feedback provided by VMS faculty.  
Very Unfavorable                      **Neutral**                      Very Favorable  
1-----2-----3-----**4**-----5-----6-----7

Comments about the coaching provided by VMS faculty:

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8. (A) Estimate the percentage of time you used DI methods in your classes **BEFORE** CR was implemented at VMS. \_\_\_\_\_%

(B) Estimate the percentage of time you are **NOW** using CR methods in your regular classes. \_\_\_\_\_%

Which DI methods (choral responding, signals, etc) are you using?

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Additional Comments/Suggestions on **COACHING**:

Additional Comments/Suggestions about the **CR** program: