Description
Instructional leadership expands the traditional role of the Principal by activating their knowledge and experience to directly improve teaching. Principals have always identified the direction for the school and developed a clear vision for growth and change. Instructional leadership refines this process by also establishing specific goals that equip staff with pedagogical skills and content knowledge to improve student outcomes.

Principals manage multiple, competing priorities, all of which must be addressed to ensure the smooth operation of the school. The focus of instructional leadership, promoting quality teaching and improving student outcomes, must be maintained in spite of these other urgent and diverse demands. Principals will often delegate responsibilities to other school leaders to maximise the effectiveness of instructional leadership.

Purpose
One purpose of instructional leadership is to overcome the impact of instructional failure through raising and sustaining the quality of teaching and learning in schools. The gap in achievement caused by differences in teaching widens over time (Dempster, 2012). Evidence shows that teacher effectiveness has a highly significant impact on improving student outcomes (Hattie, 2003). Instructional leadership is a valuable way to increase teacher effectiveness by equipping teachers with evidence-based, pedagogical skills and content knowledge.

Evidence Base
Instructional leadership has a more direct impact on student outcomes than other forms of leadership (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Evidence shows that “sustainable school improvement is seldom found without active, skilful instructional leadership from principals” (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). Robinson (et. al. 2008) found that the principals in schools that perform above expected levels were involved in curriculum planning, visiting classrooms and reviewing evidence of student outcomes. In addition to these actions, the Principal’s active involvement in teachers’ professional learning has been demonstrated to be the single most effective action of an instructional leader (Robinson, et.al. 2008).

Instructional Leadership in Action
Instructional leadership provides principals with an effective mechanism to improve teaching practice through a clear focus on a number of critical areas. Some of these are described as follows.

- **Instructional leadership shares the vision:**
  Principals develop and communicate a clear vision, grounded in shared goals and high expectations. Consensus about the shared vision enables principals to focus and coordinate actions to improve teaching practice. Embedding the shared vision in class routines and procedures provides a consistent approach across the school. Principals use evidence-based practices to drive the focus of the vision they establish across their school community.

- **Instructional leadership actively leads professional learning:**
  Principal’s active participation in professional learning has been shown to have the greatest influence on student learning, when compared with any other component of instructional leadership (Dempster, 2012). When principals are actively engaged in professional development, it demonstrates the value placed on this learning. They take part in conversations about teaching practice, provide effective feedback to staff and their expertise is enhanced.

- **Instructional leadership promotes disciplined dialogue:**
  Principals promote professional disciplined conversations to analyse qualitative and quantitative data about student progress, lesson observations and leadership activities. When data is reviewed it is interrogated to monitor the impact of teaching on student learning. It also informs planning and provides accountability. The outcomes of disciplined dialogue can impact both the focus of professional learning and the extent to which it is effectively transferring to classroom practice.

- **Instructional leadership builds capacity:**
  Principals carefully select key school leaders, developing their capacity to share the tasks involved in instructional leadership. Importantly, principals maintain the responsibility for instructional leadership while developing the collective capacity of other school leaders. They develop structures to support, evaluate and develop teaching quality in their school. Principals and school leaders conduct lesson observations and provide feedback to staff, working together to improve teaching. Teacher capacity is enhanced by collegial discussions regarding the impact of teaching practices on student outcomes in conjunction with lesson observations and feedback.
Instructional Leadership

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• Instructional leadership oversees curriculum and teaching:
  Principals actively oversee the coordination of the curriculum, working together with staff to determine areas that need reviewing. They ensure that all aspects of the curriculum including the teaching programs, assessments, professional learning and teaching practices are evidence-based. Making decisions regarding timetabling and minimising interruptions to core teaching time is critical. Principals regularly conduct walk throughs and classroom observations in order to monitor curriculum content and teaching practice.

• Instructional leadership resources strategically:
  Principals strategically allocate resources to improve the total school environment. In particular, principals make decisions about staffing and teaching resources that impact student learning. Principals, with teachers, influence the emotional and social conditions within the school by promoting student and staff well-being, seeking to create an orderly and supportive environment by resolving conflict quickly and effectively (Robinson, et. al. 2008).

Summary

Instructional leadership demands principals concentrate on increasing teaching quality to improve student outcomes. Focusing on the teaching practices that make a demonstrable impact on student learning requires systematic effort by principals over time, where actions are supported by a clear moral purpose and strong evidence base.

References


Diagnostic Assessment

Description
Many assessments are designed to provide teachers with information about the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students have developed over the course of their teaching, and as such, they summarise student progress. Diagnostic assessments, however, identify the specific skills and understandings students have and have not yet acquired at a particular point in time. In this way diagnostic assessment can directly inform the teaching program.

Diagnostic assessments are an essential component of instructional decision making. By identifying the skills that students have acquired, it can provide a baseline from which to determine whether students are on track to meet curriculum outcomes. In addition, diagnostic assessments assist teachers to detect the gaps that exist in student knowledge, and ascertain the intensity of intervention the student will require to fill those gaps.

Purpose
Teachers use diagnostic assessments to plan and adjust instruction, targeting areas where students require further teaching or extension. Teachers use the findings from diagnostic assessments to determine the success of their own instruction, adjusting the delivery and/or content as required (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Diagnostic assessments play a vital role in early detection of students who are not making sufficient progress. This is critical to ensure all students receive the teaching they require and do not fall behind (Rowe, 2006). Diagnostic assessments are used within a tiered interventions framework to determine if students require supplementary interventions, and to inform the design and delivery of that instruction (Ketterlin-Geller & Yovanoff, 2009). It is important to note that diagnostic assessments are not designed to stream or grade students. However, information gained from diagnostic assessments may be useful to guide the formation and focus of purposeful instructional groups.

Evidence Base
Evidence shows instructional decisions, informed by quality student data, have the potential to improve student achievement and performance. Data is indispensable to inform planning, to identify concepts for reteaching, and to differentiate instruction (Datnow & Park, 2014). Diagnostic assessments that enable teachers to adjust instruction promptly, at the time when misconceptions have occurred, ensures students are able to develop accurate knowledge and understandings (Wilson, 2005). Russell, O’Dwyer and Miranda (2009) found that when diagnostic assessments and instructional interventions are used concurrently, students performed significantly better than students who received typical classroom instruction without the guidance of diagnostic assessments.

Types of Diagnostic Assessment
Diagnostic assessments, such as the AISNSW ESTA-L™ (an Early Literacy screening tool), Dalwood Spelling Test, AISNSW Early Numeracy Screening Tool and Number Knowledge Test are used by teachers to plan effective instruction. These have specific administration guidelines and are delivered either to a class or a group of students. Timeframes for administering diagnostic assessments can differ depending on the design and purpose of the assessment. Some diagnostic assessments are standardised to reveal if students are achieving at, below or above the expected level in a specific area. Teachers choose specific diagnostic assessments to provide the most valuable information about the students in their class.

Diagnostic Assessments in Action
Information gained from diagnostic assessments has many uses across schools. Some of these are described below.

- Whole school instruction:
Consistent implementation of diagnostic assessments across year groups provides valuable information about the impact of instruction across the school. This enables principals and school leaders to monitor the effectiveness of instruction over time, determining any areas that may require targeted support. Disciplined dialogue, during the analysis of data, may highlight specific areas that require further development through demonstrations of explicit teaching lessons, professional learning and/or additional resources.
Class level:
Quality instruction requires a clarity of the scope and sequence of the learning content, as well as awareness of students’ knowledge, skills and understandings gained through regular assessment. Teachers use data from diagnostic assessments to determine the knowledge and skills their students have acquired and identify any areas that require further teaching. Diagnostic assessments can also be used to monitor progress and identify students who are at risk of not acquiring critical skills. Teachers use this information to make timely adjustments to instruction.

Teachers use diagnostic assessments prior to teaching to effectively plan instruction that targets the skills that have been identified in the assessments. These skills will then be taught in subsequent explicit teaching lessons and daily reviews. Data from diagnostic assessments are also used following teaching to determine the success of instruction.

Tiered interventions:
Diagnostic assessments can be used within a tiered interventions framework to identify students who require additional targeted support. These assessments provide in-depth information that informs the focus and intensity of the intervention. Using data from diagnostic assessments to make instructional decisions that impact the effectiveness of the interventions within Tier 2 or Tier 3 is essential. Diagnostic assessments can also provide teachers with the information needed to determine when supplementary interventions are no longer required.

Summary
Diagnostic assessments provide critical information to teachers, principals and school leaders about the effectiveness of instruction. Timely adjustments to instruction in the areas where it is required are essential for students who are not achieving grade level expectations. Selecting the most appropriate type of diagnostic tool is critical to ensure the most useful information is found and resources are used effectively.

References


Description

Tiered interventions offer a framework for schools to ensure that all students receive the intensity of instruction they require to be successful. It relies on continual monitoring of student learning, with additional attention to students whose learning is not progressing at the required rate. Such students receive a double or triple dose of instruction, as needed, within whole class lessons, small groups or individually.

Tiered interventions are grounded in the provision of high quality explicit teaching for all students through the regular class program (Tier 1). Students who do not make satisfactory progress also receive strategic, small group intervention (Tier 2). Specifically targeted, intensive interventions are provided to students for whom quality instruction at Tiers 1 and 2 has been insufficient (Tier 3). Critical to understanding this framework is that a student’s level is not a label or a fixed position but a reflection of his or her response to teaching at that point in time. Effective response is dependent upon the targeted collection of comprehensive diagnostic assessments and the analysis of that data.

Purpose

Student learning is the central business of a school and is the primary responsibility of all teachers. All schools endeavour to identify and support the wide range of learners found in each classroom. To be successful, students require variations to the frequency and duration of instruction they receive. At the same time schools strive to make the most effective use of existing resources. The tiered interventions model allows schools to effectively target resources, whilst ensuring that all students receive the instruction they need. Effective instruction within the classroom at Tier 1 should lead to success for 80-85% of students, greatly reducing the requirement for instruction at the other tiers. Building success in the regular classroom is more effective and sustainable than activating learning supports after failure has occurred.

Evidence Base

The concept of tiered interventions is based on the extensive Response to Intervention research (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). It is an effective means of delivering tailored instruction for all students in literacy and numeracy (O’Connor, Harty & Fulmer 2005; Hughes & Dexter, 2011). Burns et al. (2005) documented a reduction in both the costs associated with identifying students and the number of students referred for special education services when tiered interventions were in place. Improvements in learning outcomes in both reading and mathematics have also been identified when tiered interventions are implemented in conjunction with explicit instruction (Allsopp, McHatton & Farmer, 2010).
Tier 1: Class Program

In schools with effective tiered interventions, the classroom program, both in content and delivery, is sufficiently robust to ensure that at least 85% of students thrive. Instruction is explicit and systematic with clear learning objectives and success criteria. Teachers model, explain, and demonstrate in clear and consistent language. Students are actively engaged and demonstrate their learning throughout the lessons. Through frequent checking for understanding teachers continually adjust the pace and level of difficulty of the lesson, dependent upon student responses.

Tier 2: Strategic Support

Students not making expected progress in specific skills receive additional learning opportunities within the class setting. The class teacher may use differentiated examples, adjust seating plans, strategically reteach, provide extra opportunities for practice and/or supplementary small group instruction. Strategic support provides students with a double dose of instruction. More frequent monitoring is required for students receiving Tier 2 support to determine when additional support is no longer needed or when more intensive instruction is required.

Tier 3: Intensive Specialised Intervention

Tier 3 interventions are commenced when students require a triple dose of instruction. Interventions at Tier 3 deliver more intensive support targeting specific, identified skills. Tier 3 interventions are individualised in frequency, duration and group size depending upon the intensity of support required. Frequent progress monitoring to evaluate the impact of the additional teaching enables teachers to determine if Tier 3 support is no longer needed or if adjustments to the individualised program are required.

Whilst high quality, whole class, explicit instruction benefits all students, some students will still require additional instruction to meet curriculum outcomes. This support is most effective when both supplementary to and complementary of the whole class program.

References


Description

The Response to Intervention model reminds us that students require differing levels of instruction to learn the same skills and concepts. Whilst additional support can be provided at Tier 2 and Tier 3, it is the differentiated teaching within Tier 1 that provides the essential opportunities for all students to master key skills.

Differentiated teaching prioritises the adjustment of instructional variables such as the types of examples, the sequencing of steps and the allocation of time for instruction. This is to mitigate, as much as possible, the variable nature of the learners, so that each student receives sufficient instruction for the achievement of critical skills. This differs from what is sometimes known as differentiation, where the priority is to adjust the process and/or the product of learning to facilitate the participation of all students, regardless of their individual abilities. Whilst the goal of such differentiation is to ensure that all students can participate in the curriculum, differentiated teaching is driven by the need for all students to acquire critical learning.

Purpose

The purpose of differentiated teaching is to ensure that all students receive sufficient teaching to achieve curriculum skills and concepts. Not all students have the same prior knowledge and capacity, so teachers differentiate instruction within the class program. A student’s opportunities for success are maximised through the deliberate adjustments to the delivery of content. For example, presenting material in small increments increases student success by managing the limitations of working memory. Presenting too much information, too quickly, can lead to confusion for students as their working memory will be unable to process it. Presenting material in small increments is an appropriate way of managing the limitations of working memory (Rosenshine, 2012).

Evidence Base

Evidence shows that students achieve better outcomes in classrooms where instruction is differentiated than in classrooms where teachers make no adjustments to the delivery of content (Tomlinson et al., 2003). The most effective differentiated teaching occurs through fully-guided, systematic and explicit instruction (Rosenshine, 2012). Through explicit instruction, teachers are constantly and thoroughly able to check student understanding during the lesson and adjust their teaching to cater for all students (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). When teaching is differentiated through the provision of increased guidance, the gap between less skilled students and more skilled students is decreased because differentiated teaching enables less skilled students to catch up (Clark, Kirschner & Sweller, 2012).

Differentiated Teaching in Action

To effectively differentiate instruction, teachers maximise opportunities for all students to learn through a number of teaching strategies. Some strategies are described below.

- **Frequently checking for understanding:**
  The most effective teachers determine how successfully students are learning, whilst they are teaching by frequently checking their students’ understanding, and adjusting instruction based on student responses. Teachers provide multiple opportunities for students to respond through writing answers on white boards, pair-sharing, responding with gestures, providing verbal responses and orally answering targeted questions. Teachers take note of students who provide delayed, partially correct or incorrect responses and adjust their teaching in response. They may vary the pace of the lesson, reteach content in smaller steps, give specific feedback, provide extra guided practice and/or scaffold instruction to provide additional teaching.

- **Teach in small, cumulative increments using multiple examples to differentiate instruction:**
  Task analysis of content, including the identification of prerequisite skills, allows teachers to adequately identify the small steps and
specific examples required to assure student success. During whole class teaching and guided practice, teachers break content into fine increments and use examples of varying complexity. The examples will include 30% that are less complex examples, 40% at the expected level and 30% that are more complex examples to provide for the range of students in the class. Teachers use this range of examples in the presentation, guided practice and independent practice components of each lesson.

- **Provide additional scaffolds:**
  Teachers provide scaffolds to temporarily support students as they learn new material. Scaffolds such as models, prompts, ‘think-alouds’, checklists and cue cards enable teachers to tailor support to all students. Teachers initially provide high levels of guidance using scaffolds and they gradually withdraw scaffolds as students demonstrate understanding of the new material. Student success determines the duration that scaffolds are in place and the rate at which they are withdrawn. Teachers provide these variations during whole class lessons while presenting material, during guided and independent practice and when students are working in small groups.

- **Adjusting worked examples:**
  Teachers use worked examples when they demonstrate new content to provide cognitive supports to students (Rosenshine, 2012). When using a worked example, teachers show and clearly explain each step required to solve a problem. Worked examples are effective for students when they are learning new content and teachers keep worked examples in place longer for students who require them. They withdraw worked examples for students who have demonstrated their understanding of the content as once students demonstrate proficiency in the material being taught, worked examples become less effective (Clark, Kirschner, & Sweller, 2012).

- **Provide supplementary teaching:**
  Teachers provide additional instruction for low progress students in smaller instructional groups following whole class lessons. During instruction, teachers monitor students’ learning to determine if any students require additional teaching. Teachers use smaller instructional groups to explicitly reteach material and/or provide further guided practice. The activation of supplementary teaching is determined by students’ success and is therefore flexible. Students are given additional instruction when needed in particular content areas until mastery is demonstrated.

**Summary**

Effective, differentiated teaching is crucial for students’ success. It allows teachers to respond to students during teaching, making variations to the intensity of instruction. This ensures that all students receive the instruction they require to achieve grade level expectations.

### References


