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Submission in Response to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs,
Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

Interim Report: First Steps for improving educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

November 2016

This submission addresses the section of the Interim report that reports the committee's findings on Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction.

A number of specific statements made in the Interim Report warrant comment.

3.22 This method of teaching is being used in a small number of schools in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

This statement is incorrect. A substantial number of schools around Australia use Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction programs.

Programs such as Reading Mastery, Spelling Mastery, and Elementary Maths Mastery are Direct Instruction programs. They meet the definition of 'carefully sequenced and highly structured lessons' and students are required to 'master each lesson before advancing on to the next'. According to the publishers of these Direct Instruction programs, McGraw-Hill, hundreds of schools in all states and territories and all school sectors, are using one or more of these programs.

Similarly, the publishers of the Explicit Direct Instruction program — DataWorks — have worked with several dozen Australian schools. This is likely to be an underestimate of the true number, as the lesson plans and resources are readily available for purchase. A NSW school using EDI is Barnsley Public School. A video presentation from former principal Paul McDermott describing the significant improvement in results can be viewed [here](#).¹

3.26 ...the Committee is concerned that this evaluation [of Good to Great Schools Australia's schools] is not comprehensive or independent from the organisation delivering the pedagogy...

It is not clear on what basis the Committee has formed concerns about the independence of the evaluation. The Centre for Program Evaluation at the Graduate School of Education at Melbourne University is a highly credible organisation lead by well-respected and well-regarded academic, Associate Professor Janet Clinton.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMpOt38XvSQ>

3.26 [The Committee] notes that the evaluation focuses more on the delivery of Direct Instruction rather than its effectiveness or comparisons with other teaching methods. The Committee is therefore of the view that Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction should be reviewed by a truly independent evaluator, with comprehensive terms of reference that incorporate comparative studies and longitudinal measures of its effectiveness.

A program evaluation is by definition an evaluation of delivery and effectiveness in the current setting. It is not an experimental study and therefore does not require a comparison group. While it would be ideal to have a longitudinal, comparative study that includes a larger group of schools, there is sufficient evidence of the effectiveness of the pedagogy to justify continuing its use until such a study is completed.

3.28 ...The Committee is of the strong view that the efficacy of this pedagogy should now be comprehensively reviewed.

Direct Instruction is one of the most heavily researched programs in the world. The more general pedagogical approach known as ‘direct instruction’ or ‘explicit instruction’ has also been extensively studied. These approaches have consistently been found to be highly effective, particularly for foundation skills such as literacy and numeracy, but also for socio-emotional development as children develop the self-confidence that comes with competency and mastery. Research over the last decade has found that direct/explicit teaching is also effective for learning higher-order metacognitive concepts and creative thinking. For more information about this research, see the CIS report [Read About It: Scientific Evidence for Effective Teaching of Reading](#),² and the video presentation [Direct and explicit instruction: What it is and why it works](#).³

The Interim Report’s criticism of Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction appears to have been formed through insufficient awareness of the evidence and facts. High quality research and evaluation are necessary for conclusive determinations to be drawn about the efficacy of programs. However, this applies in both directions — just as good evidence is required to confirm positive impacts with any certainty, it is also required to confirm null or negative impacts. Currently, the available evidence points more strongly towards the positive, and therefore the Committee’s recommendation that no additional financial support for Direct Instruction be available until more research is conducted appears premature.

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² <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2016/07/rr11.pdf?>

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gd_9rszR27s