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SHIFTS IN BELIEFS, KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES OF INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS PRACTICE

Renny Somnath

Abstract

Teachers' beliefs may provide them with the resources necessary to maintain and improve their instructional practices. Christie, Butler and Potterton (2007) and City, Elmore and Fiarman (2010) point to the difficulties associated with bringing about changes in the teachers' instructional practice, despite professional development interventions. Social developmental theories provide understanding of teacher learning and new teacher development models that frame interventions differently to support longer-term, ongoing teacher development. One particular intervention that is consistent with the social development theory provides teachers with a lens for understanding their instructional practices and a reference point for shifting their existing instructional practices, which are linked to their beliefs. The researcher in this study collected data from four teachers at a private school in Johannesburg, who participated in the Instructional Rounds practice. An instructional core (City et al. 2010) provided the key theoretical resource for understanding how teachers constructed their instructional practice before the intervention and after the yearlong intervention. The instructional core refers to the relationship teachers establish with learners around learning content.

The study proceeded to investigate the beliefs teachers used to craft roles for themselves, their learners and the content in their instructional practice before and after the intervention. It is argued that teachers' beliefs about instruction frame their instructional practice. It is further argued that, in collaborating with other teachers and by gathering data from their instructional practice, teachers are in a better

position to change their beliefs by understanding the actual roles that they, their learners and the content of their lessons play in their classrooms.

Instructional Rounds is a disciplined form of intervention designed to equip teachers with the tools to begin the process of systematically shaping the theories of practice that will form the foundation for future development of their instructional practices. The intervention focuses teachers' beliefs in the instruction core and on shifts in critical beliefs to improve practice. While all teachers' professional development programmes target shifts in teacher beliefs, knowledge and skills, few succeed in shifting the roles of the teacher, the learner and the content. Are teachers making causal links between their roles in the classroom and the learning that occurs in the classroom?