

Direct Instruction: A Principal's perspective



Finn Buckley is the principal of Cape York Aboriginal Australian Academy's Hope Vale Campus. The school has 108 students.

Being a principal in a school like Hope Vale is really rewarding. I have never seen children as engaged with the curriculum as I have at our Campus. Direct Instruction is achieving great results for students in our classrooms.

DI Case Study: Principal

Data analysis

A key component

As a principal in a school that has implemented Direct Instruction (DI), the difference from a mainstream school, is the quality and integrity of data analysis available to us. Our teachers collect data daily regarding lessons taught, test results and behaviour. At the end of the week this data is analysed, and then sent to Good to Great Schools Australia for additional expert analysis.

We are responding to testing data on a weekly basis.

This means that we are receiving and responding to feedback from testing data on a weekly basis rather than by term. We know within very short time frames how well students are progressing and whether or not they are firm on the lessons being taught. We can also allocate students additional support to help them master concepts before the class moves ahead. This is an important aspect of the program and it means that for a large part of my week I get to be in classrooms, observing, collecting data and delivering regular feedback and coaching my team.





Before school

Getting prepared

On Wednesday mornings I arrive at school just before 7.00am with our head of class to have a weekly DI data teleconference with our instructional coaches from Good to Great Schools Australia. Prior to this meeting, they email a summary report of the testing data that has been collected over the last week so we can review their analysis.

We start by discussing the action points from last week's call and what progress has been made. Then we review the data summaries for each teacher and their classes. If the data shows that students aren't firm on the content we may direct students to remediate lessons (they don't move forward until they've mastered each concept).

We talk about test and independent work scores, behaviour issues and questions from teachers. Strategies are suggested and follow-up actions agreed.

We also discuss solutions to any 'red-flag' issues that could impact the overall implementation of the program or student progress rates. We also celebrate this week's accolades and note positive feedback for those teachers who have their groups progressing well.

It's really useful having a highly experienced Coaching Principal on-hand.

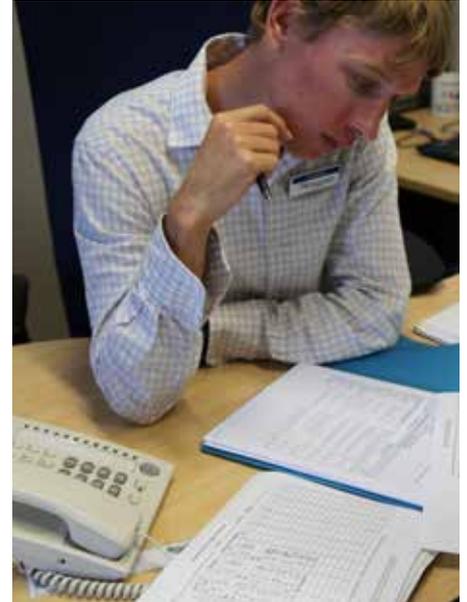
Sometimes our coaching principal attends our weekly meetings via teleconference and some weeks they are on-site to review our term goals, priorities, student data, classrooms and procedures to assist with any issues. It's really useful having a highly experienced Coaching Principal on-hand to provide practical advice on planning, staff management, issue resolution and instructional leadership. They've also coached me on how to give effective feedback to staff to help them develop, and how to prioritise my workload.

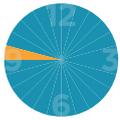
We finish the call by agreeing our actions for the week, prioritising support to teachers and determining feedback to be delivered from the call.

At 7.45am the entire teaching team gathers to receive general feedback and then pairs off to do their weekly partner practice while our instructional coach delivers individual feedback from the call. The entire staff room is buzzing as the teachers practice the aspects of their delivery that have been highlighted as areas for improvement. They also practice their scripts for the upcoming day.

At 8.30am I join the Positive Behaviour Interventions and Support (PBIS) management team for 15 minutes to talk about the previous day and to prioritise any students that may require support or intervention.

Twice a week we have a morning assembly. This is an opportunity for all students and staff to gather to hear the daily messages and to remind each other about our expectations for hard work and great behaviour.





Morning

Attendance strategy | Classroom observation

Once school starts I meet with our case managers to discuss targets and attendance strategies for the week. The classroom teachers record attendance twice daily and feed this information through to the case managers. We use the rolls to decide who to follow up for that morning. Then we visit the parents to enquire about their child's absence, remind them of their obligations and help resolve issues that are keeping the student from school.

Besides the important work we do with parents to ensure they meet their obligation to get their children to school, we have a number of other attendance strategies aimed at the students. These include scheduling birthday clubs and rewards on Fridays (when there is often a dip in attendance) and celebrating students who are doing well with attendance awards. Students can also win a raffle to have the attendance trophy in their class the next week.

At 9.30am I begin my classroom observations for the day to follow up on actions from the DI data call that morning.

We have a brief classroom observation form that I check off to record:

- Teacher is applying DI techniques with fidelity.
- The subject and lesson being taught is the correct one.
- The number of students in groups is appropriate for the class.
- Physical arrangements allow students to see and hear the lesson clearly.
- The teacher uses positive techniques to manage behaviour.
- Students doing independent work are on-task.
- Independent work is corrected and students have done 'fix-ups'.
- Student work is neat and well organised.
- Materials are organised and accessible.
- Written records of student performance are accessible.
- Reward charts are posted.

Later on in the morning I meet with the head of class to discuss my observations from the classroom visits and delegate tasks for them to follow up during the day.



Besides the important work we do with parents to ensure they meet their obligation to get their children to school, we have a number of other attendance strategies aimed at the students.



Middle

Weekly operations meeting | Classroom observation

At 11.30am principals from all three campuses dial into a weekly operations meeting with our Coaching Principal to discuss the academy and campus specific strategies. This is a great opportunity to share and agree our continuous improvement strategies.

At lunchtime I always make time to talk with the students. They love sharing stories with me and it's a good way to build relationships outside of class time.

In the afternoon I undertake more classroom observations and pass on feedback to the teachers between

administration tasks. Building great teachers is one of the key elements of our program so there is a lot of professional development and support available. Receiving regular feedback from observations and information through daily data recording, enables them to develop their skills quickly.



Afternoon

Extended school day | Home visit | Staff meeting

At 2.40pm I walk students to the undercover area for the Club and Culture part of the program. We use an extended school day so that we can provide four hours of literacy and numeracy in the timetable and have time for our students to practice and learn about their culture and other enriching activities. There are few opportunities to learn other activities in the community, so the club and culture components allow us to provide sport, music and culture that is aligned to the Australian Curriculum.

At 3.00pm I join the behaviour management team to do home visits for students who have misbehaved during the day. Parents are more open to talking with us in their own homes and more willing to collaborate on ways to help their child. We talk to the parents about the behaviour incident that day

and any consequences. We also advise on how they can help us to improve behaviour.

After home visits I catch up with agencies who may have an appointment with me. Once a week at 4.00pm we have a staff meeting, attended by all staff, where we review last week's data, set targets and discuss strategies to improve student progress and mastery.

Afterwards I meet with administration staff or any teachers who have made appointments.

I finish the day by planning my priorities for the next day and making sure any staff notices and messages for parade are ready to go.



We use an extended school day so we can provide sufficient literacy and numeracy in the timetable...



This project is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education through the Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Programme.

Teaching in a Direct Instruction school

For more information about teaching Direct Instruction in our schools and current career opportunities, go to www.goodtogreatschools.org.au

Contact us

Phone: +61 7 4042 7200

Email: info@goodtogreatschools.org.au

Web: www.goodtogreatschools.org.au