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Collaborative Literacy Project: A Framework for Improving Practice

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Abstract

The Collaborative Literacy Project (CLP) was a two-year initiative from 2009 to 2011 developed to improve teacher practice in writing instruction for K–2 teachers in four Catholic, urban elementary schools. The project began with primary teachers in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade from three schools in its first year, with a fourth school and grades three through eight added in the second year. The number of teachers involved grew from 12 to 45. School enrollments ranged from 200 to 350 students, with diverse populations who were 90 percent Catholic. The CLP introduced a new model of professional development, one that required teachers to identify their own areas for growth and involved observing teaching in action. Providing teachers the time to visit colleagues' classrooms forced them out of their own school cultures and presented them with new roles as observers and evaluators of instruction. The process offered a powerful setting and backdrop for meaningful conversations about teaching and learning to occur. This article tells how the Instructional Rounds model developed teachers' skills in writing instruction and grew into a project across all areas of the curriculum to further engage teachers in collaborative conversations about their practice.

Introduction

Imagine starting your professional development day with video clips from "Grey's Anatomy" and "ER." What message does this send to teachers about the condition of their teaching and learning? It was a way of introducing a new model of professional development, one that required them to identify their own areas for growth and involved observing teaching in action. Improving teacher practice is a complex process, with traditional professional development models not providing the impetus for sustainable, lasting change to occur. Allowing teachers the time to visit colleagues' classrooms forced them out of their own school cultures and provided them with new roles as observers and evaluators of instruction. The process provided a powerful setting and backdrop for meaningful conversations about teaching and learning. This article tells how the Instructional Rounds model was implemented to develop the skills of teachers from Catholic, urban elementary schools and further engage them in collaborative conversations about their practice.

The Collaborative Literacy Project (CLP) was an initiative developed to improve teacher practice in writing instruction for K–2 teachers in four Catholic elementary schools in an urban setting. The Collaborative Literacy Project represents a two-year initiative with four

faith-based elementary schools with strong academic reputations. The schools function as part of a council comprised of 20 member schools; the principals know one another on a system-wide level but had not collaborated on professional development prior to this time. While the project started with primary teachers in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade in its first year, a fourth school and grades three through eight were added in the second year. The number of teachers involved grew from 14 to 45. School enrollments ranged from 200 to 350 students, with diverse populations who were 90 percent Catholic.

CLP Goals and Framework

There were several goals for the Collaborative Literacy Project, with the first and most important objective to help teachers understand the essential elements of a balanced literacy program and how writing instruction is embedded within such a framework. This process provided an opportunity for collaboration within and across schools to broaden models of practice and engage in collegial conversations regarding instruction. Schools were able to consider the best ways to collect data as evidence of student progress and identify grade-level problems of practice. Teachers and principals learned how to use the Instructional Rounds model to accomplish these goals. Finally, the project was intended to serve as a springboard for future reflective conversations about teaching practice.

The last decade has provided strong evidence that effective literacy programs include balanced and motivating instruction in the following key components: phonemic awareness; systematic, sequential phonics; fluent, automatic reading of text; vocabulary development; text comprehension strategies; spelling and handwriting; and written composition strategies. (Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998). The Report of the National Reading Panel, "Teaching Children to Read," provides comprehensive information explaining the methodology and scientific research used by the National Reading Panel (NRP) in its effort to assess the best ways to teach children to read conducted by five subgroups, which focused on (1) alphabetics, (2) fluency, (3) comprehension, (4) teacher education and reading instruction, and (5) computer technology and reading instruction.

This balanced literacy model integrates various modalities of literacy instruction with assessment-based planning as a central focus. Characterized by explicit skill instruction and the use of authentic texts, the overall purpose of balanced literacy is to provide students with a differentiated instructional program supporting individualized reading and writing skill development. Through multiple modalities, the teacher implements a program whereby responsibility is gradually shifted from the teacher to the student. The teacher models the reading and writing process using interactive, shared, guided reading and writing, and demonstration or modeled writing through a Reading and Writing Workshop approach (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). The teacher begins by modeling the reading/writing strategy, and subsequently, students are engaged in small groups for practice as the teacher monitors and provides guidance. Students share their work and read and write independently while the teacher circulates to observe, record observations, and confer.

The initial planning for this project began when three of the principals met over the summer to align their school improvement and building-specific goals for professional development. Principals within the diocese are responsible for all professional development efforts within their schools and typically seek out speakers or specialists from local colleges and universities to provide training. As the principals met, they realized the greatest overlap and alignment occurred within the primary team and in the area of literacy. One of the schools was newly opened, adding a grade level each year up through eighth grade. While all three principals were committed to improving practice and providing teachers with the opportunity to collaborate, they were unsure what it would look like. What was unique to the schools was that as their enrollments grew, the number of teachers at a given grade level was changing, and sometimes rapidly. As a result, principals were eager to provide systemic professional

development that would have lasting results and improve the level of conversation and have the greatest impact on improving teacher practice. Working with a faculty member of a local university, these school leaders decided to implement a model they had read about and wanted to try in their schools.

Initial Training

The initial training began with a day-long, end-of-summer workshop for all primary teachers that focused on developing teachers' collective understandings about balanced literacy and determining current practices in writing instruction within their classrooms. The university faculty member presented an overview of the components of balanced literacy followed by ongoing dialogue about various assessments teachers utilized to identify skill levels. New teachers shared their student teaching experiences while the veteran teachers related their multi-year perspectives. Clearly, teachers had to spend some time getting to know each other, sharing philosophies, and looking for mutual, overlapping concerns. In order to do this, they had an opportunity to meet in grade-alike groups, discussing materials and methods used to implement various aspects of writing instruction and classroom practice. During the afternoon session of the full-day training, the Instructional Rounds Model was introduced, with a demonstration on how to define a problem of practice, such as helping readers to identify the main idea, and brainstorm topics they would like to study together. Working with the project leaders, the principals, and university faculty, teachers identified grade-level problems of practice and discussed what the corresponding lessons might look like. Principals were responsible for developing the schedule of visits and arranging substitutes for conducting the "rounds." Professional development funds that typically would have been spent to pay for outside speakers were used to provide substitute coverage so that teachers could step out of their classrooms to be part of pre- and post-observation discussions.

Instructional Rounds

The Instructional Rounds visits held during the fall semester included observations in all primary classrooms at each of the school sites. An entire day or morning was spent at schools visiting their kindergarten, first grade, or second grade classrooms. A one-hour block was used for each grade level during the Rounds process. The host teachers introduced the problem of practice to the visitors, explaining what the lesson would consist of, and sharing any student work or evidence for measuring the problem of practice. Classroom visits lasted 20–25 minutes, with all principals, teachers, and university faculty participating and playing a role in the discussion. Host principals and university faculty were responsible for leading meetings and keeping the discussion focused on best practice in literacy instruction. Meetings started and ended with the problem of practice identified by a particular grade level, with an emphasis on how this linked to improving instruction. The purpose was to help teachers begin to connect their own practice, learn from the visits, and then connect back to literacy instruction. Post-observation discussions required that observers organize their notes using a triple column sheet, with comments about teacher behavior and student behavior in the first two columns, and a third column reserved for questions of the hosts. Notes were transferred to post-it notes, onto large chart paper, to encourage openness and guide the discussion. Hosting teachers were given time to review the questions and prepare responses or seek clarification. Discussions evolved as the teams became more comfortable with the process and with each other. While early feedback centered on compliments or non-judgmental comments, over time the feedback evolved into specific questions and follow-up from one set of visits to the next and directly related to the problem of practice. Following each visit, the notes were typed up and sent to all participants for follow-up activities that occurred at each school site.

Mid-Year Professional Development

A January professional development after-school event was held to build upon the existing knowledge base in literacy

and writing instruction, and obtain feedback regarding the process. This session prepared for the second set of Rounds and continued to emphasize collaboration across the network. A formal presentation by the university faculty on the development of assessment materials was included; teacher leaders gave a presentation about the CLP that would be shared at an upcoming state literacy conference. Both further reinforced the purpose and goals of the project, as teachers began to take leadership roles and participate in decisions about their own professional growth. When teachers reconvened in grade-level teams, they were far more comfortable when asked to share in decision-making, further taking ownership in planning the second semester visits. Teachers were provided with three options to consider for the next set of Rounds as they reconvened in their grade-level groups. The options included identifying a new problem of practice and scheduling Rounds visits similar to the first semester visits. Other options included creating an instructional unit as a network grade-level team or development and implementation of a common assessment across a grade-level team. Kindergarten teachers chose to develop and implement a theme-based unit together, while first grade chose to develop a common assessment, and the third grade teachers implemented another set of rounds based on a new problem of practice. This shared ownership of the project provided a boost for the teachers' decision making as they responded to a new culture that was evolving within their schools. While teacher leadership grew in the process, they were still being guided throughout the second semester by principals and university faculty. During this second set of rounds, principals and faculty partnered so two project leaders would be in attendance at each of the sessions. Teachers were responsible for note-taking and follow-up details with their unit development and creation of instructional materials, while those embarking on a new problem of practice worked on the schedule, getting support from principals for substitute coverage.

Year 2

Year 2 of the project started with a day-long training prior to the start of the school year. In feedback obtained during Year 1, teachers indicated that more specific information on writing instruction and implementation of Writers' Workshop would benefit them. University faculty provided in-service training in Writers' Workshop and how to develop students as writers. The addition of a fourth school and inclusion of grades three through eight for all schools meant the Instructional Rounds model needed to be reintroduced. This reintroduction of the Instructional Rounds model allowed teachers who had been through the process the prior year to serve as facilitators in the discussion, providing sample problems of practice and feedback about the process; this continued to build upon teachers' leadership and shared ownership of the project. New teachers were mentored by veterans, not based on years of teaching experience, but rather on prior experience with the Rounds model. Fall semester visits followed the Rounds process, and with other areas of the curriculum included in the observations, writing across the curriculum could be observed. Grade-level teams worked together during training and via email to develop problems of practice. Problems of practice were approved by principals and university faculty to ensure the emphasis was focused on developing teacher practice in writing instruction. When one grade level submitted a problem that did not meet the criteria, they were asked to reconvene and develop a new problem that did meet criteria. Technology was incorporated in the second year to provide an added dimension. Three teachers at one of the schools wanted to implement the same lesson and determined that videotaping would be the best method to capture the observations. The post-observation discussion, in this case, focused on similarities and differences in the lesson's implementation and enabled teachers to see their classrooms directly alongside their colleagues. While this changed the process of observation from watching three real-time lessons to watching three separate video clips, the conversation and level of dialogue and discussion remained consistent with the process. It also reinforced teacher ownership in setting up the lessons to demonstrate the problem of practice. During this second year, other areas of training included looking at student work and developing and using rubrics. Within all of these sessions, a mini-lesson

presented by a university faculty member was followed by an actual demonstration and practice using samples of student work and teacher materials.

School-University Partnerships — Professional Development School Model

This urban university's College of Education has a long-standing history of strong partnerships with local area schools throughout a large Midwestern city and surrounding areas. The Professional Development School (PDS) network represents a group of partner schools working in collaboration with the university. The Professional Development School model is an important one in the work of school reform, providing a means for collaboration and sharing of resources, allowing partnerships to emerge and develop over time (Teitel, 2008). University faculty immerse themselves in the work in the school, while teachers and administrators take responsibility for training preservice teachers. New roles emerge as the collaboration among the partners evolves over time. An important aspect of the PDS work is the development of teacher leaders and leadership at all levels. There are some key elements of the PDS model within this project. University faculty immersed themselves in the culture of the local school, providing the resources of the university to support training and mentoring of new teachers. An opportunity for roles to merge and overlap was also present. Principals and teacher leaders assumed positions as adjunct faculty; professional learning communities evolved as a model of collaborative inquiry was used to dialogue about teaching practice. Trust-building and getting to know the university had already taken place. The schools and teachers were familiar with university faculty, since they had served as mentors for student teachers in previous years.

Professional Development — Surveying the Landscape

There is no one best way for improving teacher practice. Current research suggests that teacher involvement in the process is critical, and any way to link the professional learning with changes in behavior will support lasting change in practice (Borko, 2004). Borko (2004) states that, "Despite recognition of its importance, the professional development currently available to teachers is woefully inadequate" (p. 3). Phase 1 research also provides evidence that strong professional learning communities foster teacher learning and instructional improvement. Guskey's (2000) model of professional development suggests higher level professional development relates to how the new learning impacts student learning, in contrast with lower levels of professional development, which are concerned about whether or not the participants liked the training. Hirsh and Killion (2009) suggest principles of professional learning that need to be present for true professional learning and development to take place. Fullan (2007) provides key ideas for reshaping professional learning as a mandate of what teacher learning should involve. He cites one of the key obstacles for teacher learning stems from limited opportunities for teachers to learn within their own classroom settings; his work redirects to Elmore's (2004) ideas about using the classroom as a vehicle for improving practice. Hargreaves (2007) recommends that staff development should involve teachers learning from watching each other teach, by working together rather than alone, and improving practice for long-term gains and impact. The National Staff Development Council's 2010 report on the state of professional development suggests that 49–100 hours of intensive training are necessary to impact teacher practice. Improving teaching requires the kind of deep focus on content knowledge and innovations in delivery to all students (Collins, 2010). This can only occur when teachers are given opportunities to learn from experts and from one another. Teachers need a supportive framework and culture to continually develop their skills alongside their peers.

Teacher-Led Professional Development — Instructional Rounds

The Instructional Rounds model (City et al., 2009) is adapted from the medical rounds model and is a classroom-

oriented approach that involves observing, analyzing, and improving teaching and learning by watching it occur. Instructional Rounds is a method for visiting classrooms and identifying descriptive evidence relating to the instructional core of teaching practice. Adapted from the field of medicine, the model places an emphasis on the instructional core of teaching. The focus is on identifying and observing good practice as well as those elements that improve instruction. Based on a theory of action, the goal of the process is to change student learning by changing one of the three elements of the instructional core — teacher behavior, content, or student behavior. The first step in the model is identifying a problem of practice; this represents something that teachers care about changing that would make a difference in the quality of student learning if improved. A rich problem of practice focuses on the instructional core and is observable and actionable — it connects a broader strategy of improvement and will make a difference in student learning.

Data Collection and Analysis

Evaluation of the project was ongoing and multilayered, with formal and informal processes in place for data collection and analysis throughout the two years. Since it was a new initiative, principals and university faculty were cautious about moving forward without having the evidence that would further guide them in making planning decisions. Principals met with university faculty on a quarterly basis to review feedback, plan, and determine next steps in the process. While feedback from all participants served useful for planning considerations, the focus of this study was on the teacher feedback and obtaining their perceptions about the project.

This study used a mixed method approach for collection and analysis of data. In order to address the impact of the project, the researchers used a survey (see Appendix) comprised of quantitative (Likert-scale) and qualitative responses (open-ended comments). The Likert scale provides for respondents to indicate varying degrees of intensity on a scale (Issac & Michael, 1995), while the

open-ended comments allow for greater understanding practitioners may have to share (Glesne & Peshkin, 1997). Comments were analyzed by researchers independently looking for the emergence of broad themes. Modeled after the writings of Coffey and Atkinson (1996), open coding was used to separate the data. Codes were determined by researchers individually by reading and rereading the data. This was followed by coding of similar themes and then researchers coming together to compare themes. From these open codes, general themes developed and emerged.

Results from Year 1
Year 1 of the project involved 14 K–2 teachers at the three schools. Evaluation forms used at each meeting sought feedback in three broad areas: the best features of the activity, suggestions for improvement, and comments or reactions to the meetings. Comments from these evaluation forms centered on three distinct themes: (1) teachers valued the time to collaborate and talk with colleagues, (2) teachers learned from visiting each other's classrooms, and (3) the project helped teachers think about and reflect upon their teaching in a new way. The Year 1 survey was developed by Shannon, who was pursuing a master's degree at a local university and developed the tool in conjunction with a research class to gather information about teacher perspectives on CLP and the Instructional Rounds model. This electronic survey consisted of five Likert scale questions to assess the teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of the Rounds model, and the areas of instruction teachers perceived to be impacted the most by the project. Shannon shared survey results with the principals and university faculty so that they could analyze the data together and use it to plan the second year of the project.

Teachers' perceptions of Instructional Rounds in Year 1 and areas of greatest impact are shown in Table 1. At the end of the first year, 64 percent of teachers agreed that participating in Instructional Rounds was a valuable way to spend their time. Seventy-one percent felt that they gained new and pertinent information about the grade

level and subjects they taught. An overwhelming majority (92 percent) felt strongly about the value of conversing and collaborating with other grade-level teachers, and saw it as an effective way to gain insight on how to best teach their students. In addition, 64 percent of teachers were able to apply what they observed during Instructional Rounds to their own classroom practice. Teachers were also asked to rate which areas of classroom instruction they felt were most impacted by participating in Instructional Rounds. One hundred percent of teachers felt that their instructional methods were most affected, followed by planning (71 percent), classroom management (71 percent), and assessment (57 percent). The positive response from teachers was illustrated in their open-ended feedback. One teacher shared, "It is great to visit other classrooms and see the variety of ways we all teach, see students at work, and engage in conversations about practice with other teachers at our grade level."

Table 1: Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Rounds — Year 1

Survey Item	Strongly Agree/ Agree
	Percentage of teachers
Valuable way to spend time	64
Gained new information	71
Valued collaboration	92
Applied to own practice	64
Areas of Impact	
Instructional Methods	100
Planning	71
Classroom Management	71
Assessment	57
Total: N=14 Teachers	

Results from Year 2

The ongoing evaluation of each training session and Rounds visit continued in Year 2 of the project. A more detailed evaluation form was used to gather feedback on the Rounds visits, with the intent of determining specific content teachers learned from the process. Responses to four questions were elicited. Teachers were asked to: (1) identify a specific concept learned during the visit, (2) compare this visit to the previous month's visit, (3) identify specific content or strategy to try in your classroom, and (4) identify a writing topic to learn more about. These more targeted questions helped identify what teachers were taking from the experience, how their perceptions of the visits were changing over time, and specific content they were learning. The survey from Year 2 consisted of 25 questions, both Likert scale and open-ended response questions. Forty-five teachers responded to the electronic survey, with questions specific to literacy and Writers' Workshop. Table 2 provides results from the Year 2 survey, indicating teachers' perceptions to the second year of Instructional Rounds.

According to the survey, 86 percent of teachers agreed that the Instructional Rounds professional development model was helpful in growing their understanding of how to teach writing in an effective manner. One teacher commented, "I feel like I have always struggled to teach Writers' Workshop throughout my first three years of teaching. It was so great to observe the other teachers as they taught writing. In addition, the pre- and post-[observation] discussions really helped me to understand and think through my own teaching." One hundred percent of teachers agreed that the cross-school aspect of the project enhanced the experience because it provided them opportunities to observe a variety of school environments. One teacher shares, "One of my favorite parts of CLP was seeing the different schools and the different ways that fourth grade is taught from school to school. I learned a lot of new ideas to use in my classroom, which are grade-level appropriate since I knew that they were already successful in another classroom." Teachers also commented on the value of observing their colleagues in action, and 98 percent of teachers felt that it helped them reflect on their own teaching. Seventy percent of teachers valued the feedback given by fellow teachers about their instructional practices. After going through the Rounds process, 86 percent of teachers actually went back and made adjustments to their instruction based on what they learned from colleagues. One teacher even

commented that she implemented ideas that were *not* directly related to the grade-level problem of practice. Perhaps one of the more powerful statements came from one teacher who shared, "Everything that I do in teaching writing right now is directly a result of CLP."

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Rounds — Year 2

Survey Item	Strongly Agree/Agree
	Percentage of teachers
Helpful for teaching writing	86
Valued feedback	70
Valued collaboration	100
Applied to own practice	86
Helpful for reflecting on teaching	98

Total: N=45 Teachers

Results from the surveys showed positive changes from Year 1 to Year 2, with growth in the percentage of teachers who valued the collaboration, from 92 percent to 100 percent and those who applied what was learned to their own practice, 64 percent to 86 percent. Feedback provided in comments and on evaluation forms consistently indicated two areas which were positive outcomes of the project: the opportunity to collaborate and the opportunity to reflect upon their own teaching in a new way.

Emergent Roles

In keeping with the work of PDS partnerships, new roles emerged or were reinforced. Pitcher et al. (2003) suggest that a principal's understanding of reading goals has a major influence on making a difference in literacy instruction. Zemelman, Daniels & Hyde (1998) suggest practical roles for principals in literacy development. Many of these roles center on modeling, promoting, and supporting time and resources for literacy. Principals in the CLP demonstrated these multiple roles as they served as key members of the observation team, making time to observe in classrooms and openly dialogue with teachers about their practice. Within that structure it is critical to provide teachers time to talk about literacy. Sebring

& Byrk (2000) suggest that professional development tied to an overarching plan for school improvement provides evidence of schools making strong achievement gains. Principals reported that the Instructional Rounds process provided them with an opportunity to align their professional development with existing school goals and school improvement plans. They were comfortable working with this network of schools as they had similar missions and visions for the work of their teachers and goals for their students. As school leaders, they were cognizant of the need to connect their teachers with grade-alike teachers from other schools. The range of schools provided differing numbers at each grade level; there was a strong desire to provide teachers with collegial conversations, role models, and opportunities to reflect on their practice with the support and involvement of university faculty serving as content specialists. Principals also stepped into new roles, serving as instructional leaders, modeling for teachers, and serving as part of an instructional team within their own schools. Differing from past experiences of scheduling speakers for professional development sessions, they were participating and leading curriculum conversations with continual emphasis on the goals and outcomes of the project.

University faculty also found themselves serving in new roles. Instead of practicing the "sage on the stage" model, or as experts who had all the answers, they served as members of the team providing feedback, noting what they observed, and developing questions for the discussion. As the project evolved, university faculty could and did provide insights, training, and information as needed, when it counted and when the readiness for learning was present.

The role of teachers evolved throughout the course of this project. Teachers play a critical role in creating a classroom atmosphere that supports and nurtures early literacy. They are responsible for fostering student motivation, adapting the curriculum to meet students' individual needs, engaging students in meaningful classroom activities, and monitoring student progress. This increased accountability has led many teachers to

seek professional development opportunities centered upon best practices in early literacy, with the hope that they will take the learned information and immediately implement it in their classrooms. While many of these professional opportunities come in the form of one-day workshops, research has shown that such activities foster little change in teacher practice (McCutchen et al., 2002). Sustained and ongoing professional development that includes genuine communities of learners (in this case, teachers) has been considered to be a more effective way for teachers to take what they learn and apply it to their instructional strategies.

Instructional Rounds provides exactly this type of professional development. Instead of attending one-day workshops, with strategies and ideas delivered to teachers in neatly fashioned packages, the teachers involved in Instructional Rounds took control of their own professional growth over a two-year period. This ownership is a critical component for lasting change to occur (Borko, 2004). Teachers were able to constantly reflect and change their methods based on observing literacy instruction in other classrooms. They actively constructed their own learning while taking on the roles of observers, data collectors, and at times, mentors. More experienced teachers were able to model and offer guidance and advice to novice teachers, while simultaneously refining their own craft. The collaborative nature of the Rounds model allowed teachers from different backgrounds and levels of experience to plan, brainstorm, and implement instructional strategies based on the outcomes of each Rounds meeting. The learning that took place during these meetings was constantly evolving, and teachers were eager to get back to their classrooms to put into practice what they had seen or learned that day.

As each grade-level group of teachers formed a working dynamic, certain individuals clearly established themselves as facilitators or leaders. This seemed to happen naturally as the teachers got to know one another on both personal and professional levels. While all teachers actively contributed to the discussion and learning that took place

during Rounds meetings, it was apparent which teachers initiated conversations about student work, kept the group on task, and determined what the group would focus on during the next set of Rounds. These "lead teachers" exhibited comfort and confidence in directing others within the Rounds model and also showed a solid understanding of the Rounds model itself. As a result, they will be ready to serve in a leadership capacity as the project continues in future years.

Conclusion

The CLP introduced teachers to a new repertoire of skills which included observing other teachers and reflecting about practice, as well as thinking about ways to change their own practice. The classroom was the vehicle for this professional learning to occur, suggested as key elements for professional learning (Elmore, 2004; Hargreaves, 2007). The learning took place within the actual teaching environment and during classroom instruction, which made the experience unique from other professional development. It reinforced literacy leadership at all levels, but especially at the teacher level. The project gave teachers the ability to collaborate with new team members, exposing themselves to new teaching practices and new ways of doing things. Teachers presented at a state literacy conference for two consecutive years, sharing the work of the project with pride and interest in moving forward to new levels of understanding. The teacher-developed survey allowed the opportunity to collect data and coordinate an action research project.

Instructional Rounds could be useful to schools in other areas. This model could be easily replicated in a school seeking alternative or collaborative methods of professional development. The Rounds model would be especially useful in a school with one teacher at each grade level, so that those teachers could establish working relationships with other professionals in different school communities. It would also be helpful to a school that desires to strengthen its literacy program or instruction in other content areas. Teachers and administrators can adapt the Rounds model

to fit the needs of their student population, even if this does not include literacy. Math, science, and social studies teachers can participate in Rounds to strengthen their practice in their individual subject areas.

A number of lessons were learned from this project that may serve to guide others as they consider embarking on such collaborative work. Getting inside classrooms and watching teachers actually teach was at the core of the Collaborative Literacy Project. The opportunity to participate in the observation of real-time instruction is what made this professional learning project unique from those in the past. However, organizing and managing such a project is challenging and requires a large time commitment, reallocation of funds for substitute coverage, and overall administrative support and involvement. Principals served in key roles in this project and provided their support, time, and managerial skills and served as members of the team. Year 2 goals of the CLP included growing the project from three to nine grade levels, and from one content area to several content areas with writing across the curriculum as the common theme. These Year 2 goals proved to be too ambitious, and as a result, some of the focus of the work was diminished. Teacher leaders proved to be an important component in the process and should have been utilized more extensively. They were more familiar with the procedures than assistant principals, who sat in when principals were called away. Teacher leaders demonstrated a readiness to continue growing their leadership. They knew the CLP from the ground up and served to keep the integrity of the project intact and further serve to bring about real, lasting changes within their schools.

The future of the CLP is currently being determined by the participants; the principals in collaboration with university faculty members are reviewing teacher feedback and considering possibilities for a third year of implementation. Although the focus on writing was valuable to most of the teachers who participated in CLP, quite a few teachers expressed a desire to address reading instruction if CLP is adopted as the professional development model for future years. Additional faculty, such as reading specialists, librarians, and resource room teachers, could be invited to take part in CLP if the focus did shift to reading instead of writing. The principals have also discussed having a team of teachers plan and lead CLP for the third year, thereby stepping away from their roles as facilitators. Each school would select teachers to manage scheduling, planning, and monitoring the project, as well as collecting feedback at its conclusion. Principals would then have more time to determine how the CLP continues to align with ongoing professional development and school improvement goals.

The CLP has been successful in opening the door for developing a new culture and method of professional development as teachers gain skills in observing instruction and reflecting upon their work. In keeping with Guskey's (2000) model of professional development, this project considered how the new learning by teachers impacted student learning. The CLP gave teachers this type of new learning, with constant attention to student learning. It provided them with the opportunity to observe in classrooms and connect what they saw with what was going on in their own classroom environments, something they have had limited opportunities to do in the past. Teachers developed new skill sets and learned a new process for their own professional growth and development. This type of professional learning was process-driven, enabling teachers to reflect upon growing their own skills in identifying problems of practice. Whatever the principals and decision makers decide to do, the idea of situating this work into existing or future school improvement goals is critical. What is so valuable for all of the teachers involved in the project is the way in which they learned a new process that can translate into other areas of the curriculum — the collaboration, observation, reflection, and review of student work provided new ways of honing their craft.

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Appendix

Survey Questions — Year 1

Please indicate your response using the rating scale Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

1. Participation in Instructional Rounds was a valuable way to spend my time.

2. I gained new and pertinent information about the grade level and subjects I teach.

3. Conversing and collaborating with other grade-level teachers is an effective way to gain new insights on how to best teach my students.

4. I was able to apply what I observed in today's Instructional Rounds experience to my own classroom practice.

5. The experience in the Instructional Rounds will impact changes in the following areas related to my teaching:

   a) Planning

   b) Instructional Methods

   c) Time Management

   d) Classroom Environment

   e) Assessment

Survey Questions — Year 2

1. What is your name?

2. What grades do you teach?

3. What school do you work at?

For Questions 4-25 responses indicated by Strongly Agree, Agree, or Strongly Disagree.

4. The type of professional development experience was helpful in growing my understanding of how to teach writing in an effective manner.

5. Comments, if any, on previous question.

6. The cross-school aspect of the project enhances this experience because it provides opportunities to observe in a variety of school environments.

7. Comments, if any, on previous question.

8. Observing colleagues' teaching helped me reflect on my own teaching.

9. Comments, if any, on previous question.

10. When colleagues observed in my classroom, I valued the feedback given to me about my instructional practices.

11. Comments, if any, on previous question.

12. I have made adjustments to my instruction based on what I have learned from colleagues throughout this project.

13. Comments, if any, on previous question.

14. I now feel as if I have a cadre of teachers that I can collaborate with when I need support in developing writing instructional plans.

15. Comments, if any, on previous question.

16. To date, what have you learned about writing from the Collaborative Literacy Project?

17. To date, have your done anything in your classroom as a result of CLP? If yes, please explain.

18. I thought the half-day structure of the visits were okay.

19. I would prefer to have a full day dedicated to CLP work.

20. I would prefer to spend more time on observations.

21. I would like to spend more time looking at student work with colleagues.

22. I am interested in learning how we could work collaboratively online to share instructional practices, examine student work, and collaborate on ways of addressing problems of practice.

23. Having a facilitator for our meetings was helpful.

24. Please describe the kind of session you are interested in: I am interested in participating in professional learning sessions that are…

25. As we think about moving forward, what additional suggestions can you offer for CLP?