

Marie Keel: A Remembrance

“I may not be able to change the world, but I can make a difference in my own little corner of it.” Marie was known to say this often and those who knew her well will always remember her as someone who dedicated her career to making a difference for children and their teachers. She worked tirelessly in her teaching, her service, and her research to accomplish that end.

A native of Chataqua County, New York, Marie earned her bachelor’s degree in special education from the University of Kentucky and her master’s degree from Georgetown College before returning to the University of Kentucky to earn her doctorate in special education in 1993. She was not quite finished with her dissertation when she was offered a position at Georgia State University. She once claimed that the fastest way to complete a dissertation is to have a position in hand and a place to be in a short time.

I was just learning about Direct Instruction in 1993 and was on a mission to bring it to Georgia State and the surrounding metropolitan area when I learned that another department had just hired a DI expert—Marie. I contacted Marie immediately and with that contact began a partnership that lasted until her untimely passing on November 29, 2001. Marie immediately began spending countless hours teaching me about DI, training teachers, answering questions from principals and teach-

ers, and helping to salvage partially used Take Home books so that we could start our first small and minimally funded DI implementation in Atlanta. From all her prior work with DI, Marie had many DI materials and was completely unselfish about sharing them. From our tiny beginnings we grew and with grant funds were eventually able to supply much needed materials and technical support for our many DI implementation projects.

Marie was an excellent teacher who never seemed to tire of helping others to effectively implement DI programs—she taught the teachers who took courses from her in their graduate programs, she taught the teachers in the schools where we offered them the DI programs as an alternative to Whole Language reading instruction, and she taught any colleague who wanted to know about DI. Marie had a passion for teaching—she appeared to do it effortlessly whether she was teaching her classes at the university or training teachers in the schools.

Marie was very generous with her time and her expertise. Her students loved and respected her for what she taught and how she taught it. Students sought her out to serve on their graduate committees because they knew she would prepare them well. Marie spent many hours on email or the phone with teachers who needed strategies and materials for students who were struggling with reading. Many of these contacts were not Georgia State graduates, not people she was responsible for, just teachers who wanted to do a better job of teaching reading. All it took for Marie to get involved was an interest on someone’s part to improve reading for anyone. It was not long before she was rec-

ognized as a reading expert in the Atlanta metropolitan area. As such, she responded to countless schools that called for help.

Marie's service was not only in the schools. She served on numerous professional and university committees, always giving generously of her time and energy. From 1998 to 1999 she served as vice-president of the Georgia Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children and was president of this division of CEC when she passed away.

In addition to the teaching and tireless service she provided, Marie published over a dozen articles and book chapters and left several more in various stages of completion. She also produced twenty-five modules and manuals and five computer programs, delivered numerous satellite staff-development programs, secured funds from ten grants, presented at two to three conferences a year, and still found time to write what a colleague recently called "a gangbuster" language arts book for a local school system. Three of Marie's articles appear in this special issue. In "Using *Reasoning and Writing* to Teach Written Language Skills to Students With Learning Disabilities," she showed that well-implemented Direct Instruction can dramatically improve writing skills for students with mild disabilities. In "Making the Most of Instructional Time: Teaching Reading at an Accelerated Rate to Students At Risk," we see Marie's dedication to students who are at risk. This research was an attempt to demonstrate to teachers and principals that students who are at risk can succeed when effective instructional materials are used properly and on a regular basis. Finally, in "An Examination of the Effectiveness of *Reasoning and Writing* With Gifted Fifth-Grade Students" we find that DI is not just for the at-risk population. It is excellent instruction that is equally effective for students who are gifted. These articles reflect what a colleague recently said about Marie, that is, that she is one of a handful of researchers who is conducting research related

to the educational problems of students who are at risk as well as extending beyond special education into general education. There are three distinct groups of students served in these articles, students with learning disabilities, students in general education who are at risk because of environmental situations, and students who are identified as gifted.

While Marie was the recipient of several awards, I suspect the one that meant the most to her was the Excellence in University Education Award from the Association for Direct Instruction. In accepting the award, Marie opened her remarks by saying, "I may not be able to change the world, but I can make a difference in my own little corner of it." Marie made a difference, and I believe the difference she made extends well beyond her own little corner of the world. As a teacher educator, she touched many lives directly, and she touched many more lives indirectly through her students and the many other educators who knew her. These students and colleagues, Marie's legacy, continue to make a difference for children through their teaching and through their example of what can be done when we put our students first and refuse to leave effectiveness to chance. The lives she touched directly and indirectly are more than can be counted and the number will continue to grow. As her mother so lovingly said "we are confident that through her teachings, her educational views and skills will be carried on by her students." There are children who will become competent readers because of Marie's efforts. It would not matter to Marie that the children did not know she was in some way responsible for their success, it would only matter that they succeeded. On behalf of all who had the pleasure of knowing Marie, learning from Marie, or succeeding because of Marie, we want to say—Thank You, Marie.