Reduce Change to
Increase Improvement

Viviane Robinson
Workshop Outcomes

- greater understanding of the difference between the bypass and engage approach to leading improvement
- increased skill in inquiring into others’ theories of action
- more insight into the effectiveness of your own leadership of improvement
REDUCE CHANGE TO INCREASE IMPROVEMENT

VIVIANE ROBINSON

CORWIN IMPACT LEADERSHIP SERIES
PART A

Change vs Improvement
To lead improvement is to exercise influence in ways that create something better.

To lead change is to exercise influence in ways that create something different.
Three Reasons Why This Matters

The language of improvement:

• invites evaluative discussion
• prevents the assumption that the change will be better than the status quo
• requires leaders to articulate a theory of improvement
Consider
In your context is it assumed that changing is equivalent to improving?
PART B

The Typical Approach
1. Identify a problem

Perhaps student achievement, progress, well being, attendance or engagement is believed to be unsatisfactory
2. Try an improvement strategy

Consult with affected teachers
Provide opportunities for teachers to adopt practices that leaders and teachers believe will improve the selected outcomes
3. Fail to reach targets

Some improvement with persistently inequitable student outcomes (within school variation)
Discuss

Suggest 2 or 3 hypotheses about why this approach fails to deliver the intended improvement
Discuss

Suggest 2 or 3 hypotheses about why this approach fails to deliver the intended improvement
PART C

Bypass vs Engage
Theories of Action
describe the links between what people do (actions), the beliefs and values that explain their actions, and the consequences of those actions, both intended and unintended.
Leading Improvement in math and science comprehension

**Current Theory of Action**

**Beliefs and Values**

**Actions**

**Consequences**
- Curriculum is ‘covered’
- Class mostly under control
- Factual knowledge good
- Low achievement in math and science comprehension

**Alternative Theory of Action**

**Beliefs and Values**

**Actions**

**Consequences**
- Curriculum is ‘covered’
- Class mostly under control
- Students understand the content and can explain their reasoning
- Higher achievement in math and science comprehension
Leading Improvement in math and science comprehension

**Current Theory of Action**

**Actions**
- Teaching Resources:
  - simplified text extract
  - worksheets

**Teaching Approach:**
- whole class teaching of subject content
- little focus on literacy

**Assessment:**
- quizzes
- worksheets
- tests

**Alternative Theory of Action**

**Actions**
- Teaching Resources:
  - rich texts

**Teaching Approach:**
- teach subject specific literacy strategies
- small group teaching for understanding of problems

**Assessment:**
- oral and written problem solving processes
- requires writing extended paragraphs
Beliefs
• I am a science and math teacher
• Teaching literacy is the job of the English Department
• I cannot cover the curriculum and teach literacy
• Students will struggle with more complex texts and misbehave

Actions

Current Theory of Action

Beliefs
• I am a science and math teacher which includes teaching subject-specific literacy
• Curriculum coverage means students understand and apply key concepts and processes
• I believe I can, with appropriate support, improve science and math comprehension

Actions

Alternative Theory of Action
Observable actions are visible

Mental models are invisible
The teaching practices you seek to improve are the outward manifestations of a tacit personal theory about how to teach.
Bypassing teachers’ theory of action

Engaging teachers’ theory of action
A Principal reflects on bypass and engage…

“When I think of a lifetime of frustration in getting people to teach maths properly - there was a conflict with values and beliefs. I never bothered to understand them and take them from there.”

Salvi Gargiulo, retired principal
Consequences of the Bypass Approach

- Too much change not enough improvement
- Leaders underestimate the complexity and difficulty of reform
- Leaders feel frustrated and teachers may mistrust leaders’ competence in leading change
- Repeated failure to meet improvement targets
PART D

How to Engage
The Four Phases of Theory Engagement

1. Establish the problem to be solved
2. Reveal the theory in the relevant current practices
3. Implement and monitor a new sufficiently shared theory
4. Evaluate the relative merit of the current and alternative theories of action
PHASE I

Agree on the problem to be solved

Focus on one or two priorities

Use constructive problem talk to recruit people to the problem solving

Gain sufficient agreement to make a start and learn together
PHASE II
Reveal the current theories of action

What happened as a result?

What was done or not done?

Why was that done or not done?
PHASE II

Reveal the current theories of action

1. Ask direct and respectful questions
2. Inquire systematically into each component of the theory of action
3. Check the logic that links the three components
4. Postpone evaluation of the theory of action
Inquiry into a Theory of Action
IT'S TIME YOU STEP IN!
REVEALING A THEORY OF ACTION
The Principal has noticed a line of students outside the AP’s door every day.

She thinks this is problematic so decides to find out what is going on.
WORKSHOP ACTIVITY - WHAT IS JACQUI’S THEORY OF ACTION?

1. Watch the video and listen for information about Jacqui’s
   • actions
   • beliefs and values
   • consequences

2. In pairs, complete the Theory of Action template for Jacqui
IT'S TIME YOU STEP IN!
REVEALING A THEORY OF ACTION
WORKSHOP ACTIVITY – WHAT IS JACQUI’S THEORY OF ACTION?

The Structure of a Theory of Action

Key Beliefs and Values
Why was it done or not done? These are the relevant beliefs and values of those whose actions are described below.

Actions
What was done or not done that you believe is relevant?

Consequences
What happened or did not happen as a result of the above actions and beliefs?
WORKSHOP ACTIVITY – HOW DO YOU DISCOVER JACQUI’S THEORY OF ACTION?

1. Watch the video again and listen for the types of questions being asked by the leader.

2. Complete the Inquiry into a ToA template
WORKSHOP ACTIVITY – HOW DO YOU DISCOVER A THEORY OF ACTION?

How to Inquire into a Theory of Action

*Record the behaviours Viviane is using in the LH column and her actual words in the RH column*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example:</strong> Summarises and checks what she thinks the other person has said.</td>
<td>“So you have given three reasons for the disappointing results... [Gives the reasons]. Have I got that right?&quot;</td>
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Discuss

What did you notice about the leader’s talk in this conversation?
Discuss

What did you notice about the leader’s talk in this conversation?
**WORKSHOP ACTIVITY – YOUR CONCERN**

In groups of three hold a 4 minute recorded conversation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role 1</th>
<th>Role 2</th>
<th>Role 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think of a specific colleague whose practice concerns you in some respect. You play the part of that colleague.</td>
<td>You inquire into the colleague’s theory of action.</td>
<td>You listen and complete the theory of action template <em>for the colleague</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listen to the recording and evaluate the skill of the person playing Role 2 against the success criteria. Change roles and repeat.
SUCCESS CRITERIA

1. Did the person playing Role 1 feel respected rather than judged?

2. Did Role 2 listen carefully as evidenced by providing an accurate summary of the Theory of Action for Role 1?
Discuss

What did you learn about your own skill in inquiring into another’s theory of action?
PHASE III

Evaluate the relative merits of the current and alternative theories of action

Develop a plausible alternative theory of action

• Use evidence based in research and good practice to generate ideas

• Systematically compare the current and alternative theories and discuss the tensions between them
PHASE IV

Implement and monitor a new sufficiently shared theory of action

• Treat the implementation as an opportunity to continuously improve and learn.
• Use implementation and outcome indicators
• Embed the indicators in the work of improvement
Thank you
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