INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TEACHERS

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Abstract

Instructional rounds for educators can create a system and structure in which teachers enter into professional dialogue reflecting on their individual and collective work within their schools. The critical reflection and data analysis inherent in the instructional rounds process fosters collaboration among the participants and creates a culture in which the relationship between the adult learning that exists within the organization is directly proportionate to the student learning. The theory of action purports that if educators observe, analyze and predict what students will learn from the instruction they observe then a clear understanding of the cause and effect relationship between teaching and learning will emerge. This participatory evaluation study investigates the effectiveness of utilizing instructional rounds as professional development for teachers. The participants consist of high school department heads from a rural regional school district in north central Massachusetts during the spring of 2012. The findings of this study suggest that Instructional Rounds as a process support teachers’ ability to collaborate with their colleagues and develop specific skills that foster professional development. In order to understand the Instructional Rounds process and determine its potential, the department heads opened their classrooms to their colleagues and participated in the rounds process so that they would have direct experience with the process and be in a better position to analyze its effectiveness as professional development. The perceptions of the participants focused on the direct benefits of conversations with their colleagues about teaching, the ability to increase their own teacher toolkits, and the enhancement of observation and reflection skills.

Keywords: instructional rounds, teacher collaboration, professional development, communities of practice, critical reflection, participatory evaluation, asynchronous computer-mediated communication, adult learning theory, organizational learning theory
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Chapter I: Introduction

We do our best discernment in community, where many eyes, ears, sets of experiences, and voices can sort out the wheat from the chaff. That’s how every mode of human knowing proceeds, including science. All of us together are smarter than any one of us alone—especially if we listen to the dissenters and to the people raising critical questions.

—Parker Palmer from his interview with Van Gelder (2009, p. 1)

Problem of Practice

Teaching can be a lonely, isolated profession. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, forty-nine percent of teachers entering public education leave after five years (Darling-Hammond, 2010). All too often teachers are rarely given opportunities to observe another teacher’s classroom and collaborate through professional dialogue analyzing data collected while visiting each other’s classrooms. Collaboration usually takes place in program or lesson design not in execution. Teachers may be provided with common preparation time that allows teachers to plan together, but teachers are not provided the opportunity to visit other classes and observe strategies in practice. According to Hawkes and Romiszowski (2001), teachers work on their own in their classes with very little professional interaction with their colleagues. Participating in instructional rounds will provide teachers with an opportunity to visit their colleagues’ classes while still in session.

The purpose of this study is to examine the process of utilizing instructional rounds as professional development for teachers within a rural regional school district in Massachusetts by
piloting the practice at the high school within that school district. At this stage in the research, the Instructional Rounds will be generally defined as a structured opportunity for teachers in small groups to visit classes in session in order to collect data as to what student skill development looks like and use data to inform their practices and instructional methods.

**Significance**

Instructional rounds have been utilized in the medical field for decades. They provide doctors opportunities to study cases together and work collaboratively to help develop recommendations and plans of actions based on the data they collect while on the rounds. The Harvard Graduate School of Education has developed a practice of Instructional Rounds currently being used by educational administrators to review classroom instruction throughout the country (Teitel, 2009; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). After participating in these rounds with the administrative team in my school district, I wondered why teachers were not being included in this practice as a model of authentic embedded professional development.

Specific opportunities need to be implemented for teachers to participate in instructional rounds just as professionals in the medical fields have done successfully for generations. Rounds practiced in the medical field engage learners in purposeful conversations teaching aspects of professional reasoning and thinking contextually (Bryant & Milstein, 2007; Dolcourt, Zuckerman, & Warner, 2006; Tariq, Ali, Riaz, Awan, Akhter, 2010). The teaching profession followed the medical field in developing specific training programs that lead to certification (Darling-Hammond, 2010); as suggested by one educational researcher, it is time that educational leaders examine more best practices such as the medical profession's institution of
candidate internships with supervision from skilled doctors and methodologies for continual reflection in the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

The practice of participating in instructional rounds creates a structured format for which teachers enter into professional dialogue with their colleagues reflecting on the individual and collective work they have observed together and the data they have collectively gathered within the school (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). By participating in instructional rounds, professionals will “look at classroom instruction in a focused, systematic, purposeful and collective way” (Teitel, 2009).

Teachers are struggling in isolation with student skill development versus content coverage (Jacobs, 2009; Trilling & Fadel, 2009). The pressure to prepare students for standardized high-stakes tests like the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and the anticipated PARCC exams beginning in 2014 weighs heavy on many of our teachers. Many states are moving towards linking student achievement on standardized tests with teacher evaluation systems (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). This conflicts with the fact that many educational professionals (Silva, 2009) are calling for an overhaul in assessment strategies that are used in general. Teachers need encouragement and ongoing support if we expect them to let go of what they have been told to do for so long (to cover content) and shift the focus to skill development (Brinson & Steiner, 2007).

The very notion of using student achievement on standardized tests to evaluate the performance of individual teachers could create a greater divide between teachers if they feel the need to protect their strategies to ensure job security. This will also negatively impact both the individual and collective teacher efficacy as teachers will be directly compared to their peers regardless of the ability level of the students with whom the teachers have worked (Friedman &
To counteract that fear, schools need to create even more collaboration and foster environments where all of the stakeholders identify their responsibility in helping all of the students achieve (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). As a possible support, providing teachers with opportunities to visit one another’s classrooms while participating in instructional rounds will develop a structure that fosters collaboration through professional dialogue and the collective analysis of data identified and gathered through combined efforts. If done in a non-judgmental atmosphere and manner, teachers would benefit greatly from observing the classrooms of their peers (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Focusing on the benefits of this type of collaboration in which individual efforts are combined to collect and analyze data leading to meaningful professional dialogue among teachers builds collective teacher efficacy or “their beliefs that they can engage in powerful actions that influence student learning” (City, et al., 2009, p 165). Collective teacher efficacy improves student performance and creates a work environment that builds teacher commitment to the school (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; City, et al., 2009). One of the suggestions stemming from research as to how leaders can improve collective efficacy is by creating “opportunities for teachers to collaboratively share skills and experience” (Brinson & Steiner, 2007, p. 3).

Teachers need ongoing professional development that encourages them to reflect on their own practices while engaging in more meaningful opportunities to observe what practices are effective in other classrooms creating a specific context in which to better understand the relationship the identified effective practices have to their own. These types of job-embedded professional development opportunities connect problem-solving characteristics and the benefits
of learning from personal experiences that are inherent in both adult learning and organizational learning theories (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005; Senge, 2006).

Instructional rounds provides an authentic learning experience (Herrington & Herrington, 2005; Webster-Wright, 2009) in that it involves a genuine task embedded in real work experiences which enable learning to take place through the reflective action and practice of solving a specific dilemma presented within the context of the participants’ environment. As authentic professional development emerging from the reflection and potential problem solving of teachers engaged in the rounds, the evaluation of the instructional rounds process can lead to developing a “theory that travels” (Fullan, 2008). As more schools within our district and others consider implementing the practice of instructional rounds as professional development they can look to this research as a resource to inform their decision.

Practical and intellectual goals

Intellectual goals. My intellectual goals or what I hope to understand through my research (Maxwell, 2005) are best expressed in the questions that I developed as my focus. The questions are grounded in whether or how instructional rounds can benefit teachers in gaining new ideas in the teaching of student skills and improve teacher efficacy. The questions also consider how instructional rounds as a professional development model might support embedded opportunities for collaboration and reflection.

Practical goals. My practical goal (Maxwell, 2005) is to implement a process of instructional rounds with teacher participation that will provide ongoing embedded professional development fostering collaboration through professional dialogue among a cohort of faculty
regarding the analysis of data collected reflecting instructional practices and problem solving throughout the school. Collaboration in education is understood as the “process of willing cooperation with peers and colleagues to reach educational objectives. In schools, however, teachers often work more in isolation from—than in collaboration with—each other” (Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001, p 287).

**Research Questions**

My research questions evolved from the synthesis of my intellectual goals and the theoretical framework guiding my focus:

1. What are the experiences of the department heads participating in the Instructional Rounds process?
2. Having participated in Instructional Rounds, what do the department heads perceive to be the benefits and challenges of its use as a collaborative professional development practice for themselves as teachers and the teachers within their departments?
3. After participating in Instructional Rounds, to what extent do department heads believe it can serve as an effective professional development practice for teachers?

**Document Organization**

This document consists of five chapters each addressing different areas of the study. First, the introduction presents the problem of practice and the research questions, the significance of the study and the theoretical framework which provides insight for examining the research questions through the lenses of adult learning theory and organizational learning theory. Next, the body of research is presented in the literature review which identifies emerging themes
from literature examining the utilization of instructional rounds and teacher collaboration during professional development. The third chapter presents the research design, which includes detailing the methodology, validity and credibility. The final two chapters present the findings followed by an analysis and synthesis of the findings through the lens of the theoretical framework and research literature to date.

**Theoretical Framework**

Two theories are used to inform this investigation of the utility of instructional rounds as an effective professional development tool and process: adult learning theory and organizational learning.

**Adult Learning Theory**

Adult learning theory (Knowles, et al., 2005; Leonard, 2002; MacKeracher, 2004) is grounded in the premise that adults learn what they want to learn or that the learning is driven by internal motivations rather than external motivations. A crucial component of any design for adult learning is that the personal goals of the adults involved need to align with the focus of the learning providing a stronger context for the development of knowledge (Knowles, et al., 2005; Leonard, 2002; MacKeracher, 2004). Adults afforded the opportunity to be involved in the process of identifying their own needs, considering directions for learning and assessing their own development, therefore experience what Knowles, et al. (2005) set out to establish with his original model of adult learning theory. The model includes the following assumptions: adults are self-motivated and self-directed learners; their experiences and knowledge can be shared with
others; adults are task-oriented, problem solving individuals and learn in order to enrich their lives by completing specific tasks or solving problems (Knowles, et al., 2005).

Adult learning theory is in keeping with the practice of instructional rounds as the rounds process closely follows the assumptions identified in the Knowles’ model. Participants choose to engage in the rounds process due to self-motivation and their ownership as self-directed learners. The second assumption included in Knowles’ model of adult learning addresses the sharing of experiences and knowledge. An integral aspect in the utilization of instructional rounds is acknowledging and benefitting from the wealth of knowledge in the room through the varied experiences each individual participant brings to the process (City, et al., 2009). The problem solving and task-orientation assumptions included in the adult learning theory model are echoed as participants collaboratively establish the focus of the rounds by identifying a specific problem of practice motivated by the individual needs of the members of the group. While instructional rounds might not always be voluntary and could include external motivations for participants, adult learning theory purports the individuals involved will still only learn what they want to learn while participating in the process (Knowles, et al., 2005; MacKeracher, 2004).

MacKeracher (2004) focuses on the need for adult learning to be contextual. The instructional rounds process embeds teachers’ opportunities to learn within the context of their own classrooms. While observing others and reflecting on the relationship their practices have to their colleagues’, teachers as adult learners are then able to apply what they learn to practical situations which MacKeracher (2004) identifies as a key component to adult learning theory.
Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational learning theory (Collison & Cook, 2007; Garvin, 2000; O’Connor & Kotze, 2008; Schmuck & Runkel, 1985; Senge, 2006) will be the second theory that informs the design of my study and analysis. Garvin (2000) describes activities that characterize organizational learning as the following: systematic problem solving, experimentation and innovation, learning from own experience, learning from the experience of others, and transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently through the organization. Collison and Cook (2007) define organizational learning as “the deliberate use of individual, group, and system learning to embed new thinking and practices that continuously renew and transform the organization in ways that support shared aims” (p. 8).

Organizational learning theory parallels both the design and desired outcome of the instructional rounds process. The design of the instructional rounds process includes four parts: identifying the problem of practice, observing the practice, observation debrief, and identifying the next level of work (City, et al., 2009). These parts directly correlate with the activities described by Garvin (2000) from systematic problem solving to transferring knowledge as well as connecting with his three stages of organizational learning: acquiring, interpreting, and using/applying. As the process of rounds is cyclical, the continuous renewal mentioned by Collison and Cook (2007) naturally takes place through the reflective nature of the rounds process when the participants identify and address a problem of practice within the organization and develop the next level work. It is developing the next level of work within the rounds process that solidifies its relationship with organizational learning. Garvin (2000) states, “action is essential; if an entity does not purposefully modify its behavior to reflect new knowledge and insights, then it does not qualify as a learning organization” (p. 26).
Senge (2006) discusses the metanoia, or shift in mind, that focuses on the whole and moves people from being reactionary individuals to active participants collectively creating their futures together as an ensemble. Organizational learning can also be divided into separate disciplines according to Senge (2006) which include personal mastery, mental models, building shared vision, and team learning; these four are then made coherent by the fifth discipline, system thinking. The individual content knowledge and pedagogical skills of the rounds participants inform the mental models and personal mastery disciplines while the shared vision, team learning and system thinking disciplines are developed through collaborative work of the entire rounds process.

In order for instructional rounds to be successful as professional development for teachers, conditions need to exist that foster the improvement of instruction. Collison and Cook (2007) identify collaborative analysis, evaluation, and experimentation among colleagues as primary conditions conducive to improving instruction both individually and collectively.

Ultimately, instructional rounds bridges both adult and organizational learning theories allowing us to examine different components to study through each lens. Collaboration is fostered during instructional rounds as shared experiences of observation occur in order to collect data that can be analyzed collectively creating “norms that support adult learning and make organizational learning possible” (Teitel, 2009, p. 3).

**Chapter II: Literature Review**

As previously mentioned, instructional rounds are planted deeply in the pedagogical roots of medical education. In order to locate more resources on the subject, I opened my search from merely examining educational literature to include medical journals looking for references to
instructional rounds and studies that addressed either the implementation of rounds or the effectiveness of the practice.

The literature review is organized into three distinct categories: medical rounds used for instruction, instructional rounds in education, and the use of teacher collaboration for professional development. Throughout all of the reviewed literature two specific themes continued to emerge: communities of practice and critical reflection. Both themes are grounded in adult learning theory and organizational learning theory.

Each of the studies reviewed identified a specific community of practice. According to Johnson (2001), a community of practice is a group of individuals in action towards a common goal. Effective communication is paramount in establishing a productive instructional rounds practice (City, et al., 2009) and the participants would indeed be described as individuals in action toward a common goal.

Critical reflection has already been identified as a crucial component for professional growth (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Elmore, 2006; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; Knowles, et al., 2005). The studies included in this literature review address the inherent practice of critical reflection within the structure of rounds across fields of study.

**The Use of Medical Rounds for Instruction**

Outside the arena of education publications, the most beneficial research comes from medical journals, specifically nursing journals (Cant & Cooper, 2010; Close & Castledine, 2005) and general medical instruction journals (Balmer, Master, Richards, Serwint, & Giardino, 2010; Dolcourt, et al., 2006; Irby, 1992; Kernan, Quagliarello, & Green, 2005; Tariq, et al., 2010). The analysis presented from differing fields of study provides an additional vantage point from which
to understand the implementation and development of instructional rounds. The initial arrangement of the studies was determined by the researchers’ choice of design. Ultimately, upon further investigation, the themes of communities of practice and critical reflection emerged allowing the literature to be organized into a more specific relationship with the practice of instructional rounds as a whole. Overall, reviewing the literature selected from the medical journals led to conclusions that the rounds process in the medical field is varied and unique to each organization utilizing rounds as an educational strategy. Within the medical field there seems to lack a universal structure or protocol connecting the practices from institution to institution. However, the two most universal components are linked to the identified emerging themes.

As qualitative studies took longer than quantitative studies to find acceptance in the research communities (Creswell, 2007, 2009), nearly half of the medical studies, which have a longer history focusing on instructional rounds than educational studies, fell within the quantitative research paradigms. Six studies were located specifically dealing with rounds instruction. Two of the studies were traditional quantitative designs: a systematic review of themes arising in quantitative studies conducted from 1999-2009 (Cant & Cooper, 2010), while the other was conducted over nine years in the ambulatory care rotations through the Department of Internal Medicine at Yale University in order to assess the student-faculty rounds experience with no specific theoretical framework identified other than quantifying responses on surveys and evaluations (Kernan, et al., 2005). Two other studies were qualitative designs: a narrative study of nursing students in the Dudley Group of Hospitals in England (Close & Castledine, 2005) and an ethnographic case study investigating attending rounds as a social phenomenon in a pediatrics unit in an urban hospital (Balmer, et al., 2010). Dolcourt, et al., (2006) conducted a
mixed method study utilizing both quantitative and qualitative designs focusing on the decision of the learners to participate in Grand Pediatric Rounds. Finally, a cross-sectional study was reviewed that highlighted important areas in specific types of medical rounds education which needed improvement from the learners’ perspective (Tariq, et al., 2010).

**Communities of Practice.** As a collection of literature focusing on the practice of rounds within the medical field, specific communities of practice are identified by the different types of professional members within each of the medical communities. The homogenously organized groups of nurses (Close & Castledine, 2005) and physicians (Balmer, et al., 2010) compared to the heterogeneous interactions of medical students and their respective faculty (Dolcourt, et al., 2006; Kernan, et al., 2005; Tariq, et al., 2010) provides insights to the various ways in which rounds can be organized and the outcomes of various environments created by each community of practice.

Communities of practice created without specific hierarchies tended to result in developing stronger collective efficacy (Balmer, et al., 2010; Close & Castledine, 2005). The qualitative nature of both studies supported an avenue in which the emotional responses of the participants were more clearly articulated. Engagement on the part of all of the stakeholders was more consistent throughout the studies.

Combining members from different groups within the medical community in order to create specific communities of practice had its advantages, as well. Tariq, et al. (2010) identifies areas of improvement to the rounds process conducted as an integral part of Internal Medicine instruction. Students, interns, residents and fellows were included in the sample of 134 participants in the study. The differing perspectives of all of the represented groups provided significant feedback from the varied participants that allowed the researchers to reach concrete
results regarding the effectiveness of each aspect of their structured rounds.

**Critical Reflection.** Each of the studies identifies the presence of critical reflection both in the rounds process and in the design of the studies themselves. While some of the studies specifically address the benefits of critical reflection within the structure of the rounds process, others include deficiencies in critical reflection as a concern with the rounds process examined.

The systematic review of simulation-based learning in nurse education looked to identify themes from twelve different papers using pre-test and post-test experiments along with quasi-experiments (Cant & Cooper, 2010). According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009), quasi-experiments do not include random assignment and utilize other techniques to reduce threats to internal validity. However, the actual techniques utilized in the quasi-experiments were not discussed in the systematic review conducted by Cant and Cooper (2010), therefore providing little assistance in understanding all of the aspects of the study. While the overall effectiveness of each rounds process included in the papers reviewed was inconclusive, the presence of critical reflection was exhibited by participants throughout the study. The quantitative study conducted with medical rounds at Yale University utilized a ten-point rating scale on the feedback form and categorized all verbal comments as either positive or negative (Kernan, et al., 2005). This method was highly effective in illustrating how subjective responses can be quantified in order to translate data into analyzable numbers for a quantitative study. The ability to quantify seemingly subjective information is pertinent to the development of any effective rounds protocol and directly coincides with its transferability among cohorts within an organization or from one organization to another.

The quantitative study conducted by Kernan, et al. (2005) focusing on rounds research in
the medical field provided data analysis potentially informing types of analysis instrumental in developing effective instructional rounds for educators. Their analysis based on the critical reflection of both the students and the teachers compared the chosen topics for the student lead presentations during the Student-Faculty Rounds with the effectiveness of the presentations based on the faculty evaluations (Kernan, et al., 2005). This analysis illustrated the connection between the topic choice and the faculty response. In a study of instructional rounds, identifying the connection between faculty expectations and final evaluations with student choices and the level of participation could be beneficial in establishing future problems of practice based on data analysis.

**Instructional Rounds in Education**

*Instructional Rounds in Education: a Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* (City, et al., 2009) is the seminal work on the subject and is cited in all of the articles and studies regarding instructional rounds written after its publication. Looking at journal publications by one of the authors, Elmore (2004, 2006, 2007), recognized as a leading voice in education reform, provides greater understanding and insight into his philosophies and recommendations referenced in other publications (Del Prete, 2006; Rallis, Tedder, Lachman, & Elmore, 2006; Teitel, 2009; Virtue, 2009). Additionally, *Schools for all Kinds of Minds* (Barringer, Pohlman, & Robinson, 2010) and *Analyzing School Contexts* (Hoy & DiPaola, 2010) reference Elmore's work in the development of instructional rounds and provide insight into its potential to improve not only individual schools but entire systems through the commitment of educational leaders to engage in regular communication regarding strategies to improve student achievement. As with the previous category of reviewed literature, communities of practice and
critical reflection emerge as themes throughout.

**Communities of Practice.** Perhaps Virtue’s (2009) study of instructional rounds for pre-service teacher candidates in South Carolina creates the closest parallel to a study of instructional rounds as professional development for established teachers. The parallel exists most specifically with the communities of practice participating in each of the rounds processes; all of the members are teachers. In both cases, rounds are being utilized specifically for the development of all of the stakeholders within the community of practice. In contrast, other examples of instructional rounds in education focus primarily on the participation of administrators as the identified members of the community of practice (Del Prete, 2006; Rallis, et al., 2006; Teitel, 2001). Hoy and DiPaola (2010) include teachers but not exclusively as they focus their work on examining the principal-teacher interaction and its effect on instruction and discuss the nature of instructional rounds as forms of collaborative inquiry.

The entire focus of the Superintendents’ Network in Connecticut centered on the established community of practice of superintendents willing to open the doors of their districts to others in order to receive feedback and collectively examine data with other individuals who share their unique professional responsibilities. Rallis, et al. (2006) created an ethnography, a study of in an intact social group (Creswell, 2007), in order to examine the experience of the twelve superintendents collaboratively engaged in the rounds process throughout the state of Connecticut. The results were overwhelmingly positive and inspired additional networks of superintendents to develop within the state and in others (City, et al., 2009; Teitel, 2009; Rallis, et al., 2006).

While communities of practice were prevalent in the relationship between Clark University and the Worcester Public Schools (Del Prete, 2006; Teitel, 2001), they were not
necessarily the participants of any of the rounds processes that took place. It is clear that in the establishment of the Professional Development Schools, the success of the programs were grounded in the relationships and support fostered by the communities of practice within the schools (Del Prete, 2006).

**Critical Reflection.** Among the literature regarding instructional rounds in education, critical reflection exists in established protocol, as well as the data analysis of the reviewed studies. Barringer, et al. (2010) examines how instructional rounds are specific types of walkthroughs that enable the observers to study snapshots of student performance in order to better inform pedagogical decisions through the critical reflection of the participants. Specific reflection protocol is identified by City, et al. (2009) and utilized by administrators participating in the established networks of instructional rounds (City, et al., 2009; Rallis, et al., 2006; Teitel, 2009). Virtue (2009) developed a protocol for critical reflection unique to the instructional rounds process used by his pre-service teacher candidates. This enabled the participants to assess their effectiveness in collectively analyzing the data they gathered and provided a formative assessment in which participants could track their individual skill development throughout the process.

The studies including instructional rounds all shared a qualitative research paradigm but utilized different theoretical frameworks. Virtue (2009) examined the effectiveness of instructional rounds for pre-service teacher candidates in South Carolina through an action research study, a study in which action or cycle of actions addressing a particular problem or set of problems brings about change in the setting or within the people personally involved (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Herr & Anderson, 2005; McIntyre, 2008; Stringer, 2007). Finally, both Teitel (2001) and Del Prete (2006) use case studies examining aspects of the partnership
between Clark University and the Worcester Public Schools to create Professional Development Schools. One case study focuses on the initial process of creating the University Park Campus School (Teitel, 2001), while the other is a comparative case study between two Worcester Public Schools (Del Prete, 2006), one with a direct connection to Clark University, University Park Campus School, and the other without a direct connection, South High School. Both studies, while not focused on rounds entirely, include data collected from rounds reports or rounds-like practices as part of their professional development for teachers.

The qualitative studies focusing on instructional rounds utilized a wide range of methods and instruments in order to collect and organize data throughout their studies. The action research study conducted by Virtue (2009) included field notes of the participants, interviews, specific observation protocol, completed rounds feedback forms, reflective journals written by the participants, and online discussions of the rounds experience. An addendum to the study included examples of the protocols and the rounds feedback forms which provided additional resources moving forward with my study. Rallis, et al. (2006) also included examples of observation protocols but in addition provided the manner in which problems of practices were identified for their rounds process and utilized transcripts from debriefing meetings as an instrument for collecting data. The Professional Development School for Teachers established at the University Park Campus School through the collaboration of Clark University and the Worcester Public Schools not only utilized rounds reports, reflective writings of the participants, and interviews, but also included performance assessment through portfolios (Del Prete, 2006; Teitel, 2001).

The most specific examples of analysis provided in the qualitative studies incorporating rounds were found in the action research study conducted by Virtue (2009). The data was
analyzed by identifying specific words or phrases used by multiple participants or “in vivo” codes (Creswell, 2007). Specific themes emerged from the data during the second phase of coding and the process was repeated until it reached saturation or additional analysis yielded no new insights (Virtue, 2009). The data was then triangulated or confirmed by analyzing sets of data holistically across multiple interns or participants in the study (2009). Similarly to Kernan, et al. (2006), this process informs potential strategies useful in analyzing the range of data gathered in both the participation of the rounds process to examine problems of practice within a specific school and in assessing the effectiveness of the rounds process as professional development for the participants.

**The Use of Teacher Collaboration for Professional Development**

In order to improve collaboration, there are definite applications for social media and communication networks during the rounds process. As teachers are already without additional face time to collaborate, the ability to use social media in order to facilitate asynchronous dialogue among the participants in both the pre-rounds discussion and the post-rounds debriefing could be incredibly beneficial. Asynchronous communication refers to “the facility for participants to take part at any time or place convenient to them, and to the intervening time gap between communication and response” (Allen, Hartman, & Truman as cited in Duncan, 2005, p. 875). After the instructional rounds pilot is established as a professional development practice within one building in our district then the process will expand beyond the initial pilot building to the entire district encompassing many buildings and considering many different schedules which further complicates face-to-face meeting opportunities.

Among the literature assembled regarding asynchronous communication following all of
my searches, a new theme, social constructivism, emerged in addition to the two identified in the previous categories: communities of practice and critical reflection. The three themes combine together to present information establishing support for a collaborative process of professional development such as instructional rounds. While there is no specific mention of instructional rounds in any of the articles represented in this section of the literature review, the results in the majority of the studies included here provide evidence promoting the effectiveness of individual elements that are present in the practice of rounds.

Communities of Practice. A number of the articles reviewed included specific references to Wenger (2006) and the communities of practice (Amhag & Jakobsson, 2009; Johnson, 2001; Kingsley, 2009; Scherer & Cator, 2011; Vonderwell, 2003). Members of the “Net Generation” (Tabscott as cited in Kingsley, 2009) are creating very specific communities of practice that are more dependent on the ability to converse using computer-mediated communication, or online dialogue, whether it is synchronous or asynchronous. Computer-mediated communication is defined as electronic communication such as email; listservs; web-based forums such as blogs, wiki groups, or social networking sites; microblogging tools such as Twitter; or any other online dialogue tool which allows a community of practice (Wenger, 2006) to emerge in which participants share a virtual space or environment for a unified purpose (Duncan, 2005; Mason & Berson, 2000; Scherer & Cator, 2011). Young teachers new to the profession will be members of the “Net Generation” as they have not experienced life before the world wide web was developed (Kingsley, 2009). However, automatically utilizing computer-mediated communication to facilitate asynchronous dialogue during the professional development of instructional rounds might not be plausible for universal application. A concern still exists in that many veteran teachers are anxious about receiving proper training with new
technologies (Scherer & Cator, 2011) and those living and working in rural, remote areas where asynchronous communication would be most effective are often unable to consistently participate without sufficient computer access thus limiting potential online collaboration (Duncan, 2005).

Acknowledging potential complications with asynchronous computer-mediated communication does not prohibit investigating its benefits to instructional rounds implementation. Asynchronous computer-mediated communication opens the potential for developing virtual communities of practice (Ardichvili, 2008; Johnson, 2001; Scherer & Cator, 2011; Wenger, 2006) that will enable teachers to engage in more reflective conversations.

**Critical Reflection.** The next theme emerging from this category of the literature was asynchronous communication facilitating critical reflection among participants (Amhag & Jakobsson, 2009; Davis & Resta, 2002; Duncan, 2005; Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001; Mason & Berson, 2000). Again, the literature supports the use of asynchronous computer-mediated communication for instructional rounds as critical reflection is crucial in establishing an effective rounds process (City, et al., 2009). Authors approached the subject of critical reflection for various perspectives. Hawkes and Romiszowski (2001) center their entire article on the benefits of asynchronous computer-mediated communication over face-to-face meetings in the ability to better facilitate critical reflection. The very nature of a delayed time as mentioned in Davis and Resta (2002) allows participants opportunities to create more reflective responses in their communications and possibly connect their ideas to those of experts in the field that they might not be able to do during synchronous face to face interactions (Amhag & Jakobsson, 2009; Duncan, 2005; Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001). In addition, many professional development initiatives include a new emphasis on critical reflection in order to utilize collegial dialogue in an
attempt to sustain improvements made in instructional practices (Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001). However, due to limited resources, many efforts to support collegial dialogue and critical reflection through collaboration are not cost effective for face-to-face engagement and remain unsupported rather than implemented through more economical asynchronous computer-mediated communications (2001).

According to Mason and Berson (2000), supportive structure, alternative perspectives, and challenging content are necessary factors within the environment in order to sustain critical reflection. These elements, when present in computer-mediated communication, connect the resources from multiple participants and enhance collaboration (2000). The structure of instructional rounds provides an organized forum that enables critical reflection to take place within asynchronous computer-mediated communication.

Similar to the previously mentioned struggles with implementing collegial dialogue in professional development initiatives, participants involved in an instructional rounds process can engage in critical reflection more readily and efficiently through the use of asynchronous computer-mediated communication. Pre-rounds discussions are necessary in preparing all of the participants for the observation process and the collecting of data that will be analyzed collaboratively (City, et al., 2009). Limiting the time that teachers need to be out of their classrooms during both pre-rounds and post-rounds meetings, students benefit from increased accessibility to their teachers and with asynchronous communication established as an effective tool for critical reflection, its utilization would remove, or at least minimize, the pressure felt by teachers to rush through the reflection process in an effort to return quickly to their students.

Social Constructivism. The final theme emerging from this category of the literature was the proliferation of asynchronous communication being associated with the theory of social
constructivism. Nearly all of the authors included in the review referred to social constructivism in their article. Johnson (2001) effectively connects the initial concept of a community of practice to the roots of constructivist theories in that both exhibit learning environments which focus on solving authentic problems with the recognition of shared goals and collaboration. The constructivist perspective was identified as a theoretical framework for six of the studies (Amhag & Jakobsson, 2009; Davis & Resta, 2002; Duncan, 2005; Gorsky & Caspi, 2005; Kingsley, 2009; Mason & Berson, 2000).

Gorsky and Caspi (2005) identify two different types of dialogue that correlate with learning outcomes in their study: intrapersonal and interpersonal. The latter, interpersonal, is grounded in constructivist theory as it describes communication between multiple parties and is open and divergent in nature rather than predetermined (2005). Instructional rounds relies on interpersonal dialogue as it is a collaborative process seeking to discover new information through communication and analysis of shared experiences of data collection (City, et al., 2009).

Constructivist learning specifically through collaboration is a central focus of the study by Murphy (2004). Not only are perspectives shared initially at the onset of collaboration but the perspectives are also challenged and refined throughout the process of effective collaboration (2004). The sense of common purpose necessary for collaboration emerges when individuals within a group begin to share goals and build upon one another’s understanding (2004). Murphy (2004) also presents the web-based learning module Solving Problems in Collaborative Environments (SPICE) designed “to help practitioners such as social workers, nurses, and teachers advance their practice through the process of collaborative problem solving”(p. 424).
Chapter III: Methodology

This chapter presents the research questions guiding this study as well as the research design used to investigate the perceptions of department heads participating in the instructional rounds process as professional development for teachers. The following sections of this chapter discuss the validity and credibility of this study and the protections of human subjects and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the data collected and how it was analyzed in this study.

1. What are the experiences of the department heads participating in the Instructional Rounds process?

2. Having participated in Instructional Rounds, what do the department heads perceive to be the benefits and challenges of its use as a collaborative professional development practice for themselves as teachers and the teachers within their departments?

3. After participating in Instructional Rounds, to what extent do department heads believe it can serve as an effective professional development practice for teachers?

Research Design

Grounded in adult learning theory and organizational learning theory, a qualitative participatory evaluation was conducted (Collie-Akers, Watson-Thompson, Schultz, & Fawcett, 2010; Cousins & Earl, 1992; King, Cousins, & Whitmore, 2007; Weaver & Cousins, 2004; Zukoski & Luluquisen, 2002) examining the experience of high school department heads participating in instructional rounds as professional development for instructional practices and
the potential the process might have for implementation as professional development within their respective departments.

According to Cousins and Earl (1992), participatory evaluation is a form of collaborative research. Participatory evaluation exhibits three distinguishing characteristics: control of the evaluation process, stakeholder selection, and depth of participation (King, et al., 2007; Weaver & Cousins, 2004). Control of technical decisions affecting the process ranges from being entirely in the hands of the researchers to being in the hands of the practitioners. The selection of the stakeholders refers to the inclusion of only primary users to that of more extended groups. Finally, the depth of participation ranges from consultation, in which no decision-making exists, to full participation, in which there is deep involvement in every aspect of the evaluation from design to dissemination of results (Cousins & Earl, 1992; King, et al., 2007).

To address the problem of teacher isolation and the potential use of instructional rounds as structure for meaningful professional development, a group of four department heads with teaching responsibilities of their own working in the same rural high school within the regional district constituted the sample participating in the practice of instructional rounds facilitated by myself, a building administrator in the district acting as a participant/researcher. The goal was for the group to be empowered to exercise full control of technical decisions during each stage of the rounds process as far as which forms of communication were most efficient and organizing schedules of meetings and expectations for deadlines. The selection of stakeholders was primary users as there was no additional involvement of participants in the evaluation process who were not involved in the instructional rounds practice. Finally, the depth of participation reflected a fully engaged group of practitioners committed to evaluating the entire process of instructional rounds as professional development for teachers within their respective departments.
The site of the study was a rural, regional high school in north central Massachusetts serving three communities. Population of the high school is approximately 1100 students in grades 9-12 with 70 full-time faculty members in six departments (Culture and Humanities; Science, Engineering, and Health; Math, Technology and Business; Global Arts and Communications; Special Education; and Guidance). The school is the only high school in a seven-school district of approximately 3,400 students. There is one pre-school, three elementary schools (one in each of the three member towns) and two middle schools that feed into the high school. The school demographics are consistent with similarly sized regional schools in the state. This site was selected specifically due to the nature of participatory evaluation and this researchers’ access to the participants for this shared research study. The results of the study will help to guide future decisions regarding professional development within both the school and the regional district as a whole.

**Data collection.** Data was collected using a variety of methods and instruments. The purpose of the data collection for this study was to gather information addressing the research questions as to the perceptions of the participants within the rounds process and the effectiveness of the rounds process as professional development for teachers. Data collection and analysis therefore consisted of two parts (see Table 1): data collected through interviews and focus groups in regards to the instructional rounds experience, and data collected during the instructional rounds process.
Table 1

Use of categorized data sources by participant group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of collection and analysis</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Data collected through interviews and focus groups in regards to the instructional rounds experience</td>
<td>Department Heads</td>
<td>Pre-rounds focus group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asynchronous computer-mediated communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-rounds interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher as participant</td>
<td>Pre-rounds focus group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Asynchronous computer-mediated communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Post-rounds interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Data collected during the instructional rounds process.</td>
<td>Department Heads</td>
<td>Rounds Observation Protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher as participant</td>
<td>Rounds Observation Protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Researcher field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Digital images of rounds debriefing data (pictures of data collected on whiteboard)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data collected in the first part included pre- and post-interviews with the rounds participants both collectively, as an established community of practice, and individually. The second part included examining the data collected and generated through the rounds process. Rounds observation protocols were utilized along with field notes of the researcher. Instructional rounds include a four-part process of identifying the problem of practice, observation of the
practice, observation debrief, and determining the next level of work (City, et al., 2009). Data was generated during observations using protocols, face-to-face meetings and through additional electronic communication among members. Specific asynchronous computer-mediated communication established by the participants using Google docs and e-mail was also collected as data to evaluate the effectiveness of collaboration among the participants between the face-to-face meetings. By communicating electronically online, participants were able to continue collaboration during the more reflective components of the rounds process when they were not meeting together in person. Data collected for the rounds work was analyzed as data for the participatory evaluation study examining the experience in order to qualify the effectiveness of the practice.

As mentioned earlier, the instructional rounds process contains four parts: identifying the problem of practice, observation of the practice, observation debrief, and identifying the next level of work. This four-part process or cycle was conducted in full twice during this study in order to collect significant data as to the effectiveness of the practice as professional development for the teachers participating. A focus group interview was conducted initially prior to beginning the cycle as well as between each round cycle collecting data that acted as both a formative assessment in the rounds process for the facilitator and the participants and qualitative data for the purposes of the participatory evaluation study.

**Data analysis.** Participatory evaluation requires an interactive, iterative approach in the analysis of data (Cousins & Earl, 1992; King, et al., 2007). Data was transcribed and coded using a combination of predetermined and emerging coding (Creswell, 2009). Similar to the rounds study by Virtue (2009), “in vivo” coding which utilizes specific words or phrases used by multiple participants (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2005) was used in analysis early in the process.
Major themes were identified in subsequent cycles using “pattern coding” (Creswell, 2007). Upon saturation of the coding process, when new information obtained no longer provided further insight into the identified codes (Creswell, 2007), data analysis transitioned to articulate specific findings in the research. The qualitative data analysis software program, HyperRESEARCH, was used to assist in the formulation of theories based on the codes and themes emerging from the data. Ultimately, four major findings were identified at the completion of the data analysis.

Themes were coded in relationship to each of the three research questions across all of the collected data. A number of coding strategies were implemented in order to analyze the qualitative data that was collected and organized into the two categories: data collected during the rounds process and data collected through interviews and focus groups in regards to the rounds process. Audio recordings of the focus group discussion and each of the individual interviews were created using the application AudioNote on the researcher’s iPad and then transcribed by the researcher into rich text files still utilizing the AudioNote application. The files which included input from the participant were shared individually with each participant using Google docs which allowed participants to validate their contribution included in the transcription file.

**Validity and Credibility**

According to Maxwell (2005), validity refers to “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p 106). In order to establish validity in a qualitative study it is imperative to provide a clear argument consisting of the strategies planned to identify and try to rule out threats to the perception of correctness
(2005). Thoughtful descriptions of the specific application of strategies protect proposals from drifting into generic, theoretical terms presented as “magical charms that are intended to drive away evil” (p 107).

Stringer (2007) suggests that rigor must be ensured as a strategy in establishing the validity and trustworthiness of the outcomes of qualitative research. The rigor is assessed through procedures that identify specific attributes of the study such as credibility, transferability, and confirmability (2007).

**Credibility.** Both member checking (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Stringer, 2007) and respondent validation (Maxwell, 2005) focuses on allowing the participants opportunities to review raw data and conclusions and verify that the research is an adequate representation of their perspectives ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting what they have said or done. As the rounds process reflects the perceptions of all participants, the data collected from the observation debriefing and the focus group discussions will represent the participants’ perceptions. By sharing all of the collected data with the participants, individuals will be able to review data at his or her leisure.

The third stage of the instructional rounds cycle is the observation debriefing. That stage along with the focus group discussions will utilize participant debriefing opportunities (Stringer, 2007). This opportunity focuses on specific responses and feelings of the participant which will lead to understanding participants’ perceptions.

As a participatory evaluation, it will be crucial that the study utilizes referential adequacy (Stringer, 2007) which ensures that the ideas and concepts “reflect the experiences and perspectives of the participating stakeholders” (pp 58-59). All communication will be created by
the participants and will therefore represent their terminology and language. Reports need to reflect their perspectives and be clearly understood by the participants (Stringer, 2007).

**Transferability.** Although participant evaluation applies to the particular perceptions of the people involved in the study it does not mean that the outcomes may not be relevant elsewhere (Stringer, 2007). If the context, activities, and events are described in detail, then it is possible for individuals not part of the study to determine whether or not outcomes can be applied based on similarities in other situations (2007). Therefore great detail will be provided in describing the entire rounds process, the data collected from participants during the rounds process and focus group discussions, and in the findings of the research in order to provide a foundation for transferability.

**Confirmability.** Stringer (2007) describes confirmability as the ability for researchers to confirm that the described procedures as reported in the study actually took place. All of our data will be stored electronically both on the facilitators’ laptop and backed-up on a cloud-storage system which will enable any observers to view an “audit trail” (p 59) of data collection, protocols, field notes, recordings, and journals related to the study.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Participatory evaluation studies require the need to address ethical considerations maintaining an inherent transparency as to the process for all of the participants. Having successfully completed the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) online course entitled, “Protecting Human Research Subjects” offered through the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), the ethics and the protection of human subjects was assured throughout the research process of this proposed study. All participants were provided information regarding
the purpose of the study, specific research procedures, and any risks and benefits in participating in the study. Participants signed consent forms acknowledging the voluntary nature of their participation (see Appendix B). A preliminary copy of the study and any other publications resulting from the study will be made available to all participants (Creswell, 2009). Throughout the study, data was collected and stored electronically on a secure cloud-based storage system, dropbox.com, which utilizes shared folders in which only the participants had access. The very nature of instructional rounds requires confidentiality among the participants in order to foster an atmosphere of trust. The discussions that took place during focus groups remained confidential. Although total privacy cannot be guaranteed due to the participants’ exposure to each other, privacy and boundaries were discussed prior to the rounds process and focus group discussions in order to eliminate potential problems. There was no possibility of harm to the participants as group discussions, both small and whole, group work and observations are all accepted school practices at the study site (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The research project was in full compliance with Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies following the IRB review.

Conclusion

The practice of instructional rounds provides teachers the opportunity to exhibit the collective intelligence that Parker Palmer refers to in his interview with Van Gelder (2009). By working together and challenging each other’s perceptions, organizational learning (Fullan, 2005 2009) can take place and strengthen student achievement by focusing on instructional practices and how administrators can support students and teachers in the endeavor to improve learning. By investigating the best practices in other professional fields, educators can benefit from the
new knowledge gathered and from reflecting on the experiences. Instructional rounds have been effective in the medical field for decades and professionals all over the world have been benefiting from the implementation of various online theories to improve overall efficiency by addressing communication and maximizing schedules.

**Chapter IV: Research Findings**

Chapter IV presents the key findings of the participatory evaluation conducted by five individuals (one administrator and four department heads) over a six week period within a rural high school. The chapter is presented in four sections, each of which focuses on a separate aspect of the study. A description of the study’s context is presented in the first section of the chapter. The next section details the coding process and identifies categories used in analyzing the facilitator’s field notes from observations and the debriefing sessions as well as the six transcribed data sources which included the initial focus group discussion, the asynchronous computer mediated communication and the four individual post-rounds interviews. The third section presents the emergent themes as identified through the analysis of the collected data and connects the findings to each of the three research questions:

1. What are the experiences of the department heads participating in the Instructional Rounds process?
2. Having participated in Instructional Rounds, what do the department heads perceive to be the benefits and challenges of its use as a collaborative professional development practice for themselves as teachers and the teachers within their departments?
3. After participating in Instructional Rounds, to what extent do department heads believe it can serve as an effective professional development practice for teachers?
Data collected from focus groups, individual interviews, debriefing sessions following the instructional rounds observations, and researcher’s field notes will be presented along with this researcher’s analysis of the data as it pertains to each research question. The final section will summarize the findings as a whole.

**Study Context**

This participatory evaluation study was designed to consider the perceptions of high school department heads involved in implementing an instructional rounds process as a potential ongoing professional development practice for their teachers in a rural high school. The department heads involved in the study all have the responsibility of continually reflecting on their own teaching strategies within their classrooms as well as facilitating the reflection and development of the teaching strategies of the teachers within their respective departments. As a collaborative process, this study provided the department heads with the opportunity to experience instructional rounds as participants and reflect on whether or not members of their departments would benefit from such participation. As a participatory evaluation, the process allowed all five participants’ voices to inform the manner in which the instructional rounds were carried out throughout the study. Opinions reflected during the initial focus group discussion prior to conducting the first observation of the instructional rounds established a foundation of trust for the participants and clarified expectations of the process.

The first observation involved all of the participants being in the same classroom at one time observing the students in the class and collecting data on the complexity of the tasks in which the students were engaged. Participants communicated via email following the first observation and, based on their reflection, adjustments were made to the structure of the second
set of observations. For the second set of observations, three different classes were visited during the same time period by having the participants rotate through each other’s classes while the students were engaged in work. The participants all met later for a formal face-to-face debriefing of the observations followed by individual interviews with each participant regarding the entire instructional rounds process. These final interviews were conducted by the participant/researcher.

While the number of years of experience in leadership positions varied among the participants, the years of teaching experience did not (as displayed in Table 2). The most years of experience in a leadership position was six years. One participant was in the fourth year of leadership, another in the second, and two were in the first year. All of the participants had more than fifteen years teaching experience and less than twenty. This data establishes the experience each of the participants brought to the study in regards to time spent working with students as a teacher in comparison to the time each participant has spent facilitating the professional development of others. The ages of the participants ranged from late thirties to late forties. All of the participants had been working together as part of the high school leadership team since the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year in which the study was conducted.
Table 2

Experience of participants in study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years in Education</th>
<th>Years in Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DH 1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH 2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH 3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DH 4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question #1: What are the experiences of the department heads participating in the Instructional Rounds process?

As a participatory evaluation study, the experience of the participants drives the development of the research questions and the qualitative data gathered reflects both the individual and collective perspectives of the participants. In order to review the experiences of the participants, the researcher examined and analyzed data collected during the rounds process, through individual interviews with each participant, and during the focus groups with all participants. This provided a rich set of data from which to review and analyze the experience and perspectives of the participants involved in the instructional rounds.

Table 3 illustrates the themes that emerged from an analysis of the data regarding participants’ engagement in instructional rounds.
Collaborating with colleagues in the context of the instructional rounds provided valuable and meaningful opportunities for the participants to discuss instructional practices.

Seeing their colleagues in action allowed the participants to witness the instructional strategies being utilized by other instructional leaders within the building.

Participants found the activity of the instructional rounds in itself provided a variety of engaging experiences:

- Observing various levels of rigor inherent in the student tasks
- Observing expectations set by other instructional leaders
- Reflecting on individual practices in relation to other instructional leaders

Collaborating with colleagues in the context of the instructional rounds provided valuable and meaningful opportunities for the participants to discuss instructional practices. The department heads identified the importance of collaboration and opportunities to converse with colleagues early during the initial pre-rounds focus group with four out of four participants commenting on successfully collaborating with colleagues in the past and anticipating the opportunity to engage in professional dialogue or conversation with colleagues during the rounds process. Highlighting the ability to have conversations with colleagues as critical to effective professional development, four out of four of the participants commented on
previous personal experiences both formal and informal. One participant shared during the focus
group discussion:

As the department chair, I was in everyone's room once a week. I have found that as a
very useful learning tool for myself and for other members of my department. Because
then we will have conversations about it. Some of the best conversations that I have about
education have come as a result of me being in their rooms.

Collaboration also created initial concerns on the parts of the participants. During the
focus group discussion, potential concerns regarding the collaborative aspect of instructional
rounds were thus addressed. All four of the participants stated that they did not have any
concerns when the question was first mentioned. However, when asked about any concerns they
had having their colleagues visit their classroom (a necessary as part of instructional rounds),
each participant expressed concerns about being judged by their colleagues. For example, in the
course of the discussion, there was a great deal of laughter when one participant mentioned that
the seniors in her class have asked her to “take her foot off the gas pedal” as it was the spring of
their senior year. Later during the same conversation, concerns were raised regarding the large
number of students in their classes, which, as stated by them, makes it more difficult to reach
each and every student. These statements implied a certain concern about the teachers being
judged by their peers if any students were not engaged in the lesson being observed:

Ah, my concern is that I have 33 kids in my first period class so I don't know where you
guys are going to stand or sit. Well, you definitely aren't going to be able to sit. The other
concern is that of the 33 kids I have a pocket of maybe 6 or 7 seven kids that no matter
what I have tried I have not been able to reach and they have given up.
Another participant also shared conversations that he had had recently with others regarding this topic:

We both said that for whatever reason, we both felt terrible about that; although, we had both done everything we can, including standing on our heads. I have done more than I should and the recognition is that these two kids are doing nothing and it is their fault clearly but for whatever reason we both felt badly.

While the participants were addressing concerns about their participation in the study and in particular their colleagues observing their classes, they were also finding themselves encouraging each other and appreciating the opportunity to be working with one another in the instructional rounds format, observing each other:

I think it is us realizing we are all professionals and we are all at the top of our game. So, we are not there to judge whether we are good teachers or not. It is really just to help us grow as educators.

Seeing their colleagues in action allowed the participants to witness the instructional strategies being utilized by other instructional leaders within the building. All of the participants’ regular professional responsibilities as department heads include going into classrooms and observing instructional practices and student behavior, but they do not regularly observe one another as peers. In addition, the department heads do not regularly interact with each other outside of administrative meetings. However, a review of the individual interviews, the debriefing session and the focus group discussion clearly indicated that the department heads found visiting each other’s classes as a valuable opportunity to see each other as instructional leaders practicing their craft and observe how their classes were both similar and different.

During the individual interviews, one of the participants specifically addressed the
The opportunity of seeing other classes in session:

The strengths, I think, is being able to see other classes in action, other activities, other instructional strategies that teachers are doing. Being able to say, hey, I can do that in my classroom or what a great idea. Maybe take it back to your own classroom.

Another participant highlighted during his interview how the classes he observed directly addressed issues that he is facing trying to transition his department to the new curriculum standards:

Well, knowing that we are going towards the new common core, it was good to see discussion going in (DH 1)’s classroom and in (DH 4)’s, as well. The project based learning going on in (DH 3)’s class was good to see, as well. Seeing what it looks like in other classes was definitely helpful.

Additionally, during the debriefing session following the rounds observations the participants discussed how the ability to visit each other provided an opportunity to understand each other’s perspectives as they often engage in discussions during meetings in which they are representing one specific department. One participant celebrated, “to have a new perspective, a new way at looking at things as we go through that. I found that to be really helpful to me as a teacher.”

It was summed up by one participant when he said, “You were able to see the commonalities between the disciplines.”

Another participant continued, “I think that being able to have those types of opportunities for any staff member in any discipline is one of the most important things that we can do.”

The ability to better understand both the challenges and successes that other teachers...
experience that may be similar or unique to others was highlighted as other “good ideas of things that you can incorporate from visiting someone else’s classroom.”

The comments from both the debriefing sessions and the post-rounds interviews were consistent with sentiments expressed initially during the focus group discussion. While discussing the expected benefits from participating in the instructional rounds process, participants were enthusiastic about the opportunity to visit other classrooms:

I think any time you go into someone else's class you can learn so I think that is going to be great. Personally, when you guys come to see me I think that will be great.

Later in the same conversation, a participant added being intrigued by observing disciplines that are different than his own:

It's what we do; the topic seems to be irrelevant. How to get what it is that you are good at across to the kids in front of you. I think it is a neat deal to get to see teachers that are good at other things; what is it that they do?

Participants found the activity of the instructional rounds in itself provided a variety of engaging experiences. During the debriefing session with participants prior to the post-rounds interviews, the overall activity of the instructional rounds process was highlighted. The participants discussed the overall enjoyment they had being able to observe the levels of rigor and expectations set by others as well as reflecting on individual practices in relation to the other instructional leaders in the building.

Observing various levels of rigor inherent in the student tasks. By going into classes within different departments and with students from different grades, the participants were able to observe a range in regards to the level of rigor the student’s task involved. The department heads expressed noticing differences within each class as well as from class to class. This
created the foundation for the conversations regarding the multiple levels of rigor observed in classes and led to the participants discussing the difference between the rigor inherent in the assigned task and student engagement. Students might seemingly be on task and engaged in the assignment but that did not mean the assignment was rigorous as illustrated by one participant:

Sometimes they might be doing exactly what the teacher asked them to do but when you say why are you doing this? They will say because I was told to do this. Do you know why? Why this is...no, they have no idea, but they are obedient.

The participants discussed that there is no direct evidence from a discussion like that with a student that the task was rigorous only that the data collected by the observer would indicate that the student was focused on the assignment and not off task.

Another participant suggested that the rigor needs to be appropriate to the individual in that what might not be challenging for some might be for others: “the other kids might be really struggling with it but their pistons are firing if you will so I don't think it is a bad thing.” The participant continued by stressing the importance of the teachers’ ability to identify what the appropriate rigor is for each student and that the teacher should not assume “one size fits all assignments” should be beneficial even in homogenously grouped or leveled classes.

During her final interview, one participant referred to the conversation regarding rigor and shared how it affected a pre-conceived notion she had regarding specific tasks:

Oh, my gosh, this is not as low level as I thought; this could actually be a challenging exercise. Like doing a review. Doing a review sheet on its own I don't usually do but the way it was being done in one of the classrooms was bringing it up to a higher order level which I thought was great. That is just something that jogged in my mind that I can do a review sheet but I have to beef it up in turns of why things happened or have the kids go
into much more detail with things.

The ability to engage in such specific discourse was invigorating for the participants as they frequently did not have the time or opportunity to do so. One participant shared during his final interview that the conversations alone helped to “sharpen what we look at the next time we observe the students' work.”

**Observing the expectations set by other instructional leaders.** The initial concerns of the participants being judged by their peers when they opened their classrooms for the observations manifested in the opinions that were discussed about the expectations set by each other in the classes:

With people's teaching, would they be nervous to have someone come into their classroom? It is something that is breaking a norm. In education, we go into our rooms and we teach. There is not always people in my room day in and day out. It is not normal to have people watching.

Two of the classes visited were reviewing for an upcoming assessment while the other two classes exhibited student centered activities where students were engaged in specific skill development. The researcher observed a noticeable reluctance on the part of the participants to discuss the activities taking place in the classes and focused on the overall list of skills observed throughout the process which allowed the participants not to discuss specifically the choices each other made in the assigned activities and therefore did not require them to commit to an opinion about the expectations imbedded in the assigned tasks. During the post-round interviews, participants were more comfortable sharing privately opinions more critical in nature:

(It) was just a review and to be perfectly honest I would rather have seen a lesson, but that was just the nature of the beast and the time that we had. When a teacher needs to get
ready for an exam and with limited time like that, it just is what it is. In some ways I would have liked to have seen instruction and then student activity and then instruction with more student activity.

**Reflecting on individual practices.** The experience of participating in the instructional rounds process allowed everyone involved to reflect on individual practices. While working together, all of the participants expressed how the process of entering other teachers’ classrooms encouraged them to reflect upon the way in which they might have approached similar topics, strategies they might have used in similar circumstances or how what they were witnessing might relate to work in their own classes. During the post-rounds interviews, one participant commented:

> I think it was more reflective about my practice and do I accomplish the things I need to do and if don't, do I try differently or take an extra day to go over the content.

Another participant expressed during his interview how witnessing the work of others made him reconsider how he might approach certain activities:

> But knowing that even in the case of a review there are some higher order thinking skills going on. Knowing that some of the things they were being asked to do were not higher order thinking skills and that members of the group still identified others as higher order thinking was good to know.

The comments made by other participants during the debriefing session encouraged one participant to share during her interview that she became more confident in the direction initially headed in the given assignment:

> …it also reassured me that I am doing a lot of higher order things in my class when others are mentioning your class and saying they saw this activity and this activity. I feel more
confident in that I am expecting...or that the kids are doing what I am expecting and outsiders are seeing that.

Finally, the participants all expressed enjoying themselves throughout the process. Visiting other classes, having others visit their classes and be afforded the opportunity to engage with other professionals in conversation about instructional practices was both affirming and invigorating. It was discussed that although timing was often an issue, the participants looked forward to the process and appreciated having the time to meet with each other outside of administrative meetings.

**Research Question #2: Based on their experience participating in Instructional Rounds, what do the department heads perceive to be the benefits and challenges of its use as a collaborative professional development practice for themselves as teachers and the teachers within their departments?**

Data expressing the department heads’ perceptions was gathered both during the instructional rounds process and through the final interviews following the entire process. Table 4 presents the themes that emerged specifically in regard to the benefits and challenges of the rounds process through an analysis of the facilitator’s field notes as well as the six transcribed conversations which included the focus group discussion, the asynchronous computer mediated communication and the four individual post-rounds interviews.
Table 4

*Themes in relationship to the benefits and challenges of utilizing instructional rounds as collaborative professional development as perceived by the participants.*

- Opportunity to converse with colleagues about instructional practices
- The ability to increase their teacher toolkits by observing strategies in other classes
- Increasing collective efficacy by observing colleagues in “their zone”
- The amount of additional time needed beyond regular responsibilities

**Opportunity to converse with colleagues about instructional practices.** The experience had by the participants within the rounds process directly related to their ability to identify benefits of the activity. Throughout the process the most singularly identified benefit was that of their ability to converse with their colleagues about instructional practices:

> Sometimes if you are only talking to the people in your department after a while your own way of doing things might not be as fresh necessarily. So, I think by having other people look at what you are doing you might get a different perspective or you might expand the way that you look at things.

Another participant reflected, “I think meeting together and sharing our observations led us to different conversations, as well, I think that was great.” This specific theme reverberated throughout the study continuing to remain in the focus of the researcher and the participants. With teachers often working in isolation, the ability to engage in conversation on a more regular basis provided a much needed diversion from the typical routine.
The ability to increase their teacher toolkits by observing strategies in other classes.

One of the early codes used during data analysis was “increasing teacher toolkits.” The original comment that inspired the code took place during an informal discussion with one of the participants while waiting for everyone else to arrive for the pre-rounds focus group discussion. The individual expressed how encouraged he feels every time he is able to have great conversations about education as it increases his teaching toolkit.

Table 5 includes comments illustrating how the rounds process created opportunities for the participants to gain additional instructional strategies to add to their teaching toolkit.

Table 5

Quotes illustrating increasing teacher toolkits

- You know, you see something in science that you never thought could be used in a world language class and then you are surprised. Oh, I could use that in my class.

- Some of the best ideas that I have gotten, having been from my own department or from other departments and how I can incorporate them into my own strategies and plans, has kind of revitalized or refreshed some of the materials that I have been using. I think that if we can do that as a group, collectively, that could really have a huge effect on outcomes for students just as well.

- Because when I do walk throughs in my department I am looking to steal things, as well. Or take things from teachers that are very successful.

- Again, looking at student work, projects, assignments, what have you, that other teachers in the department are doing and going back and saying this is great, this is what I can use in my classroom. Oh, this is a good idea; I might tweak it this way for my own kids versus their kids.

The comments included in Table 5 exhibit each individual’s reflective nature and the acknowledgement that observing others can be beneficial. All of the participants expressed how they can get great ideas from the opportunity of having time to go into other teacher’s classes.
Whether it is being able to see new ideas or different strategies to address similar topics, the participants felt they were “sharpening their skills” when their conventions were challenged by observing things they might not have initially considered or witnessed something work in a different way than it had in their own classes.

**Increasing collective efficacy by observing colleagues in “their zone”**. Continuing the identified benefits of the instructional rounds process, visiting other classes, and observing their peers in action repeatedly resonated among the participants as a major component; “seeing folks in ‘their zone’” was specifically identified by one participant during the debriefing session. The participants identified this aspect of the process as a clear benefit in that they enjoyed both seeing the work of their peers and felt as if they benefited from observing other experts in the field in action.

As instructional leaders, there is a certain expectation that they are masters of their craft and that the instructional practices being utilized in their classes would be consistent and high level. The participants in the study regularly observe classes within their own departments and help other teachers develop their own strategies. The opportunity to observe other master teachers and witness strategies that can both challenge and/or resemble strategies of their own was beneficial to the participants. One participant shared during his post-rounds interview:

> In each discipline, you know what higher order thinking is and you get to see it and you know it but when you observe it elsewhere it is a little different. It helped me...the way I observe things it helped me to see ok that is what that is.

Another participant expressed during his interview his anticipation to visit other classes, “Word on the street is that they are all very good teachers and I was excited to go and see them and I was comfortable.” He continued by addressing the benefits of observing other teachers’
strategies in practice and how it helped solidify his confidence in other departments, “seeing what it (great teaching) looks like in other classes was definitely helpful.” Finally, he expressed how the rounds process helped him consider new ways to appreciate his colleagues’ efforts by focusing on the work of the students:

As a teacher, each day when you walk in and look at other people's students and what they are accomplishing, you can do the same thing. You can sit back and look at student work and are they doing what the teacher is hoping that they will be able to do.

During the debriefing session, the participants all commented on the difference between going through classrooms as a department head with supervisory responsibilities and visiting each other’s classes as peers. One participant commented:

Being seasoned teachers, master teachers on the top of your game and opening your doors was a different thing than say some of the departments with a wide range of experience.

It was followed by another participant considering how the process benefited him as department head and he expressed how he could envision the practice working with his teachers:

I think if this person saw what that person was doing...maybe we could expand our own practices. In a department sort of format we could really improve each other’s practice and not just higher order thinking skills but just how we teach math for example.

The amount of time needed beyond regular responsibilities. The greatest challenge identified by the participants was consistently addressed throughout the data collection as it was the only theme crossing all six of the transcripts: time. Initially, during the pre-rounds focus group, an ongoing concern for collaboration time and preparation time was mentioned by all four of the participants as a major challenge facing teachers regularly only to be compounded when
adding new initiatives to their plates. Each of the participants at various times during the asynchronous computer-mediated communication expressed concern for the amount of time that was available for the rounds process to be successful. Of the twenty-three occurrences of identified codes in the asynchronous computer-mediated communication, fourteen occurrences focused on time conflicts while attempting to organize the second group of observations during the rounds process. Some of the comments are shown in the left-side column of Table 6. As a result of the concerns, the second cycle of observations was delayed a few times and ultimately reorganized. The other quotes included in Table 6 are from the post-rounds interviews in which all four of the transcripts included references to the time concerns and mentioned time as something to be considered in future instructional rounds activities.

Table 6

*Illustrative Quotes regarding the theme of “time”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotes from asynchronous computer-mediated communication</th>
<th>Quotes from post-rounds interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As you can see, the logistics of making it happen can prove to be complicated at times.</td>
<td>The other obstacle was timing it and making sure that we were going to have enough time to see the kids engaged in the activity and really doing it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the entire rest of the year planned out - losing a day will impact every lesson for the remainder of the year.</td>
<td>I think one of the obstacles that we all faced was time. When do we have time to do the observations? When do we have time to meet and discuss the observations after? I think that was the biggest obstacle: time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is not good for me. My students have a last quiz on a tough grammar point and we need to seriously review for this last grammar quiz!</td>
<td>The time is tough; as we are in the schools today time is difficult. People work very hard and to put something else on their plate even though it will benefit them, can be difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Here’s the issue for me: if we do it Wednesday, I will miss valuable instruction time with my class.</td>
<td>The time of the year, too. The seniors had just</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for me. This week is definitely crazy!

I realize your time in the classroom is important all of the time and crucial at other times. We can certainly spread out the visits to each other’s classes and not try to see all of them during one block.

I can make 20 minutes in my day to help… anyone can stop by my class period 1 tomorrow, keep me posted.

As the students' task is what we are observing (student work in action!), I realized that it might be possible for us to pick one day in which the three other classes were visited during the same block. If we rotated through each other’s class while the students were working, we would not need to worry about "coverage" as we would be in each other’s class.

left so those of who taught seniors were down to just one class and trying to get them ready for finals. I think the time has got to be a very important part of this whole process.

So, I do think that it would be a valuable tool if we had the time for collaboration inside the department as well as outside the department, so I guess that inter as well as intra-departmental would have benefits.

Also, I think the limitations were the time, time constraints. I wish we had more time to be able to do it.

It didn't at that point because it was in June. That is probably the most difficult one because I think that if we were to participate in this moving forward earlier in the year I think it would definitely do that because it would have a shaping to it. We were wrapping up at the end of the year.

Comments made during the asynchronous computer-mediated communication had a different focus in that decisions were being made and the opinions of the participants were directly affecting the choices in determining the next steps to take during the study. Every participant’s time was seemingly so limited that it was the only part of the study process in which individuals exhibited defensiveness or the need to protect their individual time. As a participatory study, the lack of compromise in regards to sharing time required the initial plan schedule of the second round of observations to be restructured. As communication remained open and honest, it allowed the participants to retain the foundation of trust that had been established at the beginning during the pre-rounds focus group discussion.

The selected quotes from the post-rounds interviews were reflective in nature and focused
more on time as a necessity for the process, not their individual time conflicts as reflected in the other quotes. Having had a positive experience with communication when time was creating a conflict in the scheduling of the second round of observations, the participants were able to respond to the time constraints during the interviews as ways to improve future instructional rounds opportunities and did not allow the concerns and challenges in regards to time to overshadow the overall positive experience had throughout the process:

   It sounds like I am harping on this but the time...you know...again, if we had done this around a day in March I think it would have been a little better...not that it was a terrible experience. It was a great experience but I think it would have been a little better if it was in the middle of our teaching as opposed to the end of the year.

   Although time was a common concern of all of the participants, the actual amount of time spent by each participant during the entire study was very consistent as seen in Table 7. During both the pre-rounds focus group and debrief session, all of the participants spent the same amount of time engaged in the process: twenty-nine minutes and fifty-three minutes, respectively. Variations in participant’s time are most noticeable in the observation category. The first round of observations took place in DH 1’s classroom and therefore that participant was involved in the process longer as the other participants overlapped their observations in groups of two. Similarly, during the second round of observations, due to the concerns of time as mentioned earlier, each participant rotated through one another’s classrooms while the students were working on the tasks assigned by the teacher. The amount of time that each participant spent observing varied. Finally, each participant met individually with the researcher to conduct the post-rounds interviews. With only a few minutes in variation among the department heads’ participation, it is clear that their investment of time throughout the process was very similar.
Table 7

Amount of time reflecting each participant’s engagement in the rounds process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>DH 1</th>
<th>DH 2</th>
<th>DH 3</th>
<th>DH 4</th>
<th>Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-rounds focus group</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First round observation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second round observations</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations debriefing</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final interview</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After looking at the total time involvement from Table 9 of each of the participants during this study, the average amount of time of the department heads’ was 132 minutes. That amount of time is much less significant for professional development than what the department heads described when sharing their most successful professional development experiences. One
participant’s contribution to the discussion was,

   It was really good because it was two and a half days of diving in to what different people were doing in their workshops. Seeing their styles and how they presented information. It was a really good conference.

Another participant shared,

   That was probably the coolest thing I have done definitely this year. Um, it took a little bit of time going to a conference that is held all over the world. Going to that for one day, bringing something back and using it a year and half later in my class and then having a kid surpass what I was able to do and then write the steps down…that was really cool--kinda sprung off of that. That was full circle. It was great.

However, as an ongoing process, allocating approximately two hours of time on multiple occasions during the school year for the purpose of participating in instructional rounds could provide significant opportunities for teachers to engage in professional dialogue with their colleagues which was highlighted by all of the participants as a major element to professional growth.

**Research question #3: After participating in Instructional Rounds, to what extent do department heads believe it can serve as an effective professional development practice for teachers?**

Table 8 presents the findings emerging from the analysis of data in relationship to the third research question: After participating in Instructional Rounds, to what extent do department heads believe instructional rounds can serve as an effective professional development practice for teachers.
Table 8

Themes regarding department heads’ beliefs of instructional rounds as a promising professional development activity for teachers

- Structured observation and reflection benefits teachers’ skill development
  - Observing students in different environments
  - Observing expectations set by others
  - Reflecting on individual practice

- Collaborating and engaging in conversation about instruction benefits departments
  - Seeing folks in their zone
  - Enjoying time spent with colleagues
  - Calibrating among members

**Structured observation and reflection benefits teachers’ skill development.** This theme speaks directly to the effectiveness of the practice as presented in the third research question. Determining the specific skills developed by the participants came through analysis of the data sources including the rounds observation protocols, individual interviews, researchers’ field notes and the digital images of the work produced during the debriefing session.

Data from both the researcher’s field notes and the debriefing session presented specific categories of skills being developed throughout the instructional rounds process. While observing classes and debriefing together, the participants exhibited certain skills necessary for the collaborative process of instructional rounds. Categories were established to best organize the skills that were identified.
Observing students in different environments. The largest category featured skills in the category of observation. Thirty-seven percent of the skills identified were a form of observation. Participants paid close attention to tasks students were engaged in completing. In completing the two column notes (Appendix E), participants recorded a great deal of detail in student activity from the interactions of groups collaborating in a sociology class to the specific questions students were calculating while reviewing for an exam in Pre-Calculus. The environments contributed to the success students experienced in completing the assigned tasks. Three out of the four rooms were organized in such a way as to promote collaboration among the students. Two of the rooms utilized tables while the third had student desks grouped together to facilitate communication. The fourth classroom was organized in traditional rows, but the student task was independent in nature and all of the students were engaged. The participants discussed everything from the organization of the students’ physical location in each class to the amount of materials available to the students. In some cases, it was beneficial to see the students in different content areas as one participant reflected, “I wouldn't say it was specific techniques that I haven't already seen; it was more about how the kids were doing.”

Participants noted that focusing on students’ tasks was extremely beneficial in establishing a more trusting environment for the rounds process. One participant specifically commented on how he would introduce the rounds to his department first by focusing on students, as well. “Let's do it about kids and what they are doing and then maybe come and look at some of the skills that you have.” He felt that it would create a less judgmental environment more conducive to the observation process if the teachers were not worried that their colleagues were “nit-picking.”
**Observing the expectations set by others.** Additionally, many of the skills in the category of observation included the participants noting similarities and differences in what they expected of the students. They effectively observed variations in the classroom environments by reading the rooms noting the agendas and essential questions posted in the rooms. The participants were all familiar with the essential questions being used in their departments but they had not had many opportunities to observe how other departments were developing their essential questions and how they compared to those of their own. During debriefing one of the participants reflected that student engagement is a result of appropriate expectations:

Teaching is teaching; it is an art across the curriculum. Can you connect with kids, can you engage kids? You can see that based on the activities that the kids are doing; they were involved. You can see that as the result of watching what the students were doing that good teaching was involved as a predecessor of that.

**Reflecting on individual practice.** Ultimately, it is crucial that individual reflection take place in order for professional development to be effective. The collaborative aspect of the instructional rounds process enabled individuals to reflect regularly in order for the rounds to be productive. One participant shared during her post-rounds interview,

For me, just being able to have that dialogue with other professionals, with my colleagues, about the students’ task helps you to reflect on your own practice and think...oh, that really is a good task, I think that is a good assessment or a good way of doing things; but you get another voice.

It was highlighted during the debriefing session that in order to engage participants in the future, one of the major benefits of the rounds would “best be presented as an opportunity for you to look at your practice and what it is that you do and your kids are doing.”
Additionally, another participant reflected during his post-rounds interview:

When we were looking at what the kids were doing in the classes, it made me reflect back about focusing on them and are they really getting it, not did you present the information to them, but how are they doing and did they get what you were hoping to get across.

Another participant echoed a similar idea during her interview that suggested the foundational necessity for reflection:

Like differentiated instruction, differentiated rounds. What do you need to look for in order to help your own practice? Ok, let's go and see if we can find that happening in other classrooms that you can then take into your own.

**Collaborating and engaging in conversation about instruction benefits departments.**

While the earlier section focused on the development of individual’s skills through the instructional rounds process, another finding addresses the benefits for the collective group participating and how it could benefit entire departments. As department heads engaging in the rounds process, participating in the study allowed them to examine how this practice might be effective professional development for their respective departments in the future. Beyond the benefits to the individuals and how that might in turn benefit a group, the collective efficacy of each department can be supported by engaging in the rounds process.

**Seeing folks in their zone.** Just as it was a benefit of the process for the individuals, departments can benefit from the members being able to see their peers at their best in the classroom. Believing in the competency of the group develops a stronger collective efficacy. The participants in the study noted the benefits in the rounds debriefing sessions:

I think it is something that we really need at high school because it also gives you an opportunity to see your colleagues in a different way. Usually you see them at the copy
machine or at a committee meeting together, but with this you see them in their
environment and really have an opportunity to maybe ask questions that you wouldn't
have asked them before.

Another participant connected the benefits of collaboration with increased student outcomes:
That collaboration process, that piece is so important... I think that if we can do that as a
group, collectively, that could really have a huge effect on outcomes for students just as
well.

*Enjoying time spent with colleagues.* If the individuals were not enjoying themselves in
the process then it would be very difficult to identify any benefits and it would be highly unlikely
that anyone would continue to volunteer to participate. As the participants repeatedly expressed
their enjoyment throughout the process, it was clear that they were voluntarily engaging
themselves in the practice.

I think if people saw people doing this it would create a buzz around this and then have a
kind of grass roots feel and people would want to get involved. It definitely has value; it
is just that we need more time to talk with our colleagues and this provides a nice
protocol, I think, to manage that.

Another participant shared during her post-rounds interview a similar optimism based on her
enjoyment of the process:

…if the ball got rolling and people were talking about and saying it was pretty cool and
how great it was, it would be sort of like my experience. It was cool; I enjoyed seeing
(DH 1) in her class with her kids and (DH 3) with all of her kids and all that.

*Calibration among members.* One of the benefits of using the instructional rounds as
collaborative professional development is the ability for the participants to calibrate expectations
and outcomes throughout the observation and debriefing process over time. The focus of the observations for the instructional rounds was identifying student tasks and articulating specific skill application. Table 9 presents the list of observed student skills generated during the rounds debriefing session. All five of the participants, the four department heads and the researcher, took turns sharing the observed skills included in their two column notes from the first and second rounds observations. Twenty-two separate skills were identified during this initial sharing of data.

Table 9

*Illustrating the observed student skills as identified by participants while conducting instructional rounds*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observed skills during rounds</th>
<th>Number of participants identifying each skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative learning</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesizing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calculating</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applying</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing conclusions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active learning</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justifying</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending answers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note taking</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting to the real world</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalizing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recalling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Next, the list was reviewed by the participants cross-referencing their individual two column notes. If multiple participants observed the same skill, a check mark was placed next to the skill for each participant who observed the skill. This provided additional opportunities for reflection as the participants were able to examine how their lists compared to the other participants. Ultimately, fifteen skills were observed by the majority of the group in that at least three of the participants observed the same skill. Seven skills were observed by only one or two of the participants. This data reflects one aspect of calibration among the group as sixty-eight percent of the identified skills were observed by the majority of the participants during this initial experience of rounds observations.

However, more important than identifying the initial skills observed was the subsequent conversation regarding which of the skills could be categorized as higher order thinking skills. Fortunately, the group was able to reach consensus quite easily when discussing the developed list of skills. This demonstrated an additional level of calibration and one that has a greater relationship to the level of rigor and expectations as mentioned earlier that the individual participants were accustomed to articulating. Everyone agreed that not all of the skills observed were being “performed at a higher order”; however, only two of the skills were identified by the group as not having the potential to be higher order thinking skills: recalling and reviewing. Great conversation took place debating whether note taking is a higher order thinking skill and ultimately it was determined that “depending on the complexity of the content and whether or not it was simply copying notes or indeed creating notes” would make the difference in the categorization. It was a strong example of how individually some of the participants might have considered the task of note taking as lower order thinking, but observing it taking place in such a complex manner as in the math class during the rounds observations process allowed the group
to reconsider previous assumptions and expand their understanding both individually and collectively.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings of this study suggest that Instructional Rounds as a process supports teachers’ ability to collaborate with their colleagues and develop specific skills that foster professional development. As a participatory evaluation study, the findings reflect the voices and perceptions of the individuals involved. In order to understand the Instructional Rounds process and determine its potential, the department heads opened their classrooms to their colleagues and participated in the rounds process so that they would have direct experience with the process and be in a better position to analyze its effectiveness as professional development. The perceptions of the participants focused on the direct benefits of conversations with their colleagues about teaching, the ability to increase their own teacher toolkits, and development of specific skills such as to communicate, to observe, and to reflect. The participants discovered the benefit of calibration that comes from effective collaboration which the rounds process fostered.

The largest challenge impeding the effectiveness of the rounds process as professional development was not unique to this process. The participants mentioned their concern for available time in their initial focus group discussion and it was addressed in each transcript of the study. The lack of time is a constant concern facing teachers and this study showed no exception. Time was a factor both mentioned and experienced in the initial focus group discussion in that not all of the participants were able to stay for the entire time and the questions were re-arranged and the schedule was altered to accommodate the time constraints of the participants. During the rounds process, as reflected in the asynchronous computer-mediated
communication, the schedule was not convenient for all of the participants and created temporary barriers in completing the rounds process. Finally, it took a few weeks to conduct all of the final interviews as once again participants’ schedules conflicted with each other and the time of the year presented a variety of additional responsibilities for the participants, complicating their opportunities to meet.

Regardless of the time concerns, the benefits of the Instructional Rounds process encouraged each of the participants to reflect how this opportunity could affect their individual departments and how they might incorporate the practice in the near future.

Chapter V: Discussion of Research Findings

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

This study examines the utilization of the instructional rounds process as collaborative professional development for department heads as teachers and instructional leaders. The lack of opportunities for teachers to engage in professional dialogue with their colleagues on a more regular basis prohibits their ability to improve collective efficacy through the sharing of skills and experiences (Brinson & Steiner, 2007). Student performance can be directly linked to the teacher’s work environment which is improved through opportunities to collaborate and combine efforts in data analysis and collection (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; City, et al., 2009).

Schools need to provide opportunities for all stakeholders to take ownership of student achievement and reflect through collaboration strategies for continual development (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). One possible strategy for teachers is found by participating in instructional rounds which has been utilized primarily by administrators to date (City, et al., 2009). The rounds process provides teachers with opportunities to visit their
colleagues’ classrooms in a non-judgmental manner and engage in professional dialogue regarding the data collected and analyzed collaboratively, benefiting both the individual and the group as instruction is examined in a purposeful and systematic way (Brinson & Steiner, 2007; City, et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

**Review of Methodology**

This participatory evaluation was designed to examine the perceptions of four department heads and one administrator, acting as a participant/researcher, engaging in the instructional rounds process at a rural, regional high school in north central Massachusetts during the spring of 2012. The research questions guiding the study focused primarily on the perception of the participants in relation to the benefits and challenges of the instructional rounds process and its effectiveness as ongoing professional development for teachers within the participants’ departments. Focus group discussions, asynchronous computer-mediated communication and individual interviews were combined with observational data such as observation protocols, researcher’s field notes and data generated in debriefing sessions to engage the participants in the process of evaluation by soliciting their feedback and documenting their perceptions of the instructional rounds experience.

In order to ensure and maintain the validity of the study, steps were taken by the researcher throughout the process. Member checking (Butin, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Stringer, 2007) and respondent validation (Maxwell, 2005) were conducted by sharing all of the transcripts with the participants using Google docs prior to any data analysis providing the participants opportunities to review their contributions in any of the discussions in which they were involved. Participant debriefing (Stringer, 2007) was a natural part of the process as it is
included in the instructional rounds structure in order to establish the participants’ voices as a driving factor in the process. As a participatory evaluation it was crucial to utilize referential adequacy which involved ensuring the terminology and language of the participants was reflected consistently in articulating their experiences and perceptions.

The foundations for transferability and confirmability (2007) exist in the detailed descriptions of the instructional rounds process and the data generated through the focus groups discussions along with the individual interviews. With transferability, it is possible for individuals not part of the study to determine whether or not outcomes can be applied based on similarities in other situations. An audit trail of collected data was saved on both the researcher’s laptop, iPad, and backed-up on a cloud storage system which allows the establishment of confirmability.

The sample size of five participants presented limitations during the study. With a limited number of participants, it is difficult to establish whether or not their perceptions are unique or universal. Also, coordinating schedules became cumbersome without the flexibility of larger numbers of participants being able to dilute the effect of missing members.

Due to the relationship of the researcher to the participants it was important to maintain transparency throughout the process. As an administrator in the building, the researcher was also a direct supervisor of the department heads participating in the study. Working closely with the Institutional Review Board, the researcher was able to establish clear documentation that participation in the study had no connection to participants’ personal evaluations (see Appendix B) and avoided hints of coercion.

This final chapter is organized in the following sections: discussion of the major findings, discussion of findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks, discussion of findings
in relation to the literature review, limitations, significance, next steps, and conclusion.

**Discussion of Major Findings**

Table 10 includes identified themes that emerged through the data collection and analysis.

**Table 10**

*Major Findings*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Opportunities increased that engaged colleagues in conversations about instructional practices</th>
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<tr>
<td>Observation and discussion increased teacher toolkits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structured observation and debriefing increased observation skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities for personal reflection enhanced individual self-assessment skills</td>
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Opportunities increased that engaged colleagues in conversations about instructional practices. The overarching theme that permeated the study was that of both a desire to engage in conversations with colleagues and the direct benefits from conversations with colleagues about teaching. All of the participants agreed during the focus group discussion and each participant mentioned during their post-rounds interviews the benefits of being able to talk with their colleagues about teaching. Findings for each of the three research questions all included conversations with colleagues. The first research question identified a central focus of the participants’ experience included conversing with colleagues. The second question which addressed the benefits and challenges of the instructional rounds process identified the benefit of the process in that a specific protocol existed that required affording time to converse. Finally, the third research question centered on the department heads’ perception of the effectiveness of
the rounds process as professional development as the structure of the rounds increased opportunities for colleagues to discuss instructional practices.

**Observation and discussion increased teacher toolkits.** At the very foundation of all teachers’ professional development is the desire to increase their toolkit in order to improve instructional strategies. All of the participants in the study commented on adding to their strategies using words like “stealing ideas”, “making things fresh”, “make it my own”, and “incorporate into my own class”. Observing other classes provided an opportunity for the participants to watch others who were also master teachers and able to model effective instructional strategies. The additional opportunity to visit classes outside of their content area provided the participants the chance to see both familiar and unfamiliar strategies in action. This alone gave the participants ideas as to how strategies typically used in one content area could transfer to another creating new ways to approach lessons than had been considered prior to the rounds process.

**Structured observation and debriefing increased observation skills.** The instructional rounds process is grounded in observations and therefore provides opportunities to develop observation skills. The participants agreed during the debriefing session that having a specific protocol and focus for the observations was helpful. Subsequently, during the post-rounds interviews each of the participants expressed that the conversations that accompanied the observations allowed the participants to reflect more keenly on their individual observation skills as they were constantly able to compare their observations with those of their colleagues. This comparison provided the pumice stone necessary to help individuals “sharpen their skills” as they were able to develop more sophisticated sensibilities for identifying various levels of rigor as well as investigating how the expectations set by others compared to their own.
Opportunities for personal reflection enhanced self-assessment skills. Throughout the process, participants commented on how entering other classrooms and collaborating with the other participants consistently led to individual reflection. As they were in the midst of observation, it was only natural for the participants to consider what they might do in similar situations or how the assigned task compared to tasks that they have assigned students in their own classes. Having their peers enter their classes and observe the tasks at hand also fostered confidence among the participants as the reactions of their peers validated what they were attempting to do and the positive feedback from peers helped them to reflect positively on their individual work and the process as a whole.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

This study was informed through the perspective of adult learning theory and organizational learning theory. Both of these theories served as lenses to investigate the experience of department heads participating in instructional rounds as professional development.

Adult Learning Theory. Knowles (2005) established a model for adult learning theory which includes the following assumptions: adults are self-motivated and self-directed learners; their experiences and knowledge can be shared with others; adults are task-oriented, problem solving individuals and learn in order to enrich their lives by completing specific tasks or solving problems (Knowles, et al., 2005). This model supports the collaborative structure of the instructional rounds process as identified by City, et al. (2009) and provides a roadmap of implementation for any group wishing to utilize the rounds process as professional development.

Adults are self-motivated and self-directed learners. A stronger context for the
development of knowledge is provided when the focus of the learning aligns with the personal goals of the adults involved (Knowles, et al., 2005; Leonard, 2002; MacKeracher, 2004). The department heads participating in this study all expressed an interest in experiencing the rounds process and investigating its benefits and challenges. Each participant signed the consent form (Appendix B) and voluntarily joined the study enthusiastically anticipating how additional opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues might provide greater professional development. Their interest and desire to participate guided the development of the process and directly impacted the organization of this participatory evaluation study.

The participants identified observing student tasks as the primary focus of the instructional rounds observations during the study. The process of the instructional rounds began with the participants directing their learning by identifying the data to be collected during the observations. This supports adult learning theory in that the learning was driven by internal motivation which in this case was the participants’ desire to increase their knowledge by collaborating with each other rather than external motivators such as remuneration of any kind; in addition, the learners were presented with choices and therefore were more invested and engaged in the learning (Knowles, et al., 2005; Leonard, 2002; MacKeracher, 2004).

*Their experiences and knowledge can be shared with others.* The collaborative foundation of the rounds process demands that participants be able to share knowledge and experiences in order for it to be successful. The participants in this study shared freely during each phase of the process and commented regularly during the post-rounds interviews about the benefits of working collaboratively with their colleagues or more specifically the ability to engage in conversations with their colleagues in a professional manner.

Every phase of this participatory evaluation process required collaboration from the
participants. During the initial focus group meeting, individuals shared their experiences and expectations regarding peer observations and professional development as a whole with each other in order to establish a trusting environment conducive to learning. The observation process of the instructional rounds included each participant opening his or her classroom for the others to join and collect data through observation. While debriefing the observations, it was crucial for each of the participants to share observations with each other in order to generate a greater understanding reflective of each of the participant’s perspective. The final interviews while individual in nature, still relied on the collaboration of the researcher and the participant in both organizing the logistics of the interview and reviewing the content for accuracy prior to the analysis of data.

**Adults are task-oriented, problem solving individuals and learn in order to enrich their lives by completing specific tasks or solving problems.** The process of instructional rounds is very organized and uses specific protocols (Appendices E and F) which present participants with clear tasks and problems to both identify and attempt to address if not completely solve. The structure of the rounds process engages the participants immediately by requiring that they identify the problem of practice for the group or what they want the focus of the rounds process to be in regards to the observations (City, et. al, 2009). In addition to the problem of practice, the structure of the process allows for autonomy among the participants. They had control over the schedule and in fact collaborated with each other to adjust the sequencing of the second round of observations when time became a concern across the board.

**Organizational Learning Theory.** According to Garvin (2000), organizational learning is characterized by systematic problem solving, experimentation and innovation, learning from own experience, learning from the experience of others, and transferring knowledge quickly and
efficiently through the organization. Collison and Cook (2007) include the notion that organizational learning incorporates continuous renewal and transformation through embedded reflective practices. The four-part instructional rounds process of identifying the problem of practice, observing the practice, observation debrief and identifying the next level of work directly correlates with components of organizational learning theory beginning with systematic problem solving to continuous renewal through embedded reflective practices to transferring knowledge.

**Systematic problem solving.** The initial stage of the instructional rounds process is identifying the problem of practice. As part of the protocol and clearly defined system of instructional rounds, the participants determine collectively what the focus of the observations should be and develop the schedule of observations and debriefing sessions together to best accommodate the participants’ individual schedules. The problem of practice identified during the instructional rounds process for this study was to examine the rigor and complexity of the assigned student tasks while visiting classrooms. The participants recognized the importance of calibration among educators in regards to what they were expecting of their students.

**Continuous renewal through embedded reflective practices.** As identified earlier, one of the major findings of the study related to individual reflective practices. The structure of the instructional rounds fostered personal reflection among the participants as they shared their individual observations and inferences with each other during the debriefing sessions following the rounds observations. The cycle of the rounds includes using the data collected during the rounds observations and debriefing to inform the next level of work.

While this study does not examine the benefits of utilizing instructional rounds continuously over a longer period of time, the shape of the study mirrored the instructional
rounds process and included a reflective component that would benefit all of the participants in moving forward with the rounds process within their respective departments. The participants specifically reflected on the benefits and challenges of the instructional rounds process and shared suggestions of improvement for the future. This supported Collison and Cook’s (2007) suggestion that embedding reflection into the process establishes a framework that supports renewal and/or transformation.

Transferring knowledge. Transferring the knowledge quickly and efficiently through the organization was well represented initially in the capacity building among the participants in regards to their understanding of the rounds process and the calibration of their perceptions of the student tasks being observed during the rounds. The instructional rounds process provides a structure in which each participant in this study could in turn facilitate rounds within individual departments. Additionally, the participants discussed the benefits the instructional rounds process provided for groups of teachers from different departments.

The benefits to the departments were addressed earlier in that the collective exercise fostered growth among the participants. The participants acknowledged their individual growth during the process and speculated how members of their departments would benefit from participating in the instructional rounds process. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, during the debriefing session one department head stated, “If this person saw what that person was doing...maybe we could expand our own practices.”

Considering the benefits to both her department and for teachers in other departments, another participant mentioned during her post-rounds interview:

We might all get something different out of it that we would be able to apply what we garnered from conversations and from working together. It might be a little different
application. So, I do think that it would be a valuable tool if we had the time for
collaboration inside the department as well as outside the department, so I guess that inter
as well as intra-departmental would have benefits.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature Review

The findings from this study connect strongly with the literature presented earlier in
Chapter 2 and the two specific themes emerging throughout the review: communities of practice
and critical reflection. Both themes are grounded in adult learning theory and organizational
learning theory.

Communities of practice. The findings from this study were consistent with the
literature regarding communities of practice. The literature established a clear definition of
communities of practice as a group of individuals in action towards a common goal (Johnson,
2001). The very nature of the instructional rounds process as presented earlier is fostering
community in order to identify a problem, collectively examine it and determine collaboratively
the next steps in action towards the common goal. The strengths and benefits of communities of
practice according to the literature directly relates to the strengths and benefits of the
instructional rounds practice.

Developing a stronger collective efficacy was a benefit expressed by the participants in
the instructional rounds process and the literature also identified that communities of practice
created without specific hierarchies tended to foster this result (Balmer, et al., 2010; Close &
Castledine, 2005). Other than the researcher/participant, all of the other participants in the study
were peers without a structured hierarchy. In fact, as a participatory evaluation, the researcher
only initiated original meeting times and throughout the instructional rounds process did not
monopolize or control the observations or conversations taking place in the debriefing sessions. Any hierarchy inherent in the daily relationship between the researcher and the other participants disappeared within the established community of practice as noted by one participant during his post-rounds interview:

I thought the group meetings were good. When we were able to talk about what we were concerned about going into the rounds process...sort of what are we looking for. When we had those quick meetings with everyone, it was good to hear from everybody together and that we would all get on the same page. I felt like it was good to hear from each other as well as having time for my voice to be heard.

The literature established that rounds can be organized various ways depending on the community of practice. The range includes completely homogeneous communities such as nurses (Close & Castledine, 2005), physicians (Balmer, et al., 2010), school administrators (Del Prete, 2006; Rallis, et al., 2006; Teitel, 2001), and teachers (Virtue, 2009) to heterogeneous communities such as those of teachers and principals (Hoy & DiPaola, 2001) or students and their respective professors (Dolcourt, et al., 2006; Kernan, et al., 2005; Tariq, et al., 2010). The participants in this study acknowledged organizing the instructional rounds with other department heads might be a different experience than organizing it with just members in their departments. Most participants felt that it would be a smooth transition for departments to adopt the practice insofar as the teachers would be excited about opportunities to engage in communities of practice addressing problems specific to their content area while engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues. Only one participant expressed hesitation:

I could see where, going back to the department sort of issue, where some people might have a problem with it...being uncomfortable to speak about other people’s practice
within their own department. But I didn't have a problem with it. I don't think anyone on
the team had a problem with it, but I could see where going forward the department could
have an issue with it.

The participants agreed that as department heads representing various disciplines there
were advantages to coming together as a community of practice during the instructional process.
Just as Tariq, et al. (2010) combined members from different groups to create a specific
community of practice, the instructional rounds process with the departments heads allowed the
members to venture out of their comfort zone and observe classes with which they were less
familiar. One department head admitted her fear during the post-rounds interviews when she
was asked to address any obstacles that she faced during the rounds process:

  Well, honestly, probably my own insecurities in the math and science classrooms and not
having any idea what I was looking at in terms of understanding if the kids were doing it
right or if the task made sense to the instruction because I don't know anything about
trigonometry or algebra. But that really wasn't what we were looking for anyway, we
were just looking at the expectations of the assignment. So, despite feeling that that was
going to be the challenge for me, once I was in there and doing it I felt like it wasn't an
obstacle at all.

Later during the interview, she continued to connect the concern she had initially with the benefit
her experience would later provide the members of her department:

  I would say that it was great for the department chairs to do it in the first place because
we can say that we have done it in departments outside of our own and we can speak to
you know, how...I won't say…easy it was, but how it was ok that I don't know the math
because I was still able to look for what we were looking for and see it and know that it
was happening.

Engaging the stakeholders in the community of practice as exhibited in the literature was also found to be most beneficial in this study. The rounds process in this study as well as in the study conducted by Virtue (2009) for pre-service teacher candidates in South Carolina and the study conducted by Del Prete (2006) examining the Professional Development Schools in Worcester, Massachusetts was directly utilized for the professional development of the stakeholders within the communities of practice. The instructional rounds process supports the professional development of the participants by first engaging them as stakeholders in the process. Their voice and input is paramount for success in following the protocols. By choosing to be involved and then having an integral role in the process, all of the stakeholders have a vested interest. One department head recognized the difference between members in his department having the option to participate as opposed to being forced to participate:

Give some ownership to the people in the department. I can think of one individual in particular who is very set in her ways and that is ok. Sometimes when told that this is what is going to happen, there is some resistance. But if told that this is an opportunity, what do you think, how would this work for you? She might be all over this.

While not a major finding in this study but certainly something reflected in the literature, it was noted by participants that the ability to utilize asynchronous computer mediated communication certainly helped establish stronger more efficient opportunities to communicate with other members in the community of practice. The community of practice within this study was not an exclusively virtual community of practice (Ardichvili, 2008; Johnson, 2001; Scherer & Cator, 2011; Wenger, 2006) but the ability to communicate via email and share documents electronically using Google docs expedited communication and allowed the participants to solve
problems in scheduling in a more timely manner than needing to all come together at one time to meet and make decisions. This related closely with the literature (Hawkes & Romiszowski, 2001) in that the time needed for teachers to be out of their classrooms was limited and students benefited from the consistent accessibility to their teachers. In essence, teachers felt less pressure communicating asynchronously than if they were worried about returning to their students.

**Critical reflection.** The findings of this study, specifically the third and fourth finding relating to structured observation and personal reflection, support the importance of critical reflection as presented in the literature. All of the studies examined in the literature included the presence of critical reflection as exhibited by the participants just as this study established earlier in this Chapter and in Chapter 4. The structured observation and debriefing that led to increased observation skills speaks to the protocols utilized in the rounds process for this study and is similar to the experiences presented in the rounds processes included in the reviewed studies. The opportunities for personal reflection which enhanced individual self-assessment skills echo the sentiments expressed in the studies reviewed earlier, as well.

Protocols utilized in this instructional rounds process as seen in Appendices C, D, E and F were structured such that each of the participant’s experience collecting data was similar. The studies examined in the literature review also contained examples of the effectiveness of specific protocol use in establishing structured observation opportunities and how that helped develop observation skills in the participants (Rallis, et al., 2006; Virtue, 2009).

All of the participants in this study commented on the benefits of structured opportunities to collaborate and engage in the process of the instructional rounds and how those collaborations led to personal reflection on their own practices. In the reviewed literature, Barringer, et al.
(2010) discussed the relationship between the observations of the participants focusing on student performance and their critical reflection leading to improved pedagogical practices. Virtue (2009) developed a specific protocol that enabled participants to assess their effectiveness in analyzing their data collectively. The support provided by the specific protocols in this study (Appendix C, D, E & F) allowed the participants to easily organize the data collected during observations which led to more focused analysis and discussion for the group.

Additionally, the debriefing session required the participants to share their observed data. This aspect of the debriefing established an informal catalyst for participants to critically reflect on their individual data collection and assess the effectiveness of their observation skills. While listening to the shared data of others and seeing their contributions on the board next to each other, it was natural for all of the participants to compare their work with that of their colleagues.

All of the participants responded enthusiastically about the experience of sharing their observed data during the debriefing sessions. One participant shared during her post-rounds interview:

I thought it was great (sharing observed data) and I thought it is great that we all kind of came up with the same practices that were being used in all of the classrooms. We were really consistent. It was eye opening that we were all doing really, really great things but some people maybe need to be looking at what kids are being asked to do in the class. And I think meeting together and sharing our observations led us to different conversations, as well, I think that was great.

Another participant expressed a similar reaction during a different interview:

When we had an opportunity to talk about what we had shared I actually thought it was rather invigorating to have a professional discussion about what we saw even though we
teach very different courses in a variety of disciplines. The types of skill sets that we were talking about...you know, do the students analyze, do they think critically, what types of things showed that and do we see that? Those were really good discussions. So, I do feel like I felt comfortable sharing the data and it was nice to be able to bounce off each other like...oh yeah, I observed that too, and thought that we had an opportunity to do that and it was really nice...that collaboration piece.

In order to sustain critical reflection, the literature suggests the need for a supportive structure, alternative perspectives, and challenging content (Mason & Berson, 2000). The participants in this study consistently identified the presence of all three areas. The protocols and schedule of the instructional rounds process provided a clearly supportive structure. The opportunity to both visit other classes in order to observe and collect data as well as share feedback during the debriefing sessions allowed the participants exposure to alternative perspectives. The content of the process was in the skill development of identifying specific student tasks and determining whether or not the skills required higher order thinking on the part of the students. As a new process for the participants, it was appropriately challenging for them as it required a change in the paradigm of how they conducted classroom observations regularly.

Limitations

The small and purposeful sample utilized for this study limits the results in being generalized or transferred to other populations or contexts. The four department heads participating in the study all work with the researcher at the same regional high school in rural north central Massachusetts; therefore, the results may not be representative of department heads in other parts of the state or regions of the country.
Another limitation is that the researcher himself is a supervising administrator for the participants. As he facilitated the focus groups and interviews as a researcher/participant, the other participants could have tempered their answers accordingly, thereby creating additional obstacles in generalizing the results.

Future research is needed in order to better establish any universal benefits of the instructional rounds practice as professional development for teachers. This study focused on the perceptions of a unique sample in order to determine whether or not the practice might be beneficial for the specific needs of the faculty at the high school in which the participants are employed. This research could have practical applications for organizing future professional development calendars within the district and as a model for other schools to use in investigating the application of the instructional rounds process as professional development for teachers. Future studies might investigate the differences between utilizing instructional rounds within specific departments or across departments. This might allow for greater understanding of how observing classes both similar in content and strategies could differ from observing a wider variety of content areas and instructional strategies.

**Significance of this Study**

This study is important to the field of education as it reports the benefits of utilizing instructional rounds as professional development for teachers. Primarily to date, instructional rounds within the educational field have been used by administrators exclusively. As a relatively new concept in itself, the body of research on this subject within education is rather limited. With the growing demands of new initiatives in education monopolizing teachers time outside of the classrooms, professional development that includes requiring teachers to remain in the
classroom as one aspect and observe other classrooms as another aspect increases their ability to stay with their students and receive professional development at the same time. The participants in this study embraced the opportunity to work collaboratively with their colleagues and capitalize on the resources of each other for professional development.

The use of the instructional rounds process shows promise as a viable option for professional development for teachers as it increases their opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues while engaging in professional dialogue regarding instructional practices as well as providing specific opportunities for critical reflection and skill development. This job-embedded professional development enabled the department heads participating in the study to engage more regularly with their colleagues outside of administrative meetings and experience what the instructional rounds process might be like if they were to utilize it within their departments as ongoing professional development. Many important themes emerged from this study and provide avenues for future studies related to the findings. In order to provide engaging professional development that connects teachers with their colleagues, opportunities to regularly converse with each other about teaching through the process of utilizing protocols as those found in instructional rounds should be considered.

This study was conducted using the theories of adult learning and organizational learning. It was through the lenses of these theories that the many beneficial aspects of the instructional rounds process were identified. The results were consistent with what the theories suggest and led to a more thorough understanding of what possibilities may lay ahead in making the process of instructional rounds a regular practice for professional development for teachers within a school. Teachers continue to be stretched thin with all of the unfunded mandates of common core implementation, new teacher evaluation systems connected to “race to the top” initiatives,
and the expectation of continuing to improve teacher-parent communication. As long as the four walls of the classroom isolate and separate teachers from each other, we must continue to increase opportunities for them to collaborate and converse with their colleagues in order to establish supportive relationships that develop our teachers so that they can in turn work towards helping their students develop.

Next Steps

While it may not be possible to incorporate regular time during the school day for department meetings and collaboration, it is certainly possible for schools to carve out some time throughout the year for teachers to engage in collaborative professional development that engages them in conversation regarding instructional practices with their colleagues. The participants in this study offered suggestions for moving forward in order to implement a practice like this in their school in the future.

Participants suggested moving forward with department specific instructional rounds would be very beneficial. While they shared the benefits of seeing commonalities across content areas and seeing what strategies were similar and different in other departments, all of the participants felt that the instructional rounds practice would be most beneficial within separate departments rather than trying to start with interdepartmental communities of practice. One participant expressed his concern with asking his teachers to explore outside of their content area: “perhaps maybe start in the department because people would perhaps be more comfortable working with people that they see on a more regular basis.” Another participant shared a similar response in her interview:

I think it would be good to start in the departments just to build up that comfort level and
then once people have that to go outside the departments. Just because people are so nervous about the trust issue and not knowing or not believing that someone from outside the department would have any idea what is going on in my classroom. I think just to build up that comfort and confidence level it would be good to start within the department and then expand it beyond there.

Another department head felt that the versatility of her department provided her teachers with a rich foundation to experience a variety of lessons:

In my department, I am very fortunate because it is world languages, visual arts, and performing arts and ways that people may not be able to think of we are able to talk about culture. It would be reflected in music or visual arts or languages. So, we could have different approaches to the same subject so for our department it would be a really interesting dynamic for us to do.

Participants suggested time is precious and must be well guarded in order for instructional rounds to be received as effective professional development. It was mentioned a few times that planning the observation portions of the rounds process at a time closer to the middle of a course would provide more varied instructional strategies and student tasks. This study was conducted in the spring of the school year and some of the observations took place after the seniors were no longer in class. Some of the courses were clearly wrapping up in preparation for final exams and assessments. During his post-rounds interview one participant shared the suggestion, “So, I think that the middle portion of a course would be the best time to do this.” Another participant stated, “I think the limitations were the time, time constraints. I wish we had more time to be able to do it.”

Finally, the enthusiasm of the participants’ experience flowed into their suggestions for
getting the rest of the faculty engaged in the process in the future. Knowing the faculty’s compulsion to fear new initiatives, the participants offered suggestions for encouraging teachers to volunteer to participate in the instructional rounds process:

Introduce it to the faculty in a way that they see that it isn’t something to be defensive of or resistant to and how exactly it can help their practice. Instead of just telling them, hey, it can help your practice, telling them specifically how going into someone else’s room can help their practice. I think by having them come up with what they want to look for could be a good idea. Maybe the first time you give it to them and then maybe after a few cycles...ok now we are going to shift focus and what do you think you need...what do you think will help your practice?

Another participant shared:

If it were rolling and a couple of people were talking about it during lunch then it might be like…wow. Oh, this just popped in my mind. I like to eat lunch privately and just kind of be away, but some people like to eat group lunches and those people might be like, hey, you guys eat lunch together every day, how about this instructional rounds thing?

In the fall of the next school year following the study, the researcher, as a building administrator, was able to successfully establish time within the schedule of each school day for teachers to communicate more regularly with each other even on an informal basis. For many teachers sharing the same courses, they were afforded planning time that was common. Departments were given common lunch times in order to allow teachers at the very least the opportunity to eat together in the event that they did not share common courses with others in their department.
Conclusion

The three research questions that directed this study focused on: the experience of department heads participating in instructional rounds, the perceived benefits and challenges of instructional rounds as professional development, and what the perceptions of the department heads are in regards to utilizing instructional rounds with their respective teachers as ongoing professional development. The responses of both the department heads and the researcher illustrate the possible future of incorporating instructional rounds as professional development as a regular practice. While the process of instructional rounds has been clearly established (City, et al., 2009; Del Prete, 2006; Rallis, Tedder, Lachman, & Elmore, 2006; Teitel, 2009; Virtue, 2009), there are few examples of putting this practice in the hands of the teachers to examine pedagogy and improve instruction. However, the results of this study suggest that utilizing the instructional rounds process as professional development for teachers can provide rich opportunities for those professionals to engage in dialogue examining instructional practices and participate in critical reflection necessary for effective professional development.

The findings of this study demonstrate the impact on teachers’ professional development through the use of the initial stages of the instructional rounds process. The positive results provide the framework for future studies to continue to examine the benefits of instructional rounds as professional development and increase the opportunities for teachers to engage in conversations regarding teaching with their colleagues on a more regular basis.

Final Researcher Commentary

The participants most often expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to talk with one another about instructional practices. In the hurried world of standardized testing and
curriculum overflowing with state standards, teachers are given little opportunity to reflect never mind visit with other teachers on a regular basis. The participants in this study spoke often of time constraints and seemed to carry the burden of time around with them like the heavy backpacks their students lug from class to class. In the pre-rounds focus group discussion, all of the participants anticipated the perceived luxury of talking with other teachers about instructional practices. During the debriefing and the post-rounds interviews all of the participants expressed gratitude for being afforded the time to converse with their colleagues about teaching. The conversations that took place throughout the study provided the researcher with a new perspective of his department heads’ passion for teaching and the incredible insight they bring to their instruction and when contemplating the instructional strategies of others.

The study has provided me, as a high school administrator, with a look at the benefits associated with utilizing instructional rounds as professional development for the teachers within my building and throughout our district. The study has provided me, as a researcher, with a number of possible studies that could further benefit the field of education, specifically in the area of regular ongoing professional development for our teachers.
References


Friedman, T. L., & Mandelbaum, M. (2011). *That used to be us: how America fell behind in the world that it invented and how we can come back* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux


* Australasian Psychiatry, 16(3), 173-178. *


* Educational Leadership, 68(5), 17-21. *


Appendix A

Letter to Superintendent of Schools

Dr. XXXXX X. XXXXXXX, Superintendent of Schools
XXXXX XXXXXXX Regional School District
XX Main Street
XXXXXXX, MA XXXXX

January 9, 2012

Dear Dr. XXXXXXX:

As part of my doctoral studies at Northeastern University, I need to conduct a research study that addresses an identified problem of practice in education and contributes to the field of study. I am writing to request permission to conduct a participatory evaluation study here within the XXXXX XXXXXX Regional School District. This letter outlines my intentions and presents the context for the study.

The problem of practice that I have witnessed all too often is that teachers are rarely given opportunities to observe another teacher’s classroom and collaborate through professional dialogue analyzing data collected while visiting each other’s classrooms. Collaboration usually takes place in program or lesson design not in execution. Teachers may be provided with common preparation time that allows teachers to plan together, but teachers are not provided the opportunity to visit other classes and observe strategies in practice.

The purpose of this participatory evaluation study is to examine the process of utilizing instructional rounds as a model of authentic embedded professional development for teachers within the XXXXX XXXXXX Regional School District by piloting the practice at XXXXX XXXXXX Regional High School in XXXXX, MA. At this stage in the research, the instructional rounds will be generally defined as a structured opportunity for teachers in small groups to visit classes in session in order to collect data as to what student skill development looks like and use data to inform their practices and instructional methods.

Participatory evaluation is a type of qualitative action research in which the participants are actively involved in the process. Along with participating in the instructional rounds process, focus groups of participants and document analysis of observation protocols will be included in the data collected during the study along with reflection journals in the form of online blogs and discussion forum archives.

I believe this participatory evaluation study will only serve to benefit the XXXXX XXXXXX Regional School District as it should indicate both strengths and weaknesses of this instructional rounds pilot. If instructional rounds are found to be effective as professional development for teachers, then the findings from the study will allow for further refinement of the program.
If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me directly at (978)621-2989 or via e-mail at chew.c@husky.neu.edu, or the chairperson of my committee, Dr. Christopher Unger at Northeastern University, (617) 909-1360. Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request for permission.

Sincerely,

Christopher Chew, Headmaster, XXXXX
Appendix B

Signed Informed Consent Document

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies

Investigator Name: Christopher Chew
Title of Project: Participatory Evaluation of Instructional Rounds as Professional Development for Teachers

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?
You have been asked to participate since as a department at the study site, XXXX XXXXX Regional High School (XXXXX), you have teaching responsibilities and planning time that is common with other department heads which allow you to experience the rounds process and assist in evaluating its effectiveness as professional development for teachers.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of utilizing the instructional rounds process as professional development for teachers.

What will I be asked to do?
The researcher will be looking for you to participate in the following ways:
1. Participate in the instructional rounds process being facilitated at XXXXX
2. Participate in focus group sessions between each cycle of rounds that will be recorded using digital audio recording equipment
3. Allow use of asynchronous computer-mediated communication such as blog posts, electronic reflection journals and archived discussion forums dating from March 2012 onward as data
4. Allow use of researcher’s field notes from the rounds process dating from March 2012 onward as data

Where will this take place and how much time will it take?
The study will take place over two to three months. In order to collect enough data to evaluate the rounds process, three separate cycles of the instructional rounds will take place. The cycle consists of four parts: identifying the problem of practice, observing the problem, debriefing the observation, and establishing the next steps. An initial focus groups discussion will take place prior to starting the first cycle and will take place subsequently following each cycle resulting in four different focus group sessions. Each focus group session will last approximately thirty minutes to one hour, and will take place at XXXXX at a location and time convenient for those participating.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
Benefits will include opportunity to participate in the instructional rounds process, to observe a variety of classrooms, to reflect on your own instructional practices, to reflect on your growth as a participant in the instructional rounds process, and the opportunity to aid in refining the program for future participants, benefiting yourself and the school district at large.

**Who will see the information about me?**
As a participatory evaluation, the other participants will know your identity and discussion contributions both in face-to-face meetings and through asynchronous computer-mediated communication. Outside the other participants, your part in the study will be completely confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all study participants. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you other than as a department head at XXXXXX.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**
You are not required to take part in this study. If you do not want to participate, you do not sign this form.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
There are no significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Participation in this study is voluntary, and your participation or non-participation will not in any way affect other relationships (e.g., employer, school, etc.). You may discontinue your participation in this research program at any time without penalty or costs of any nature, character, or kind.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
Christopher Chew  
XXXXX XXXXX Regional High School  
XX Main Street  
XXXXX, MA XXXXX  
Home # (978) 621-2989  
Work # (978) XXX-XXXX x2415  
E-mail: chew.c@husky.neu.edu

Christopher Unger, Ed. D.  
College of Professional Studies  
50 Nightingale Hall  
Northeastern University, Boston  
Campus # (617) 373-2400  
E-mail: c.unger@neu.edu

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact_______. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**
There is no compensation for participation in this study.
**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant and the potential risks. Should I be selected, I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis.

_____________________________________________________
Research Participant (Printed Name)

_____________________________________________________
Research Participant (Signature)                      Date
Appendix C

Focus Group Discussions Protocol

Steps:
1. Select a timekeeper and recorder
2. Establish clear expectations and norms for discussion
   - Listen attentively
   - Resist interrupting
   - Be brief in order to allow others to speak, decide on appropriate time limits for each question
3. Provide focus group questions to each participant
4. Begin discussion

Preliminary Focus Group questions prior to conducting initial cycle of instructional rounds
1. Have you ever participated in peer observations?
   - Describe that experience
2. Discuss what non-judgmental observation means to you?
3. Discuss a memorable learning experience you have had as an educator
4. Describe the most successful professional development that you have experienced
5. What concerns do you have in allowing your colleagues to visit your classroom?
6. What benefits do you anticipate experiencing during the rounds process?

Focus Group questions used following each cycle of instructional rounds
1. Do you feel your voice was reflected in the identified problem of practice?
2. What obstacles did you experience during the observation stage?
3. How did you feel sharing your observation data?
4. Identify the strengths and limitations of the collaboration
5. What insights did you develop about your own teaching practices?
6. Did anything observed or discussed during this cycle affect your instructional practices?
7. What recommendations can be made to improve this process of instructional rounds?
Appendix D

Facilitator Field Notes /Three Column Notes

Date
Instructional Rounds Cycle #
Instructional Rounds Participants (I.R.P.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Stamps &amp; Questions</th>
<th>Observed Objective Data</th>
<th>Behavior of I.R.P.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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Appendix E

Instructional Rounds Observation Protocols

Steps:

1. Prepare two column notes prior to visiting any classes
2. Clearly identify each classroom separately within two column notes to ensure the authenticity of unique data
3. Only enter classrooms that you have been authorized to visit
4. Make every effort to act as an observer only and minimize participation in the lesson at hand
5. Other than asking for clarification or assessing student understanding of the task minimize speaking with students or teachers while the lesson is taking place
6. Refrain from talking privately with other observers while in the classroom as your notes alone can tend to make students and teachers uneasy; whispering might cause additional stress
7. Data collected during observations need to be free of judgment and subjective comments; analysis of data takes place later

Example template for two column notes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Stamps and General Questions</th>
<th>Observed Objective Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:15 When was project assigned? Were groups chosen or assigned? How about roles?</td>
<td>Stdnts in 5 grps, working on storyboards, each grp using co-op learning roles, Roles listed on front board Agenda posted on eno board Essential ?s along top of black board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:18</td>
<td>3 stdnts in grp 1 flipping through a magazine while 1 stdnt colors storyboard Grps 2-5 all have multiple students (2-3) coloring at a time Tchr is circulating rm chking in with each grp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:22</td>
<td>Stdts in grp 3 begin to argue about which color is more representative of the main characters’ inner struggle Grp 4 has each member working independently identifying the symbolism in each frame of storyboard Grp 1 is still looking at magazines with 1 stdnt coloring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F
Observation Debrief Protocol:
Balancing the Triangle of the Instructional Core

Steps:

1. Identify the tasks.
   - Each observer shares one observed task until all of the observed tasks have been identified. Each task gets its own column on chart paper or white board. Creating our evidence board, list observed behavior and activities that took place during each task. Refrain from making judgments continue to share objective observations.

2. Review the problem of practice.
   - The problem of practice identified prior to the observations should be re-articulated and posted above the tasks. Individually, each participant should identify what it looks like to meet and not to meet the standards of the problem of practice. The group will then discuss the standards. For the purposes of calibration, there should be consensus in the final rubric of standards.

3. Analyzing the Task.
   - Using rubric, participants “analyze” tasks by sorting the observed tasks into the two categories: Meets Standard and Does Not Meet. This should first be done independently and then discussed. (It is likely that some tasks will fall in-between Meets Standard and Does not. These tasks will be discussed further in the process.)

4. Evaluation.
   - Discuss whether students have generally demonstrated an understanding of the intended target. What do they know and what are they able to do. Did the task either support or reveal the development of understanding?

   - If any tasks were not clearly identified as meeting or not meeting the standard, discuss this more now that you have evaluated the other tasks. What does it mean that some tasks are not easily identifiable?

5. Implications for change.
   - Considering the triangular relationship of the content, teacher, and student, analyze whether the problem (if there is one) is in the appropriateness of the curriculum (which may have led to the task) or in the ability of the student or in the expectations of the teacher. Brainstorm a list of ideas for fixing. Encourage all ideas during brainstorming without comment. In planning for action, decide ahead whether consensus will be needed. If all participants utilize these tasks, that would be the case. If the lesson came from one teacher and the lesson is not going to be shared, then consensus is not needed.