

4-2015

Creating a Cycle of Continuous Improvement Through Instructional Rounds

Catherine L. Meyer-Looze
Grand Valley State University, meyerlca@gvsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/coe_articles



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

ScholarWorks Citation

Meyer-Looze, Catherine L., "Creating a Cycle of Continuous Improvement Through Instructional Rounds" (2015). *Peer Reviewed Articles*. 11.

https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/coe_articles/11

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at ScholarWorks@GVSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Peer Reviewed Articles by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@GVSU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@gvsu.edu.

Creating a Cycle of Continuous Improvement Through Instructional Rounds

This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.



Catherine L. Meyer-Looze
Grand Valley State University

Instructional Rounds is a continuous improvement strategy that focuses on the technical core of educational systems as well as educators collaborating side-by-side. Concentrating on collective learning, this process only makes sense within an overall strategy of improvement. This case study examined the Instructional Rounds process in a northern Michigan school district. Pressure points identified included a culture of distrust, an unclear definition of learner outcomes and effective teaching, and a status quo view of improvement. Supportive strategies for change were identified and continue to be implemented as part of the district's continuous improvement strategy.

Introduction

Schools must tackle a variety of instructional problems that are ever-present and emergent. The complex adaptive nature of instructional needs requires the use of the most valuable resources that schools have available to them: people. According to Schmoker (2010), “The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community” (p. 1).

There have been many reform initiatives and movements throughout the years that have either gone by the wayside or have been continually recycled without any real sustainable progress in schools (Kotter, 1996; Marzano & Waters, 2009). Although well-conducted educational research might appear to offer answers, due to many factors, educational research does not replicate well in different settings. Two of the factors that might contribute to this include the inability to properly train school personnel and the inability to create a capacity for learning in the face of a school’s current climate (Schmoker, 2010). Ultimately, these shortcomings tend to limit improvement results (Kotter, 1996; Marzano & Waters, 2009).

Background

Fullan (2006) stated that effective teachers must be treated as active learners. Teachers should be empowered and taught to make decisions based upon relevant data and be treated as active researchers or scientists in trying to solve whatever problems might exist in their classroom or school (Schmoker, 2010). Oblinger (2003) provided deeper insight into this issue, indicating that an essential component to facilitating learning is to understand the learner. One researcher claimed that systemic problems become activated when a school tries to adopt an adult learning process absent an understanding of the learner (Roberts, 2012).

Teaching has historically been an isolated profession (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Schmoker, 2006). Traditionally, when the classroom doors close, what happens between the teacher and learner is a mystery. In addition, a culture of fear appears to follow high-stakes standardized testing as schools respond to what policy-makers say students should know and be able to do (Sagor, 2003). Teachers and principals everywhere are scrambling to raise test scores without really paying attention to methods for increasing learning within their school or district (Elmore, 2000). What Schmoker (2010), Elmore and Burney (1999), Newmann and Wehlage (1995), and others have suggested is breaking through that culture of fear by working together and looking closely at our students and the tasks we are asking them to do in the presence of rich content. If educators work together with a clear focus on the technical core of schools, which is teaching and learning, and with a developmental stance, some believe that reform is more apt to take a firm foothold (Elmore, 2008).

The technical work in education includes the interaction of student, teacher, and content. Changes cannot be made to one unless they are made to all three (Elmore, 2008). At the center of the technical work, also termed the instructional core, are the tasks teachers are asking the students to do, as well as the tasks students are actually doing (City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel, 2009). These might be the same—or not.

Instructional Rounds Process

Instructional Rounds is a strategy of continuous improvement. Throughout the process, educators take a close look at the instructional core—at what is really happening between teacher and student in the presence of content—by analyzing the tasks teachers are asking the students to do, as well as what the students are actually doing (City et al., 2009). Instructional Rounds is also a culture-building process. It works best when it is part of a system-wide improvement strategy instead of a stand-alone strategy. Rounds only make sense within an overall strategy of improvement that contains specific learning goals. These goals must be directly related to the gaps identified through the setting of a clearly articulated vision and data analysis. Rounds is not an evaluation tool or a process to lead to evaluation. Rather, it is a focus on collective learning instead of individual learning (City et al., 2009).

According to City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009), the process of Rounds includes the following steps:

1. The identification of a problem of practice
2. The observation of current practice within the instructional core
3. The observation data debrief, which includes describing, analyzing, and predicting
4. The identification of the next level of work

One of the first steps in the process is for a school's leadership team or school improvement team to determine on what problem they should focus on as a school, based upon tangible data. The data should identify a gap between where the school wishes to be and how it is currently functioning, based upon its vision statement. When the school team has identified a focus area (i.e., a problem of practice), they request a visit from a network of educators who have been trained in the process of Instructional Rounds. The visitors will offer observational data to support, refute, or provide more information about the identified problem of practice.

Working with trained facilitators, the network of educators visits approximately four random classrooms for at least 20 minutes each in teams of four to six individuals. Each team visits different classrooms and/or visits at different times of the class period. After a round of visits, the network convenes in their teams to look at the data they have collected through an affinity mapping protocol (NSRF, n.d.) (Appendix A), which is a structured way of bringing order to the observational data. First, visitors are asked to identify 6-8 pieces of observational evidence and share with their team. Then, the team begins to categorize the pieces of evidence and suggest patterns as well as infer what the observational data might be telling them. Once the teams go through the protocol of debriefing, analyzing, and predicting, they suggest next levels of work for the school in their same teams or as a whole network.

These suggestions are then given to the host school by the facilitator(s), with a debriefing that will help move the school forward addressing its identified problem of practice. The school team decides what suggested strategies, or next level of work on which they wish to work (City et al., 2009). If the school team finds they need more information, they can request another visit from the network of educators.

After some time of working with strategies, that either do or do not work, the school team develops some theories around their strategies or actions they have taken. These theories help to define and refine the work they do with students and the tasks teachers ask students to complete.

These theories also may be supported or refuted based upon a triangulation of analytical and observational data.

This cycle can continue indefinitely. Instructional Rounds is a strategy within a cycle of continuous improvement highlighted within the instructional core, which is where authentic teaching and learning improvements are made.

Research Questions

The research presented in this article describes the work of a continuous improvement strategy that focused on the technical core of educational systems as well as educator collaboration. The following questions were explored:

- How does the process of Instructional Rounds distribute and build leadership capacity for all within the system?
- How can the process of Instructional Rounds assist in identifying areas needing improvement within the system?
- What strategies, skills, and processes support Instructional Rounds as an improvement strategy?

Methodology

A case study approach was chosen for this study. The aim of this case study was to describe the school improvement process in one public school district. The study examined the state of improvement work based on critical enablers of school culture for successful use of the Rounds process. Rounds put pressure on the organization in ways the schools had not confronted before (Roberts, 2012). This case study looked closely at a journey of school improvement caused by those pressure points. It also uncovered strategies used to mitigate those pressure points so that the work of improvement was able to continue.

This study used multiple data points. Data included teacher and administrator interviews, direct observations, artifacts, archival records, and reflection statements collected by the researcher. Artifacts and other evidence collected included meeting agendas and minutes, documents detailing written problems of practice from multiple schools and their revisions, protocols created, used, and revised by the facilitators; and dates of school visits.

The researcher used three strategies suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) to analyze the data collected in this case study: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interviews and reflective statements were both transcribed and then combined for each response to the question in the protocol. The responses were marked for patterns and similar responses. The researcher identified emerging themes from the responses.

Other data collected were also reduced and analyzed from general to specific trends and emerging patterns. Observations were made of behaviors, situations, interactions, and environments. Topics were identified from the observation and put into categories and then from categories to patterns. Conclusions were inferred based on the patterns and categories identified. Emerging patterns were further reduced to identify specific activity, which could impact the researcher's interpretation taken from the data collected. Implications and recommendations for practice emerged from the data reduction strategies.

This study was designed to examine the implementation of Instructional Rounds in one district. Therefore, this study presents explanatory data on the subject of the implementation of Instructional Rounds, and making generalizations is limited to the scope of this study.

The researcher was the professional development director in the district at the time of this study. She first implemented Instructional Rounds at one high school with early success and expanded the process to all of the schools within the district, which included two large high schools, one alternative high school, two middle schools and 13 elementary schools. The purpose of sharing this journey was to describe a typical story of a reform initiative to provide some insight into the implementation of Rounds as well as offer strategies to improve the process of implementation.

In the following sections, the researcher did interweave the theory of Instructional Rounds with the findings of the study. This approach was taken in efforts to suggest ways the work of continuous improvement through the use of Instructional Rounds can be supported in other districts and schools.

Instructional Rounds: Building Structures for Leadership Capacity

You don't have a strategy unless it is in the heads, hearts, and hands of every person in the organization (Constante, 2010). One way to enhance the distribution of leadership in a school is to provide some structures within the Instructional Rounds process. Structures that have been found to be helpful in this process include establishing leadership teams within each school to guide the continuous improvement process, identifying trained facilitators for each school, and establishing norms of behavior throughout the entire process.

For example, the target of this research was a district located in Northern Michigan (NMPS) that serves approximately 10,000 students. The purpose of employing Instructional Rounds in this situation was to target individual building-wide improvements while also identifying patterns across the district that would facilitate district-wide improvement. To successfully implement this continuous improvement strategy, some structures needed to be put in place that would flatten an existing hierarchical leadership structure and build leadership capacity in educators across the district, regardless of their position title.

Establish Leadership Teams

The first of these structural changes was for each building to establish a leadership team consisting of the principal and teachers across the building interested in leading the school in a uniform direction (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; Marzano, 2010). Characteristics of a leadership team member included: (a) respect for and influence among colleagues, (b) knowledge and leadership capacity, (c) unique perspective, (d) specialized training, (e) relationships with key members of the staff, and (f) a sense of the school's history (vonFrank, 2011). Those chosen to be on the leadership team needed to understand their roles and responsibilities, which included determining a vision for the school, collecting current data, understanding the cycles of continuous improvement, and using their influence to move staff forward on well-crafted goals (based on the evidence) in collaboration with the principal. The number of teacher leaders on the team depended on the size of the building. Smaller elementary buildings might have only three or four teachers on their leadership teams, while secondary

buildings had anywhere from six to 10 leadership team members. Some schools called this a “school improvement” team; others, a “data” team.

The primary function of each leadership team was to work with their respective principals in establishing goals for the school by surfacing gaps and challenges through a data inquiry process. Each leadership team looked at data the school and district provided to identify a problem of practice for their school. They also helped to carry the collective message back to the other teachers in their buildings, articulating the building’s vision and providing professional learning directions and opportunities in relation to their theories of action. Many of these professional learning opportunities were provided via facilitated professional learning communities, which were scheduled in 90-minute segments six times a year.

Establish Facilitators

A second structure put in place involved 10 teacher/administrator pairs who served as facilitators to the buildings. Each building had a pair of facilitators who worked with the staff throughout the Instructional Rounds process. They worked with the leadership teams to identify a problem of practice, facilitated the actual Instructional Rounds visit, and debriefed with either the leadership team or the whole staff on the results of the visit, including suggested next levels of work.

These 20 facilitators also served as a leadership team for the overall process of Instructional Rounds within the district. They met as a team regularly, evaluating the process and identifying successes and challenges. They also provided professional learning opportunities to the district as patterns began to emerge regarding areas of need. The facilitators worked with the original Instructional Rounds protocols they received from Harvard’s Professional Education seminars, but they also were empowered to revise and adapt the protocols to meet the needs of the individual buildings. Facilitators met after each building visit to debrief and discuss what worked and what did not. They utilized collaboration as a way to continuously improve the processes they were implementing.

Establish Participant Norms

Finally, a norm was established that helped to distribute the leadership and build capacity in others. This norm was the notion of “side-by-side learners.” When staff were involved with the Instructional Rounds process, titles and labels were set aside. It was with deliberate intention that all professional facets of the organization were involved with the process—from union leaders to central office administrators, building leaders, board of education members, and teachers. Beliefs and assurances were drafted to help secure a mutual understanding of the importance of the work and the commitment of all involved (Appendix B). When participating in Rounds within the building, everyone needed to be present from start to finish, engaging in every aspect of the process. Groups were carefully crafted to ensure a collaborative and equal discussion in which all voices were heard.

Instructional Rounds: Identifying Needed Improvements

Instructional Rounds can put pressure on an organization in ways it has not confronted before

(Roberts, 2012). If improvements are “stuck” in a school or district, then work-around efforts and culture change need to occur. This research looked closely at some of those pressure points the NMPS district encountered: (a) a culture of distrust, (b) an unclear definition of learner outcomes and effective teaching, and (c) a status quo view of intelligence and improvement.

Trust

To effectively distribute the leadership that goes along with building leadership capacity, there must be a foundation of trust among the educators within the system. NMPS discovered a lack of trust rather quickly. The more the teachers in multiple buildings were asked to discuss and analyze aspects of the instructional core, the more issues and problems around management kept getting in the way. It was obvious teachers were not comfortable “opening their doors” to their colleagues to engage in discussions that highlighted what they were asking students to do or even what the students were accomplishing.

In addition, there were a couple of individual building teams that were so excited about the process they went off the agreed-upon protocols resulting in the teacher union leadership immediately putting a halt to the process. This led to multiple in-depth discussions about why the district was engaging in the Instructional Rounds process. All agreed, regardless of status within the district, that the purpose of Instructional Rounds was to improve teaching and learning across the whole building and the whole district. It was not evaluative; it did not target individual teacher performance. Thus, to move forward, systems were put in place to ensure the fidelity of the process. One system, previously mentioned, included the Beliefs and Assurances document (Appendix B). This document included norms of behavior all Instructional Rounds participants would agree to follow. This document was reviewed and signed before every Rounds visit.

Another system put in place included the review of protocols used within the overall process and facilitation. Facilitators had the authority to revise protocols, as they deemed necessary to meet the needs of the buildings for which they were responsible. However, each revised protocol was shared with all other facilitators, and the facilitators met after every Instructional Rounds visit to reflect upon what worked and what did not.

Learner Outcomes and Effective Teaching

Another challenge to the work of improvement was a lack of definition and shared understanding about learner outcomes and effective teaching. As problems of practice were identified, it quickly became evident that many people within the district had a different definition of each learner outcome, as well as vastly differing thoughts about effective teaching. Many problems of practice were identified around student engagement, but there were many different thoughts on what student engagement should look like and what strategies should be utilized to increase engagement. As a result, the district’s school improvement teams took a school year to define each of the learner outcomes, including bringing in student work and student evidence to illustrate each outcome. These definitions were then rolled out to each building through the principals and a member of each building’s leadership team.

Defining effective teaching was an ongoing process and changed with district leadership. In the first year of Instructional Rounds, NMPS defined effective teaching through the lens of

Newmann’s framework of authentic instruction and assessment (Newmann & Associates, 1996). Subsequently, however, the district decided to align with regional schools in adopting Marzano’s Learning Map, based upon his research (Marzano, 2007). Ultimately, having a clear definition and shared understanding of effective teaching will help the Instructional Rounds network of educators understand what they are observing and better equip them for suggesting next levels of work.

Status Quo Mindset

Another area that was stalling improvement was a “status quo” view of learning, as well as continuous improvement. On a visit to the district, Lee Teitel, one of the authors of “Instructional Rounds in Education” (City et al., 2009), met with the district’s school improvement leadership teams (and Instructional Rounds facilitators) and asked the question, “If your schools are in continuous improvement, then why is it taking a year or more to craft a problem of practice?” He also shared his theory of systems not achieving improvement until there is a mindfulness of the adult learning in the system. This led the district to further investigation of growth versus a fixed mindset within the adults (Dweck, 2006), and the facilitators began paying closer attention to what was said in the leadership teams. The facilitators also used a continuum of school improvement efforts with the leadership teams to assess their buildings and discover where they might be “stuck.” They assessed where the adults were in each of their buildings and helped to coach them toward more of a growth mindset, which helped to move the process—and continuous improvement—further along.

Supportive Strategies, Skills, and Processes

As mentioned, there were many strategies, skills, and processes utilized to help support the work in the NMPS district. The use of structured universal protocols—such as “Hopes and Fears” (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2007) (Appendix C); “The 5 Whys for Inquiry” (National Staff Reform Faculty [NSRF], n.d.) (Appendix D); and “Affinity Mapping” (NSRF, n.d.) (Appendix A)—supported the implementation of the Instructional Rounds process. On the other hand, having the autonomy to revise the protocols to meet the immediate needs of the building being visited helped to authenticate and personalize the data for that building. The work could get messy, but with protocols to guide the process, visiting educator teams were able to make sense of the observational data that were collected.

The use of a data inquiry cycle within each building proved to be a process that greatly enhanced the strategy of Instructional Rounds and assisted in continuous improvement. The data inquiry cycle included identifying a problem of practice from an analysis of data, such as standardized assessments as well as local assessment and classroom data. A problem of practice was something the building believed they were able to improve upon. In each analysis, the need for collecting additional observational data around the instructional core became apparent. What was really happening when students and teachers were getting together in the presence of content? What tasks were being given and how were the tasks being completed? Once observational data was collected and next levels of work were suggested, staff members were able to identify which next levels of work or strategies they wished to employ. After focusing on the next level of work for some time during professional learning opportunities, the building

would reflect upon their original problem of practice, collect more current data, analyze, and continue the cycle of inquiry.

Understanding the data inquiry cycle helped teams to better understand the cycle of continuous improvement (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2013). It put “walking legs” on compliance with school improvement and made it more real and authentic to all of those working with the students in the building. Leadership teams began to understand that the work was never finished. Some buildings began to embrace the notion that working on a problem of practice together should be ongoing and be included in professional learning community time as well as other professional learning opportunities. The observational data collected during an Instructional Rounds visit informed where time should be spent instructionally to improve the learning of the students.

The use of developmental scales and continua around school improvement and the processes used were very helpful in creating and supporting a growth mindset within and throughout the system. It was discovered that the assessment of where groups stood at any point in time fluctuated with the growth in learning. Rarely did any one group or building “arrive” at any criteria. Rather, there was improvement; when there was new learning, the assessment of a criterion might have taken a dip on the continua. The point of using the continua was to frame discussions and assist in targeting next levels of learning.

Ultimately, the most important part of the process was the attempt to level the hierarchical structure by acting as side-by-side learners and putting systems in place to support that change. These systems included the administrator and teacher pairings as a facilitator team, creating a set of norms for how the visits would be conducted, and the commitment of going through the entire visit and data analysis process together.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Instructional Rounds enhances learning for all involved with the process, in service of improving instruction for the students (City et al, 2009). When engaged in the process from start to finish, it is not just the target school that benefits from the analysis and synthesis of the data. Those among the network of educators who are engaging in dialogue about good teaching and learning also are able to take with them new insights and thoughts about what might work in their classrooms/buildings/districts. As previously stated, Instructional Rounds is not a stand-alone strategy for school improvement; it is a process of continuous improvement. If the process of Instructional Rounds does not appear to be working or forward movement is stalled, it is important to identify the reasons for this lack of progress. Instructional Rounds sheds light on parts of the system that work and parts that do not work. If a system appears to be “stuck,” leadership teams should examine the situation within the continuum of school improvement, pay attention to the adult learning, and take a developmental approach to move forward. Instructional Rounds, at its best, serves as an accelerant to building and/or district-wide improvement (Roberts, 2012). At its worst, it highlights areas of dysfunction within the system that demand attention prior to moving forward.

The practice of Instructional Rounds pulls multiple improvement initiatives together and tells us what is happening (or not happening) in the classroom. High-performing schools don’t look solely at assessment data. They look at data in the classroom, including observational data around the instructional core. If rigor is not seen in the tasks teachers are asking students to do,

then it is not there. It is best for a school or district to utilize Instructional Rounds to better understand the learning that is and is not taking place from a developmental stance. Improvement is growth, and growth is a process, not an event. Attention should be paid to all the learning experiences of each school as well as within the district and Instructional Rounds is a process that can facilitate this process.

References

- Boudett, K., City, E., & Murnane, R. (2013). *Data Wise: A step-by-step guide to using assessment results to improve teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- City, E., Elmore, R., Fiarman, S., & Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional rounds in education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Costante, K. (2010). Leading the instructional core: An interview with Richard Elmore. *In Conversation*, 3(2). Ontario, Canada.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Elmore, R. (2008). *Improving the instructional core. Usable Knowledge*. Harvard University's Graduate School of Education. Cambridge, MA.
- Elmore, R., & Burney, D. (1999). Investing in Teacher Learning. In *Teaching as the Learning Profession: Handbook of policy and practice* (pp. 263-291). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2006). Leading professional learning. *The School Administrator*, 63(10), 10-14.
- Katzenmeyer, M. & Moller, G. (2009). *Awakening the sleeping giant: Helping teachers develop as leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Kotter, J. (1996). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Marzano, R. (2007). *The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction*. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Marzano, R. (Ed.). (2010). *On excellence in teaching*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Marzano, R. & Waters, T. (2009). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- McDonald, J., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E. (2007). *The power of protocols: An educator's guide to better practice*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. 23-25.
- Miles, M. & Huberman, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- National Staff Reform Faculty. (n.d.). *National School Reform Faculty Resource Book*. Bloomington, IN: Harmony Education Center. Retrieved June 16, 2014, from <http://www.nsrffharmony.org/protocols.html>
- Newmann, F.M. & Associates (1996). *Authentic achievement: Restructuring schools for intellectual quality*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Newmann, F. M. & Wehlage, G. G. (1995). Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators. Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Center for Education Research. Retrieved from: http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cors/Successful_School_Restruct.html
- Oblinger, D. (2003). Boomers, gen-xers, and millennials: Understanding the new students. *Educause Review*, 38(4), 37-47.
- Roberts, J. (2012). *Instructional rounds in action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

- Sagor, R. (2003). *Motivating students and teachers in an era of standards*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schmoker, M. (2006). *Results now: How we can achieve unprecedented improvements in teaching and learning*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schmoker, M. (2010). Tipping point: from feckless reform to substantive instructional improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*. Retrieved April 14, 2010, from <http://mikeschmoker.com/tipping-point.html>.
- vonFrank, V. (2011). Leadership teams set the course for school improvement. *The Learning Principal*, 7(1). 2-5.

Appendix A



Affinity Mapping

This revision and description by Ross Peterson-Veatch, Instructional Consulting, Indiana University Kelley School of Business, 2006.

Description

This activity works best when begun with an open-ended analytic question that asks for defining elements of something, or that has many answers and thereby provides many points of entry for deepening a conversation.

Ex. What is the purpose of discussion? Or, perhaps: What do you need to be able to contribute to discussions?

Preparation

Hang pieces of chart paper on a wall in the room so that small groups can gather around the paper. Hand out to every participant a “block” of post-it notes (perhaps 5-10 maximum).

Step 1

Ask the question and request that participants write one idea in response per post-it note. Instruct them to work silently on their own.

Step 2

Split into groups (of 4-8). In **silence**, put all post-it notes on the chart paper.

Step 3

Reminding participants to remain silent, have them organize ideas by “natural” categories. Directions might sound like this:

“Which ideas go together? As long as you do not talk, feel free to move any post-it note to any place. Move yours, and those of others, and feel free to do this. Do not be offended if someone moves yours to a place that you think it does not belong, just move it to where you think it does belong — but do this all in silence.”

Step 4

Once groups have settled on categories, have them place post-it notes on chart paper in neat columns. At this point, ask them to converse about the categories and come up with a name for each one.

Step 5

Have the groups pick a “spokesperson” to report their ideas to the larger group.

Gather that data, and have an open discussion using questions such as the following to help participants make connections between each groups’s responses and categories:

1. What themes emerged? Were there any surprises?
2. What dimensions are missing from our “maps”? Again, any surprises?
3. How did this expand your knowledge or your notion of what the question at the beginning asked you to consider?

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at www.nsrharmony.org.

Appendix B

Beliefs and Assurances

We believe Instructional Rounds...

is a culture building practice, requiring of us sustained interaction around the details of the instructional core and instructional practice in ways that become part of the daily routine of schooling;

is about instructional problem-solving, getting a sense of the real challenges and complexities present when teachers and students get together in classrooms;

is an ongoing process, not an isolated event, whereby we continually coalesce our understanding of powerful teaching and learning in the presence of rich content;

is meant to be descriptive, predictive, and diagnostic, not evaluative;

is about professionalizing educators' work, not making it more bureaucratic or hierarchical;

is not about supervision and evaluation, nor an implementation check

We are committed to...

An invitational spirit. Visiting and serving schools only takes place when we've been invited by them to conduct rounds.

Supporting schools. Visiting and serving schools only happens when they've gone through their own in-house collaborative process of identifying their problem of practice and, possibly, a theory of action which drives their school improvement endeavors.

Confidentiality and respect. Confidentiality is a non-negotiable feature of this process whereby no classroom is ever referenced by teacher name or individual classrooms discussed outside of the rounds process.

A learner's stance. Individual network members participate in this process not as teachers, principals, central office leaders, or union leaders; but as equal educators taking on the role of learner.

Collective actions. Instructional Rounds is a collective, collaborative effort -- no one, single person can "do rounds." Individual actions cannot be called Instructional Rounds, nor should they ever be mistaken for "rounds."

Collaborative support. As network members and host schools interface with one another in this way to better support each other's learning, we offer support, patience, and sensitivity to one another. Missteps will happen, and when they do, it is up to the collective group to extend support for rectifying and keeping the process to the highest of integrity.

The assurances we extend and adhere to...

A specific classroom or teacher observed in an Instructional Rounds visit will never be discussed or identified in any way outside of the rounds process.

All observation notes will be collected and destroyed by the facilitator of any given Instructional Rounds visit.

School administrators and teachers within the network will not participate as observers when hosting an Instructional Rounds visit at their particular site. If only part of a school has invited the network to visit (i.e. a neighborhood, an academy, etc.), then it is up to the leadership team (teachers + principal) of that section of the school whether or not to invite network members to participate as observers should they be assigned a different division of the host school.

All faculty members within a host school will know which network members will be part of their Instructional Rounds visit. Host school's leadership team (teachers + principal) will organize the network members into teams and assign them classrooms to visit.

A school will not be visited unless they have developed their problem of practice and, possibly, a theory of action in a collaborative way. We will only visit schools when a host school's leadership team (teachers + principal) have gone through a process with all faculty associated with the visit of identifying what it is they want out of the Instructional Rounds visit as part of their ongoing improvement strategies and efforts.

I have read and understood the above requirements for Instructional Rounds Network membership. By signing below, I agree to abide by this code of conduct in all Instructional Rounds Network endeavors of which I am a part. Should I violate any of the above conditions, I am willing to work with the network to rectify any missteps to the satisfaction of the network membership or else be asked to no longer take part on any future Instructional Rounds visit.

Name of Network Member: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

Hopes and Fears

Adapted from McDonald, J., Mohr, N., Dichter, A., & McDonald, E. (2007). The power of protocols: An educator's guide to better practice. New York, NY: Teachers College Press. Pp. 23-25.

Purposes:

1. To help people learn some things about one another
2. To establish a norm of ownership by the group

Details:

The time can vary from 5 to 25 minutes depending on the size of the group and the range of concerns. If the group is larger, the facilitator should group people together to report out to the group as a whole. The only supplies needed would be writing materials, chart paper and markers.

Steps:

1. **Introduction:** The facilitator asks participants to write down briefly for themselves their greatest fear for this meeting: "If it's the worst experience you've had, what will have happened (or not happened)?" Then, they write their greatest hope: "If this is the best meeting you've ever attended, what will be its outcome?"
2. **Pair-share:** If time permits, the facilitator asks participants to share their hopes and fears with a partner.
3. **Listing:** Participants call out fears and hopes as the facilitator lists them on separate pieces of chart paper.
4. **Debriefing:** The facilitator prompts, "Did you notice anything surprising or otherwise interesting while doing this activity? What was the impact on you or others of expressing negative thoughts? Would you use this activity in your school? In your classroom? Why? Why not?"

Appendix D



The 5 Whys for Inquiry

Developed in the field by educators affiliated with NSRF.

Purpose

To help the presenter get at the foundational root of his/her question and to uncover multiple perspectives on the question.

Presentation (3 minutes)

The presenter describes the context of his or her inquiry question

One might include...

- Why you chose this question
- Why it is so important to you
- How it relates to your work back home

Clarifying Questions (3 minutes)

The group asks clarifying questions. These are questions, which clarify the context of the presenter's remarks. They should be specific questions, which can be answered with brief statements. For example, "How long has your school been involved in place based learning?" Or, "How many community members are involved with planning this project?"

Decision (3 minutes)

The group discusses the best line of inquiry to get at the heart of the question and decides upon the initial "why question". The presenter is silent.

The "Why Questioning": (10 minutes)

The "why question" decided upon is asked and the presenter responds. Another "why question" is asked in response to the presenter's answer. This continues with a maximum of five "why questions" being asked.

Discussion (5 minutes)

The group then discusses what they have heard the presenter say. Their discussion is not a solving of a problem but an attempt to help the presenter understand the underlying causes for the issue he or she described. The presenter is silent.

Response (3 minutes)

The presenter responds to what has been said. The group is silent.

Debrief (3 minutes)

The group and the presenter debrief the experience.

Protocols are most powerful and effective when used within an ongoing professional learning community such as a Critical Friends Group® and facilitated by a skilled coach. To learn more about professional learning communities and seminars for new or experienced coaches, please visit the National School Reform Faculty website at www.nsrffharmony.org.