

## **Cape York Aboriginal Academy Teams with NIFDI to Develop Internal Capacities**

*By Jane F. Carter, PhD.*

At a time when many schools are looking for quick fixes for student performance, the Cape York Australian Aboriginal Academy (CYAAA) schools, located in the far northern part of the country, stand out as shining exceptions. This organization, developed for the specific mission of serving underserved Aboriginal populations, has dedicated itself to achieving excellence by using Direct Instruction (DI) in its four schools.

Three years ago, CYAAA embarked on a unique mission to develop an exceptional teaching force able to implement the rigorous DI programs with fidelity on all four of their campuses. The National Institute for Direct Instruction (NIFDI) has been their partner from the beginning. Through years of intensive training provided by NIFDI, a passion for DI has been established in these schools and a teaching staff dedicated to fidelity of the programs is growing strong.

With NIFDI's assistance, the leadership at CYAAA has also increased internal capacity to sustain rigorous training and support using their own teacher-leaders. In Australia, the need for building capacity is particularly important because of the remote location for a couple of reasons. First, there aren't coaches nearby. The nearest coach is in Melbourne – thousands of miles away. Second, living and working in remote communities results in a high rate of teacher turnover (with, of course, the exception of a very small minority who find it their calling and have the mission engrained in who they are and what they do.) Without local capacity, schools would be perpetually dependent on NIFDI or other support providers, which can eventually become cost prohibitive.

Only three years ago, the entire DI training in Australia was provided by trainers who traveled to Cairns from the US for pre-service training of Aussie staff. January 2013, for the first time ever, all of the DI trainers were Aussie teachers. But, there were no short cuts allowed on the way to developing the Aussie training cadre. Teacher-trainers received intensive on-site coaching provided by NIFDI along with advanced training at the National Direct Instruction Conference sponsored by the Association for Direct Instruction (ADI) in Eugene, Oregon.

May-Brit Lane, one of the new Aussie trainers, describes the ADI Conference training this way, "I was amazed at how much I learned in such a short amount of time, they did a fantastic job. I am now confident in training others, and have learned a lot of tips and tricks along the way that I am now able to share with others."

Participants were impressed and excited by their Aussie colleagues who had been selected for advanced training based on their excellence in delivering DI programs for years. The trainers spoke with the authenticity and shared experience that only teachers who have actually taught in Aboriginal communities could express.

This year, CYAAA is bringing Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model of school wide discipline to its campuses. The intention to develop local support training and capacity has been duplicated in this initiative by developing local school teams and an Academy PBIS Facilitator. Training, support and reliability are central themes of developing organizational capacity with proven expertise.

Real and sustained school improvement focused on student outcomes is not a short-term, quick fix proposition and the teachers and staff at CYAAA know this. Developing expertise among their teaching staff will be central to the sustained implementation of DI over the years. Rather than yield to the pressure of shrinking budgets by reducing programs, CYAAA has solidified DI by developing cost-effective training opportunities. The enduring partnership and leadership provided by NIFDI supported, informed and backed local efforts and was central in providing training necessary to achieve the all-Aussie training team for the first time!

The need for capacity and fidelity is more far-reaching than just what it does for the local school and its students. The implementation garners countrywide attention that affects other aboriginal communities across the continent. Several articles about the Direct Instruction implementation in Cape York have appeared in the national press, and the head of the opposition party, Tony Abbott, has visited one of the schools, along with other prominent public figures. If the Cape York DI schools continue to implement DI successfully, which will involve expanding local capacity to support DI, many other schools in Australia may decide to implement this proven instructional approach.