

Instructional Rounds

3 September 2015

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Introduction

'This approach enables the knowledge-base of teachers to be used to develop theories of action that discipline the culture of teaching and learning in the school and across the network.'

**David Hopkins (2012) *Theories of Action for Teaching and Learning*,
www.rnlcom.com/.../Theories-of-Action-Instructional-Rounds_PDH-HA**

The concept of instructional rounds is derived from medical practice in teaching hospitals where medical professionals, at all stages of their careers, learn with and from each other using real patient problems. Instructional rounds are intended to create reliable and practical 'theories of action' that are based on collective observations and discussion of what works in real and specific situations.

The method has been widely adopted in the UK, Australia and the United States where it has helped teachers develop theories of action that:

1. Work across different phases of schooling in different school contexts.
2. Are characterised by an enquiry based approach to teaching.
3. Are strongly supported by research literature.

Ultimately, these theories of action can create a new teaching culture in schools that promotes both enquiry and achievement. To do this, schools need to have staff development strategies that build a common language of instructional practice within and across schools.

Instructional rounds involve teachers, local authority specialists and others, working in mixed teams, with networks of schools and in consultation with academic partners, to build and share best professional practice. They spend time in classrooms, looking at teaching in fine detail. They learn to talk in new ways about what they see (not in vague or judgemental generalisations).

Team members work together to develop a concept of what abstract ideas such as 'increased rigour' or 'critical thinking skills' should look like in real classrooms. They develop theories of action around what teachers and students would be saying and doing if critical thinking skills were being demonstrated, or what students would be working on if their tasks were really rigorous.

Ultimately, this is a way for teaching professionals to take control of their activity. And when things don't work out as they hoped, they have the collective power to problem-solve solutions from their own expertise and the research literature. This is a highly effective way of putting the Model for improvement into action.

Key Facts

Instructional rounds are an integral part of a broader three-step model designed to support delivery of interventions that have a positive impact on inequity and attainment. The three steps can be summed up in three questions:

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- How will we know that a change is an improvement?
- What change can we then make that will result in improvement?

This is, however, not just a simple three step/full-stop process. Each trio of steps can be viewed as one of a series – a single stage in a progressive cycle of change in which these three questions are repeatedly asked and, for each revolution, reviewed in order to establish

- What works?
- What needs to be changed and how?

The model requires engagement in a constant process of PLAN, DO, STUDY, ACT. As with any research initiative or programme, it should be considered and applied in the context of Six Key Questions that are crucial in the delivery of any change programme.

Six Key Questions:

1. Is there an agreed AIM that is understood by everyone in the system?
2. Are we using all our knowledge to find the RIGHT CHANGES and prioritise those likely to have the biggest impact in relation to our aim?
3. Does everyone UNDERSTAND THE METHODS we will use to improve the system?
4. Can we MEASURE and report progress on our improvement aim?
5. Are PEOPLE and RESOURCES deployed and developed in the best possible way to support improvement?
6. Do we have clear plans for INNOVATING, TESTING, IMPLEMENTING and SHARING LEARNING so we can translate and apply the improvement more widely?

How do Instructional rounds work?

There are four phases of activity.

1. **Problem of Practice** – a school network identifies a problem of practice as the focus for its learning. This problem:
 - focuses on a particular teaching issue
 - is directly observable
 - is within the school's/authority's control and is something that can be improved in real time
 - is connected to a broader strategy of school and/or system improvement
 - has the potential to make a significant difference to student learning.

2. **Observation of Practice** – the team (teachers, other education professionals and relevant stakeholders) spends time looking at classroom teaching in a focused, systematic and purposeful way. Typically, groups of four or five visitors observe in five or six classrooms for about 20 minutes each. The host site selects the classrooms to reflect the chosen problem of practice. The team has learned to take careful descriptive notes and to pay special attention to students and the tasks they are actually doing (which are not always what they have been asked to do).

They collect data that is:

- descriptive, not evaluative
- specific
- directly relevant to teaching practice
- related to the problem of practice.

3. **Observation Debrief** – the observation teams discuss data in a specific sequence:

- Describing what has been observed
- Analysing descriptive evidence, for example looking for patterns and ways of organising the data
- Predicting what students have learned, locating themselves in the place of the students - if I had done everything the teacher told me to do, what would I know and be able to do?

4. **Next Level of Work** – in order to benefit from this activity the group needs to

- Brainstorm the next level of work
- Share theories of action with the local authority
- Share information on context, including resources, relevant professional development and influence/impact of any current initiatives.
- Develop collective suggestions for consideration/implementation at school level and at LA level
- Make explicit links between these suggestions and the LA's (and school's) theory of action.

Example

Where?

The Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) has about 100 elementary, middle and high schools, located near San Francisco in California.

What?

In 2014 the OUSD decided to roll out instructional rounds district wide. The plan was for every school in the district to host two rounds, visiting over 800 classrooms and observing the learning experience of 10,000 children. The broad focus for rounds was 'academic discussions'.

Why?

The OUSD's manager of leadership development, Davina Goldwasser, identified a core issue which all schools have experienced – that, too often, they are propelled into taking actions and initiatives to 'mend' a problem without having clear evidence that these actions will work for them – a 'quick fix' somewhere else doesn't always transfer into a different school and a different set of circumstances. Instructional rounds offer a way for teachers to work together to identify the roots of their specific problem and select the most promising solutions together, refining them in the light of practice.

Who?

Davina trained 42 Instructional Rounds facilitators (administrators, coaches and special assignment teachers) and worked with principals to prepare for the observations. She created data tools and reports on impact while also facilitating responses to the needs that were identified from the data collected.

Who benefited?

The focus on Academic Discussions has led to immediate action on the issues identified, using a wide range of media and approaches. These are still early days but, so far, there has been a very positive response to the initiative from all involved and, perhaps most importantly, there is evidence that the work is resulting in improved student learning.

The work so far is evidence of the capacity of schools to work collaboratively on a large and ambitious, but carefully designed and focused, professional development plan. Teachers, principals, and district staff have worked and learned together for a shared purpose. Rounds offer a very different kind of professional development experience and schools have emerged with a real time action plan based on the observers' evidence.

This is an adult learning experience that mirrors the rigour we want to see in our classrooms.

Advice from Oaklands

Rounds take a significant amount of time and everyone needs to be fully prepared. Before your first round you should:

- spend time reading about Instructional Rounds so you are well informed
- bring a team together to devise a plan for rounds that meets your school's needs
- if possible, shadow a round in action at another school.

Throughout, stay true to the agreed structure and focus – if you don't the power of the activity may be diminished and you will not have such a rich experience.

There are some excellent books, guides and on-line resources. One very useful guide is:
<https://prezi.com/ntddozznyxzi/copy-of-instructional-rounds-in-education/>

Suggested reading

Learning from Instructional Rounds by City, E. 2011.

Coaching: The New Leadership Skill, pp 36-41 Available at
<http://aiu3piic.wikispaces.com/file/view/Instructional+Rounds.pdf>

Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning by City, E.; Elmore, R .; Fiarman, S.; Teitel, L 2009.

Further information on the OUSD example above, including resource materials can be found at:
<https://sites.google.com/a/ousd.k12.ca.us/instructional-rounds/home>

A brief YouTube overview of OUSD Instructional Walks is available at:
Also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FM8yPvz_b2k

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