

SCHOOL SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT THROUGH BUILDING LEADERSHIP, ADULT LEARNING,
AND CAPACITY: A CONSIDERATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL ROUNDS
AS A SYSTEMIC IMPROVEMENT PRACTICE

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The problem of the study was determining the supportive conditions related to instructional rounds (rounds) to understand better what conditions may allow for sustained systemic improvement over time. Three Texas school districts were studied to understand the perceptions of district leaders, principals, teacher leaders, and teachers with regard to the sustainability of instructional rounds as a systemic improvement practice, the supportive conditions necessary for sustainability, the salient characteristics that differentiated rounds from other improvement practices, and the potential of rounds to build organizational capacity. Observation of network rounds visits and document analysis was conducted to determine alignment of perception with observation and documents. Findings include perceptions, themes, and critical factors for the sustainability of rounds as an effective systemic improvement practice. Supportive conditions emerged as the most significant perception expressed by the participants. Implications for action for school districts beginning or continuing implementation of instructional rounds are suggested based upon findings from participant perceptions and observation of networks. Suggestions for future research are shared. With supportive conditions in place, instructional rounds has the potential to serve as an effective systemic improvement practice.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Instructional rounds (Rounds), a systemic professional practice by which educators engage in classroom observation, study of practice, and professional learning to improve the instructional core, emerged from Harvard Graduate School of Education in 2009 (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). Since its inception, Rounds has expanded from one site to many sites across the United States, Canada, Australia, and beyond, touted as a promising practice to improve teaching and learning. Inspired by medical rounds, Rounds shares many similarities in concept to the notion of bedside rounds in the field of medicine. Because organizational reform and growth is dependent upon the changed practice of the individuals in the organization, the perception and attitude of the individual about a new professional practice, such as Rounds, are critical to the development and sustainability of the reform (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Fullan, 1993).

Problem Statement

Since the launch of *Sputnik*, America has been enthralled with the notion of school reform (Powell, 2007). In an increasing race to improve American schools to outperform international competitors, the United States and its schools have pursued a broad range of reforms with varying degrees of success. No reform has yet produced wide scale instructional improvement across systems.

The field of education suffers from initiative fatigue, moving rapidly from one innovation to the next in an effort to improve teaching and learning (Reeves, 2010). The problem of the

study is determining the supportive conditions related to Rounds to understand better what conditions may allow for sustained systemic improvement over time.

Purpose Statement

The American school system functions as a nested system, comprised of units of local organization, the school, nested within a larger district. Districts function as independent entities across states. State education agencies function as independent entities across the nation. Unlike the medical profession, a strong, systemic professional practice for improving teaching and learning across the nested system does not exist (City et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to determine what supportive conditions are required for sustainability of Rounds as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement.

Research Questions

The study includes four distinct groups of participants: district instructional leaders; principals; classroom teachers, who participate in Rounds network visits; and classroom teachers who may be observed in Rounds network visits but do not directly participate. The following research questions will guide the study:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of Rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?

2. How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents?

Background to the Study

History of Reform

The history of American schools is a history of reform. Some of the major reforms include expanding schooling from primary to age 18, making compulsory schooling, integrating schools, increasing math and science instruction after the launch of Sputnik, increasing efforts to raise student achievement after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, and improving education by opening up markets such as charter schools and on-line schools. Throughout this history of school reform, educators remain, as a profession, largely unable to demonstrate the improvement of whole systems of schools. With increased demands for accountability, changing diversity, and pressures from local stakeholders and policy makers, school leaders continue to search for promising approaches to systemic improvement, contributing to initiative fatigue (Drago-Severson, 2009; Reeves, 2010). Educational leaders continue to focus on structural changes rather than engaging in the cultural change required to improve instruction at scale (Elmore, 1996, 2007a; Glazer & Peurach, 2012). Excellence in schools remains in isolated pockets of classrooms or single schools while school districts struggle to improve across the entire system. Sustainability of reform appears elusive as sustainability requires planning and preparing for succession (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Leverett, 2008). Gaps exist in sustainability due to multiple factors, including leadership churn, lack of succession planning, and because all teachers do not yet have the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills to help all students, in a very diverse population, to succeed (Hargreaves & Fink, 2004; Hord & Hirsh, 2008).

When considering measures of systemic improvement, international tests, including PISA and TIMMS, continue to show the United States falling behind international competitors such as Singapore, Finland, and Canada, in literacy, mathematics, and science (Mullis, Martin, Foy, & Arora, 2012; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014). The world is rapidly changing, and the United States is shifting from an industrial and manufacturing economy to a knowledge and creative economy; the middle class has shifted from laborers to knowledge and service workers (Zhao, 2014). In this complex content, school policy makers and leaders struggle to adapt to changing expectations. American schools are preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist, and there is a need to improve instructional practice to meet the demands of the 21st century (Friedman, 2005; Zhao, 2014).

The United States grants state government control over public education. The states set standards and determine state assessments, but allow local districts great latitude and local control of education. Thereby, there are thousands of systems operating across the United States, with over 1,000 school districts in Texas alone. While one has seen schools as models of improvement, rarely has one seen, in American education, systemic improvement efforts designed to affect instructional practice. In fact, education in America has been referred to as a profession without a professional practice. American schools have more variance in student achievement than most of our international peers by means of within school variance higher than between-school variance; teacher assignment can function as sort of a lottery in which a student's achievement depends highly on the quality of instructor to whom he is randomly assigned (City et al., 2009). Rounds, introduced in theory and practice by a faculty group at Harvard University Graduate School of Education, has great promise as a systemic improvement

practice to improve classroom instruction and student learning (City et al., 2009). However, until one understands how Rounds is being successfully implemented and sustained as in improvement practice in school districts, one will not know if Rounds will fulfill the promise of its potential. Based on the concept of medical rounds, or grand rounds, Rounds brings clarity to the practice by which cross-function teams of central office leadership, campus administrators, and teachers study instruction with the determination to improve student learning.

Medical Rounds

To embed Rounds in history, one must understand its parent: medical rounds. While there are several versions of medical rounds, the most common manifestation of the practice is for groups of interns, residents, and supervising physicians to visit patients and discuss possible treatments (Marzano, 2009). Rounds are an embedded and ritualistic practice in medicine; however, it has changed over time to accommodate changing demands of the field and current technologies, as well as changing audiences. Bedside rounds began as a practice to teach young physicians at the bedside of the patient. Studying under the physician, students learned about diagnosis and treatment. Today, the primary purpose of medical rounds remains education and problem-solving, whether it be for doctors in medical school learning skills related to diagnosis and treatment, for doctors in training learning about bedside manner, or for cross-role teams (nurses, psychiatrists, physicians, and interns) to learn more about the patient to engage in problem solving strategies for treatment (Balmer, Master, Richards, Serwint, & Giardino, 2010; Praschinger, Stieger, & Kainberger, 2007; Strain & Hamerman, 1978).

From Medical Rounds to Rounds

With the belief that education in America functions as a profession without a professional practice, City et al. (2009) applied the medical rounds concept to education in *Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. Rounds is the intersection of observation, professional learning communities, and systems thinking (J. Roberts, 2012). The application of the concept of medical rounds to education is a relatively new practice in the field. While school districts and systems around the world, primarily in the United States, Australia, and Canada, are experimenting with the implementation of Rounds, there is a small, but growing, body of research on the phenomena as applied to education. The research that has been conducted has not been applied to enough samples or enough situations to be considered reliable. Facilitation guides have been written based on experience for both network rounds and teacher rounds (Chew, 2013; J. Roberts, 2012; Troen, Boles, Pinnolis, & Scheur, 2014). Network rounds differ from teacher rounds in that network rounds are often comprised of cross-role teams from multiple school and/or district sites while teacher rounds are comprised of teachers from the same school site. A study has been conducted on superintendent experiences with Rounds, and a study has been conducted on teacher efficacy as it relates to Rounds (Schiavino-Narvaez, 2012; Grace, 2014). Two studies have been conducted that relate to either experiences of teachers or experiences of system participants with Rounds; however, the sample size is limited and invites further research to broaden understanding of the participants' experience in Rounds, as well as the potential of Rounds as a systemic improvement practice (Chew, 2013; J. Roberts, 2012). One study has given consideration of comparison of Rounds and medical rounds with the encouragement of further

research of potential challenges for consideration in extrapolating the medical model to the field of education, as well as more research on the experience of participants in order to gain greater insight into the process. While in the medical field, rounds is an established practice and doctors expect to be observed and share practices, teachers have long functioned as a collection of independent contractors gathered in the school house. However, in both the structure of medical rounds and Rounds, power of the participants (resident, surgeon, medical student or teacher, principal, superintendent) and how their role impacts their voice in the practice is a consideration (Roegman & Riehl, 2012). By expanding the study of the phenomena and adding cases for learning, greater understanding will develop of the systemic improvement practice. Through understanding the supportive conditions necessary to sustain a system-wide improvement effort, such as Rounds, practitioners will have more information and examples to guide their own Rounds practice and work.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is developed from a synthesis of research on professional learning communities, learning organizations, systems thinking, and Rounds. Sustainable systemic improvement may exist in a school district in which there is a clear, shared vision and strong leadership guiding the work of improving teaching and learning (Fink & Markholt, 2013; Fullan, 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Kirtman & Fullan, 2016; Kotter, 1996; Lambert, 2003; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; D. B. Reeves, 2006; Senge et al., 2000; Wagner & Kegan, 2006). When leadership is shared between district and campus, and between administrator and teacher, a culture of trust emerges (Barth, 2006; Hall & Hord, 2011; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord, 2004; Tschannen-

Moran, 2013). When a culture of trust emerges on a campus or within a system, supportive structures, such as financial resources and resources of time and space, will be present to support adult learning (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). When adult learning is supported in a school system, with a systemic practice such as Rounds, the adults in the school and district build instructional capacity (Bennett, Ylimaki, Dugan, & Brunderman, 2014; City et al., 2009; Drago-Severson, 2009). When systems of adult learning are in place and instructional capacity of the teacher is increased, improvements can be made to the instructional core—the teacher’s knowledge and skills, the student’s interaction with content, and the level and rigor of content (City et al., 2009; J. Roberts, 2012). When the instructional core is impacted across a school system, instructional, as opposed to structural, change can occur. When the instructional core improves, the outcome is increased student learning as shown in Figure 1.

Significance of the Study

The cornerstone of the nation’s democracy is public education. Public education was founded, in concept, by the founding fathers in order to educate the voting populace. Over time, the role of public education and the audience for public education has shifted, and in the last half century, public schools have been charged with a task of educating all children at high levels of attainment, regardless of socio-economic status, disability, or language of origin. This charge has coincided with the rise of the technology age in which the demand for knowledge workers has increased (Friedman, 2005; Zhao, 2014). Today, at least five broad purposes for schooling have been identified: citizenship, employability, interesting lives, releasing ingenuity, and stimulating innovation (Marx, 2014). To meet these rigorous demands, instructional practice must continue to improve, at scale. Across the nation, there are

classrooms of excellence, or schools of excellence; however, there has yet to be large scale shift in instructional practice across school districts or across states.

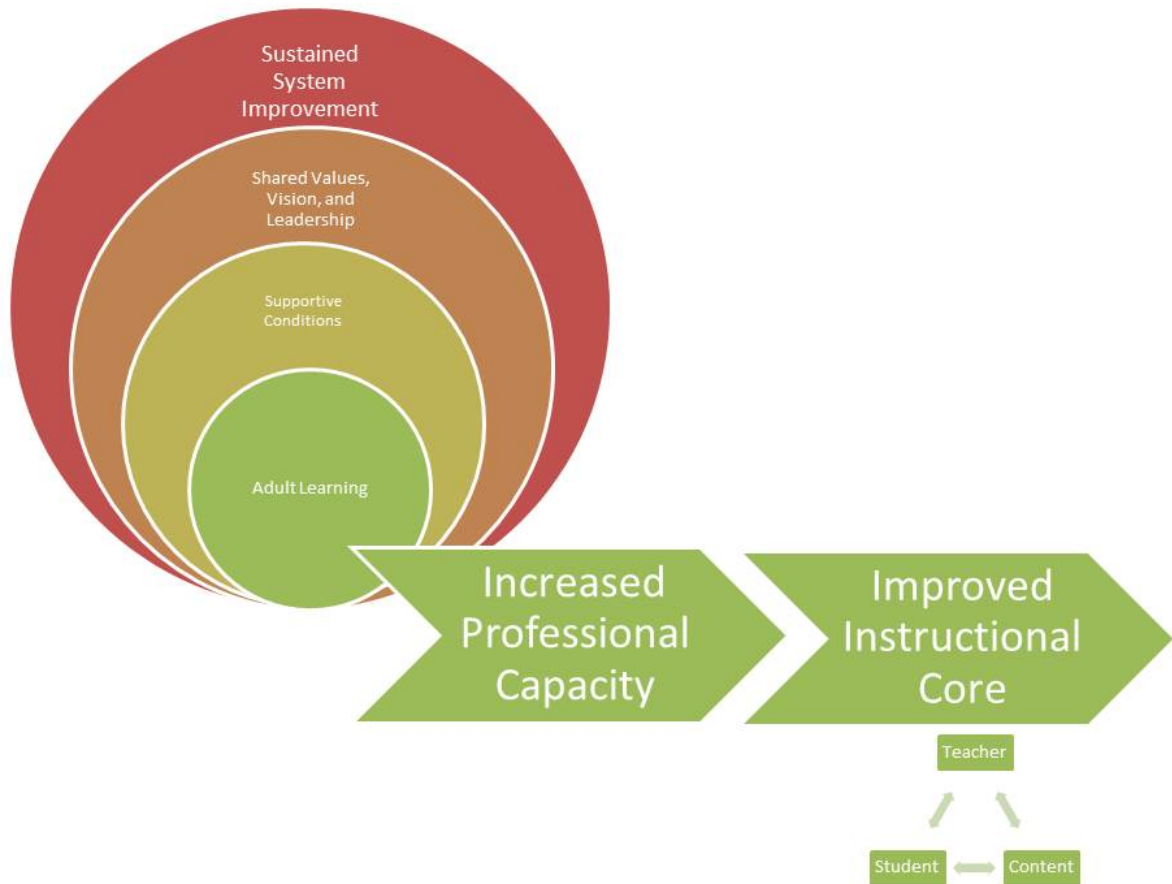


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Rounds is not a process to *fix* individual teachers, but it is a process to understand what is happening in classrooms at scale, how a system produces effects, and how a system can improve teaching and learning (City, 2011). Currently, the United States does not have a systems approach to improving instructional practice at scale. Rounds may serve as a systems approach to instructional improvement at scale; however, the role of the individual participants in the system and supportive conditions for sustainability must be understood in order to move systemic improvement forward.

The teachers on a campus, led by a principal, are the participants who are actually *doing* the work. While policy can be an important driver in education, the work of schools is not done from a board room or from the legislature, it is accomplished in classrooms. What happens in each individual school room is dependent not only on the individual teacher and his/her skill in instructional practice, but also by the support provided by the principal and the collective accountability of the professionals on the campus and district (City, 2011). Rounds, in theory, is the intersection of adult learning, observation, and systems improvement (City et al., 2009; J. Roberts, 2012). Policy can drive action, but transformational change will happen within the walls of classrooms. The current study results may assist in strengthening the instructional core by increasing understanding of supportive conditions for a systemic improvement practice, such as Rounds, to be sustained.

Delimitations

I considered school districts in Texas that are engaging in Rounds. Three districts were selected based on their size: one district of 40,000+ students with 57.4% of students receiving free and reduced lunch, one district of 25,000+ students with 64.7% of students receiving free and reduced lunch, and one district of approximately 10,000 students with 76% of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Districts were selected based on the following criteria: district implementation of Rounds for varying lengths of time (more than six years, three to five years, one year), participation in the Texas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development led by Dr. Sheila Maher, and continuation of Rounds professional development with Dr. Sheila Maher. The study occurred from September 2016 through January 2017, and the sample of the study was limited to one campus per district. The participants for each case

included at least one central office staff member responsible for leading district-wide Rounds work, the campus principal, three teacher leaders involved in the Rounds practice as observers on the network team, and a focus group of six teachers who were not involved on the network team. Thus, the study is limited geographically to Texas and may not be applicable outside of the state. Further, the small sample size is not representative of all classrooms in Texas. There are many systemic improvement efforts; however, this study focuses on the practice of Rounds as a systemic improvement practice. While the study is limited to this systemic practice, there may be relatability to other systemic improvement practices.

Assumptions

I assumed participants responded openly and honestly in focus groups and interviews. I further assumed participant behavior and language during observation was not altered due to the presence of the researcher. I acknowledge that I, as the researcher, am a part of the research, and I was able to bracket biases in the discussion and findings, further discussed in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

In the study, critical terms will be used. For clarity, definitions of frequently used terms are included in this section.

- *Adult learning*—Adult learning is building the capacity of the adults in the school system to address both technical and adaptive challenges endemic to schools (Drago-Severson, 2009). Adult learning is supported through professional development in order to build organizational capacity and instructional capacity. Teachers, school leaders, and district leaders share a need for “job embedded, ongoing, safe opportunities. . . . and engagement in

meaningful dialogue about their work and its inherent challenges” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 15).

- *Capacity*—Two kinds of capacity are defined: organizational (or school) capacity and teacher capacity. Organizational capacity is the “collective ability as a functioning whole to increase achievement” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 8). Teacher capacity is the ability of the teacher to provide effective instruction (Drago-Severson, 2009).

- *Instructional core*—Systemic improvement comes from improving the instructional core. Simply defined, it is the “teacher and the student in the presence of content” (City et al., 2009, p. 22). In order to improve student learning, all three components of the instructional core must be improved: the teacher’s knowledge and skills, the level and rigor of the content, and student engagement with content (City et al., 2009).

- *Network*—A network is a group of professionals often from different roles in the organization (central office administrators, instructional support staff, principals, assistant principals, teachers, etc.) who convene at regular intervals to observe practice and analyze instruction related to a problem that the host campus has presented for study. The network establishes norms and commitments to guide their learning. While networks can be like-role (such as all teachers or all administrators), cross-role networks (networks in which principals, teachers, and central office staff all learn together) may deepen systemic learning (City et al., 2009). The network observes in classrooms and reserves time for debrief of the observation, analysis, predictions, and next level of work.

- *Next level of work*—After observation and analysis, the network team will generate a next level of work for the campus, based on the problem of practice (City et al., 2009). The next

level of work should be specific and actionable, helping to drive steps for improvement of the instructional core at the campus, and it should be rooted directly in the analysis of classroom instruction. The campus Rounds team makes the determination about how to implement next level of work suggestions (City et al., 2009). The campus leaders may design a Momentum Plan to specify further inquiry, professional development, text study, peer observation, or other high leverage strategies to continue moving forward the work related to the problem of practice. Furthermore, short term targets may be established to mark progress and direct short-term steps of campus leadership and classroom teachers.

- *Professional learning community (PLC)*—A professional learning community can describe any combination of people with an interest in education (a grade level team, an intervention committee, a content-based department, an entire school faculty, a leadership team) that focus on critical core beliefs and practices: ensuring all students learn, building a culture of collaboration, and focusing on results (DuFour, 2005). In ensuring students learn, PLCs ask three critical questions: “What do we want each student to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?” (DuFour, 2005, p. 33). In building collaboration, there exists “a systemic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning” (DuFour, 2005, p. 36). A results-orientation in PLCs shifts the focus from what was taught to what was learned and shifts outcomes from a focus on implementing a program or initiative to considering the impact on student learning based on results from assessment (DuFour, 2005). In order for a PLC to move “from concept to capability,” five dimensions form the foundation of

effective PLCs: “supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions” (Hipp & Huffman, 2010, pp. 12-13). Supportive and shared leadership exists when campus leaders, supported by district leadership, share power and decision making while developing leadership in others, namely teachers. Shared values and vision exist when campus staff has an unrelenting focus on student learning with norms of behavior to develop teaching and learning. Collective learning and application is defined as campus staff working together to plan, solve problems, and refine instruction for increased student learning. As peers observe and provide feedback on instruction to each other, the campus community builds shared personal practice. Finally, in order to establish shared values and vision, collective learning, and shared personal practice, supportive conditions must serve as both foundation and umbrella to protect and nurture the PLC. Supportive conditions include both relational elements, such as trust, respect, and positive relationships, and structural elements, such as time for meeting and financial resources. These five dimensions are critical to building the capacity of the campus team to function as a professional learning community and to build sustainability.

- *Problem of practice*—Identifying a problem of practice is the first step for a host school in Rounds work. The problem of practice helps the network determine what to focus on during the network visit. A well-designed problem of practice “focuses on the instructional core, is directly observable, is actionable, connects to a broader strategy of improvement, and is high-leverage” (City et al., 2009). The problem of practice should be rooted in data, and it will evolve over time from first articulation to a more thoughtful problem of practice as the school and/or district level team refines thinking and understanding of the problem of practice

(J. Roberts, 2012). The problem of practice, essentially, is a student learning problem that can be impacted positively or influenced by instructional pedagogy. Essential questions are designed to help the campus deeply examine the problem of practice. Essential questions are thoughtful questions designed to drive worthwhile inquiry related to the problem of practice. A campus or district may create three or four essential questions to drive inquiry related to the problem of practice.

- *System*—System is defined as a collection of schools (with the school as the base unit) operating in a larger system, a school district. The system of schools is a nested system with levels of defined autonomy at each unit. The school is nested within a district which is nested within a region which is nested within the state which is nested within the United States. Learning organization and district may be used synonymously with system (“Hidden curriculum,” 2014).
- *Theory of action*—Expressed in an if-then statement, the theory of action espouses the “organization’s collective belief about the relationships between certain actions and desired outcomes” (Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University, n.d., para. 4). As networks seek evidence to prove or falsify the theory, lines of inquiry are opened. Therefore, the theory of action must be precise enough that data can be collected to determine if the theory in action is making an impact on student learning (City et al., 2009). The theory of action provides the link between “the mission of increased performance for all students to the strategy the organization will use to achieve that goal” (Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University, n.d, para. 4).

Organization of the Study

The remainder of the study, following the introductory chapter, will be organized into seven additional chapters followed by the references and appendixes. In Chapter 2, I present related literature to the practice of medical rounds for systemic learning and current trends related to Rounds in education, exploring the process and potential of Rounds. Chapter 3 is a description of the research design and methodology of the study. The instruments used to gather data, the procedures followed, and determination of the sample are explained in this chapter. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the three case studies. Chapter 7 is an analysis of themes across the multiple case studies, and Chapter 8 concludes the study with implications and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to Rounds

In 2010, *Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* was published with the assumption that educators could learn from the model of medical rounds as an improvement practice (City et al., 2009). The role of rounds in medical education is an embedded ritual, and inherent in medical rounds is the notion of solving a problem. The patient exhibits symptoms, and the doctor's role is to understand the symptoms, form a hypothesis or a theory of action, test the hypothesis through medical examination and tests, form a correct diagnosis, and determine a treatment plan based on the diagnosis. All the while, the doctor, preferably, is relatable and explains the diagnosis and course of treatment to the patient with a friendly bedside manner. This process is not unlike teaching. The teacher must observe the student for symptoms and signs of mastery or learning difficulty, diagnose the student's needs, and implement a learning program in order to move the student to achievement. This, just as in medicine, is a complex process, made more complex by the variety of needs that each child brings to the classroom, the depth and complexity of the content which is required to be taught, and the demands on the classroom teacher. American educational practice has yet to create a system to implement this process and to allow for systemic improvement of teaching and learning (City et al., 2009; Elmore, 1996, 2007b; Fullan, 2009; Reeves, 2010; Senge et al., 2000). In the literature review, I will explore the research related to instructional rounds (rounds) as a systems improvement practice by an examination of systems, culture, supportive conditions, adult learning, and the instructional core.

Connection to Medical Rounds

Rounds was born from the concept of medical rounds. While education and medicine apply the concept of rounds for different purposes, there is value in understanding the history and concept of medical rounds. Extensive research exists on the significance and importance of rounds to the medical field. In 1910, the publication of the Flexner Report changed the face of medical education (Flexner, 2002). Flexner argued medical education and high quality medical care were essential to democracy. Focused on reducing the number of medical schools in an attempt to exert quality control over medical education, the Flexner Report also called for “a hospital under complete educational control. . . . High grade teaching within a hospital introduces a most wholesome and beneficial influence into its routine” (as cited in Flexner, 2002, p. 595). Prior to the 1960s, 75% of medical rounds took place at the bedside of the patient. By 1978, approximately 16% of rounds occurred at the bedside, and that number is estimated to be even less today (LaCombe, 1997). The diminishing number of bedside rounds, and rise of alternative forms of rounds, has occurred for a number of reasons including demands for efficiency, rising medical costs, increased technology, and pedagogy skills of residents (Beck, 2004; Bensinger, Meah, & Smith, 2005; Birtwistle, Houghton, & Rostill, 2000; Gonzalo, Chuang, Huang, & Smith, 2010; Irby, 1994; Muething, Kogagal, Schottker, Gonzalez del Ray, & DeWitt, 2007; Stanley, 1998). The ritualized expectations of what medical rounds should be often conflicts with what medical rounds actually are. Demands of time, patient needs, urgency in shortening stays, increasing complexity in coding and billing, and restrictions of service hours for interns all play a role in shaping the reality of medical rounds from the expectation of what medical rounds should be (Balmer et al., 2010; Bodnar et al., 2013;

Ottolini, 2014; Sarosi, 2010). There is growing pressure to expedite patient care in order to reduce costs while also focusing on patient safety in an increasingly complex field, due to technology and the growth of knowledge in medicine (Bodnar et al., 2013). In order to allow for sleep, resident duty-hour restrictions have been put in place in the medical community, further limiting the time for teaching (Bodnar et al., 2013). Due to increased medical capacity and the desire to reduce costs, the length of patient stays has also been drastically reduced, thereby reducing the student hours on bedside rounds and shifting medical learning from the bedside to the lecture hall (Balmer et al., 2010). The increasing restrictions limit, curtail, or de-emphasize the learning in medical rounds, thus creating a knowing-doing gap between the ritualized and idealized medical round and what actually happens in practice.

A return to bedside rounds is debated in the literature with its proponents arguing that diminishing bedside rounds leads to the loss of important parts of patient care (Gonzalo et al., 2010). Rounds in medicine have morphed into many types of rounds, including, but not limited to, cross-role rounds, grand rounds, nursing rounds, bedside presentations, post-take ward rounds, outpatient rounds, and pharmaceutical rounds (Baker, Klein, Samaan, & Brinkman, 2007; Bodnar et al., 2013; Burgess, Brenner, Sorensen, & Garland, 2003; Dewhurst, 2010; Lehman, Brancati, Chen, Roter, & Dobs, 1997; Sarosi, 2010; Strain & Hamerman, 1978). The rise of technology in the information age led to grand rounds. Grand rounds often investigate a complex medical problem with a large audience gathered for learning (Balmer et al., 2010; McGee, 2014; Praschinger et al., 2007). In addition to practice for medical students, medical rounds have extended to include learning experiences for nurses, interns, residents, psychiatrists, and other roles within the hospital (Jarman, 2009; Strain & Hamerman, 1978).

The expansion of and continued change of medical rounds highlights the deep entrenchment of rounds as a learning practice in the field (Balmer et al., 2010; Neale, 1989; O'Leary, Boudreau, Creden, Slade, & Williams, 2012; Ottolini, 2014; Rothman & Sibbald, 2002). Unlike education, medical rounds exist as a system-wide improvement practice. Even though medical rounds have undergone metamorphosis, any doctor in any hospital in the United States could explain rounds using similar language and will have had experiences with some form of rounds; it is an entrenched professional practice in the field of medicine.

Continuous improvement is a common quest between medicine and education, as is the continued evolution of learning. The needs for systemic improvement, leadership, adult learning, and capacity building also exist as commonalities between the two professional fields. The embedded professional practice of rounds as an improvement strategy in the medical field is different from professional learning in education which often exists in stand-alone professional development seminars and workshops rather than embedded in the ongoing work of the professional, leading to fractured and incomplete improvement rather than systemic change. Fink and Markholt (2013) describe K-12 education “as often practiced” as a “quasi-profession at best because we do not in fact have common standards of professional practice” (p. 320).

Rounds in Education

In 2009, *Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* was released (City et al., 2009). Based on the notion that school systems in the United States do not have a clear definition and vision of what high quality teaching looks like and the only way to improve instruction is to carefully study and understand it, the practice of rounds was

born (City et al., 2009). Rounds, at its core, is a set of “protocols and processes for observing, analyzing, discussing, and understanding instruction that can be used to improve student learning at scale” (City et al., 2009, p. 3). The practice embodies a specific set of ideas and protocols regarding how educators work together to improve instructional practice.

In order to evaluate instruction, the journey must begin with description. Too often, classroom observation quickly moves to evaluation without first describing what was seen, analyzing observation data, making predictions, and then moving to evaluation. Rounds provides a process to make meaning around classroom instruction in a systematic way (City et al., 2009).

Rounds Process

Rounds, in practice, is a gathering of educators, typically from cross-functional roles in the organization, such as teacher, principal, central office leadership, content directors, coaches, and other instructional personnel; however, rounds cannot start or end with the network visit. A great deal of planning and preparation must precede a network visit, and a great deal of effort and learning must extend from the network visit in order to create systemic improvement (Fowler-Finn, 2013). Each network is different, ranging from small in-school teacher networks to large 50+ member networks from cross-functional, cross-campus, and cross-district roles (Fowler-Finn, 2013; Rallis, Tedder, Lachman, & Elmore, 2006; Troen et al., 2014). Fowler-Finn (2013) recommends capping networks at 36 members, and no more than eight teams in order to maintain successful system learning, and further recommends multiple networks to serve the systems improvement of large districts. For successful implementation, the cost in terms of both time and financial resources (in order to secure substitute teachers

and pay for administrative costs) must be explicit and realized as a commitment to the systems improvement effort (Fowler-Finn, 2013). A facilitator, either internal or external, must be named and trained in order to facilitate the network visits successfully and the adult learning of the network members (Fowler-Finn, 2013; Troen et al., 2014). Each school participating in a network will develop a problem of practice: a student learning problem that the school wishes to address through instructional pedagogy in order to increase student learning that connects with the district's or campus's theory of action. For the network visits in a cross-role network, a group of principals, teachers, and central office staff gather at the designated site. The hosting principal shares his/her problem of practice and the school's journey. In addition, the principal shares essential questions that he/she wishes for the network to ponder and investigate.

Rounds allows for the increase of knowledge and skills of the participant by solving authentic problems defined by goals for achievement and actual performance, as defined in the campus problem of practice (City et al., 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999, Rallis et al., 2006). Then, the teams of four or five members observe in classrooms for four or five 20 minute segments, scripting observations of the teacher and student moves, and gathering evidence around the school's problem of practice and essential questions (Fowler-Finn, 2013; J. Roberts, 2012). This practice may be modified for similar role teams, or led by teachers rather than administrators or a facilitator; however, the process remains similar in theory (Troen et al., 2014).

The teams then return to the debriefing room to analyze the detailed descriptive notes taken in the classroom, looking for patterns in instruction. Then, teams share their observed patterns to look for broader patterns across the school. Teams also make predictions, based on observation, about what students in the school would learn if they were doing exactly what

they were asked to do. There is great nuance in observing for what students are asked to do. For example, a teacher may explicitly state the expectation that students use academic vocabulary in class discussions. However, during observation, the team may note the teacher accepts words such as *thing* and *stuff* in lieu of correct academic terms; thus, what students are *actually* asked to do differs from what it may appear students are asked to do (Fowler-Finn, 2013). Finally, network teams provide suggestions for next level of work to the site-based team. By focusing the next level of work around broad patterns across the school rather than on specific teacher interventions, the network team provides the home school greater leverage to improve learning at scale.

System-Wide Improvement

Education in the United States, unlike medicine, has yet to develop a systemic improvement practice. Beginning with the launch of Sputnik in 1957 and spurred on by the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, American education has been the focus of reform as Americans fear falling behind in an increasingly globalized world (Friedman, 2005; Zhao, 2014). The American classroom has become far more diverse with regard to socio-economic status of students, English language learners, and students with disabilities; and a desire for more ambitious learning to meet the demands of the 21st century has increased (Sykes, 1999). However, from 1997-2002, “there was no national strategy, no explicit use of change theory, and aside from a successful school district here and there, there was no progress” (Fullan, 2009, p. 105). As large scale educational reform came to age in the United States in the No Child Left Behind era, there came a greater understanding that current strategies were not successful; however, there is no agreement on what systemic reform strategy *will* work to improve

American schools at scale (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Fullan, 2009). Thus, instructional improvement and systems reform in American schools remains sporadic and isolated (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Fullan, 2009). Current policy strategies in the U.S., from replacing principals in low-performing schools to establishing targets for improved results without support to reach the targets, are “based on a foundation of wrong drivers and flawed fallacies” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 41). Hargreaves and Fullan define drivers as the “policies and strategies you count on to successfully drive the reform forward” (p. 41).

The four wrong drivers of policy are negative accountability, individualistic solutions, fascination with technology, and piecemeal or fragmented solutions. The five fallacies of misdirected educational change are excessive speed, standardization, substitution of bad people with good ones, overreliance on a narrow range of performance metrics, and win-lose inter-school competition. (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 41)

Shifting from the *wrong drivers* to solving the problems facing American schools today requires adaptive solutions, not technical solutions (Drago-Severson, 2009; Wagner & Kegan, 2006).

Technical solutions are solutions for complicated problems that one knows how to solve. For example, while open-heart surgery is complicated and requires expert knowledge, the technical knowledge of open-heart surgery is known. Adaptive solutions are those solutions that are yet unknown; complex problems with unknown solutions require adaptive and integrative thinking.

Educators must design and do work differently in the schools of the 21st century based on a knowledge economy demanding new skills (Drago-Severson, 2009; Wagner & Kegan, 2006). In American public education with an increasingly diverse population, educators do not know, yet, how to move student learning forward, at scale, for every child in the digital world, which is moving at rapid speed with volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (M. Prensky, personal communication, July 29, 2015). We have pockets of great teachers, but

we don't yet have an education system that can produce dependably proficient teaching in every classroom, in every school. . . . And we've not yet seen a K-12 school district where every school is steadily improving student achievement from one year to the next. (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 27)

Commitment over Time

The American public, and policy makers, expect quick changes with rapid concrete evidence of improvement in schools; however, systemic change is a long, multi-stage process of awareness, planning, implementation, and reflection. It often takes three to five years in implementation for improvement to occur with success depending on the quality of teacher learning in the system (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Sykes, 1999).

Operationally, all members must be working on instructional improvement. The enemy of systemic change is when attention is diverted from the focus on improving teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1999).

Planning for success with gains in student learning and achievement requires the system establish an inquiry process and conduct a comprehensive needs assessment to determine the solution to meet the needs of the system (Reeves, 2010). The system improvement practice must be relevant to the system and aligned with the needs assessment with reasonable timelines established for goal achievement in three to five years. Teacher learning throughout this system is critical in order for the solution to be implemented system-wide (Sykes, 1999). The demand for quick changes and the desire of school personnel to deliver can lead to leadership churn and initiative fatigue as schools drop one improvement effort for the next, or introduce a new project which diverts attention from improving teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Reeves, 2010).

Initiative Fatigue

Initiative fatigue, as defined by Reeves (2010), is the weariness that arises in a system in which one initiative is adopted, only to be abandoned in a short time, and replaced by another initiative, or when multiple initiatives are adopted at the same time. Time, resources (money, facilities, people), and emotional energy are all finite resources. As the number of initiatives increases, time, resources, and emotional energy will serve as constraints. The number of priorities that school system leaders pursue in an attempt to create system-wide improvement will determine their effectiveness (Reeves, 2010). Reeves argued fewer than six priorities, with measurable outcomes, must be established in order for the system to inoculate itself from initiative fatigue.

Leadership

In order to avoid initiative fatigue, a supportive culture, clear vision, and support for professional learning must reside in leadership at both the district and campus level (Leithwood et al., 2004; Reeves, 2010). To develop adaptive solutions, American public schools must shift from unconnected thinking to systems thinking, from operating in isolation to building collegiality, from relying on perception to being driven by evidence, and from individual autonomy to collective accountability (Futtrell, 2011; Wagner & Kegan, 2006; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004). Leadership is second only to classroom instruction in the school-related factors contributing to learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Collective accountability in the nested system is built when central office leadership, campus leadership, and classroom teachers are centered on improving teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Futtrell, 2011; Honig, 2012). Central offices in school districts have long been viewed as a regulatory agency with budget and

business functions, managing the operations of the school district, and ignored as a change agent in improving teaching and learning (Honig, 2012). Districts do not see district-wide improvement in teaching and learning without substantial engagement in helping schools, both principals and teachers, to build capacity (Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). Improving teaching and learning district-wide is a systems problem that depends not on formal structures, but the practice of people within structures. “Clearly, teaching and learning improvement in single schools depends on how central office creates and implements support for change” (Honig et al., 2010, p. 5). Central office and campus leaders indirectly influence student learning through direct influence on teachers and “helping the organization to set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move toward those directions” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 7). The core of leadership is setting directions, developing people, and redesigning systems within the organization (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Leithwood et al., 2004). In preparing for whole-system change, leaders who articulate deep understanding and urgency related to the need for improving learning and teaching for all and implement systemic improvement processes will create shared accountability to solve problems and establish trust (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Networks, systems of schools set on improving, can function as a comprehensive and mutually supportive system builder developing new capabilities within the organization (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves, Parseley, & Cox, 2015; Watterson & Caldwell, 2011). Leadership is critical to systemic improvement. Change can occur when leadership promotes professional capital, knows staff and understands the culture, secures stability and sustainability of leadership, is aware of contrived collegiality, reaches out beyond

the borders of the organization, and is evidence informed, not overloaded with data (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Rounds as Systemic Improvement Practice

McKinsey & Co. (2007) personnel examined top performing systems in the world (typically including Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Canada) and found four common themes: attraction of high quality candidates to the teaching corps, focus on strategies for developing quality instructional practice, cultivating strong instructional leadership, and continuing use of data practices to determine effects of early intervention (Fullan, 2009). Fullan argues the next step in the United States' reform effort is capacity building through practices such as rounds, building a systems approach to school improvement.

In the United States, it is easy to find outstanding teachers and schools. What is difficult to find is examples of reformed large-scale systems because teaching in the United States is treated as if it is a set of gifts endowed to individuals rather than a body of professional knowledge that can be learned through careful study and practice (Elmore, 1996, 2007).

City (2011) explained rounds is about "understanding what's happening in classrooms, how we as a system produce those effects, and how we can move closer to producing the learning we want to see" (p. 37). By embedding a systemic practice that places classroom observation at the center of improvement, rounds shifts education from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration and inquiry. As Fowler-Finn (2013) refers to rounds, he notes the practice of rounds

. . . pushes people to move away from the isolated norms of idiosyncratic practice to look at systems of improvement and make coherent connections between classroom, school, and district improvement strategies. Rounds requires educators to unlearn old patterns and collaboratively learn new ones. (p. v)

Culture

Collaborative learning requires a healthy organizational culture. Cultural health indicators include collegiality, experimentation, high expectations, trust and confidence, tangible support, reaching out to knowledge base, appreciation and recognition, caring and humor, investment in decisions, protection of custom and tradition, and open and honest communication (Barth, 2013). The degree to which the members in the organization feel comfortable reaching out to (more knowledgeable) others for help with their work in order to meet high expectations indicates cultural health (Barth, 2006, 2013). Establishing a culture that encourages reflective practice and collegial inquiry requires trust as a foundation (Drago-Severson, 2009). Barth (2006) describes adult interactions, reflective of culture, in schools in four categories: parallel play, adversarial relationships, congenial relationships, and collegial relationships. In a school culture rooted in parallel play, teachers and principals operate in isolation, each remaining in their respective territory as the teacher is isolated in the classroom and the principal manages the building. In a culture characterized by adversarial relationships, teachers are in competition with each other. No systems exist for the sharing of ideas and beliefs. In a culture characterized by congenial relationships, people are friendly and social; however, their interactions are not connected to improving teaching and learning. In a collegial culture, teachers talk about practice, share pedagogical knowledge, observe each other in classroom instruction, and help each other (Barth, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2009). To establish collegial adult interactions as the norm requires a strong foundation of trust, strong leadership, and a clear, shared vision with instructional improvement at the center.

Transforming culture is the key to improvement. The key to transforming culture is to open the connection between what people believe and who believes it. School personnel must make it necessary to examine the culture and its impact on students and adult learners (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Professional culture connects the way people perform their work to the people they are, the purposes they pursue, the colleagues they have, and how they do or do not improve (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Systemic change will not occur unless principals, teachers, and central office leaders are learning together in regular meetings, observing classrooms, and exchanging ideas (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Change is a long, multi-step process in which the adult learners must have interactions as interaction will generate improvement more so than working in isolation (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Elmore and Burney argue good ideas come from talented people working collaboratively toward a shared end; central office leadership should set clear expectations and decentralize the work with specific progress monitoring established. Collaboration of all adult learners is essential, as the culture of collaboration will facilitate systemic change and improvement (Drago-Severson, 2009; Elmore & Burney, 1999). Schools have long been a collection of independent practitioners with the focus on norms that “value independence over interdependence” (Noonan, 2014, p. 149); until systems are established that invite collaboration and build professional practice, systemic improvement is unlikely.

Shared Values and Vision

In improving organizational culture, establishing a shared vision is critical. There must be a clear theory of action aligned with the vision and a unifying strategy. School districts must be both tight and loose: tight on the expectations for campuses, but loose on the specifics of

how campuses arrive at the expectations, leading to a shared vision (Leverett, 2008). Shared vision, with a clear articulation of what school looks like when all stakeholders establish and share core beliefs, is critical to school transformation (Zmuda et al., 2004). Identifying one's own beliefs and purposes and creating shared vision leads to an outcome that the adults are committed to the benefit of the students (Hall & Hord, 2011). Without shared values, there can be no community and no growth (Hall & Hord, 2011). Reform requires revising beliefs and values, even for structural change (Sykes, 1999). Revising beliefs and values, and sharing the vision, is even more critical for instructional change. The role of the leader is to invite others to join in creating a vision and influencing the organization, as well as helping the organization stay focused on the vision. Korach (2011) suggests:

Closing the gap between espoused values and behavior is often painful and disruptive; ingrained organizational patterns of behavior breed complacency. Second order change occurs when practices and policies fundamentally shift, requiring people to shift their mental models, to see things from different perspectives. (p. 662)

Korach highlights the importance of establishing vision and shared values. In order to close the gap between values and behavior requires a systemic improvement practice at scale with identifiable strategies in place: urgency in using data, shared vision of good teaching, meeting about the work, shared vision of student results, effective supervision, professional development, and diagnostic data with accountable collaboration (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). The role of the campus leader and district leaders are both significant in shaping a shared vision. Decisions made at central office communicate about values and vision (Elmore, 2000). Elmore describes the example of Anthony Alvarado in shaping culture through a shared vision. Alvarado came to lead Community School District 2 in New York City in 1987. Alvarado built shared vision by establishing system-wide use of professional development as the strategy

which created beliefs and culture around instructional improvement at the center of the organization (Elmore, 2000). Professional learning focused on improving teaching and learning may be a strategy to build shared vision and beliefs; rounds is a practice by which the systems learning in an organization may be improved, increasing shared beliefs and values and building organizational culture.

Common Language

In organizational culture, language is critical. By engaging adults in ongoing collaborative discussion rooted in common language, routines are established that build human capital around personal interactions, resources, and shared professional practice, thus improving the adult learning within the system and the system holistically (Hatch & Roegman, 2012; Lachman & Wlodarczyk, 2011; Rasmussen, 2012; Von Frank, 2013). By engaging in collaborative adult learning, schools move from systems of isolation to systems of interdependence and collaboration in which systems success translates to student success. In building ongoing collaboration and common language through rounds networks, isolation is reduced, and interdependence is created. By engaging in the rounds network as a district, the system creates meaning around a common language of instruction—“a way to talk about instruction that’s shared by everyone in the district” (Marzano, 2009, p. 35). Through rounds, pedagogical skills of educators are increased through the ensuing and ongoing reflective discussion around observed practice (Marzano, 2009). Building common vocabulary in a collaborative environment strengthens organizational culture.

The Role of the Leader

In building and sustaining organizational culture, the role of the leader is critical

(Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Kotter, 1996; Senge et al., 2000). Leadership is establishing the direction, aligning people, motivating, and inspiring (Kotter, 1996). The literature surrounding leadership is largely connected to building and sustaining organizational culture, and the literature surrounding organizational culture is largely linked to the role of the leader. In school systems, the role of the principal and superintendent have changed; they are no longer charged only with the managerial task of running the school and/or district. Now, superintendents and principals are expected to perform their roles as transformational leaders, often with little training in how to do so. In order to bring systemic change, school leaders “must become the primary adult developers and architects of collaborative learning communities’ (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 11). When leadership is strong, it enables teachers to sustain commitment to a vision, to a district, and to a school. For teachers, leaders must demonstrate visibility, communicate a clear vision, be open and approachable, be trusting, and demonstrate personal care (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The principal, as the instructional leader is important to improving teaching and achievement; however, the role of central office is also critical (Drago-Severson, 2009; Honig, 2012). Reform efforts will fail without support from central office. Central office and principals must partner to model rather than direct, develop and use tools, broker and bring in new ideas, and create and sustain engagement. Transformation may be achieved when principals and central office share a vision that both central office leadership and principals should be engaged side-by-side in teaching and learning improvement, the core work of schools (Honig, 2012). The work of the central office should mirror the work that the best principals do with teachers, sitting side-by-side with principals in schools to focus on improving the instructional core (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012).

The clear imperative in leadership is to provide focus, a focus on people and practices, not programs (Reeves, 2010). In developing leadership, sustained capacity is dependent in developing teacher leadership. (Reeves, 2010). Systems change and failure occurs when leadership allows too much complacency and fails to create urgency (Kotter, 1996). Leading system-wide change requires focusing on the “right drivers” of capacity building, teamwork, pedagogy, systemic policy, and key leadership competencies (Kirtman & Fullan, 2016, p. 7). Key leadership competencies challenge the status quo, build trust, create commonly-owned vision, focus on team, develop high urgency, commit to continuous improvement, and build networks (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Kirtman & Fullan, 2016; Kotter, 1996).

Leadership, teaching, and adult actions matter in schools. Particular leadership moves are linked to student outcomes: degree of leader inquiry, implementation, and monitoring (Reeves, 2006). How the principal promotes and supports teacher learning has a large effect size on student learning (Drago-Severson, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Shared leadership is more accurate and less risky. The leader serves as the architect of the organization; vision of the leader is necessary, but it must be widely distributed in the organization in order for systemic improvement to occur (Reeves, 2006). Networks allow for shared leadership and numerous examples of collaboration (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1999). Network building requires leaders to develop new capacities as they engage with other campuses across a system.

Reciprocity

In order to build systemic improvement, the rounds network, comprised of cross-role individuals from different campuses within a system, must sacrifice time on their own campus in order to support the adult learning and growth of another campus within their system (or

outside of the district or system if the network is cross-district). J. Roberts (2012) terms this sacrifice as the *problem of reciprocity*. In a highly supportive culture with shared values and vision, one of the challenges of rounds as a systemic improvement strategy is balancing the value of the network visit with the challenges of being away from one's own classroom and campus as it strains the resource of time. Reciprocity is the understanding that the sacrifice of investing one's time in the improvement of another campus within the network will pay dividends in one's own adult learning and in the reciprocal network visit to one's own campus at a future date. In the case study of Lakeside Public Schools, J. Roberts (2012) found campuses struggled with the frequency of network visits. Network members saw great value in their own campus visit; however, they did not feel that it was as beneficial for them to spend days away from their campus to provide the network experience for another campus. Furthermore, as the rounds process developed in Lakeside Public Schools, the *new* wore off and greater challenge arose with what the next steps would be for the network (J. Roberts, 2012). The professional responsibility and commitment to each other in a learning organization must be examined in order to solve the problem of reciprocity. This issue of reciprocity and value of learning outside of one's own campus may hinder the full development of rounds as a systems improvement practice, and further study is needed in examining this issue.

Supportive Conditions

When systemic improvement occurs, the organizational culture is established in which strong leadership develops shared vision within the organization. To move improvement forward, supportive conditions, both physical conditions and relational conditions, must be in place (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

Relational Conditions

Relational conditions refer to the relationships that must be in place in order for a supportive, collaborative culture to exist. Relational leadership, based on the work of Daniel Goleman, is rooted in trusting relationships (Reeves, 2006). “If we want to improve teaching and teachers, then improve the conditions of teaching that shape them, as well as the cultures and communities” (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 45). Being surrounded by excellent colleagues increases commitment, shared values, and collaboration (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Adult learning requires the building of trust and helpful, generous adult relationships (Barth, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2009; Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Trust is the supportive foundation for adult learning, and adult learning is linked positively to student achievement (Drago-Severson, 2009; Tschannen-Moran, 2013). When trust is established, structures can be created for learning, for both adults and students (Drago-Severson, 2009; Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Many leaders in many roles joining in one common goal and collective allows for sustainability of system improvements; the development of many leaders in the organization, including teacher leaders, requires trust (Reeves, 2006). Professional learning communities are one vehicle in which adults come together to build and sustain change and learning in schools. Widely shared leadership and collective responsibility for student learning is the foundation of a professional learning community (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). In addition to the physical supports, such as time to meet, there must also exist opportunities for creating and sustaining trust (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hord & Hirsh, 2008; Louis, 2008; Tschannen-Moran, 2013). Collegiality, caring, and respect exist when people cultivate a deep personal and professional respect and caring for each other (Elmore & Burney, 1999).

Physical Conditions

In addition to the relational conditions that must be established in order for systemic improvement to occur, supportive physical conditions must also be in place: time, space, and financial resources. With scarce educational resources, policy makers often view professional development as expendable and not as a major force to improve students and teachers (Elmore & Burney, 1999).

Resource of Time

Time needs to be allowed for networking, observation, and learning, as well as reflection (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Hord & Hirsh, 2008). Teachers and leaders must have time with school based teams to work on immediate issues and long-range planning. Teachers should engage in collaborative problem solving with continuous and supported professional development, rather than fractured and isolated workshops (Hipp & Huffman, 2010). Learners need feedback, coaching, and follow up (Hawley & Valli, 1999). District and campus leaders must allocate both the time and structure for learning, reflection, and problem-solving (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Reeves, 2010). In addition to actual time to learn and collaborate, district and campus leaders must also provide adequate time for learning and implementation. Adequate time must be allowed in the day and week, and also adequate time must be devoted to the improvement initiative (Hawley & Valli; 1999; Reeves, 2010).

Financial Resources

In addition to time, district leaders must allocate financial resources to the ongoing development of its members. Using budgeted funds and other available resources to support

the professional learning and system-wide improvement of teaching and learning is critical to organizational improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Hipp & Huffman, 2010). School systems that foster improvement of teaching will minimize bureaucratic constraints and rules; be clear about multiple goals and prioritize them; provide teachers, students, and administrators with valid and accurate measures of student performance and processes, as well as frequent and constructive monitoring of progress (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Reeves, 2010).

Supportive Structures

The heart of the work of PLCs is not just teams; it is the school. The teachers, principals, and central office personnel work together in a PLC to determine goals and focus for learning, and establish supportive structures. PLCs require whole school coordination; if a fractured effort exists, balkanization will occur (Hall & Hord, 2011; Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

Drago-Severson (2009) summarizes four structures that may support adult learning: teaming, providing leadership roles, collegial inquiry, and mentoring. Teaming is the most frequently used structure to support adult growth and learning. Examples of teams include cross-functional teams, network teams, teaching teams, grade level teams, strategy and leadership teams, curriculum development teams, student support teams, critical friends, and professional learning communities (Drago-Severson, 2009). Essential features of teams include questioning, inquiry, resources for collaboration, and provision of relevant data. Teams, or professional learning communities allow for support; adult learners need support to embrace, practice, and receive feedback in learning something new (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Teachers spend too much time in isolation. Embedded

in a collaborative culture with strong leadership and with the supportive conditions of trust, relationships, time, structure, and fiscal resources, the foundation is established for adult learning (Hipp & Huffman, 2010).

Adult Learning

Creating systems for adult learning and building a common language allows for the development of human capital, thus building the capacity of the organization (Hatch & Roegman, 2012; Marzano, 2009; von Frank, 2013). A direct link exists between supporting adult learning and enhanced student achievement (Drago-Severson, 2009). High impact professional learning focuses on student learning, rigorous measurement of adult decisions and student outcomes, and on people and practices rather than programs (Reeves, 2010).

Most research conducted to date regarding adult learning is in the form of rich case study (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Practicing teachers learn from other teachers inside their own practice, often termed job-embedded professional development. Teachers learn not only through action research by systematically intervening and studying practice, but also from other teachers in informal mentorships and through more formalized coaching (Bransford et al., 2000).

Models and Characteristics of Adult Learning

System-wide, there exists a common need for job-embedded, ongoing professional adult learning that takes place in a safe environment and in which the adults in the organization engage in meaningful dialogue about teaching and its challenges (Drago-Severson, 2009).

Currently, there exist six models of professional development in practice: training, observation/feedback, involvement in improvement processes, inquiry and collaborative action

research, individually-directed, and mentoring and coaching (Drago-Severson, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999).

Effective adult learning approaches have several common features. They:

1. Work to link improved instructional practice and student learning
2. Address the needs of student and adult learners
3. Are collaborative and ongoing experiences
4. Create a culture of excellence
5. Allocate time for reflective practice that nurtures learning and application (Drago-Severson, 2009; Hord & Hirsh, 2008)

Effective adult learning is driven by goals and student performance, involves teachers (as learners) in the design, allows for school-based solving of authentic and immediate problems, is information rich, and is part of a comprehensive change (Hawley & Valli, 1999). As professional learners shift from being passive recipients of training to engaging in solving real problems of teaching and learning actively, voice is given to those who have previously been the recipients in professional learning (Hord & Hirsh, 2008).

Both adult and student learners need learning environments that are learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered (Bransford et al., 2000). Learner-centered professional development for teachers is akin to a differentiated classroom for students. Often, in the United States, professional development is a *one-size fits all* delivery rather than being differentiated for the needs of the adult learners. Whereas a veteran teacher may grow in practice through action research or curriculum writing with other veteran teachers, an inexperienced teacher may need more learning on classroom management prior to engaging in deep work regarding curriculum alignment (Bransford et al., 2000). Knowledge-centered learning is learning centered around improving teacher knowledge of pedagogy, as

well as content. In assessment-centered learning environments, teachers have the opportunity to learn a new skill, practice the skill, and receive meaningful feedback for improvement. The assessment-centered learning environment for teachers supports coaching and formative assessment in teaching practice (Bransford et al., 2000). Finally, community-centered environments support the notion that adults learn with and through others. In professional learning communities, teachers develop collaborative peer relationships and on-going professional development through working together in partnership for student learning and achievement (Bransford et al., 2000). Consequently, in order to improve the learning in American schools systemically, one must improve the learning of the adults in the organization through the power of teacher preparation and on-going professional learning rooted in best practices of learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Dinham, 2013). The concepts of learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered adult learning also apply to student learning; thus, by creating a system that provides the same type of adult learning as is encouraged for student learning, the system builds symmetry.

Symmetry

Schools exist to promote learning in all their inhabitants; students will not learn unless the teachers are learning (Barth, 2013; Drago-Severson, 2009). J. Roberts (2012) defines symmetry in schools as occurring when adults are learning and thinking as the adults in school systems hope to see mirrored in student learning. J. Roberts (2012) reports:

When organizational learning is symmetric, educators are engaging in the same kinds of learning that they expect of students. Further, every adult in the system should have the same basic requirements for learning, regardless of his or her role or position in the system. (p. 12)

Rounds offers the opportunity to examine symmetry within the school system as rounds is an intellectually engaging, emotionally challenging study of meaningful work. J. Roberts discusses the emotional and highly charged conversations between educators; he notes some walking out or shutting down in frustration due to their new learning experience. Some teachers in network visits wanted more direction and guidance and to be told if they were *doing it right*. Yet, this struggle and challenge, exemplified in rounds for adult learning, was the same kind of learning that teachers desired for their students.

Symmetrical systems are systems in which members of the organization at all levels (educators and students) are expected to do similar kinds of learning noting that “relatively symmetrical organizations tend to favor networks over hierarchy, observation of practice over evaluation, and theories of action rather than premature solutions” (J. Roberts, 2012, p. 103). With the changes in society, and thus in education, over the past quarter-century, “we are asking teachers to engage students in types of learning that *they, the teachers, have never experienced themselves*” (Troen et al., 2014, p. xiii). The symmetry of rounds places the adult learning in the hands of the educators; teachers and principals guide their own learning through a facilitated process, thereby building the professional skills of the adults in the learning organization (City, 2011; City et al., 2009; Elmore, 2007a; Fowler-Finn, 2013).

In order to have deep professional learning and in order for rounds to become a practice rather than an event, the schools must reorganize in order to impact the way adult learning occurs between rounds network visits. One method that developed in Lakeside Public Schools was for the schools to begin to train staff and conduct internal rounds, thus continuing the

momentum of the network visit and expanding the impact to the adults across the campus, thereby increasing adult learning in the system (J. Roberts, 2012).

Capacity

Systemic improvement often develops as a result of shared leadership and vision, building a supportive culture, and increasing adult learning. Through adult learning, capacity of both the individual and the organization is built. The 21st century is placing incredible demands on educators; capacity building must increase too (Drago-Severson, 2009). Capacity building concerns the knowledge, skills, and disposition of individuals, but more important, collectively (Fullan, 2010a). Fullan argued capacity can be increased in one of two ways: hire the people with capacity and potential or continuous learning through peer learning. Capacity is enhanced when teachers can observe new strategies, practices, and engage in coaching. Success builds capacity and engenders confidence for continuous improvement (Elmore & Burney, 1999). Professional capacity is developed in teachers by building capability (expertise), commitment, career, culture, and supportive conditions of teaching. Capability is the skills and qualities built to lead to accomplishment; a teacher has capacity when he/she knows that they have knowledge and skills to build student learning (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). To meet the needs of the 21st century, school leaders and teachers must develop adaptive skills to bring about systemic change. This type of second-order change can only occur in an organization by impacting the system for genuine capacity building (Hatch & Roegman, 2012).

One limiting factor in a professional learning community may be a lack of capacity or expertise in the group necessary to advance the learning of the group (Fink & Markholt, 2013). Through engaging in rounds, the teacher may compare his or her own practice to the

observation and learning observed during rounds, thereby moving teaching from individual skill to a body of professional knowledge, ultimately building teacher capacity and organizational capacity (Elmore, 1996; Marzano, 2009; J. Roberts, 2012; Stocklin, 2010; Stoll, 2009; Troen et al., 2014). While rounds may leave participants with as many questions as answers, it is ultimately about adult learning of the network participants in order to breed systemic instructional improvement (J. Roberts, 2012).

Instructional Core

The core technology of the school is teaching and learning (Hawley & Valli, 1999). When adult learning is designed to build teacher and organizational capacity, the instructional core will be strengthened. The instructional core is comprised of three facets: the teacher, the student, and the content. There are seven principles central to the instructional core (City et al., 2009):

1. Increases in student learning occur only as a consequence of improvements in the level of content, teachers' knowledge, and skill, and student engagement.
2. If you change any single element of the instructional core, you have to change the other two.
3. If you can't see it in the core, it's not there.
4. Task predicts performance.
5. The real accountability system is in the tasks students are asked to do.
6. We learn by doing the work, *not* by telling other people to do the work, *not* by having done the work at some time in the past, and *not* by hiring experts who can act as proxies for our knowledge about how to do the work.
7. Description before analysis, analysis before prediction; prediction before evaluation. (p. 23)

The teacher must improve his/her knowledge and skills, the student must interact with content in new and engaging ways, and the content itself must be rigorous. By changing the

teacher's knowledge and skills, the teacher will change the way the student interacts with content.

The Role of the Teacher and Student

Teachers must know how students learn in order to shape and design the role of the student; this is not currently established in wide practice. Building schema, reflecting and regulating thoughts and behaviors, accessing intrinsic motivation, awareness of student developmental states, and considering learning as both socially shared and individual enterprise are critical considerations as the teacher facilitates the student role in the classroom; these factors impact both adult and student learning (Hawley & Valli, 1999). There is an increased demand for students to think critically, solve problems, and synthesize information; this requires a shift from teaching by telling to teaching for understanding and transfer which requires building the teacher's knowledge and skill in order to change practice (Hattie, 2012; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Zmuda et al., 2004).

The Role of Content

The quality of the teacher's knowledge and skills are developed in practice with colleagues through thoughtful inquiry (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Del Prete, 2006). By increasing the level of content, the teacher must design tasks that change the way the student engages with the content. All students, regardless of background, deserve access to a rigorous curriculum, and the quality of teaching of the curriculum will determine student outcomes (Del Prete, 2006; Dinham, 2013). At the center of this triangle of teacher, student, and content is the task. The task will determine the achievement outcomes of students, and the task is defined as the work that students are actually doing, not what the teacher has assigned or what

the teacher thinks students are doing (City et al., 2009; City, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010). For example, a teacher may assign students to compare two civilizations, and the teacher may believe the cognitive skill involved is comparison. In actuality, the teacher writes her thoughts on the board and the students copy her thinking in their notebooks. The task is listening and copying, even though the assignment was for students to make comparisons. Thus, designing and implementing thoughtful tasks in which students engage is the real work of schools. Accountability to the curriculum is in the task, not in a standardized test that may serve to narrow curriculum and experience (Fullan, 2009).

Learn by Doing the Work

Building understanding of the instructional core can only happen through careful study and analysis of what is currently happening in classrooms. Those in administration and central office roles must be present in the real work of classrooms in order to understand the instructional core and lead teachers regarding improvements of instructional practice. The role of school leadership is to assist in developing teachers in order to build a strong instructional core and developing teachers' capacity to teach (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Marzano, 2009). Too often the improvements attempted in school reform are structural in nature. The bell schedule, the class schedule, later start times, and special programs are all part of reform efforts that have fallen flat because they are not addressing the instructional core of teacher and student in the presence of content; rather, they are addressing structural and technical changes only, skirting the edges of true transformation of instruction (City et al., 2009; Elmore, 1996, 2007b, 2011; Fullan, 2009; Korach, 2011; Lachman & Włodarczyk, 2011).

Summary

Systemic improvement of teaching and learning is central to the current study. If strong leadership is embedded and sustained in a system at both district and campus levels, then systemic improvement can occur (Fullan, 2009, 2010b; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Kirtman & Fullan, 2016; Kotter, 1996). Leaders at both the campus and district level build a shared vision and distribute leadership by establishing a culture with strong supportive conditions: trust, relationships, structure, funding, and time (Hall & Hord, 2011; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, 2013). With these conditions in place, the organization is ripe for learning. Adult learning builds both individual and organizational capacity (Drago-Severson, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). With increased capacity, the instructional core (the teacher and student in the presence of content) is strengthened (City et al., 2009). Rounds is a professional practice that may enable systemic change by providing a supportive network structure for adult learning with a focus on the instructional core and its improvement (City et al., 2009; J. Roberts, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Research Questions

To understand the potential of instructional rounds (rounds) as a systems improvement strategy, one must examine the systems in which rounds is currently embedded in practice. In this chapter, I present the research questions that guided this study, as well as the research design used to understand the supportive conditions necessary to the development of rounds as a systemic improvement practice. I also explain the selection of multiple case study analysis as the method, propositions I considered, how I defined the case, and the steps I took to prepare and collect data. I will further explain the data analysis protocols, how I established validity and credibility in the qualitative study, the limitations of the study, and the ethical considerations of the study.

Two research questions guided the study:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?
2. How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents?

From understanding the experience of the participants, themes may be uncovered related to rounds as a meaningful process for systemic improvement, as well as conditions necessary for sustaining instructional improvement.

Research Design

To understand the experiences of the school participants in rounds, I will overlay phenomenology with a constructivist perspective. Phenomenology is the study of a particular phenomenon, such as an event (Grbich, 2013). Modern school system research is generally rooted in a post positivist paradigm (Taylor & Medina, 2013). With the ontological belief that there is an actual reality to be determined and an epistemological belief that there is a somewhat objective truth of which approximations can be made, post positivist researchers believe if effective practice and design are articulated, progress toward achieving a measurable goal can be made (Taylor & Medina, 2013). The funded research projects driving Comprehensive School Reform are largely rooted in the notion there are generalizable truths to be discovered and applied to school improvement. However, at the heart of any reform effort are people. People bring to rounds their own perspectives, and each person comes to the story with his or her own truth. In school improvement, adults in the learning organization engage with the improvement practice, such as rounds, and invest time and energy in order for learning to occur. In a comprehensive school system with large numbers of students and teachers, there will be multiple perspectives to inform multiple truths regarding the improvement practice. Qualitative study is, at its core, an observation of the world through interviews, stories, pictures, and conversations with the goal of providing to an audience the perspective of those participants in the research with the understanding that there are multiple

truths to be heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Within these school cultures, created realities exist, based on the common understanding of language and the understanding that the reality each individual constructs can never truly be known; therefore, reality can truly never be known (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, the researcher can seek understanding of the constructed reality through participant observation, documented discussions, and through seeking the stories of the participants in the school culture.

Self as Researcher

I approached this study with the admission that I was a part of the research, and due to my investment, I had limitations as the researcher. However, from a constructivist perspective, I acknowledged the created reality within the scope of the school culture and acknowledged that my perspective was one reality; yet, there existed many other realities within the school culture, functioning side-by-side with my reality. Bracketing is a process designed to remove the researcher's bias from making meaning of the data (Grbich, 2013). I was able to separate out my own experiences from the experiences described in the data in order to determine meaning with accuracy and trustworthiness, developing critical subjectivity. At the same time that I remained critical of my own biases entering the research, I also acknowledged the subjectivity I bring to the topic was formed from years of study and participation in rounds. This experience has formed and shaped my learning, experiences, and added possibly valuable experiential data and understanding as I uncovered others' experiences and perspectives related to rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

Awareness of background, bias, perspective, context, and how the researcher's story interacted with the research was important to establish credibility. As a high school principal, I

had the opportunity to travel to Harvard University and attend the Rounds Institute Session I & Session II in 2010 and 2011 respectively. In 2010-2011, I served as one of the first principals in my school district to pilot implementation of rounds as a school improvement practice. I currently serve as the lead academic officer of a Texas school district in which every campus, with the exception of three non-traditional campuses, participates in one of seven rounds networks. Over 400 staff members from central office, campus administration, and campus teaching staff are engaged in rounds as a systemic improvement practice. My perceptions from leading the rounds work at both a campus and district level could possibly impact my research. The researcher cannot be separated from research; in fact, new learning can occur in the sphere in which the researcher and research interact; however, this process must be transparent. Keeping a reflexive diary is a method to make reflective thought transparent (Bollough & Pinnegar, 2001; Grbich, 2013). For the course of the study, I kept a reflexive diary to assist with bracketing during data analysis.

In order to build credibility, I wish to disclose that I have served in one of the districts included in the study since 1999 as a teacher, principal, and currently as the chief academic officer. In our district, four vertically aligned networks comprised of elementary and secondary schools are led by the Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools and me. Three elementary networks are led by the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools. For the purpose of this study, I chose an elementary network site at the direction of the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools. The site was chosen because of the success the site has demonstrated with rounds and because the veteran principal has a reputation for candor and

frank discussion. The Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools recommended this site based on these factors.

I conducted the study in my district as I did in the two other districts included in the study. I set up interviews through the principal, at her request, and I followed the direction of the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools. In addition to reviewing the informed consent document, I reassured participants prior to interviews that this study was being conducted as a doctoral student, and it was unrelated to my role in the district. I also assured the participants that I have no evaluative or contract authority over any of their positions. Teacher contracts and evaluations are the responsibility of the principal; principal evaluations and contract recommendations are the responsibility of the superintendent. In our district, the role of the chief academic officer is one of support and guidance. However, I wish to acknowledge that my role in the district may have influence over the participants and their comfort with being candid regarding rounds.

As a researcher with personal connections and interactions with the content, I had an opportunity to build authenticity in the study. As part of the reflexive diary, I bracketed emotions and self-connections to expose and explore during data analysis, thus increasing authenticity. Flexible thinking and consideration of one's own experiences allows for the development of new learning (Bollough & Pinnegar, 2001). In order to remain trustworthy as a researcher, I remained aware of possible bias and included it in the study. By considering self-as-researcher in relation to the study with transparency, validity and trustworthiness are increased as self cannot be removed from research and reflection (Bollough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Method

To understand the factors significant to sustaining improvement and how districts are implementing rounds work, I utilized case study methodology using qualitative data seeking themes and similarities across cases. Case study is a recognized method to understand a complex social phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Case study is appropriate for investigation of a case while retaining a holistic perspective regarding organizational processes, such as rounds. “A case study tries to illuminate the set of decisions, why they were taken, and how they were implemented, and with what results” (Yin, 2014, p. 15). Case study allows for a small number of sites to be studied intensely, including many observations on the same variable in order to generate multiple implications related to the hypothesis (Levy, 2008; Wilson, Huttly, & Fenn, 2006). Multiple case studies, as compared to single case study, allows for greater theoretical generalizability, or relatability, and for stronger reliability. In the case study process, the researcher drafts a process, designs which data to collect, develops a collection protocol, and conducts the case study research for each single case. Upon conclusion of research for each single case, I drafted the case study report and then drew cross-case conclusions. I determined the conceptual framework did not need modification, and I continued to follow-up with participants for both member-checking and continued research through September 1, 2017. Then, I developed policy implications, if any, based on the conclusions, and wrote the cross-case report (Yin, 2014).

Propositions to Consider

Propositions help the researcher move in the right direction of what to study.

Propositions I considered in my study, or assumptions I made, are schools and/or districts

undertake the work of rounds as a means for systemic improvement. Schools and districts wish to improve the instructional core in order to improve academic achievement for students. In order to understand the system and improve the system, systemic reforms and improvements must be embedded that address the core work of the system. Often school reform centers on structures, schedules, and other peripheral and tangible structural reforms that do not touch the chief function of schools: instruction (City et al., 2009; Elmore, 1996, 2007a).

Defining the Case

The case is defined with a focus on both the district officers leading rounds work in the school system and campus teams in rounds networks. Campus teams are defined as the campus principal and teachers on the rounds team (such as department managers or instructional facilitators who are helping the campus launch and/or lead rounds work on the campus and who are participating in internal rounds or network visits. Campuses were selected from three diverse districts in Texas: one district comprised of 40,000+ students with rounds networks underway for five years, one large district comprised of 25,000+ students with rounds networks underway for seven years, and one district comprised of 10,000+ students beginning the first year of rounds work.

Participants

Participants in the study include representatives from three school districts in Texas selected due to variance in size and location with a common focus of using rounds as a systemic improvement strategy. Participants from each district include at least one central office administrator leading rounds in the school system, one principal, three teachers involved in rounds directly as network participants, and a focus group of six teachers who are not involved

in the network visit, but who may be observed as part of the network visit. The campus in each district was selected by the central office administrator based on this guiding question: “at which campus in your district is rounds making the most significant impact on instructional improvement?” Context for each case was established by reviewing demographic data, achievement data, and through the interview and observation processes.

Data Collection

Data collection is comprised of two elements: preparation and strategies. In preparing to collect data, I screened and selected districts to participate in the study. Data elements of the study included documents, such as campus and district improvement plans and other documents related to rounds, interviews conducted with both campus and district personnel, focus groups of teachers, and participant observation of rounds network visits.

Preparation

Five key steps exist in preparation for data collection: preparation of skills, training for a specific case, protocol for study, screening candidate cases, and conducting a pilot study (Yin, 2014). In preparing to collect data, I practiced and refined my skills as a qualitative researcher. As the interviewer, I prepared to be inquisitive, attuned to both words and emotions, able to refrain from inserting personal bias, and I sought to understand verbal and non-verbal communication in the interaction with participants (Yin, 2014). In writing the literature review, I have undergone training for writing this specific case as I have built my understanding of rounds and systemic school improvement, as well as connections to the origination of rounds in the medical field. Screening candidate cases was assisted by Dr. Sheila Maher. As Dr. Maher conducted training on the practice and implementation of rounds in districts across Texas

through Texas Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (TASCD), she referred districts to me that are conducting professional development and internal network visits as part of a systemic improvement strategy. I contacted the chief academic officer charged with rounds implementation for a screening interview and willingness to participate in the study. In screening for candidate cases within districts, I was aware of the ethical requirements of research, explored later in this chapter.

Strategies

Data collection began in May 2016, with committee and IRB approval. Prior to writing the IRB Application, I contacted each chief academic officer, or other referred contact, to discuss the study. I informed the chief academic officer or contact in each district that I sent a letter outlining the study and assuring the respondents that neither their personal identity, nor the identity of their school or district will be released in the dissertation. A copy of the letter is in Appendix A. As part of the IRB application, I completed the necessary research request forms for each district and gained permission to conduct the study. In June 2016, I made contact with each chief academic officer to establish a date to conduct the interview with him/her or his/her designee. Each chief academic officer, with support of his/her superintendent, determined the school site for the study within the district. I also requested documents from the district as outlined later in this chapter. In consult with the chief academic officer and principal, I followed processes that the school district wished for me to use in contacting teachers for the focus group. The chief academic officer and principal of Tall Oaks Elementary in Central Plains ISD (CPISD) determined the campus would invite teacher participants to participate in the focus group. I provided principals of Rancho Vista Elementary in Rancho Vista ISD (RVISD) and

Southern Pines Middle School in Southern Pines ISD (SPISD) a description of the study to read at a faculty meeting to solicit volunteer participants for the focus group and for interviews with teacher leaders. The description of the study provided to the principals is in Appendix B. In consultation with the chief academic officer and principal, I scheduled a site visit and interviews with the central office leader, principal, teacher leaders, and a focus group with the teachers. During the site visits, I asked the principal to share campus-level documents (defined later in this chapter). I followed this initial contact with a written summary of the schedule we determined for the fall via electronic mail, as well as the consent forms for the participants and reassurance that their identity, as well as the identity of the campus and district would remain anonymous. I brought hard copies of the consent form to each interview for the participant to review and sign. Two weeks prior to the scheduled visit, I confirmed the date, time, and location with both the chief academic officer and principal.

Pilot Study

During May 2015, I conducted a pilot study at an elementary school. I directly observed the network visit at the campus. I conducted participant interviews with the principal, teacher leaders, and a focus group of teacher participants. I also completed document analysis at the pilot study campus, referring to the Campus Improvement Plan and all documents connected to the rounds network visit and planning. From this pilot study, I was able to refine instrumentation, refine interviewing skills, and practice the case study protocol I established. The pilot study assisted me, with the guidance of members of the committee, in determining changes to the data collection in the study.

In order to establish validity, multiple sources of data must be used and data must be triangulated in order to strengthen construct validity (Yin, 2014). Yin identifies six sources of evidence most frequently considered in case studies: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. For the scope of the multiple case studies, I collected documents, conducted interviews, and conducted direct observation.

Document Collection

For document collection, I utilized the district and campus websites to locate the most recent version of the district improvement plan and campus improvement plan. I submitted requests for the following documents to the central office instructional leader:

- Rounds schedule for the district
- Schedule of meetings related to rounds
- Agendas from meetings related to rounds
- Outline or slides from district professional development related to rounds
- District protocols related to rounds (such as momentum plan template or next level of work template)
- Procedures for rounds network visits
- Any other responsive documents

A pseudonym was assigned to each district and campus, and documents were coded according to the pseudonym.

Validity of Document Collection

Validity is “the degree to which your instrument truly measures what it purports to

measure” (C. Roberts, 2010, p. 151). Validity of document collection was established by the quantity and quality of documents I was able to collect and by the quality of the document analysis (discussed later in this chapter). I also member-checked my findings with the participants and expanded on understanding of the documents through the semi-structured interview, further establishing validity.

Reliability of Document Collection

Reliability is “the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another” (C. Roberts, 2010, 151). In order to protect anonymity of participants and to establish reliability so that other researchers could use the data analysis method with the documents collected to possibly replicate findings, researchers may contact me for additional identifiable information related to documents, if needed.

Interviews of Participants

I interviewed one central office leader, the campus principal, teacher leaders who have participated in rounds, and a focus group of teachers who have not participated in a rounds network visit (but may have been observed during a network visit) using a semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to elicit responses to assist me in answering the research questions (RQ). I conducted 45-60 minute interviews with follow up interviews as needed. I hired a NIH-certified assistant to transcript each of the interviews, as well as the focus groups, for data analysis (described later in this chapter) as some of the school districts prohibited audio or video recording of teacher participants. I also took notes during the interview and reviewed the transcripts with my notes to ensure accuracy in the transcript. I used judgment to determine when I needed to ask probing questions to

explore topics further, but the probing questions were captured in the transcript when I deviated from planned questions in order to maintain validity. Interviews assisted me in answering the research question:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?

Interview Questions

In interviewing the central office leader(s), principals, teacher leaders, and focus groups of teachers, I asked questions using a semi-structured interview protocol with probing questions as necessary to better understand the participants' experiences with rounds and perceptions regarding systemic instructional improvement. I sought to understand the supportive conditions necessary to sustain rounds as a systemic improvement practice, the appropriateness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice, and how the participant understands rounds as a practice to improve the instructional core. Interview questions are in Appendices C, D, E, and F.

Validity of Interview Questions

In order to determine the validity of interview questions, I field tested the interview protocol with one central office member, one principal, three teachers, and one focus group of six teachers as part of the pilot study. I made changes to the questions based on feedback from

the pilot study participants. Additionally, I field tested the revised questions with two central office members, four principals, three teachers, and one focus group of six teachers. I gathered feedback about the interview protocol from these participants with the following questions:

1. Is the interview too long?
2. Are the questions clear?
3. Do the questions need to be rephrased?
4. Do any questions need to be dropped?
5. Are there any additional questions that I should ask?

I received feedback that the questions asked generated more feedback about the structural process of rounds rather than feedback about rounds as a systemic instructional improvement practice. Furthermore, the initial questions may have generated more feedback about how the network visit was organized than about the implications of rounds on adult learning and improving student learning. Upon receiving feedback, I modified the questions to increase validity and to align more tightly with the research question I am seeking to answer.

The semi-structured interview is appropriate for qualitative research.

Reliability of Interview Questions

To increase reliability of the data analysis of interviews, I transcribed each of the interviews. I member checked responses after analyzing data with all participants to increase reliability further. Reliability is also strengthened as I used the same interview questions, with only slight modification based on the role of the participant in the organization.

Direct Observation

I visited a network site visit for the three campuses bound in each of the cases and observed the network visit. As part of the data collection, I included observation notes. I did not participate in the network which I observed in order to function fully as observer and limit the bias possible in participant observation (Yin, 2014). Weaknesses of observation include selectivity and reflexivity. In the rounds network, there were five to six teams observing in classrooms and discussing observation during the debriefing period. I was selective in deciding to stay with one team and ignore the remainder, or in moving from team to team to observe which limited what I was able to collect and observe. Furthermore, the teams may have changed behavior during periods of observation (reflexivity) (Yin, 2014). Despite the weaknesses, the observation notes allowed for greater contextual understanding and helped me to understand further with regard to the research questions.

As part of the rounds network, physical artifacts are generated regarding analysis of instructional practice. Physical artifacts include analysis statements regarding instruction observed, data related to practice, and other evidence that the campus asks the network to collect as related to the problem of practice. Part of data collection involved photographs of the physical artifacts of network visits for inclusion in data, if allowed by the district and campus, or the Network Visit Debrief forms from each network visit. In order to increase validity and limit weakness, I included all physical artifacts generated at internal visits as part of the data collection (Yin, 2014).

Validity of Direct Observation

Direct observation of the practice being studied, rounds, is appropriate for the

qualitative study. Observation allowed for uncovering of supportive conditions, observation of relationships, and fidelity of focus on the instructional core. After analysis, I used member checking to verify findings.

Reliability of Direct Observation

By transcribing field notes and photographing the physical artifacts, I have a reliable record of the observation. However, the events observed are unique and not able to be replicated. Future researchers in the field may conduct observations of network visits, but each visit will be unique.

Data Analysis

To conduct data analysis from the multiple sources of data collection (interview, focus groups, documentation, observation, and physical artifacts), I analyzed the data using constant comparison analysis, the most common qualitative data analysis tool, with deductive coding with codes developed from the conceptual framework guiding the study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). All sources of data were transcribed and coded. I conducted content analysis of the artifacts and documents, as well as the interview transcripts and observation field notes, using word frequency to check the themes that emerged during the constant comparison analysis using deductive coding (Grbich, 2013). I conducted an initial reading of the documents and interview transcripts and made notes of possible codes and keywords that aligned with the conceptual framework and applied the codes to the documents and interview notes using comment features in Microsoft Word. I then conducted a reading of documents with use of a computer assisted qualitative data analysis system (CAQDAS), Atlas.TI. I coded the documents with the same deductive codes. I checked the initial coding with the second coding in Atlas.TI in

order to check the themes that emerged from deductive coding of interview transcripts. The discovery of themes can occur by analyzing repetition of concepts and by seeking examples of key words in content, or by repetition of words (Grbich, 2013). I reviewed the codes that emerged from multiple readings of the data in alignment with the conceptual framework. I identified rival or conflicting evidence during the coding process, and checked data with participants following observation and interview.

In order to increase rigor and trustworthiness, I checked the data using a second data analysis method. Interested to see what word count may reveal about the documents, I created a word cloud using word cloud features in Atlas.TI. In a word cloud, the words used most frequently appear in the largest font (Grbich, 2013). I connected these words to the broader thematic categories that emerged from deductive coding. By member checking, thematic analysis by constant comparison, pattern checking, and word count, I established validity as I determined major findings and themes in the analysis. Critical to the validity of the case study is the examination and continuous consideration of rival explanations and possible alternative explanations (Yin, 2014). To increase validity of data analysis, I invited a doctoral student from the University of North Texas with experience in qualitative data analysis to code one data set using the deductive codes established from the conceptual framework in order to establish interrater reliability. In coding one case, 76% of interrater reliability was established, thereby increasing validity for data analysis.

Validity and Credibility of the Study

Questions around validity and trustworthiness and how these qualities are established have arisen in the field of qualitative research. There are many definitions of validity in the

research, and all definitions bring meaning and may be relative to the research in question (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Creswell and Miller (2000) considered an array of terms often considered with regard to validity: credibility, adequacy, trustworthiness, and authenticity, among others. These characteristics of research may be established by multiple methods; however, the researcher must be explicitly clear in defining the term and establishing meaning with the reader by providing both definition and example. In order to determine a qualitative study is valid, one must consider both internal and external validity. In qualitative research, internal validity is determined by the researcher communicating the trustworthiness and rigor of the process (P. Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006). Further, internal validity is expressed when replication of results is possible (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Methods to establish internal validity may include member-checking, triangulation, thick description, peer review, and external audits (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Internal validity increases rigor and establishes trustworthiness of the researcher as it increases the possibility of replication, creating reliability (C. Roberts, 2010).

Negative Evidence

During analysis, seeking negative, or disconfirming, evidence is imperative in order to establish internal validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morrow, 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Whitemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). If using coding analysis, the researcher will either deductively or inductively establish themes. Once themes are established, the researcher must seek evidence contrary to the theme, as well as the evidence consistent with theme (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Once the researcher commits to rigorous evaluation, the researcher must seek out evidence to contradict (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Morrow, 2005; P. Roberts et al., 2006).

While, in final analysis, negative evidence should not outweigh confirming evidence, the search for disconfirming evidence provides validity and credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Often, qualitative researchers are subject to confirmation bias, or seeking evidence that supports or confirms established themes (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). By seeking substantial negative evidence, the researcher demonstrates avoidance of confirmation bias, thus increasing credibility and validity. If claiming a constructivist orientation, the avoidance of confirmation bias and the claim of negative evidence are particularly important, as it demonstrates understanding of the complexity and multiplicity of reality (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, if the researcher chooses to use an audit trail to increase validity, the auditor may seek what strategies have been used to seek disconfirming evidence, furthering credibility and validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Seeking evidence contrary to themes, or that does not serve in congruence with other evidence, is one analysis strategy that allows for increased credibility and increased validity.

Construct Validity

With regard to case study research specifically, the researcher must establish construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2014). To establish construct validity, I used multiple sources of evidence, including interviews, focus groups, and documents, as well as physical artifacts. I established a chain of evidence, linking logic from evidence to conclusion in single case studies, and linking logic between case studies in the drawing of conclusions and findings. I had participants review a draft of the case study report, as well as perform member-checking in the interview and focus group process (Grbich, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Internal Validity

In order to establish internal validity, I used explanation building, connecting conclusion from evidence points, as well as addressing disconfirming evidence or rival explanations. Using the following checklist for case study conditions and requirements, internal validity was established:

1. Multiple methods of data collection used
2. Multiple sources of evidence used
3. Chain of evidence leading to the study's conclusion
4. Case study is reviewed by key informants prior to publication
5. Thorough descriptions are used to envision the context
6. Ethics issues addressed
7. Researcher bias addressed
8. Direct quotes and excerpts from field notes used to support findings (Yin, 2014)

By using the checklist with fidelity and providing evidence for each step, I established validity of the study.

Reliability

To establish external validity and reliability, I conducted multiple case studies to expand possibility of analytic generalizability. However, I acknowledge the sample size is small, and while there may exist analytic generalization (generalizing theory), it is not be possible to extrapolate statistical generalizations from the multiple case study examination of rounds (Yin, 2014).

Limitations

The study was limited by both time and access allowed for the research due to the dissertation process and small sample size, as well as self-reported data and limited research

studies on the implications of rounds for systemic improvement. The time allowed for the research due to the dissertation process is one full semester, which allows for one campus visit and initial interviews with follow up interviews and member checking. If the case were studied over multiple years rather than a single semester, the longitudinal study might allow more insight into the research questions and deeper understanding of rounds as a systems improvement practice. The districts will allow a certain amount of access to participants and observation, which may also limit the study. The case is limited to three districts with interviews of school and district leadership, three teachers who are participants in the rounds network, and a focus group of teachers who are not directly involved in observation in the network. The relatively small sample size allows for reliability, but precludes generalizability to the greater population. The research may allow for connections to themes and application of themes to one's own practice; however, generalizability will not be possible. Due to the methodology chosen and use of self-reported data through interviews and focus groups, it may be difficult for independent verification of the study. I must assume what participants shared was honest and unbiased, but the study is potentially limited by potential bias of participants, such as telescoping (focusing on one event out of sequence), selective memory, attribution (attributing success to one's own ability and failure to external forces), or exaggeration (USCLibraries, 2017). Finally, few research studies exist on the topic, and quantitative data related to student achievement gains due to rounds has not been collected due to the difficulty in isolating rounds as one factor in student achievement as it exists as a nested systems improvement practice.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics and protection of human subjects is assured throughout the study. Completion of the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) online course regarding protection of human research subjects and completion of the University of North Texas' Institutional Review Board (IRB) established protocols to ensure protection of human participants. All participants were provided information regarding the purpose of the study, specific research procedures, and risks and benefits of participation in the study. Participants signed consent forms agreeing to their voluntary participation in the study. Follow-up interviews, member checking, and preliminary findings were shared with participants at appropriate intervals in the study. All participants were assigned a pseudonym, and pseudonym connections to actual participants have been stored in a separate and locked location from the research files which is stored on a secure hard drive and backed up in a secure cloud-based storage with password protection. Assurances of privacy and standards for research were discussed prior to the interview and focus group participation.

Conclusion

By conducting a multiple case study using qualitative data seeking themes and similarities across cases, I sought to deepen understanding regarding rounds as a systemic improvement practice and supportive conditions necessary for sustainability. Participants represent three different school districts in Texas and represent different roles within the system, thereby establishing greater relatability within the case study. I used and triangulated multiple data sources to strengthen construct validity, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation of rounds, and focus group interviews. Using constant

comparison analysis, I evaluated the data seeking to understand themes that were unmasked from data sources. In order to build credibility and validity, I sought disconfirming evidence and maintained a reflexive diary to understand self as researcher in the process and to bracket out my emotions. The sample size of the study was small, so while reliability may exist, statistical generalization was not possible in the study. Assuring the protection of the participants was a foremost concern and was thoughtfully considered throughout the study.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: TALL OAKS ELEMENTARY IN CENTRAL PLAINS ISD

The purpose of the study was to determine what supportive conditions are required for sustainability of instructional rounds (rounds) as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement. In this study, I investigated the perceptions of rounds from four distinct groups of participants: district instructional leaders, principals, classroom teachers who participate in rounds network visits, and classroom teachers who may be observed in rounds network visits but do not directly participate. I also observed rounds network visits and reviewed district and campus documents to better understand perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice, effectiveness and appropriateness of rounds, and what conditions may be required for sustainability of rounds as an improvement system for school districts. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?
2. How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents?

In this qualitative study, I collected data through interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document review. Central office leaders, principals, and teacher leaders were

interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Focus groups of teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviews were designed to gather information about the participant's perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice in an effort to answer Research Question 1. I observed a rounds network visit at a campus representing each of the three districts in the study. I reviewed documents relevant to rounds, as well as the district and campus improvement plans. Network observation and document analysis were used to respond to Research Question 2.

I developed a conceptual framework, shown in Figure 1, from research themes that emerged from a review of literature on rounds and medical rounds, adult learning, and professional learning communities. Interviews and documents were coded using deductive codes derived from the conceptual framework. Disconfirming evidence was also identified and coded.

In this chapter, I describe the analysis of the data collected from Case 1: Tall Oaks Elementary in Central Plains ISD (pseudonym assigned to both campus and district).

Background of the District and Campus

Tall Oaks Elementary is located in Central Plains ISD (CPISD). CPISD serves almost 44,000 students in Central Texas, placing the district in the top 13% of school districts in Texas with regard to size of student population (Educational Resource Group, 2017). CPISD serves 400 square miles across multiple municipalities. The district is comprised of 34.6% African-American students, 29.4% Hispanic Students, 23.8% Caucasian students, 2.4% Asian students, 1.9% Pacific Islander students, 7.4% students of two or more races, and .63% Native American students. Due to a high volume of students who are military dependents, the district has the

second highest mobility in the state with 28.9% mobility (Educational Resource Group, 2017). Teacher turnover rate in CPISD is 15.6%. While 59% of school children in Texas are economically disadvantaged, Central Plains ISD serves 56.5% of students in poverty. Students identified at-risk account for 43.9% of the student population. CPISD's superintendent is in his third year of tenure with the district; he became the superintendent in the 2014-15 school year.

Tall Oaks Elementary is a neighborhood school with a rich history. The campus serves a neighborhood that has undergone significant demographic change over the past 50 years. Tall Oaks Elementary is comprised of 18% African-American students, 44.8% Hispanic students, 26.5% Caucasian students, 1.7% American Indian students, .7% Asian students, 1.5% Pacific Islander students, and 6.8% students of Two or More Races. Tall Oaks Elementary has a mobility rate of 28.5% with 71.3% of students defined as at-risk. Eighty-three percent of Tall Oaks students are economically disadvantaged. The principal of Tall Oaks Elementary has served the district since 1979 as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal—becoming principal of the campus in 2002.

Following observation of the Tall Oaks network visit, I interviewed the former Executive Director of Elementary Schools, DL1, who was a key leader in developing and leading the initial rounds work in CPISD. While DL1 recently retired, she has returned to work part-time in CPISD to lead rounds work and mentor new leadership to eventually lead rounds. I interviewed the principal, P1, and teacher leaders (TL1, TL2, and TL3) on the rounds team, and I conducted a focus group of teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, and T6) at Tall Oaks Elementary. The purpose of these interviews was to answer Research Question 1:

What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:

- a. The supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice
- b. Its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice
- c. The salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices)
- d. Whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core

In this chapter, I report findings from interviews and focus groups related to each part of RQ1.

Further, related to RQ2, I review how the perceptions of participants aligned to practice and documents related to rounds. Figure 2 provides an overview of the organization of the chapter.



Figure 2. Organization of Chapter 4.

RQ1a: Perceptions of the Supportive Conditions Required for Sustainability of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

Considering the perceptions of the district personnel, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers observed, multiple perceptions of supportive conditions emerged as important to the sustainability of rounds with regard to themes of relational resources, fiscal resources, and

physical resources. All participants were asked the question, “What supportive conditions are required in order to sustain rounds in your district?” with variances in the probing questions that followed based on the role of the participant in the organization. The participants referenced supportive conditions, including relational, fiscal, and physical resources 39 times in the interviews and focus groups along with additional critical factors related to each theme.

Figure 3 shows the organization of perceptions, themes, and critical factors regarding supportive conditions for the sustainability of rounds in response to RQ1a.

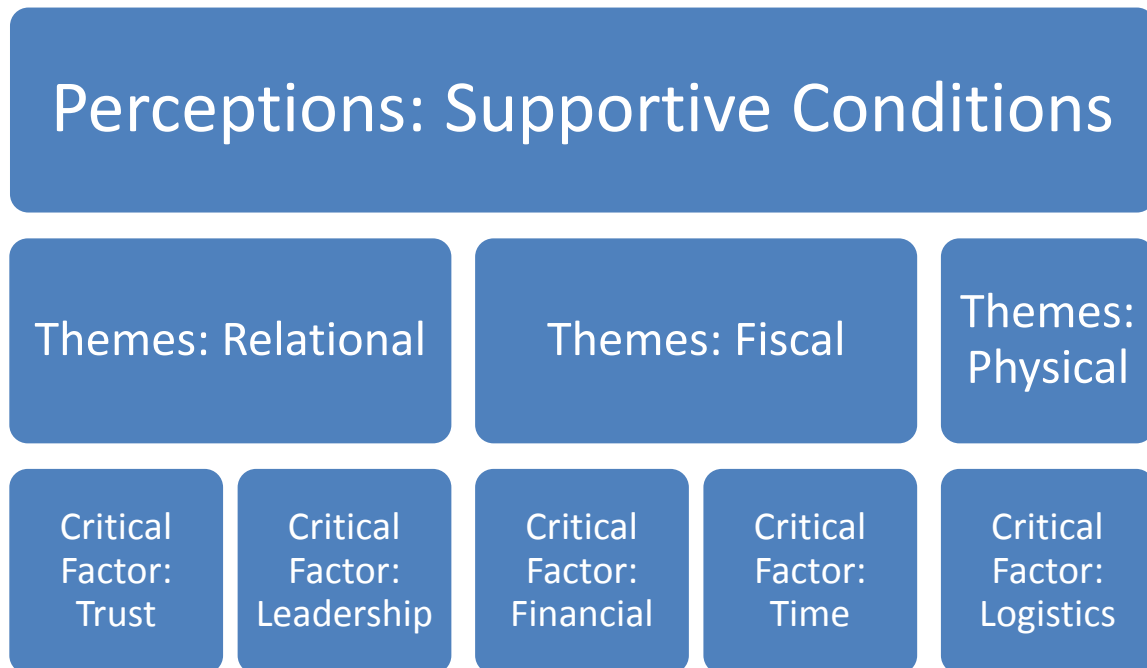


Figure 3. Findings related to RQ1a regarding perceptions, themes, and critical factors—Tall Oaks Elementary.

Relational Conditions

Relational conditions emerged as one theme related to supportive conditions required for the implementation of rounds. Thirty-nine references were made to relational conditions, including the critical factors of the role of trust and the role of leadership. With regard to trust,

the absence of judgement and confidentiality were uncovered as important factors. Leadership also emerged as a critical factor at the classroom, campus, and district level.

The Role of Trust

Relational conditions emerged as significant to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with 21 of 39 quotations connected to trust and relational capacity.

Building trust as a factor required for sustainability emerged in interviews of the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. Elements of trust included rounds as a non-evaluative, non-judgmental process, the inclusion of teachers in the process to build trust with staff, and trust built over time as teachers and administrators grow in comfort with the practice of rounds.

DL1 explained the importance of trust and emotional safety in the process of rounds as a result of confidentiality. Participants are reminded as part of the process that what they observe is to remain in confidence in order to honor the teachers who are opening the doors of their classrooms for the learning of the rounds network.

All administrators have a deep understanding and they communicate it and they talk it and participate and they walk it . . . we have worked really hard at confidentiality so that teachers feel safe and in the process. I think we have done a really good job with that. We have done some round table end of the year feedback with teachers who have had rounds in their classrooms. They share that they feel safe and they have learned and grown. (DL1)

DL1 explained the rounds process is to support instructional improvement around a student learning problem to be conducted without judgment. Rounds network members are to observe and record what they see in the classroom, refraining from evaluative language or judgment.

Our teachers need to be supported in the practice of rounds. They need to know there is nothing that is evaluative that ties to appraisal, nothing that is punitive or judgmental, and it's all about practices and building capacity across the district. (DL1)

To monitor the use of evaluative language during the network visit in Central Plains ISD, the rounds networks use a pink card. It sits in the center of each table where the network team conducts post-observation dialogue. If someone uses judgmental or evaluative language, another team member will hold up the pink card as a reminder to correct the statement in a non-evaluative manner. For example, if a team member made the statement, "The task in the classroom was low level," someone might flag the pink card. The statement may be reworded with language such as, "The task in the classroom was for students to copy notes from the board onto their paper." This change in language is a description of what was observed, not a judgement. One teacher leader noted, "the pink card is non-evaluative" (TL3).

Trust with regard to rounds in CPISD has been built over time. In the initial implementation of rounds, CPISD did not include teachers in the first year as "the previous superintendent said that no teachers would participate as he was concerned about confidentiality" (DL1). TL2 stated perceptions about rounds have changed over time.

When it [rounds] first started in 2014, it was very scary, very intimidating. . . . I was one of the ones observed. . . . teachers were very worried about being judged. In the first year, it wasn't clearly defined that they were not judging me. . . . Last year, we were in there as teachers and able to say, "look, it's not judgmental, here is the data," and that made teachers feel better, teachers were in there and if they were worried about, there is no judgment and this is just data. In the first year, teachers were scared, but this year, teachers said let's just teach. I do not get the feeling that it was scary this year.

TL1 and TL3 echoed the perception that teachers' fear of rounds has dissipated over time as the District has included teachers as participants and maintained the practice of rounds, including

more teachers over time. DL1, teacher leaders, and teachers discussed the inclusion of teachers, as significant to building trust in the process. TL3 stated,

I liked that they switched it this year to all teachers and not as many administrators; it has made it a more open forum without the feel of repercussions because we are within our own families . . . we can actually discuss it and be able to sit back and enjoy . . . we are relaxed and can discuss things as teachers instead of administrators. I think it wasn't as intimidating knowing it was mostly teachers instead of administrators. I mean, six strangers coming into your room is intimidating, but it was more comfortable because it was our peers doing the analyzing.

Teachers, observed during rounds but who did not participate in a rounds network, held a more cautious perception of rounds with regard to trust. T1 shared, "when they come [for rounds], there's no benefit, but when you observe, there is a benefit. They say they are not there to judge, but I don't know." T6 added, "There's not supposed to be judgment." T3 stated, "It's horrible to feel like you are going to be judged."

The Role of Leadership

For sustainability of rounds, the role of leadership was a second critical factor that emerged in supportive conditions related to the theme of relationships. In the interviews, participants mentioned leadership 16 times related to supportive conditions required for the sustainability of rounds from the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. Participants perceive the sustainability of rounds requires a superintendent and Board of Trustees that are supportive of rounds as an instructional improvement practice, the continued development of leadership at the district and campus level who are equipped to lead the practice and develop trust, and continued focus of the leadership on the practice of rounds.

DL1 stated the support of the superintendent and Board of Trustees is critical to the success and sustainability of rounds.

Our current superintendent has seen the fruit and benefit of rounds in our practices and seeing the results of rounds in our student achievement. It is a practice that will be sustained because we believe in it and see the results. As long as our superintendent is here, we will continue.

Teacher leaders echoed that support for rounds has to be from “the top down.” TL1 remarked she was impressed that the superintendent attended the rounds network visit, noting his attendance was a tangible display of support for the practice.

Teacher leaders commented that campus leadership was encouraging during the initial stages, even during resistance from staff. TL1 stated,

The very first year is always the hardest. . . . lots of resistance and grumbling. Leaders said we are in this together and held faculty meetings to provide information and conversations. . . . [leadership] was very persistent and [we] took baby steps to do it together.

DL1 also discussed the continuity of rounds as dependent on the development of leadership and the establishment of a succession plan for the rounds work.

We need to continue to build capacity of young leaders that are going to be stepping into district level positions. It will be very important to have a succession plan of belief and commitment to the process and knowledge and skill to lead the process. I would like to see the district send a team to Harvard to have the training. It is expensive. I would like to see that commitment. We need to send some of our younger leaders that will be with us for a while to build their capacity. It will be very critical in sustaining the work. (DL1)

Teachers who had not participated in the rounds network but were observed, discussed leadership with the pronoun of “they” with frequency and used the pronouns “us” and “we” to describe themselves. The district leader, campus principal, and teacher leaders more frequently used “we,” “us,” and “our” to discuss campus administration, teacher leaders, and teachers. During the focus group, teachers discussed why leadership was conducting rounds and the instructional support and professional development connected to rounds:

- T6: They are doing it [rounds] to make sure we are doing student discourse, but who is to say we only do it when they come?
- T4: I do awesome every day. [Laughter]
- T5: like the classes that they are giving incorporating more learning strategies, book talks . . .
- T5: Yes, they are giving us the tools to be successful.
- T6: When they give us new ideas, we incorporated this, we don't know they are given to us . . . I wonder if these are all connected . . . they didn't tell us?
- T5: They are pushing it more, and we're more aware of it.

TL1 stated, with regard to district leadership, "it is a 'We'—knowing that support is there and knowing that he believes in it says a lot for our district. If our leadership does not support it, there is no buy-in."

Fiscal Conditions

In interviews, the theme of fiscal conditions emerged as a necessary supportive condition for the implementation of rounds. Financial resources, including money for substitutes and training, were discussed by participants. Participants also highlighted the importance of the resource of time.

Financial Resources

Six comments related to supportive conditions were connected to substitutes and cost of funding rounds with consideration of facilitator and substitutes for teachers to be out of classrooms observing, as well as funding for leadership training. DL1 expressed the need to invest in training for leadership and the financial commitment that would require. P1 discussed the need for substitutes,

Finding subs . . . the cost of rounds will always play a part because look how many subs we had to have yesterday—all of those teachers have to have subs, how is that funded? Not a problem, but it could be a challenge. We have strong financial support. What if it was not as strong as it is?

Teachers in the focus group also expressed the need for substitutes, funding for substitutes, and difficulty obtaining substitutes.

DL1, TL1, TL2, TL3, and P1 discussed the training for rounds participants. While several did not directly acknowledge the funding needed to continue the training, they did indicate the district provided training with an external consultant initially and the district now provides the two-day training for network participants internally. TL2 stated,

I went to rounds class . . . I took it four years ago and it was more intense than what we did yesterday [in the campus rounds visit]. But like yesterday . . . we spent time watching other people doing it [teaching and scripting], and videos of what we are looking for—we went really into detail of what you do during a rounds visit. The training was provided by the district.

TL1 discussed the facilitator’s role in the network visit, commenting the retired district leader who facilitates rounds for some of the schools in the district, DL1, “does a great job.” While TL1 did not discuss costs associated with the facilitator, the need for a facilitator to conduct rounds was implied. There are costs associated with facilitation of the network. Funding for ongoing training of leadership, network participants, facilitator costs, and substitute teachers to allow teachers out of the classroom to participate in rounds network visits is a critical factor for consideration of sustainability of rounds.

The Resource of Time

In CPISD, time occurred four times as a critical factor for sustainability of rounds. T4 and T5 described concerns that the observation of the classroom is too short; T6 explained the observation is short because the team members on the network visit have to save time to discuss what was observed. Scheduling the rounds was discussed as complicated due to limitations of time. The campus conducts internal rounds in addition to the network visits.

Internal rounds are a structure to allow teachers to observe other teachers on campus and discuss the campus problem of practice. TL3 stated, “We need time; she [the principal] sets up a whole day in place of planning time, we do internal rounds . . . we see two teachers and then rotate and discuss in next PLC meeting.” Dedicating time to the work of rounds is a supportive condition to be considered for sustainability.

Physical Conditions

Physical resources emerged as a theme to be considered for sustainability of rounds.

Physical resources include the critical factors of meeting space and the role of logistics.

The Role of Logistics

Determining location and schedule for rounds was a recurring critical factor discussed by participants in the case. Four instances of logistics were discussed with regard to meeting space, scheduling, and network construction.

Meeting space for the networks was expressed as a need. The network met in the library for the campus visit. P1 shared,

Basically, the more we grow, we need meeting spaces. . . . As we grow, how do you manage rounds at five high schools versus four? At 17 middle schools? Thirty-three elementary schools? Size is hard, but it is critical that we do this work.

The campus principal also discussed scheduling the networks; she explained how networks were constructed with elementary school participants. The central office schedules the network visits.

Teachers discussed the scheduling of the campus network visit and the need for clear labeling of classrooms and the need for staff members to be present to escort teams. T6 noted the portable classrooms at the campus are not labeled clearly and T5 remarked that during the

network visit, “a mistake was made when they went to the wrong room.” An accurate schedule, a meeting space for large groups, and knowledge of the campus with clearly marked buildings are supportive logistics for the continuation of rounds.

RQ1b: Appropriateness and/or Effectiveness of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

In conducting individual interviews and a focus group in Central Plains ISD, I sought to understand the participants’ perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice as indicated in RQ1b. What are the district instructional leaders’, principals’, and classroom teachers’ perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice? DL1, P1, teacher leaders, and teachers all expressed the perception that rounds is an effective systemic improvement practice due to the building of shared values and vision, reduction of initiative fatigue, and focus on instructional improvement. Participants provided suggestions for improvements to rounds to increase its effectiveness including improvements to structure of networks and observations, post-network visit learning and monitoring, and feedback to teachers who are observed. Figure 4 summarizes findings related to RQ1b.

Shared Values and Vision

DL1 described rounds as a highly collaborative process that values educators as highly skilled professionals focused on improving practices instead of fixing people.

The collaboration; the whole process is a collaborative process. The second part is that it values educators as highly skilled professionals. It is a tool or process that taps into the educator-teacher expertise and builds on it through a collaborative process. Rounds focuses on practices, not on people; it doesn’t set up to evaluate or fix people but it looks at our

professional practices as a body of work and research that says here is what we know works best and seeks to build capacity of all educators to implement in their practice.

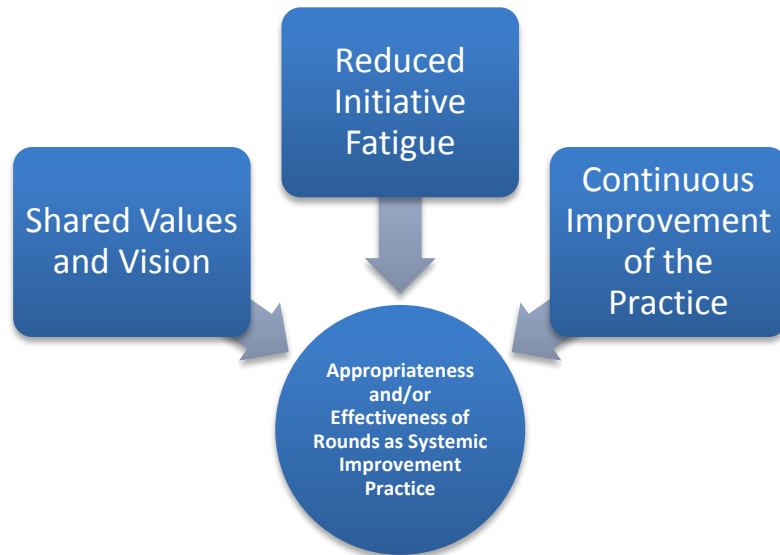


Figure 4. Findings related to appropriateness and/or effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

DL1 shared, at the beginning of implementation, observational data revealed there was a lack of common understanding in the district of learning targets. As the initial work of rounds began,

A challenge came forward that there was not a common understanding of what is a goal, an objective, a target. . . . We regrouped and said we need to define what we are going to mean when we say goal, objective, target. How do those each connect to curriculum? . . . We built district wide understanding around our vocabulary with modules. We had common learning. Our first big challenge and goal was to build a common vocabulary. We learned . . . to be very clear in language and intentionally set out to determine common language. (DL1)

The focus of the work of the CPISD shifted from learning targets to student discourse as part of the rounds process. DL1 said as teachers across the district demonstrated mastery of learning targets, during network visits it was observed that “student discourse and student work was staying at the foundational level.” DL1 questioned how to equip teachers with tools to increase

the level of discourse in academic tasks; thus, student discourse and rigor became the new focus in rounds work as the district rewrote the problem of practice. Building common language in the district was a result of rounds; shared language is evidence of shared values. Evidence of effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice is uncovered as each participant described their connection to the work of improving student discourse. P1 discussed the changes she has witnessed at Tall Oaks Elementary that she attributes to rounds.

I think we found that discourse from students by listening. When we started, we were learning about tasks and targets. With task--we always had this--but listening to children explain and listening to learning . . . it was so powerful to hear how children are learning. Powerful! Teacher to student to teacher [pattern of discourse], if you ask higher level questions . . . but now we are listening to children and getting them to explain their thoughts. (P1)

TL1, TL2, and TL3 remarked about the focus on student discourse in their interviews. They noted the focus on district-led professional development around student discourse and strategies to improve their skills to lead discourse, learning talk moves, learning about sentence stems and starters, and sharing a common goal with the district. T3 noted, “We all have the same goal in the district. To have more discourse, more student to teacher talk. Other campuses do not have the same goal language because principals choose their own guiding questions but they are all connected.”

The focus group of teachers also discussed the focus on student discourse and the shared vision of the district.

T5: Everyone is on the same page.

T4: It seems to me that it has been slowly building and adding to our plate of things. Last year, we did not have this focus on discourse.

T1: Yes, last year, it was targets and goals, but we haven’t talked about that this year.

T5: We are being scaffolded. Ahhhhh . . . we are being scaffolded.

T6: Ahhh, we are being scaffolded.

T6: We should already know the targets, like we don't go back to addition in fifth grade math because we should know it by then . . .

T4: And we started the depth of knowledge last year?

T1: Yes, depth of knowledge. We still mention that . . . depth of knowledge and student discourse . . . it's a lot of stuff.

Reduction of Initiative Fatigue

Reeves (2010) discusses initiative fatigue and initiative churn in schools as a deterrent to ongoing success of schools as new initiatives arise as a *quick fix* to the problems of the school or district with the outcome that no initiative is deeply implemented. Districts and/or campuses move yearly from one program to the next without arriving at the intended outcome. DL1 stated,

An impact that I think we've seen is that you can be so initiative heavy in a district that you have so many plates in the air and nothing is ever implemented deeply or with fidelity or in a way that it will be sustained. Because of the learning from rounds and the knowing that where real improvement takes place is in the teaching and learning and core, I almost see our district pulling back from quick fix initiatives because we are growing in our awareness that real improvement occurs in the teaching and learning in the instructional core. The big initiative is improving instructional practices.

Teacher leaders observed that the district is tying staff development back to rounds practices, noting "everything is hanging off that [rounds], I think it should if they want improvement. . ." (TL1). Teachers, teacher leaders, and the principal acknowledged the problem of practice at the center of the rounds work was student discourse and professional development sessions, PLCs, and campus based faculty meetings included a focus on discourse.

Participants also noted the district was "staying the course" (TL1) with rounds. While teachers and teacher leaders noted the first year of implementation was challenging, participants in both groups expressed the continuation of the practice of rounds now enabled

them to see instructional improvements focused on “the same goal in the district: more discourse, more student to teacher talk” (TL3).

Continuous Improvement: Suggested Improvements to Rounds

In response to questions regarding the effectiveness of rounds and how it could be improved, participants made suggestions to increase the effectiveness. No participant interviewed in CPISD commented rounds should stop or be reduced; each participant expressed ideas for improvement that may indicate a perception rounds can be improved but is an appropriate systemic improvement practice. Feedback for improvement was related to the structure of rounds networks and observation, post-network visit learning, and feedback to teachers.

Improvement to Structure of Networks and Observation

In the literature regarding facilitating rounds, multiple network structures are discussed: cross-role networks, single-role networks, teacher networks, small networks, observation groups, and district networks (City et al., 2009; Fowler-Finn, 2013; Troen et al., 2014). In CPISD, the network visit at Tall Oaks Elementary was comprised of five teams. Each team represented an elementary campus in CPISD; the principal led each team of six teachers from their campus. District level instructional staff attended the network visit, but they were not included in a team. They did observe in a classroom and listen to the dialogue of the teams during the network debrief. All five campuses at the network visit at Tall Oaks Elementary hosted a rounds network visit during the 2016-17 school year. The composition of each network changes at each visit. Tall Oaks Elementary staff may or may not observe at the other campuses that were included at Tall Oaks Elementary. During the network visit, the teams observed four classrooms

each for a total of 20 different classrooms observed. Each classroom was observed for 20 minutes. Each team observed a variety of grade levels from kindergarten to fifth grade. Participants at Tall Oaks Elementary also conduct internal rounds visits; they described that during internal rounds teachers gather in a small team during planning time or PLC time to observe a colleague or two colleagues. Then, they debrief the instructional practice observed with regard to their problem of practice. Participants made several suggestions for improvement connected to the structure of observation and networks for both the rounds network and internal rounds.

Rounds Network

In previous years, networks were comprised as cross-role networks. Participants in CPISD included principals, teachers, and central office instructional staff. Teams were mixed groups with staff from different schools and central office staff participating on the same team. For the network at Tall Oaks Elementary, the teams were grouped by campus with the principal and six teachers. Participants in the network visit remarked that they liked the structure of teaming with teachers from their own campus as they felt more comfortable than in previous years (TL3). They also remarked they thought having more teachers on the network visit was effective.

I liked that they switched it this year to all teachers and not as many administrators. It has made it a more open forum without the feel of repercussions because we are within our own families. . . . Before I was the only teacher and I felt intimidated because my voice was not as strong. . . . I think it wasn't as intimidating knowing it was mostly teachers instead of administrators. (TL3)

Teachers in the focus group implied teachers are selected for observation during rounds because they are “on the good list” or “perform . . . well in front of other people” (T5). The

focus group teachers expressed agreement that all teachers should be observed as part of rounds rather than the same teachers being observed during each network visit.

Internal Rounds

Teachers also discussed the structure of internal rounds, expressing an interest to see like grade-level peers (T2, T5, T6) rather than peers on other grade levels. They expressed they see peers on other grade levels due to scheduling conflicts, but observing other grade levels is not as helpful to their practice as they believe it would be if they observed other teachers teaching the exact same content as they are currently teaching. As an alternative, T5 suggested to meet the scheduling needs of the campus and meet the needs of the teachers that teachers be allowed to observe grades most closely aligned to their grade level to build vertical understanding at the campus level. Teachers also discussed the length of time of the observation, suggesting ten minutes is not long enough for observation during the internal rounds.

Post-Network Visit, Learning, and Feedback

Another improvement suggested for rounds in CPISD was to increase emphasis on post-network implementation of feedback from network visits. DL1 stated the best learning for “teachers not on network teams happens when the campus does internal rounds and internal rounds debriefs. Also when a campus hosts a network visit, teachers are exposed to rounds and the resulting PLC work.” The teacher focus group commented there was a lack of feedback from the network rounds. TL2 responded she would like more emphasis on what to do after the network visit.

. . . once we have the data, what do we do with it? We have PLCs but we hardly discuss it. I would like to continuously track, when we get the data, and have a big session to go

over it. . . . we have not gone through the charts and seen the data. . . . we don't do anything with the data once we are done. (TL2)

TL2 shared the campus focuses on topics connected to the campus problem of practice in the PLC meetings and staff development. The principal and curriculum and instruction specialist for the campus leads these meetings. The teacher leader expressed an interest in continuing her leadership role in leading campus work connected to the rounds problem of practice. TL2 would accomplish this by embedding data from the rounds network visit and internal rounds in PLC meetings on the campus, strengthening the connection between the problem of practice, observation, data, and the momentum plan in place at the campus to continue teacher learning. P1 shared the district decided only the principal and teachers would attend rounds this year, so the "CIS [curriculum & instruction specialist] did not go—only principals which is different . . . it's good, but it's different." While the CIS was not part of the rounds, the CIS and principal were designing and leading the on-going professional learning for the campus. The teacher leaders also expressed a desire to help lead this work based on the feedback from rounds.

A third improvement suggestion connected to the network visit was providing feedback to teachers from the rounds visit. The principal, district leader, and teacher leaders did not acknowledge feedback to teachers as problematic. However, the teachers who were not involved as directly with the rounds process described the lack of feedback as a contributing factor as to why they did not think rounds had a large impact on their classroom practice. The focus group described that after the rounds network visit, the data charts collected from classroom observation would be posted for teachers to view. When asked how rounds is impacting teaching and learning, the focus group responded:

- T2: It makes you stay more focused and conscious of your response; it makes you think of questioning to get them [the students] there.
- T6: Do you mean during rounds or after?
- Me: Either, but more considering the impact after the rounds . . .
- T6: After the big rounds, I don't know.
- T2: Yeah, because there is no feedback.
- T5: Because there is no feedback, then there's no impact, it's not changing anything . . . it didn't impact my students except making them ask questions as to why are they here or are they coming back? It changed me only as an observer. When I observed, we go into other classrooms and it reminds me to refocus as a teacher, to be more aware of what I was asking and having students give proof of their opinion as to why they felt that way. As an observer, I saw a center I wanted to model. . . .
- T2: When we do it [rounds], at the campus, we come back and talk about and ask how many questions, how many teachers and students ask, you see it and ask . . . as a teacher, when we meet, we see all of these numbers and wonder if the numbers are you, you never know if you did what you were supposed . . . am I doing what they are looking for, what are they looking for?

The focus group continued to discuss the indirect benefits of rounds as they benefit from professional learning connected to the problem of practice. Teacher leaders and teachers in the focus group expressed the desire for more feedback from rounds and ongoing connection of professional learning to the data derived from the network and internal rounds.

RQ1c: Salient Characteristics of Rounds and Comparison to Other Improvement Practices

To understand the salient characteristics of rounds and to determine what sets rounds apart from other improvement practices, participants were asked to compare rounds to other improvement practices employed in the district. Two salient characteristics emerged to describe rounds in comparison to other improvement practices: collaborative nature of rounds and focus on improving instructional practice. Figure 5 summarizes the findings related to RQ1c: What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions

of rounds with respect to the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices or how it compares to other improvement practices?

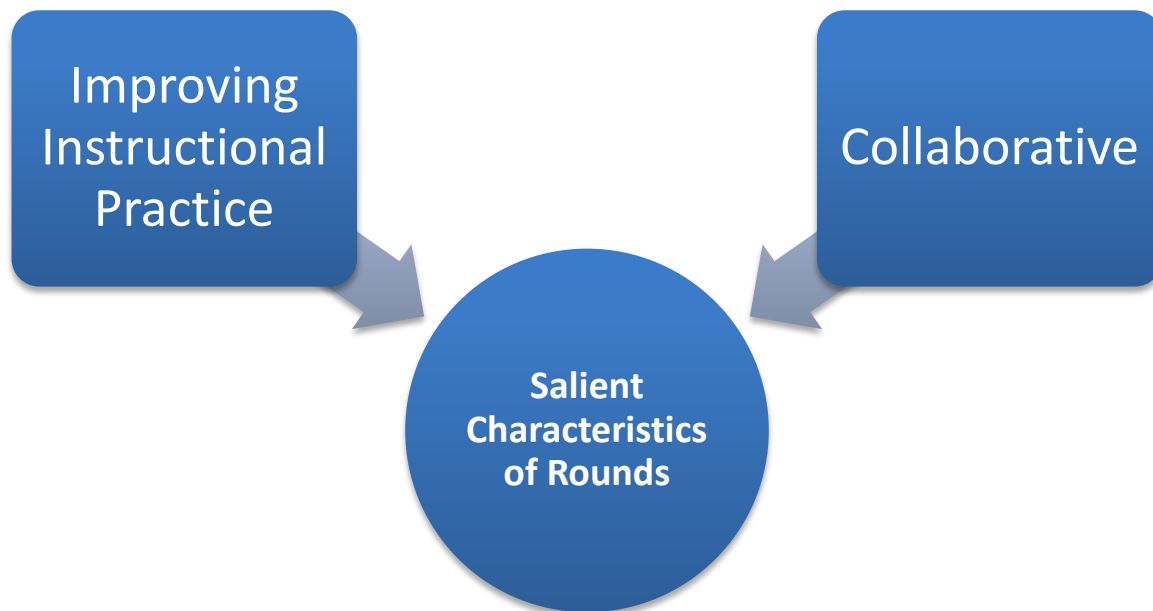


Figure 5. Findings related to RQ1c: Salient characteristics of rounds, Tall Oaks Elementary, Central Plains ISD.

Comparison of Rounds to Other Improvement Practices

When asked to compare rounds to other improvement practices implemented in CPISD, participants named multiple improvement practices that were either presently employed or had been employed in the past: Comprehension Toolkit (DL1; P1), Empowering Writers (DL1; P1), Teacher Appraisal System (DL1; TL2), Accountability System (DL1; P1), NWEA MAP (P1), Math Academy (P1, TL1), Schlechty Center (P1, TL1), LEARN model (P1), PLC (TL1), and Learning Targets (TL1). Some participants struggled to articulate an instructional improvement practice that the district had embedded at scale. DL1 discussed the connection of rounds to other instructional improvement efforts.

Because of the learning from rounds and the knowing that where real improvement takes place is in the teaching and learning and core, I almost see our district pulling back

from quick fix initiatives because we are growing in our awareness that real improvement occurs . . . in the instructional core. The big initiative is improving instructional practices.

Reducing the focus from many *quick fix initiatives* to one of improving the instructional core through collaboration was a theme echoed in the interview of P1 and TL1.

We haven't had anything this intense. We have had different cadres that went out to professional learning. You are supposed to come back and debrief, either at faculty meetings or PLCs, but accountability was never there . . . so, we did Schlechty, but there was never any follow-through, if you don't have follow up, it's not successful . . . [previous initiatives] wasn't collaborative. (TL1)

P1 envisioned rounds as an evolution of previous initiatives, connecting prior initiatives. She stated, "It all goes together . . . different components . . . that support what we believe as a district." The principal views rounds as an extension of different initiatives, as a "tool, not a program."

Improving Instructional Practice

Both DL1 and P1 discussed accountability-driven improvement efforts in the past. Both acknowledged the importance of improving scores on state-administered standardized tests. DL1 implied that previous improvement efforts may have been determined to rapidly improve standardized test scores. She noted that a shift is required from using standardized testing data as the improvement driver, noting:

. . . a very different cycle is involved in rounds. If you asked what is your [CPISD's] improvement cycle, it would not be a cycle that starts with STAAR [state standardized test] data. It would begin with rounds data and what that tells us about practices, identification of our next levels of work, providing and equipping people on practices that make a difference . . . then following up with rounds. Do we look at state accountability? Yes, but we look at it with a different lens. In addition to our rounds data, what does our achievement data tell us about our instruction? We are always tying it back to rounds practices.

The campus principal also noted state testing data is a marker and a source of data to inform progress, but it was one of several measures used to determine progress. Rather than focusing on improving state testing data, DL1 and P1 stated the importance of improving instructional practice through collaboration. According to district and campus leadership, rounds in CPISD shifted the focus of leadership from improving data to improving practice through a focus on the instructional core. The teachers in the focus group reinforced this concept as they discussed improved instruction and high quality instruction, not the improvement of test scores.

Collaborative Nature of Rounds

Several references were made in the interviews to teacher appraisal as a former improvement initiative. The defining characteristic separating rounds from teacher appraisal as an improvement practice is the collaborative nature of rounds. TL2 identified the use of the past Texas teacher appraisal system PDAS (Professional Development and Appraisal System) and the newly implemented T-TESS (Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System) as improvement practices employed by the district. DL1 also identified teacher appraisal systems as a previous driver for improvement utilized by CPISD with a focus on improving the performance and capacity of individual teachers. Participants noted rounds is different; it does not focus on the individual teacher. The lack of focus on individual teachers prompted concerns from the focus group that individual feedback is not provided to teachers. Rather, rounds focuses on the collective practice of the campus. DL 1 stated,

. . . in the past, we invested a lot of energy and effort in improving the practices and capacity of individual teachers. We have moved away from that. You really impact classroom instruction when groups of teachers are collaborating and building collective efficacy and collaboration around content. Improvement practices are moving from . . .

we still have to do PDAS, now TTESS . . . building collaborative expertise, not focusing on individuals. Not fixing or improving individuals as much as building our collective practices.

TL1 emphasized the collective and collaborative nature of rounds, noting the differentiating factor of rounds when compared to other improvement practices.

RQ1d: Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

The fourth component of RQ1 asks for participant perceptions with respect to whether and how rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core: teacher, student, and content. Participants from CPISD referenced adult learning 29 times in their interviews, and increased capacity was coded 36 times. Improvement of the instructional core was coded 12 times in the interviews. Figure 6 summarizes findings related to building organizational capacity to improve the instructional core.

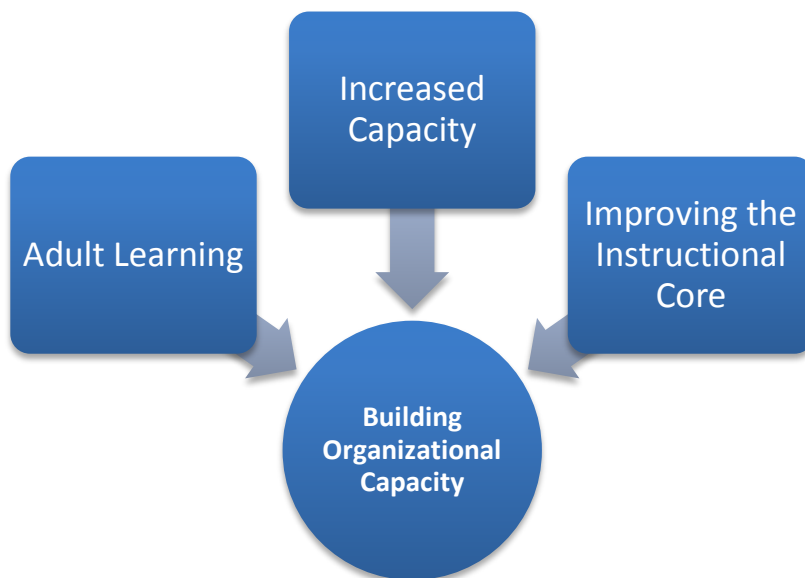


Figure 6. Findings related to building organizational capacity.

Adult Learning

All participants in the study indicated rounds contributed to their professional learning, building the knowledge and skills of the adults at the campus and in the district. In Chapter 2, I

examined research related to adult learning, noting characteristics of effective adult learning link to improved instructional practice and student learning; ongoing and collaborative experiences; culture of excellence; time for reflective practice, learning, and application; and school-based solving of authentic and immediate problems (Blankstein et al., 2007; Drago-Severson, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Participants connected their perceptions of rounds with the aforementioned characteristics of effective adult learning, most notably connecting adult learning stemming from rounds to changed instructional practice and school-based solving of authentic problems. Participants described the opportunities for adult learning as embedded in the school-day with opportunities to observe instruction and debrief with colleagues regarding the observation; studying discourse, rigor, targets, and questioning in PLCs; and attending workshops or cadres at the district. Participants described changes in student behavior with increased discourse observed in classrooms. Participants also described rounds as adult learning, particularly for those who were able to participate in the rounds network.

Increased Capacity

Organizational capacity is the collective ability of the organization to improve achievement; teacher capacity is the ability to deliver effective instruction (Drago-Severson, 2009). Perceptions of the participants revealed participants do believe rounds impacts the capacity of both the organization and the individuals, although there are varying perceptions about the degree to which capacity may be built through rounds in its current implementation in CPISD. TL3 said:

I've noticed a big difference because we've been doing rounds for so many years. . . . We had lower scores when targets were first being brought out. . . . There's been a huge difference in the four years in discourse. We are big into verbalizing our answers and it made us change styles as teachers; it's changed in my classroom . . . there's a lot more

talking and socializing on an academic level. . . . Rounds has pushed us to get questions more at a rigorous level and for students to answer at a more rigorous level.

Other participants echoed the sentiment of TL3, expressing their own personal growth in capacity, the growth of their colleagues, and growth of the campus. DL1 also remarked about growth that she has noticed across the district, as well as increased collaboration and capacity of leadership related to instruction as a result of rounds.

Improving the Instructional Core

The instructional core is comprised of the teacher, student, and content. A central tenet of rounds is learning is improved when these three components of the instructional core are improved by increasing the teacher's knowledge and skill, changing and improving the students' role in learning, and raising the level and rigor of content. Participants cited their perceptions and experiences of improvement in the instructional core as they noted:

- A "huge difference" in the discourse of students as teachers learned about talk moves (TL1, TL 2, TL3, T5, T6, P1, DL1)
- Changes in their own classrooms and classrooms of others they have observed (TL2, TL3, T2, T5)
- An increased focus on learning targets (TL1, TL2, T5, T6, DL1)
- Change in practice to ask students more rigorous questions (TL2, TL3, P1, DL1)
- An increase in students talking (TL1, TL3, P1, DL1), an increase in teaching academic vocabulary (TL1, TL2, DL1)
- An increase in teacher knowledge of how to move students to higher cognitive levels (TL1)

Participants shared the student role in the instructional core has been impacted by the increased level of discourse and the raised expectation of student engagement in academic talk in the classroom. The teachers' knowledge and skills has been improved through rounds and

the focus on building collective capacity around learning targets, discourse, and critical thinking. The content has been changed as both district and campus curriculum writers learn through rounds and as teachers realize a need to change the level of content in the classroom. Participants remarked on changes in their own practices and observations of changed practice in other colleagues.

Summarization of Research Question 1

Perceptions of participants related to rounds as a systemic improvement practice overall indicate participants believe fiscal, physical, and relational resources are important to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with leadership as a key element required for sustainability. While participants provided suggestions for improvements for rounds, they indicated a belief that it is an effective practice because it is collaborative, ongoing, and focused on classroom instruction. Salient characteristics that set rounds apart from other improvement initiatives included the collaborative nature of rounds. Some participants were unable to articulate previous improvement initiatives. All participants expressed, with varying degree, the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core.

Transcripts from the interview were entered into Atlas.TI. I used the word cloud generator to create Figure 7. All transcripts were included in generating the word cloud. In a word cloud, the frequency of word use determines the size of font of the word with greater frequency represented by the largest font. The frequency of which the words learning, teacher(s), discourse, student, professional, leadership, core, change, capacity, instructional, and district were used responses to RQ1 and is aligned to the perceptions of the participants.



Figure 7. Word cloud, Tall Oaks Elementary, Central Plains ISD.

RQ2: Alignment of Perceptions with Practice and Documents

The second research question I addressed was: How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents? To respond to RQ2, I attended a network rounds visit at Tall Oaks Elementary as a participant observer and reviewed all relevant documents related to rounds from both Tall Oaks Elementary and CPISD. This section includes four areas: the observation of the network visit, the report of the alignment findings, the report of the alignment based on documents, and the conclusion. Figure 8 shows the organization of data related to RQ2.

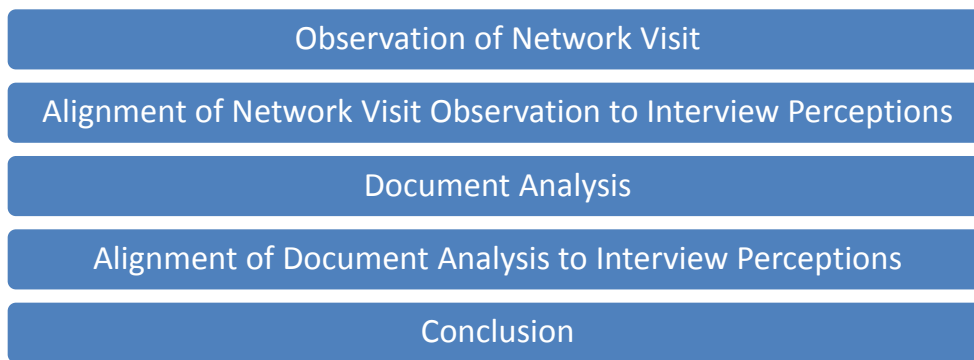


Figure 8. Organization of findings related to RQ2, Tall Oaks Elementary, Central Plains ISD.

Observation of Rounds Network Visit

Learning Time

Upon arriving at Tall Oaks Elementary for the observation of rounds, I was seated with two district leaders; both district officials spoke with high regard about the rounds process. Five campuses were represented with seven teachers and 1 principal from each campus for a total of 40 network team members. After introductions, DL1 clarified the purpose of rounds. She stated the goal is the “acceleration of instructional improvement.” DL1 shared additional goals of rounds: to improve student achievement, to deepen our understanding of the instructional core, and to understand the research-based strategies that strengthen the instructional core.

DL1 then discussed the professional norms of the rounds network visit, expressing concern that all discussion, comments, and observations are to remain confidential. She reminded the network the discussion is not to be about teachers or individuals, but it is to be about the instructional practices that we observe. The instructional curriculum director leaned over to me and whispered that these norms are very serious. She said the team is sworn to a high degree of confidentiality and DL1 and other district leaders have a high degree of belief in and fidelity to the norms established for the process.

DL1 equated rounds with rigor; mirroring adult learning in rounds is what the network members want to see with regard to student learning in classrooms. DL1 explained rounds is a commitment, a long-term process to improve teaching and learning, with all members of the network serving as beneficiaries as rounds improves instructions at all campuses in the district. She shared these direct results from rounds in CPISD: instructional targets in every classroom,

different ways to teach academic vocabulary with student ownership, students tracking their own progress, increased writing across the district, student discourse including talk moves, accountable talk, and Socratic seminars. Included in the slides were photographs of student work, teacher work, classrooms, and hallways with work displayed to provide evidence of the ongoing work launched from rounds.

DL1 reviewed the CPISD district problem of practice, students struggle to achieve (demonstrate learning) at high cognitive levels. She shared the problem of practice has evolved and changed over time based on data, observational data, and dialogue about practice and improvement work. DL1 reviewed observational data collected from the rounds network visits in 2015-16; this data shows a need to increase work on depth and complexity and student discourse at higher levels. DL1 reviewed the previous year's state assessment data and discussed the advanced scores and connected those scores to the need to increase cognitive levels of discourse and tasks.

DL1 shared the district's theory of action: If all students engage in rigorous learning and interact at high cognitive levels with learning tasks that are aligned to the learning targets and goals, then student achievement will improve. DL1 identified three actions the district has identified for further work at campuses: rigorous learning, high cognitive levels, and alignment. She defined each of the following terms for the network team: alignment, high cognitive level, problem solving, and critical thinking. DL1 shared resources related the problem of practice with the network team and encouraged them to use the resources at their campuses with PLC groups or grade level teams. DL1 led the rounds group in learning activities using the resources. Additional details are in Appendix G.

The principal of Tall Oaks Elementary, P1, shared demographic information about students and teachers of the school, the vision and mission of the campus, and the campus journey with rounds. P1 shared the campus essential questions that guide the rounds work at Tall Oaks Elementary:

1. What is the evidence that all students are interacting at high cognitive levels with a task that is tightly aligned to the learning goal and target?
2. What is the evidence that students are engaged in rigorous learning?

P1 asked the team to focus on student discourse during the observation, and she asked each network team to designate someone to keep track of the approximate time the teacher spoke during class in comparison to the time students spoke. She asked the team to consider how the teacher set up student discourse in the classroom using questions or talk moves. Further, the principal directed the network teams to listen to student conversation and to quantify “strings of conversation.” She defined “strings” as student-to-student conversation about an academic topic. P1 stated each team would use a verbal discourse rubric to analyze the level of the conversation strings during the analysis of observation data.

Classroom Observation

The network dispersed to study instruction in 20 classrooms. The network split into five teams with eight observers on most teams. Each team observed four classrooms for 20 minutes each for a total of 80 minutes of observation. Following observation, the network team returned to the library to analyze the observation data and debrief. P1 and DL1 told me that I was welcome to join any team during the observation, or that I could join multiple teams for one observation each. I chose to join the team from Tall Oaks Elementary and stay with the team through their observations. I made this choice so I would have a common experience and

shared knowledge about what they observed in classrooms as I proceeded with the interviews on the following day. During classroom observations, each of the participants focused on scripting what the teacher said and did, what students said and did, and what observations were noticed from the classroom environment with regard to task, learning targets, and instructional materials. Observers remained focused on the task and adhered to the norms established by CPISD.

Analysis of Classroom Observation

In arriving back in the library to begin analysis of the classroom observation notes, I observed that team members had multiple pages of notes and scripts from observing in the classrooms. At each table, a pink card was placed in the center of the table. As the analysis portion of the network meeting began, DL1 informed the network that the pink card was for any team member to hold up when another team member used judgmental language or evaluative language. The pink card was intended to be a non-threatening marker to help members adhere to the network norms. Teachers laughed when the pink card was shared. The atmosphere of the room upon returning to begin analysis was one of professionalism, collegiality, and urgency. The network members appeared to understand that the task to study and analyze the classroom data was important and serious.

DL1 informed the teams they were to note patterns and provide responses to the essential questions in a way that made sense to the team as they looked for patterns and connections. DL1 reminded the group to discover examples of direct alignment, examples of depth and complexity, and then to craft the most significant analysis statement based on all of the evidence gathered.

I spent time at each of the five tables, listening to the analysis of observation. The teams were largely focused and using the tools provided to them in the morning learning session to analyze the instruction they had observed. One example of discussion during analysis was:

TM1: In the first classroom, that had the matrix chart going.

TM2: I'll read the IFD [scope and sequence document] and then we'll decide.

TM2: (reads IFD)

TM3: There was 18 minutes of student to student talk and 2 minutes of movement in the classroom.

TM2: In first grade, the TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills] say I can identify and explain non-fiction text features and TEKS 1.14D is—Use text features to locate specific information in the text.

TM4: What was the standard? Use standard features to locate specific information in text. So is that understand?

TM1: The target says I would identify and explain non-fiction features. Task 1 was as whole group: two tasks . . . DOK 1; when they had to come up and explain, they had to justify, may be DOK 3. They had to support their evidence. Independent activity . . . when they were cutting and pasting. Then it may be . . . they were interacting. [DOK – depth of knowledge]

TM5: Do we agree on the first task? It was modeling or applying DOK 1. Task 2: identify a text feature and justify . . . DOK 2 or DOK 3.

P1: At first they are just selecting . . . identifying. It is apply. . . . What were they actually doing? You know . . . we could get in trouble with the card, the pink card. Do they understand? Can they apply it? Do they understand? It is appropriate to identify. It is our "I do, we do" model. Second task is DOK 2 or DOK 3. Different text feature.

TL1: My opinion was that it was understand. The task was understand. She was writing. I thought this was understand and DOK 1. Really only one task.

TM6: Do we agree?

Conversations analyzing the data from each classroom in relation to the problem of practice and the essential questions continued through the lunch hour. As teams continued analysis, they began to create artifacts to share during the debrief process. The principal from another elementary sat at my table for part of the lunch break. During the lunch hour, she shared with me that at her campus,

We really love rounds; it's been great for us. We have a very open culture; it's been great learning from teachers who are in the rounds. It's not the principal saying this is what we need to do. The data helps us with next level of work and we decide that together.

Debrief of Classroom Observation

To debrief as a network, DL1 asked the group to reconfigure the furniture into a new arrangement. DL1 reminded the network that the language to be used is to remain non-evaluative and non-judgmental. Network teams reported data from classroom observations. DL1 asked for specific examples of what a learning target aligned to task would be; groups shared examples such as,

The target was "I can make predictions and identify changes in matter." Students were working in a small group to conduct experiments and then had to identify changes in states of matter [such as liquid to solid with water to ice].

Throughout the debrief, DL1 corrected judgmental language. One team member stated, "only one group was aligned." DL1 rephrased to state, "Let's say one of five groups was aligned." DL1 also asked the team to consider what instructional moves would have shifted a task to a more rigorous task. A pattern emerged regarding student discourse that most time in the classroom was spent on direct teaching with the teacher talking. Turn and talk was a talk move observed in multiple classrooms. DL1 asked probing questions of the network team related to

why it may be important for teachers to understand how much instructional time is spent with teacher talk versus student talk.

During the debrief, I was seated at the back of the room with the instructional director.

She leaned over during this discussion and shared with me,

Oh, now I just had an idea. I'm thinking about our New Hire program and how we could include more about student discourse into the script; I really like the idea of brainstorming ways to include more student discourse in the lesson.

To close the rounds visit, each network team shared short-term targets for Tall Oaks Elementary. Ideas for the next level of work were discussed with the network team. At the end of debriefing, the Superintendent of CPISD arrived. He shared with the team that he applauds the efforts of the group. He shared that the philosophy of the district is one of collaboration and stated the network teams

. . . have engaged in critical conversation on what it should always be about—improving teaching and learning. I applaud your efforts, your engagement . . . this is continuous improvement; it really is. We wish there was a magic bullet and all children would be immediately successful . . . it just doesn't exist. This is truly how we improve our campus culture and learning experiences for our students.

The group was left with this closing thought: "Real improvement happens when we become students and evaluators of our own teaching, our own practices."

Alignment of Observation with Participant Perceptions

Supportive Conditions

In the interviews, participants shared the perceptions that supportive conditions, including relational, fiscal, and physical, are required for the sustainability of rounds.

Relational Conditions

The participants in the interviews verbalized the critical factors of trust and leadership

as related to the theme of relational conditions. During observation of the rounds network, multiple references were made to confidentiality, nonjudgmental language, non-evaluative language, respecting the host school, and honoring teachers. The provision of and use of the “pink card” was a physical demonstration of a practice embedded to support the norms around nonjudgmental and non-evaluative language. Without prompting, I was informed by network team members about how important the norms are in order to build and maintain trust. There appeared to be a high degree of trust between participants during the analysis of observation, and adherence to the norms was observed. When members did slip in use of judgmental or evaluative language, other team members or DL1 reminded of the norms.

Leadership was another critical factor discussed in the interviews as a requirement for successful sustainability. DL1, the campus principal, the chief instructional officer for the district, and the Superintendent of Schools were all in attendance at the rounds for all or part of the day. DL1, P1, the chief academic officer, and the Superintendent all reinforced the purpose of rounds and used common language in encouraging the academic work of the network participants. There were multiple rounds in progress in CPISD on September 29; the chief academic officer was attending part of each rounds. The presence of the chief academic officer and the Superintendent of Schools was a tangible display of the value that leadership in CPISD places on rounds. In the interviews, TL1 remarked the superintendent’s presence sent a message about the value of rounds. In the interviews, sustainability of leadership was discussed by DL1. At the visit, the new executive director was on-site to learn about the process so he could better support and lead the rounds work in the district. His presence and

focused study of rounds during the network visit indicated the district is planning for sustainability of the process.

Fiscal Conditions

Participants remarked the financial support of the district is a critical factor to procure substitutes, provide for facilitation of rounds, and provide for future leadership training. During the network visit observation, seven teachers from five campuses were present. Substitutes or other support to provide class coverage was in place to allow the teachers release time from teaching in order to participate in the rounds. No discussion regarding substitutes or concerns regarding financial commitment to maintain the process emerged during the network observation.

DL1 was present to facilitate the rounds for Tall Oaks Elementary. Recently retired, DL1 has returned part-time to facilitate rounds and train her replacement. This was not discussed at the rounds network, but her presence and the commitment of the district to retain part-time staff in the transition of leadership demonstrates a financial commitment on the part of CPISD.

Physical Resources

In interviews, participants expressed the importance of the physical resources needed for rounds with regard to meeting space, as well as logistics and scheduling. In the network visit, meeting space was dedicated for the full day. A schedule was available to all participants. Pre-work was completed by P1 to create the schedule, provide maps, and organize with teachers to arrange for the logistics of the event. There was an error when a team went to the wrong classroom to observe due to the fact that the classroom was not clearly labeled and the members of the observation team were unfamiliar with the campus. This was discussed in the

interviews as why the logistics of the network visit are critical. Alignment between the participant interviews and the role of physical resources was clear.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Rounds

While participants, when interviewed, provided suggestions for improvements for rounds, they indicated a belief that it is an effective practice because it is collaborative, on-going, and focused on classroom instruction. During the observation of the rounds network, the collaborative nature of the process was evident. During the first 90 minutes, there was a learning time for the 40 network members that continued on-going district work. The teams of eight observed instruction in four classrooms, and took notes independently about what they observed in the classroom. They returned to the meeting site to discuss and analyze what was observed in the classroom instruction. Following observation, 25 minutes was set aside to individually review notes and organize evidence responsive to the problem of practice and essential questions. The independent classroom observation and 25 minutes of individual organization time was the only time that the team member was not collaborating with others; however, the independent observation and organization time was provided to prepare for collaborative learning. Teams shared dialogue about what they observed in the classrooms. Some teams had disagreements about the observation. DL1 and P1 shared the value of the rounds is in the collaborative discussion when there is disagreement or differences of opinion. This collaborative dialogue helps to refine understanding and create a shared vision of what quality instruction looks like.

The Tall Oaks rounds was one of the first rounds visits of the year; each of the other elementary schools represented on the Tall Oaks network team will host a rounds network visit

at their own campuses. The structure of the day is the same at each network visit: learning time, observation, analysis, and debrief. The learning time at each rounds network will continue the professional development based on needs observed during classroom observation and will be related to the problem of practice. The ongoing nature of the network supports the perceptions shared in the interview. Furthermore, Tall Oaks Elementary will host internal rounds with their own staff periodically during the year. Internal rounds was referenced by multiple participants in the interviews. The internal rounds are another mechanism that supports the ongoing nature of rounds.

Collaboration, ongoing work, and focus on classroom instruction were characteristics described in the interviews which led participants to have the perception that rounds is an appropriate and/or effective practice for improvement. While participant perceptions revealed varying degrees of effectiveness of rounds, evidence from observation aligned with perceptions uncovered during interviews.

Salient characteristics that set rounds apart. Salient characteristics that set rounds apart from other improvement initiatives included the collaborative nature of rounds. Some participants were unable to articulate previous improvement initiatives; some participants highlighted previous work in CPISD related to learning targets, comprehension toolkits, and other processes.

Evidence from the observation supports participant perceptions that collaboration is a salient feature of rounds that distinguishes it from previous improvement practices. A focus on learning targets or comprehension toolkit does not require collaboration with others; one can independently study and implement the instructional improvement in one's own classroom.

The observation of rounds indicated it is a collaborative process; it is the intersection of classroom observation, a professional learning community, and systems thinking (J. Roberts, 2012). While previous instructional initiatives were mentioned in the Next Level of Work during the rounds network debrief, they were discussed as tools to continue the instructional improvement of the campus in response to a larger problem of practice identified as needs due to classroom observation and collaborative dialogue as part of the rounds network.

Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

All participants expressed, with varying degree, the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core. DL1 shared previous data that indicated the impact of rounds on district organizational capacity with regard to increased use of learning targets, student achievement data, and other data. I observed that district leaders believe rounds has impacted the organizational capacity to improve instruction in the past.

Observation of the rounds network revealed the opportunity to build organizational and individual capacity was present; however, observation did not reveal whether or not capacity was increased due to the rounds network I observed. To determine if capacity was increased from learning at the rounds, further research may include observing classrooms of teacher participants in rounds network to understand practices better that are improved as a result of learning from rounds. Further study may also include researching school-wide planning and PLC work resulting from rounds network. Did campus leaders and teacher leaders depart from Tall Oaks Elementary and put new learning into practice to strengthen organizational capacity? Observation of the network visit revealed the charge from district leadership to campus

leadership to embed the work of the network back at their campus; however, without further study, the actual implementation is unknown.

In interviews, participants at Tall Oaks Elementary did reveal they believed their practice changed based on their learning from rounds with regard to learning targets, questioning, and student discourse. TL1 discussed she planned to implement the CRM from the network visit immediately and she had noticed another teacher using it every day in her classroom. DOK and its impact on practice in their classrooms was also mentioned by participants (T1, T4, TL1, TL2) in interviews. In interviews, participants perceived rounds as an effective practice, with varying degrees of effectiveness, in building capacity to impact the instructional core. Observation supports that the opportunity to build organizational capacity was present; however, further research is needed to determine the full effect of the rounds network on organizational capacity.

Analysis of Network Visit Documents

I asked the chief academic officer of CPISD, the principal of Tall Oaks Elementary, and DL1 to share with me any documents that may be relevant to rounds in the district and at the campus. I received the following documents related to expectations and norms, problem of practice, management of the network visit, and adult learning:

- CPISD Rounds Classroom Observation Norms
- Tall Oaks Elementary Problem of Practice
- CPISD rounds learning materials for network visit at Tall Oaks Elementary
- Schedule for rounds elementary site visits
- A blank rounds debrief form for CPISD

- A copy of the Hess Cognitive Rigor Matrix (CRM) for Reading, Writing/Speaking, Math/Science, Social Studies/Humanities, and Fine Arts
- An article titled “A Tool for Rethinking Questioning” by A. Simpson, S. Mokalled, L. Ellenburg, and S. M. Che
- A blank template of data collection charts to be used at Tall Oaks Elementary and CPISD
- CPISD Rounds Collective Commitments
- A schedule for rounds at Tall Oaks Elementary

Additionally, I located the District Improvement Plan 2016-17 and the Campus Improvement Plan 2016-17 at the district and campus websites. The improvement plans are required by state education code and district policy.

Expectations and Norms

Interview and focus group participants expressed the belief that trust was an important relational condition for the sustainability of rounds. I reviewed three documents related to the expectations and norms of the rounds process in CPISD and Tall Oaks Elementary: Rounds Collective Commitments, CPISD Rounds Network Goals, and CPISD Rounds Classroom Observation Norms.

Collective Commitments

The rounds collective commitments are four articulated commitments for CPISD:

1. We will keep all discussions, comments, and deliberations confidential.
2. We will be fully “present” and come to the network visit prepared for meaningful work.
3. We will display a growth mindset that embraces challenging learning, expects follow-up actions, and participates as a host site.
4. We will commit to open, honest, and authentic discussions without fear of repercussions or judgments.

The collective commitments reinforce the perceptions that emerged in the interviews related to building trust through nonjudgmental and non-evaluative language. Interview participants expressed the perception that trust was built over time and these tenets were reinforced through the rounds process. Observation of the rounds network validates the value the district and campus leadership placed on these relational commitments.

Challenging learning was listed in the collective commitments, and it was observed during the rounds network. During learning time, teams were expected to engage in a rigorous cognitive task and were expected to analyze instruction with complex tools. Interview perceptions of follow-through at the campus with regard to study of learning targets, PLC work, study of discourse, and study of DOK revealed participants understand the campus and district are continuing the work determined by the problem of practice throughout the year using various structures to continue learning, such as PLCs, faculty meetings, and district meetings. During the rounds network, I observed the teams share ideas for the Next Level of Work for Tall Oaks Elementary. This implies the campus will select a next level of work and continue the work.

CPISD Rounds Network Goals

CPISD established three goals for rounds networks:

1. To improve student achievement.
2. To deepen our understanding of the instructional core and the research-based strategies that strengthen the instructional core.
3. To foster a culture of collaboration where expert instructional delivery drives dialogue and serves as a catalyst for improvement.

Also contained in the rounds network goals are the district problem of practice and theory of action. The goals of rounds were observed as they were shared in the network visit during learning time. The data shared during learning time aligned with the goals. The process observed during the network visit during learning time, classroom observation, analysis, and debrief aligned to the goals of improving achievement, deepening understanding of the instructional core and research based strategies, and fostering collaboration. Participants did not reference these goals during their interviews; however, the concepts contained in the goals align to participant perceptions of the instructional core, learning new strategies, and rounds as a collaborative process.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice was listed as a part of three documents: Rounds Network Goals, Tall Oaks Elementary School rounds schedule, and the CPISD District Improvement Plan. The problem of practice in CPISD is “Students struggle to achieve at high cognitive levels.” The theory of action is, “If all students engage in rigorous learning and interact at high cognitive levels with learning tasks that are aligned to the learning targets and goals, then student achievement will improve.” Additionally, Tall Oaks Elementary framed two essential questions to guide the observation during the network visit:

1. What is the evidence that all students are interacting at high cognitive levels with a task that is tightly aligned to the learning goal and target?
2. What evidence that (*sic*) students are engaged in rigorous learning?

The documents are all in alignment with regard to the problem of practice and the focus on high levels of cognition. In interviews, the perception of the participants related to the problem of practice is the campus is focused on discourse, increasing student talk, and learning targets.

P1 and DL1 made connections in interviews to the problem of practice as it relates to the ongoing strategic work to address the problem of practice; however, teacher leaders and teachers did not connect the problem of practice to the strategic and tactical work of the campus and district. There is no evidence regarding the teacher perception of the problem of practice and alignment between perception and documents.

Management of the Network Visit

Three documents were provided to support management of the network visit: Rounds—Elementary Site Visits Schedule, Tall Oaks Elementary School Rounds Schedule, and a map of Tall Oaks Elementary. The detailed schedule provided for elementary site visits described the day for participants on the network visit. From breakfast, the team moved to learning about goals and commitments, the school context and rounds journey, learning for the network, and team planning for classroom observation. Then, the schedule describes classroom observation, individual thinking and organizing time, analysis time, lunch, continued analysis, artifact creation, completion of analysis form, generation of next levels of work, network debrief, reflection, and host school commentary. In observation of the rounds network, the detailed schedule functioned as a sort of checklist as the five teams worked independently with guidance from the facilitator. The schedule assisted teams and the facilitator in staying on target with regard to time and content. Observation reveals adherence to the schedule and the agenda items listed within the schedule. Participant interviews and focus groups referenced the artifacts, steps from the next levels of work, and the classroom observation. In participant interviews, effective facilitation and scheduling were perceived as conditions required for sustainability of rounds. This perception aligns with observation and document analysis.

Rounds process norms were listed on the Tall Oaks Elementary Rounds schedule:

1. Observers will stand and may walk around the classroom during the 20 minute observation.
2. Teacher will continue class as if observers are invisible. Teacher will not interact with observers.
3. Observers will script descriptive notes during the observation.
4. Observers will look for evidence around the problem of practice and essential questions.
5. Observer may talk to students, but not during direct instruction.
6. Observers will return to the debriefing room before processing.

During observation, adherence to these norms was observed. During interviews, teachers in the focus group referenced pretending the observers were not there (T4), they “swarm around the kids trying to write everything down” (T1), and teacher leaders described the need to capture descriptive evidence. The perception of teachers related to the process aligned with the documents and observation. Teachers in the focus group expressed the perception that there were too many people included on the rounds team observing in a single classroom.

In addition to the schedule, there was a map provided of Tall Oaks Elementary. During the network visit, due to inaccurate labeling on the map or outside of the classroom, one classroom was observed twice. This was an error according to the schedule. The children were not used to adult visitors in the classroom and the teacher was upset as two sets of observers came to the classroom at a time for which she was not prepared. In her interview, the principal stated,

You know, the fourth grade class that we went to twice, I am going to pull that [data] from our stuff. I can tell she wasn't expecting adults—the children were anxious about

strangers in room—one little girl was truly frightened—she said, ‘don’t make me talk to strangers.’ They felt comfortable talking with the teacher; they didn’t feel comfortable talking with people in the room. She [the teacher] was really upset. The teacher said, ‘this is not how I taught but I have to honor my children.’ She was trying to respect what they told her. I told her that I was not upset in any way, shape, or form.

The focus group suggested a supportive condition required for rounds is accurate maps, scheduling, and direction to the classroom. T5 stated, “And then, like yesterday, a mistake was made when they went to the wrong room.” T6 replied, “Portables are not labeled, so it can be hard to find the room, more of a logistics thing.” The perceptions expressed in the interview regarding logistics, scheduling, and management are supportive conditions required for sustainability as they impact other supportive relational conditions. Alignment emerged from the interviews, observation, and documents.

Documents to Support Adult Learning

Seven documents were shared with me regarding adult learning connected to the rounds network visit at Tall Oaks Elementary:

- A white paper titled “What Exactly Do ‘Fewer, Clearer, and Higher Standards’ Really Look Like in the Classroom? Using a Cognitive Rigor Matrix to Analyze Curriculum, Plan Lessons, and Implement Assessments” by K. K. Hess, D. Carlock, B. Jones, and J. R. Walkup
- An article titled “A Tool for Rethinking Questioning” by A. Simpson, S. Mokalled, L. Ellenburg, and S. M. Che
- The Hess cognitive rigor matrix (CRM)
- A matrix with Bloom’s II taxonomy and verbal discourse rubric
- Blank copies of matrices for analysis to share during debrief
- Rounds debrief form
- Rounds exit ticket

Perceptions emerged during the interviews that rounds increased adult learning and thereby impacted both teacher and organizational capacity to improve the instructional core. Documents shared during the network visit align with the perceptions that were uncovered during the interviews.

The content of the articles and matrices align with the supporting work to improve student learning with regard to the district problem of practice, and the articles and matrices align with participant perceptions of improving the instructional core, increased discourse, and improving rigor. The network teams used the tools during observation and DL1 encouraged continued study and use of the articles and tools upon return to home campuses. CPISD's focus on adult learning was revealed through interviews, observation, and document analysis.

District Plan

In addition to documents given to me related to rounds, I also located a copy of the district improvement plan for CPISD. The district improvement plan for CPISD specifies that ongoing district work to strengthen the instructional core began in 2012-13 and continues, rooted in research based strategies identified in Robert Marzano's (2007) *The Art and Science of Teaching*. The district plan states rounds work began in 2013-2014 school year and describes rounds as a process focused on "gathering data pertaining to a collaboratively developed district problem of practice with the goal of building the instructional leadership capacity of campus leaders." Continuing the focus on instructional and based on data from the previous year of rounds, the district lists its problem of practice and theory of action explicitly in the district improvement plan. The district lists steps that it is taking to focus on rounds including providing professional development to campuses on the topic of rigor and relevance, job-

embedded instructional coaching, and creating campus momentum plans. In summarizing the district context and organization, the district lists PLCs as a collaborative structure supported on each campus. PLC work includes learning from rounds. In the district needs assessment, rounds is listed as strength of the district as the district works to increase the number of campuses hosting network visits. There are five goals in the district plan; each goal is supported by strategies. Reference to "strengthening the instructional core" or direct references to rounds occur 14 unique times in the district plan.

All interview and focus group participants expressed the perception that rounds work would continue in CPISD; this perception aligns with the references to rounds contained within the district plan. Observation data and documents from the campus are aligned with the references to rounds and problem of practice contained within the district plan; perceptions from employees align with the content of the district plan with regard to focus on deepening rigor and discourse in an attempt to strengthen the instructional core.

Campus Plan

In addition to the district plan, i also analyzed the campus improvement plan for Tall Oaks Elementary. In the campus improvement plan (CIP), rounds is described as being implemented throughout the district as a *valued tool showing increased focus on targeted instruction and inclusion of best practices*. The CIP states all members of the professional staff have participated in rounds professional development and implementation with the administration team spending 1 day per week on *short walks* or rounds. Furthermore, according to the CIP, rounds and focus on the problem of practice is part of weekly PLC work at the campus. The CIP states all staff will participate in a rounds observation during PLC time to

strengthen the understanding of the impact of quality teaching and learning focused on increased rigor and instructional focus. The campus momentum plan is addressed in the CIP with a reference that the campus momentum plan will outline a cohesive professional development plan for the campus to address the district-wide problem of practice through a study of depth of knowledge.

Perceptions from the interview mostly align with the strategies listed in the campus improvement plan. Teacher leaders and the focus group, as well as the principal, referenced conducting internal rounds and conducting walkthroughs during PLC time focused on the problem of practice. The focus group and teacher leaders referenced DOK and other strategies to increase discourse as the focus for PLC and continued professional development on the campus. This perception aligns with the CIP. In interviews with the campus principal, teacher leaders, and focus group of teachers, no mention was made of weekly “short walks” or weekly rounds in PLCs or with administrators. The campus momentum plan was not referenced in interviews. Further study would need to be conducted to reveal perceptions of weekly walkthroughs and the campus momentum plan as articulated in the campus improvement plan.

Conclusion

I studied Tall Oaks Elementary in CPISD seeking to understand the perception of participants with regard to:

- The supportive conditions required for the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice
- The effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice
- The salient characteristics that distinguish rounds from other improvement practices
- Whether rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core

Furthermore, I observed a rounds network visit and reviewed documents related rounds to understand if perceptions of participants aligned with observation and documents.

Participants expressed perceptions that supportive conditions and leadership are important to continue rounds as a systemic improvement practice. Participants offered suggestions for improvement of the practice of rounds, and they indicated its effectiveness is due to the collaborative nature of rounds and its focus on improving the instructional core. All participants expressed, with varying degree, the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core.

Observation of the rounds network and analysis of documents from both CPISD and Tall Oaks Elementary related to rounds largely align with participants' perceptions regarding:

- Supportive conditions required for sustainability
- The effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice due to its focus on collaboration
- The salient characteristic of collaboration
- The possibility of building both teacher and organizational capacity through rounds

While there were some areas in which the perceptions of participants were not evident when compared to observation and document analysis, there was a great degree of alignment between perceptions of participants and what was revealed in observation and document analysis with regard to the research questions at Tall Oaks Elementary in CPISD.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: RANCHO VISTA ELEMENTARY IN RANCHO VISTA ISD

The purpose of the study was to determine what supportive conditions are required for sustainability of instructional rounds (rounds) as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement. In this study, I investigated the perceptions of rounds from four distinct groups of participants: district instructional leaders, principals, classroom teachers who participate in rounds network visits, and classroom teachers who may be observed in rounds network visits but do not directly participate. I also observed rounds network visits and reviewed district and campus documents to better understand perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice, effectiveness and appropriateness of rounds, and what conditions may be required for sustainability of rounds as an improvement system for school districts. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?
2. How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents?

In this qualitative study, I collected data through interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document review. Central office leaders, principals, and teacher leaders were

interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. I also conducted a focus group of teacher participants at each of the three study sites using a semi-structured interview protocol. I designed the interview questions to gather information about the participant's perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice in an effort to answer Research Question 1. I observed a rounds network visit at a campus representing each of the three districts in the study. I reviewed documents relevant to rounds, as well as the district and campus improvement plans. Network observation and document analysis were used to respond to Research Question 2.

I developed a conceptual framework, as previously shown in Figure 1, from research themes that emerged from a review of the literature on rounds and medical rounds, adult learning, and professional learning communities. Interviews and documents were coded using deductive codes derived from the conceptual framework. Disconfirming evidence was also identified and coded. In this chapter, I describe the analysis of the data collected from Case 2: Rancho Vista Elementary in Rancho Vista Independent School District (pseudonym assigned to both campus and district).

Background of the District and Campus

Rancho Vista Elementary is located in Rancho Vista Independent School District (RVISD). RVISD serves over 25,000 students in North Texas, placing the district in the top 25% of school districts in Texas with regard to size of student population (Educational Resource Group, 2017). RVISD serves 54 square miles across six municipalities. The district is comprised of 16.6% African-American students, 56% Hispanic students, 14.2% Caucasian students, 10.4% Asian students, .1% Pacific Islander students, 2.4% students of two or more races, and .3% Native

American students. RVISD is an urban-suburban district bordering one of the largest metropolitan areas in the state of Texas; teacher turnover rate in RVISD is approximately 15% annually. While 59% of school children in Texas are economically disadvantaged, RVISD serves 65% of students in poverty. Students identified at-risk account for 52.3% of the student population. RVISD is led by a superintendent in his 30th year of service with the district; he became the superintendent in 2009. RVISD began work with rounds in 2009-2010 as three campuses were selected as pilot campuses. All principals, along with teachers from the three pilot campuses and central office instructional leadership, participated on a network in 2010-2011 with network visits conducted at the three pilot schools. In 2011-12, networks were expanded to include additional campuses. Beginning in 2012-13 and continuing until present, all 34 traditional campuses participate in a rounds network.

Rancho Vista Elementary is a neighborhood school with a long history. The 50 year-old campus has transitioned over time from serving a more affluent neighborhood to serving a community of working poor families. Rancho Vista Elementary is comprised of 2.3% African-American students, 87.4% Hispanic students, 8.4% Caucasian students, 1.1% Asian students, and .7% students of Two or More Races. Rancho Vista Elementary has a mobility rate of 7.3% with 58.2% of students defined as at-risk. The mobility rate of students is lower than the state and the district. The percentage of economically disadvantaged students at Rancho Vista Elementary is 85.3%. The principal of Rancho Vista Elementary has served the district for 19 years as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal, becoming principal of the campus in 2006. The principal participated in rounds in 2010-11 as a member of the network team; Rancho Vista Elementary began participation in rounds in 2011-12.

Prior to observation of the Rancho Vista Elementary rounds network visit, I interviewed the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools, DL2, who is a key leader in developing and leading the initial rounds work in RVISD. Following the network visit, I interviewed the principal, P2, and teacher leaders (TL4, TL5, and TL6) on the rounds team, and I conducted a focus group of teachers (T7, T8, T9, T10, T11, and T12) at Rancho Vista Elementary. The purpose of these interviews was to answer Research Question 1:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?

In this chapter, I report the findings from interviews and focus groups related to each part of RQ1. Further, as related to RQ2, I will review how the perceptions of participants are aligned to practice and documents related to rounds). Figure 9 provides an overview of the organization of the chapter.



Figure 9. Organization of Chapter 5.

RQ1a: Perceptions of the Supportive Conditions Required for Sustainability of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

Considering the perceptions of the district personnel, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers observed, multiple supportive conditions emerged as important to the sustainability of rounds with regard to themes of relational resources, fiscal resources, and physical resources. Critical factors for success emerged to support the themes of relational resources, fiscal resources, and physical resources. Figure 10 provides the organization of the perceptions, themes, and critical factors.

All participants were asked the question, “What supportive conditions are required in order to sustain rounds in your district?” with variances in the probing questions that followed based on the role of the participant in the organization. Supportive conditions, including relational, fiscal, and physical resources were referenced 53 times in the interviews and focus groups. Figure 11 summarizes the findings related to RQ1a.

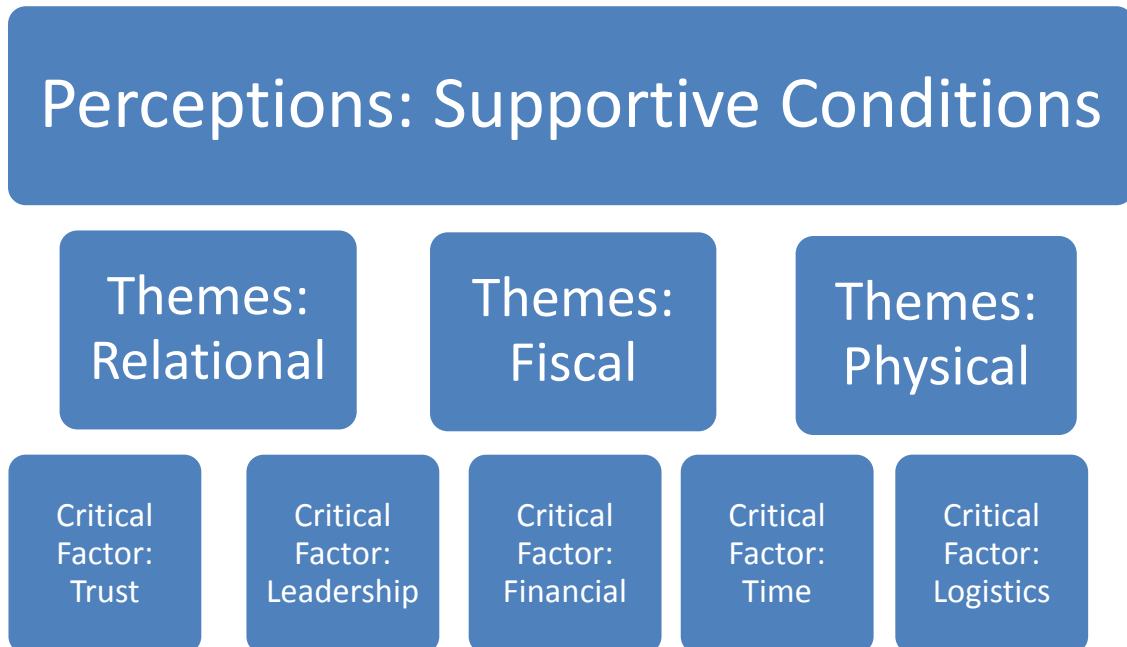


Figure 10. Findings related to RQ1a with regard to perceptions, themes, and critical factors in Chapter 5.

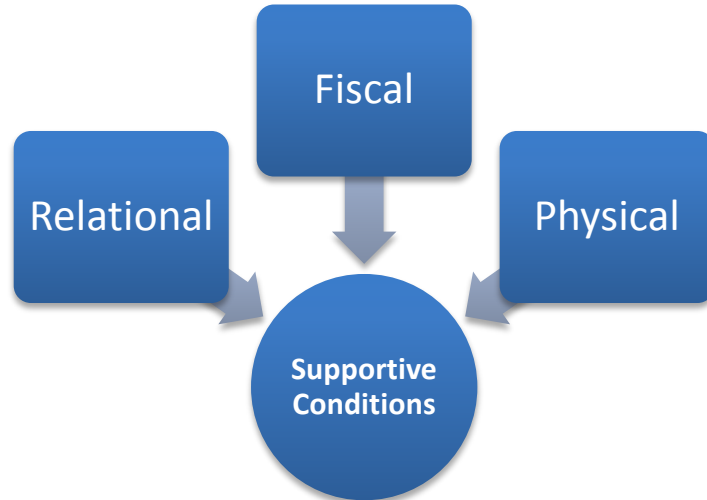


Figure 11. Supportive conditions at Rancho Vista Elementary in RVISD.

Relational Conditions

Relational conditions emerged as one critical factor of the supportive conditions required for the implementation of rounds. Fifty-three references were made to supportive conditions; 30 references were related to relational conditions, including the role of trust. Leadership was referenced 15 times in interviews. With regard to trust, the absence of judgement and confidentiality were uncovered as important themes. Leadership also emerged as a critical resource at the classroom, campus, and district level.

The Role of Trust

Relational conditions emerged as significant to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with 30 of 53 quotations connected to trust and relational capacity. Building trust and strong leadership as factors required for sustainability emerged in interviews of the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. Factors regarding trust included rounds as a non-evaluative, nonjudgmental process, the inclusion of teachers in the process to build trust with staff, trust built over time as more staff participated in rounds, and trust built

over time as teachers and administrators grow in comfort with the practice of rounds. TL5 discussed the beginning of the implementation of rounds. She stated,

In the beginning, people were hesitant because it was something new. T10 and I put on a great presentation [for the staff at Rancho Vista Elementary] after our original training, but we heard people whisper, 'oh no! Are we really doing this?' As we went through the beginning process there were some people who were negative. They would say things like 'I don't want to be one of the ones watched . . . I don't want to be judged.' . . . No one really understood the true benefit until we started doing Internal rounds. Before implementation on our campus, P2 had us read parts of the book and told us not to change anything about our instruction for the visit. As our principal got more and more people involved, everyone saw it was really okay. Somewhere along the way it began to feel safe and we had ownership.

DL2, TL4, TL6, and T11 also discussed the idea that initial feelings about rounds were cautious or fearful, but that trust grew over time as more staff participated in the process.

DL2, TL4, TL5, and TL6 discussed the importance of having teachers participate in the process. DL2 shared she has heard of other networks in other districts that are comprised of only administrators, and she expressed concern about having single role, administrative networks. TL6 shared,

Having teachers [on the rounds] reduced stress . . . with administrators used to doing evaluation . . . I think having teachers reduced the stress and having non-teachers [instructional coaches and specialists] . . . I've loved that part . . . a mixed group of people on the team.

With regard to including multiple roles on networks, TL5 stated it would be critical for sustainability to keep multiple roles invested in the rounds process. DL2 emphasized the importance of the role of the teacher on network rounds stating:

If we were only able to have administrators or central office . . . if we don't have teachers on the networks, we lose the heart . . . it would become 'it's just more people coming to tell us what to do.' [With teacher participation], we are all in this together, it doesn't matter my title. If we had to go to only administrators, then we shouldn't do it . . . you'd lose buy-in.

TL4, TL6, T9, T10, and T11 all discussed the fact that rounds is nonjudgmental and non-evaluative as important to the process. They emphasized from their experience that once you participate in rounds, you understand the non-evaluative nature but it is difficult to understand until you participate in the process.

All of the teacher leaders and teacher focus group participants discussed the culture of the campus as one with a high degree of trust. TL4 stated,

At Rancho Vista Elementary, we have always had a culture of everyone working together and students belonging to all of us, so that has not changed. When we are looking at rounds data and see the same little things pop up from grade to grade, we can be more focused in coming up with ideas to try. It keeps us focused and working together for the same goal at the end of the day.

Multiple teachers and teacher leaders expressed sentiment that there is no fear in asking a colleague for help, asking leadership for help, sharing ideas, or joining together to try a new instructional practice to impact student learning. A high degree of trust and pride in the school culture was evident in the perceptions of the participants. This culture of high trust was frequently attributed to the strength of the leader and the team, not necessarily to rounds as an improvement practice. Rounds strengthened the focus of the team and reinforced the culture, but it did not create the culture at Rancho Vista Elementary.

The Role of Leadership

For sustainability of rounds, the role of leadership was a second critical factor that emerged in supportive conditions related to relationships. In the interviews, leadership was mentioned 15 times related to supportive conditions required for the sustainability of rounds from the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. Participants perceive the sustainability of rounds requires a superintendent and district leadership who are supportive of

rounds as an instructional improvement practice and exceptional campus leadership to implement and sustain rounds.

DL2 and P2 noted the support of the superintendent of RVISD. P2 stated,

The superintendent views rounds as important because he supports it with time and resources. He makes a point to be at every rounds and is very visible. He asks whether rounds is important and beneficial. He takes the feedback and listens. If there were a change in superintendent, continuing rounds at the district level would depend on what's important to the next superintendent. As a principal, I could continue to conduct internal rounds on my own campus.

DL2 and T10 emphasized the role of district leadership in sustaining rounds. T10 stated it is critical to have "leaders who are willing to do the rounds and continue it and sustain it, not just look for something new . . . let it work through its problems and grow; that's really important."

The majority of comments about leadership were related to the importance of the campus principal. While district-level support and leadership is critical for the implementation of rounds, successful sustainability will not be possible, according to the participants at Rancho Vista Elementary, without the strong leadership of the campus principal. TL4, TL5, TL6, T8, T9, and P2 all emphasized the role of the principal in leading and sustaining rounds. TL4 stated,

The role of the building leader determines what the campus benefit will be. If the principal doesn't really have buy-in, they can't convince the teachers to give it a fair try. Here we all get together and look at the data and talk about it and make decisions all together and led by our principal. I can go see the posters [after a network visit] and get a little out of it, but until you get together and analyze it, you don't get as much value out of it. At one of my [colleague's] previous schools, they would have rounds and I would ask, 'how did it go when you met and talked about it?' She would say, 'oh, we don't do that.' If you don't do anything with the data as a staff, the school will not see any real benefit of rounds. Campus change starts with the principal.

Staff at Rancho Vista Elementary described the leadership as hands-on, coaching, invested in the classroom and students, and focused on student achievement. TL4, TL5, TL6, T9, T10, and T12 all described the collaborative process the staff uses to determine the problem of practice,

to participate in internal and network rounds, and to determine next steps for the campus based on the data collected during rounds observations. The principal serves as the architect of the system, designing how the work will move forward with teacher voice, input, and buy-in. All of the teachers interviewed attributed the success of rounds and the high degree of trust on the campus to the leader. A teacher in her second year on the campus, T8 stated,

It feels like a very safe community. I can say, 'I really need help with this because my kids aren't getting this' . . . and I am not worried about getting judged. Having the principal and the leadership we do . . . I'm not sure I will ever again have a leader like her. If she leaves, I am going with her.

T9, a teacher with 26 years of experience in the district, stated,

There's a deep sense of trust; if you have an issue, you can find someone in any wing that can help you. The strength of the leader. She is hands on. . . . She is about student achievement. Because of her dedication to learning, it makes us dedicate ourselves more. . . . She believes in buy-in. The problem of practice was us-driven, teacher-driven. Ultimately, we picked what we needed to work on.

The role of the campus leader was a factor emphasized for the sustainability for rounds from the perspectives of the participants.

Fiscal Conditions

In interviews, fiscal conditions emerged as a necessary critical factor for the implementation of rounds. Financial resources, including money for substitutes and training, were discussed by participants. The need for training and quality of training was also discussed with regard to funding the quality of training needed. Participants also highlighted the importance of the resource of time as related to the rounds networks and training for staff and rounds participants.

Financial Resources

Financial resources were referenced 18 times by participants; comments were

connected to substitutes and cost of funding rounds with consideration of facilitator and substitutes for teachers to be out of classrooms observing, as well as funding for training for teachers, rounds participants, and leadership.

TL4, T9, P1, and DL2 noted the importance of funding for substitutes to attend to classes while teachers engage in the network visits. T9 stated, “The district needs to allocate funds for subs. . . . it takes financial support.”

T9, T10, P2, and DL2 discussed the training for rounds participants and training on rounds for all teachers, especially teachers who are new to the district. While several did not directly acknowledge the funding needed to continue the training, they did indicate the district provided training for network participants internally. P2 stated,

Training for staff who are newly participating in rounds occurs at the district level during summer staff development. It’s consistent and they hear the same message. We identify who will participate in rounds and then send them to initial training in the summer.

T9 shared her perception with regard to the training of rounds participants, stating “if they aren’t trained well on how to look for and what to look for, it ends up being just taking notes but not taking what they should be.” Additionally, T10 believes all new teachers to the district should be trained about rounds so “they are able to assimilate so they know the expectations and what it’s meant for.” T8 acknowledged such training would have been helpful to her in the first year in the district as she was not sure about the purpose of rounds and how to understand the data collected at Rancho Vista Elementary. P2 shared she conducts training for the entire staff at Rancho Vista Elementary for at least one half or one full day in August each year to discuss the rounds journey and to make certain “we are all on the same page.” This dedication of training to rounds has a fiscal cost, as well as the cost of time.

DL2 shared the district does not have one person solely responsible for leading the rounds work across the district, but that the rounds work is led by a district team comprised of assistant superintendents. She stated that having “someone, or more than one, who continues to lead and organize the work” will be a critical factor for sustainability of rounds. While DL2 did not acknowledge the cost associated with the positional leadership of rounds, there are implied costs in personnel to lead training, networks, and organize the rounds work.

Funding for ongoing training of leadership, network participants, facilitation costs, and the expense of substitute teachers to allow teachers out of the classroom to participate in rounds network visits is a supportive condition for consideration of sustainability of rounds.

The Resource of Time

In RVISD, time occurred six times as a critical factor for sustainability of rounds. TL4, TL5, P2, and DL2 all commented on time as a resource needed to sustain rounds successfully. P2 stated, “As far as resources, time is the main resource needed. Time on the calendar must be captured early.” TL4 expressed concern about the time commitment to rounds and being out of the classroom away from students during network rounds visits. Teachers in the focus group described the number of rounds visits per network changing over the years to balance time on the rounds network with time out of the classroom. T11 shared that in previous years, the network met six times and teachers were away from their students for six days during the year just for rounds. In the past couple of years, the district adjusted so networks meet for three days during the year. Dedicating time to the work of rounds is a critical factor to be considered for sustainability.

Physical Conditions

Physical conditions emerged as a theme to be considered as a supportive condition for sustainability of rounds. Physical conditions include meeting space and scheduling.

The Role of Logistics

Determining location for rounds was a recurring supportive condition discussed by participants in the case. Logistics were discussed in three instances with regard to meeting space and network construction.

Meeting space for the networks was expressed as a need by T9 and P2. The network met in the library for the campus visit. P2 shared, “The campus needs a large gathering place for rounds work.” P2 also commented on the need for a schedule from the district in advance so the campus principals can plan accordingly.

Scheduling the networks was also discussed by the teacher focus group with the importance of scheduling bilingual teachers on the bilingual network visits. T7, a bilingual teacher, mentioned there can be a struggle to capture the dialogue accurately and interaction in a bilingual classroom if the team observing is not comprised of bilingual members. T7 stated,

There needs to be enough bilingual observers . . . sometimes that’s an area that gets cut back . . . there’s only four [observers] on the team . . . that’s difficult to make sure you have the right observer scribe in the right classroom.

A schedule, a meeting space for large groups, and composition of the network observation teams are supportive logistics for the continuation of rounds.

RQ1b: Appropriateness and/or Effectiveness of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

In conducting individual interviews and a focus group in Rancho Vista ISD, I sought to understand the participants’ perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or

effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice as indicated in RQ1b: What are the district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice? DL2, P2, teacher leaders, and teachers all expressed the perception that rounds is an effective systemic improvement practice due to the building of shared values and vision, reduction of initiative fatigue, and focus on instructional improvement. Participants provided suggestions for improvements to rounds to increase its effectiveness including improvements to structure of networks and observations, post-network visit learning and monitoring, and feedback to teachers who are observed. Figure 12 summarizes findings related to RQ1b.

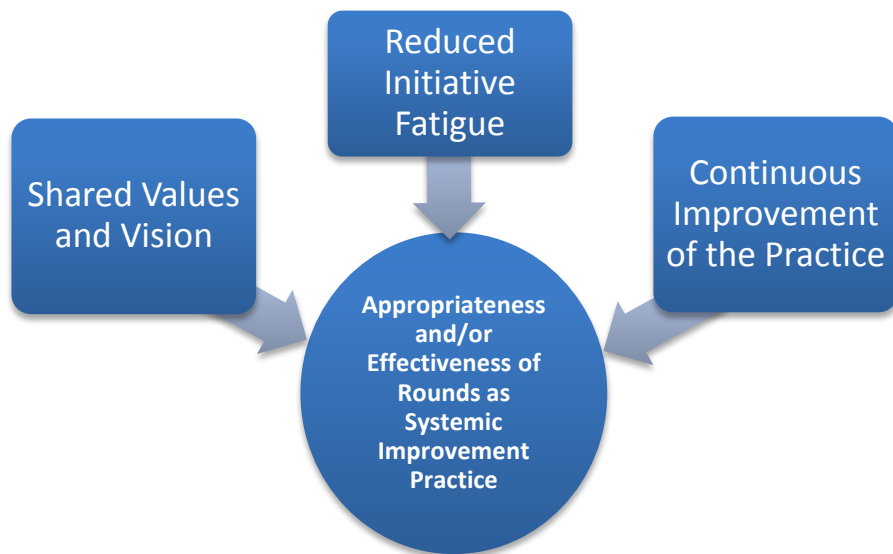


Figure 12. Findings related to appropriateness and/or effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice at Rancho Vista Elementary, RVISD.

Shared Values and Vision

All participants in Rancho Vista ISD described rounds as a practice that establishes a common vision and focus for instructional improvement and builds a common vocabulary. Common vocabulary was evident in the interviews of the principal, teacher leaders, and the

teachers in the focus group. Participants described shared values and vision at the district level and the campus level.

Shared Values and Vision at the District Level

DL2 described the district's journey with regard to the problem of practice. She shared that, initially, campuses each devised their own problem of practice and essential questions. However, due to the data around literacy across the district, the district determined a central problem of practice. Then campuses personalized the problem of practice with essential questions related specifically to the campus. DL2 stated,

The common language that has and continues to be associated with rounds is important in the district work. Actually figuring out when someone says 'higher level thinking'— what that means . . . I think because we have this common focus, we are better at deciding next steps for professional development. From surveys, we've used that to devise what we need to focus on in the district plan, [summer professional learning], and campus plans . . . all of that has served to make our work more cohesive.

P2 described the problem of practice and the shared vision created through the district problem of practice.

Everything we are doing as a district related to staff development is centered on improving reading and writing. Our content directors have been charged to ensure that literacy is a big push district wide in all content areas. As principals, we have been using best practices with our staffs on ways to improve literacy. It's addressed in our campus plans, and it's how we spend the majority of the school budget including our Title I funding.

TL6 reflected on the shift from a campus-based problem of practice to a district-based problem stating, "Rounds has connected the district by initiating a common problem of practice.

Literacy is the district's problem of practice now." T12, a teacher at Rancho Vista Elementary, who also has children who attend other campuses in the district, shared,

I think it is neat when I walk into the high school that my son attends and see the problem of practice posted and my kids will say again that they're writing a lot in class

because they know what the campus is working on . . . writing . . . as their campus problem of practice . . . they are aware at the high school of what the overarching goal is. It's neat to see that they know where they need to grow as learners; I can see the parallel to what we do [at the elementary] and what is systemic throughout our district.

Participants expressed perceptions that a common problem of practice builds a shared vision and values at the district level, and they provided evidence to support those perceptions including the focus of professional development, the inclusion of literacy in all content areas, and awareness of why the district selected literacy as the problem of practice.

Shared Values and Vision at the Campus Level

TL4, TL5, TL6, T7, T9, T10, and T11 described the shared vision and values created at the campus level through the practice of rounds established through common expectations for students. TL4, a mathematics teacher, described the focus that rounds brings to instructional practice by stating,

Rounds has helped bring an awareness of practices that, if enforced school-wide, can make campus wide changes in student performance. It has helped me to stay aware of the importance of encouraging students to be speaking, reading, writing, and justifying in every class so that those habits are instilled in each student.

TL6 described the campus's journey with regard to the problem of practice by stating,

We noticed that students were not engaged in verbal discourse, or if they were, it was very short—one word—and we wanted to fix that. We wanted children to speak, become familiar with language that would help them in the future. Our students come from families who have limited conversations and we wanted to improve that. We wanted to talk about their learning, not just one word or two word phrases . . . we wanted complete sentences. It started with just verbal and then we progressed to using Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary words . . . that improved and so we went to writing how we speak and that's where we are now. We've seen slight improvement . . . every classroom has the poster whether English or Spanish . . . students are reminded visually that a sentence should look like this [references poster]. We have 'Mustang Must Haves' and teachers remind students to fix work when it is missing. I can see students' discourse improving . . . both written and speaking. . . . It's incredible.

T4 emphasized the shared vision of the campus with regard to instructional practices and expectations.

Two things that we have implemented school wide here at RVE are 'Speak Like a Mighty Mustang' and 'Mustang Must Haves.' These were collaborative works by the staff after rounds and the analysis of the data. Speak like a Mighty Mustang is a strategy we use to encourage students to speak in complete sentences with justification. Mustang Must Haves are five rules of writing that we hold all students accountable for in all content areas.

P2 spoke about the power of a shared vision as it impacts students.

When we say 'Speak like a Mighty Mustang' or 'Use your Mustang Must Haves in your writing' to our students, they understand what it means. One fifth grader asked me the other day if he needed to use Mighty Mustang sentences in his math response or if he could write a bulleted list. I thought, 'wow, he gets it.' They have internalized it because it is a practice we are implementing campus wide.

TL6 and teachers on the focus group spoke to the shared values underlying the shared practice as the desire for students of poverty and English language learners to be competitive and achieving success in the future and a belief that high levels of literacy will contribute to future success. T10 stated, "we are a thinking society and we have to create the society." T9 replied, "We want strong, successful citizens who speak eloquently and fill out job applications and not be in the bottom of the stack or passed over for opportunities because of their non-fluent [English literacy] ability." Shared values, vision, and practice regarding the role and importance of literacy were evident in the perceptions shared by the campus principal, teachers, and teacher leaders.

Reduction of Initiative Fatigue

Reeves (2010) discusses initiative fatigue and initiative churn in schools as a deterrent to ongoing success of schools as new initiatives arise as a *quick fix* to the problems of the school or district with the outcome that no initiative is deeply implemented. Districts and/or campuses

move yearly from one program to the next without arriving at the intended outcome. P2 stated,

Another challenge is staff members wonder if rounds is a fad like so many initiatives we implement in education. People will ask, 'Are we still doing rounds next year?' My response is, 'Do we still have a problem with practice? Do we still have challenges with literacy?' Keeping the focus on rounds and staying the course is a challenge.

DL2 confirmed there is challenge in staying the course with one initiative over time. She shared,

After the first few years, I think for a while, we felt like we were wandering Egypt . . . has this moved us as far as we can go? . . . But I think the district wide problem of practice has rejuvenated the process a little bit . . . we're struggling with the new problem of practice, but it's rejuvenated too. We have to remember that in struggle comes the greatest learning.

Participants also noted the district was continuing a focus with rounds. T11 stated,

It's reassuring that next year it's not going to be something different . . . let's do this book study and focus on this . . . and next year, something different . . . no, we have the time to improve . . . it hasn't been the pendulum swinging . . . that means a lot to me . . . we have had consistency. We aren't moving on to the latest and greatest thing.

T9, T12, and TL5 shared the sentiment that rounds has given the campus a focus and slowed initiative fatigue.

Continuous Improvement: Suggested Improvements to Rounds

In response to questions regarding the effectiveness of rounds and how it could be improved, participants made suggestions to increase the effectiveness. No participant interviewed in RVIDS commented that rounds should stop or be reduced; each participant expressed ideas for improvement that may indicate a perception that rounds can be improved but is an appropriate systemic improvement practice. Feedback for improvement was related to the training of participants, network construction, post-network visit learning and feedback to teachers, and the problem of practice.

Improvement to Training of Participants

Training for participants, both leadership and rounds network participants, was an improvement suggested by teacher leaders, principal, and teachers. Deprivatizing practice means that, for the first time in the district, teachers had the opportunity to observe teachers and principals in other schools. School leaders have varying levels of comfort, understanding, and buy-in to the practice. Teachers from campuses across the district have common initial training, but they have varied experiences in serving on rounds teams or implementing rounds based on their unique campus experiences. TL5 noted,

Preparation may be a struggle as well because some of the campuses aren't at the same level of comfort or ability. I feel very strongly that our principal knows our school very well. At some campuses I have visited, the principal did not know how they wanted us to collect the data. Not knowing was hard to record because without a clear focus we don't know what they are looking for. It was challenging when they didn't have a specific or easily recordable problem of practice.

Teachers in the focus group shared participants in network visits sometimes have preconceived ideas about what data to collect or what to be looking for in the observation which may not support the campus's need or problem of practice.

T11: I think that it is important for the teachers and staff who come in for external rounds that they don't have preconceived idea of what to look for and listen for and what to script. I've had the experience and felt like, "why did they script this?" and "that's not our problem of practice" . . . or they didn't try to engage with the kids . . . they just stood there and watched . . . it varies from school to school and there's different expectations and then it's not helpful to us.

T9: If they aren't trained well on how to look for and what to look for, it ends up being just taking notes but not taking what they should be.

T11: We get back data on Bloom's, but that's not our problem of practice. The morning portion of the rounds visit when the principal is explaining the problem of practice is when visitors should be open minded and think how are we going to catch the data [around the school's problem of practice].

T9: . . . the training part is hitting me . . .

T10: At the same time, training all new teachers about rounds as they come in and so they are able to assimilate so they know expectations and the purpose.

T8, a second year teacher in RVISD, stated she was confused about the data from the campus network visit. She said,

I don't understand them and it doesn't make sense to me . . . I just see words . . . I wish I understood it and I don't, so I don't look at it anymore . . . The day the external came in, I was a lost puppy, there were lots of pictures, but I didn't know what any of it meant.

In the focus group, T8's colleagues reassured her and stated teachers new to the process need more training in how to understand the artifacts and data that emerge from the rounds network visits and internal rounds.

Principals' understanding of rounds and data collection, network participants providing data and feedback to support the campus's problem of practice, and the challenge of teachers new to the district understanding the feedback from rounds were those concerns shared by the participants at Rancho Vista Elementary. These concerns all suggest an improvement in professional development for leadership, rounds participants, and teachers new to the district.

Network Construction

RVISD has created rounds networks with different configurations over the past seven years of implementation, with both horizontal (all schools of the same level, such as elementary or middle school) and vertical (combined networks with elementary, middle schools, and high schools). Networks have been comprised of multiple roles, including principals, teachers, central office instructional leaders, and instructional coaches. While perceptions of the participants believe the participation of multiple roles is important to rounds, participants expressed some suggestions for improvement with regard to network construction. TL5

suggested it was difficult to have elementary and secondary teachers on the same network, and she expressed fears that secondary teachers might not see value in elementary instruction. T12 shared this same concern. T5 also suggested a “different, deeper discussion” might occur if teachers from the same content area were on the same network. Consideration of the network composition is important, according to the participants’ perceptions.

Post-Network Visit, Learning, and Feedback

A third improvement suggestion connected to the rounds network visit was providing feedback to teachers from the rounds visit. Two teachers from the focus group stated feedback to teachers is critical; rounds provides feedback to the campus, but it is difficult to determine the individual feedback from the campus feedback. T7 stated,

After the internal visit, I wanted to chase them down and tell them, “tell me what you see.” I want that feedback. This is what I told the math coach . . . “don’t say everything was great; tell me what you truly see so I can continue and so I can grow.” I see the writing so much and they are scripting . . . did they hear complete sentences? I have Leverage Leadership [to get individual feedback], but it’s also great that I hear these 6 or 7 and they saw something amazing...I like the constant feedback.

The other teachers in the focus group emphasized the desire for increased personalized feedback while recognizing the value of the feedback to the campus as a whole.

Improving the problem of practice and focus of networks. The district leader shared perspectives from observing multiple networks over several years. She stated improving the problem of practice has been a continued focus, sharing,

It’s hard to admit a problem and we had some campuses choosing things [for their problem of practice] they had already solved in order to be seen in a good light [during network observations]. We continue to have challenges if this is what we see on a day to day basis or if it is a show . . . it goes back to the level of trust. All principals want to have their school seen in a great light. . . .

She went on to state,

Until this year, we had 36 campuses, 36 problems of practice. There was some overlap, but I don't know . . . it seemed . . . not disjointed, but I'm not sure . . . sometimes it felt like we were stopping, starting, stopping, starting [as we moved from problem to problem based on the campus selection].

An improvement suggestion made by DL2 and reinforced in other interviews was the need for a specific, actionable problem of practice that actually is a student learning problem, not a problem that is already solved or an area of strength for the campus. Selecting a district problem of practice has brought about some "rejuvenation," but DL2 shared it was too early in the process to determine the effects of the single, district-wide problem of practice.

In addition to focusing on improving the problem of practice, DL2 suggested district leaders invest more deeply in a focus on the task. She stated with previous problems of practice, the focus has largely been on the teachers' knowledge and skill or student engagement. She stated looking at the actual work that students are completing is the next level of work for the district.

Participants expressed perceptions that rounds is an effective systemic improvement practice due to the sharing of values and vision and the reduction of initiative fatigue. Participants expressed a belief in the continuation of rounds and provided suggestions for continuous improvement with regard to additional training for leadership, participants, and new teachers, network configuration, feedback to teachers, and increased attention to the problem of practice and next levels of work.

RQ1c: Salient Characteristics of Rounds and Comparison to Other Improvement Practices

To understand the salient characteristics of rounds and to determine what sets rounds apart from other improvement practices, I asked participants to compare rounds to other improvement practices employed in the district. Two salient characteristics emerged to

describe rounds in comparison to other improvement practices: deprivatizing practice and the collaborative nature of rounds. Figure 13 summarizes the findings related to RQ1c: What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices or how it compares to other improvement practices?

When asked to compare rounds to other improvement practices implemented in RVISD, multiple improvement practices were named that were either presently employed or had been employed in the past:

- Leverage leadership (TL4, TL5, T9, T10, T12, D2)
- Focused walkthroughs (TL5, TL6, DL2)
- Collegial coaching (TL6, T9)
- Strategies such as content literacy and talk moves (TL5, P2)
- Content coaching (T10, D2)
- Teacher appraisal (D2)

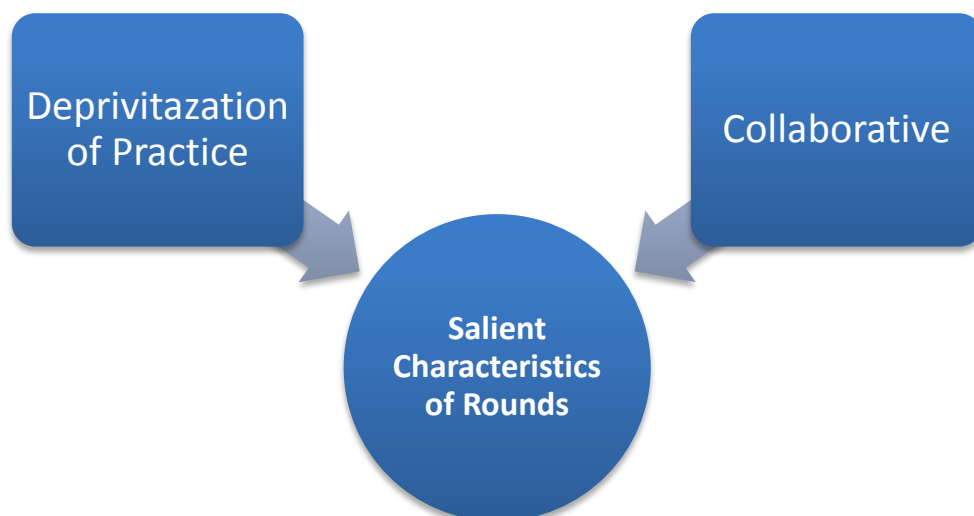


Figure 13. Findings related to salient characteristics of rounds at Rancho Vista Elementary, RVISD.

Comparison of Rounds to Other Improvement Practices

The most frequently compared improvement practice was leverage leadership.

Leverage leadership is a protocol for feedback and observation based on the work of Paul Bambrick-Santoyo (2012). As part of the leverage leadership model, the teacher works with an observer/coach. They review data and set goals. The observer provides feedback regularly to the teacher with progress to meeting the goal. The observer and teacher practice the next step for improvement. The coach returns to the classroom to see the improvement in action; the cycle continues. TL5 compared leverage leadership to rounds, stating,

Rounds is collecting data for the whole school and Leverage Leadership is just you. With both leverage leadership and rounds, the problem of practice is selected and not chosen for you. Leverage leadership is kind of like doing a mini-rounds with one observer in your classroom.

The focus group also discussed the comparison between leverage leadership and rounds, describing how the two practices are connected. T12 stated,

I took our problem of practice for the campus and decided what to work on with my leverage leadership coach when she came in for leverage leadership . . . I wanted to improve oral communication with whole group discussion when we were in whole class with tracking the eyes of the speaker and engaging with the discussion. . . . My problem of practice for leverage leadership was using Socratic seminar to prompt debate and discussion . . . what do we need as a campus and how can I hone in in my classroom to see how students are challenging each other and speaking?

Both practices are embedded at Rancho Vista Elementary; they are connected to each other with one practice focused on the individual teacher and the other focused on the school as a whole.

The next most frequently compared improvement practice was focused walkthroughs.

Focused walkthroughs were a pre-cursor to rounds in which a small team from the home campus, usually comprised of 3-4 members, observed a classroom using a protocol. The

protocol focused on the individual teacher; the team discussed the instruction and the teacher may have received feedback at a later time. TL5 stated,

We previously had focused walkthroughs, but those were different because it felt like a checklist since we had to look for certain things when we were observing. A walkthrough was similar to rounds in that you had a group coming into the classroom. We also managed them internally and maybe you had some outsiders. There was more of a list to look for with walkthroughs though. It was a set list versus a problem that you chose. With rounds we get to find the problem and we get to find the data on it. We are more interested in the results because it's ours. We take more ownership of our learning, or our data once we receive it. We even celebrate our successes. Walkthroughs made you feel isolated because it was data on you.

T9 shared that focused walkthroughs seem like a repressed memory, stating she obviously “did not get anything out of it.” Salient characteristics that set rounds apart from these two other improvement efforts are the deprivatization of practice and the collaborative nature of rounds.

Deprivatization of Practice

Deprivatization of practice is a critical component of rounds, a salient characteristic that distinguishes it from other improvement practices. DL2 described several benefits of rounds, stating deprivatization of practice was one of the primary benefits. She shared the district had explored several initiatives to open the doors of classrooms to observation, but none had been as essential to deprivatization as rounds. DL2 stated,

For the first time ever, we were going into teachers' classrooms and getting feedback as the campus on what we were doing well. . . . seeing what works in other places started to give ideas and conversations of ideas that were working in other places.

Those conversations gave focus of instruction in principals' meetings and in teachers' conversations . . . There was so much variety in buildings . . . people started seeing the variety and deciding that it wasn't okay . . . it made PLCs more important than they were in the past; it created more buy-in from teachers on why they needed to work with and through each other.

P2 echoed this perception regarding the deprivatization of practice by stating,

I think the main difference with rounds as compared to other improvement practices is that with rounds you are getting into classrooms to observe instruction. In the past, we have used improvement practices such as content literacy strategies. However, you don't truly know how well the content literacy strategies are being implemented unless you observe classroom instruction.

The value of deprivatization is for both the observer and the campus. The campus benefits from the feedback of the observation team, and the observer learns from watching others practice the craft of teaching. TL4 noted,

Just being able to get a snapshot of the building at one time . . . a principal can go room to room but that's what one person saw . . . there's so much going on in a classroom so to have five people . . . the five people don't even see the same thing . . . to see the whole school and get a grasp of what's happening today in the school adds some value to what we do and what we plan to do as a school.

As the doors of classrooms open to multiple observers, from within and outside of the campus, in the service of adult learning, deprivatization of practice increases. T9 shared, "It's just not as big of a deal now . . . people are constantly coming in and it's just not as big of a deal." Not only are the doors of classrooms opened for observation, but artifacts are created by the rounds network team to provide data back to the campus, and those artifacts are shared with the staff. T12 stated, "Having the artifacts made public and having access to what was scripted in the classroom; having it available to look at is another piece . . . it's like feedback to you." Teachers in the focus group described debriefing the artifacts, as shown in Figure 14, and determining next steps for the campus based on the data collection as another element of the deprivatization of practice.

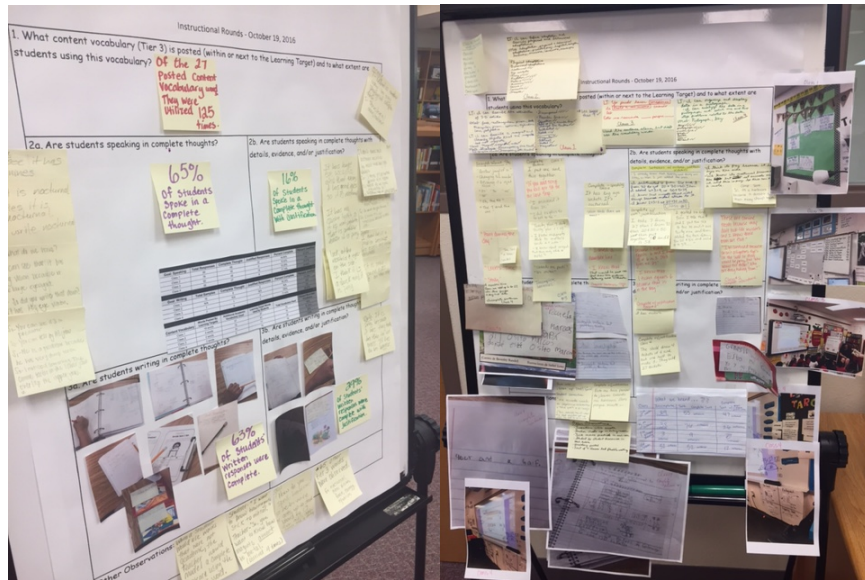


Figure 14. Artifacts from network debrief, Rancho Vista Elementary, RVISD.

Collaborative Nature of Rounds

In addition to deprivatization of practice, the participants in the study highlighted collaboration as a salient factor that sets rounds apart from other improvement practices. TL4, TL5, TL6, T9, T10, T12, P2, and DL2 all remarked about the collaborative nature of rounds as a characteristic that distinguishes rounds from other improvement practices. Collaboration takes many forms: collaboration of the rounds network team, collaboration of the campus to move forward with the next level of work, and collaboration across the district.

Collaboration of the Rounds Network Team

TL6 described the collaboration of the rounds network team by stating,

Rounds is different in that you have several people looking at different things and then you put the data together . . . before it was one or two people and focused on one thing. In rounds, we consider, “are they engaged? “Are they writing?” I think rounds is more powerful.

TL4, TL5, and DL2 emphasized the role of collaboration in the rounds network team as they shared the significance of the multi-role network where teachers, administrators, central office

staff, and instructional coaches engage in rounds to benefit their learning and support the campus. Furthermore, TL4 discussed the impact of having five people observing and capturing feedback from different vantage points in the classroom. One person might be observing student dialogue with one group while another team member may be observing the teacher interact with a small group of students. A third team member may be observing and capturing notes regarding students independently reading while a fourth observer scripts the interaction of students at a center. Then, during the debrief, the team collaborates to understand a more robust picture of the instruction and activity in the classroom. DL2 highlighted the factor that multiple team members play at the rounds network visit as part of the collaborative effort of the network observation team, stating,

There are people from various levels that sit around a table [principals, teachers and central office staff] and hopefully with no one being of more importance than another . . . we are all practitioners working to solve, not our own problem, but somebody else's . . . with an objective set of eyes. This problem solving can't help but improve those visited and the rounds participants themselves. Whether it's the learning time that occurs at the beginning of each rounds visit or the observance of what is going on in the classroom, participants always come away with a keener understanding of some part of the instructional core.

Collaboration of the Campus

All participants discussed the collaborative nature of rounds as it relates to the campus.

T10 stated,

A lot of those practices are on an individual basis [Leverage Leadership and Coaching] . . . but some teachers aren't as open to improve. Rounds impacts the whole school . . . it focuses not only on me but how I am impacting children and how we want them to develop. . . . I have to focus on myself, yes, but more importantly we have to focus as a community on what we are seeing in the children and what do we need to focus on as a whole . . . less of me and more of the kids; if I don't like what I see, we can change it, but we change as a school.

T9 reinforced this perception when she shared, “Rounds is kind of like Leverage Leadership, but on a team . . . how’s the team doing? . . . are we going to make it [to our goal]?” T9, T10, and TL5 described the collaboration of the campus in determining the problem of practice and reviewing the problem of practice each year. P2 discussed the process by which the campus reviews the problem of practice and determines next steps as a team. This collaboration emerged as a salient characteristic of rounds that separated it from other improvement practices that appeared to be based on improvement of the practice of the individual teacher rather than improvement of instruction at scale. DL2 suggested part of the collaboration is the campus’s choice with the next level of work. At each rounds network visit, the observation team leaves suggestions for the campus as ideas for next level of work. DL2 shared,

Everyone is sitting around the table with expertise they bring to share next level of work for the campus to consider . . . that’s another thing . . . that you “may consider” . . . not that you have to do. The experts about the campus are the campus people, but the outsiders provide some perspective on what they know . . . they don’t say “do this next.” Choice is great for everyone, including the campus . . . which one of these . . . ideas will help us move to the next place?

P2, TL4, TL5, TL6, T9, T10, and T11 described the collaboration that emerged from rounds as the campus selected next levels of work over time, moving from a focus on discourse to academic vocabulary to writing as the skill level of students improved. TL5 described the process, stating,

Sometimes we revisited the problem of practice as a group. She [the principal] often asked for volunteers to present to the staff, but we didn’t have to. We always decided as a team if we wanted to keep the current problem of practice or move on. We knew we had to have buy-in from everyone . . . they’ll feel negative if they aren’t involved or part of making the decisions.

From selecting the problem of practice to determining the next level of work to presenting to faculty, there appeared to be a wide space for collaboration within rounds at Rancho Vista Elementary.

Collaboration across the District

Not only does rounds promote collaboration within the network team and within the campus, TL5 and DL2 shared the district-wide collaboration that occurs through the practice of rounds. TL5 shared,

It's neat seeing people on other campuses since it builds camaraderie and excitement. . . . I like it that we get to share ideas. . . . If we just stopped [rounds], I don't think we'd have a focus in our district anymore.

DL 2 elaborated on how the district builds collaboration through rounds.

Everybody is involved . . . not just a few campuses or a few people . . . from the superintendent to classroom teachers to Instructional Technology Specialists . . . to everyone . . . everyone is sitting around the table with the expertise they bring to share.

The value of networking across the district builds collaboration and relationships district-wide.

From the collaboration of the network to the collaboration of the campus to the collaboration across the district, the capacity to work as a collaborative team is a salient characteristic of rounds.

RQ1d: Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

The fourth component of RQ1 asks for participant perceptions with respect to whether and how rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core: teacher, student, and content. Participants in the study in RVISD referenced adult learning 33 times in their interviews, and increased capacity was coded 31 times. Improvement of the instructional core was coded 13 times in the interviews. Figure 15 summarizes findings related to building organizational capacity to improve the instructional core.

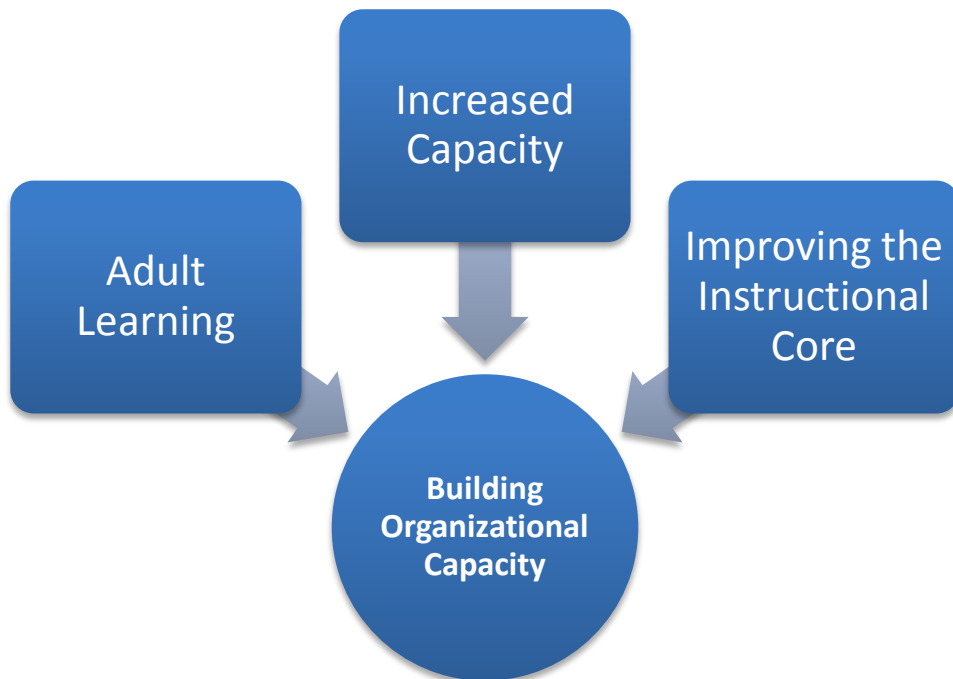


Figure 15. Findings related to RQ1d: Building organizational capacity at Rancho Vista Elementary, RVISD.

Adult Learning

All participants in the study indicated rounds contributed to their professional learning, building the knowledge and skills of the adults at the campus and in the district. In Chapter 2, I examined research related to adult learning, noting characteristics of effective adult learning: link to improved instructional practice and student learning; ongoing and collaborative experiences; culture of excellence; time for reflective practice, learning, and application; and school-based solving of authentic and immediate problems (Blankstein et al., 2007; Drago-Severson, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Participants connected their perceptions of rounds with the aforementioned characteristics of effective adult learning, most notably connecting adult learning stemming from rounds to changed instructional practice and school-based solving of authentic problems. Participants described the opportunities for adult learning as prologs to observe instruction and debrief with colleagues regarding the observation, studying discourse,

academic vocabulary and writing, and attending professional development sessions provided by the district. Participants described changes in student behavior with increased discourse observed in classrooms, and they described increased standardized test scores in writing. Participants also described rounds as adult learning, for both network participants and campus teachers receiving feedback from rounds.

Increased Capacity

Organizational capacity is the collective ability of the organization to improve achievement; teacher capacity is the ability to deliver effective instruction (Drago-Severson, 2009). Perceptions of the participants revealed participants do believe rounds impacts the capacity of both the organization and the individuals. TL4 mentioned, “Learning from rounds gives the staff an insight into what students are doing across the campus. This information can help guide and adjust teaching moves and curriculum adjustments.” Seven participants mentioned the impact on the organizational capacity of the campus. Because of the adoption of school-wide practices and expectations based on rounds, the participants believe that rounds has a high effect on building capacity. T11 teaches in the primary grades, and she stated,

We make them answer in complete sentences; previous to rounds, I wouldn't have given it as much consideration. Being more verbal helps translate into their writing, and I wouldn't have given as much thought to that without the problem of practice.

Organizational capacity is built as teachers build their capacity individually and together.

TL5 described her own increased capacity after participating in rounds.

Rounds made me think differently. Every aspect makes me think about my own practice. Being involved in a network, I'm constantly and internally evaluating myself, even though the process is non-evaluative. I ask myself how I could do it differently or

how I could do this in my own classroom. I'm even noticing the small moves that teachers have done, like "Track the speaker" or different management styles.

The principal shared the building capacity has become a process in which the

. . . adults have become very open to feedback because they want to get better. It's fostering a growth mindset. . . We are constantly improving; we want to get better. Visiting each other's classrooms validates the work we are doing. Seeing former students a few grades older gives you a different perspective you can't see when you are in your own classroom.

Perceptions shared by teachers, teacher leaders, and the principal supported the concept that rounds increases teacher capacity and builds organizational capacity.

Improving the Instructional Core

The instructional core is comprised of the teacher, student, and content with the task at the center of the instructional core. A central tenet of rounds is learning improves when these three components of the instructional core are improved by increasing the teacher's knowledge and skill, changing and improving the student's role in learning, and raising the level and rigor of content. Participants cited their perceptions and experiences of improvement in the instructional core as improvement in the verbal discourse of students as teachers learned about talk moves and set common expectations for students (TL4, TL5, TL6, T7, T9, T10, T11, T12, P1), and changes in their own classrooms and classrooms of others they have observed (TL4, TL5, TL6, T7, T9, T10, T11, T12, P1). During the focus group, teachers shared,

T12: That's my big takeaway . . . we did this . . . kids explaining their thinking in math. I remember when we started that they [the students] were reticent to speak, to share, to communicate about math. Somewhere after that, we developed this conversation . . . now it's tweaking . . . refined to building deeper oral language. Now, I never have to teach my students how to have a conversation when they walk into a fifth grade classroom.

T10: Yes, they know talk moves, foundational talk moves; we may add more. They know how to speak in a complete sentence; they know what a Mustang Must Have is . . .

T12: Yes, it's very obvious when a student has come from out of district and they don't know how to explain their thinking in mathematics . . .

T9 Yes, they [students moving in from out of district] speak in one word answers.

Participants shared the student role in the instructional core has been impacted by the increased level of discourse and the raised expectation of student engagement in academic talk in the classroom due to the school-wide expectations of "Speak Like a Mighty Mustang" and "Mustang Must Haves" in writing. The teachers' knowledge and skills has been improved through rounds and the focus on building collective capacity around literacy: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The content has been changed as both district and campus curriculum writers learn through rounds and as teachers realize a need to change the level of content in the classroom. DL2 reflected,

Sheer fact that we are focused on all four aspects of the core [teacher, student, content, task] is the biggest benefit. Unless we're making changes to all four, then change is not really happening. The district's work on curriculum, including the content and the task, teacher training, student motivation through engaging, thought-provoking work are all beneficial in moving the work forward.

Participants remarked on changes in their own practices and observations of changed practice in other colleagues. Additionally, learning about the instructional core has changed practice with regard to planning. TL6 stated she considers the instructional core during planning by reviewing her lesson through the lens of the core to think about her knowledge and skill as the teacher in selecting strategy, considering the level and rigor of the task, and considering the students' role with the content. She believes "if one piece [of the instructional core] is missing, nothing is going to work." P2 shared, with regard to the instructional core:

For so long, we saw those things as separate. . . . we spent time working on content and curriculum but little to no thinking about the teacher and developing that part or thinking how we impact the student but not realizing that they are all interrelated. When you impact one, you impact all three, and you have to spend equal time on all three.

Participant perceptions are that rounds allows for opportunities for adult learning; through adult learning, teacher capacity is increased. Through increased teacher capacity, organizational capacity is built. Increased organizational capacity allows for improvement in the instructional core.

Summarization of Research Question 1

Perceptions of participants related to rounds as a systemic improvement practice overall indicate participants believe fiscal, physical, and relational resources are important to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with leadership as a key element required for sustainability. While participants provided suggestions for improvements for rounds, they indicated a belief that it is an effective practice because it is collaborative and leads to deprivatization of practice. Salient characteristics that set rounds apart from other improvement initiatives included the collaborative nature of rounds and the deprivatization of practice. All participants expressed, with varying degree, the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core.

I entered the transcripts from the interviews into Atlas.TI. I used the word cloud generator to create Figure 16. All transcripts were included in generating the word cloud. In a word cloud, the frequency of word use determines the size of font of the word with greater frequency represented by the largest font. The frequency of which the words learning,

teacher(s), practice, student(s), principal, leadership, instructional, feedback, values, writing, and district were used responds to RQ1 and is aligned to the perceptions of the participants.



Figure 16. Word cloud, Rancho Vista Elementary, RVIDS.

RQ2: Alignment of Perceptions with Practice and Documents

The second research question I addressed was: How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents? To respond to RQ2, I attended a rounds network visit at Rancho Vista Elementary as a participant observer and reviewed all relevant documents related to rounds from both Rancho Vista Elementary and RVIDS. This section includes four areas: the observation of the rounds network visit, the report of the alignment findings, the report of the alignment based on documents, and the conclusion. Figure 17 shows the organization related to RQ2.

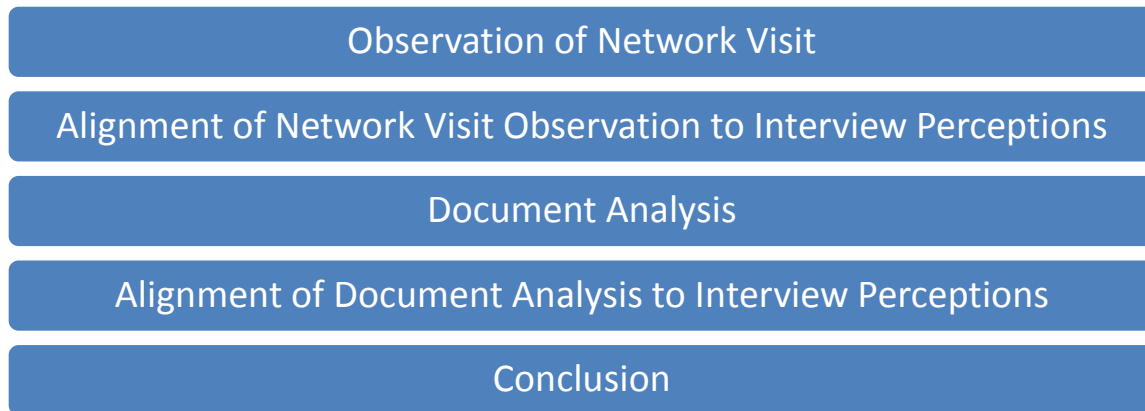


Figure 17. Organization of findings responding to RQ2, Rancho Vista Elementary, RVISD.

Observation of the Rounds Network Visit

The observation of the rounds network visit was scheduled in order to determine if participant perceptions expressed in interviews were aligned with observation of the network in practice. The observation of the network included learning time in which the network members were assembled for learning prior to dispersing for classroom observation, classroom observation, analysis of classroom observation, and debrief of the observation.

Learning Time

The rounds network at Rancho Vista Elementary was comprised of four elementary schools with the principal and teachers attending from each school. Also included in the network were a campus librarian, instructional coaches for mathematics and literacy, instructional technology specialists, campus counselor, advanced academics specialist, science specialist, and the elementary language arts director. The 30 participants were seated in six teams of five, and each team was comprised of people from different campuses and departments. DL2 explained the network was in its second year of meeting, so the overview of the process would be brief as there were few new members to the network.

DL2 placed an illustration of the instructional core on the screen for the network to view; the participants discussed the importance of the instructional core, highlighting that all three areas of the instructional core are important. DL2 reviewed the goals of rounds in RVISD:

1. to improve student achievement,
2. to deepen understanding of the instructional core,
3. to have clarity around the district's language of instruction and its impact on improving student achievement at scale, and
4. to foster a culture where classroom instruction drives dialogue and serves as a catalyst for improvement.

DL2 then reviewed norms for the rounds network:

1. Bring a growth mindset to each rounds visit,
2. Turn off all personal technology during rounds visit,
3. Honor RVISD culture and our risk takers by maintaining confidentiality.

After introductions and expectations, DL2 shifted the focus of the rounds network time to learning related to the district problem of practice. Following the learning time, DL2 provided an overview of the rounds process. She reminded network members that their first task during observation is to collect descriptive evidence, as “descriptive and fine-grained as possible.” DL2 reminded participants to stay focused on the essential questions of the campus as they observed and scripted. DL2 reminded the participants that judgment is forbidden as part of rounds, and they were to eliminate judgmental language from their vocabulary for the day. DL2 shared the network members may make *other observations* or “OOs” that are not directly related to the essential questions but that may influence the problem of practice. She

encouraged the teams to reflect on any OOs at the end of the debrief. DL2 introduced the campus principal, P2.

P2 reviewed the history of rounds at Rancho Vista Elementary so all participants would understand the problem of practice and the current state of the campus. P2 reviewed the demographic data of the campus, as well as the special programs contained at the campus.

P2 shared the rounds journey for Rancho Vista Elementary began in 2011 with the reading of *Rounds in Education* as the campus summer reading (City et al., 2009). The campus leaders decided to pursue a problem of practice related to student discourse, asking essential questions about who was talking, what were they saying, and how were they using content vocabulary. Over time, the campus refined the problem of practice and generated strategies to impact student learning of vocabulary and common expectations for speaking and writing.

Details are in Appendix H.

P2 responded to questions from network participants and explained how the campus wished for the network participants to collect data using an artifact template. P2 requested the teams script as much detailed evidence as possible and take pictures of writing samples for further study. P2 reviewed a few logistics, and DL2 asked teams to prepare for classroom observation.

Classroom Observation

Each rounds network team observed four classrooms for a period of 20 minutes each. Two teams observed each classroom, so each of the 12 classrooms was observed for a total of 40 minutes. In RVISD, the principal and the facilitator visit each of the classrooms for approximately 10 minutes so they can observe in most of the classrooms. I was invited to

observe classrooms with the principal and facilitator. The superintendent arrived during observations and joined us as we observed in classrooms. Following the observation period, the teams returned to the library to analyze the data collected during observation. The superintendent observed the analysis for a brief time before leaving the campus. DL2 and P2 sat together during the analysis time and discussed the coaching moves P2 may consider for each of the classrooms observed.

Analysis of classroom observation began with a silent period during which team members studied their notes, reflected on the essential questions, and reviewed evidence responsive to the problem of practice. The network participants were considerate of the norms established by RVISD.

Analysis of Classroom Observation

In arriving back in the library to begin analysis of the classroom observation notes, I observed team members had multiple pages of notes and scripts from observing in the classrooms. The atmosphere of the room upon returning to begin analysis was one of professionalism, collegiality, and urgency. The rounds network members appeared to understand the task to study and analyze the classroom data was important and serious.

Conversations analyzing the data from each classroom in relation to the problem of practice and the essential questions continued through the lunch hour. As teams continued analysis, they began to create artifacts to share during the debrief process.

Debrief of Classroom Observation

During the debrief, DL2 asked the teams that viewed like classrooms to combine and share their learning. During this process, the first group to observe in a classroom might

understand additional information about what happened after they exited, and the second team to enter may understand more about the events that occurred before they entered. DL2 then asked the entire group to reconfigure the furniture into a new arrangement. DL2 formed new debriefing teams of participants comprised of one member from each of the six rounds network teams. DL2 explained the participants would spend about 30 minutes proceeding through a gallery walk of the artifacts. The teams gathered in front of their respective artifact and the participant who was on the observation team for the particular artifact explained the poster and answered questions of the team. An example of the gallery walk conversation was:

TM1: Were they speaking in complete thoughts?

TM2: Yes, we took that into account; did we hear complete sentences? Did we hear justification? Here (reading from post-it note) "I take 7 from 27 and 1 from 31"—this is a good example of what we saw.

TM2: We've seen writing in complete sentences; this class did not write because of the activity they were doing, but we took pictures in that classroom. In fifth grade science, they were looking at structural adaptations and the vocabulary was posted. Then, in informal conversation, students were using the posted vocabulary.

TM2: Next, we were in a first grade bilingual classroom; only two of us could script everything. They were doing independent reading when we went in; we asked some questions in English and the students could verbalize and justify in English as well as Spanish.

TM3: We found it interesting that the sentence stem was posted, but three of four classrooms had writing . . . there was a lot of student discourse; we did observe OOs. Three of four classrooms had flexible seating.

This cycle repeated until all teams had visited each poster to review the data. Then, DL2 requested all participants sit in the circle to continue the debrief.

During the debrief, DL2 led the participants in a conversation about what they had observed and what patterns they noticed from the gallery walk review of charts. After

considering patterns observed across the campus, DL2 asked the network to share predictions across the school responding to the question, “If I were a student in this school and did exactly as the teacher asked, what would I know and be able to do?” The rounds network responded with predictions that Rancho Vista Mustangs would be able to provide justification with teacher guidance, use talk moves to engage in discourse, have access to academic vocabulary posted in the classroom, and be engaged in academic conversation.

Following predictions, DL2 asked the participants to share ideas for next level of work for Rancho Vista Elementary to consider. Next level of work suggestions provided by the rounds network team included ideas to continue work related to vocabulary development and extending verbal discourse and thinking work for students. DL2 reminded the network that the campus would consider all of these suggestions as next levels of work and determine their next steps.

DL2 invited P2 and the rounds leadership team from Rancho Vista Elementary to share closing thoughts. The principal observed the struggles of the rounds network team mirrored the challenges of the campus as they analyze instruction and determine next steps to improve literacy. To conclude the day, DL2 invited each member in the circle to share a reflection of how they would use their learning from the day when they returned to their home campus on the following day.

Alignment of Observation with Participant Perceptions

Supportive Conditions

In participant interviews, supportive conditions, including relational, fiscal, and physical were included in the participant perceptions of conditions required for the sustainability of

rounds.

Relational Conditions

The participants verbalized relational conditions of trust and leadership as critical factors in the interviews. During observation of the rounds network, the norms were established at the beginning of the day and members of the network adhered to the norms: showing respect for confidentiality, use of nonjudgmental language, and use of non-evaluative language. There appeared to be a high degree of trust between participants during the analysis of observation, and adherence to the norms was observed. When members did slip in use of judgmental or evaluative language, other team members or DL2 reminded participants of the norms.

Leadership was another factor discussed in the interviews as a requirement for successful sustainability. DL2, the campus principal, and the Superintendent of Schools were all in attendance at the rounds for all or part of the day. DL2 and P2 reinforced the purpose of rounds and used common language in encouraging the academic work of the network participants. The presence of the Superintendent of Schools was a tangible display of the value that leadership in RVISD places on rounds. In the interviews, P2 and DL2 remarked the superintendent's presence sent a message about the value of rounds.

Fiscal Conditions

Participants remarked the financial support of the district is a critical factor necessary to procure substitutes, provide for facilitation of rounds, and provide for future leadership training. During the network visit observation, three teachers from each of four campuses were present. Substitutes or other support to provide class coverage was in place to allow the

teachers release time from teaching in order to participate in the rounds. No discussion regarding substitutes or concerns regarding financial commitment to maintain the process emerged during the network observation.

DL2 was present to facilitate the rounds for Rancho Vista Elementary. DL2 serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Schools and facilitates three of the district's seven rounds networks. This was not discussed at the rounds network, but her presence demonstrated a financial commitment on the part of RVISD.

Physical Conditions

In interviews, participants expressed the importance of the physical conditions needed for rounds with regard to meeting space, as well as logistics and scheduling. In the network visit, meeting space was dedicated for the full day. A schedule was available to all participants. Pre-work was completed by P2 to create the schedule, provide maps, and organize with teachers to arrange for the logistics of the event. Alignment between the participant interviews and the role of physical resources was clear.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Rounds

While participants, when interviewed, provided suggestions for improvements for rounds, they indicated a belief that it is an effective practice because it controls initiative fatigue and establishing shared vision and values. During observation of the rounds network, the shared vision and values of the campus were evident. The description of the campus process from 2011 to 2017 leading from a problem to practice to uniform campus expectations aligned with the descriptions of the same events shared from multiple participants during the interviews. In walking classrooms and halls, evidence of the shared vision and expectations was

plentiful, from posters in the hallways to bulletin boards in classrooms. Evidence of the shared vision and expectations was also observed in classroom instruction. Tight alignment existed between the perception of shared vision and values in interviews and observation.

The reduction of initiative fatigue was also discussed as a positive effect of rounds, contributing to its success as an improvement practice. While initiative fatigue was not discussed directly during the observation, the principal did share the rounds journey of the campus. In her detailed review of the process of the campus from 2011 to 2017, it was evident the campus had remained focused on the practice of rounds and adhered to the practice as a system to drive continuous improvement. The principal shared each step of the campus journey; it was clear the campus had stayed focused on one improvement practice rather than jumping from initiative to initiative.

Salient Characteristics that Set Rounds Apart

Evidence from the observation supports participant perceptions that collaboration and deprivatization of practice are salient features of rounds that distinguishes it from other improvement practices. The observation of rounds indicated it is a collaborative process; it is the intersection of classroom observation, a professional learning community, and systems thinking (J. Roberts, 2012). During the observation of the rounds network, the collaborative nature of the process was evident. During the first 90 minutes, there was a learning time for the 30 network members that continued on-going district work. The learning time directly related to classroom instruction as the team learned, discussed, and practiced a classroom strategy concomitant to the district problem of practice. The teams of five observed instruction in four classrooms, and took notes independently about what they observed in the classroom.

They returned to the meeting site to discuss and analyze what was observed in the classroom instruction. Following observation, 25 minutes was set aside to review notes individually and organize evidence responsive to the problem of practice and essential questions. The independent classroom observation and 25 minutes of individual organization time was the only time the team member was not collaborating with others; however, the independent observation and organization time was provided to prepare for collaborative learning. Teams shared dialogue about what they observed in classroom. Some teams had disagreements about the observation. This collaborative dialogue helped to refine understanding and build common vocabulary.

The ongoing nature of the rounds network and the continuing work on the campus based on feedback from the network visit supports the perceptions shared in the interview. Furthermore, Rancho Vista Elementary will host internal rounds with their own staff two or three times during the year. Multiple participants referenced internal rounds in the interviews. The internal rounds are another mechanism which supports the ongoing, collaborative nature of rounds.

Deprivatization of practice was evident in the individual rounds network visit. Observation teams were comprised of principals, librarians, counselors, teachers, instructional coaches, instructional specialists, and content directors. The teams observed instruction and then engaged in dialogue regarding the observation. The participation of multiple roles from the district and the time spent learning in actual classrooms is the essence of deprivatization of practice. Collaboration and deprivatization were characteristics described in the interviews that led participants to have the perception that rounds is an appropriate and/or effective

practice for improvement. Evidence from observation aligned with perceptions uncovered during interviews.

Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

All participants expressed the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core. The reflection at the conclusion of the debrief, in which network members verbally committed to work they would take back to their respective campuses, was evidence of the learning and potential capacity building that occurred during the network visit. Observation of the rounds network revealed the opportunity to build organizational and individual capacity was present; however, observation did not reveal whether or not capacity was increased due to the rounds network I observed. To determine if capacity was increased from learning at the rounds, further research may include observing classrooms of teacher participants in the rounds network to understand practices better that are improved as a result of learning from rounds. Further study may also include researching school-wide planning and PLC work resulting from the rounds network. Did campus leaders and teacher leaders depart from Rancho Vista Elementary and put new learning into practice to strengthen organizational capacity? Observation of the network visit revealed the charge from district leadership to campus leadership to embed the work of the network back at their campus; however, without further study, the actual implementation is unknown.

In interviews, participants at Rancho Vista Elementary did reveal they believed their practice changed based on their learning from rounds with regard to expectations for writing and student discourse. In interviews, participants perceived rounds as an effective practice, with varying degrees of effectiveness, in building capacity to impact instructional core.

Observation supports that the opportunity to build organizational capacity was present; however, further research is needed to determine the full effect of the rounds network on organizational capacity.

Analysis of Network Visit Documents

I asked the assistant superintendent of RVISD and the principal of Rancho Vista Elementary to share with me any documents that may be relevant to rounds in the district and at the campus. I received the following documents related to expectations and norms, problem of practice, management of the network visit, and adult learning:

- RVISD rounds process norms
- RVISD Problem of Practice and Theory of Change
- *RVISD's Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD* booklet
- Rancho Vista Elementary's Essential Question
- RVISD Rounds learning materials for network visit at Rancho Vista Elementary
- Schedule for rounds site visits
- A blank rounds debrief form for RVISD
- A blank template of data collection charts to be used at Rancho Vista Elementary
- A schedule for rounds at Rancho Vista Elementary

Additionally, I located the District Improvement Plan 2016-17 and the Campus Improvement Plan 2016-17 at the district and campus websites. The improvement plans are required by state education code and district policy.

Expectations and Norms

Interview and focus group participants expressed the belief that trust was an important

relational condition for the sustainability of rounds. I reviewed two documents related to the expectations and norms of the rounds process in RVISD and Rancho Vista Elementary: RVISD rounds process norms and *RVISD Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD* booklet.

The RVISD rounds process norms were available for all participants on the day of the rounds network visit. Rounds process norms include the following:

1. Observers will stand and may walk around the classroom or sit if a seat is available to observe the 20 minute session.
2. Teacher will continue class as if observers are invisible. Teacher will not interact with observers.
3. Observers will script descriptive notes during the observation.
4. Observers will look for evidence around the problem of practice and essential questions.
5. Observers may talk to students, but not during direct instruction.
6. Observers will return to the debriefing room before processing.

Team members adhered to the observation norms, coupled with the norms reviewed during the learning time with regard to confidentiality and use of non-evaluative language, during the network visit.

Also available to participants at the network visit and distributed to each teacher in the district was a booklet titled *The Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD*. The booklet is a collection of resources related to the instructional philosophy of RVISD, as well as specific resources for planning and instructional strategies. In the section of the booklet devoted to rounds, the instructional core is described along with the seven principles of the instructional core. The four components of the rounds site visit are described: problem of practice, observation, observation debrief, and next level of work. The booklet states, “Because rounds

is a growth improvement strategy, evaluative language is not used. One of the norms in the process is no evaluation or judgement.”

These two documents reinforce the processes and expectations for staff to adhere to during rounds network visit. Coupled with the verbal reinforcement of norms during the learning time of the network visit, the documents state the important factors required to build trust and confidence in the practice.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice was listed as a part of two documents: Rancho Vista Elementary School rounds schedule and the booklet, *The Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD*. The problem of practice in RVISD is “Students struggle with developing reading, writing, and thinking skills that enable them to perform at or above grade level in all content areas.” The theory of action is “If we consistently develop literacy (listening, speaking, reading, & writing) and thinking skills of students in all content areas and provide frequent, meaningful feedback on those skills, then student achievement will increase.” Additionally, Rancho Vista Elementary framed three essential questions to guide the observation during the rounds network visit:

1. What content vocabulary (Tier 3) is posted (within or next to the Learning Target) and to what extent are students using this vocabulary?
2. Are the students speaking in complete thoughts or complete thoughts with details, evidence, and/or justification?
3. Are the students writing in complete thoughts with details, evidence, and/or justification?

The documents are all in alignment with regard to the problem of practice and the focus on literacy. In interviews, the perception of the participants related to the problem of practice is that the campus is focused on discourse, vocabulary, and literacy. P2 and DL2, teachers, and

teacher leaders made connections in interviews to the problem of practice as it relates to the ongoing strategic work to address the problem of practice at both the campus and district. Evidence exists to support the alignment between the problem of practice articulated in documents and participant understanding of the problem of practice as revealed in interviews.

Management of the Rounds Network Visit

Three documents were provided to support management of the rounds network visit: rounds site visit schedule, Rancho Vista Elementary School rounds schedule, and a map of Rancho Vista Elementary. The detailed schedule provided for elementary site visits described the day for participants on the network visit. From arrival breakfast, the team moved to learning time for the network, learning about the school's journey, and team planning for classroom observation. Then, the schedule describes classroom observation, individual thinking and organizing time, analysis time, lunch, continued analysis, artifact creation, completion of analysis form, generation of next levels of work, network debrief, reflection, and host school commentary. In observation of the rounds network, the detailed schedule functioned as a sort of checklist as the six teams worked independently with guidance from the facilitator. The schedule assisted teams and the facilitator in staying on target with regard to time and content. Observation reveals adherence to the schedule and the agenda items listed within the schedule. Participant interviews and focus groups referenced the artifacts, steps from the next levels of work, and the classroom observation. In participant interviews, effective facilitation and scheduling were perceived as conditions required for sustainability of rounds. This perception aligns with observation and document analysis.

In addition to the schedule, there was a map provided of Rancho Vista Elementary. The participants suggested a supportive condition required for rounds is a location for meeting and a schedule. Observation of the rounds network provided evidence of both a meeting space (the library), and the documents support the logistic plan for the network visit. The perceptions expressed in the interview regarding logistics, scheduling, and meeting space are supportive conditions required for sustainability as they impact other supportive relational conditions. Alignment emerged from the interviews, observation, and documents.

Documents to Support Adult Learning

In addition to the district and campus improvement plans, four documents were shared with me regarding adult learning connected to the rounds network visit at Rancho Vista Elementary: pre-reading regarding a strategy, *The Art of the Sentence*; rounds debrief form; *RVISD's Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD* booklet, and a blank template of data collection charts to be used at Rancho Vista Elementary. Perceptions emerged during the interviews that rounds increased adult learning and thereby impacted both teacher and organizational capacity to improve the instructional core. Documents shared during the network visit align with the perceptions that were uncovered during interviews.

The content of the article aligned with the supporting work to improve student learning with regard to the district problem of practice, and the article aligned participant perceptions of improving literacy. The strategy was practiced by the rounds network members during learning time and DL2 encouraged continued study and use of the article and strategy upon return to home campuses. RVISD's focus on adult learning was revealed through interviews, observation, and document analysis.

District Plan

In addition to documents given to me related to rounds, I also located a copy of the district improvement plan (DIP) for RVISD and *The Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD* booklet. The DIP for RVISD is a four-year plan, spanning 2016-2020 with a vision, mission, goal, and four guiding objectives. The district has one goal: high achievement for each student. The goal is supported by four guiding objectives:

1. Continuously improve student learning
2. Continuously improve the learning environment
3. Continuously improve operational effectiveness
4. Continuously improve community support

The first page of the DIP is an executive summary that provides context for the goal and the four objectives. The first objective, continuously improve student learning, is defined by the improvement of the instructional core. The plan states,

The instructional core is composed of the teacher and student in the presence of content. The relationship between the teacher, student, and content determines the nature of instructional practice. The only way to improve instruction is by increasing the level of knowledge and skill the teacher brings to instruction, change the role of the student in instruction, and to increase the level and complexity of content. How do we improve student learning? Improve knowledge and skills of teachers and staff; Improve student engagement with content; Improve level and rigor of content (City et al., 2009).

The DIP outlines three years of strategies related to rounds under the broader category of Improving Literacy and Driven by Data. Table 1 is a listing of the strategies excerpted from the RVISD DIP.

Table 1

Strategies Related to Rounds from RVISD District Improvement Plan

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Develop a district-wide problem of practice to improve student literacy through rounds	Refine district problem of practice to improve literacy through rounds	Continue rounds focus on literacy
	Determine district-wide data to inform rounds work on literacy	
Study data and strategies at each rounds network visit to build understanding of current state of literacy and improvement strategies	Study data and strategies at each rounds network visit to build understanding of current state of literacy and improvement strategies	Study data and strategies at each rounds network visit to build understanding of current state of literacy and improvement strategies
Conduct rounds network visits to observe and collect data on campus instruction	Conduct rounds network visits to observe and collect data on campus instruction	Conduct rounds network visits to observe and collect data on campus instruction
Use observation data to guide instructional and professional development decisions	Use observation data to guide instructional and professional development decisions	Use observation data to guide instructional and professional development decisions

Additionally, RVISD produces a booklet, *The Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD*. All professional staff receives an updated copy of this booklet every other year, and all new hires to the district receive a copy during the induction training. *The Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD* contains four pages dedicated to rounds. The instructional core and seven principles of the instructional core are defined; the process for rounds is defined, and the problem of

practice for the district is listed. Additionally, the expectations for campuses with regard to momentum plans for continued progress with rounds work is listed.

All interview and focus group participants expressed the perception that rounds work would continue in RVISD should the financial condition of the district be able to support the costs of the practice; this perception aligns with the references to rounds contained within the DIP and *The Essentials: High Achievement in RVISD*. Observation data and documents from the campus are aligned with the references to rounds and problem of practice contained within the DIP and the booklet; perceptions from employees align with the content of the DIP with regard to the focus on improving literacy.

Campus Plan

In addition to the district plan, I also analyzed the campus improvement plan (CIP) for Rancho Vista Elementary. In the CIP, information related to the district goal and four guiding objectives is replicated. The focus on the instructional core is repeated from the DIP to the CIP. The CIP outlines a three-year strategy for rounds under the subheading of improving teachers' knowledge and skills. In Year 1, the CIP states the campus will "Implement district-wide problem of practice. Develop campus focus through essential questions. Use the collected evidence/data to guide our next steps." In Years 2 and 3, the CIP states the campus will "Implement district-wide problem of practice. Adjust essential questions based on previous year's data. New staff members will be trained in the process and participate on the team."

Perceptions from the interview align with the strategies listed in the CIP. Teacher leaders and the focus group, as well as the principal, referenced adopting the district-wide

problem of practice and revising the essential questions, as well as using data from rounds to guide next steps. The CIP was not referenced by any participants in the study.

Conclusion

I studied Rancho Vista Elementary in RVISD seeking to understand the perception of participants with regard to

- The supportive conditions required for the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice
- The effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice
- The salient characteristics that distinguish rounds from other improvement practices
- Whether rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core

Furthermore, I observed a rounds network visit and reviewed documents related to rounds to understand if perceptions of participants aligned with observation and documents.

Participants expressed perceptions that supportive conditions and leadership are important to continue rounds as a systemic improvement practice. Participants offered suggestions for improvement of the practice of rounds, and they indicated its effectiveness is due to the collaborative nature of rounds, the building of shared vision and values, and the deprivatization of the classroom that emerges from the practice. All participants expressed the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core.

Observation of the rounds network and analysis of documents from both RVISD and Rancho Vista Elementary related to rounds largely align with participant perceptions regarding supportive conditions required for sustainability, the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice due to its focus on collaboration, the salient characteristics

of collaboration and deprivatization, and the possibility of building both teacher and organizational capacity through rounds. While there were some areas in which the perceptions of participants were not evident when compared to observation and document analysis, there was a great degree of alignment between perceptions of participants and what was revealed in observation and document analysis with regard to the research questions at Rancho Vista Elementary in RVISD.

CHAPTER 6

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: SOUTHERN PINES MIDDLE SCHOOL IN SOUTHERN PINES ISD

The purpose of the study was to determine what supportive conditions are required for sustainability of instructional rounds (rounds) as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement. In this study, I investigated the perceptions of rounds from four distinct groups of participants: district instructional leaders, principals, classroom teachers who participate in rounds network visits, and classroom teachers who may be observed in rounds network visits but do not directly participate. I also observed rounds network visits and reviewed district and campus documents to better understand perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice, effectiveness and appropriateness of rounds, and what conditions may be required for sustainability of rounds as an improvement system for school districts. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?
2. How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents?

In this qualitative study, data were collected through interviews, focus groups, participant observation, and document review. Central office leaders, principals, and teacher

leaders were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Focus groups of teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviews were designed to gather information about the participant's perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice in an effort to answer Research Question 1. I observed a rounds network visit at a campus representing each of the three districts in the study. I reviewed documents relevant to rounds, as well as the district and campus improvement plans. Network observation and document analysis were used to respond to Research Question 2.

I developed a conceptual framework, as previously shown in Figure 1, from research themes that emerged from a review of literature on rounds and medical rounds, adult learning, and professional learning communities. Interviews and documents were coded using deductive codes derived from the conceptual framework. Disconfirming evidence was also identified and coded. In this chapter, I describe the analysis of the data collected from Case 3: Southern Pines Middle School in Southern Pines ISD (pseudonym assigned to both campus and district).

Background of the District and Campus

Southern Pines Middle School is located in Southern Pines Independent School District (SPISD). SPISD serves approximately 10, 278 students in Central Texas which places the district in the top 50% of school districts in Texas with regard to size of student population (Educational Resource Group, 2017). SPISD experienced a 13.2% growth in enrollment over the past 5 years. SPISD serves over 400 square miles across more than five municipalities. The district is comprised of 4.79% African-American students, 62.83% Hispanic students, 28.96% Caucasian students, .47% Asian students, .03% Pacific Islander students, 2.61% students of two or more races, and .31% Native American students. SPISD is a rural-suburban district in Central Texas;

teacher turnover rate in SPISD is approximately 20% annually, compared to the state average of 16%. While 59% of school children in Texas are economically disadvantaged, 68% of students in SPISD are economically disadvantaged. SPISD's superintendent is in his eighth year of tenure with the district and 36 years of service in Texas public schools. SPISD began work with rounds in 2016-17 with the first network visit at Southern Pines Middle School.

Southern Pines Middle School is comprised of 7.8% African-American students, 48.8% Hispanic students, 38.9% Caucasian students, and 3.3 % students of two or more races.

Southern Pines Middle School has a mobility rate of 15.5% with 59.3% of students defined as at-risk. The mobility rate of students at the campus is lower than the district. 56% of Southern Pines Middle School students are economically disadvantaged. The principal of Southern Pines Middle School has served the district and campus for 2 years as principal. The principal participated in rounds in his previous district; Southern Pines Middle School began participation in rounds in 2016-17.

After the observation of the Southern Pines rounds network visit, I interviewed the Chief Academic Officer of Secondary Schools, DL3, who is a key leader in developing and leading the instructional work in secondary schools in SPISD. I also interviewed the principal, P3, and teacher leaders (TL7 and TL8) on the rounds team, and I conducted a focus group of teachers (T13, T14, T15, T16, T17, T18, T19, and T20) at Southern Pines Middle School. Additional teacher leaders were attending a conference on the day that I scheduled interviews. I invited the teacher leaders to participate in an interview at another time; the teacher leaders did not respond to my inquiry. The purpose of these interviews was to answer Research Question 1:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:

- a. The supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice
- b. Its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice
- c. The salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices)
- d. Whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core

In this chapter, I report findings from interviews and focus groups related to each part of RQ1. Further, as related to RQ2, I will review how the perceptions of participants are aligned to practice and documents related to rounds. Figure 18 provides an overview of the organization of the chapter.

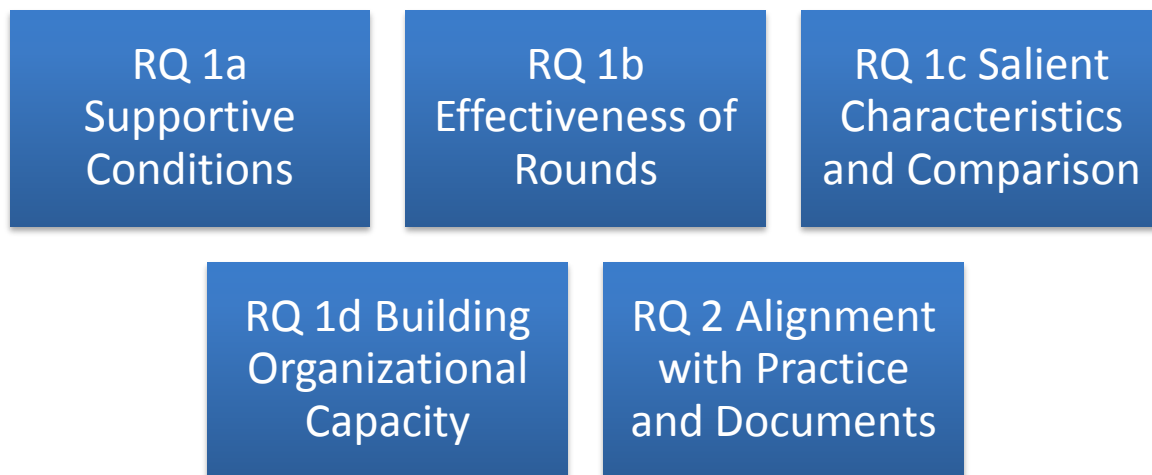


Figure 18. Organization of Chapter 6.

RQ1a: Perceptions of the Supportive Conditions Required for Sustainability of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

Considering the perceptions of the district personnel, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers who are observed, multiple supportive conditions emerged as important to the sustainability of rounds with regard to themes of relational resources, fiscal resources, and

physical resources. Critical factors for success emerged to support the themes of relational resources, fiscal resources, and physical resources. Figure 19 provides the organization of the perceptions, themes, and critical factors.

All participants were asked the question, “What supportive conditions are required in order to sustain rounds in your district?” with variances in the probing questions that followed based on the role of the participant in the organization. Participants referenced supportive conditions, including relational, fiscal, and physical resources, 37 times in the interviews and focus groups. Figure 20 summarizes the findings related supportive conditions.

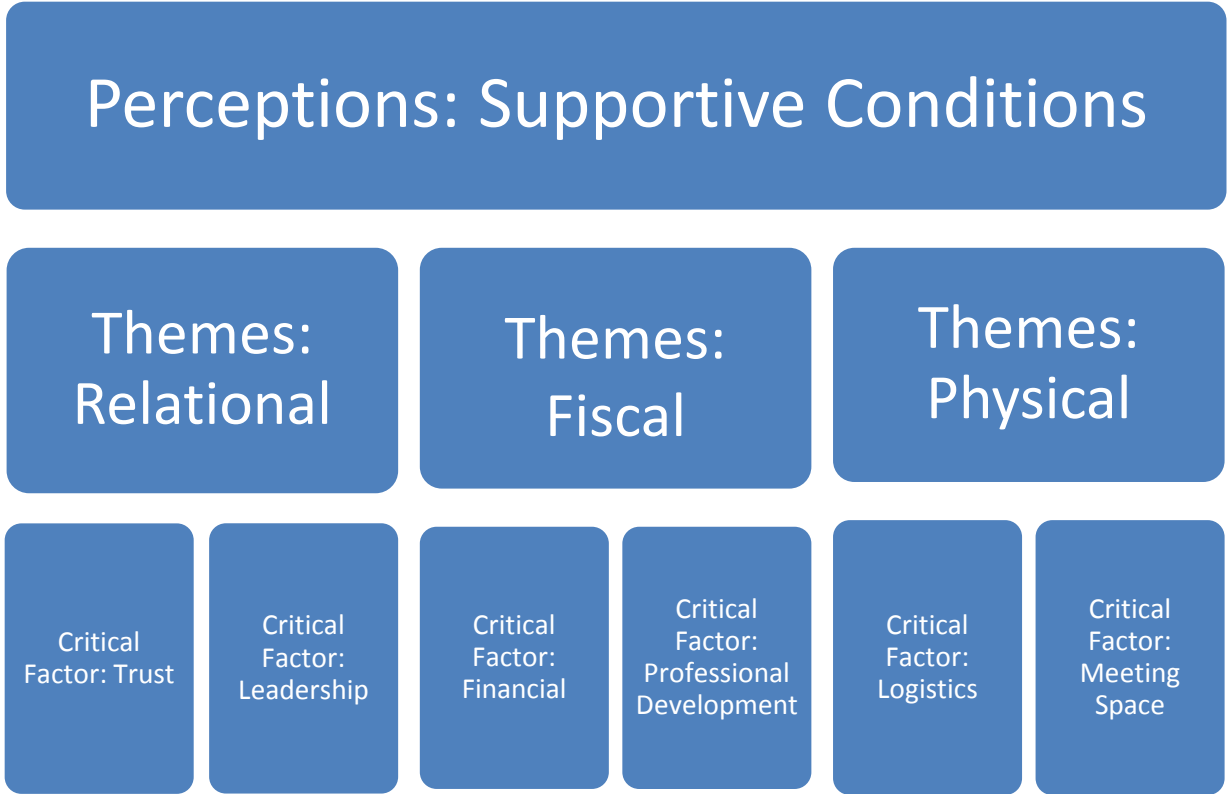


Figure 19. Findings related to RQ1a with regard to perceptions, themes, and critical factors in Chapter 6.

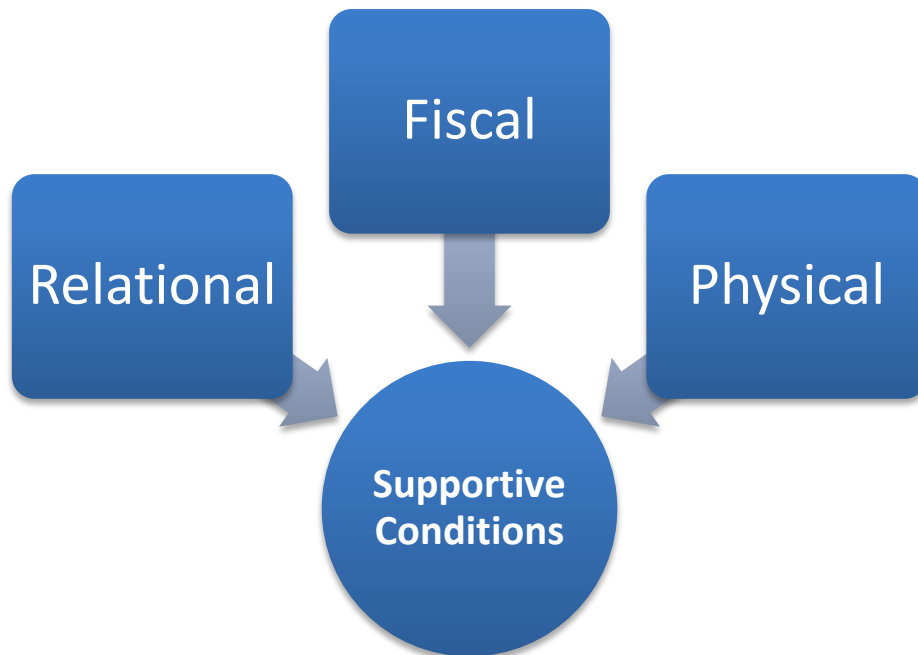


Figure 20. Supportive conditions in Southern Pines Middle School, Southern Pines ISD.

Relational Conditions

Relational conditions emerged as one critical factor of the supportive conditions required for the implementation of rounds. Of the 37 perceptions related to supportive conditions, 22 references were related to relational conditions, including the role of trust. Leadership was referenced 34 times in the interviews. With regard to trust, the absence of judgment, role of communication, and campus culture were uncovered as important elements. Leadership also emerged as a critical factor, particularly sustainability of leadership.

The Role of Trust

Relational conditions emerged as significant to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with 22 of 37 quotations connected to trust and relational capacity. As this was the first year for the district or campus to implement rounds as an improvement practice, building trust as a factor required for sustainability emerged in the interviews of the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. Elements regarding trust included

rounds as a non-evaluative, nonjudgmental process, the inclusion of teachers in the process to build trust with staff, trust built over time as more staff participated in rounds, and trust built over time as teachers and administrators grow in comfort with the practice of rounds.

Administrators and teachers acknowledged this is the beginning of a process. DL3 stated, "Trust and relationship is in its infancy . . . you have early adopters and others who are skeptical." Teachers in the focus group advised continued trust building by including teachers in the process, involving more people in the process, and increasing the frequency of rounds while maintaining the non-evaluative focus. Teachers stated,

T18: Get teacher buy-in, continue to promote trust and it's not evaluative.

T20: Do it often enough so people don't see it as something special, but see it as part of our culture.

T19: More opportunities for people to participate.

P3 emphasized the role of trust connected to the non-evaluative nature of rounds, explaining,

It's non-evaluative. That's really it. That's the key. That's where we run into problems when we make it about the people instead of what's happening. It's about a system-wide problem we are connected around versus this teacher is bad or good . . . the cultural piece . . . willingness for participants and change as a result of what you are seeing. Trust is huge.

Building trust over time through a focus on communication and the non-evaluative nature of rounds emerged as a critical factor under the theme of relational conditions needed to sustain rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

The Role of Leadership

For sustainability of rounds, the role of leadership was a second critical factor that emerged in supportive conditions related to relationships. In the interviews, the participants mentioned leadership 34 times related to supportive conditions required for the sustainability

of rounds from the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. Participants perceive the sustainability of rounds requires district leadership and campus leadership who are committed to remaining at the campus and district in order to sustain the initiative.

Leadership churn was a significant concern discussed by all participants. DL3 stated,

The longest serving principal in our district has 4 years of [principal] experience . . . except the high school has 13 years of experience, but this is his first year here. The last 4 years . . . they don't have the longitudinal perspective. . . . We've had a high turnover in our principals . . . in 3 years, we've had 50% [turnover].

P3 discussed the impact of leadership changes, stating,

Rounds has helped us to grow trust. There's a culture of distrust toward administrators on this campus . . . they went through a lot of them. . . . Principal comes in and spends a year or two, wears people out, get test scores up and moves on to the next promotion . . . things they brought were good and then they move on. . . . That's largely connected to leadership. . . . 80% of leadership positions need to be maintained year to year . . . cannot have the turn and churn we have seen in previous years.

Teachers expressed thoughts related to changing leadership and the critical factor of leadership with regard to sustaining rounds. Teachers in the focus group stated,

T17: Well, and principals too . . . we've had different principals and they have different perspective and principals fly out every 2 years . . . every agenda changes . . . we've had him two years.

T13: Up until [our current principal], in my 11 years, we have had seven principals.

T14: And 2 years isn't long.

T17: Having a principal 100% involved, it makes the staff committed because he is the leader and he's involved . . . how it's facilitated and enforced and commitment from leadership . . . both in-house and above

In Southern Pines ISD and at Southern Pines Middle School, sustainability of leadership appeared to be a concern of participants and a critical factor to implement and sustain an instructional improvement practice, such as rounds.

Fiscal Conditions

In interviews, fiscal conditions emerged as a necessary supportive condition for the implementation of rounds. Financial conditions, including money for substitutes and training, were discussed by participants. The need for training and quality of training was also discussed with regard to funding the quality of training needed. Participants also highlighted the importance of the resource of time as related to rounds networks and training for staff and rounds participants.

Financial Resources for Substitutes

Financial resources were referenced 12 times by participants; comments were connected to substitutes and cost of funding rounds with consideration of substitutes for teachers to be out of classrooms observing, as well as funding for professional development for teachers, rounds participants, and leadership. DL3, P3, TL7, TL8, T13, and T14 noted the importance of funding for substitutes to attend to classes while teachers engage in the network visits. TL7 stated, “Money-wise, it’s going to require more district allocated funds for subs as we are out of class.”

Financial Resources for Professional Development

DL3, P3, and teacher leaders discussed the training for rounds participants and training on rounds for more teachers. P3 also noted funding needed for coaching of principals related to rounds. TL8 shared the district an outside facilitator from Texas ASCD to conduct the initial training for participants, but that there was not yet a plan to continue training of teachers, stating,

That’s our next piece to figure out . . . how teachers are trained. We had three on our rounds team who aren’t trained. P3 did a short informal training with them about how

it was, how to script, and then it was on the job training. . . . it was an eye-opening experience for those who hadn't gone through the three-day training.

This dedication of training to rounds has a fiscal cost, as well as the cost of time.

The rounds network visit was facilitated by the principal, rather than an external facilitator. DL3 commented on facilitation, stating,

P3 was facilitator and it was on his campus . . . I wasn't comfortable to facilitate . . . I haven't been through the process . . . I told him that it was best that you facilitate until I have a deeper understanding . . . we're in the very early stages . . . we're only 5 months in.

DL3 expressed the need for additional professional development for central office and leadership for continued implementation; however, he did not describe costs associated with the ongoing training needs.

Financial resources to provide for ongoing training of leadership, network participants, facilitation costs, and the expense of substitute teachers to allow teachers out of the classroom to participate in rounds network visits is a critical factor for consideration of sustainability of rounds.

Physical Conditions

Physical conditions emerged as a critical factor to be considered for sustainability of rounds. Physical conditions include meeting space and scheduling.

The Role of Logistics and Meeting Space

Determining location and schedule for rounds were critical factors discussed by participants in the case. Logistics were discussed in three instances with regard to scheduling and meeting space.

Meeting space for the rounds networks was expressed as a need by TL7. The network met in the library for the campus visit. TL7 shared,

It would be nice as we sustain to find a different space to use than the library . . . we have literacy push and we need to have kids in the library . . . if we could not shut down the space where kids go to get books.

Scheduling the networks was also discussed by the teacher focus group with the importance of scheduling in advance so teachers plan the calendar to accommodate the rounds visit. A schedule and meeting space for a large group were critical physical factors for the continuation of rounds.

RQ1b: Appropriateness and/or Effectiveness of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

In conducting individual interviews and a focus group in Southern Pines ISD, I sought to understand the participants' perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice as indicated in RQ1b: What are the district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice? DL3, P3, teacher leaders, and teachers all expressed the perception that rounds is an effective systemic improvement practice due to the building of shared values and vision, building collective data, and reducing initiative fatigue. Figure 21 summarizes findings related to RQ1b.

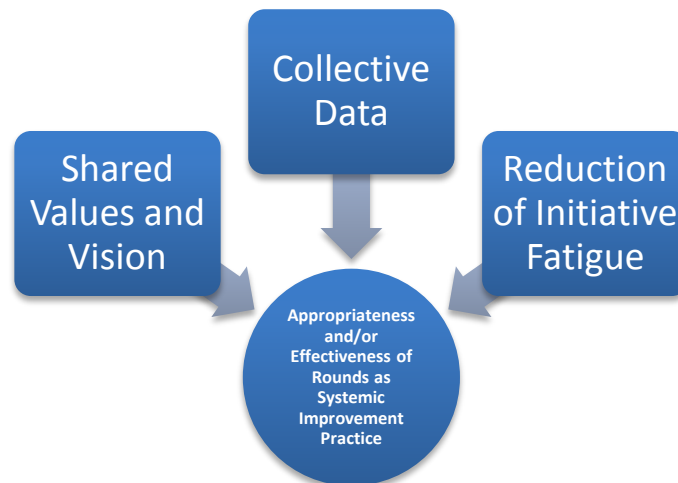


Figure 21. Findings related to appropriateness and/or effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice at Southern Pines Middle School, SPISD.

Shared Values and Vision

Rounds was described by some participants in Southern Pines ISD as a practice that establishes a common vision and focus for instructional improvement and a practice which builds a common vocabulary. Building common vocabulary was mentioned by the district leadership and the principal of Southern Pines Middle School as a benefit of rounds.

Participants described shared values and vision at the campus level with an emphasis on decentralized leadership and campus-based practices.

Shared Values and Vision at the District Level

DL3 explained the district culture in SPISD as “really decentralized.” He stated,

Some initiatives that are district wide . . . these are tried and true . . . then we get this push back. We have to separate “is this a new thing?” and “what is central office doing to us?” Then we move to . . . “oh, I understand what we’re trying to do” . . . we should have been doing this a long time ago We might be behind The superintendent has been stable; the churn is underneath. This is the first year with curriculum specialists at the district level . . . coaches were at campuses and building curriculum at the campus level instead of the district level. We created a silo issue and now we’re moving into a more centralized idea lack of consistency from one building to the next.

Because of the attempted shift from a decentralized culture to more centralized systems, DL3 expressed hope that rounds will “streamline common vocabulary” and allow growth as teachers have more opportunities to view each other’s classrooms. Teacher leaders expressed uncertainty related to the systemic implementation of rounds. TL8 stated she was unsure about the district’s system with regard to rounds,

I don’t know if the district will adopt this problem of practice or a different one . . . I’m not sure if every campus has a different problem of practice, but I don’t know what the district’s view will be. I don’t know how it will all work, but hopefully each school is working to get better in some way.

Teachers also expressed uncertainty about the district’s plan for rounds as they stated,

T18: Is it district wide?

T20: Yeah, we had visitors from SPHS here at our visit.

T18: Teacher buy-in . . .

T20: They better be doing rounds there if we are doing it over here . . . at the West side of the district.

T13 expressed a positive perception regarding initial steps to build shared vision with other campuses from the district:

We are focused on our campus. We haven't done anything outside of our campuses. . . . I think it was good that they brought the high school and intermediate here to our rounds . . . it binds us all . . . those two campuses now have something to go back and look at

.
From deprivatizing practice and sharing in a common experience, district leadership expressed hope that shared values and vision can be built across the district using rounds as a practice to build shared values and vision. However, DL3 articulated a plan had not yet been drafted with regard to rounds at the district level. Perceptions of participants appeared to be hopeful regarding the effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice; however, there was little evidence in place at the district level due to the beginning level of implementation.

Shared Values and Vision at the Campus Level

Campus personnel shared more perceptions related to the appropriateness and effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice at the campus level. P3 participated in rounds in his previous district. He stated,

I had seen previously in rounds and knew the purpose and creating communication between people but I will say as I led it more, I am more convinced of the need and power of it. I was involved in my previous district, but I was just a participant . . . I didn't realize we were forming a common language. Now that I have studied more deeply and

gone through the training with the lens of something I am leading, for me where the value is . . . it's not about changing, it's about making people see each other and creating common language.

DL3, teacher leaders, and teachers also remarked that a shared vision is built through the observation of other teachers. DL3 noted,

When teachers see other teachers teach or present, growth happens, so we have to create more opportunities for that to happen and show where pedagogy is strong and where it is lacking. The only person to hold the knowledge of what classrooms look like is the leadership; teachers haven't been in each other's classrooms.

T17, T20, and TL7 all remarked on the opportunity to visit other classrooms to observe their colleagues teaching. While they did not describe the building of shared language or values, they expressed learning as they observe in each other's classrooms and used common language in their responses related to what they were learning and how they were focused on improving questioning. T15 shared, "It will help us all be on the same page . . . like all our norms and things could be more similar."

Collective Data

P3 and DL3 shared the process that the campus used to determine its problem of practice was a process rooted in student learning data. P3 described a two-day retreat with campus leadership in which the team focused on reviewing data to conduct a needs assessment and deriving the problem of practice from the data. DL3 echoed this process in his interview. Teachers and teacher leaders also discussed the collective nature of the data; data is not provided to or about individual teachers, but rather the data is collected and displayed as collective data representing all classrooms observed.

Teachers discussed the focus on data as an element that they perceive as making rounds an effective improvement practice,

T17: There's no names and no specifics are involved . . . just the straight data.

T13: It is data driven.

T14: We hear the data they collected.

T17: I got no feedback after as an individual teacher.

T14: The idea is big data . . . whole school data. . . .

T13: To me, the beginning step was having people on campus . . . we are the first ones with people on our campus . . . the only way to grow is everyone implementing.

T17: The focus on the data is what will make it effective [later in focus group].

T13: And we back it up with data.

T14: We went to the classroom.

T17: Research, data, reflect.

T13: We've never looked at data before . . . that's the biggest difference.

Teacher leaders also perceived that an effective and appropriate characteristic of rounds was the focus on collective data.

TL8: A big piece is that it is data driven, not evaluative . . . it's a systemic campus wide or district wide . . . a systemic issue and how we are doing that. . . the fact that we aren't presenting teacher results . . . across campus, these are the trends we see. As soon as it's personal, that one person is the only person that thinks about that information . . . everyone has to own a piece of it.

TL7: It helps, I think . . . I have less of a gut reaction or being upset about what's happening and what was observed . . . you can't pick yourself out of the string of data . . . it kind of creates a safety zone for everyone to be willing to learn and be willing to improve. Whereas on walkthroughs, your feelings do get hurt and it's hard to change your practice if it feels like you are attacked . . . these are just numbers, not good or bad . . . here's some things we can do together to improve.

District leadership, the principal, teachers, and teacher leaders remarked on the use of data and the power of collective data, as opposed to individual teacher data, as effective and appropriate elements of rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

Reduction of Initiative Fatigue

Reeves (2010) discusses initiative fatigue and initiative churn in schools as a deterrent to ongoing success of schools as new initiatives arise as a *quick fix* to the problems of the school or district with the outcome that no initiative is deeply implemented. Districts and/or campuses move yearly from one program to the next without arriving at the intended outcome.

Participants in Southern Pines ISD discussed initiative fatigue and leadership churn as two concerns in their district; some participants expressed hope that rounds may help to serve to reduce initiative churn. Since rounds is in initial implementation, the outcome is yet to be determined. Based on past experiences, perceptions of participants may be described as guarded optimism that rounds may reduce initiative churn and fatigue. However, in order for this to happen, leadership stability is a necessary condition.

DL3 expressed concerns about leadership churn, sharing that the longest tenured principal has 4 years of experience in the district. DL3's perception is there exists mobility in leadership and a strong culture of decentralization. P3 echoed this perception, stating:

The campus communicated a clear need to focus on something. We have a lot of initiative fatigue happening across the board. It honestly didn't matter what we picked . . . we just needed to pick something and stick with it for a while.

Teacher leaders echoed the sentiment regarding leadership churn and initiative fatigue, saying,

TL8: It feels to me like it is more purposeful professional development really truly focused on our campus needs and problems and how we address them . . . in the past, I think we just latched on to the shiny new initiative—whatever the sales guy said.

Teachers emphasized the concerns about initiative fatigue and leadership churn in their focus group discussion.

Researcher: What supportive conditions are required to sustain rounds in your district?

T13: That the district doesn't change their mind.

T14: We've band wagoned on some things . . . everything . . . and we do it for 2 years and it's over and just kind of fizzles.

T13: It doesn't stay a top focus from the top down.

T15: That's not a problem just here; we cannot keep a focus in education.

T17: Well, and principals too . . . we've had a different principal and they have different perspectives and principals fly out every 2 years. . . . [later in focus group]

T14: The last thing that the bandwagon did . . . I decided that when it's here for 3 years, then I'll go to the training. . . .

T17: I think this is different . . . it's more informative . . . not just let's start this and see what happens. . . .

T17: This isn't another "try to do this better."

T14: This is making you focus on . . . you can really keep.

T17: This is real feedback.

Participants expressed perceptions that rounds may possibly be an effective systemic improvement practice due to the building of shared values and vision, the use of collective data, and the reduction of initiative fatigue. Participants expressed a belief in the continuation of rounds; however, since rounds was in the initial phase of implementation, participants were cautious in expressing support as they have little evidence of the effectiveness of the practice.

RQ1c: Salient Characteristics of Rounds and Comparison to Other Improvement Practices

To understand the salient characteristics of rounds and to determine what sets rounds apart from other improvement practices, participants were asked to compare rounds to other improvement practices employed in the district. Two salient characteristics emerged to describe rounds in comparison to other improvement practices: focus on problem of practice

and inclusion of all staff. Figure 22 summarizes the findings related to RQ1c: What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices or how it compares to other improvement practices?

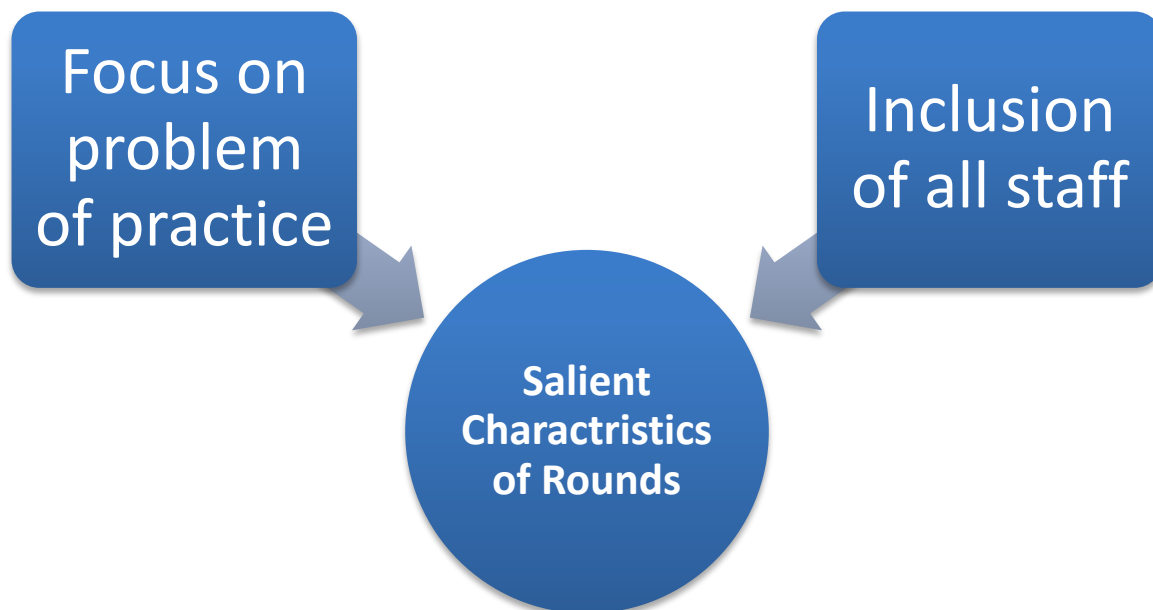


Figure 22. Findings related to salient characteristics of rounds at Southern Pines Middle School, Southern Pines ISD.

Comparison of Rounds to Other Improvement Practices

When asked to compare rounds to other improvement practices implemented in SPISD, staff struggled to answer the question. DL3 stated,

I see them from my level personally as there's three ways we examine pedagogy . . . two are district wide and one is campus based. We examine pedagogy through TTESS and rounds in its infancy and the other is Learning Walks . . . learning walks only exists on 2 or 3 campuses out of 14. This allows us to build systems around improving instruction.

TTESS is the statewide teacher evaluation system. DL3 did not make comparisons between the teacher evaluation system and rounds, aside from indicating rounds is non-evaluative. He described rounds in its infancy and indicated Learning Walks occur at 2 or 3 campuses. P3

struggled to articulate comparisons between rounds and district initiatives, stating, “I can’t tell what the other initiatives are at this point. There are so many floating out there . . . other than rounds, I can’t tell what our big focuses or initiatives are.” P3 described learning walks as a campus-based initiative enacted in the prior year.

That was our first baby steps to where I envisioned rounds could go. The teachers were so nervous about going in classrooms; we had them pick and volunteer. It wasn’t deep or dealing with problems. It was Tier 1 of getting our staff dealing with problems . . . we made it very accessible . . . you can learn about what you want and bright spots . . . just getting in classrooms . . . Just getting our staff used to being in classrooms.

Teachers and teacher leaders expressed similar sentiments when asked to compare rounds to other district-wide practices.

T18: I don’t know how to answer that question.

T19: I don’t know of other initiatives. . . .

T20: Last year, we did learning walks . . . very similar to rounds, but there are differences.

T18: You don’t get feedback with rounds, but you do with Learning Walks.

While the district leader included TTESS in improvement practices, no other participants made this connection. If participants connected rounds to a previous improvement practice at the campus, they made comparisons to Learning Walks, highlighting differences from Learning Walks as salient characteristics of rounds, including a focus on a problem of practice and inclusion of all staff.

Focus on Problem of Practice

Learning walks were described as classroom observations focused on bright spots, classroom management, or instructional strategy; there were as many as five areas of focus discussed. Teachers highlighted a salient characteristic of rounds as focus. All staff were

focused on one problem of practice, rather than multiple focus points for classroom observation. Teachers stated,

T14: Learning walks.

T13: To me when we started learning walks, we picked and chose what we looked at; this is more prescriptive; we are focused on one thing . . .

T15: And we decided as a group.

T13: Yeah, the other stuff, we got to pick . . .

T15: There were five things you could look at.

T17: Well, it's all reflective in the long run . . . let's look and see and learn from it.

The teachers in the focus group discussed perceptions that rounds is more focused than Learning Walks. Teacher leaders also emphasized this point as TL8 stated, "the thing with rounds is the campus wide focus and specifically looking at the data." The teachers and teacher leaders acknowledged the campus-wide focus was determined as a whole staff, building collaboration, rather than individual teachers choosing an area of focus. TL7 emphasized,

Every single aspect of professional development is around the problem of practice. Last year, professional development was whatever it needed to be whenever it came up, but this year, it is constantly emphasized at every faculty meeting . . . at every faculty meeting, it is always focused on in some way, shape, or form.

Participants shared that focus is a perceived salient characteristic of rounds.

Inclusion of All Staff

In addition to focus on a problem of practice, one participant in the study highlighted inclusion of all staff as a salient factor that sets rounds apart from other improvement practices.

TL7 stated,

It felt like every little initiative that came down was aimed at core content, but this is campus wide. It unites all on one thing we are working on which helps support each

other, including our electives . . . a lot of times, our elective teachers have felt left out . . . it also lets core content teachers feel like it's not all on me . . . it shares the load.

The inclusion of all staff on one focused problem of practice is a salient characteristic of rounds, as expressed by one participant in Southern Pines Middle School. Wide agreement from all participants regarding salient characteristics was not uncovered.

RQ1d: Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

The fourth component of RQ1 asks for participant perceptions with respect to whether and how rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core: teacher, student, and content. Participants in the study in SPISD referenced adult learning 19 times in their interviews, and increased capacity was coded 15 times. Improvement of the instructional core, related to teachers' knowledge and skill, was coded 18 times in the interviews. Closer analysis of the participant interviews and focus groups reveals an initial understanding of rounds and self-reflection as the staff begins the process of rounds. Figure 23 summarizes findings related to adult learning and building teacher capacity.

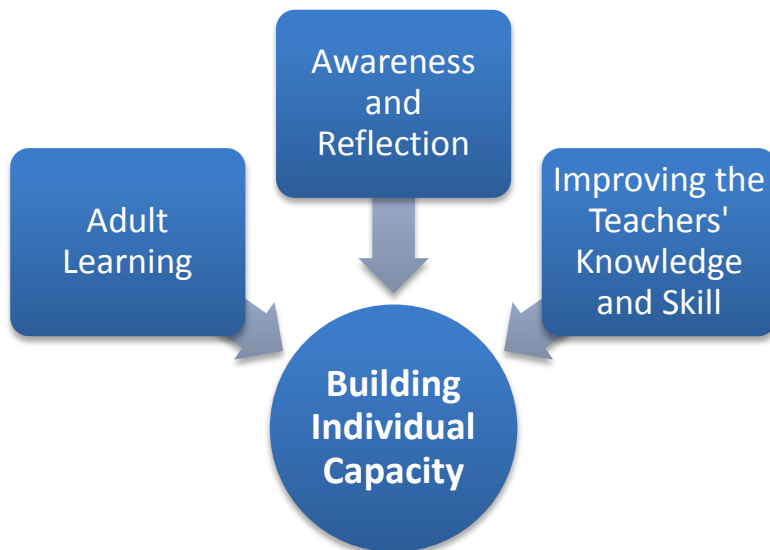


Figure 23. Findings related to RQ1d: Building individual capacity at Southern Pines Middle School, Southern Pines ISD.

Adult Learning

Most participants in the study indicated rounds contributed to their professional learning, building the knowledge and skills of the adults at the campus and in the district. In Chapter 2, I examined research related to adult learning, noting characteristics of effective adult learning: linked to improved instructional practice and student learning; ongoing and collaborative experiences; culture of excellence; time for reflective practice, learning, and application; and school-based solving of authentic and immediate problems (Blankstein et al., 2007; Drago-Severson, 2009; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Participants connected their perceptions of rounds with the aforementioned characteristics of effective adult learning, most notably connecting adult learning stemming from rounds to time for reflective practice and school-based solving of authentic problems. Participants described the opportunities for adult learning as opportunities to observe instruction and debrief with colleagues regarding the observation, studying higher order thinking questions, and studying critical thinking. Participants expressed minimal changes for students, but they expressed anticipation that changes will occur in students' interaction with content based on increased teachers' knowledge and skills; however, the participants acknowledged this was the first year of rounds. Participants also described rounds as adult learning, for both network participants and campus teachers receiving feedback from rounds.

Awareness and Reflection

Perceptions of the participants revealed participants do believe rounds has caused them to reflect on their practice individually and become more aware of the problem of practice in their own respective classrooms.

All participants expressed the belief individually rounds is improving, or has the potential to improve, the individual teacher's capacity in the classroom. Teachers expressed that,

T20: Two things . . . if you are on the team that goes into classrooms, you can observe another teacher doing what you would like to do and you can implement. The second is that if you have visitors and you get feedback and this is what we saw, you can go back and evaluate and this is what I wanted them to see? Both of those things can make us aware and plan accordingly and implement . . . if I can see another teacher doing it effortlessly and seamlessly, I could implement.

T19: T20 said it best.

T18: We talk about it at all of our meetings. At our faculty meetings, we look at the data all laid out . . . questions and responses from students and data laid out to learn from it.

Another focus group of teachers shared,

T15: It makes you more aware of what you are saying.

T17: The kinds of questions you ask.

T14: I am associating back to learning walks, see and start, start analyzing myself . . . both good and bad . . . do I do that? Oh, I liked that . . . oh, I want to try to apply that. . . .

T17: It helps teachers evolve and become better . . . thinking and not just going through the motions of doing your class only. Seeing the data on questioning . . . thinking, "oh, we need to do better on certain questioning."

Me: What changes have you noticed in your instruction as a result of rounds?

T16: Nothing.

T14: One of the things is getting kids to answer higher order thinking questions. We started writing them on the board and keeping it visual. I've made kids and making a better habit for myself reading the essential questions each day. We read the objective, what the goal is for our unit and read essential questions. . . .

T15: Questioning was a big thing, so I looked up question stems so I know what is out there and what other people are saying . . . how they are phrasing questions.

T13: To me, it feels like as adults and teachers, we know where we want them to go and we are aware of where they are at . . . this is a way to bridge those two things . . . we are more aware of where we need them to be and we still have to get them there.

Perceptions shared by teachers, teacher leaders, and the principal supported the concept that rounds, in its inaugural year, has caused teachers to pause for reflection and increased awareness around practices related to the campus problem of practice.

Improving the Instructional Core

The instructional core is comprised of the teacher, student, and content with the task at the center of the instructional core. A central tenet of individually rounds is learning is improved when these three components of the instructional core are improved by increasing the teacher's knowledge and skill, changing and improving the students' role in learning, and raising the level and rigor of content. Participants cited their perceptions and experiences of improvement in the instructional core as they noted improvement in their own knowledge and skills. Participants expressed they have not yet observed changes in the level and rigor of the content or the students' interaction with the content due to the beginning phases of implementation. P3 stated,

Right now, it's not, but it will. I have a lot of faith in the system in that it is focused on that [improving the instructional core]. Right now, we're still dancing around targeting pieces . . . we spend a lot of time impacting what the teachers are doing without considering our content. . . . If we want teacher changes to truly have impact, we have to change content we teach, and we have to change the student interaction. Student interaction with content has largely gone unaddressed But as of now, the rounds process is having much impact on what we are doing in PLCs.

Teacher participants and teacher leaders spoke of increased awareness and reflection related to their own knowledge and skills, but they did emphasize that student interaction with content

had not yet been impacted. No participant, aside from the principal and DL3, mentioned increasing the level and rigor of content as part of the instructional core.

Summarization of Research Question 1

Perceptions of participants related to rounds as a systemic improvement practice overall indicate participants believe fiscal, physical, and relational conditions are important to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with leadership and trust as a critical factors required for sustainability. Participants indicated a belief that rounds may be an effective practice because it has the capacity to build shared values and vision, builds on collective data, and may reduce initiative fatigue. Salient characteristics that set rounds apart from other improvement initiatives included the focus on a single problem of practice and the inclusion of all staff. All participants expressed, with varying degree, the perception that rounds builds the capacity of individual teachers through adult learning, awareness and reflection, and improving the teachers' knowledge and skill. As rounds was in its infancy in both the district and campus, staff perception was guarded and optimistic.

I entered the transcripts from the interviews into Atlas.TI. I used the word cloud generator to create Figure 24. All transcripts were included in generating the word cloud. In a word cloud, the frequency of word use determines the size of font of the word with greater frequency represented by the largest font. The frequency of the words learning, teacher(s), district, campus, need, year, one, data, and time were used to respond to RQ1 and is aligned to the perceptions of the participants.

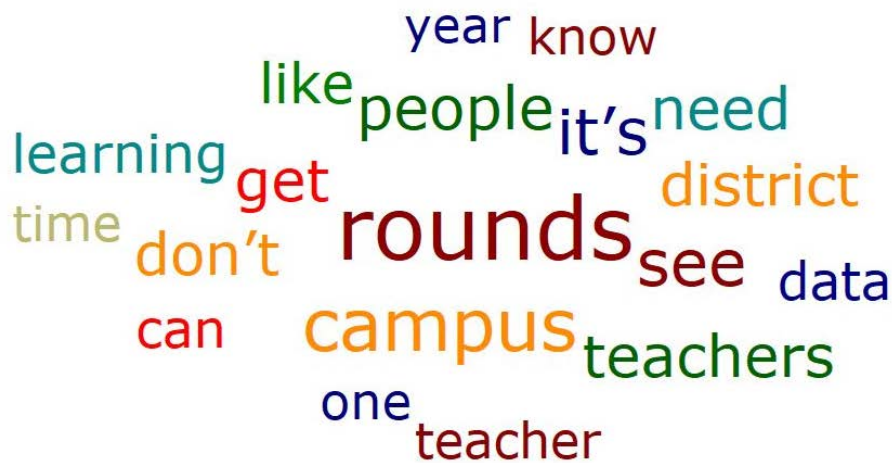


Figure 24. Word cloud, Southern Pines Middle School, Southern Pines ISD.

RQ2: Alignment of Perceptions with Practice and Documents

The second research question I addressed was: How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents? To respond to RQ2, I attended a network rounds visit at Southern Pines Middle School as a participant observer and reviewed all relevant documents related to rounds from both Southern Pines Middle School and Southern Pines ISD. This section includes four areas: the observation of the network visit, the report of the alignment findings, the report of the alignment based on documents, and the conclusion. See Figure 25 for organization of findings related to RQ2.

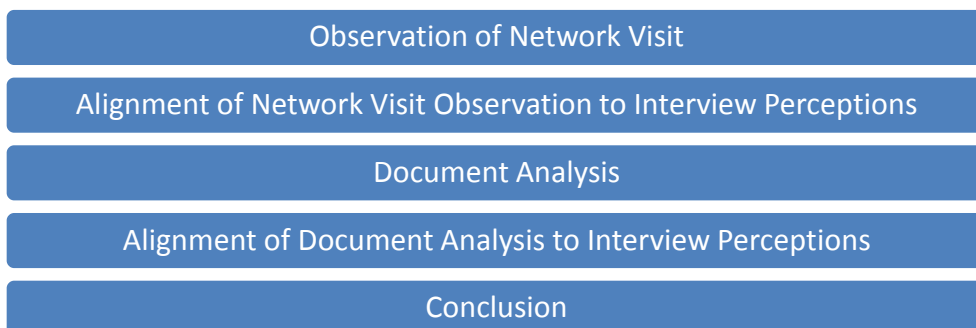


Figure 25. Organization of findings related to RQ2 for Southern Pines Middle School, Southern Pines ISD.

Observation of Rounds Network Visit

The observation of the rounds network visit was scheduled in order to determine if participant perceptions expressed in interviews were aligned with observation of the network in practice. The observation of the network included learning time in which the network members were assembled for learning prior to dispersing for classroom observation, classroom observation, analysis of classroom observation, and debrief of the observation.

Learning Time

In Southern Pines ISD, the rounds network team convened for the first network visit at Southern Pines Middle School. The principal, P3, began the day with introductions and an explanation of rounds. The principal set the expectation that the network will be operational for the next three years. Participants were present from elementary, middle, and high school. Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators from the campuses, along with two central office administrators, comprised the network team.

Staff shared what they hoped to learn from rounds as part of the first network visit. Since this was the first rounds network visit in the district, eight participants expressed interest in learning more about the rounds process in an authentic setting after completing the training. After introductions and a team-building game, the principal explained he would serve as facilitator and principal. He shared the challenge in serving in both roles, and set up visual cues for the audience to understand when he was serving as the principal of the campus and when he was serving as facilitator of the rounds network.

The principal explained the demographics of the campus and discussed the cultural norms of Southern Pines Middle School. He explained the campus academic goals, and the goal

of the campus to improve critical thinking through literacy in all content areas. He shared current systems in place at Southern Pines Middle School including study of text related to growth mindset and learning walks, as well as Internal rounds. He described mechanisms for collaboration on the campus including weekly communication and meeting structures. The principal shared the objectives of rounds that included improving student achievement at scale, driving instruction, and centering the academic work on the instructional core. He reminded the team to spend time in description before moving to analysis and evaluation in an effort to avoid a rush to judgment about what teams observe in the classroom. P3 reminded the team about the importance of non-evaluative language and the specificity of evidence to support the analysis of classroom instruction. P3 shared the campus problem of practice: Many Southern Pines Middle School students struggle to explain in-depth thinking and learning through speaking and writing. The principal reminded all participants about non-evaluative language, and he asked each table to select an evidence officer to help the team remain faithful to the norms established. P3 reminded everyone to script as much as possible while observing the classroom. Teams were given time to reflect on the process, discuss the problem of practice, and plan how they wanted to script the classroom observation.

Classroom Observation

For classroom observation, the rounds network, divided into five teams of four, dispersed to study instruction in 20 classrooms. Each team observed four classrooms for a period of 20 minutes. The principal and DL3 wanted to observe as many classrooms as possible during the observation window, and I was invited to join them in observing instruction.

Following the observation period, the teams returned to the library to analyze the data collected during observation.

Analysis of classroom observation began with a silent period during which team members studied their notes, reflected on the essential questions, and reviewed evidence responsive to the problem of practice. The rounds network participants were considerate of the norms established by Southern Pines Middle School.

Analysis of Classroom Observation

In arriving back in the library to begin analysis of the classroom observation notes, I observed that team members had multiple pages of notes and scripts from observing in the classrooms. The atmosphere of the room upon returning to begin analysis was one of professionalism and collegiality. The network members appeared to understand that the task to study and analyze the classroom data was important and serious. Conversations analyzing the data from each classroom in relation to the problem of practice and the essential questions continued through the lunch hour. As teams continued analysis, they began to create artifacts to share during the debrief process.

Debrief of Classroom Observation

After teams had time for analysis, P3 asked the group to reconfigure the furniture from groups seated at tables to theater style seating. Easels with artifacts from each group were set up in the front of the library. Each group on the rounds network team explained their findings from the classroom observation, and shared their observations. Teams used a verbal discourse rubric to chart responses, and they shared responses with the network team.

After hearing each group discuss the findings from their set of four classrooms, P3 led the participants in a conversation about what they had observed and what patterns they noticed across the entire school. Patterns observed included teacher questions at the remember/understand level of Bloom's taxonomy, student responses in a short phrase or one word response, student responses demonstrating a lack of understanding, student responses at level I on the verbal discourse rubric, and the majority of tasks given at the foundational level (remember and understand) of Bloom's taxonomy.

After considering patterns observed across the campus, P3 asked the rounds network to share predictions across the school responding to the question, "If I were a student in this school and did exactly as the teacher asked, what would I know and be able to do?" The network responded with predictions that Southern Pines Middle School students would be able to read during the scheduled sustained silent reading time, answer questions at the apply level in mathematics, read and write in language arts classes, and respond with a short phrase without explaining their thinking.

Following predictions, P3 asked the participants to share ideas for next level of work for Southern Pines Middle School to consider. Ideas for next level of work included focusing on learning and implementing two strategies to increase elaboration of student responses in every classroom, planning questions in PLCs, and planning elaboration questions in PLCs. Additional suggestions were shared to encourage accountability, such as peer observation focused on the strategy. P3 shared that the campus would consider the ideas for the next level of work. P3 and the team from Southern Pines Middle School shared closing thoughts. The principal thanked the rounds network participants for their thinking and attention to the campus.

Appendix I includes additional information regarding the network visit at Southern Pines Middle School.

Alignment of Observation with Participant Perceptions

Supportive Conditions

In participant interviews, supportive conditions, including relational, fiscal, and physical were included in the participant perceptions of conditions required for the sustainability of rounds.

Relational Conditions

Participants verbalized the relational conditions of trust and leadership in the interviews. During observation of the rounds network, norms were established at the beginning of the day and members of the network adhered to the norms which were showing respect for confidentiality, use of nonjudgmental language, and use of non-evaluative language.

Leadership was another critical factor discussed in the interviews as a requirement for successful sustainability. DL3 and the campus principal were in attendance at the rounds for the entire day. No other district leadership was present at the first rounds visit. P3 reinforced the purpose of rounds and used encouraging language regarding the academic work of the network participants. P3 served as the facilitator of the network visit.

Fiscal Conditions

Participants remarked that the financial support of the district is necessary to procure substitutes, provide for facilitation of rounds, and provide for future leadership training. During the rounds network visit observation, teachers from all participating campuses were present. Substitutes or other support to provide class coverage was in place to allow the teachers

release time from teaching in order to participate in the rounds. No discussion regarding substitutes or concerns regarding financial commitment to maintain the process emerged during the network observation.

Physical Conditions

In interviews, participants expressed the importance of the physical conditions needed for rounds with regard to meeting space, as well as logistics and scheduling. In the rounds network visit, meeting space in the library was dedicated for the full day. A schedule was available to all participants. Pre-work was completed by P3 to create the schedule, provide maps, and organize with teachers to arrange for the logistics of the event. Alignment between the participant interviews and the role of physical conditions was clear. One participant expressed concerns regarding the use of the library as the meeting space for rounds. She expressed the desire to find alternate space for future meetings so student use of the space could continue while rounds were in session.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Rounds

When interviewed, participants indicated a perception that rounds has the potential to be an effective practice because of the possibility rounds will help to build shared values and vision, focus on collective data, and reduce initiative fatigue. During observation of the rounds network, the principal shared the vision of the campus, and he shared documents with the network team to make the vision clear. P3 stated a team of staff members created this vision, and he articulated the staff shared the vision.

During interviews and focus groups, the participants articulated that rounds was effective because it focused on classroom data and collective data representing the whole

school rather than the individual data of a singular teacher. The observation of the rounds network visit provided evidence aligned to this perception. The campus used a verbal discourse rubric to collect information regarding the level of student discourse across the campus. Data was captured from a sample of 20 classrooms at the campus and converted to a format that could be shared as collective data.

The reduction of initiative fatigue was also discussed as a positive possible effect of rounds, contributing to its success as an improvement practice. While initiative fatigue was not discussed directly during the observation, the principal did share the focus of the campus and the strategies that the campus was using for improvement during the learning time of the rounds network. P3 mentioned 12 improvement strategies and/or structures at Southern Pines Middle School: mindsets in the classroom, administrative walkthroughs, learning walks, Internal rounds, weekly newsletter, staff meetings, chalk talks during conference periods, PLCs, silent sustained reading, writing rubric in all classes, blocking of English classes, and study of similar campuses. Of the 12 strategies/structures mentioned, 7 of the 12 structures/strategies were explicitly tied to the campus problem of practice and the continuation of rounds work at Southern Pines Middle School.

Salient Characteristics that Set Rounds Apart

Evidence from the observation supports participant perceptions that focus on a problem of practice and inclusion of all staff are salient features of rounds. During the first hour of the rounds network visit, P3 shared data and the process by which the campus determined the problem of practice; STAAR data, staff surveys, walkthrough, and learning walk feedback suggests many Southern Pines Middle School students struggle to explain in-depth thinking and

learning through speaking and writing. The strategies and structures the principal shared support the focus on the problem of practice. He described Internal rounds visits scheduled to continue data collection and understanding of the problem of practice, peer observations scheduled to focus on instruction related to the problem of practice, administrative walkthroughs focused on the problem of practice, and the teaching of strategies to implement across the campus related to improving the problem of practice.

One interview participant discussed that a salient feature separating rounds from previous improvement initiatives was the inclusion of the entire staff, not just teachers of the four core content areas: mathematics, literacy, social studies, and science. During the rounds network visit, the network team visited three self-contained or inclusion content-based special education classrooms, four mathematics classrooms, three science classrooms, one social studies classroom, and four enrichment classrooms (Spanish, Theater Arts, Technical Applications, and Career Portals). The inclusion of classrooms from all content areas during the network visit is aligned to the interview perception that rounds is an improvement practice for all staff, not only for core content teachers.

Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

Most participants expressed the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers by increasing opportunities for adult learning, awareness and reflection, and improving the teachers' knowledge and skill as related to the instructional core. The reflection at the conclusion of the debrief was evidence of the learning and potential capacity building that occurred during the rounds network visit. Observation of the rounds network revealed the opportunity to build individual capacity was present; however, observation did not reveal

whether or not capacity was increased due to the network rounds I observed. To determine if capacity was increased from learning at the rounds, further research may include observing classrooms of teacher participants in rounds network to understand practices better that are improved as a result of learning from rounds. Further study may also include researching school-wide planning and PLC work resulting from the rounds network. Did campus leaders and teacher leaders depart from Southern Pines Middle School and put new learning into practice to strengthen both individual and organizational capacity? Without further study, the actual implementation is unknown.

In interviews, participants at Southern Pines Middle School revealed they believed that they had a heightened degree of awareness related to the problem of practice and their practice may change based on their learning from rounds with regard to asking students higher level questions and increasing student discourse. In interviews, participants perceived rounds as a potentially effective practice in building capacity to impact the instructional core. Observation supports that the opportunity to build capacity was present; however, further research is needed to determine the full effect of the rounds network on individual and organizational capacity.

Analysis of Network Visit Documents

I asked DL3 and the principal of Southern Pines Middle School to share with me any documents that may be relevant to rounds in the district and at the campus. I received the following documents related to expectations and norms, problem of practice, management of the rounds network visit, and adult learning: Southern Pines External Rounds Schedule for Southern Pines Middle School, the PowerPoint for learning time at Southern Pines Middle

School, an executive summary for Southern Pines Middle School, the Student Discourse Rubric for Southern Pines Middle School, and the 2016-17 Rounds Plans for Southern Pines Middle School. Additionally, I located the District Improvement Plan 2016-17 and the Campus Improvement Plan 2016-17 at the district and campus websites, as well as the Southern Pines Middle School Mission Statement and Values, the District Strategic Action Plan 2016-2021, and the 2016 District Demographic Study. The improvement plans are required by state education code and district policy.

Expectations and Norms

Interview and focus group participants expressed the belief that trust was an important relational condition for the sustainability of rounds. I reviewed one document related to the expectations and norms of the rounds process at Southern Pines Middle School: the PowerPoint for learning time. In the PowerPoint, adhering to non-evaluative language was set as a norm to be reviewed with participants. The norms were reviewed during the Learning Time with regard to confidentiality and use of non-evaluative language and were adhered to during the rounds network visit. Norms for network participation are not explicitly listed in any additional documents provided to me.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice was listed as a part of three documents: Southern Pines External Rounds Schedule for Southern Pines Middle School, the PowerPoint for learning time at Southern Pines Middle School, and the 2016-17 Rounds plans for Southern Pines Middle School. The problem of practice of Southern Pines Middle School is “STAAR data, staff surveys, walkthrough, and learning walk feedback suggests many Southern Pines Middle School

students struggle to explain in-depth thinking and learning through speaking and writing. We note there is a drop in performance related to depth and complexity of task, specifically reading tasks.” The theory of action is: “If students are able to articulate/demonstrate their learning, they then will be successful when encountering difficulty questions/tasks and experience academic success, as well as success in life.” Additionally, Southern Pines Middle School framed three essential questions to guide the observation during the rounds network visit:

1. What is the task?
2. What are the questions asked by the teacher?
3. What are students saying or writing about the content or concepts being taught?

In interviews, the perception of the participants related to the problem of practice is the campus is focused on asking higher-level questions. Evidence exists to support the alignment between interview responses from participants and the essential questions, particularly the second question related to questions asked by the teacher. Interviews did not reveal a deep understanding or connection to the problem of practice as articulated by the campus.

Management of the Rounds Network Visit

One document was provided to support management of the rounds network visit: Southern Pines External Rounds Schedule for Southern Pines Middle School. The detailed schedule provided for the site visit described the day for participants on the network visit. From arrival breakfast, the team moved to introductions and planning, classroom observation with reading time for sustained silent reading, individual thinking and organizing time, lunch, analysis time, artifact creation, and debriefing. The schedule assisted teams and the facilitator

in staying on target with regard to time and content. Observation reveals adherence to the schedule and the agenda items listed within the schedule.

While a map of the campus was not provided, a staff member from the campus was present on each team to serve as a guide to the campus. Observation of the rounds network provided evidence of both a meeting space (the library), and the documents support the logistic plan for the network visit. The perceptions expressed in the interview regarding logistics, scheduling, and meeting space are supportive conditions required for sustainability as they impact other supportive relational conditions. While one participant expressed a desire to change the meeting space from the library should rounds continue, alignment regarding logistics and scheduling emerged from the interviews, observation, and documents.

Documents to Support Adult Learning

Perceptions emerged during the interviews that rounds has the potential to increase adult learning and thereby impact both teacher and organizational capacity to improve the instructional core. One document shared during the rounds network visit aligned with the perceptions that were uncovered during interviews: the student discourse rubric.

As this was the first rounds network visit for SPISD, the learning time was focused on introductions and clarifying understanding of the rounds process. The student discourse rubric used during the analysis phase of the network visit prompted reflection and adult learning that may impact the instructional core.

District Plan

In addition to documents given to me related to rounds, I also located a copy of the district improvement plan (DIP) for Southern Pines ISD and a demographic study for SPISD. The

2016-17 DIP for SPISD is focused on the mission and vision statement, as well as core beliefs.

The vision is that “Graduates of SPISD are empowered to become successful and productive in a global society.” The DIP is a 75-page document. Two references are made to rounds in the DIP.

In the section regarding Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, “Implementation of Rounds Training—year 1 deployment 2016” is listed as a strength. Additionally, a critical success factor is listed:

Increase capacity of district curriculum and instruction staff to coach teachers, administrators, and staff to improve research-based instructional practices guided by TTESS dimensions and program requirements by participating in content-and program-specific professional development including: Kilgo data analysis training, Region XX support such as curriculum council and counselor cooperative, National Middle School conference, MAPS, rounds, and E3 Alliance ExcELL.

The critical success factor includes rounds training as a professional development session to build capacity of district curriculum and instruction staff. In participant interviews, DL3 expressed the district would continue rounds for five years; P3 communicated the district was committed to continue rounds for three years. All teachers and teacher leaders expressed skepticism about the continuity of rounds and the commitment of the district to continue rounds. The two references in the DIP provide evidence that rounds training will occur and the initial implementation will begin in 2016. Observation data and documents from the campus, however, no significant plans exist in the DIP related to rounds beyond initial training in 2016-2017.

Campus Plan

In addition to the district plan, I also analyzed the campus improvement plan for Southern Pines Middle School. In the campus improvement plan (CIP), the format of the DIP is replicated. The CIP outlines a plan for rounds under Goal 2: “We will recruit, equip, and retain

staff to increase continuity and quality.” Under the Summative Evaluation of Goal 2, the CIP states the campus will have “4 rounds visits conducted.” Implementation of rounds will occur with measurement of success determined by the completion of two internal rounds and two network rounds. Additionally, survey results will give feedback on how rounds is impacting instructional practice. Under the section of the CIP outlining federal system safeguard strategies, rounds is listed as a practice to impact Campus Needs Priority 2, 6, and 7. Needs Priority 2 is improving eighth grade Reading Scores after 2016 Reading results in eighth grade fell below the state average of students meeting Level II Satisfactory. Needs Priority 6 is improving Social Studies Scores that declined from 70% to 65% in 2016, falling below the state average. Finally, Needs Priority 7 is improving staff professional growth. The Campus Improvement Committee determined rounds and a focus on the problem of practice would serve to improve reading and social studies scores, as well as build staff professional growth.

Perceptions from the interview align with the strategies listed in the CIP. Teacher leaders and the focus group, as well as the principal, explained rounds was in its initial year of implementation and it was a strategy to improve literacy through critical thinking and questioning. Interview perceptions aligned with the CIP’s articulated priority need of building staff development. The CIP was not referenced by any participants in the study.

Conclusion

I studied Southern Pines Middle School in SPISD seeking to understand the perception of participants with regard to:

- The supportive conditions required for the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice
- The effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice

- The salient characteristics that distinguish rounds from other improvement practices
- Whether rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core

Furthermore, I observed a rounds network visit and reviewed documents related rounds to understand if perceptions of participants aligned with observation and documents.

Participants expressed perceptions that supportive conditions and leadership are important to continue rounds as a systemic improvement practice. A few participants indicated its effectiveness is due to the building shared vision and values, the focus on collective data, and the potential of rounds to reduce initiative fatigue. Two participants identified salient characteristics of rounds as the common focus on a problem of practice and the inclusion of the entire staff in solving a campus-wide problem of student learning. Some participants expressed the perception that rounds built the awareness and reflection of teachers and acknowledged that rounds may improve teacher knowledge and skill with regard to improving the instructional core.

Observation of the rounds network and analysis of documents from both SPISD and Southern Pines Middle School related to rounds somewhat aligned with participant perceptions regarding supportive conditions required for sustainability, the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice due to its focus on shared values and collective data, the salient characteristics of focus and inclusion, and the possibility of building teacher capacity through rounds. While there were some areas in which the perceptions of participants were not evident when compared to observation and document analysis, there was some degree of alignment between perceptions of participants and what was revealed in

observation and document analysis with regard to the research questions at Southern Pines Middle School and SPISD.

CHAPTER 7

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS: ANALYSIS OF THEMES ACROSS MULTIPLE CASE STUDIES

The purpose of the study was to identify what supportive conditions are required for sustainability of instructional rounds (rounds) as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement. In this research, I studied one campus as a representative of the school district in three Texas school districts: Tall Oaks Elementary in Central Plains ISD, Rancho Vista Elementary in Rancho Vista ISD, and Southern Pines Middle School in Southern Pines ISD. I investigated the perceptions of rounds from four distinct groups of participants in each district: district instructional leaders, principals, classroom teachers who participate in rounds network visits, and classroom teachers who may be observed in rounds network visits but do not directly participate. I also observed rounds network visits and reviewed district and campus documents to better understand perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice, effectiveness and appropriateness of rounds, and what conditions may be required for sustainability of rounds as an improvement system for school districts. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:
 - a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?

2. How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents?

In this qualitative study, I collected data through interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and document reviews. Central office leaders, principals, and teacher leaders were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. Focus groups of teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview protocol. The interviews were designed to gather information about the participant's perceptions of rounds as a systemic improvement practice in an effort to answer Research Question 1. I observed a network visit of rounds at a campus representing each of the three districts in the study. I reviewed documents relevant to rounds, as well as the district and campus improvement plans. Rounds network observations and document analyses were used to respond to Research Question 2.

I developed a conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1, from research themes that emerged from a review of literature on rounds and medical rounds, adult learning, and professional learning communities. Interviews and documents were coded using deductive codes derived from the conceptual framework. Disconfirming evidence was also identified and coded.

In this chapter, I describe the analysis of the data collected from all three cases, seeking to explain themes that emerged across the three cases. I consider how the themes that emerged are connected to rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

RQ1a: Perceptions of the Supportive Conditions Required for Sustainability of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

Across the three cases, supportive conditions emerged as the most significant perception related to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with 202

references to supportive conditions from participants. Themes emerged across three cases with regard to supportive conditions of relational conditions (138 references), fiscal conditions (54 references), and physical conditions (10 references) as shown in Figure 26.

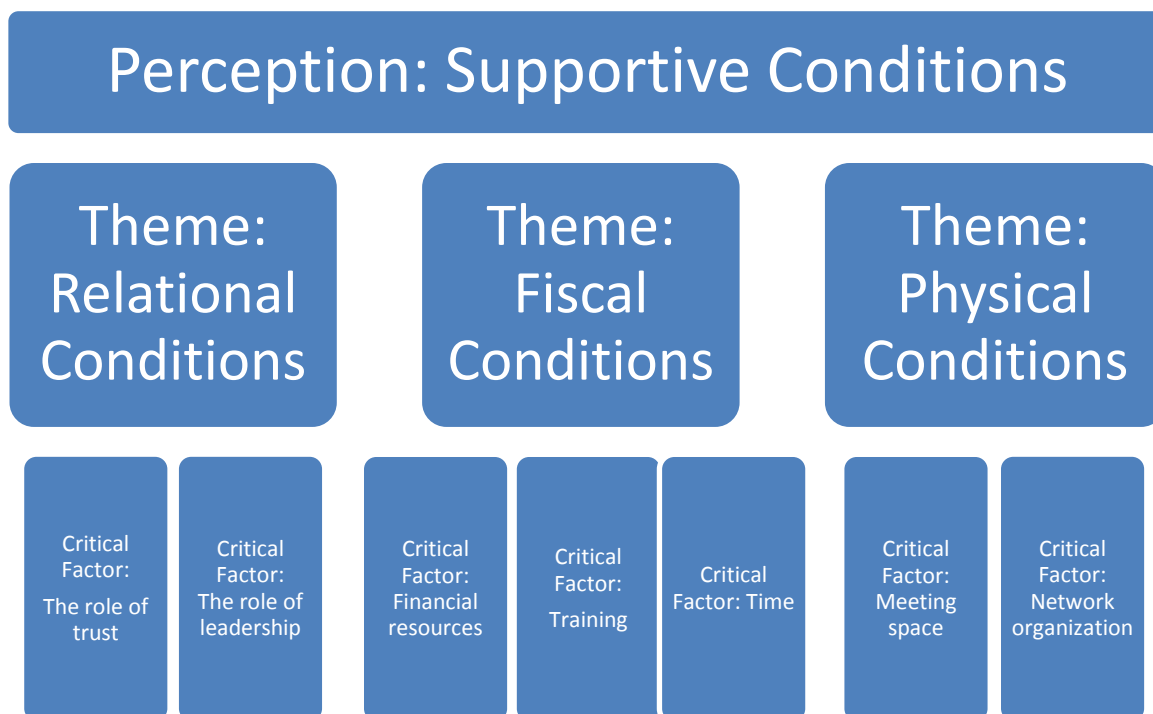


Figure 26. Perceptions, themes, and critical factors related to sustaining rounds in three Texas school districts related to RQ1a.

Relational Conditions

Across three cases, relational conditions emerged as the strongest theme with regard to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice. With 138 references to relational conditions, critical factors related to the sustainability of rounds included a high degree of trust, capable leadership at the district and campus level, and sustained leadership. While these relational conditions emerged as a critical factor for the sustainability of rounds, these factors may emerge as critical factors for the implementation and sustainability of other instructional improvement practices. The significance of trust and leadership are not limited to

rounds as an instructional improvement practice; however, participant interviews and document analysis in all three districts revealed trust and leadership as critical factors for the sustainability of rounds.

The Role of Trust

Across cases, trust was described as the absence of judgment and the maintenance of confidentiality. Further, across cases, teachers described the non-evaluative nature of rounds as an important element of trust building. In all three cases, participants described the nonjudgmental and non-evaluative nature of rounds. During observation in all three districts, both verbal reminders and processes were established to maintain an atmosphere of non-evaluative language during the rounds network observation. Additionally, in all three cases, participants described the inclusion of teachers in rounds as an important element related to the factor of building trust regarding the practice. In Central Plains ISD, teachers were not included in the rounds process during the first year, and district leadership expressed this step did not contribute to trust-building. In Rancho Vista Elementary, DL2 mentioned if teachers could not be part of rounds due to funding constraints, then rounds should not continue. Establishing norms and practices to maintain nonjudgmental and non-evaluative language and inclusion of teachers were practices that built the critical factor of trust in all three cases.

The Role of Leadership

Leadership, both at the campus and district level, was identified as a critical factor for sustainability of rounds. In Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, both campus and district leadership had been with the districts for an extended time, between 19 and 38 years. In Central Plains ISD, the superintendent had been in the district for six years, but supporting

district administration had long tenure in Central Plains ISD. In Southern Pines ISD, the superintendent had been in the district for eight years. The building level leadership and supporting district leadership had been in the district for three years or less. The longest term principal in Southern Pines ISD had four years of in-district experience. The sustainability of leadership, coupled with the effectiveness of leadership in building shared values and vision and implementing processes for growth, emerged as a critical factor in the study.

Furthermore, in all three districts, district and campus leadership contributed to the effectiveness and sustainability of rounds. In both Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, there was a district-level officer facilitating and leading the rounds work for the district. In both districts, the superintendent of schools attended the rounds visit that I observed. In both districts, the superintendent and his support for rounds was mentioned by participants in interviews. In Southern Pines ISD, the campus principal facilitated the rounds network visit. The Southern Pines ISD superintendent did not attend the rounds network visit. The Executive Director for Secondary Schools was the superintendent's designee to attend rounds in Southern Pines ISD. The superintendent was mentioned in DL3's interview in Southern Pines ISD; however, he was not referenced by any other participants.

In all three districts, sustainability of leadership was referenced by participants. In Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, participants expressed the central administration was supportive of rounds and that central administration would continue rounds so long as the current administration remained in place. In Southern Pines ISD, sustainability of leadership emerged as a great concern of participants. Leadership sustainability was discussed by the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. From reviewing interviews, I uncovered

a pattern of leadership churn in Southern Pines ISD. As described in interviews, principals remain at Southern Pines Middle School for a short tenure, 2-3 years. Participants described a pattern in which each new leader introduced a new initiative or multiple initiatives to the campus and/or district, remained at the school for a few years, and then left the campus. With the exit of the leader, it appeared the initiative also left. With the arrival of the next leader, the next initiative was introduced.

In Rancho Vista ISD, the participants discussed the effectiveness of the leader. One participant stated the principal was the most outstanding leader she had worked with, and she would follow the principal if the principal left. There was head-nodding and general consensus among the focus group teachers that the principal was effective. District leadership in Rancho Vista ISD was discussed in terms of developing and implementing systems. District leadership shifted from site-based problems of practice to a district-wide problem of practice; participants commented on this change in what seemed to be a positive frame.

In Central Plains ISD, one teacher praised the district facilitator's leadership. In Central Plains ISD, one teacher leader expressed a desire to work differently with the data produced by the rounds network, stating she would like more training on what to do with the data and next steps following the rounds visit. In Central Plains ISD, participants expressed understanding there was a district-wide problem of practice and multiple references were made to district-level training and professional development.

In Southern Pines ISD, district leadership effectiveness was not discussed by teachers. Decentralized leadership emerged as a theme as teachers seemed unsure of district-wide initiatives or plans. One teacher leader did comment the implementation of rounds seemed

“backwards” as campus leaders had initial training and district level leaders were following up with training in the 2016-17 school year. DL3 noted the training schedule was determined due to limited space at training and a desire to have campus leadership attend the training first for immediate implementation of the practice of rounds. Southern Pines Middle School teachers expressed the principal, in his second year at the campus, had communicated about rounds to build general understanding. One participant stated the new principal needed to move to another position due to the high demand he placed on the campus. Other participants in the group acknowledged that there were many demands on the campus teachers with a high level of expectation.

Fiscal Conditions

Participants from all three cases indicated fiscal conditions were an important sustaining theme for rounds. Participants mentioned the theme of fiscal conditions 54 times across the three cases highlighted by the critical factors of financial resources, allocation of time, and training for leadership, network participants, and teachers.

Financial Resources

Financial resources emerged as the lead critical factor in the theme of fiscal conditions. Participants in all three cases expressed the need for the district to fund rounds by providing substitutes, training, and personnel to facilitate the network visits. In order to have teacher participants in rounds, substitutes must be provided to relieve teachers of their classroom responsibilities. Additionally, participants in all three cases discussed the need for training of leadership and participants, recognizing an expense to pay for the training and possible travel for training. Finally, in all three cases, at least one participant discussed the role of the network

facilitator. While funding for the network facilitator was mentioned only once in Central Plains ISD where a retired district administrator served as facilitator, the indirect costs of rounds facilitation as an additional job responsibility emerged.

Training for Leadership and Participants

In all three cases, training for leadership and participants emerged as a critical factor related to the theme of fiscal conditions. In Central Plains ISD, DL1 expressed the desire for district leadership to attend training at Harvard University, acknowledging the high cost of such training. Additionally, DL1 explained the training necessary at the district level for rounds network participants. Teacher leaders and principals also spoke to the training required for rounds network participation which comes at a cost of both time and money. In Rancho Vista ISD, participants also discussed the need for training for rounds network participants and principals. Additionally, in Rancho Vista ISD, participants in the teacher focus group also discussed the need for new hires to the district to have training on rounds. They expressed the training for new teachers might alleviate concerns for discomfort for new teachers and would better build their understanding of the process. In Southern Pines ISD, DL3 and P3 discussed the need for training. DL3 explained training of campus-based personnel took place first to begin to create traction around the practice. He explained central office personnel would receive training at a later date. P3 expressed a desire for one-on-one coaching or training to build his knowledge and skills as he led the work at his campus. Teachers acknowledged that training to serve as a participant was important; however, one participant noted some rounds network participants had not received formal training and they were figuring it out during the

network visit. Overall, there was alignment regarding the need for fiscal conditions of funding, time, and training in order to implement rounds as an instructional improvement practice.

Time Allocated

In all three cases, time emerged as a critical factor for the sustainability of rounds. Time was described as time set aside for the rounds network visit, time for planning the network visit, time for developing the problem of practice, and time for follow-up of the network visit. Teachers referenced the time to develop substitute plans for quality instruction during their absence to attend rounds network visits. The planning of time, time management, and advanced notice of time dedicated to the rounds network was a critical factor that emerged in all three cases.

Physical Conditions

Physical conditions emerged as the third theme related to supportive conditions. Participants in Central Plains ISD, Rancho Vista ISD, and Southern Pines ISD referenced physical conditions, such as meeting space, schedule of the rounds network visit, and network configuration, as critical factors in sustaining rounds. Participants referenced physical conditions 10 times in interviews across the three cases.

Meeting Space

At least one participant in each case mentioned that meeting space was a necessary factor to support the implementation of rounds. All three rounds networks met in the campus library of the host campus. The library afforded space large enough for teams to meet at separate tables and to congregate as a whole group. Furthermore, the library could be restricted from other use throughout the day so the rounds were not interrupted. Other large

spaces on the campus, such as the cafeteria, could not be restricted from use during the school day.

Network Organization

Network organization includes two components: schedule of rounds network visit and network configuration. In Central Plains ISD and Southern Pines ISD, at least one participant referenced the schedule of the rounds network visit. Developing the schedule of classroom visits requires attention to detail and advanced planning. In Central Plains ISD, an error was made during the network visit in which one team mistakenly visited a classroom that was not clearly marked, resulting in two classroom observations for one teacher at a time when she did not expect visitors. This error highlighted the need for clarity in the schedule, signage, or a team member to escort campus visitors to the correct location. Both the principal and one teacher remarked about the need for clarity with regard to scheduling.

In Rancho Vista ISD, network configuration emerged as a critical factor for consideration related to physical conditions. Due to the number of bilingual classrooms observed at the elementary, participants in the focus group discussed the need for bilingual representatives on the rounds network team. In Rancho Vista ISD, both a teacher leader and DL2 discussed the importance of the configuration of the network team. The teacher leader remarked she enjoyed the cross-role collaboration as part of the rounds experience. Having teachers, instructional coaches, content directors, technology leaders, campus administrators, and district administrators collaborating about classroom instruction was important to her. The same participant discussed continuing with the same network participants for a prolonged

period of time. DL2 remarked the teacher voice is very important to rounds and rounds should not continue if funding considerations caused the elimination of teacher participants.

In Central Plains ISD, participants discussed network configuration. One teacher leader opined of the comfort she felt at rounds because teams were seated as school-based teams. The principal and all teachers from the same campus formed a team at the rounds network. The teacher leader believed this led to a higher level of comfort and discussion due to the familiarity that participants had with each other.

RQ1b: Appropriateness and/or Effectiveness of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice

In conducting individual interviews and a focus groups in three Texas school districts, I sought to understand the participants' perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice as indicated in RQ1b: What are the district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice? District leaders, principals, teacher leaders, and teachers expressed the perception that rounds is an effective systemic improvement practice due to the themes of building of shared values and vision, reduction of initiative fatigue, and focus on collective data. Participants provided suggestions for improvements to rounds to increase its effectiveness including improvements to structure of networks and observations, post-network visit learning and monitoring, and feedback to teachers who are observed. Figure 27 summarizes findings related to RQ1b across three cases.

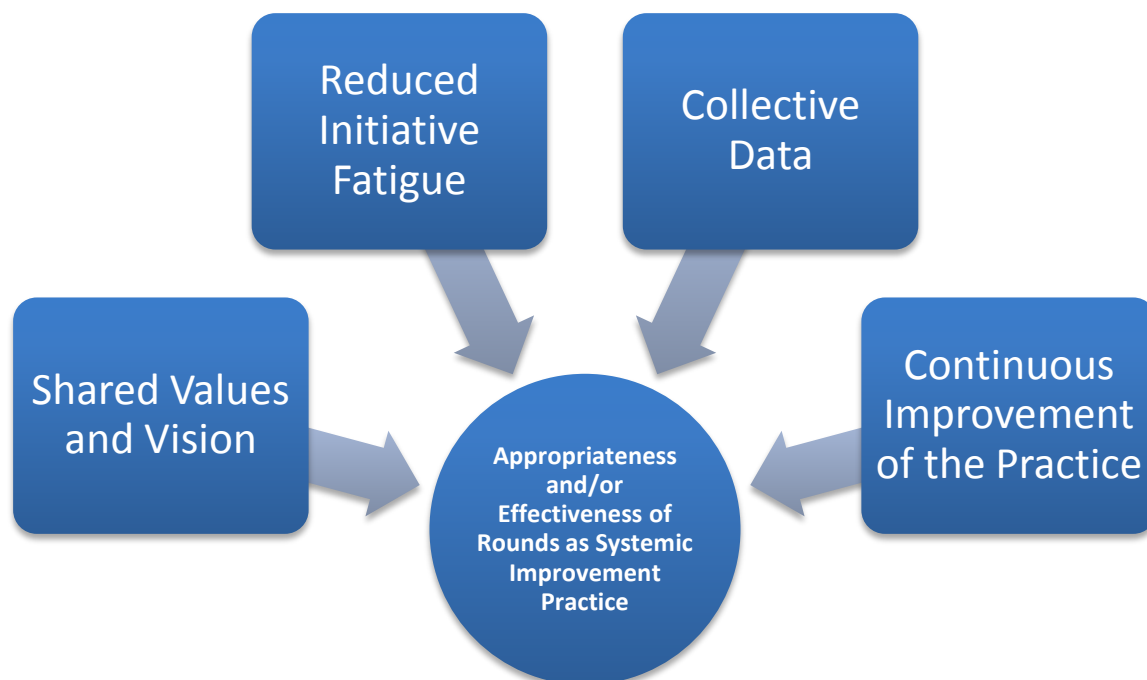


Figure 27. Findings related to appropriateness and/or effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice related to RQ1b.

Shared Values and Vision

Shared values and vision emerged as a theme across all three cases related to the appropriateness and/or effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

Participants in all three school districts described rounds as a process that enabled the building of and sharing of a common language and vocabulary. Through rounds, the district was able to clarify understanding and meaning of language and reinforce the use of common language, thereby building a shared vision. Not only did rounds assist in building a common language, but rounds also contributed to the sense of a district-wide focus on a singular common goal in two of the districts studied: Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD. With a district-wide problem of practice and essential questions personalized by the campus, participants shared a sense of focus on a common goal or problem. In Southern Pines ISD, the rounds work was in its initial phases; the participants at the campus level expressed the same focus on a common goal, but it

was not shared across the district as the problem of practice was located at the campus singularly. In Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, participants described rounds as highly collaborative which created shared values and vision as cross-role participants observed and discussed instruction together.

Reduction of Initiative Fatigue

A second theme that emerged related to the appropriateness and effectiveness of rounds was the reduction of initiative fatigue. Rounds has been growing as an instructional improvement practice for at least five years in both Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD. Participants in both districts discussed the alignment of professional development to the problem of practice. Participants in both districts acknowledged that there seems to be a jump from initiative to initiative in education as educators search for the intervention that will make a great impact in student learning. Participants in both districts acknowledged the district was *staying the course* with implementation of rounds in an effort to minimize initiative fatigue. In Southern Pines ISD, the participants spoke to the potential of rounds to minimize initiative fatigue. Participants, including DL3, P3, and teachers, connected initiative fatigue in Southern Pines ISD to leadership churn. They described new initiatives developed as new leaders came into the school. Participants in Southern Pines ISD also described a highly decentralized structure with a high degree of autonomy for campus leadership. The desire to reduce initiative fatigue with a focus on a manageable number of goals and initiatives was expressed across the three districts.

Collective Data

Participants expressed collective data, rather than individual data, as a theme related to

the effectiveness and appropriateness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

Collective data was mentioned extensively in Southern Pines ISD as a distinguishing factor of rounds. Participants expressed the power of collective data, rather than individual data, as a particularly effective element of rounds. Participants expressed an emotional safety as data was collected and shared related to the entire campus, rather than teachers receiving individual data and feedback. Participants expressed collective data sharing created ownership of the problem of practice to all teachers on campus whereas individual data only assisted the individual teacher. In Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, participants also spoke to the power of the collective data; however, they also expressed a desire for more individualized feedback from the rounds process.

Continuous Improvement of the Practice

Participants in all three districts expressed the theme that rounds either is or has the potential to be an effective and appropriate school improvement practice. In the two districts with greater experience with rounds, participants offered suggestions to improve the practice. Suggestions for improvement imply the participants wish to continue rounds and are thinking of ways to make it a more effective practice. In Central Plains ISD, participants made the following suggestions for improvement: additional feedback to individual teachers, continued growth in next levels of work and building understanding of what to do with data following the rounds visit, observing teachers on the same grade level and content, and inclusion of all teachers on the observation. Some participants in the focus group suggested certain teachers are chosen to be observed during rounds network because they are the most effective or successful teachers on the campus or they have effective classroom management. Two

teachers in the focus group suggested some teachers put on a *dog and pony show* for the rounds network team. They suggested the network is not observing the regular instruction, but rather a show for the day. DL3 spoke to the concept of a *dog and pony show*. She stated,

Early on, concerns were voiced at the district level that how do you know that teachers aren't going to just put on a dog and pony show and you really see what happens on a daily basis. The purpose of rounds is looking at practice . . . if they have practices in their repertoire and they can do those practices . . . and they can . . . it is valid data and it is the best. They only can do what they know to do. Teachers do what they know and are able to do. For that 20 minutes, they will show us their best practices. Deep at my core, I believe teachers come to work every day wanting to do the very best for students. Rounds respects teachers.

In Rancho Vista ISD, participants made suggestions for improvement of the practice of rounds. Suggestions for improvement included training for leadership on developing essential questions, training for the rounds network on collecting data connected to the campus problem of practice, district level training for new teachers about rounds, providing networks that allowed elementary campuses to see other elementary campuses and secondary campuses to see other secondary campuses, and providing individual feedback to teachers. The focus on professional development for leadership, network participants, and new teachers was shared from the district leader, principal, teacher leaders, and teachers. The desire to increase professional development and learning about how to improve rounds was evidence that rounds is an appropriate practice for systemic improvement. In Rancho Vista ISD, the rounds networks had previously been comprised of schools by level: elementary and secondary. In recent years, the district shifted to vertical networks comprised of elementary, middle, and high schools. Participants suggested the power of observing in schools with the same age of children. In both Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, providing personalized feedback to teachers who were observed was suggested. In Rancho Vista ISD, the focus group discussed the notion of sharing

personalized feedback, and one participant remarked giving personalized feedback would change the structure of rounds and the collective power of rounds. The participants discussed other structures in the district for personalized feedback to teachers. Suggestions for improvement of rounds were not made in Southern Pines ISD.

RQ1c: Salient Characteristics of Rounds and Comparison to Other Improvement Practices

To understand the salient characteristics of rounds and to determine what sets rounds apart from other improvement practices, participants were asked to compare rounds to other improvement practices employed in the districts. Across the three districts, the participants described 17 other improvement practices. Other improvement practices described were connected to evaluation of teachers (such as TTESS or PDAS), connected to achievement test improvement, connected to observation and feedback to teachers (such as Leverage Leadership and Learning Walks), or were a program designed and/or purchased to meet a need in the school district (such as Capturing Kids Hearts, the Literacy Project, etc.). Three salient characteristics emerged to describe rounds in comparison to other improvement practices: collaborative practice of rounds, deprivatization of practice, and focus on improving instructional practice. Figure 28 summarizes the findings across three districts related to RQ1c: What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices or how it compares to other improvement practices?

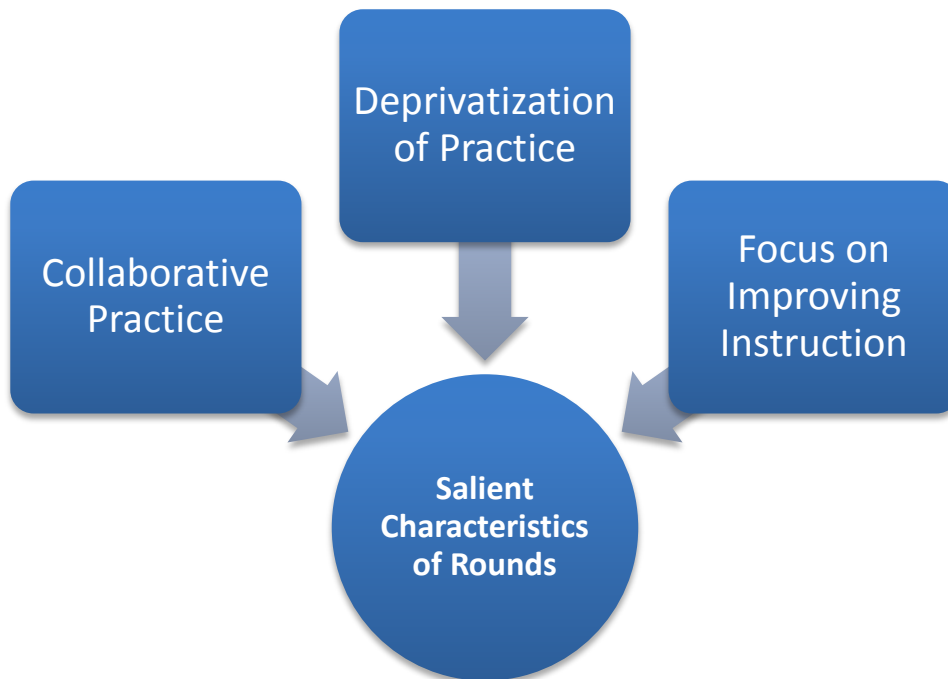


Figure 28. Findings across three Texas school districts related to RQ1c: Salient characteristics of rounds.

Collaborative Practice

Collaborative practice emerged as a salient characteristic across all three districts. In Central Plains ISD, DL3 described rounds as shifting from accountability-driven improvement to improving practice through collaboration. The focus on the collective practice of the campus and district was a shift in ideology that was previously focused on improving individual teachers. This focus on collective practice builds collaboration as participants seek to improve the campus as a whole. In Rancho Vista ISD, collaborative practice also emerged as a salient characteristic of rounds. Participants described collaboration of the rounds network team, collaboration of the campus as they determine the problem of practice and next levels of work, and collaboration across the district with regard to the problem of practice and the practice of rounds. The structure of rounds creates opportunities for purposeful collaboration. In Southern Pines ISD, as the network team conducted its first rounds visit, the participants

discussed the focus on the problem of practice and the use of observational data was building collaboration across the campus, including all staff in addressing the problem of practice. One teacher leader shared that previous initiatives focused only on core teachers, but rounds included all teachers on the campus.

Deprivatization of Practice

In all three districts, the participants described and observed the concept of deprivatization of practice as classroom observation and debriefing the observation was at the center of the practice of rounds. In Rancho Vista ISD, several participants discussed deprivatization of practice as a salient characteristic of rounds. DL2 described rounds as the first practice in the district that opened the doors of the classroom to teachers, and the first practice in which teachers and administrators from one campus were observing instruction at another campus in a systematic way. Furthermore, DL2 and other participants noted the district had previously conducted focused walkthroughs, a practice that flirted with observation at the center of the improvement effort, but it was not deemed effective by the participants. DL2 stated rounds was the first improvement practice centered on observing classroom instruction and opening doors of the classrooms in a transparent way. The rounds network team observed privatization of practice in all three districts as over 20 classrooms at each site were observed during the visits.

Focus on Improving Instruction

In both Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, improved instructional practice emerged as a salient characteristic of rounds. In Central Plains ISD, the principal and teachers described improved instructional practice, improved questioning, and improved quality of

student discourse during the time that rounds had been in place as an improvement practice. In Rancho Vista ISD, all campus participants described the instructional improvements witnessed at the campus including improved student discourse, improved student vocabulary, and increased expectations from the classroom teacher. Participants in both Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD noted improvements connected to the three elements of the instructional core: teachers' knowledge and skill, students' interaction with content, and level and rigor of content. In Southern Pines ISD, teachers remarked they had not seen improvements in student learning, but they noted increased reflection and focus around the problem of practice. The teachers in the focus group also stated they believe they will see improvements in the instructional core, but they noted the practice of rounds was new to the campus.

Across all three districts, participants expressed the belief that salient characteristics of rounds included collaboration, deprivatization of practice, and improvement of instruction.

RQ1d: Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

The fourth component of RQ1 asks for participant perceptions with respect to whether and how rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core: teacher, student, and content. Participants in the study across three Texas school districts referenced adult learning 81 times in their interviews, and increased teacher capacity was coded 82 times. Improvement of the instructional core was coded 62 times in the interviews. Figure 29 summarizes themes related to building organizational capacity to improve the instructional core.

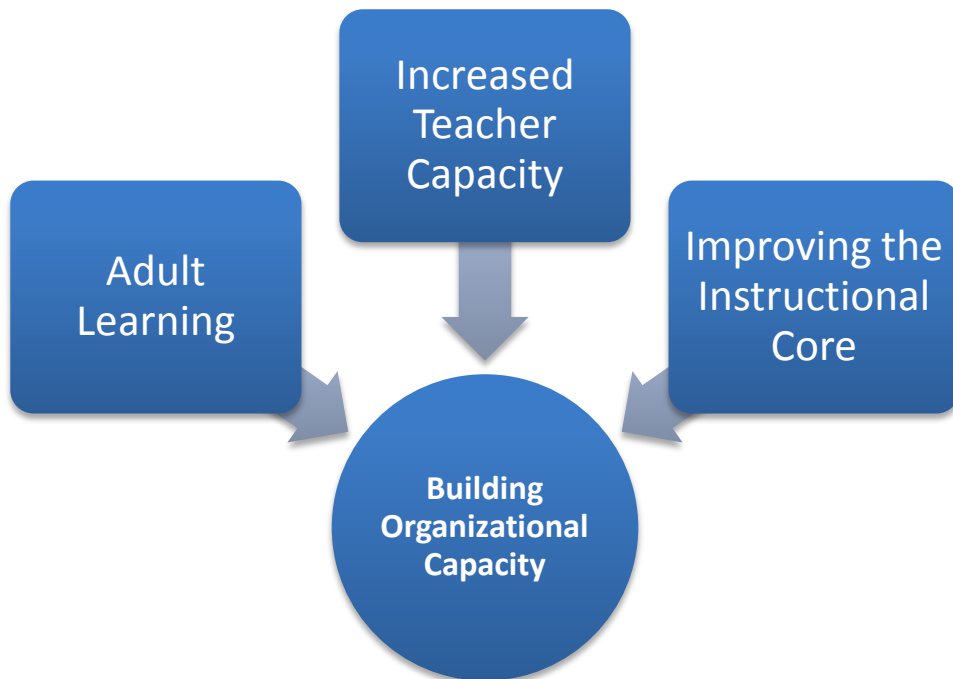


Figure 29. Findings related to building organizational capacity across three Texas school districts related to RQ1d.

Adult Learning

Participants referenced adult learning 81 times across three Texas school districts when asked how rounds may build organizational capacity. Organizational capacity is the “collective ability as a functioning whole to increase achievement” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 8). Adult learning emerged as a characteristic of rounds that participants believe may lead to increased organizational capacity. Participants from all three districts noted adult learning occurs through the practice of rounds. Participants from all three districts highlighted the adult learning that occurs for participants on the rounds network team. As the participants have the opportunity to observe classrooms and then discuss the observation with colleagues, their learning of instruction deepens. Several participants remarked about practices they had observed in a classroom on a rounds visit that they employed or adapted for their own classrooms. Aside from the adult learning of the network team members, participants in the study also described

professional development at the campus or district level related to the problem of practice and/or rounds. In Rancho Vista ISD, participants described changed practice and increased learning through school-based solving of authentic problems. The participants described adult learning for both network participants and campus teachers who were not participating in rounds; however, they expressed the perception that the deepest learning for adults occurs for those participating on the network.

Increased Teacher Capacity

Participants from all three districts expressed the connection of adult learning to increased teacher capacity. Teacher capacity is the ability of the teacher to provide effective instruction (Drago-Severson, 2009). Participants referenced increased capacity 82 times. There are varying perceptions regarding the effectiveness of rounds as a practice to increase teacher capacity at scale. One participant from Central Plains ISD and one participant from Southern Pines ISD expressed the sentiment that rounds had no impact on their instructional practice and did not increase their capacity as a teacher. Other teacher participants acknowledged rounds improved the capacity for teachers serving on the rounds team, but the practice had limited reach to improve capacity for teachers who were not serving on rounds. In Rancho Vista ISD, one participant in the focus group stated rounds built the capacity as the teacher allowed it to build capacity. She acknowledged a teacher can see the data and attend the professional development sessions, but unless the teacher is reflective about their practice, they could be dismissive of rounds and the learning available from rounds.

Participants from all three districts reflected on changed practice and reflection, with varying degrees. Participants in Central Plains ISD described witnessing improved instructional

practice in classrooms of colleagues and in their own classroom. Participants in Rancho Vista ISD described improved practice with regard to literacy instruction and vocabulary instruction. They also described improved understanding of the role of student discourse and how to create high levels of student discourse in the classroom. Participants in Southern Pines ISD reflected on the beginning of the rounds experience, and they shared increased reflection about the level of questioning in the classroom. Several participants shared they were focused on building their capacity through the process of rounds.

Rounds is not the singular practice to build capacity of teachers; however, participants from three districts acknowledged, with varying degrees, rounds was a practice that allowed for the increased capacity of the individual teacher.

Improving the Instructional Core

One of the core tenets of rounds is the focus on the instructional core: the teachers' knowledge and skills, the students' interaction with content, and the level and rigor of content. Participants referred to the instructional core 44 times across three cases. In both Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, the participants expressed visible improvement in both the teachers' knowledge and skill and the students' engagement with content. In Central Plains, participants remarked on a noticeable improvement in student engagement due to the focus on learning targets, student discourse, asking rigorous questions, and building academic vocabulary. Thus, by building the teachers' knowledge and skill, the student engagement increased. In Central Plains ISD, participants alluded to increasing the level and rigor of content, but it was not discussed explicitly. During the observation of rounds network in

Central Plains ISD, the learning time was devoted to the cognitive rigor matrix and building capacity to increase the level and rigor of the student learning task.

In Rancho Vista ISD, the instructional core was referenced as participants discussed improved teacher knowledge and skill and increased student engagement. Two participants referenced the role of the content directors in helping to increase the rigor of the content. DL2 remarked the focus on task with regard to rigor of content is the next area of focus for the district. One teacher leader shared she uses the instructional core to develop each lesson plan, considering the strategies and skills she has in her repertoire, the strategies she will use to engage students, and how she can increase the rigor of the content.

In Southern Pines ISD, participants described their beginning work with rounds. Teachers expressed rounds was affecting the teachers' knowledge and skill, with varying degree. Participants acknowledged they had not seen an impact on student engagement due to the beginning work of rounds. Participants in Southern Pines ISD did not note improvement in the rigor and complexity of the content.

Participants from all three Texas school districts expressed the belief that rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core. To the extent that rounds, as a practice, builds organizational capacity is varying based on participant perspective and role of the participant. Further, perceptions of participants highlighted that rounds builds capacity to impact the instructional core with regard to the knowledge and skill of the teacher and student engagement with content. Participants reflected least frequently on how rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the level and rigor of content.

Summarization of Research Question 1

Participants' perceptions from three Texas school districts related to rounds as a systemic improvement practice overall indicated they believe fiscal, physical, and relational conditions are important to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice with trust and leadership as critical factors required for sustainability. While participants provided suggestions for improvements for rounds, they indicated a belief that it is an effective practice because of several factors: the building of shared values and vision, the focus on collective data, and the reduction of initiative fatigue. Salient characteristics that set rounds apart from other improvement initiatives included the collaborative nature of rounds, the deprivatization of practice, and the focus on improving instruction. Participants from all three districts expressed, with varying degree, the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core, particularly the teachers' knowledge and skills.

RQ2: Alignment of Perceptions with Practice and Documents

The second research question I addressed was: How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practices and in school districts' documents? To respond to RQ2, I attended rounds network visits at Tall Oaks Elementary in Central Plains ISD, Rancho Vista Elementary in Rancho Vista ISD, and Southern Pines Middle School in Southern Pines ISD. I attended the rounds network as a participant observer and reviewed all relevant documents related to rounds from both the campuses and the districts. This section includes four areas: the observation of the rounds network visit, the report of the alignment

findings, the report of the alignment based on documents, and the conclusion. Figure 30 describes the organization of data related to RQ2.

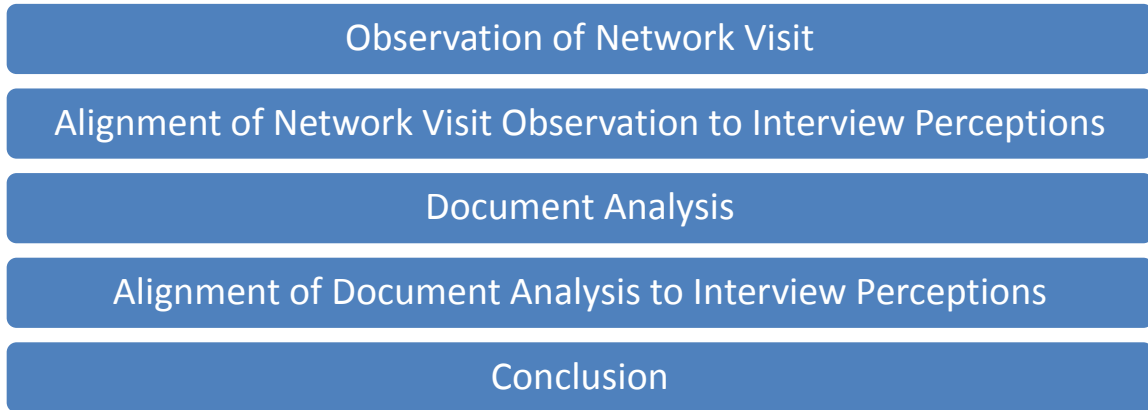


Figure 30. Organization of findings related to RQ2 across three Texas school districts.

Observation of Rounds Network Visit

The observation of the rounds network visits was scheduled in order to determine if participant perceptions expressed in interviews were aligned with observations of the networks in practice. The observations of the rounds networks in each of the districts included learning time in which the network members were assembled for learning prior to dispersing for classroom observation, classroom observation, analysis of classroom observation, and debrief of the observation. Appendices G, H, and I are detailed explanations of each rounds network visit.

Learning Time

Each district conducted a learning time at the beginning of the rounds network visit. The learning time took place prior to classroom observation and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. In Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, the learning time included study of articles or strategy related to the problem of practice. In Southern Pines ISD, the learning time included

a review of rounds as it was the first network visit in the district. All three rounds network visits included an overview of the school and the problem of practice during the learning time. In Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, a facilitator at the district level initiated the visit. In Central Plains ISD, the visit was facilitated by a recently retired district leader. In Rancho Vista ISD, the facilitator was the Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Schools. At Southern Pines Middle School, the rounds network visit was facilitated by the principal. DL3 shared the principal had more experience in rounds as he had previously been employed at a high school in Rancho Vista ISD. DL3 communicated that he planned to facilitate future rounds or have a facilitator other than the campus principal, but for the initial visit, the principal would facilitate.

Classroom Observation

The size of the rounds networks varied from 20 participants with four members per team in Southern Pines ISD to 30 participants with five members per team in Rancho Vista ISD to 40 members with up to eight members per team in Central Plains ISD. All teams in all three school districts observed four classrooms for 20 minutes per classroom for a total of 80 minutes of observation. A wide variety of classrooms were observed in all three districts.

In all three districts, analysis of classroom observation began with a silent period during which team members studied their notes, reflected on the essential questions, and reviewed evidence responsive to the problem of practice. The network participants were considerate of the norms established by each respective school district.

Analysis of Classroom Observation

In arriving back in the library to begin analysis of the classroom observation notes, I observed team members had multiple pages of notes and scripts from observing in the

classrooms. The atmosphere of the room upon returning to begin analysis was one of professionalism, collegiality, and urgency. The rounds network members appeared to understand that the task to study and analyze the classroom data was important and serious.

Conversations analyzing the data from each classroom in relation to the problem of practice and the essential questions continued through the lunch hour. As teams continued analysis, they began to create artifacts to share during the debrief process.

Debrief of Classroom Observation

During the debrief, Central Plains ISD and Southern Pines ISD adopted similar structures as they rearranged furniture into a theater-style setting and allowed time for each group to present their findings to the large group. Rancho Vista ISD also rearranged furniture, but they debriefed using a gallery walk of the artifacts with each team sharing findings with a small group. During the analysis and debrief, correction of judgmental language in order to remain bound to the norms of using nonjudgmental and non-evaluative language was observed in all three districts.

All three districts used a debriefing form that was very similar in structure with guiding sections on analysis statements, predictions, next levels of work, and short term targets. Group discussion was led by the facilitator in each network to provide feedback from the observing team to the home campus. In each network, the facilitator invited the campus participants to reflect and share their thinking at the end of the rounds network visit.

Alignment of Rounds Network Visit Observation to Participants' Interview Perceptions

Supportive Conditions

In participant interviews across all three districts, supportive conditions, including

relational, fiscal, and physical were included in the participant perceptions of conditions required for the sustainability of rounds.

Relational Conditions

Participants verbalized relational conditions of trust and leadership as critical factors in the interviews across all three districts. During observation of the rounds network, the norms were established at the beginning of the day at all three campuses, and members of the networks adhered to the norms: showing respect for confidentiality, use of nonjudgmental language, and use of non-evaluative language. Adherence to the norms was observed in all three districts. When members did slip in use of judgmental or evaluative language, structures were embedded at all three districts to remind participants to remain neutral in language choice, such as the use of the pink card in Central Plains ISD.

Leadership was another factor discussed in the interviews as a requirement for successful sustainability. In Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, the superintendent and other district officials were in attendance at the rounds network visit for all or part of the day. In Southern Pines ISD, the Executive Director for Secondary Schools was in attendance at the rounds network visit. At all rounds network visits in all three districts, the district leadership and principal shared the purpose of rounds and used common language in encouraging the academic work of the network participants. The presence of the Superintendent of Schools was a tangible display of the value that leadership in Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD places on rounds. In the interviews in both districts, participants remarked that the superintendent's presence sent a message about the value of rounds.

Fiscal Conditions

Participants remarked the financial support of the district is a critical factor necessary to procure substitutes, provide for facilitation of rounds, and provide for future leadership training. During the rounds network visit observation, teachers from multiple campuses in each district were present. Substitutes or other support to provide class coverage was in place to allow the teachers release time from teaching in order to participate in the rounds. No discussion regarding substitutes or concerns regarding financial commitment to maintain the process emerged during the network observations in any of the three districts.

DL1 was present to facilitate the rounds for Tall Oaks Elementary. DL1 is recently retired from Central Plains ISD and served in central administration. DL2 was present to facilitate the rounds for Rancho Vista Elementary. DL2 serves as the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Schools and facilitates three of the district's seven rounds networks. P3 facilitated the rounds at his campus. This was the first rounds visit in Southern Pines ISD, and P3 was most knowledgeable about the rounds facilitation. The facilitation and financial commitment of the district was not discussed at any of the rounds network, but the commitment of external facilitators demonstrates financial commitment on the part of the districts' leaders.

Funding and resources for training was an additional element described by participants. While training and funding were not discussed at any of the three network visits, it was evident that participants had engaged in training prior to the rounds network as they were able to engage in the process without overt guidance on the process from the facilitator. While members had procedural questions and questions related to the analysis, the participants did appear to have engaged in training regarding the practice of rounds in all three districts.

Physical Conditions

In interviews, participants expressed the importance of the physical conditions needed for rounds with regard to meeting space, as well as scheduling. In the rounds network visits in all three districts, meeting space in the campus library was dedicated for the full day. A schedule was available to all participants at each rounds network visit for all three districts. Across cases, pre-work was completed by the campus principals and district facilitators to create the schedule, provide maps, and organize with teachers to arrange for the logistics of the event. Alignment between the participant interviews and the role of physical conditions was clear.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Rounds

While participants, when interviewed, provided suggestions for improvements for rounds, they indicated a belief that it is an effective practice because it established shared vision and values, reduced initiative fatigue, and promoted collective data. During observation of the rounds network visits in each district, the process of building shared vision and values was evident. The journey of each campus with regard to rounds was shared in each district, building shared values and vision. In each district, certain language was reinforced or defined. In interviews, participants described the building of common language as a characteristic that made rounds appropriate and/or effective as an instructional improvement practice.

The reduction of initiative fatigue was also discussed as a positive effect of rounds, contributing to its success as an improvement practice. While initiative fatigue was not discussed directly during the observation of the network in any district, the principals did share the rounds journey of the campus. At Tall Oaks Elementary and Rancho Vista Elementary, it

was evident the campus had remained focused on the practice of rounds and adhered to the practice as a system to drive continuous improvement. At Southern Pines Middle School, the rounds work was beginning. There was no evidence rounds would provide focus to reduce initiative fatigue from the initial observation; however, participants expressed optimism that rounds and stable leadership may reduce initiative fatigue.

In addition to building shared values and vision and reducing initiative fatigue, participants in districts also expressed the practice of collective data was a characteristic that made rounds an appropriate and/or effective instructional improvement practice. The participants described that the data was not that of specific teachers, but it was related to the entire school. Observation from rounds network visits across all three districts supports the observation of collective data versus individual teacher data. The artifacts collected and information shared with the campuses during the rounds network debriefs were related to patterns observed across the entire campus in each of the three districts.

Observation from each district supports participant perceptions regarding characteristics that make rounds an appropriate and/or effective instructional improvement practice, including building shared values and vision, reducing initiative fatigue, and building collective data.

Salient Characteristics that Set Rounds Apart

Evidence from the observation supports participant perceptions that collaboration, deprivatization of practice, and focus on improving instruction with classroom observation at the center of the practice are salient features of rounds that distinguish it from other improvement practices. The observation of rounds indicated it is a collaborative process; it is

the intersection of classroom observation, a professional learning community, and systems thinking (J. Roberts, 2012). During the observation of the rounds networks, the collaborative nature of the process was evident. During the first part of the day, there was a learning time for the rounds network members related to on-going work related to the problem of practice (Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD) or learning related to the launch of rounds (Southern Pines ISD). The teams at each rounds network visit in all three districts observed instruction in four classrooms, and took notes independently about what they observed in the classroom. They returned to the meeting site to discuss and analyze what was observed in the classroom instruction. In each district, following observation, a quiet period was set aside to review notes individually and organize evidence responsive to the problem of practice and essential questions. Across cases, the independent classroom observation and 25 minutes of individual organization time was the only time the team members were not collaborating with others; however, the independent observation and organization time provided was to prepare for collaborative learning. Teams in each district shared dialogue about what they observed in the classroom. Some teams had disagreements about the observation. In each district, this collaborative dialogue helped to refine understanding and build common vocabulary.

Deprivatization of practice was evident in the rounds network visits. Observation teams were cross-role teams. In each district, the teams observed instruction and then engaged in dialogue regarding the observation. The participation of multiple roles from the district and the time spent learning in actual classrooms is the essence of deprivatization of practice. Across cases, collaboration and deprivatization were characteristics described in the interviews that led participants to have the perception that rounds is an appropriate and/or effective practice

for improvement. Evidence from the observations aligned with perceptions uncovered during the interviews.

Finally, focusing on improving instruction with classroom observation at the center of the practice was a salient characteristic that sets rounds apart from other instructional improvement practices. The observation of the rounds network visits across all cases supports that the networks were focused on improving instructional practice and observation was at the core of the network visits.

Organizational Capacity to Improve the Instructional Core

When interviewed, most participants from each school district expressed the perception that rounds built capacity of teachers and/or the organization with regard to improving the instructional core to some degree. Observation of the rounds network reveals the opportunity to build organizational and individual capacity was present in each district; however, observation did not reveal whether or not capacity was increased due to the rounds network I observed. To determine if capacity was increased from learning at the rounds, further research may include observing classrooms of teacher participants in rounds network to understand practices better that are improved as a result of learning from rounds. Further study may also include researching school-wide planning and PLC work resulting from the rounds network. Did campus leaders and teacher leaders depart from rounds network and put new learning into practice to strengthen organizational capacity? Observation of the network visit revealed next levels of work suggested by rounds team members at each campus and the expectation was the campus leaders and teachers would embed the work of the network back at their respective campuses; however, without further study, the actual implementation is unknown.

Document Analysis

As part of the study, I analyzed documents from each district related to rounds, as provided to me upon request. I also reviewed the campus improvement plan and district improvement plan for each campus and district included in the study. Detailed description of the document analysis is available in Chapter 4 (Tall Oaks Elementary in Central Plains ISD), Chapter 5 (Rancho Vista Elementary in Rancho Vista ISD), and Chapter 6 (Southern Pines Middle School in Southern Pines ISD). I analyzed 24 documents related to rounds across three cases in addition to the CIP and DIP for each campus and district. Documents related to learning for the rounds networks or management of the rounds network. Learning documents included articles and frameworks. Learning documents were pronounced in Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD. Management documents, across all three cases, included norms, schedules, maps, problems of practice, and essential questions. In all documents related to managing rounds, across cases, references to trust and adult learning were made in each district.

In addition to documents connected directly to rounds, I analyzed the district and campus improvement plans for the three campuses and district. In Tall Oaks ISD, the district plan referenced rounds directly or indirectly 14 times. In Rancho Vista ISD, the DIP referenced rounds directly five times with inclusion of improving the instructional core as a central goal of the district. In Southern Pines ISD, the DIP referenced rounds directly two times.

Alignment of Document Analysis to Interview Perceptions

Perceptions from the interviews align with the strategies listed in the respective campus and district documents. Documents supporting the management of rounds align with the perceptions expressed in interviews regarding the supportive conditions necessary for

implementation and sustainability of rounds: relational, fiscal, and physical. Campus and district plans highlight the fiscal commitment to rounds on the part of campuses and districts across cases. The campus improvement plans and district improvement plans were not referenced by any participants in the study.

Conclusion

I studied three school districts in Texas seeking to understand the perception of participants with regard to

- The supportive conditions required for the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice
- The effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice
- The salient characteristics that distinguish rounds from other improvement practices
- Whether rounds builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core

Furthermore, I observed three rounds network visits and reviewed documents related to rounds to understand if perceptions of participants aligned with observations and documents.

Participants expressed perceptions that supportive conditions, including relational, fiscal, and physical conditions, are important to continue rounds as a systemic improvement practice. Across cases, participants indicated the effectiveness of rounds is due to the building shared vision and values, the reduction of initiative fatigue, and the focus on collective data. Salient characteristics of rounds were identified across cases as the collaborative nature of rounds, the deprivatization of practice, and the focus on improving instruction with observation at the core of the practice. Across cases, participants expressed the perception that rounds increased adult learning, particularly for rounds network participants, and increased capacity of teachers with varying degrees of effectiveness. Additionally, across cases, participants agreed

some parts, if not all, of the instructional core are impacted by the practice of rounds as a systemic improvement practice.

Observation of the rounds network and analysis of documents from all three districts related to rounds somewhat aligned with participants' perceptions regarding supportive conditions required for sustainability, the effectiveness and/or appropriateness of rounds as an improvement practice due to its focus on shared values and collective data, the salient characteristics of focus and inclusion, and the possibility of building both teacher capacity through rounds. While there were some areas in which the perceptions of participants were not evident when compared to observation and document analysis, there was some degree of alignment between perceptions of participants and what was revealed in observation and document analysis with regard to the research questions across the three school districts in Texas.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The field of education suffers from initiative fatigue, moving rapidly from one innovation to the next in an effort to improve teaching and learning (Reeves, 2010). The problem of the study was determining the supportive conditions related to instructional rounds (rounds) to understand better what conditions may allow for sustained systemic improvement over time.

In this chapter, I draw conclusions from the findings of a qualitative study of three school districts in Texas considering the perceptions of participants regarding the conditions required for sustainability of an instructional improvement practice. I also describe implications for action and make recommendations for future study.

The study involved three districts in the state of Texas, selected because of their respective work with implementation of rounds as a systemic improvement practice. The districts' selections were due to the variance in size: Central Plains ISD has over 40,000 students, Rancho Vista ISD serves over 25,000 students, and Southern Pines ISD serves just over 10,000 students. I also selected these districts due to the variance in length of implementation: Rancho Vista ISD has conducted rounds for over seven years, Central Plains ISD has conducted rounds for over five years, and Southern Pines ISD was in the first year of implementation of rounds. Seeking to understand the perceptions of participants, I designed a qualitative study. In each case, I interviewed a district leader responsible for the implementation of rounds, a building principal, and teachers on the rounds leadership team. I also conducted focus groups of teachers who were observed during rounds, but who were not currently participating in a

leadership role. I observed a rounds network visit in each district, and I reviewed documents relevant to rounds from each district, including both district and campus plans from each district. Themes emerged related to the perceptions of supportive conditions required for sustainability of rounds as an instructional improvement practice, the effectiveness of rounds as an improvement practice, the salient characteristics of rounds as an improvement practice, and the potential of rounds to increase organizational capacity. I then reviewed documents related to rounds to consider alignment of documents to participants' perceptions.

Purpose Statement

The American school system functions as a nested system, comprised of units of local organization, the school, nested within a larger district. Districts function as independent entities across states. State education agencies function as independent entities across the nation. Unlike the medical profession, a strong, systemic professional practice does not yet exist for improving teaching and learning across the nested system (City et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to determine what supportive conditions are required for sustainability of rounds as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement.

Research Questions

The study included four distinct groups of participants: district instructional leaders, principals, classroom teachers who participate in rounds network visits, and classroom teachers who may be observed in rounds network visits but did not directly participate. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are district instructional leaders', principals', and classroom teachers' perceptions of rounds with respect to:

- a. the supportive conditions required for its sustainability as a systemic improvement practice,
 - b. its appropriateness and/or effectiveness as a systemic improvement practice,
 - c. the salient characteristics that set it apart from other improvement practices (or how it compares to other improvement practices), and
 - d. whether and how it builds organizational capacity to improve the instructional core?
2. How well do these perceptions match or align with what is observed in classroom/school practice and in school district documents?

Review of Methodology

A qualitative study was appropriate for the consideration of participant perceptions regarding the conditions required for effectiveness of rounds as an improvement practice, as qualitative study seeks to provide the audience with the perspective of participants with the understanding that there are multiple truths to be heard (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Various perspectives were uncovered during the interviews and focus groups and themes emerged related to the research questions.

Self as Researcher

To build credibility, I disclosed that I served in one of the districts involved in the study, and I have been involved in rounds as both a campus and district leader since its inception in the district. I sought to examine biases throughout the process by keeping a journal and bracketing emotions and self-connections. My understanding of rounds from a participant perspective adds credibility to my research and adds depth to the study as my past experiences with the improvement practice inform the study.

Method

To understand the factors significant to sustaining improvement and supportive

conditions necessary for successful implementation of rounds, I utilized multiple case study methodology seeking themes and similarities across cases. Case study is a recognized method to understand a complex social phenomenon (Yin, 2014). I chose to conduct a multiple case study in order to build reliability.

Data Collection

Beginning in May, 2016, I prepared to collect data. With the guidance of Dr. Sheila Maher, I contacted districts who had participated in Texas ASCD's rounds training and had ongoing work in the district related to rounds. I contacted the chief academic officers in each district and sent the superintendent in each district a letter that outlined the study and requested permission to conduct the study. Once permission from the superintendent was granted, I made contact with each chief academic officer to determine the school site for participation in the study. I followed the guidance of each school district in setting up the rounds network observation and interviews. In the fall of 2016, I observed a rounds network visit in each of the three districts. I also interviewed the designated district academic officer, the designated campus principal, and teacher leaders who were involved in the campus leadership of rounds. I also conducted focus groups of teacher participants who were not currently serving in a leadership role related to rounds. Each campus and district leader also sent me documents they believed related to rounds in their school district. I located the campus and district improvement plans at respective websites to include in the document analysis. Upon completion of the interview, participants reviewed all transcripts for accuracy.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data using constant comparison analysis with deductive codes developed

from the conceptual framework guiding the study. I transcribed and coded all the sources of data. I used word frequency tools to check the themes that emerged during the constant comparison analysis using Atlas.TI, a computer assisted qualitative data analysis system. I checked the initial coding with the word frequency generated in Atlas.TI. Further, a doctoral student at the University of North Texas with experience in qualitative data analysis coded one case of data using the deductive codes established from the framework. In coding one case, 76% of interrater reliability was established, thereby increasing validity of the data analysis.

Ethical Considerations

The ethics and protection of human subjects is assured throughout the study. I adhered to regulations established by the National Institutes of Health and the University of North Texas's Institutional Review Board. Participants signed informed consent forms. Follow-up interviews, member checking, and preliminary findings were shared with participants at appropriate intervals in the study. All participants, campuses, and districts were assigned pseudonyms as an assurance of privacy.

Major Findings

Perceptions, themes, and critical factors were identified from the interviews of participants and focus groups across three Texas school districts. Major findings then emerged and corresponded with the research questions.

Figure 31 presents the major findings, lists the critical attributes for each major finding, and includes the alignment analysis. Thus the major findings and critical attributes were supportive conditions, appropriateness and effectiveness of rounds, salient characteristics of rounds, and building organizational capacity. Further, I found alignment between the

perceptions of personnel and the observation of rounds network visits and analysis of documents.

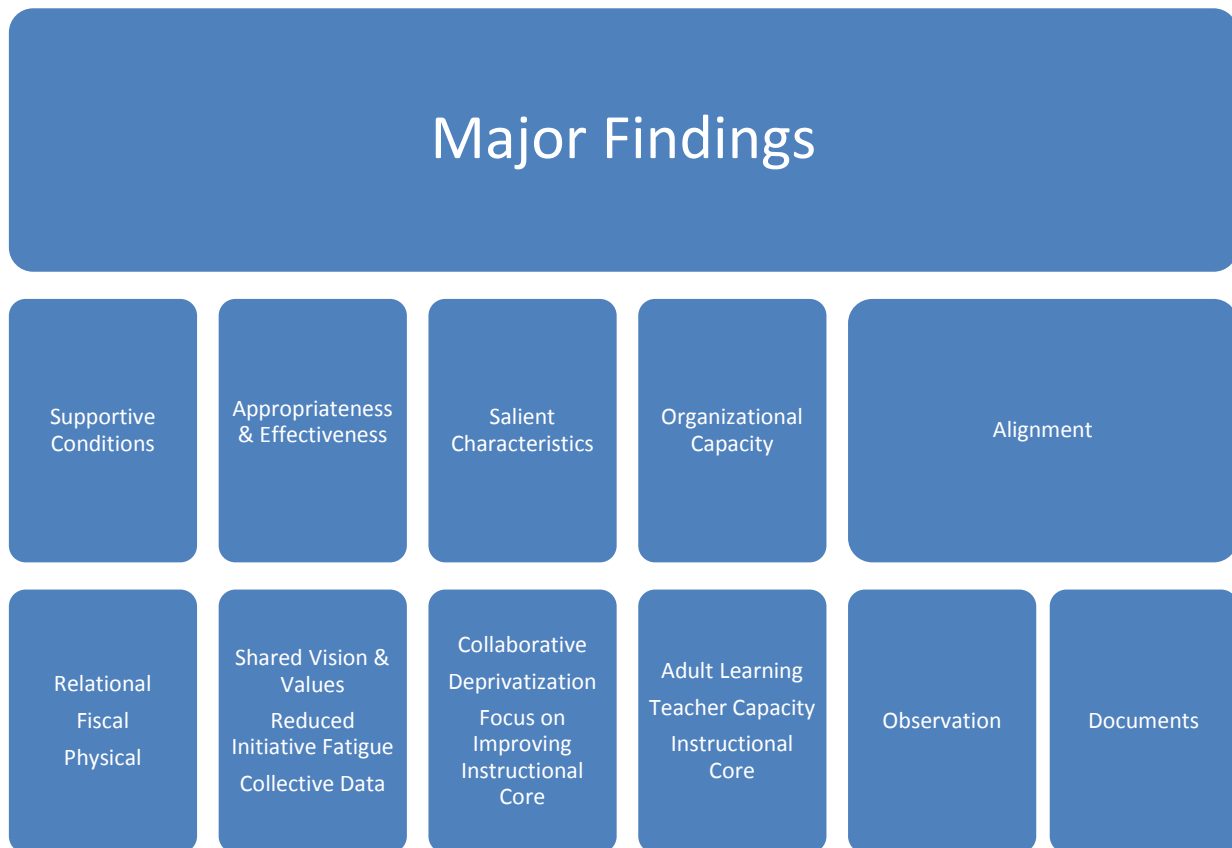


Figure 31. Major findings regarding rounds in three Texas public school districts.

Supportive Conditions

With regard to perceptions of supportive conditions, three themes emerged as significant to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice: relational conditions, fiscal conditions, and physical conditions. Related to the theme of relational conditions, trust and leadership emerged as critical factors to success. With regard to fiscal conditions, financial resources, training, and time emerged as critical success factors. Physical conditions were also significant, with meeting space and rounds network organization emerging as critical factors.

Supportive conditions have been found essential to the systemic improvement of school, including relational, fiscal, and physical conditions (Barth, 2006; Drago-Severson, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Reeves, 2006). The study extends on the body of research related to the importance of supportive conditions for systemic school improvement as participants widely expressed the need for the critical factors of trust, leadership, financial resources, time, meeting space, and network logistics with regard to the themes of relational conditions, fiscal conditions, and physical conditions. Participants referenced supportive conditions 202 times across three cases; the most critical factors, based on numbers of references, were trust and leadership. While these factors are critical to the successful sustainability of rounds as an improvement practice, they are also critical to the successful implementation of any school improvement practice. While the study was focused on rounds, an argument could be made the supportive conditions described by participants, and supported in the literature, are critical factors for implementation of any initiative in school systems.

The findings also extended the literature review in the area of leadership. The literature revealed supportive culture, clear vision, and support for professional learning must reside in leadership at both the district and campus level in order for school improvement to occur (Leithwood et al., 2004; Reeves, 2010). This theme from the literature was revealed in the study. Leadership is perhaps the most critical factor in the systemic improvement of the school, at both the district and campus level aside from classroom instruction (Leithwood et al., 2004). In both Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, the districts and campuses had sustained leadership that appeared focused on the improvement of teaching and learning.

Superintendents attended the rounds visit, central office leadership was present at both rounds network visits, and the principals had long connections with the districts. Aside from sustainability of leadership, participants from Rancho Vista Elementary described their principal as a supportive leader that includes all staff in making decisions but provides leadership and guidance along the way.

The literature supports that the improvement of teaching and learning in single schools, and in systems of schools, depends on how central office creates and implements support for change and improvement (Honig et al., 2010). In the cases of Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, the picture of central office emerged as the architect of the system with defined autonomy for campuses and room for campus leadership to make determinations related to the improvement of the campus. Contrary to this image was the picture of Southern Pines ISD. The central office leadership described the district as highly decentralized. Each campus in Southern Pines ISD, from participant description, appeared to have wide latitude to develop curriculum, determine structures, and operate independently. DL3 expressed the district's future direction to centralize more processes for the school district. The rounds work was launched by the principal of Southern Pines Middle School and then adopted by the district as a systemic improvement strategy. However, the organization to support a systemic improvement practice was not yet in place in Southern Pines ISD. Thus, the district may establish a pattern in which wide variance exists in the system between schools and single schools demonstrate vast improvement, but the system struggles to improve at scale. The study extends on the concept of leadership expressed in the literature review as the critical factor for school improvement, second only to classroom instruction.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness

Participants expressed perceptions related to the appropriateness and effectiveness of rounds as a systemic improvement practice. Themes emerging as related to the appropriateness and effectiveness of rounds were: shared vision and values, reduced initiative fatigue, and collective data. While participants shared perceptions that rounds was an appropriate and effective improvement practice, they also suggested improvements to the practice to build its effectiveness.

The study results extend understanding of building shared vision and values to create system-wide improvement. Rounds was created to address the need of systemic improvement at scale in American schools. As American schools typically jump from initiative to initiative in search of the next greatest *silver bullet* to *fix* student learning (Reeves, 2010), we do not yet have a system that produces “dependably proficient teaching in every classroom, in every school” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 7). As the founders of rounds intended, participants in the study perceive that rounds has the potential to improve student learning across the system through increasing adult learning and increased teacher capacity. The potential to improve the system depends on the commitment of the system to adhere to the improvement practice over time, rather than diverting attention to other structural change or any other attribute of the school system aside from teaching and learning (Elmore & Burney 1999; Reeves, 2010). To adhere to the practice reduces initiative fatigue, as witnessed in Rancho Vista ISD and Central Plains ISD. The districts leveraged rounds as an improvement strategy for five or more years. In doing so, other improvement strategies were not considered or set aside. While the teachers expressed the sentiment that their work is sometimes overwhelming, they also seemed to

understand a greater degree of coherence in their work and how the work was driven by the district's problem of practice. The findings connected to reduction of initiative fatigue and continued improvement over time through selection of a system-wide improvement practice was underscored in the literature review.

Salient Characteristics

Participant perceptions revealed the practice of rounds is differentiated from other instructional improvement practices due to the themes of collaborative nature of the practice, deprivatization of practice, and focus on improving instruction with observation at the core of the practice. Participants described previous improvement strategies employed in the districts as efforts either rooted in a drive to improve scores on state standardized tests, to improve scores on teacher evaluation, or as a program or strategy designed to improve student behavior or a core content area. Perceptions revealed rounds is set apart as the entire school is focused around a common problem of practice, building collaboration among both the rounds network team and the campus. Further, participants described the deprivatization of practice as the classroom and its observation is at the core of the practice of rounds.

Organizational Capacity

Participant interviews revealed the belief in the potential of rounds to serve as a practice to build organizational capacity; however, the belief that rounds had built organizational capacity varied by participant. Participants generally shared that themes related to building organizational capacity that were related to rounds included adult learning for both network participants and the campus in general, increased teacher capacity, and improvement

of the instructional core. Participants revealed the impact of rounds was greater for network participants than for teachers observed as a part of the practice.

The study extends the literature review as related to adult learning to build teachers' knowledge and skills, one of the elements of the instructional core. Through adult learning, teacher capacity is increased. Through the increase of individual teacher capacity, organizational capacity builds (Drago-Severson, 2009; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Marzano, 2009; J. Roberts, 2012; Troen et al., 2014). In each of the three cases, participants described rounds network participation as an experience designed to build the capacity of the teacher and to increase the teachers' knowledge and skill. The participants also described increased knowledge and skill based on the campus's participation in rounds and learning due to the experience. However, participants in all three cases acknowledged deeper capacity building for network participants compared to teachers who were not participating in the network.

Alignment with Observation and Documents

My observation of three rounds network visits revealed alignment with the participant interviews. Supportive conditions were either referenced or observed directly during the network visits. Building of shared vision and values through common language and the capturing of collective data was directly observed during the network visits. The collaboration of the networks and the deprivatization of practice were observed as rounds network teams observed classrooms together and analyzed practice as a team. Further, each rounds network visit began with a learning time designed to increase adult learning and build teacher capacity. The instructional core and its improvement were reinforced at each rounds network visit.

Analysis of documents relevant to rounds and the district and campus improvement plans revealed, for each case, a connection to supportive conditions, shared values and vision, and collaboration. Campus and district plans for all three districts included reference to or focus on rounds as an improvement practice.

Discussion

Through the study of three districts in Texas, perceptions, themes, and critical factors emerged related to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice. Based on the examination of findings, I offer several conclusions related to process, supportive conditions, the appropriateness and effectiveness of rounds, salient characteristics of rounds, and the building of organizational capacity.

Process of Rounds

The process of rounds in all three districts was largely similar; they all followed the same structure in developing a problem of practice and essential questions. They participated in a rounds network in which people from other campuses came for a day of observation and analysis. Each campus left with ideas for next levels of work to continue building capacity and improving student learning. The similarity of the process was noted through observation of the rounds network visits. Because the district leadership had training through Texas ASCD and on-going support from a common trainer, there was remarkable similarity in the structure of the networks and network visits. Participating in the training offered by Texas ASCD and rooted directly in the work from Harvard allowed the districts to build similar structures for networks, with some variance. This similarity allowed for common language and common understanding

when I engaged with each rounds network. It also would enable cross-district study and work to build capacity between districts and expand collaboration.

Supportive Conditions

Supportive conditions are essential for the sustainability of rounds, or any other instructional initiative. The fiscal conditions and physical conditions are required as foundational for implementation: there must be funding for training and substitutes and meeting space. The relational factors are most difficult to build and sustain, and trust and leadership emerged as the most critical factors for success. I posit that, while participants referenced trust more frequently than leadership, leadership is the most critical factor to successful sustainability of rounds or other instructional improvement practices. Leadership is required to establish and build trust; without strong leadership in place, trust will not exist. District leadership is critical, as well as campus leadership. District leadership determines campus leadership and sets parameters for defined autonomy of campus leaders. District leadership determines the fiscal conditions for support of instructional improvement, and district leadership designs systems for the district as a whole. District leadership will set the focus on teaching and learning for campus leaders, or set the focus on other priorities, or not set a focus and allow campus leaders to determine the focus of the system. In two cases, Central Plains ISD and Rancho Vista ISD, the strength of the district leadership and the shared leadership between campus and district related to the successful implementation and sustainability of rounds as an improvement practice. The sustained leadership of the district leaders and the campus leaders, and the focus of both district and campus leadership on improving teaching and learning resonated through the description of participants. While

participants in both districts offered suggestions for improvement of the practice and had criticism of the practice of rounds, the participants also expressed that leadership of the district and campus was critical in the successful implementation and continuation of rounds. In the third case, challenges with sustainability of leadership were described as participants remarked about a seeming *revolving door* of principals. Each new principal introduced new initiatives due to the decentralized system described by the district instructional officer. The lack of systems established by the central office may contribute to initiative fatigue in Southern Pines ISD. If there are not systems in place from the district and campus leadership continues to change, then each new campus leader will bring their own system, creating leadership churn and fatigue, as described by multiple participants in the case. In this environment, it will be difficult to sustain rounds or any other initiative. Geography may have some impact centralizing systems; Southern Pines ISD is spread over 400 square miles while Rancho Vista ISD is contained to 54 square miles. However, Central Plains is also spread over approximately 400 square miles with a seeming greater degree of systems directed by the central office and a greater degree of shared leadership between central office and the campus leadership than Southern Pines ISD.

Campus leadership is critical to the ongoing and sustaining work of rounds. The principal at Rancho Vista ISD emerged as a strong leader; the teacher leaders and the participants in the focus group echoed this sentiment. The campus leader's role is to determine the direction for the campus within the boundaries established in partnership with central office to reach a goal established with the community and set by the superintendent. The campus leader determines if rounds will be an effective practice that drives the instructional

improvement of the campus or if rounds will be an interesting academic exercise for the day of the network visit. Participants described the process at Rancho Vista Elementary School as one in which the principal led the campus in discussing and defining the problem of practice and determining next steps together. From the work of rounds, participants described expectations for writing, speaking, and improvements in all areas of the instructional core. One teacher leader acknowledged this was the practice at Rancho Vista Elementary because of the principal, sharing his colleague at another school in Rancho Vista ISD does not have the same experience with rounds. The role of district and campus leadership is not unique to successful implementation and sustainability of rounds; the role of leadership is critical to any school improvement effort.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Rounds

Another conclusion that emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the data was rounds is a practice that can build shared values and vision through constructing a common language around instruction. Most critical is rounds may reduce initiative fatigue. Teachers across cases shared the perception that either they could not name the improvement strategy of the district or there were so many components they focused on for the improvement of teaching and learning, they were overwhelmed. While not proven in the scope of this study, there did emerge the belief that rounds may reduce initiative fatigue as it focuses the campus and/or district on one problem, functioning as a filter to reduce the temptation to jump to the next bandwagon product or practice. The ability to remain constant and focused on one initiative requires strong leadership at both the district and campus levels.

Salient Characteristics of Rounds

Participants across three cases described previous instructional improvement efforts of each district as, generally, connected to teacher evaluation, increased scores on standardized tests, or a program for purchase. In all three cases, participants also described individual teacher feedback and observation as part of a previous improvement effort, referring to Learning Walks and Focused Walkthroughs in two cases. While no participant clearly articulated this independently during interviews, the collective interviews and observation revealed what sets rounds apart from other improvement practices described by participants are the focus on classroom instruction, the deprivatization of practice, and the focus on improving the collective whole. No other improvement practice was described that included deprivatization of practice by bringing teams of observers from different campuses and different roles together to study a problem of practice by observing classroom instruction and then analyzing what was observed. With deep analysis of classroom instruction at the heart of the practice, it is set apart from other improvement practices described.

Furthermore, the suggestions for improvement and next levels of work are made to the campus as a whole body for consideration, rather than next steps recommended to an individual teacher as part of an evaluation or walkthrough. The focus is also on improving instruction; the consideration of achievement scores is not included in the analysis of the classroom observation. In the three cases, state testing achievement data may be used to uncover the problem of practice or measure progress, but they are used as a measure, not as the driver of the practice. From my own experience, participating in rounds was the first time I went to observe a classroom at another campus or had people from outside of my campus come to observe and give collective feedback on our campus growth. The deprivatization of

practice and opening the doors of the campus may build trust, stimulate growth, and serve to build relationships across the network. These characteristics are unique to rounds. The extent to which these characteristics develop is dependent upon leadership.

Building Organizational Capacity

Across cases, all participants expressed the sentiment that rounds has the potential to build organizational capacity by increasing adult learning, increasing teacher capacity, and improving the instructional core. Participants expressed varying opinions about the degree to which this organizational capacity may be built, acknowledging that growth occurs more rapidly and robustly for participants on the rounds network than for classroom teachers who are only observed. Again, the role of leadership is critical to the potential of rounds as a systemic practice to build capacity of both individual teachers and the organization. Campus and district leaders will determine structures and lead work to increase adult learning and improve capacity of teachers.

Implications for Action

Multiple implications for action emerged from the study. Based on the findings from the study, I present the following actions for districts considering implementing and/or sustaining rounds as a systemic improvement practice:

1. Determine and provide for the supportive conditions necessary for successful implementation of rounds with regard to fiscal conditions: financial resources for substitutes and appropriate training for rounds network leaders and participants, as well as appropriate training for teachers who are not participating in the rounds network.

2. Determine and provide for the supportive conditions necessary for successful implementation of rounds with regard to physical conditions: provide meeting space and determine a schedule in advance for rounds network participants.

3. Determine and provide for the supportive conditions necessary for successful implementation of rounds with regard to relational conditions: trust and leadership. Realize that building trust occurs over time with the beginning of the practice of rounds.

4. Review structures and systems in the district established for improving instruction. Consider how rounds is similar to and different from previously explored practices for improvement.

5. Inform principals, central office leaders, teacher leaders, and teachers about the purpose and desired outcomes of rounds; teach all stakeholders about the process.

6. Build understanding through professional development regarding the instructional core.

7. Focus on building a common vocabulary and ensuring staff have a common understanding of language used to describe instruction.

8. If such a system does not yet exist, create a system for deprivatizing practice on a small scale, such as those described by participants in Rancho Vista ISD (focused walkthroughs) and Southern Pines ISD (learning walks).

9. Provide continued development for leadership at the campus and district level on both technical skills related to rounds and instructional improvement as well as interpersonal skills related to leadership and trust-building.

10. Provide on-going training for rounds network participants, teachers new to rounds, and teachers new to the district regarding the problem of practice and implementation of rounds.

11. As participants expressed the greatest learning occurred for those who participated in rounds networks, expand opportunities for teachers to participate in rounds.

12. Consider the benefits and consequences of creating a district-wide problem of practice.

13. Consider connecting with other districts engaged in rounds to build wider community and possible intra-district networks.

14. Determine how district leadership will support and monitor the campus learning journey with regard to rounds.

15. Stay the course. Be determined to focus on one practice as a driver for improvement rather than jumping from initiative to initiative.

Recommendations for Future Study

While the study revealed perceptions of participants in three districts in Texas related to rounds as an instructional improvement practice, it is not an exhaustive study. A need exists for future study. Possible considerations for future study that would deepen understanding of rounds as systemic improvement practice include the following:

1. A longitudinal study in one district, or multiple districts, regarding the sustainability and effectiveness of rounds over time. This study was limited to one year, but including further study over time may increase reliability and deepen understanding of the effectiveness of rounds to improve a school system.

2. A study examining multiple schools in one district to understand further how the system functions with greater depth.

3. A comparative study examining the implementation of another systemic improvement practice compared to the implementation of further rounds may provide greater insight regarding effectiveness of the practice.

4. A study of the impact of further rounds on standardized test or other student achievement data.

Concluding Remarks

In this study, I studied three Texas school districts to understand

- The perceptions of district leaders, principals, teacher leaders, and teachers with regard to the sustainability of rounds as a systemic improvement practice
- The supportive conditions necessary for sustainability
- The salient characteristics that differentiated further rounds from other improvement practices
- The potential of further rounds to build organizational capacity

I conducted observation of rounds network visits and document analysis to determine alignment of perceptions with observation and documents.

Findings included perceptions, themes, and critical factors for the sustainability of rounds as an effective systemic improvement practice with supportive conditions emerging as the most significant perception expressed by the participants. Implications for action for school districts beginning or continuing implementation of rounds were suggested based upon findings from participant perceptions and observation of rounds networks. Suggestions for future

research were shared. With supportive conditions in place, rounds has the potential to serve as an effective systemic improvement practice.

For those practicing education today in the United States, the stakes are high and the challenges are many. Educators must educate every child to a high degree of proficiency in core content areas while preparing students for jobs that do not yet exist in an increasingly complex and global economy with emergent technologies. In an attempt to outperform global competitors and meet the demands of the rapidly changing economy, the United States and its schools have pursued a broad range of reforms with varying degrees of success. No reform has yet produced wide scale instructional improvement across systems. Rounds has the potential to serve as a systemic instructional improvement practice. Because organizational reform and growth is dependent upon the changed practice of the individuals in the organization, the perceptions and attitudes of the individual about a new professional practice, such as rounds, are critical to the development and sustainability of the reform. The significance of this study is, it is the first study to consider the perceptions of the practitioners attempting to implement the instructional practice across multiple districts, providing insight into the needs for supportive conditions necessary to sustain rounds as a systemic improvement practice. The study contributes to the literature, and extends the research of systemic improvement theory and practice by providing cases that serve as connections between the theoretical and practical and demonstrate the synthesis of multiple fields of literature embedded in practice: systemic improvement, culture, leadership, and professional learning communities. Furthermore, the study provides resources for practitioners regarding the implementation and conditions required for sustainability of the practice of rounds.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Letter to Superintendent of Schools

Dr. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX, Superintendent of XXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXX
City, State ZIP
Date

Dear Dr. XXXXXXXX,

As part of my doctoral studies at the University of North Texas, I am completing a dissertation about school and district systems that contribute to the field of education. I am writing to request permission to conduct research within XXXXX Independent School District based on your District's work with Rounds. Dr. Sheila Maher referred me to your District. This letter outlines my intent and presents the context for the study.

The field of education suffers from initiative fatigue, moving rapidly from one innovation to the next in an effort to improve teaching and learning. Rounds, as the intersection of professional learning communities, observation and feedback with a specific problem of practice, has been touted as a promising systemic reform to improve teaching and learning.

The purpose of the study is to determine what supportive conditions are required for the sustainability of Rounds as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement.

The design of the study involves face-to-face interviews of the following representatives from your school district: central office leader directly involved in leading district-wide Rounds work, 1 campus principal leading Rounds at his/her campus, and 3 teachers at the campus who are involved in the Rounds campus leadership and/or Rounds network visits. The design of the study also involves interviewing a focus group of 6 campus teachers who are not involved with Rounds leadership or network visits. Along with the interviews and focus groups, participant observation and document analysis would be included in the data collection. I would request to join the Rounds network visit for one day of participant observation. I would also request access to existing documents connected to Rounds, such as the problem of practice, momentum plan, Campus Improvement Plan, or any other documents deemed relevant by the central office leader or principal in your school district.

The District leader, campus principal, and all individual teachers interviewed and/or observed would be involved in the research process with the opportunity to member-check my observations and research notes in order to give further credibility and reliability to the study. The District itself and all individuals interviewed would be assigned a pseudonym for anonymity during the study.

The time commitment required of each employee is approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour for the initial face-to-face interview or focus group with a willingness to review findings and follow up via telephone with any clarification as part of member-checking. The total time required of each participant should not exceed 2 hours. Participants who are interviewed or participate in the focus group will receive a modest compensation (gift card) as gratitude for their time. I will also engage in participant observation in one network visit, and the time required for the visit depends on how the District arranges network visits (either half-day, 1 full day, or over 2 days). No special preparation will be needed for the participant observation of the Rounds network.

I request that the study take place at the convenience of the District over two to three days in the Fall of 2016 with 1 day spent in participant observation and other time spent in interviews. In order to accommodate district guidelines for research, I will adjust travel and length of stay if needed.

Information collected will be used solely for the purpose of the research study and resulting dissertation.

All District guidelines related to research will be strictly adhered to, and all participants will give signed informed consent.

I believe this study will serve to benefit XXXX Independent School District as it will indicate the supportive conditions in place to continue the systemic improvement efforts underway, and it may highlight areas for growth as the District continues its journey of improvement and student achievement. The findings, which will be shared with the District, may allow further refinement of Rounds in your District.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact me directly at (██████████)-██████████ or via email at warnockg@██████████, or the Chairperson of my committee, Dr. Jane Huffman at University of North Texas at jane.huffman@unt.edu.

Thank you in advance for your time. I look forward to hearing from you regarding this request for permission.

Sincerely,

Georgeanne Warnock, Associate Superintendent
██

APPENDIX B

SCRIPT FOR PRINCIPAL TO READ TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS AT FACULTY MEETING

Script for Principal to Read to Potential Participants at Faculty Meeting

Principal or Designee: For entire campus: Our district and campus has agreed to participate in a research study for a doctoral student from the University of North Texas. The study is titled "School System Improvement through Building Leadership, Adult Learning, and Capacity: A Consideration of Rounds as a Systemic Improvement Practice." The purpose of the study is to determine what supportive conditions are required for sustainability of Rounds as a practice for large-scale systemic improvement. The study will involve the researcher spending one day at our campus observing a Rounds network visit, as well as interviews of central office personnel, me as the campus principal, teacher leaders from our Rounds leadership team, and a focus group of 6-8 teachers who may or may not have participated in Rounds but are not part of a leadership role this year. If you are on the Rounds leadership team, may I please speak to you briefly after the meeting (or hold a separate meeting)? If you are not on the Rounds Leadership team and you are interested in participating in the focus group, please add your name and email to the list I am distributing. This sign-in list for volunteers will be returned to the researcher. Your participation is completely voluntary. If more than 6-8 staff members volunteer, then names will be placed in a random drawing for participation from the list of volunteers. You will receive modest compensation in the form of a gift card upon completion of the focus group. The focus group will last for approximately one hour and will be scheduled from my office in accordance with our campus policy and procedures. If you are selected as a participant, you will receive an informed consent document from the researcher via email, as well as additional information. If you have any questions, you may ask me. If I am unable to answer, you may address your questions to warnockg@██████████ or call the researcher, Georgeanne Warnock, at 214-██████████

██████████

APPENDIX C

DISTRICT LEADER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

District Leader Interview Protocol

1. Please share your name and role in the district.
2. How long have you worked for the district?
3. How is Rounds impacting teaching and learning? (1d)
 - a. What changes have you implemented in the district's/campus's instructional work as a results of Rounds?
 - b. Has Rounds made you think differently about the leadership moves necessary to support instructional improvement? If yes, how?
4. How is Rounds helping your district to improve the instructional core? (1d)
 - a. How does learning from Rounds improve the knowledge and skill of the adults in the organization?
 - b. How does learning from Rounds impact students and the way they interact with content?
 - c. How does learning from Rounds increase the level and rigor of content?
 - d. How does learning from Rounds impact the design of task for students?
 - e. How does learning from Rounds drive professional development at the campus and/or district?
5. What has the impact of Rounds been on school culture? (1d)
6. What makes Rounds an effective systemic improvement practice? (1b)
 - a. How does the district/campus select the problem of practice?
 - b. What is the student learning problem that the district/campus is attempting to solve?
 - c. What data sources does the district/campus use to determine the student learning problem addressed in the problem of practice?
7. How is Rounds connected to other district initiatives? (1b)
8. How does Rounds compare to other improvement practices the district has employed presently or in the past? (1c)
 - a. How is it similar?
 - b. How is it different?
9. What supportive conditions are required in order to sustain Rounds in your District? (1a)
 - a. How are your networks constructed?
 - b. How is time set aside for the Rounds work?
 - c. What resources are required in your District to support Rounds work?
 - d. How is staff trained to participate in Rounds networks?
 - e. How is staff trained about Rounds if they are not participating on a network?
10. What challenges has your district faced in implementing Rounds? (1a)
 - a. How have you addressed the challenges?
11. Does your district plan on continuing Rounds? If so, for how long? (1a)
12. If your district plans to continue Rounds, what conditions will your district need for successful sustainability? (1a)
 - a. What obstacles do you anticipate?

APPENDIX D

CAMPUS PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Campus Principal Interview Protocol

1. Please share your name and role in the district.
2. How long have you worked for the district?
3. How is Rounds impacting teaching and learning? (1d)
 - a. What changes have you implemented in the district's and campus's instructional work as a results of Rounds?
 - b. Has Rounds made you think differently about the leadership moves necessary to support instructional improvement? If yes, how?
4. How is Rounds helping your district and campus to improve the instructional core? (1d)
 - a. How does learning from Rounds improve the knowledge and skill of the adults in the organization?
 - b. How does learning from Rounds impact students and the way they interact with content?
 - c. How does learning from Rounds increase the level and rigor of content?
 - d. How does learning from Rounds impact the design of task for students?
 - e. How does learning from Rounds drive professional development at the campus and/or district?
5. What has the impact of Rounds been on school culture? (1d)
6. What makes Rounds an effective systemic improvement practice? (1b)
 - a. How does the district/campus select the problem of practice?
 - b. What is the student learning problem that the campus is attempting to solve?
 - c. What data sources does the campus use to determine the student learning problem addressed in the problem of practice?
7. How is Rounds connected to other district initiatives? (1b)
8. How does Rounds compare to other improvement practices the district has employed presently or in the past? (1c)
 - a. How is it similar?
 - b. How is it different?
9. What supportive conditions are required in order to sustain Rounds in your District? (1a)
 - a. How are your networks constructed?
 - b. How is time set aside for the Rounds work?
 - c. What resources are required in your District to support Rounds work?
 - d. How is staff trained to participate in Rounds networks?
 - e. How is staff trained about Rounds if they are not participating on a network?
10. What challenges has your district faced in implementing Rounds? (1a)
 - a. How have you addressed the challenges?
11. Does your district plan on continuing Rounds? If so, for how long? (1a)
12. If your district plans to continue Rounds, what conditions will your district need for successful sustainability? (1a)
 - a. What obstacles do you anticipate?

APPENDIX E

TEACHER LEADER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teacher Leader Interview Protocol

1. Please share your name and role in the district.
2. How long have you worked for the district?
3. How is Rounds impacting teaching and learning? (1d)
 - a. What changes have you implemented in your instructional practice due to Rounds?
 - b. Has Rounds made you think differently about your instructional practice? If yes, how?
4. How is Rounds helping your district to improve the instructional core? (1d)
 - a. How does learning from Rounds improve the knowledge and skill of the adults in the organization?
 - b. How does learning from Rounds impact students and the way they interact with content?
 - c. How does learning from Rounds increase the level and rigor of content?
 - d. How does learning from Rounds impact the design of task for students?
 - e. How does learning from Rounds drive professional development at the campus and/or district?
5. What has the impact of Rounds been on school culture? (1d)
6. What makes Rounds an effective systemic improvement practice? (1b)
 - a. How does the campus select the problem of practice?
 - b. What is the student learning problem that the campus is attempting to solve?
 - c. What data sources does the campus use to determine the student learning problem addressed in the problem of practice?
7. How is Rounds connected to other district or campus initiatives? (1b)
8. How does Rounds compare to other improvement practices the district has employed presently or in the past? (1c)
 - a. How is it similar?
 - b. How is it different?
9. What supportive conditions are required in order to sustain Rounds in your District? (1a)
 - a. How are your networks constructed?
 - b. How is time set aside for the Rounds work?
 - c. What resources are required in your District to support Rounds work?
 - d. How are you trained to participate in Rounds?
10. What challenges has your district faced in implementing Rounds? (1a)
 - a. How have you addressed the challenges?
11. Does your district plan on continuing Rounds? If so, for how long? (1a)
12. If your district plans to continue Rounds, what conditions will your district need for successful sustainability? (1a)
 - a. What obstacles do you anticipate?

APPENDIX F

TEACHER FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol

1. Please share your name and role in the district.
2. How long have you worked for the district?
3. How is Rounds impacting teaching and learning? (1d)
 - a. What changes have you implemented in your instructional practice due to Rounds?
 - b. Has Rounds made you think differently about your instructional practice? If yes, how?
4. How is Rounds helping your district to improve the instructional core? (1d)
 - a. How does learning from Rounds improve the knowledge and skill of the adults in the organization?
 - b. How does learning from Rounds impact students and the way they interact with content?
 - c. How does learning from Rounds increase the level and rigor of content?
 - d. How does learning from Rounds impact the design of task for students?
 - e. How does learning from Rounds drive professional development at the campus and/or district?
5. What has the impact of Rounds been on school culture? (1d)
6. What makes Rounds an effective systemic improvement practice? (1b)
 - a. How does the campus select the problem of practice?
 - b. What is the student learning problem that the campus is attempting to solve?
 - c. What data sources does the campus use to determine the student learning problem addressed in the problem of practice?
7. How is Rounds connected to other district or campus initiatives? (1b)
8. How does Rounds compare to other improvement practices the district has employed presently or in the past? (1c)
 - a. How is it similar?
 - b. How is it different?
9. What supportive conditions are required in order to sustain Rounds in your District? (1a)
 - a. How are your networks constructed?
 - b. How is time set aside for the Rounds work?
 - c. What resources are required at your campus to support Rounds work?
 - d. How are you trained about Rounds?
10. What challenges has your district faced in implementing Rounds? (1a)
 - a. How have you addressed the challenges?
11. Does your district plan on continuing Rounds? If so, for how long? (1a)
12. If your district plans to continue Rounds, what conditions will your district need for successful sustainability? (1a)
 - a. What obstacles do you anticipate?

APPENDIX G

DETAILED NOTES OF OBSERVATION OF ROUNDS NETWORK VISIT: TALL OAKS ELEMENTARY

Detailed Notes of Observation of Rounds Network Visit: Tall Oaks Elementary

Learning Time

Upon arriving at Tall Oaks Elementary for the observation of Rounds network, I was greeted warmly by DL1 and P1. DL1 shared that the campus does “Rounds really well” and that they desire to standardize their data from Rounds so that the Rounds team does not have to figure out how the campus wants data collection to be reported. I was seated with two district leaders, one new Executive Director attending Rounds to learn about the process as he will be taking over facilitating Rounds and an instructional content director responsible for curriculum in first and second grades. Both district officials spoke with high regard about the Rounds process.

At precisely 7:30 A.M., DL1 began the meeting of the Rounds network at Tall Oaks Elementary. She articulated the agenda for the day and affirmed that the network would begin classroom observations at 9:00 A.M. She asked each campus in attendance to introduce their team members. Five campuses were represented with seven teachers and 1 principal from each campus for a total of 40 network team members. After introductions, DL1 clarified the purpose of Rounds. She stated the goal is the “acceleration of instructional improvement,” and she posted the following quote from Richard Elmore on the screen at the front of the room: “To help schools and districts develop effective and powerful teaching and learning on a large scale, not just isolated pockets of instruction.” DL1 shared additional goals of Rounds: to improve student achievement, to deepen our understanding of the instructional core, and to understand the research-based strategies that strengthen the instructional core.

DL1 then discussed the professional norms of the Rounds network visit, expressing concern that all discussion, comments, and observations are to remain confidential. She reminded the network that the discussion is not to be about teachers or individuals, but it is to be about the instructional practices that we observe. The instructional curriculum director leaned over to me and whispered that these norms are very serious. She said that the team is sworn to a high degree of confidentiality and that DL1 and other district leaders have a high degree of belief in and fidelity to the norms established for the process.

DL1 discussed growth mindset and stated the network team is in place to help Tall Oaks Elementary with recommendations and next levels of work. DL1 established it is a very vulnerable position to be the host campus, and the staff of the host campus wants to grow and improve. DL1 equated Rounds with rigor, mirroring adult learning in Rounds what the network members want to see with regard to student learning in classrooms.

DL1 explained that Rounds is a commitment, a long-term process to improve teaching and learning, with all members of the network serving as beneficiaries as Rounds improves instructions at all campuses in the district. She shared the following impacts as direct results from Rounds in CPISD: instructional targets in every classroom, different ways to teach academic vocabulary with student ownership, students tracking their own progress, increased writing across the district, student discourse including talk moves, accountable talk, and Socratic seminars. Included in the slides were photographs of student work, teacher work, classrooms, and hallways with work displayed to provide evidence of the ongoing work launched from Rounds.

DL1 reviewed the CPISD district problem of practice: Students struggle to achieve (demonstrate learning) at high cognitive levels. She shared the problem of practice has evolved and changed over time based on data, observational data, and dialogue about practice and improvement work. DL1 reviewed observational data collected from the Rounds network visits in 2015-16, sharing that the network teams across the district observed the following: 100% of learning targets posted and 88% of students knowing the learning target (an increase from 10% of learning targets posted and 15% of students knowing the learning target in 2014-15), 76% Tasks aligned to target, 19% of tasks moved learning on the diagonal on the Cognitive Rigor Matrix (CRM) with increased depth and complexity, 39% tasks observed at Depth of Knowledge (DOK) 2, 5% tasks observed at DOK 3, and 15% of student discourse was at higher cognitive levels on Bloom's II Taxonomy. DL1 stated this data shows a need to increase work on depth and complexity and focus on DOK3 and student discourse at higher levels. DL1 reviewed the previous year's state assessment data, showing an increase in passing in Reading of 2.5%. Math scores improved by 3%. DL1 discussed the advanced scores and connected those scores to the need to increase cognitive levels of discourse and tasks. From 2015 to 2016, the district moved from 35% to 40% in the percentage of students who attained Post-Secondary Readiness in two or more subjects on the state assessments.

DL1 shared the district's theory of action: If all students engage in rigorous learning and interact at high cognitive levels with learning tasks that are aligned to the learning targets and goals, then student achievement will improve. DL1 identified three actions that the district has identified for further work at campuses: rigorous learning, high cognitive levels, and alignment. She defined each of the following terms for the Rounds network team: alignment, high

cognitive level, problem solving, and critical thinking. DL1 shared two articles with the network team and encouraged them to use these articles at their campuses with PLC groups or grade level teams.

DL1 highlighted the Cognitive Rigor Matrix (CRM) at each person's seat. She described the matrix and reviewed previous training that participants had received. DL1 posted a task on the PowerPoint presentation and asked the Rounds network teams to use the CRM to determine the level and alignment of the task. A sample classroom activity was shared, and teams analyzed the activity according to the CRM. DL1 asked groups to share and facilitated conversation regarding the CRM. She reinforced that the network is building a shared understanding and vocabulary.

At 8:25 A.M., the principal of Tall Oaks Elementary, P1, was introduced. She shared demographic information about students and teachers of the school, and she shared the vision and mission of the campus. P1 shared the campus story related to Rounds. In the first year of Rounds, the campus focused on student articulation of instructional targets, increasing teacher knowledge of Bloom's II Taxonomy, increasing rigor, building common vocabulary, and conducting Internal Rounds with 100% of staff participating. In the second year of Rounds, the campus focused on students tracking progress, teachers increasing knowledge and application of Bloom's II, and studying the work of John Hattie. The campus conducted 2 Internal Rounds and 1 Rounds network visit. As part of Internal Rounds, the campus reflected on the percentage of teacher talk and student talk. The campus estimated that 75% of talk at the campus was from the teacher, and 25% was from students. In 2015-16, the third year of Rounds, the campus focused on depth of knowledge (DOK). The goal established for the

campus was to have 25% of tasks at Level 1 DOK, 50% at Level 2 DOK, and 25% of tasks at Level 3 or 4. Learning targets remain a focus of the campus as well with a goal to have 100% of classrooms with a posted and stated learning target.

P1 shared the Campus Essential Questions that guide the Rounds work at Tall Oaks

Elementary:

- 1) What is the evidence that all students are interacting at high cognitive levels with a task that is tightly aligned to the learning goal and target?
- 2) What is the evidence that students are engaged in rigorous learning?

P1 asked the team to focus on student discourse during the observation, and she asked each Rounds network team to designate someone to keep track of the approximate time that the teacher spoke during class in comparison to the time students spoke. She asked the team to consider how the teacher set up student discourse in the classroom using questions or talk moves. Further, the principal directed the Rounds network teams to listen to student conversation and to quantify “strings of conversation.” She defined “strings” as student to student conversation about an academic topic. P1 stated that each team would use a verbal discourse rubric to analyze the level of the conversation strings during the analysis of observation data.

DL1 reminded the team that Rounds is a disciplined process and that teams are to follow the rules and protocols. DL1 reminded again of the norms: no judgment, no evaluation, descriptive evidence only. The network was reminded to script with as much detail as possible, and classroom norms were reviewed.

Classroom Observation

At 8:55 A.M., the Rounds network dispersed to study instruction in 20 classrooms. The network split into 5 teams with 8 observers on most teams. District level officials and I were instructed to join in a team of our choosing. This caused some teams to be larger than 8 members. Each team observed four classrooms for 20 minutes each for a total of 80 minutes of observation. Following observation, the network team returned to the library to analyze the observation data and debrief. P1 and DL1 told me that I was welcome to join any team during the observation, or that I could join multiple teams for one observation each. I chose to join the team from Tall Oaks Elementary and stay with the team through their observations. I made this choice so that I would have a common experience and shared knowledge about what they observed in classrooms as I proceeded with the interviews on the following day. During classroom observations, each of the participants focused on scripting what the teacher said and did, what students said and did, and what observations were noticed from the classroom environment with regard to task, learning targets, and instructional materials. Observers remained focused on the task and adhered to the norms established by CPISD.

Analysis of Classroom Observation

In arriving back in the library to begin analysis of the classroom observation notes, I observed that team members had multiple pages of notes and scripts from observing in the classrooms. At each table, a pink card was placed in the center of the table. As the analysis portion of the Rounds network meeting began, DL1 informed the network that the pink card was for any team member to hold up when another team member used judgmental language or evaluative language. The pink card was intended to be a non-threatening marker to help

members adhere to the network norms. Teachers laughed when the pink card was shared. The atmosphere of the room upon returning to begin analysis was one of professionalism, collegiality, and urgency. The Rounds network members appeared to understand that the task to study and analyze the classroom data was important and serious.

DL1 informed the teams that they were to note patterns and provide responses to the essential questions in a way that made sense to the team as they looked for patterns and connections. DL1 shared with me that previously each team created their own artifact, but the teams spent too much time determining how to display data. Last year, DL1 created an artifact template for teams to complete; she stated this increased the level of analysis as they did not have to determine format and could focus more deeply on analysis.

DL1 reminded the group to discover examples of direct alignment, examples of depth and complexity, and then to craft the most significant analysis statement based on all of the evidence gathered.

During the analysis, which occurred from 10:35 A.M. until 2:00 P.M. with a 45 minute break for lunch, I spent time at each of the five tables, listening to the analysis of observation. The teams were largely focused and using the tools provided to them in the morning learning session to analyze the instruction they had observed. One example of discussion during analysis is as follows:

TM1: In the first classroom, that had the matrix chart going.

TM2: I'll read the IFD [scope and sequence document] and then we'll decide.

TM2: (reads IFD)

TM3: There was 18 minutes of student to student talk and 2 minutes of movement in the classroom.

TM2: In first grade, the TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills] say I can identify and explain non-fiction text features and TEKS 1.14D is Use text features to locate specific information in the text.

- TM4: What was the standard? Use standard features to locate specific information in text. So is that understand?
- TM1: The target says I would identify and explain non-fiction features. Task 1 was as whole group: two tasks . . . DOK 1; when they had to come up and explain, they had to justify, may be DOK 3. They had to support their evidence. Independent activity . . . when they were cutting and pasting. Then it may be . . . they were interacting.
- TM5: Do we agree on the first task? It was modeling or applying DOK 1. Task 2: identify a text feature and justify . . . DOK 2 or DOK 3.
- P1: At first they are just selecting . . . identifying. It is apply . . . What were they actually doing? You know . . . we could get in trouble with the card, the pink card. Do they understand? Can they apply it? Do they understand? It is appropriate to identify. It is our “I do, we do” model. Second task is DOK 2 or DOK 3. Different text feature.
- TL1: My opinion was that it was understand. The task was understand. She was writing. I thought this was understand and DOK 1. Really only one task.
- TM6: Do we agree?

Conversations analyzing the data from each classroom in relation to the problem of practice and the essential questions continued through the lunch hour. As teams continued analysis, they began to create artifacts to share during the debrief process. The principal from another elementary sat at my table for part of the lunch break. During the lunch hour, she shared with me that at her campus,

We really love Rounds; it’s been great for us. We have a very open culture; it’s been great learning for teachers who are in the Rounds. It’s not the principal saying this is what we need to do. The data helps us with next level of work and we decide that together.

Debrief of Classroom Observation

At approximately 2:00 P.M., DL1 asked the group to reconfigure the furniture into a new arrangement. Easels with artifacts were set up at the front of the room, and seating was rearranged from table seating to theatre style seating. DL1 asked that principals refrain from speaking during the debrief, allowing for more time for teachers on the team to share their learning and analysis from the morning’s observations. DL1 decided that the debrief would

operate by reviewing data for each essential question from all five groups, then proceeding to the next essential question. DL1 reminded the Rounds network members that the language to be used is to remain non-evaluative and non-judgmental. Network teams reported the data shown in Table G1.

Table G1

Target to Task

Target	%				
	Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4	Team 5
Targets Aligned with Task	100	64	50	100	80
Tasks at DOK1	50	50	50	75	50
Tasks at DOK2	50	50	25	25	40
Tasks at DOK3			25		10
Teacher Talk	65	41	40	60	
Student Talk	35	35	45	40	40
Other Talk/Quiet	0	24	5		60

DL1 asked for specific examples of what a target aligned to task would be; groups shared examples such as:

The target was ‘I can make predictions and identify changes in matter.’ Students were working in a small group to conduct experiences and then had to identify changes in states of matter [such as liquid to solid with water to ice].

Through the debrief, DL1 corrected judgmental language. One team member stated, “only one group was aligned...” DL1 rephrased to state, “Let’s say one of five groups was aligned...” DL1 also asked the team to consider what instructional moves would have shifted a task to a more rigorous task, moving from a DOK 2 to a DOK 3. DL1, as the facilitator, also asked teams to return to the text and find evidence to support their placement of certain tasks on the CRM. A pattern emerged regarding student discourse that most time in the classroom was spent on direct teaching with the teacher talking. Turn and talk was a talk move observed in multiple classrooms. DL1 asked probing questions of the Rounds network team related to why it may be important for teachers to understand how much instructional time is spent with teacher talk versus student talk.

During the debrief, I was seated at the back of the room with the instructional director.

She leaned over during this discussion and shared with me:

Oh, now I just had an idea. I’m thinking about our New Hire program and how we could include more about student discourse into the script; I really like the idea of brainstorming ways to include more student discourse in the lesson.

To close the Rounds visit, DL1 asked the team, “What tools will you walk away with today to help move this work forward?” Replies from the team included the cognitive rigor matrix, ideas for moving student discourse to higher levels, and the article to share with PLCs. Short-term targets for Tall Oaks Elementary were shared from each Rounds network team, including bringing task alignment from 75% to 100%, increasing the time of student verbal discourse to 25%, and increasing the number of classrooms using discourse sentence stems from 75% to 100%. Ideas for the next level of work were shared including using the CRM matrix for lesson planning, further learning on discourse and growth mindset, a book study of *Mindset*

in the Classroom, a book study of *Rigorous Reading*, utilizing resources from *Lead Forward*, study of a toolkit lesson on discourse, and searching for resources on accountable talk, talk moves, and discourse.

At the end of the debrief, the Superintendent of CPISD arrived. He shared with the team that he applauds the efforts of the group. He shared that the philosophy of the district is one of collaboration and stated the Rounds network team:

. . . have engaged in critical conversation on what it should always be about—improving teaching and learning. I applaud your efforts, your engagement . . . this is continuous improvement; it really is. We wish there was a magic bullet and all children would be immediately successful . . . it just doesn't exist. This is truly how we improve our campus culture and learning experiences for our students.

The principal shared her gratitude for the thinking and ideas that emerged from the Rounds visit. DL1 asked that all observation notes be torn off of notepads so that they could be shredded, and she asked the participants to complete an exit ticket. The group was left with this closing thought: "Real improvement happens when we become students and evaluators of our own teaching, our own practices."

APPENDIX H

DETAILED NOTES OF OBSERVATION OF ROUNDS NETWORK VISIT: RANCHO VISTA ELEMENTARY

Detailed Notes of Observation of Rounds Network Visit: Rancho Vista Elementary

Observation of Rounds Network Visit

The observation of the network visit was scheduled in order to determine if participant perceptions expressed in interviews were aligned with observation of the network in practice. The observation of the network included learning time in which the network members were assembled for learning prior to dispersing for classroom observation, classroom observation, analysis of classroom observation, and debrief of the observation.

Learning time. Upon arrival at Rancho Vista Elementary, I was greeted warmly by the principal, P2, and DL2, the facilitator for the Rounds network visit. The network was comprised of four elementary schools with the principal and teachers attending from each school. Also included in the network were a campus librarian, instructional coaches for mathematics and literacy, instructional technology specialists, campus counselor, advanced academics specialist, science specialist, and the elementary language arts director. The thirty participants were seated in six teams of five, and each team was comprised of people from different campuses and departments. The principal and facilitator were seated at a small table at the front of the room. Since this was the first Rounds network visit for the year, DL2 began the session with introductions of each Rounds network member. DL2 explained the network was in its second year of meeting, so the overview of the process would be brief as there were few new members to the network.

The facilitator placed an illustration of the instructional core on the screen for the network to view; she asked the audience to use a talk move, turn and talk, to discuss the significance of the visual. The participants discussed the importance of the instructional core,

highlighting that all three areas of the instructional core are important. The center of the instructional core is the task, and a participant shared that if the task is at a low level, then student performance will be at a low level.

The facilitator reviewed the goals of Rounds in RVIDS:

1. to improve student achievement,
2. to deepen understanding of the instructional core,
3. to have clarity around the district's language of instruction and its impact on improving student achievement at scale, and
4. to foster a culture where classroom instruction drives dialogue and serves as a catalyst for improvement.

DL2 then reviewed norms for the Rounds network:

1. Bring a growth mindset to each Rounds visit,
2. Turn off all personal technology during Rounds visit,
3. Honor RVIDS culture and our risk takers by maintaining confidentiality.

She stated that we do not have conversations in the hall way; what we have learned will leave with each participant, and what we see stays at the campus.

After introductions and expectations, DL2 shifted the focus of the network time to learning. A reading assignment on a strategy from Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion 2.0*, Art of a Sentence, was shared prior to the network visit. Participants were asked to read the text in advance of the visit. DL2 explained the Rounds network team would be practicing the strategy explained in the reading and thinking how to use the strategy in classrooms at the respective campuses.

DL2 displayed a slide of a painting; she instructed participants to view the picture, think about the picture, and write one well-crafted sentence. After the Rounds network members shared and reflected on their sentences, DL2 instructed the participants to write a single well-crafted sentence with parameters, using the words equal, equity, and classroom within the sentence. After 2 minutes of writing time, the participants shared their sentences with their table groups. Following the sharing of sentences, DL2 asked participants to reflect on the two sentences they had written and how they were different. Participants shared reflections such as, “By having specific vocabulary to use, I was pushed to think in a more specific way” and “I felt challenged to use all of the vocabulary in the sentence.” In processing the strategy, DL2 asked how the time to discuss the first sentence impacted their writing. Participants responded with statements such as, “It was nice to hear the vocabulary and ideas in the first round; hearing what people thought and hearing their thinking helped to steal their ideas” and “I heard different viewpoints that I could add on to.” DL2 asked the network participants to reflect on how this strategy could be used in the classroom. Participants shared ideas such as using the strategy as a pre-assessment, exit ticket at the end of class, or at the beginning of instruction to generate ideas.

Following the strategy share, DL2 provided an overview of the Rounds process. She reminded network members that their first task during observation is to collect descriptive evidence, as “descriptive and fine-grained as possible.” DL2 reminded participants to stay focused on the essential questions of the campus as they observed and scripted. DL2 reminded the participants that judgment is forbidden as part of Rounds, and they were to eliminate judgmental language from their vocabulary for the day. DL2 shared that the network members

may make other observations or “OOs” that are not directly related to the essential questions but that may influence the problem of practice. She encouraged the teams to reflect on any OOs at the end of the debrief. DL2 reviewed the schedule of the day, and she reminded the team that following observation that they would begin analysis with a 25 minute silent period, a time for individual reflection and organization of classroom notes. DL2 then turned the meeting over to the campus principal, P2.

P2 started by asking everyone to stand for a brain break, a short period of physical movement. Following the brain break, P2 reviewed the history of Rounds at Rancho Vista Elementary so all participants would understand the problem of practice and the current state of the campus. P2 reviewed the demographic data of the campus, as well as the special programs contained at the campus. Rancho Vista Elementary is a traditional PreK-5 campus that also serves PPCD 3 and 4 year olds and offers a Support Center for Grades 1-5 for students with intellectual disabilities that require self-contained instruction with some inclusion time with peers. P2 shared 42% of the student body is labeled as Limited English Proficiency with far more students coming from homes of poverty. P2 asked for the Rounds network participants employed with RVISD in 2011 to raise their hands; approximately 85% of the network responded affirmatively.

P2 shared the Rounds journey for Rancho Vista Elementary began in 2011 with the reading of *Rounds in Education* as the campus summer reading *Education* (City et al., 2009). P2 shared that the staff read the book and spent several days together thinking about the problem of practice for the campus which she described as “a beautiful disaster.” She explained that the task force working on the problem of practice considered big struggles of the campus including

higher level questioning, ownership of learning, discourse, and vocabulary. They wrote out essential questions for each and thought about what they could collect, observational data. The campus decided to pursue a problem of practice related to student discourse, asking essential questions about who was talking, what were they saying, and how were they using content vocabulary.

The campus began the Rounds process with external Rounds network visits and Internal Rounds. During 2011-12, an “OO” arose from one of the visits: the team determined that the location of the posting of vocabulary words in the classroom makes a difference in how the content vocabulary is used by students. Teachers that posted vocabulary tended to use the vocabulary more often themselves during instruction, and students were more likely to use content vocabulary. The campus decided to revise the problem of practice and spent time over the summer learning about Tier 2 and Tier 3 vocabulary.

Over the next year, the campus learned that students know Tier 3 words as these are words explicit to content that teachers generally teach, such as preposition, hexagonal, or carnivore. Tier 2 words may be defined as SAT words; they are words that are not generally explicitly taught as they may not relate directly to academic content. P2 stated that it is “crippling” to students when they do not have Tier 2 vocabulary access. The campus continued to think and learn about vocabulary.

In 2013-2014, the campus revised the problem of practice to consider what content vocabulary was posted within or next to the learning target and to what extent students were using this vocabulary. The campus also asked essential questions to understand what students were saying, what additional content vocabulary was being used, and if the students were

speaking in one-word responses, phrases, or complete sentences. Knowing that students write as they speak, the campus wanted to increase the complexity of oral language used in the classrooms. Over the 2013-2014 school year, P2 shared that the discussion “got really messy.” The campus struggled with the definition of “complete sentence.” P2 shared the example that “This is it” is a complete sentence, but it’s “a terrible sentence.” The teachers wanted to build students’ ability to justify thinking with evidence. The Rounds leadership team began dabbling with different ideas. In August 2014, the campus developed and finalized the expectations for “Speak Like a Mighty Mustang.” P2 referred the participants to a rubric for “Speak Like a Mighty Mustang” at each table. During the 2014-2015 school year, the campus collected data on how students were responding with oral language and determined 28% of student responses were in complete sentences with evidence or justification. The campus had dialogue about when it is appropriate to justify, and when it is not.

At the end of 2015, the campus revised the problem of practice again, creating the Mustang Must Haves for writing for campus-wide implementation. P2 explained that she firmly believes the teacher’s expectation is critical; she said half of the time we get a poor product in writing because we allow it. The staff spent time developing the Mustang Must Haves for writing to be implemented in K-5. Mustang Must Haves for writing include use of appropriate punctuation at the end of the sentence, correct spelling of word wall words, correct use of upper and lower case letters, correct spacing, legible writing, and use of complete sentences.

In 2015-2016, the campus again revised the problem of practice to include not only speaking, but also writing with regard to complete thoughts with details, evidence, and justification. P2 shared that the next step is to capture writing samples using screenshots in

addition to scripting classroom dialogue. Finally, in 2015-2016, the staff developed a Mustang Creed to keep focus for teachers and students: M-Must Haves, U-Use Vocabulary, S-Speak Loud and Proud, T-Talk Moves, A-Answer Completely, N-New Learning Every Day, G-Growth Mindset.

P2 responded to questions from network participants and explained how the campus wished for the network participants to collect data using an artifact template. P2 requested that the teams script as much detailed evidence as possible and take pictures of writing samples for further study. P2 reviewed a few logistics, and DL2 asked teams to prepare for classroom observation. Teams determined

Classroom observation. At 9:00 AM, the network dispersed to study instruction in 12 classrooms. Each team observed four classrooms for a period of 20 minutes. Two teams observed each classroom, so that each of the 12 classrooms was observed for a total of 40 minutes. In RVISD, the principal and the facilitator visit each of the classrooms for approximately 10 minutes so that they can observe in most of the classrooms. I was invited to observe classrooms with the principal and facilitator. The superintendent arrived during observations and joined us as we observed in classrooms. Following the observation period, the teams returned to the library to analyze the data collected during observation. The superintendent observed the analysis for a brief time before leaving the campus. DL2 and P2 sat together during the analysis time and discussed the coaching moves that P2 may consider for each of the classrooms observed.

Analysis of classroom observation began with a silent period during which team members studied their notes, reflected on the essential questions, and reviewed evidence

responsive to the problem of practice. The Rounds network participants were considerate of the norms established by RVISD.

Analysis of classroom observation. In arriving back in the library to begin analysis of the classroom observation notes, I observed that team members had multiple pages of notes and scripts from observing in the classrooms. The atmosphere of the room upon returning to begin analysis was one of professionalism, collegiality, and urgency. The network members appeared to understand that the task to study and analyze the classroom data was important and serious.

Conversations analyzing the data from each classroom in relation to the problem of practice and the essential questions continued through the lunch hour. As teams continued analysis, they began to create artifacts to share during the debrief process.

Debrief of classroom observation. At approximately 1:30 P.M., DL2 asked the teams that viewed like classrooms to combine and share their learning. During this process, the first group to observe in a classroom might understand additional information about what happened after they exited, and the second team to enter may understand more about the events that occurred before they entered. At 2:00 P.M., DL2 asked the group to reconfigure the furniture into a new arrangement. Easels with artifacts were set up in a circle around the library; the chairs were moved into a circle inside the easels. DL2 formed new debriefing teams of participants comprised of one member from each of the six network teams. DL2 explained that the participants would spend about 30 minutes proceeding through a gallery walk of the artifacts. The teams gathered in front of their respective artifact and the participant who was on the observation team for the particular artifact explained the poster and answered questions of the team. An example of the gallery walk conversation was:

- TM1: Were they speaking in complete thoughts?
- TM2: Yes, we took that into account; did we hear complete sentences? Did we hear justification? Here (reading from post-it note) “I take 7 from 27 and 1 from 31”—this is a good example of what we saw.
- TM2: We’ve seen writing in complete sentences; this class did not write because of the activity they were doing, but we took pictures in that classroom. In fifth grade science, they were looking at structural adaptations and the vocabulary was posted. Then, in informal conversation, students were using the posted vocabulary.
- TM2: Next, we were in a first grade bilingual classroom; only two of us could script everything. They were doing independent reading when we went in; we asked some questions in English and the students could verbalize and justify in English as well as Spanish.
- TM3: We found it interesting that the sentence stem was posted, but 3 of 4 classrooms had writing . . . there was a lot of student discourse; we did observe OOs. Three of four classrooms had flexible seating.

This cycle repeated until all teams had visited each poster to review the data. Then, DL2 requested all participants sit in the circle to continue the debrief.

During the debrief, DL2 led the participants in a conversation about what they had observed and what patterns they noticed from the gallery walk review of charts. Patterns observed included justification more commonly used toward the end of the lesson, differences in speaking compared to writing, justification used more frequently when teacher was present to prompt students and less frequently when students were working in small groups, fewer opportunities to write when there were more opportunities for oral responses, students more likely to use content vocabulary after the teacher explicitly used the target vocabulary, teachers holding students accountable for using higher level words (attract instead of stick), explicit use of talk moves by students in multiple groups, more diverse language when multiple sentence starters and models were shared with students, and students asking other students if they could rephrase statements or strategies. The group questioned how justification applied to mathematics, and DL2 asked them to discuss and consider possibilities.

After considering patterns observed across the campus, DL2 asked the network to share predictions across the school responding to the question, “If I were a student in this school and did exactly as the teacher asked, what would I know and be able to do?” The network responded with predictions that Rancho Vista Mustangs would be able to provide justification with teacher guidance, use talk moves to engage in discourse, have access to academic vocabulary posted in the classroom, and be engaged in academic conversation.

Following predictions, DL2 asked the participants to share ideas for next level of work for Rancho Vista Elementary to consider. Next level of work suggestions included using the strategy Art of the Sentence both in writing and verbally to include sentence parameters. Voice overs and modeling of academic discourse by the teacher to lift the level of thinking and syntax was another suggestion. Further suggestions for consideration included providing students a greater variety of sentence starters and stems, changing the order in the classrooms from speak-write to write-speak-write, planning more opportunities for students to practice justification and writing, planning deliberate modeling of writing and mentor sentences, and using student work in the moment as models to build justification. DL2 reminded the network that the campus would consider all of these suggestions as next levels of work and determine their next steps.

DL2 invited P2 and the Rounds leadership team from Rancho Vista Elementary to share closing thoughts. The principal observed that the struggles of the network team mirrored the challenges of the campus as they analyze instruction and determine next steps to improve literacy. The campus team thanked the Rounds network participants for their thinking and attention to the campus. To conclude the day, DL2 invited each member in the circle to share a

reflection of how they would use their learning from the day when they returned to their home campus on the following day. Reflections included desires to develop common expectations for the campus like Mustang Must Haves and Speak Like a Mighty Mustang, revise the classroom structure to write-read-write, include more writing in mathematics, shift to flexible seating, develop sentence stems and frames for use in the classroom, use the Art of the Sentence, use voice overs during lessons to model, and develop a rubric for what qualifies as good justification for classroom use. DL2 thanked all of the participants for their energy and thinking, and asked the team to help tidy the library before leaving.

APPENDIX I

DETAILED NOTES OF OBSERVATION OF ROUNDS NETWORK VISIT: SOUTHERN PINES MIDDLE
SCHOOL

Detailed Notes from Southern Pines Middle School Rounds Network Visit

Observation of Network Visit

The observation of the network visit was scheduled in order to determine if participant perceptions expressed in interviews were aligned with observation of the network in practice. The observation of the network included learning time in which the network members were assembled for learning prior to dispersing for classroom observation, classroom observation, analysis of classroom observation, and debrief of the observation.

Learning time. In Southern Pines ISD, the Rounds network team convened for the first network visit at Southern Pines Middle School. The principal, P3, began the day with introductions and an explanation of Rounds. The principal set the expectation that the network will be operational for the next three years, and started with introductions. Participants were present from elementary, middle, and high school. Teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators from the campuses, along with two central office administrators, comprised the network team.

Staff shared what they hoped to learn from Rounds as part of the first network visit. Participants shared their particular desires for learning including

- wanting to understand the vertical relationship between elementary, middle, and high school;
- getting outside perspectives regarding the school's performance;
- learning from other teachers;
- learning about the process of Rounds;

- learning about middle school and how to better prepare elementary students for middle school;
- understanding the classroom data and how it connects to other data; and
- understanding comparisons from Southern Pines Middle school to other schools.

Since this was the first Rounds network visit in the district, eight participants expressed interest in learning more about the Rounds process in an authentic setting after completing the training. Following the sharing of what participants hoped to learn, the principal led the Rounds team in a team-building game. Following the game, the principal explained he would serve as facilitator and principal. He shared the challenge in serving in both roles, and set up visual cues for the audience to understand when he was serving as the principal of the campus and when he was serving as facilitator of the Rounds network.

The principal explained the demographics of the campus and discussed the cultural norms of Southern Pines Middle School. He explained the campus academic goals, and the goal of the campus to improve critical thinking through literacy in all content areas. He shared current systems in place at Southern Pines Middle School including study of text related to growth mindset and learning walks, as well as Internal Rounds. He described mechanisms for collaboration on the campus including

- weekly staff communications,
- chalk talks during conference periods,
- daily time set aside for PLC's,
- daily reading focus,
- work with writing rubrics,

- studying like-campus with higher academic performance, and
- teaching the purposeful use of behavioral and academic strategies based on Doug Lemov's *Teach Like a Champion 2.0*.

The principal shared the objectives of Rounds that included improving student achievement at scale, driving instruction, and centering the academic work on the instructional core. P3 read a portion of *Rounds in Education* (City et al, 2009). He reminded the team to spend time in description before moving to analysis and evaluation in an effort to avoid a rush to judgment. P3 reminded the team about the importance of non-evaluative language and the specificity of evidence. P3 shared he was withholding previous data from the group related to the problem of practice in an attempt to leave the network unbiased. P3 shared the campus problem of practice: Many Southern Pines Middle School students struggle to explain in-depth thinking and learning through speaking and writing. The principal reminded all to hold the table to non-evaluative talk and about confidentiality. He asked each table to select an evidence officer to help the team remain faithful to the norms established. P3 reminded everyone to script as much as possible while observing the classroom. Teams were given time to reflect on the process, discuss the problem of practice, and plan how they wanted to script the classroom observation.

Classroom observation. At 9:00 AM, the network dispersed to study instruction in 20 classrooms. Each team observed four classrooms for a period of 20 minutes. Five teams comprised of four members observed each classroom. The principal and DL3 wanted to observe as many classrooms as possible during the observation window, and I was invited to

come with them to observe. Following the observation period, the teams returned to the library to analyze the data collected during observation.

Analysis of classroom observation began with a silent period during which team members studied their notes, reflected on the essential questions, and reviewed evidence responsive to the problem of practice. The Rounds network participants were considerate of the norms established by Southern Pines Middle School.

Analysis of classroom observation. In arriving back in the library to begin analysis of the classroom observation notes, I observed that team members had multiple pages of notes and scripts from observing in the classrooms. The atmosphere of the room upon returning to begin analysis was one of professionalism and collegiality. The network members appeared to understand that the task to study and analyze the classroom data was important and serious.

Conversations analyzing the data from each classroom in relation to the problem of practice and the essential questions continued through the lunch hour. As teams continued analysis, they began to create artifacts to share during the debrief process.

Debrief of classroom observation. After teams had time for analysis, P3 asked the group to reconfigure the furniture into a new arrangement. Easels with artifacts were set up in the front of the library, and seats were reconfigured into theater style seating. Each group on the network team explained their findings from the classroom observation, and shared their observations. Teams used a verbal discourse rubric to chart responses, and they shared responses with the whole group.

During the debrief, DL2 and P3 led the participants in a conversation about what they had observed and what patterns they noticed after hearing each group discuss the findings

from their set of classrooms. Patterns observed included teacher questions at the remember/understand level of Bloom's taxonomy, student responses in a short phrase or one word response, student responses demonstrating a lack of understanding, student responses at level I on the verbal discourse rubric, and the majority of tasks given at the foundational level (remember and understand).

After considering patterns observed across the campus, P3 asked the network to share predictions across the school responding to the question, "If I were a student in this school and did exactly as the teacher asked, what would I know and be able to do?" The network responded with predictions that Southern Pines Middle School students would be able to read during the scheduled sustained silent reading time, answer questions at the apply level in mathematics, read and write in language arts classes, and respond with a short phrase without explaining my thinking.

Following predictions, P3 asked the participants to share ideas for next level of work for Southern Pines Middle School to consider. Ideas for next level of work included focusing on learning and implementing two strategies to increase elaboration of student responses in every classroom, planning questions in PLCs, and planning elaboration questions in PLCs. Additional suggestions were shared to encourage accountability, such as peer observation focused on the strategy. P3 shared that the campus would consider the ideas for the next level of work. P3 and the team from Southern Pines Middle School shared closing thoughts. The principal thanked the network participants for their thinking and attention to the campus.

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