

GUIDES TO ENQUIRY

INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS



Consortium Canolbarth y De
Central South Consortium

Gwasanaeth Addysg ar y Cyd
Joint Education Service

Grymuso ysgolion i wella deilliannau i bob dysgwr

Empowering schools to improve outcomes for all learners

CONTEXT

One of the key ways in which doctors learn their craft is through the process of medical rounds. Often led by a senior consultant, younger practitioners are invited to examine the symptoms which a patient is exhibiting and explore the possible causes of those symptoms. Without an accurate diagnosis prescribing the right treatment is not just difficult it is potentially dangerous. The Instructional Rounds process is based upon the idea that a group of educational professionals might walk a school focused upon a particular challenge the school is facing. In the course of that round the enquiry team explores practice focused upon instruction. In the US instruction is used to describe the process of teaching and learning, contrasting instruction with curriculum. Curriculum is the content of the lesson, instruction the ways in which the teacher endeavours to ensure children learn that content. Created by a team from Harvard led by Richard Elmore the instructional rounds process draws together groups of teachers and school leaders who are exercised by a similar problem of practice. They work together to create novel approaches to overcoming that problem and support one another in the implementation and refinement of those new approaches. Using instructional rounds as the means by which they continually revisit practice and enquire into what works and what they might do differently.

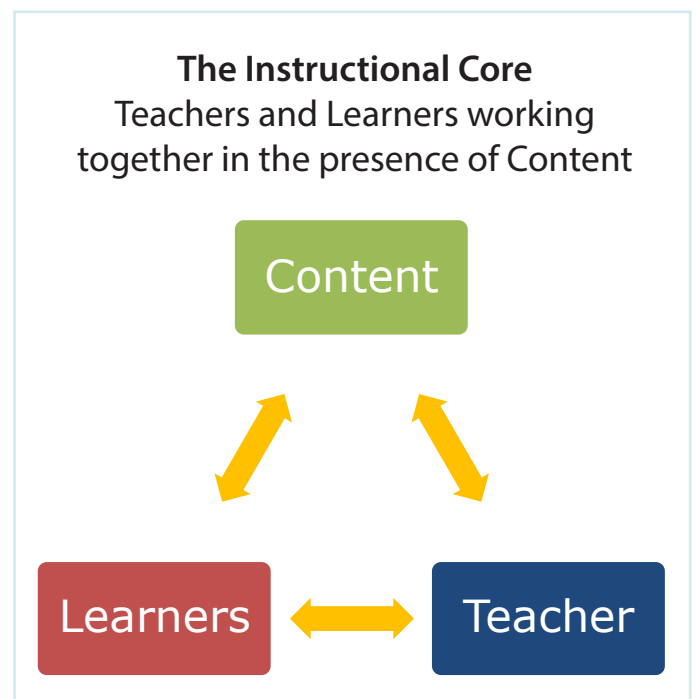
The methodology developed at Harvard focuses upon the Instructional Round process being a leadership tool, helping schools to work together to develop practice and enhance learning. However, it is equally applicable for groups of classroom practitioners who wish to come together to focus upon classroom practice in a focused, systematic, purposeful and collective way.



KEY INGREDIENTS

The Instructional Core

The whole Instructional Rounds process is rooted in a view of the classroom which is based upon the idea of the instructional core. Elmore suggests that there are only three ways to improve classrooms; changing the content, changing the teaching approach, or changing the way the children engage with the learning. He also argues that if you change one of them then inevitably the other two must change. This powerful insight enables the enquirers to explore how the changes to one of these might impact on the others and thereby outcomes for children. In the instructional rounds process the instructional core is both the lens through which classrooms are observed and the framework for analysing what was learned from those observations.



A PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

This is the focus for improvement. The aspect of classroom practice which the enquiry team wish to use the Instructional Rounds process to help them overcome. Often it is an aspect of practice which, despite huge efforts, has resisted the approaches taken and is still causing problems. Whatever the focus for the problem of practice it needs to be something which is directly observable in classrooms; something which the enquiry team can learn more about from observation rather than looking elsewhere for new strategies. In building an enquiry question around a problem of practice there needs to be two parts. The aspect of practice the enquiry team wish to focus upon and the impact they wish to have on learners.

Non-judgmental Observation

The instructional rounds process is based upon the idea of medical rounds. What medical practitioners are doing in those rounds is resisting the temptation to jump too quickly to making a diagnosis. The process is about describing symptoms in finer and finer detail until they are absolutely confident they can make a diagnosis, a judgment as to what is the cause of those symptoms.

MEDICAL ROUNDS

Doctors are taught not to diagnose

- Taught to look for medical signs and symptoms
- Taught to build case histories
- Taught to look for even finer details
- To start from the position that there is a problem of practice – then build the medical history
- Only then can you make a diagnosis
- When you jump to diagnosis because of the most obvious signs and symptoms there is a real DANGER that you jump to the wrong diagnosis
- And prescribe the wrong treatment!

Whenever professionals walk into a classroom the instantly begin to make judgements; they spot things they like, things they are discomforted by and things they would do differently. The danger in making those judgements is that we don't recognise our own preconceptions about what we expect to see in good classrooms. Being tied into those implicitly held preconceptions hinders our ability to discover new possibilities.

Being cognisant of this when exploring a problem of practice which is proving persistent and difficult to overcome is vitally important. In observing practice we need to find ways of suspending judgement. The instructional rounds process overcomes the challenge of making non-judgmental observations by inviting participants to simply describe what they are experiencing. The instructional core provides the framework for making those observations.

A Theory of Action

A theory of action is a statement which links an action to an outcome; if we change this, then that will happen. An existing problem of practice is often based upon a theory of action where that causal link didn't happen. We did this so that would happen and it didn't! What the instructional rounds process aspires to do is to take that flawed theory of action and through enquiry into practice develop a new one. Then agree to test it out and come back together to explore its efficacy.



OBSERVING OF PRACTICE

Facilitating the process

The first role of the facilitator of the instructional rounds process is to share with the staff room the purpose of the process and how the aspiration is to help them to get more clarity about how they might collectively overcome the identified problem of practice;

This is what your school aspired to, so what is the reality and how can the enquiry team help you to find a better way forward?

The member of the enquiry team who is facilitating the process can't possibly be a member of each of the observation groups during the process. This means it is vital in the briefing meeting before the observations begin that every member of the team is aware of purpose, process and the protocols which will make those observations safe for observer and observed.

PURPOSE

Our purpose is to focus upon how we can help the school to overcome this problem of practice.

PROCESS

The instructional rounds process invites us to describe, not make judgements about, classrooms.

PROTOCOLS

The school is opening up its practice to enquiry and nothing we learn in the course of the enquiry which has the potential to hurt anyone in the school should be shared beyond this group.

Building a picture

The first question to ask when planning the observation process is where the enquiry team should go in order to build the richest picture they can of practice around the area of focus. Given that this should usually be done in the course of a morning it may mean that some rejigging of timetables is necessary in order to see the things they need to see. The team should split into groups, preferably pairs but a maximum of threes. They should aspire to visit a range of classrooms in the course of the morning, each group visiting the same classrooms but at different times. Observations should be brief, never lasting more than 10 or 15 minutes. In this way a diverse range of episodes will be observed and a rich data set will be created.



Creating a Lens for Observation

The observation must be shaped by the problem of practice. The aspect of practice those involved in the enquiry believe needs a fresh perspective on if it is to be overcome. However it must also be focused upon the instructional core. These are non-judgemental observations which simply describe what you are experiencing in each classroom. When observing through the lens of the instructional core Elmore suggests that task determines outcome so the first focus should be on the tasks children are engaged with. He goes on to suggest that teaching causes learning. So the other things to focus upon are the things children are saying and doing and the things adults are saying and doing.

So the lens for observation has two parts; the first is the focus of the problem of practice, the second the questions the instructional core asks of that practice.

PROBLEMS OF PRACTICE

- We've restructured the way we deploy support staff so that we can accelerate the learning of our most vulnerable learners but our assessment data tells us that those children still aren't making the progress we aspire to.
- We've introduced a new approach to the teaching of phonics but children aren't making the progress we hoped for.
- The maths department has agreed to focus upon a learning sequence which involves 4 processes; connect to prior learning, teach new concepts, practice new concepts, apply new concepts. We are seeing some improvements in outcomes for children but it's inconsistent and we don't know why.
- We've been trying new approaches to challenging the most able children in our classrooms but still feel their learning could go to another level.

Each of these problems of practice then leads to the creation of an enquiry question. From the problem of practice the enquiry question focuses upon how things might be different in the future.

ENQUIRY QUESTIONS

- What new approaches might we adopt to ensure classroom support staff have a significant impact on children's learning?
- What are the barriers to progress we are encountering in the teaching of phonics and how might we overcome them?
- What are the causes of the inconsistencies we see in mathematics progress across our department and how do we help one another to achieve consistently high outcomes for learners?
- What new strategies might we develop in order to meet the needs of our most able learners?



Walking the School

The notes the observers make should be absolutely focused upon using these three aspects of classroom life to explore the problem of practice. Although a brief corridor conversation between observations may be helpful in checking out what group members have captured the danger is that in those conversations participants jump to judgmental comments about what they like and dislike.

Describing what you are experiencing in each of the classroom episodes observed should be done on a recording sheet. A new sheet should be started every time you enter a new classroom. The first box, 'What is the Focus for the Enquiry', should already be printed on the recording sheet. This is the enquiry question which has emerged from the problem of practice. The two parallel boxes, 'What are children saying and doing' and 'What are adults saying and doing', are where descriptions of what is happening in each classroom should be recorded. The final box should not be filled in during the observation or in the corridor after the observation. The questions 'So what were the tasks children were involved in' and 'So what was the learning purpose of those tasks', should be filled in during the post observation debrief.

RECORDING SHEET	
What is the Focus of Enquiry:	
What were children saying and doing?	What were adults saying and doing?
So what were the tasks children were involved in?	
So what was the learning purpose of those tasks?	

This gives observers a structure to use the instructional core to describe current practice and provision in the area of the problem of practice.

LEARNING FROM PRACTICE

Observation before Analysis

Making judgments about what is happening in classrooms and why is the only way practitioners can begin to understand what they might do differently in the future. What the instructional rounds process does by employing non-judgemental observation is slow that process down and create space for collaborative reflection. The process involves four steps; observation, analysis, prediction and evaluation. These create a frame which is at the heart of the process;

Observation before Analysis

Describe what you saw and heard

Analysis before Prediction

Analyse what the descriptive evidence means

Prediction before Evaluation

Predict what the children are actually learning

The enquiry team must view the school which volunteers to host the first round as a laboratory for the day; a laboratory where they are going to explore practice and from that exploration develop new approaches to teaching and learning. Throughout that exploration it is important to remember that the process is inquisitive not inquisitorial. The team is learning together not engaging in a monitoring or accountability process.

Analysis before Prediction

In the course of a morning of non-judgemental observations the enquiry team has built a really rich data set around the problem of practice. In the analysis of that data the focus should be in making meaning; this is what we saw and heard so what does it mean? To process the non-judgemental observation data and extract insight into what it means for next practice involves going through a series of steps;

Step 1: Individual Analysis

The first step is for each individual member of the enquiry team to spend time examining their own data. Going back through the descriptions made in each of the classroom observations to draw out what they feel are the significant moments. Each time they find something significant it needs to be recorded on a separate post-it note. The post-it notes should have two parts:

- Description of the classroom activity
- Justification as to why it is significant

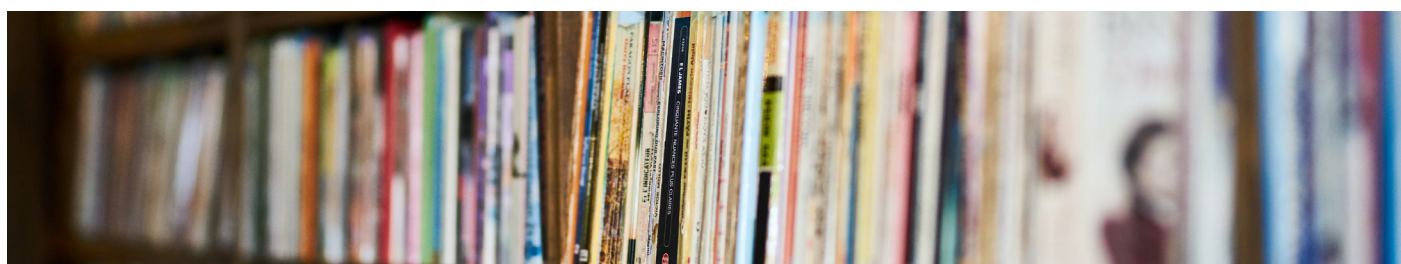
Each individual should go through each of their recording sheets building a set of post-it notes.

Step 2: Group Analysis

In the next phase of the process the enquiry team should work in the groups in which they did the observations. Whilst sharing their post-it notes and their justifications the group discuss what is emerging, the purpose of the session is for each group to create a set of emergent themes under which they feel they can classify each of the post-it notes. Once done they should be prepared to share their classifications with other groups.

Step 3: Team Analysis

As each group in turn shares its classification, and its reasons for choosing those headings, the task is to identify a set of common themes under which the data of the whole team can be drawn together. Then to create flip-charts with headings for each of those themes on to which each individual can place their post-it notes.



Step 4: Drawing Pattern

Once the flip charts have been filled with post-it notes the team should re-arrange into different groups. Each group taking a flip chart and extracting from the post-it notes the key insights from the enquiry into practice. This should be represented on flip chart sheets so that a gallery of those sheets can be created.

Step 5: New Insight

With the gallery created the focus should return to the problem of practice which was the focus for enquiry. Once again the process of sense making should go from individual engagement with the outcomes, to group and then whole team. The focus should be around these questions:

- What patterns of practice are emerging
- What insight does this give us about current practice?
- What implications might this have for next practice?

Prediction before Evaluation

Going back to the instructional core the team is now in a position to explore, predict, what the children were learning and what needs to change if learning is to be more effective and the problem of practice is to be overcome. In those questions about insight into current and next practice the group are beginning to explore what the next level of work might be. The problem of practice emerged from a theory of action which was not being acted out in the reality of the classroom. The task of the team is to use the insight from enquiry to create a new theory of action and decide what practical activities they might generate in classrooms so that it can be lived out in practice.

MOVING TO NEXT PRACTICE

A New Theory of Action

A theory of action is based upon the prediction that if certain things are done, things will happen which will lead to better outcomes for learners. The instructional core suggests that the things that need to change lie in three areas:

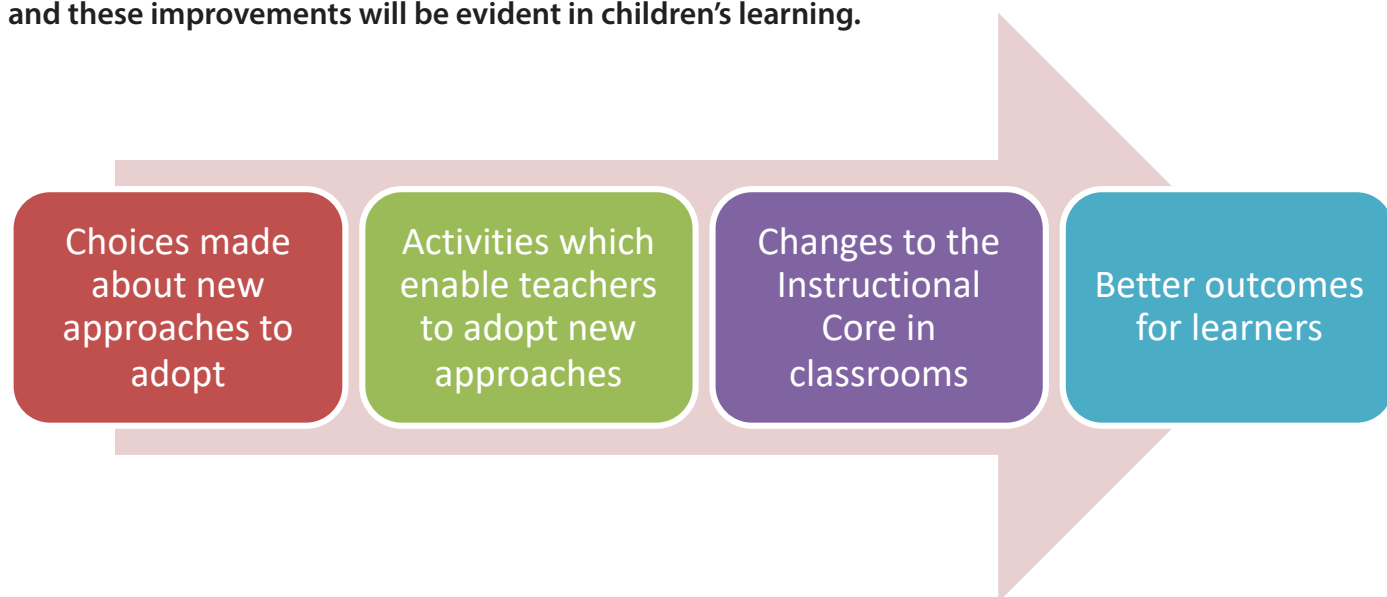
- The behaviours of teacher
- The behaviours of children
- The task children are asked to engage with



Starting with the End in Mind

What the new theory of action should describe is a series of causal links, which if it is enacted will lead to the desired outcome for learners.

If we choose to do these things differently, then that will happen and these improvements will be evident in children's learning.



Creating a Plan of Action

Having identified what new approaches need to be taken if learning is to be taken to the next level a project plan needs to be drawn up. Conversations need to take place about who will be involved and what the time frames are for the activity.

- What new approaches to overcoming the problem of practice?
- Who should be involved in the implementation of those new approaches?
- What learning opportunity for those teachers needs to take place so that they fully understand the new approach
- When will they meet to plan the detail of how those new approaches will be implemented
- How will we evaluate the impact of those new approaches on learning?

An Ongoing Cycle of Activity

Rounds are cyclical, they are a means by which a group of schools or a group of professionals can work and learn together over a prolonged period of time. Having identified the next level of work and instigated classroom activity, the next round should be in one of the other partner schools. The focus should be the same and the enquiry question should be asking the extent to which those innovative activities overcame the problem of practice. This may be a repeating cycle with an intractable problem, but it may be a new problem of practice becomes the focus for the network of practitioners. Whatever the focus practiced regularly practitioners will become more skilful at using the processes and instructional rounds will become a more and more powerful tool for change.



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