

Title: Instructional rounds for teaching EL students

Date: October 2016

Question: Could you provide research on instructional rounds and how they can be used by teachers of English learner (EL) students to improve problems of practice?

Response:

We have prepared the following memo with information using “instructional rounds” when teaching EL students. Citations include a link to a free online version, when available. All citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the document. We have not done an evaluation of the methodological rigor of these resources, but provide them for your information only.

References

Aguilar, E. (2012). *Teachers observing teachers: Instructional rounds*. San Rafael, CA: Edutopia, George Lucas Educational Foundation. Retrieved on September 27, 2016, from <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/instructional-rounds-ells-observations-elena-aguilar>

Excerpt: Teachers and administrators all over are trying to figure out how to support English Learners (ELs). One of the schools that I work with, United for Success Academy (UFSA), in Oakland, CA, has launched a concerted effort in the last year to address the needs of their ELs who comprise some 90 percent of the student body... As a school improvement coach, I’ve been in dozens, perhaps hundreds of classrooms where ELs predominate. Over and over I notice that kids aren’t talking much. The research also says this. It seems as if every other week there’s an article saying that ELs need to speak more, need structure and support and a bank of words to choose from, and more than anything, they need to speak to each other more. I often want to tell teachers, “Just let them talk!” but I know how that might be received. Instructional Rounds was a powerful process at UFSA for teachers to get in to each other’s classrooms and see what students are saying, doing, and learning. After Rounds, many teachers reflected, “We need to get our kids talking more, every single one of them.” *REL West note: Although we do not usually include blog posts in our memo responses, this one contains relevant, firsthand information about carrying out the process of instructional rounds.*

Brown, K. (2014). *The power of collaboration: A case study of Criterion 8 [Exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focusing on improving instructional practice and student learning]*. Tacoma, WA: Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession.

Abstract: Shuksan Middle School is a school community that changed the way they used time and funding to focus on collaboration. This case study reflects many different ways individual teachers and/or an entire teaching staff can collaborate professionally around instruction and student learning. Hopefully, one or more of the methods mentioned will fit into your school context. Shuksan Middle School is in Bellingham, Washington and serves approximately 630 students in grades 6–8; over 60% of students receive free or reduced lunch and 24% of students speak English as a second language. *REL West note: Although we do not usually include single-case studies in our memo responses, this one contains relevant, firsthand information about the present topic.*

City, E. A., Elmore, R. F., Fiarman, S. E., & Teitel, L. (2009). *Instructional rounds in education: A network approach to improving teaching and learning*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Book description: *Instructional Rounds in Education* is intended to help education leaders and practitioners develop a shared understanding of what high-quality instruction looks like and what schools and districts need to do to support it. Inspired by the medical-rounds model used by physicians, the authors have pioneered a new form of professional learning known as *instructional rounds networks*. Through this process, educators develop a shared practice of observing, discussing, and analyzing learning and teaching.

Marzano, R. J. (2011). The art & science of teaching: Making the most of instructional rounds. *Teaching Screenagers*, 68(5), 80–82. Retrieved on October 5, 2016, from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb11/vol68/num05/Making-the-Most-of-Instructional-Rounds.aspx>

Abstract: Instructional rounds are one of the most valuable tools that a school or district can use to enhance teachers' pedagogical skills and develop a culture of collaboration. The goal of instructional rounds isn't to provide feedback to the teacher being observed, although this is an option if the observed teacher so desires. Rather, the primary purpose is for observing teachers to compare their own instructional practices with those of the teachers they observe. The chief benefit of this approach resides in the discussion that takes place among observing teachers at the end of the observation as well as in subsequent self-reflection.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2010). *Lowell Public Schools review of district systems and practices addressing the differentiated needs of English language learners*. Malden, MA: Author.

Excerpt: A new instructional improvement strategy implemented in 2009–2010 was designed to match student learning needs explicitly with appropriate teaching methods. The Lowell Teachers' Association (LTA) also supports this process, entitled the Cycle of Inquiry. The model was collaboratively developed by the teachers' union and the superintendent to empower teachers to improve instruction using their professional

expertise and judgment rather than through a top down improvement initiative. One million dollars in stimulus funding supports the initiative; the process resembles medical instructional rounds. Under this initiative, a teacher known as the pioneer teacher identifies an individual student with a specific and challenging learning need. Often this student is an ELL or FLEP student. Through observation and conferencing with grade level or subject area colleagues in a small Professional Learning Community (PLC), the teacher develops a strategy to support the student's needs, designs lessons using that strategy, and collects student-based achievement data as evidence of success. As the teacher implements new lessons, reviews data, and tests assumptions, he or she debriefs with colleagues, most having observed the lessons through classroom learning walks. Through a process of trial and error and conferencing, the PLC attempts to resolve difficult pedagogical challenges, and promising outcomes can be generalized to a broader population. The Cycle of Inquiry is intended to be teacher-driven, and the involvement of principals and assistant principals in offering support and guidance varies across schools. Most have allowed teachers to take the lead, recognizing the need to locate responsibility for problem-solving at the classroom level. They have thereby encouraged teachers to use their collaborative strengths to improve instruction. The district has created an overlapping system of support, supervision, and professional development to help teachers strengthen their teaching skills to meet the needs of a heterogeneous student body. Addressing the multiple needs of this diverse population is challenging. Over time, the district has addressed these successfully, often one by one. With continued perseverance, the district can expect continued improvement and more consistency in instructional practice.

One America. (2013). *The Road Map Project: English language learner action plan & implementation toolkit*. Seattle, WA: Author. Retrieved on September 27, 2016, from <https://www.weareoneamerica.org/road-map-project-ell-work-group>

Excerpt: Launched by The Community Center for Education Results in 2010, the Road Map Project is a direct response to the growing opportunity gap in South King County [WA]. The Road Map Project's collective action initiative is aimed at driving dramatic improvements in student achievement—cradle through college and career—in the low-income communities of South King County. The commitment is to double the number of students in the region who are on track to graduate from college or earn a career credential by 2020... The Road Map ELL Action Plan is the result of the collaborative work of individuals and organizations invested in closing the educational opportunity/achievement gap for ELLs in South King County. In early 2013, after working together for a year and a half, the team began developing an action plan framework by researching and establishing best practices to effectively support ELL students. This included monthly Work Group meetings to design and refine the plan, an all-day retreat to mutually determine priorities, inventories of current district and department practices, and numerous meetings throughout the year with experts in each of the key focus areas. The purpose of the action plan is to identify key systems level change strategies for ELLs that will help the Road Map Project reach the 2020 goal and support the successful integration of ELL students in the school system. The action plan and implementation "toolkit," developed by leaders of the ELL Work Group, articulates comprehensive action steps for creating a stronger and more equitable education system for ELLs ... The action plan framework identifies and calls out five focus areas that must be

addressed in unison to support ELL students—Positive Identity and Primary Language Development, Parent Engagement, Comprehensive Data Collection, Strong Instructional Practice, and Post-Secondary Success. For each of these five “pieces of the pie” the group has prioritized two overarching goals. From there, strategies were developed to achieve the goals, and an accompanying implementation “toolkit” was created to outline detailed action steps for implementation of each strategy. *REL West note: See focus area on “strong instructional practice” for instructional rounds.*

Oregon Department of Education. (2010). *The “how-to” guide for implementation of sheltered English instruction in classrooms*. Salem, OR: Author.

Excerpt: The “How-to” Guide for Implementation of Sheltered English Instruction in Classrooms is a companion guide to the *Self-Assessment and Progress Monitoring for Sheltered English Instruction Classrooms* tool

(<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2532>). It represents a collective effort from practitioners across the state of Oregon with expertise in the education of English language learners. This statewide advisory group convened periodically over twelve months, under the leadership of the ESL/Bilingual office at the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), to produce additional support materials and resources for districts and schools that endeavor to address the educational needs of English Language Learner (ELL) students. In August, 2005, the ODE published *A Guide for Implementation of Content Support Programs for ELLs* to promote shared understandings about sheltered instructional models and programs that serve English learners. It is our hope that these tools underscore the importance of using data to guide program decisions at all levels, and that they prove of high utility as they become an integral component of the sheltered English instruction program and school improvement efforts in schools serving ELLs.

Symonds, K. W. (2004). *After the test: Closing the achievement gaps with data*. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates and Bay Area School Reform Collaborative.

Excerpt: In recent years, closing the achievement gaps between higher- and lower-achieving groups of students has become the focus of state and federal policy. Yet, while there are decades of research about classroom-level practices associated with increased student performance, few studies have examined the school-level policies and strategies that help close the achievement gaps. In order to identify effective school-level policies and strategies, the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC) surveyed 32 K–8 schools in the San Francisco Bay Area and compared responses from schools narrowing the gaps with schools maintaining or widening the gaps. Schools’ gaps were measured using California’s Academic Performance Index (API) ranking system over the four-year time period between 1998–99 and 2001–02. We defined *gap-closing* schools as those schools in which all students made improvement but low-performing students made more rapid progress. Conversely, we defined *non-gap-closing* schools as those schools in which high-performing students made more improvement than low-performing students. We also conducted case studies of three schools making outstanding progress in narrowing the achievement gaps. The survey explored policies and practices on a variety of issues, from the role of leaders to instructional strategies. Stark differences between the gap-closing and non-gap-closing groups emerged regarding use of data, painting a distinctive picture of what happens in

gap-closing schools. Findings from our study are grouped into three categories—teacher support for use of data, leadership for equity, and school focus—with case studies after each to illuminate what survey findings can look like in practice. *REL West note: See page 25 for Cycle of Inquiry, related to instructional rounds.*

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search

“Instructional rounds” AND “English language learners”

Search of Databases

EBSCO Host, ERIC, PsychInfo, PsychArticle, Google, and Google Scholar

Criteria for Inclusion

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).
- **Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the West Region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.