



TIPS FOR TEACHERS AND CLASSROOM RESOURCES

## Instructional Rounds: Not Just for Administrators

By Jennifer Gunn

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Ever wonder what's happening in the classroom across the hall? Besides overhearing some Staff Lounge chatter or taking a cursory glance from the hallway while passing by, teaching can often happen in isolation, and we don't always know what's really going on in classrooms beyond our own.



### Why instructional rounds?

Teachers get observed and evaluated by administrators, but it's something entirely different when a community of teachers gets to visit each other's classes in low-stakes instructional rounds. Through rounds, we reveal the learning experiences of students, and open a much-needed window into the practices of our peers. We become aware of things like repetition in a student's day, new methods we should try, and how strategies work across different classrooms.

### Keep it non-judgmental

Aren't we evaluated enough as teachers? Instructional rounds are *not* about judgement or evaluation, but rather noticing strengths in each other's work, understanding our students' experiences and gaining insight—not more anxiety. According to the book *Instructional Rounds in Education*, "The practice of walk-throughs has become corrupted in many ways by confounding it with the

...and most often, celebrating what you see rather than practices and aspects of this, celebrating strengths, not deficiencies.

### Look for what's positive

It's way too easy to go into a classroom and nitpick about what you would do differently. Maybe one student is on their phone, while another is daydreaming, and we ask, "Why can't the teacher see that?" When doing instructional rounds, look for the positive things happening in the room. Use a lens that asks: "What's going well here?" Those practical strengths are the things we need to amplify in the classroom, and by doing so the more negative things will thus be addressed.



### The basics of getting started

- Choose a moderator to lead the rounds group.
- Create a schedule for small groups to do instructional rounds. Make it voluntary!
- Keep visits short, just a few minutes, to avoid too much classroom disruption.
- Visit 3-4 classrooms in one instructional round.
- Debrief for two minutes in the hallway or in a private space between each visit.
- Discuss next steps for instructional practices. Think: How can we use the strengths we witnessed today to better overall instruction?

### Create a note-taking protocol

When doing instructional rounds, create a note-taking protocol for the visits. Establish a guiding question, such as, "What literacy strategies do we see students employing in each classroom we visit?" Or, "What evidence did we see of student learning?" Ask teachers to take notes on each room (focusing on the things going well!). Providing a notes worksheet can be helpful.

### Stick to the protocol

The moderator should ensure that visitors stick to the protocol and avoid making classroom comparisons. This isn't about pitting teachers against each other. Let each classroom stand on its own merits!

### What happens when it's just a disaster?

Sometimes, hopefully rarely, we enter a classroom and *nothing* is going right. Teachers and students have bad days, while other teachers are struggling overall in their practice—or perhaps it's just a full moon! If it's just a bad day, see if you can support the teacher in any way, or offer to come back another time. This isn't high-stakes and we're all entitled to a do-over. Often, we don't know a colleague is struggling until we get in there. If it's a teacher who is really having a hard time, still try to find moments of success. And if they're absolutely positively are none, perhaps create a constructive list of strategies for the teacher as a peer-led community. Share the strategies you observed in other classrooms with the struggling teacher. Offer to be a mentor, even short-term. Offer to co-teach for a day to help establish classroom routines. Offer to let them visit your classrooms! As teachers, we're a community. The better we do together as a teaching community, the better our students do as learners.

*Jennifer L.M. Gunn spent 10 years in newspaper and magazine publishing before moving to public education. She is a curriculum designer, teaching coach, and high school educator in New York City. She is also cofounder of the annual EDxEDNYC Education Conference for teacher-led innovation, and regularly presents at conferences on the topics of adolescent literacy, leadership, and education innovation.*

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