

## What Is It?

This document is the first in a new publication series for practitioners and parents entitled Current Practice Alerts. Each issue in the series will provide its readers access to an objective, independent, and authoritative review of what is known about a current or emerging practice intended for individuals with learning disabilities (LD). Each issue will also include a summary judgment regarding the degree of confidence that can be placed in the target practice, the choice of whether to “Go For It,” or to “Exercise Caution” in utilizing a practice. Our goal is to alert readers to both promising practices and practices which, although widely used or discussed, have not been adequately validated. Thus, each Alert is designed to guide informed decision-making about the effectiveness of a specific developmental, behavioral, instructional, or transition practice targeted for use with children or adults with specific learning disabilities.

The Alert series is the result of a joint initiative sponsored by two divisions of the Council for Exceptional Children—the Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD) and the Division for Research (DR). The purpose of the initiative is to provide timely and informed judgments regarding professional practices in the field. It is hoped that practitioners will use this information in selecting practices for implementation, and that parents will use the information as a means of evaluating the options available for their children.

The two sponsoring organizations are well qualified to undertake this project. DLD is a professional organization of teachers, specialists, and administrators committed to advancing research and improving educational practice for individuals with learning disabilities. DR is a professional organization of researchers and practitioners dedicated to the promotion of research and the utilization of empirical knowledge to enhance the education of exceptional children. The Alert series represents a commitment to readers to provide a tool which will help evaluate the common claim that a specific practice is effective. Each Alert will be prepared based on a rigorous review process to be managed by DLD and DR. This process is designed and monitored to assure the rigor, objectivity and validity of reviews. DLD and DR are unique in their depth and breadth of member expertise and practitioner experience. Together we are committed to maintaining your confidence in the Alert review process and final recommendations. It is our intent that the series will provide timely guidance regarding both effective and yet-to-be-validated practices.

## For Whom Is It Intended?

The Alert series is for practitioners, administrators, and parents who seek an authoritative, informative, and user-friendly decision-making tool to untangle the thicket of academic and marketplace claims and controversies regarding practice effec-



tiveness with individuals with learning disabilities. References will be provided for readers who want access to additional technical information. The Alerts will be distributed automatically to all members of DLD and DR. In addition, they will be available for purchase by the public from the CEC Clearinghouse.

## **How Does It Work?**

In addition to a detailed description of a specific practice and a critical evaluation of the validation research regarding the practice, each Alert will provide an overall judgment regarding whether the current research database warrants use of the practice for students with LD.

Each Alert will be printed in a manner amenable to collection in a three-ring binder, for future reference. In addition, each Alert will be posted on the DLD/DR web sites. We hope that the Alert series will become a value-added resource in determining what is known about the effectiveness of current and emerging practices in the field of learning disabilities.

We expect to produce two or three new Alert issues each year, and to revisit earlier Alerts on a regular basis to re-evaluate their status. In this way, the series should provide timely guidance regarding both effective and yet-to-be-validated practices.

The practices to be reviewed will be of sufficient prominence (either positive or negative) in professional and/or lay circles to warrant analysis and review. In preparing each issue, the DLD/DR Alert Editorial Committee will establish an invited

panel comprised of researchers and practitioners to oversee and assure the integrity and quality of the review and analysis process. This committee will make a recommendation, based on the adequacy of the current knowledge base and practice experience, to Go For It (practices for which there is solid research evidence of effectiveness), or to Exercise Caution (practices for which the research evidence is incomplete, mixed, or negative).

Each **Alert** will have a common format, with the following sections:

1. **What Is It?** A brief description of the purpose, design features, and theories/assumptions undergirding the practice will be specified.
  2. **For Whom Is It Intended?** The group(s) for whom the practice has been claimed or shown to be effective will be identified. In addition, this section will specify the educational needs of the children with learning disabilities for whom the practice is designed.
  3. **How Does It Work?** A general description of the procedures and materials involved in the practice and its implementation will be provided. References to more detailed descriptions of the practice will also be provided.
  4. **How Adequate is the Research Knowledge Base?** This section will provide a brief review of the research knowledge base, including peer-reviewed publications, primary research and evaluation reports. Experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational studies will be examined. The knowledge base will be evaluated for various technical characteristics, including: rigor of research design related to
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determining cause and effect relationships; design threats to internal and external validity; limitations of measurement; fidelity of implementation; limits of generalizability associated with the sample of LD students included in the studies; completeness of the descriptions of the individuals included in the study; the appropriateness of the individuals relative to the LD population; the adequacy of the timeframe involved in the study (e.g., length of intervention, presence of delayed post-tests); the assessment of cross-situation effectiveness; and consistency of findings across studies.

5. **How Practical Is It?** In this section, we will share information gathered from practitioners who have experience using the target practice. The major issue will be the feasibility of implementing the practice in ‘real-world’ sites. Issues of practical constraints, cost, and necessary expertise will be addressed, whenever appropriate.
6. **How Effective Is It?** The purpose of this section will be to draw a conclusion (based on the adequacy of the research knowledge base and on practitioner experience in implementing a practice) regarding whether there is sufficient justification to support a recommendation to “Go for it” or to recommend that a practitioner “Exercise Caution.” In either instance, Alert will urge users to design and collect information on whether their use of the practice is effective. A web page will be maintained to share such emerging information on the use and effectiveness of a practice.

7. **What Questions Remain?** A consideration of what still needs to be learned about the effectiveness, use and implementation of the practice will be presented.
8. **How Do I Learn More?** References to publications, web sites, and training programs which provide detailed information regarding the practice and its effectiveness will be listed.
9. **About the Authors.** Each Alert issue will be written by professionals with recognized expertise related to the target practice. These individuals will be selected to ensure familiarity with the effectiveness database and firsthand experience in using the target practice. However, care will be taken to call on experts with no vested interests in the practice. The Alerts Editorial Committee will work with the experts to develop the final description and effectiveness judgments regarding the practice.

## **What Questions Remain?**

Making decisions regarding the effectiveness of any practice in the field of education is not a simple matter. We hope that the Alert series will serve as a resource for both practitioners and parents who are making decisions regarding the best practices for children with LD. In addition, we hope that the Alert discussions will also serve as a stimulus for further research regarding effective practices. To that end, we invite suggestions regarding ways in which we can improve the series. We also invite suggestions regarding target practices for future issues.

**GO FOR IT**





## **Target Practices For Future Issues**

**Issue No. 2: Direct Instruction**

**Issue No. 3: Performance Evaluation**

A number of practices are under consideration for future Alert issues, including the following: Class-Wide Peer Tutoring; Co-Teaching; Mnemonic Instruction; Accommodations for High-Stakes Assessment; Cooperative Learning; Reading Recovery; Supplementary Phonics Training; Auditory Process Training; Social Skills Training; Fast ForWord.

## **How Do I Learn More?**

For more information about the Alert series and a cumulative list of past and future Alert topics, visit the Alerts page on the CEC/DLD website. (<http://www.cec.sped.org/dv-menu.htm>)

We welcome input about the Alert series, including suggestions for future target practices. Such inquiries can be provided in the Comments window on the website.