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Successful Leaders Beating the Odds: Leveraging Instructional Rounds With Professional Development in School-University Partnerships

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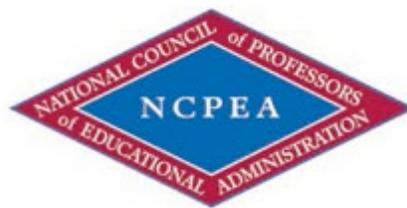*Portland State University*, petti@pdx.edu

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

Successful Leaders Beating the Odds: Leveraging Instructional Rounds

with Professional Development in School–University Partnerships

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Abstract

 How do we prepare and support better teachers during financial crisis? A newly formed

university-district partnership, utilizing Professional Development School (PDS) research

(Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodland, 1994; Mullen, 2000; Teital, 2003; Zeichner, 1992)

leveraged instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teital, 2009) as a professional

development strategy for mutual benefit. This article synthesizes two successful schools'

journeys toward innovative and transparent improvement of teachers' practices, for both

tenured and *preservice* teachers. Analysis of each school's video documentation of instructional

rounds, observations, interviews, focus groups, and artifacts of the partnership yielded increased

leadership capacity, improved culture, and continuous professional learning, even within a

context of staff reduction and budget crisis. These schools' stories have critical application to

teacher and leadership preparation in the political climate of accountability and the

reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which seeks to ensure "a

great teacher in every classroom [and] a great principal in every building" (US Department of

Education [USDOE], 2010, p. 1).

Keywords: educational leadership, professional development, instructional rounds, school–

university partnership

Background and Organization

Financial crises of unprecedented proportion in 2009–2011 led to teacher layoffs and increased class sizes in critical high poverty schools, which are held to the highest accountability measures as mandated by Federal policy. These challenged schools were forced to reduce their much-needed professional development spending, so school leaders were faced with a "Sophie's choice," to either reduce professional development spending or increase already overloaded class sizes. As the idiom suggests, these were two unbearable options. It was a perfect tempest, a perfect mess, a perfect crisis, and coincidentally, a perfect opportunity to form a school–university partnership. The partnership, born in a context of crisis, envisioned lofty goals of better teacher preparation and ongoing professional development, much like those described by the Holmes Group (1995) while implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Dufour, Dufour, Eakers, & Many, 2006).

The partnership, called Professional Learning Laboratory Schools (PLLSs) designed a low cost, mutually beneficial program of teacher preparation and tenured teacher professional development, leveraging local interpretations of instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teital, 2009). Two PLLSs flourished, moving from cooperative to collaborative partnerships. (Barnett, Hall, Berg, & Camerena, 1999, 2010). This article synthesizes the two successful schools' journeys toward innovative and transparent improvement of teachers' practices, for both those *tenured* and *preservice*.

Throughout this article, the term *tenured* refers to teachers who are tenured at the PLLS schools but are not the preservice teacher's assigned mentor. The preservice teacher's assigned mentor is referred to as the cooperating teacher. Mentors or cooperating teachers are the resident master teachers who modeled for and shared their practices with the preservice teacher. Analysis

of each school's video documentation of instructional rounds, observations, interviews, focus groups, and artifacts of the partnership yielded increased leadership capacity, improved culture, and continuous professional learning, even within a context of staff reduction and budget crisis. These school leaders subsequently improved student achievement in high poverty elementary and high schools. In particular, the high school was recognized in Education Week's *Diplomas Count 2010* as an urban district that "beat the odds" (Swanson, 2010). Learning thrived, especially for the building administrator and tenured teacher roles, which was unexpected. The PLLS programs' story has critical application to teacher and leadership preparation, and for schools whose progress is stalled. It is especially relevant in the political climate of accountability and reauthorization of the ESEA, which seeks to ensure "a great teacher in every classroom [and] great principal in every building" (USDOE, 2010, p. 1).

From Crisis to Opportunity

Financial Crisis

In the fall of 2009, Oregon's state budget contingencies were spent, and schools were faced with dramatic shortfalls. This condition worsened in 2010 and 2011, when schools were forced to further reduce staff and also faced soaring class sizes, reduced resources, and shortened school years. Class sizes rose from 22 to over 30 students in elementary grades, and often exceeded 40 students in high school. Morale plummeted as unpaid furlough days increased. The elementary PLLS cut 14 days in the 2010–2011 school year; and the high school PLLS had to reduce 30 full-time equivalent staff. Districts offered termination of contract "bonuses" to offset the high cost of unemployment. If the financial condition were a ship, its name would be the *Titanic*.

Class size crisis. As a result of the financial crisis, class sizes soared to averages above

thirty in elementary schools and to 40 or more in high schools. A high school advanced

placement class had 43 students, who were perched on radiators and the floor, since the room

could not hold enough desks. Teachers were reassigned based on seniority and licensure,

creating chaotic conditions—such as a veteran shop teacher teaching kindergarten, and a

kindergarten teacher teaching middle school language arts. Parents were upset, teachers were

devastated, and building's leadership was trying to boost morale, to keep staff responsive and

responsible for the many students who continued to show up despite these challenging

conditions.

Reduced professional development resources. Compounding the chaos, dissent, and

devastation were line item reductions to professional development funds at the local, state, and

federal levels. Furlough days resulted in zero professional development days; the few days left

without students in teachers' contracts were for report card preparation and parent conferences.

Schools were scrambling to redesign professional development to provide meaningful support to

teachers who were teaching larger classes with fewer resources. The goals of job-embedded high

quality professional development recommended by public policy (Title IA and Title IIA) seemed

impossible.

Increased Accountability

To compound the financial crisis, large classes, and reduced professional development

resources, each of the PLLS schools were identified as high poverty, at-risk schools. Both

schools in the PLLS were diverse, poor, and held to the high standards of the ESEA, commonly

referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Students needed to show academic improvement

within subgroup populations, teachers needed to ensure students were learning, and principals

needed to monitor and support high quality teaching and learning. There was no mercy for the

conditions of the state and accountability remained high, since kids still came to school every day, needing food, safety, and most importantly, highly-skilled teachers to teach them so they could learn.

Converting Crisis to Innovation

Crisis has historically generated opportunity and innovation. The crisis of the mid-1970s gas shortage generated a new wave of energy-efficient cars and homes. The crisis of racism during the 1964 Civil Rights Movement led to more fair laws and policies, including desegregation. John F. Kennedy offered this example: "The Chinese use two brush strokes to write the word 'crisis.' One brush stroke stands for danger; the other for opportunity. In a crisis, be aware of the danger—but recognize the opportunity" (remarks at Negro College Fund, Indianapolis, Indiana, April 12, 1959). This multifaceted crisis of budget and accountability drove an emerging school–university partnership (SUP)—in a newly formed professional development school (PDS) model—to new innovations and new opportunities. The PLLS became a lifeline for schools caught in the storm of crisis.

Innovate and renovate. The innovation of the PLLS was at times more of a *renovation* of past successful PDS practices. The PLLS partnership was formed using insights from prior PDS research (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Goodlad, 1994; Mullen, 2000; Teitel, 2003; Zeichner, 1992). The primary goal of the PLLS was to design a mutually beneficial program of teacher preparation and tenured teacher professional development (Holmes Group, 1994). However, the innovative part of the reiteration of past PDS models was a new structure for existing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) *and* a commitment to implement teacher-led practice of "rounds," which were designed from the process of *instructional rounds* (City et al., 2009). I use PLLS when referring to the specific partnerhsip and PDS when referring to the generalized

professional development school literature or research.

Leveraging rounds. The PLLS advisory committee's decision to leverage instructional rounds as a signature professional development process came early in the partnership formation. By signature professional development, the PLLS borrowed from Shulman's (1995) definition of signature pedagogy: "*signature pedagogies* … are types of teaching that organize the fundamental ways in which future practitioners are educated for their new professions" (p. 52). Instructional rounds are set in the context of actual teaching, and the participant/observer sees the fundamental ways in which teachers and students work together. Implementation and documentation of the rounds came about in the partnership's second year, as the PLLS partnership moved from formation (agreements to form and acquire resources) to cooperation (increased participation and decision making) to collaboration (cooperative agreements and greater involvement from leadership); these three stages of partnership development are further explored in Barnett et al. (2010).

The PLLS began as a loosely coupled organization. According to Pajack (1989), "uncertainties inherent in educational goals and techniques … fragmented and compartmentalized, learning outcomes that defy easy measurement, frequent turnover among students and professional staff, and turbulence originating in the economic, social and political environments" (p. 39). The PLLS accepted and honored a wide range of autonomy in practices at each school. However, during the second year of PLLS implementation, the schools and universities agreed to share their versions of rounds via video documentation. This commitment and accountability refocused the PLLS on the task of shared professional development.

Contribution

This article extends the conversations about innovative and collaborative partnerships,

especially PDSs. The descriptive case study follows two improving schools. An elementary and a high school interpreted and implemented instructional rounds within the context of Professional Learning Communities as part of the PDS structure. These schools kept the promise of PDS, rounds and PLCs in play as districts, schools and universities continue to lead in an era of accountability. Schools have tinkered with a variety of shared observations for decades—peer coaching in the mid 1980's (Joyce & Showers, 1995), cognitive coaching in the 1990s (Garmston & Wellman, 1999), walkthroughs (Downey et al., 2004), learning walks (Quint, Akey, Rappaport, & Willner, 2007), and, more recently, instructional rounds (City et al., 2009). Principals and teachers knew of these practices, but found it difficult to get started. The idea of buildling the PDS with the implicit implementation of instructional rounds for professional development appealed to the PLLS school leadership, as they were able to leverage the PDS beyond preservice teachers to include tenured staff.

<div align="center">Connections to Past Practices</div>

School–University Partnerships (SUP)

School–University Partnerships (SUPs) and Professional Development Schools (PDS) are terms used interchangeably by district and school practitioners (although academics and researchers tend to distinguish between the two). For this article, the simplified difference is that the SUP represents the agreement between the district and the university to enter a partnership, with a formalized process and a document represented in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU outlines roles, responsibilities, financial commitments and the duration of the partnership. For this particular SUP, the governance group, or advisory committee, defined the roles. The members of the advisory committee included the university's dean, teacher preparation faculty and supervisors of preservice teachers, the school principal or assistant

principal, district leadership, and a liaison. The liaison role was similar to Knight's (2007)

instructional coach, a teacher leader who worked directly with teachers for job-embedded

professional development. Teitel described the liaison as a person who coordinates goals,

culture, and practices of the school and the university (Teitel, 2003). The liaison's responsibility

was to support the professional development of preservice and tenured teachers, employing a

variety of instructional coaching strategies.

In the PLLS studied, liaisons were either experienced or newly retired teachers from the

local school. PLLS liaisons were responsible for coaching and mentoring the preservice teachers,

and for facilitating professional development for tenured teachers. The practice of coaching is

increasing in frequency across the nation, especially for school and district improvement plans

(Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005; Knight, 2007). The liaisons in both schools were insiders within

the school culture and bridged language, practice, and message between the university and the

school district.

Professional Development Schools (PDS)

The Professional development school (PDS) model has evolved from the early promise of

Dewey's (1916) laboratory schools in Chicago, through decades of revisiting and renovation

(Clark, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 1994, 2010; Goodlad, 1994; Kochan, 1999; Mullen, 2000;

Sewall, Shapiro, Ducet, & Sanford, 1995; Teitel, 2003; Zeichner, 1992). Professional

development schools are places of shared practice, where preservice novices learn from and with

tenured veterans. The PDS structure goes beyond a single teacher mentor to include clusters of

preservice teachers, who share multiple model mentors and the engagement of full faculty in a

shared study of teaching and learning. This particular PDS model selected two practices, the PLC

model described by Dufour et al. (2006), and instructional rounds (City et al., 2009) to define

their PDS affiliation.

Partnerships from District and School Perspectives

Schools typically do not conduct thorough reviews of literature and research in cooperating with universities for SUPs or PDS. Rather, on the casual request of either the school or university, a meeting is held, ideas are generated, and the "partnership is formed." Partnerships become trendy panaceas when financial conditions become challenging. The PLLS schools and the university (on their individual websites, strategic plans, and public relations messages) tout "parternship formation" as one of their strategic goals for generating improvement outcomes. However, partnerships can be much more complex than they appear. As Barnett et al. (2010) warn that

> [P]artnerships are viewed so positively that they appear as mandates in federal statues, such as the Higher Education Act of 1998 and the re-authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education [ESEA] act…. With this flurry of activity, one could easily be led to believe that by simply humming the mantra–*hmmm-partnership-hmmm*—all that needs changing in education will become reality. As prominent as partnership have become, creating and sustaining them is new, complex and important work for most educators. (p. 11)

Partnership Structure

Cooperative to Collaborative

Barnett et al. (1999, 2010) discuss partnership structure as an evolution of stages based on the level of involvement of the participants. These stages represent the partnership: 1) formation, 2) cooperation, and 3) collaboration. Barnett et al. further explain each stage, with the formation stage as the one in which the logistics of the partnership are determined. In the PLLS

example, agreements were made regarding resources, a commitment was made to extend preservice preparation to two years, and an advisory board was formed. They distinguish between cooperation and collaboration in qualitative language; e.g., cooperation can involve shared decision making, whereas collaboration includes greater levels of leadership preparation and long range goals being established (Barnett et al., 2010). Similarly, Dufour et al. (2006) describe PLC collaboration as

> A *systematic* process in which people work together, *interdependently*, to analyze and *impact* professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results. PLC collaboration focuses on the critical questions of learning: What is it 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 learning? How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient? (p. 214)

The most consistent evidence of collaboration occurred during the process of designing and implementing instructional rounds, especially during the preliminary meeting and during the debrief.

PLCs and Rounds

The simplest description of the interaction between PLCs and instructional rounds and the PLLS schools is that the PLC structure provided the time for planning, analysis and reflection, whereas the rounds experience was the method for gathering shared glimpses of colleagues' practices. PLCs typically focus on four central questions throughout the year:

1. What do our students need to know and do?
2. How do we know they have learned it?
3. What do we do if they struggle to learn it?

4.   What do we do if our students are already proficient?

The rounds process investigated the PLC question two: "How do we know students are learning?" It also focused on questions three and four to some extent, through observation of teacher, learner, and task. The qualitative aspect of rounds—observing the teacher, the students and the task—brought much richer conversation and reflection to the PLC meetings; formerly, the evidence for PLC question two was only student test data.

Professional learning communities. Professional learning communities or PLCs have become commonplace in the vernacular of schools, so common that Dufour et al. (2006) state, "the term [PLC] has become so commonplace and has been used so ambiguously to describe virtually any loose coupling of individuals who share a common interest in education that it is in danger of losing all meaning" (p. 2). The PLLS embraced the components of Dufour et al.'s description of PLCs, demonstrating first, a focus on learning; the rounds process helped clarify what students must learn and how they would demonstrate their learning. But also, because of the nature of the PLLS agreement, the PLCs also emphasized how existing and preservice teachers would learn by "doing" the PLC work and implementing rounds.

The second component of the PLC explained by Dufour et al. is the collaborative culture that was very evident in the interdependence of the roles of the liaison, preservice and tenured teachers, and building administrators. All of these school personnel collaborated in a deliberate practice to improve learning for students. The third component of a PLC is the collective inquiry into best practices and current reality. The rounds process brought the PLC teams literally into a teacher's current reality. Because host teachers of rounds visits were volunteers, or nudged by administrators to volunteer, the visits occurred in very skilled teachers' classrooms. One veteran teacher commented, "I'd heard so many great things about [Teacher X]; I agreed to participate

[in rounds] because I wanted to watch her teach, I thought I could learn something from her"

(video tape transcript, April, 2011). The fourth component of PLCs as described by Dufour et al.

is action orientation, or learning by doing. None of these schools wanted to just talk about

rounds, they also wanted to "just do it." The final two components of PLCs—the commitment to

continuous improvement and results orientation—were evident in the repeated opportunities for

rounds and the continuous refinement.

Each school's professional learning communities (PLCs) provided the time and structure

for conversation and shared analysis of observations, student performance data, lesson designs,

and protocols for reflection. The elementary school's PLCs were grade level teams (early

primary included tenured and preservice teachers from Kindergarten and first grade, upper

primary included teachers from second and third grades, and intermediate grades included

teachers from grades four, five, and six). High school PLCs were teams of teachers organized by

department. The PLC meeting time was built into the regular schedule. Both dedicated release

time and structure were critical to successful implementation of instruction rounds; dedicated

time (substitute release) and inclusion of preliminary and debriefing discussions (structure)

separated rounds from peer observation. Additionally, the inclusion of the preservice teachers in

the PLC time initiated future teachers into a culture of planning, discussion, and collaboration;

very different from the insular, lonely preparation work that most of the staff had experienced

during their own preservice programs.

Instructional rounds. Instructional rounds, a term made popular in City et al.'s text

(2009), is a process of visiting and describing instruction, based on the term "medical rounds," in

which a group of novice doctors are led from patient to patient by a senior physician who

described the patients' conditions, vital statistics, and symptoms, while the novices collaborate

on appropriate treatment. In schools, instructional rounds is a term that is also becoming overly generalized to include a variety of practices related to making observations of teaching and learning. City et al. focused on a disciplined practice combining three common elements: classroom observation, an improvement strategy, and a network of educators. The PLLS schools met this basic criteria, and each designed their own protocol for observation, an improvement focus, and a network of observers. However, their actual practices of rounds, as captured on video, involved a wide range of observation practices: walkthroughs (Downing, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004), demonstration teaching (Saphier & West, 2010), and lab-sites (Petti, 2010b).

The PLLS took Dufour et al.'s mantra "learn by doing" to heart and tweaked their rounds practices based on the influence and feedback of the PLLS network. As is common with school based teams, they implemented a concept or idea while modifying it to suit their culture or practice. While both PLLSs used the term "rounds," their actual practices either combined rounds protocols with demonstration and lab-site practices or were combinations of rounds and walkthroughs. This practitioner modification is something City (2011) describes: "Teachers are usually the most enthusiastic rounds participants, leading the next evolution of the practice" (p. 36).

Blanding (2009) offers the following description of instructional rounds:

The basic process [of instructional rounds] is relatively simple. A network of superintendents, principals, teachers, and central office staff agree to meet at regular intervals, usually monthly, each time at a different school. They spend the morning circulating around classrooms, observing the teaching and learning that takes place there. Then, in an afternoon meeting, they debrief what they have seen. To prime their observations, they are asked to address a "problem of practice" the school has committed to solve, such as improving math proficiency or literacy, within the context of a "theory of action" the school has identified to achieve the goal. Theories of action might include increasing teacher knowledge, upping the complexity of the material students are asked to learn, and/or changing the way students are asked to learn that material. In the

debriefing meeting, members are further asked to take four steps:

1. *Describe* what they observed in class;
2. *Analyze* any patterns that emerge;
3. *Predict* the kind of learning they might expect from the teaching they observed;
4. *Recommend the next level of work* that could help the school better achieve their desired goal. (para. 5)

In City et al.'s (2009) text on rounds, the visits are inclusive: all of the classrooms in a school are visited. The PLLS did not follow this structure; instead, teachers were either invited to host a network of observers or volunteered to do so.

Lab-sites. Similar to rounds, but different in audience and purpose, is the practice of lab-site classrooms (Petti, 2010a, 2010b). The site for a lab-site is a single well-managed classroom, the facilitator is the liaison, and the participants are one or more tenured or preservice teachers, and often administrators. A lab-site is a 60- to 120-minute cycle of preparation, teaching, observing, practicing, analyzing, and debriefing. Lab-sites are an active engagement venue for teaching. Instead of talking about teaching methods, it is an environment to demonstrate, practice, and review instructional methods in a safe atmosphere. Participants in lab-sites calibrate best practices, and create a culture in which teachers can learn from each other. Lab-sites practiced in New York City Schools have been continuously improved through a network of teachers, coaches, and principals who collaborate with Teachers College, Columbia University, New York. Lab-sites get in the middle of instructional improvement and provide learning opportunities "in the moment" of teaching. A typical lab-site includes a 20–30 minute pre-participation meeting, a 30–60 minute lesson, and a 20–30 minute debrief meeting. Participants in lab-sites are rarely just observers, but often "practice" an instructional maneuver immediately after observing the same or a preliminary component of the lesson.

The difference between rounds and lab-sites is that the rounds participants observe and debrief after the "lesson," whereas the lab-site participants are often "part of" the lesson, taking

on teacher roles in small segments of the lesson architecture. Another difference is that rounds focus on a problem of practice, whereas the lab-site is often to demonstrate and practice effective instructional practices. In the PLLS partnership, both schools used the term "rounds," but implemented a localized version of rounds or lab-sites.

Given permission and autonomy by the PLLS advisory committee, the two schools established their own routines and structure for the implementation of rounds differently. The differences became apparent during the sharing time in a PLLS advisory meeting. Since the implementation of rounds was to set apart the PLLS as signature protocol, the advisory decided to film each school's version of rounds, and then view them at subsequent meetings. The purpose of videotaping was to document the process and protocols, while the purpose of sharing the videos with the PLLS advisory was to align the practices and agree on rounds implementation. Both schools used technology staff to capture video and audio with quality equipment.

Shared video documentation. Each school's videotape consisted of six hours of video footage. The principal investigator of the PLLS edited both videos for the advisory committee. The elementary school shared their video of rounds with the advisory in December of the second year of the PLLS partnership. The video clearly established the role of the liaison as the key facilitator in the rounds process. The liaison led the process, beginning with pre-planning with the host teacher whose practice would be observed. Together, the liaison and host teacher examined student work and determined whether the observation would be at a lab-site or at a skilled teacher's room. The observation protocol would be for an extended time—for example, a full lesson of writer's workshop. From the video, the advisory committee could observe that the liaison and host teacher had collaborated to generate a sample problem of practice, a term directly from City et al. (2009). The elementary version rounds also used City et al.'s

recommended three-column notes for observers: a column to describe what the teacher was doing, a column for what the students were doing, and a column for the task. The entire cycle lasted a half day (3 hours), with each step (preliminary meeting, observation at the lab-site, and debrief) lasting for an hour. Ten observers participated, including teachers, specialists, preservice teachers, a university supervisor, and the principal.

After viewing and debriefing the elementary video of the rounds process, the high school decided to shift toward a more similar structure. Prior to the video, the high school liaison was taking preservice teachers to simply "visit" various classrooms, without a structured protocol, question, or purpose. The preservice teachers were not reflecting on their own practice in these visits; for most of them, they were only commenting on student behavior.

In winter and spring 2011, the high school initiated a rounds process that included tenured teachers, and captured one of those days on video. Like the elementary example, the observing team or network was large, including twelve participants of tenured and preservice teachers, an external facilitator, the liaison, and the administrator responsible for the PLLS partnership. The high school network met for an hour before visiting four classrooms, visiting each room for approximately thirty minutes. During the preliminary meeting, the high school network was reminded to "just observe, be a fly on the wall; as we are visiting someone else's room; we want to be like wallpaper" (Liaison, video tape transcript, 2011). High school observers used the same three-column note form the elementary had used. At the debrief, the facilitator decided to not cluster feedback to inform a problem of practice, but rather to gather feedback that was supportive of the teachers who hosted the network. First, the network brainstormed what they saw, then drafted what the facilitator called a "love letter," a letter of specific complimentary feedback to the host teachers, describing in detail the many effective

strategies and student responses observed. These letters were then shared with each host teachers individually, at the end of the debrief meeting. This public acknowledgement of effective practices dispelled doubt about the process and influenced increased participation in subsequent rounds opportunities.

The inclusion and comparison of the video documentation of each school's rounds protocols allowed the advisory committee to revisit the commitment to the signature professional development strategy. Without the videos, the rounds process might have been delayed, diluted, or abandoned. As one liaison noted, "Seeing how [the elementary] did their rounds made me want the same for our school. I realized, we were just flying by the seat of our pants; [we were] not really focusing on teaching or learning, but getting side tracked by trivial things like posters on the wall." (Liaison, interview, December, 2010). Immediately after viewing the elementary video, the high school liaison and principal created purpose statements and protocols for re-starting rounds at their school.

Key Outcomes

The intended goals of the PLLS included increased leadership capacity, improved culture, and continuous professional learning for preservice and tenured teachers. These goals were met based on participant perception. Also reported in this section are the details about the accountability aspects of the PLLS and the financial commitment and use of the funds. The finance information is particularly meaningful during strained economic times.

Increased Leadership Capacity

The leadership focus of the PLLS school teams became a shared leadership role with the principal, liaison, and often a cooperating teacher (a tenured mentor-teacher, directly responsible for a preservice teacher) who became invested in the process. Shared or distributed leadership is

well documented as a successful practice, as the leadership responsibilities are simply too great for one person alone (Knight, 2007; Schwann & Spady, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1994; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Schwann and Spady confirm the necessity for leaders to build capacity for leadership within organizations:

> Acknowledge power, which results in empowered and committed personnel. Total leaders don't believe they actually make people powerful or actively empower them. Instead, they believe that a tremendous amount of power lies within each person and that their role is to create work environments that let that power and capability emerge. (p. 21)

Cooperating teachers typically began the two-year relationship with some hesitancy, viewing the mentoring of a preservice teacher as more of a burden than a benefit. By the second year, the cooperating teachers (of the intact two-year placement arrangements) became the PLLS's greatest champions. They were telling their other colleagues about the improvement of the preparation programs, of the supportive environment, and the benefit of rounds. This bottom-up endorsement shaped the tenor of the school, and placed the tenured teachers in leadership and dialogue with the liaison and the building administrator.

Administrators. A discernible difference in the second year of the PLLS was the role of the building administrator, who became even more supportive of the PLLS and the rounds process. Building administrators took active roles in rounds in both schools. Principals became "believers" in the partnership, the professional development aspect of embedding rounds as the method of shared professional development. Principals articulated the expectations of participating in the partnership, an action of distinguished principals as reported by Ruff and Shoho (2005). Principals also began to value and get input from the university personnel, as they were more frequently in their buildings. The new principal at the elementary accepted the

position, in part because it was a PDS, and he wanted to implement rounds. He fully participated in the rounds process, sitting elbow to elbow with the multi-disciplinary team of university faculty, preservice and tenured teachers. He was very supportive of his liaison, and included building funds to pay for the liaison and the substitute release for rounds participation. Upon reflecting on the rounds process, a principal wrote:

> I believe the concept and practice of instructional rounds can be a powerful component of the work that PLCs do. Due to diminishing resources, school districts are having to reduce the amount of time spent on staff development.… There is an increasing sense of urgency to share and improve practice so that all students can reach high levels of learning. The problem is that we have not found a technique that can be used at scale across a wide range of classrooms that will help teachers achieve this goal. There are other practices to consider, but this one [instructional rounds] has sparked my curiosity because of the insistence that we look at learning together as professionals in the present moment. (written reflection, 2011)

Central office administration became a key promoter at the high school. The superintendent became so impressed with the PLLS and its embedded rounds that he promoted the model to colleagues around the state. This was a nuanced shift, from the liaison being perceived as the main PLLS advocate in year one, to the principal or building administrator as the primary advocate of the PLLS in year two.

Powerful Networks and Improved Culture

Principals, liaisons, tenured and preservice teachers all perceived the benefits of the network of collaborators and the inclusion of rounds (discussed later). The monthly attendance at the PLLS advisory board was very high, with two of the three schools attending 95% of the

meetings, and Seabird High attending 83% of the meetings. Given that all meetings began at 4:30 P.M. after a long workday, this was an indicator of benefit of the network. Each advisory meeting had agenda time devoted to sharing implementation ideas, successes, and challenges. Schools even began networking beyond the advisory board meetings. In the words of one building administrator:

> At first, I wondered, what we might learn from a small school, but we learned a lot on our visit; and in the car going there, we were able to process a lot of what we were thinking and learning …. The staff was great to work with, accessible, responsive … [focused] on solving placement problems. (interview, 2010)

Liaisons perceived major culture improvement in their schools. School culture in this article refers to this definition:

> [A] school's unwritten rules and traditions, norms and expectations. The unofficial pattern [that] seems to permeate everything: the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about or consider taboo, whether they seek out colleagues or isolate themselves, and how teachers feel about their work and their students. (Deal & Peterson, 2009, p. 6)

Liaisons comments included improved attitude and morale with tenured teachers, more focus on reflection, more aligninment of their teaching practices with school-based professional development, and increased consistency with schoolwide improvement strategies, such as credit by proficiency, writing workshops, student engagement, Cornell note taking, and vocabulary development.

> The PLLS affected [tenured] teachers, they are developing a culture of reflection; the whole process of rounds has helped instill reflection; rounds have improved on a previous process we called 'walk abouts'… the result is our teachers think they are becoming

better teachers. (Liaison, advisory board meeting, May 2010)

Another liaison noted the improvement in collaboration between grade level teachers and between preservice and tenured teachers:

We are now … in a collaborative relationship, asking the preservice teachers for their input [and] observations of their cooperating teachers' practice, [which has created] more conversations between primary and intermediate teachers; we've talked about sharing kids, the kids are now [ours] instead of someone else's. (Liaison, interview, May 2010)

The preservice teachers noted a more inclusive environment in the second year of the PLLS. At the elementary school, where a cluster of five preservice teachers remained, a participant explained, "having so many of us [preservice teachers] makes the staff more aware of us … it creates more of an emphasis for them [tenured teachers] to talk with us about issues in their (and our) practice" (Preservice Teacher, interview, 2010).

The implementation of rounds created the condition and the structure to improve the school through networks and deprivatizing practices. What was harder to measure was the impact of the layers of PDS, rounds, and PLCs; every participant group, however, associated the rounds process as one that shored up the staff emotionally. What really seemed to resonate with staff was the level playing field of all the participants in rounds. Roles changed, and all participants were simultaneously both teachers and learners. During rounds, university personnel alongside experienced and preservice teachers, liaisons, and principals were all observing, thinking, learning about the craft of teaching and the response of the learners. Rounds became a favorably anticipated process:

[We] had just announced the cut [reduction] of 30 staff positions, the staff was totally depressed…then a week later, we participated in rounds, and the staff had something to

feel good about again …. It helped us keep positive … despite the dire financial

circumstance. (building administrator, interview, May 2011)

Continuous Professional Learning

Layered professional development. The PLLS layered effective professional development

practices, long touted as successful. In the mid-1980s, Joyce and Showers (1995) studied effect

size of training components (professional development) on the transfer of training to practice.

Cornett and Knight (2009) found similar results when professional development strategies are

combined. Both report that the combination of information, theory, demonstration, practice,

feedback, and coaching resulted in the transfer of concepts to regular instructional practice

(Joyce & Showers report effect size of transfer of practice to be significant at 1.68 when all those

strategies are combined). In other words, when teachers experience professional development of

any kind, the transfer to their daily practice only occurs when the theory is demonstrated,

practiced, and feedback is provided (effect size is .39), but when coaching is added, the effect

size increases to a significance of 1.68. (See Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 112, for a complete

discussion on effect size of training.)

The PLLS demonstrated each component of training from Joyce and Showers' original

research (theory of peer observation, demonstration and practice through rounds, feedback

through debriefing of rounds, and coaching through follow up with the liaison). In addition, the

PLLS structure included collaborative teams or PLCs (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Dufour et al.,

2006; Goodlad, 1994; Hord & Sommers, 2008), confirming Killion and Harrison's (2006)

conclusion that "evidence is strong that when teachers collaborate, they are more satisfied and

more effective teachers" (p. 20). Finally, the context of the PLLS/PDS set up conditions for

continuous professional development.

The positive influence of the PLLS/rounds combination was consistent in both schools. Principals took more notice and attention, as they were getting positive feedback from their tenured staff. One administrator commented:

> [U]sually no one comes up to me and says, 'thank you, that was great professional development'…. but after this [rounds], I've been told, 'this was the best professional development I've ever had', … and … 'thank you, this [rounds] makes a difference, I feel valued, and learned something I can keep [in my practice].' (building administrator, videotape transcript, May 2011)

The success of the PLLS participants using rounds filtered upward to the central office. Upon hearing of the high school rounds process, the district superintendent stopped in for the final debriefing period. What occurred (and was captured on video) was a timely affirmation of the best practices of professional development. The superintendent stated:

> It's too bad we had to wait for a grant to make this [PLLS and rounds] happen. It's like [it should] be part of the whole [professional development] program, it's like different teachers at different times could be on cycles to do this [instructional rounds] and be proud of what they do in their classrooms, and just learn from each other.
> (superintendent, video transcript, May 2011)

Accountability

Teacher participation in the PLLS and rounds was strictly voluntary, although administrators placed preservice teachers with effective teachers, even denying requests from at least one tenured teacher to be a mentor for a preservice teacher. The administrator who denied the tenured teacher's request shared: "[I]t was really difficult, but I told the [veteran] teacher she couldn't have a preservice teacher because she wasn't modeling enough current best practices …

I know she was devastated, and then pretty mad; but I had to do what was right for the preservice teacher" (Administrator, interview, September 2010). This concern for accountability when matching preservice teachers with effective mentor teachers was a positive outcome after the first year placements were not well-monitored.

What emerged from the conversations with tenured teachers was more internal accountability and reflection. The tenured teachers indicated that they were more cognizant of their own practices, and began to speak with preservice teachers about research and practices that had "gotten away from" them; they took their responsibility to the field experience teachers very seriously, even those tenured teachers who did not have an assigned preservice teacher. The inclusion of teachers who didn't have a preservice teacher in rounds was perceived as a "shift in culture" by principals and liaisons. Liaisons reported that now tenured teachers talk more about their practices, are more metacognitive, and participate more fully in rounds. Tenured teachers wanted to be able to provide good modeling, and definitely wanted to represent the best of the profession to the preservice students. Increased reflection of tenured teachers was consistently reported as a benefit to the school. A liaison summarized:

> One of the things we talked about in [the] governance meeting [was that] as a teacher, you can't really improve without self-reflection. [Having preservice students come observe in their classrooms] opened more tenured [teachers] to self-reflection. One of the problems is teaching can be insular, and folks get stuck; [participating in the PLLS] helps teachers get more feedback [and] be more self-reflective. (liaison, 2010)

Cooperative teachers who mentored the preservice teachers reported increased metacognition of their practice: "Having a practicum [preservice] student [teacher] has led to deeper reflection of our practices and classroom communities …. Mentoring and debriefing with

practicum students leads to better understanding [of content and pedagogy] and more explicit planning" (Cooperative Teacher Focus Group, April 2010). The tenured teachers' responses support Reeves' (2010) notion of "deliberate practice," or the focus of instructional improvement on specific key strategies.

Financial Commitment

Schools were faced with little or no time or money for professional development. The university had traditionally paid between two and three thousand dollars per graduate student to adjunct faculty, to observe and coach each preservice teacher. What the dean proposed was to reallocate these funds and some additional university funds to the schools in the form of a grant. Each school agreed to host the same preservice field experience students for the 2009–2010 school year, and retain those students for the full-time student teaching experience in the 2010–2011 school year. Each school created a liaison role, or a part-time staff member, who would act as liaison between the district and SMU, and who would serve as on-site mentor or coach to the preservice students. In compensation, schools received a two-year grant of $35,000, which represented $17,500 per year. Grant management responsibilities occurred at the school site and under the discretion of the school principal. Since each school had autonomy as to how to expend the funds, each school spent the money differently. The elementary school funded the liaison's position with Title IA funds and she was a full-time, on-site instructional coach, and responsible for organizing all rounds cycles. Preservice teachers were included in the rounds schedule. The grant was used to pay for substitutes to release the tenured teachers to participate in rounds.

The high school used Title IIA funds to pay for substitutes to release tenured teachers to participate in rounds; each rounds half day session was added onto an existing collaborative

planning grant that paid for the facilitator and the second half of the day was spent by the PLCs planning lessons that reflected strategies seen during rounds. The university grant funded a retired teacher part-time to be the liaison.

Conclusions and Implications

At the close of the second year of a Professional Learning Laboratory School partnership, qualitative data indicates perceived benefits for university *and* school partners. This article has focused mostly on the school benefit. Together, university and school designed robust, simultaneous professional development of preservice and tenured teachers. The leveraging of collaboration through PLCs and the implementation of instructional rounds in the context of a PDS model yielded more tenured teacher reflection, funding for professional development, and the utilization of school-based liaisons to bring novices together with tenured teachers for shared practice. Participants who implemented instructional rounds perceived that being "in practice" with each other through some type of rounds was beneficial to improving teacher instructional skills and knowledge at both preservice and tenured levels. Rounds were seen as the primary benefit for the school in exchange for the support for preservice teachers. This *transaction* of practices morphed into a *transformation* of practice as perceived by the tenured teachers and building leaders.

What is left to do is to continue to develop, refine, and document the evolution of the rounds process for both preservice and *tenured* teachers. Given the small sample and two-year timeline, there is a need to pursue, as Clark (1999) suggests, distinction between partnership benefits and professional development school benefits. The PLLS partnership is too new to assert that one or the other (partnership or PDS) was the contributing factor to perceived benefit.

This PDS yielded increased leadership capacity, improved culture, and continuous

professional learning within a context of staff reduction and budget crisis. These school leaders

successfully improved morale and student achievement in high poverty elementary and high

schools. The high school was recognized in *Education Week* as an urban district that "beat the

odds" (Swanson, 2010, p. 26). These schools' stories have critical applicability to teacher and

leadership preparation in the political climate of accountability and the reauthorization of

ESEA, which seeks to ensure "a great teacher in every classroom … and … a great principal in

every building" (USDOE, 2010, p.1).

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