

Initiating Impactful Instructional Rounds

By: Andrew Harsha, Belzer Middle School

Team Members Names: Evan Bergman, Antonia Fields

Contact: andrewharsha@msdl.t.k12.in.us

Background That Led to Your Team's Inquiry:

MSD Lawrence Township has recently entered into a collaboration with Learning Sciences International to help implement Dr. Robert Marzano's Framework for Increasing Rigor into our schools. Our focus has been on evaluating the five pillars necessary to support rigorous instruction, which include conditions for learning, standards-based evidence, organizing students to achieve the standard, monitoring for learning, and tracking student progress. With this laser focus on instructional practices in our building, our IPLI team knew we wanted that to be the focus of our action research.

In addition, we received data on our High Reliability Schools survey that showed we had an area of concern. Indicator 2.6 which reads "Our teachers have opportunities to observe and discuss effective teaching" was the lowest score on the survey. We believed strongly that there was some fantastic teaching going on in our building, but teachers were not being given the opportunity to observe it or talk about it collectively. During our Coaching for Implementation Days, led by a consultant from LSI, our teachers raved about how impactful it was to get to observe their colleagues during instruction.

Finally, I had observed that our PLC meetings had noticeably shifted to discussions about data and curriculum, and away from sharing instructional practices. Teachers were having conversations about how students performed on summative assessments and analyzed the data, but were not sharing effective practices with one another.

Therefore, the purpose of our action research was to engage Belzer teachers in instructional rounds during the 2017-2018 school year and track the impact of those experiences.

Statement of Your Team's Wondering:

With this purpose in mind, we wondered what would be the impact of engaging Belzer teachers in instructional rounds. Would it impact school culture? Would it enhance staff morale? Would it improve student achievement? Would it change the impact of our PLCs? Would it help with a more clear understanding of the rigor work our building and district were engaging in?

Methods/Procedures:

To gain insights into our wonderings, our team first organized a system where teachers would have the opportunity to observe their colleague. The plan was to simply make everyone comfortable with another teacher coming in to their classroom. It was a very informal and non-threatening experience that would hopefully get teachers more comfortable with both observing and being observed. Teachers were assigned another colleague who was not in their content area, and we gave them a 2-week window to complete an observation. We only asked teachers to share with us when they completed the observation so we could track participation. We also asked teachers to spend no more than 10 minutes with the teacher he/she observed afterwards to provide at least one positive takeaway from the visit.

After the first set of classroom visits, I collected some anecdotal feedback via email. One of our teachers on this action research team also invited some teachers in to provide feedback and asked them questions which they answered on camera so we could record their input.

Then we decided to have a more formal second round of instructional rounds for more intentional work. Teachers knew that during the day on February 13th, they would spend their prep period observing another classroom. Each of the IPLI members led a small group each period. We used a form to collect data on our pillars for rigor. We observed a total of 17 classrooms that day and collected analytic data from our building about instruction. Each teacher who was observed received an email with specific feedback from observation.

Stating Your Team's Learning and Supporting it with Data:

As a result of our data we learned that teachers enjoyed the experience of seeing their colleagues teach, and they can learn a great deal from one another. We also learned that we had shown signs of growth throughout the year in our instructional practices. And finally, we learned that it is important to create a common understanding and a common vocabulary across the staff.

Teachers shared that they were so pleased that they had time to see other teachers in action. With such a large staff, there are teachers in our building that hardly know one another. Even those who observed a teacher they know well, shared that in many cases they had never gotten to see them teach. They had great takeaways and many shared with their groups that they saw something they'd like to take back to their own classroom.

We found that 100% of the classrooms we visited had learning targets posted, that 94% were collecting evidence from students, and that the level of rigor was above the basic retrieval level in more than half of the classrooms. It was also evident that our professional development around organizing students for learning was paying off, as many teachers had students working in small groups or pairs.

Finally, the most impactful part of these rounds was the time teachers spent conversing after the observations. We found quickly that there was not a clear understanding of what student-centered classrooms were. Many of the teachers who observed the exact same teacher and lesson, had scored their observation forms differently. It led to some incredibly deep and focused conversations, but also helped our team know that we had some clarification to do moving forward.

Providing Concluding Thoughts:

Our team valued the action research project and we learned a great deal about our school. Often times leaders talk about things that we'd like to do or should do in our schools, but they never lead to actual change. This process forced us to try something new and it was a positive experience for our leaders and all teachers involved.

We learned that our teachers are eager to learn from one another. We feared that we'd face some grumblings about having to give up their prep one day for the instructional rounds. Nobody complained and in fact, many of the teachers shared that they appreciated the opportunity. There are no teachers who come to work and hope that they are just average or okay. They all want to be better, many of them just don't know how to get better.

It is evident that if we are going to increase the level of rigor in our building and improve achievement for students, it is going to take a team effort. All teachers must be on board and be willing to accept the challenge. We found that our teachers take ownership of our kids and their learning, and they want to learn. We also learned that we can get better just by using the resources we have right here under our noses in our own building. This experience verified that teachers very much want to be part of a community, and this work helped strengthen the existing bonds and communication we have in place.

References:

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