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Instructional Rounds and Problem-Solving: An Evaluative Case Study

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Abstract

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

In the target district, instructional rounds (IR), were implemented to reform district-wide educational practices to increase student problem-solving skills over time. This evaluative case study investigated the perceived efficacy of IRs as a model to address student problem-solving. Specifically, the study examined the influences, if any, that the IR process has had on problem-solving, academics, and pedagogy since implementation. The study was framed by Bandura's social learning theory as it states that behavior is learned from one's environment through the process of observation. Qualitative data were collected from 86 stakeholders through a district-wide questionnaire, semi-structured interviews with 8 administrators, and a review of IR feedback notes and fundamental instructional practices. Data were analyzed and open coded to identify common themes and assess if there was perceived efficacy of the IR process. Findings showed that participants perceived the implementation of IRs as effective in improving academic, social, and pedagogical processes throughout the district. Participants shared the opinion that IR improved critical thinking among students, though there was no formal measure for this. A white paper was generated to inform the district of these changes, with recommendations for improvement in instructional rounds implementation. The project will promote social change by improving the teaching and learning process for students, teachers, and administrators at the target district. Based on what was reported about IR, continuing to improve the IR process can bring improvements to the teaching and learning process which will support stronger problem- solving, collaboration, and critical thinking among students.

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated first to my supportive husband Richard Scalzo, who inspires me on so many levels each and every day. His encouragement keeps me moving forward. I know that without you this would not have been possible. Please know how much I appreciate you coming into my life at the very moment you did.

Next, to my beautiful daughter, Madison Belinda, my talented son, Gunnar Darrell Lee, my step-daughters, Brianna Leigh, Julianne Rose, and Isabella Nicole. A thank you goes out to each one of you for understanding that weekends were dedicated to writing, even when my computer and I were on the sidelines of your many sporting events.

To my loving parents Darrell and Jacqueline Geist, I thank you for teaching me the morals and values that led to this point in my life. You have instilled in me a true passion for education and a strong desire to make a difference in this world. I hope that I have made you proud as I have fulfilled this monumental goal.

Finally, to the most inspirational couple I was graced to know, my grandparents, Richard and Elizabeth Beitler, may they rest in peace. You showed me the meaning of unconditional love. The amount of encouragement you shared throughout my life is unsurpassed. Your commitment to family will carry on through me and mine.

I love you to the moon and back again!

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Section 1: The Problem

Use of instructional rounds (IR) is a relatively new practice in the field of education. IRs are a time consuming, challenging, and complex process used to improve the teaching and learning process, build a common language, and guide and direct professional development (City, 2011). In this study, I examined whether there were any perceived effects that IRs had on problem-solving, academics, and pedagogy since the 2012 implementation of the process in the target district.

Definition of the Problem

A consistent challenge in many school districts is preparing students as problem-solvers and critical thinkers for the 21st century (Friedman, 2007). The target district decided to attack this challenge in a unique manner. In an effort to move the district forward with the goal of educational excellence, district administration developed a district-wide instructional leadership team (DILT). The DILT comprises 31 administrators including elementary school principals, middle school principals and assistant principals, high school principals and assistant principals, curriculum and instruction supervisors, special education supervisors, assistant superintendents, and the superintendent of schools. Beginning in August 2011, the DILT convened and continues to convene on a monthly basis to address district goals and provide ongoing professional development for district administrators. The DILT focuses on the development of frameworks (e.g.,, problem-solving and instructional practices) for the purpose of increasing student achievement. After careful examination of the target district strategic

plan in 2011, members of the DILT questioned whether the district was creating problem-solvers.

To address this question, district administrators explored using IRs, which involves a highly reflective process, as an improvement protocol. Del Prete (1997) introduced and implemented IRs to strengthen professional learning culture and enhance the teaching-learning process (Del Prete, 1997). IRs are pre-arranged visits to a classroom setting, by teachers and administrators, to observe in the focus area in which student teaching interns believe they have a weakness. Student teaching rounds have been adapted from the teaching hospital environment to engage future teachers, in-service teachers, and college-level teaching supervisors in reflective dialogue to improve pedagogy and increase student learning (Del Prete, 1997). Rounds are not simple, typical individual observations or a traditional student teaching requirement. Rounds are planned observations with specific reflection questions to be answered with an immediate group debriefing session that Del Prete (1997) defined as reflective and productive dialogue to enhance the learning process.

The DILT selected IRs as a process to facilitate district-wide improvements. In 2012, IRs were implemented district-wide. The IRs process has been in use in the district for 3 years and has not been evaluated since its inception. However, research has shown that program evaluation is an integral component for ongoing, data-based decision-making in any program (Balbach, 1999).

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The target district indicated in its mission statement it will provide an environment in which students will become communicators, collaborators, problem-solvers, and critical thinkers. The DILT raised two questions based on educational research: Are we meeting the critical thinking task? Do our schools, across the district, provide an environment in which students are able to develop communication skills, collaboration skills, and problem-solving skills, which are the essential twenty-first century skills required for success? In an effort to improve practice, the DILT recognized a need to focus on one essential skill for each school year in an effort to improve practice. The DILT held four, 6-hour sessions over the summer of 2011 to read and discuss literature related to current problems in educational practice as well as 21st century skills as defined by Fortune 500 companies. Following their literature review, the district administrators identified problem-solving strategies and skills to be emphasized across the district as the overarching plan to improve instructional practices.

The DILT held multiple sessions in which members researched a variety of data collection tools including observational checklists, evaluation frameworks, and surveys, which principals could implement at the building level. The result of the DILT's investigation indicated that IRs would facilitate student improvement in problem-solving. The DILT also determined that the best practice in its case was to lead the district through professional development on the IR process.

Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature

Teaching and learning are ever-evolving processes that change over time. There is ample evidence to show that this has been the case in American education throughout its history (Sheninger & Murray, 2017). In this project, I gave attention to what has been the focus in recent years and explored how this focus impacted public education in the United States. In response to the launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1958, President Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA). NDEA, federal legislation, provided funding to improve American schools and promote postsecondary education.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), passed in 1965, was in response to the evidence of uneven educational opportunity in the United States. Legislators focused on steps that would make quality education a reality for all students in the country (Wallender, 2014). In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative Educational Reform* (1983) was published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, in response to a perception that American education was falling woefully behind systems around the globe. President Reagan posited that American education was falling woefully behind systems around the globe. The report called for a major overhaul of the U.S. system of public education to better protect U.S. economic and political security. Legislation that followed the report resulted in the increase in high stakes testing for students, and teacher accountability for the results. According to Stern (2013), several factors were either overlooked or simply not addressed: student imagination, critical thinking, problem-solving, socio-economic diversity, social and environmental factors

facing on students and educators. The 1983 report essentially deemed public schools inadequate and not globally competitive.

In 2001, President Bush continued the educational reform movement with a focus on the achievement gap between groups of diverse students. He urged Congress to act, and that resulted in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2002. A nationwide goal was set for all students, parents, teachers, and educational leaders. The goal of NCLB was that, by the year 2014, all students in the United States would be proficient in reading and mathematics. But according to Wagner (2010), students across the nation were being left behind more than ever before after implementation of NCLB. Minority students and students at the poverty level are not meeting standards at the proficient or advanced levels. Many inner-city schools are performing at the basic and below basic performance levels. Based on adequate yearly progress (AYP) and the results of high stakes testing, these schools are often labeled as failing.

Many schools became increasingly focused upon scoring AYP rather than teaching the skills that have been identified as the most highly demanded skills in the job market today, such as critical thinking skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills (Wagner, 2010). To demonstrate school progress, NCLB required each state to individually design standards, assessments, and proficiency levels defining students' academic achievement (Wallender, 2014). The effects of NCLB were such that schools were teaching students how to take tests, which tends to build low-level learning skills rather than higher level thinking and reasoning (Popham, 2001). NCLB seemed to have made "teachers solely accountable for student test scores and as students failed to meet

targets, teachers and unions came under full frontal attack. Schools that didn't make AYP were forced into a series of punitive punishments" (Stern, 2013, p. 208). When states were charged with creating standards, assessments, and proficiency levels, each state created a different accountability system for determining proficiency levels. This allowed states to create standards with unique and various proficiency levels leaving gaps, sometimes wide gaps, in rigor and overall expectations for student achievement (Wallender, 2014). The overall goal for education during the Bush and Clinton era was to increase the rigor of core content areas in schools, laying the groundwork for standards, assessment, and accountability.

In 2009, President Obama recognized the need for continued school reform, and his administration created a $4.3 billion grant, which was essentially a competition among the 50 states. This reform was entitled, Race to the Top (RttT). Using monies generated by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Secretary Duncan began "lifting caps on charter schools, tying teacher evaluations to test scores, and opening alternative teacher certification markets. These reforms, so the administration said, were to help the crisis or failure in public education" (Stern, 2013, p. 194). This competitive grant program was intended to encourage and reward states that are "creating conditions for innovation and reform" (Weiss, 2014, p. 62). RttT was developed to lay the foundation for educational reform by supporting investments in innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness (Stern, 2013). RttT

utilized a point system, which aided in evaluation of schools within states choosing to participate. In order to participate in RttT states had to commit to doing the following:

- Develop evaluation systems for teachers and principals that rely on student achievement and growth measures.
- Strengthen teacher preparation programs at the university level in addition to improving quality and access of in-service professional development programs.
- Identify routes, alternative routes, to teacher certification removing barriers to teaching for candidates who present as strong teachers who might otherwise be impeded by existing processes or systems.
- Identify and turn around the lowest-performing schools, based upon student performance and growth measures, using one of several offered strategies proposed in federal school improvement grants this could include but not be limited to the removal of the building principal and/or much of the staff, state takeover of the school, turning the school over to a charter or other outside manager, or closing the school (Weiss, 2014, p. 61).

RttT incentivized evaluation systems tied to student performance that led the target district to implement IRs.

With increased expectations, rigor, and accountability in schools, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) "burst upon the scene in June 2010 and were quickly adopted by the vast majority of states, 43 as of spring of 2013" (Conley, 2014, p. 3). CCSS are a set of learning expectations that are focused and challenging. Teachers and

administrators can interpret and implement CCSS locally through teaching methods, best practice, curriculum, and programming that are decided to best meet the needs of the students entrusted to them (Conley, 2014, p. 4). Opponents of CCSS claim that the standards were created by government officials and legislatures in order to standardize education across the country. Proponents contended that the overarching goal is to increase student achievement. The standards were designed to help educators and students by providing an opportunity for all learners, regardless of race, socio-economic status, or demographics to be equally challenged in a rigorous manner in mathematics and language arts while developing higher-level thinking as well as creating a level of consistency of clear learning targets, expectations, economies of scale, and equity of opportunity as decisions are made by focusing on curriculum and instructional practices (Conley, 2014). The CCSS allowed for a common language focused upon academic content, expectations, and instruction across all states (Blosveren, Liben & Dewitt, 2014, p. 14).

An academic shift in the areas of mathematics and language arts are at the core of CCSS. In the area of mathematics, CCSS built a focus on grade levels covering fewer topics in a given school year: Blosveren, Liben, and Dewitt (2014) noted, "A sharper focus on fewer key topics in each grade allows educators to go deeper into the content, to help students better understand concepts rather than the 'mile-wide, inch-deep' approach to learning suggested in previous standards" (p. 16). A second focus is the "coherent progression of skills and concepts across grades, as well as coherence among major topics within grades" (Conley, 2014, p. 16). A third shift is that of increased rigor, which

"fosters reasoning, as well as flexible application of concepts and skills to solve real-world problems at a deeper conceptual understanding across the discipline" (Conley, 2014, p. 16). Sharper focus, the progression of skills, and increased rigor have refocused the teaching and learning process, requiring teachers to provide students with opportunities to engage in higher-level problem-solving and metacognition.

CCSS language arts shifts include practice with academic language through complex texts, an increase in use of non-fictional texts, and grounded reading, writing, and speaking (Conley, 2014). CCSS were the result of an ongoing 25-year process, which includes test exemplars and performance tasks with increased complexity, making assessment more real world, rigorous and relevant (Schaffhauser, 2014). Terminology in CCSS aligns with Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). Different levels of cognition and stages of thinking: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Giourouikis & Cohan, 2014) are considered in CCSS. The tradition of local governance of schools makes educational standards important in the United States. Educational standards across the country ensure that students in all schools and states have equal opportunities to educational experiences, preparing them for higher-level education in colleges and vocational-technical schools as well as career readiness. Local school boards can utilize standards as frames of reference when making curricular decisions, purchasing texts, hiring teachers, granting teachers tenure, and building courses and offerings. When standards are developed properly and implemented appropriately, students are provided an education addressing the skills and knowledge needed to be successful post-high

school (Conley, 2014). The adoption and implementation of CCSS have had an impact on all educational stakeholders.

The ACT annually publishes a report on the number of students taking its standardized college readiness test, which assesses English, mathematics, reading, and natural sciences. A heavy focus is placed on problem-solving skills and abilities. CCSS also address the need to better prepare high school students for career and college readiness. Fifty-two percent of all high school graduates took the ACT in 2012, and 25% of those graduates achieved the college readiness levels in all four areas tested. In 2007-2008, the Institute for Education Sciences reported that 20% of students took remedial courses in college (Conely, 2014). College faculty and employers are currently placing stronger demands on students while focusing on "communication skills, problem-solving, reasoning, and critical thinking through the lens of academic content" (Blosveren & Liben, 2014, p. 14). CCSS addresses the need to better prepare students across the United States for college and career readiness.

A Nation at Risk, NCLB, and RttT have all contributed to an era of increased accountability in U.S. public education and a wide variety of school improvement and reform initiatives that were all implemented in order to increase student learning and academic achievement. Moustaka-Tsiolakki and Tsiakkiros (2013) defined school improvement as "systematic and sustained effort to change both learning conditions and other related internal conditions in schools, with the main aim of more effective achievement of educational goals" (p. 3). Dessoff (2012) outlined the work of Hess and Darling Hammond, both educational researchers, sharing their belief that the federal

government can and should be a part of educational reform while taking a back seat and minimizing the possibility of micromanagement. Marzano (2011), who began his career in education and education reform in 1969 as an English teacher in New York City, disagreed. He believed that educational improvement and reform are necessary processes which allow schools to improve student achievement beginning with teachers and students in the classroom. As CEO of Marzano Research Laboratory in Englewood, Colorado, Marzano has been conducting research on educational topics including leadership and instructional practices. Marzano shared research on school improvement through leadership and puts findings into practice via administrators and teachers. Marzano's work has ramifications for educators seeking ways to better link instruction with outcomes and increase student critical thinking skills. These improvement practices shared by Marzano gets to the heart of what the DILT hopes to achieve.

In 1985, following the Reagan administration's *A Nation at Risk* report on education, DuFour (2014), implemented his professional learning communities (PLC) model at Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Ilinois. PLC was a reform initiative that was introduced as a "replacement for the school's remedial program; it was designed to ensure success for all college-preparatory program offering several layers of intervention support" (McLester, 2012, p. 62). The core value of PLC was that all students would have access to high-level expectations as well as the most "rigorous curriculum and that all students should learn" (McLester, 2012, p. 61). DuFour's reform was based upon 3 big ideas:

All students can and will learn. There needs to be a shift from teaching to learning.

1. All students can and will learn. There needs to be a shift from teaching to learning
2. A culture of collaboration is critical among and between faculty, staff, and administration breaking away from the traditional closed-door model of teaching
3. Data analysis will enable teachers to focus on individual students leading to a results-driven system (McLester, 2012, p. 66).

In a recent article, DuFour and Mattos (2013) shared that student learning significantly increases when students are exposed to good teaching more often in more classrooms. Good teaching occurs when a collaborative culture is paired with collective responsibility for teaching and learning in a PLC. Micromanaging classroom instruction has a negative effect on teaching and learning. PLCs and collaborative practices in education continue to be widely adopted in schools throughout the United States.

Meanwhile, some data has indicated that high school and college graduates in the United States are being passed over by employers for foreign-born students who have the 21st century skills that are so highly coveted (Wagner, 2010). Graduates from countries such as India, China, and Singapore are often more in demand in the job market because the education systems in these countries have placed an emphasis on the three keystone skills for success: critical thinking skills, communication skills, and problem-solving skills. Employers in the 21st century want employees to be able to think critically and generate creative and innovative ideas. After conducting hundreds of interviews with business leaders in the United States, researchers have identified problem-solving as one

of the three essential life skills that employers are looking for in their incoming employees (see Wagner, 2010).

Educational reform is an evolving and ongoing process. Globalization has increased the demand for educational excellence worldwide, as the goal of education is to create the finest and most marketable job force members in our competitive world. American educational reforms such as DuFours' PLC model and Marzano's data-driven leadership models are examples of ways in which educators and educational leaders seek to meet the demands of ESEA, NCLB, RttT and most recently CCSS, which hope to improve the overall quality of education in America.

The purpose of this study was to investigate if teachers and administrators in this district perceived IRs as an effective model to address problem-solving in the target school district. In this district, IRs were designed and implemented in 2011 to improve students' problem-solving skills.

Definitions

District Instructional Leadership Team (DILT): The DILT is a network of educators who meet over time to examine educational programming, teaching and learning practices, and collaborate often to build a common language and an understanding of teaching and learning practices (City, 2011). In this study, the DILT is comprised of 31 district administrators and building leaders including the superintendent, assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals, and program supervisors working together to provide on-going professional development for district

administrators with a focus upon the development of district frameworks for the purpose of increasing student achievement.

Instructional core: The instructional core is the combination of engaging students in the learning process, providing academically challenging content and improving teachers' instructional practice. It is the relationship between teacher, student, and content. (City et al., 2009, p. 22).

Instructional rounds (IRs): Instructional rounds are inquiry processes through which a team of teachers and school leaders gather data, primarily descriptive and analytic, about the instructional core in classrooms to learn more about their own practices and develop a collective understanding of teaching and learning with a goal of improvement (City, 2011). IRs are the educational processes that I evaluated in this study.

Fundamental instructional practices (FIPs): FIPs are high leverage, visible activities and strategies that are done with fidelity in classrooms with an intent to bring about student learning (Elmore, 2007). In this study, there are FIPs that are expected to be visible in every classroom K-12, in every subject, as defined by the DILT.

Problem of practice: A problem of practice is a topic or educational practice that a school identifies as a focus that they collectively care about and choose to understand more deeply. It is observable and can lead to action while connecting to overall improvement (City, 2011, p. 36). Problem-solving is the identified problem of practice that will be explored and evaluated in this study.

Significance

The research is relevant because the implementation of IRs is a long-term commitment for any district that chooses to use the process for overall school-wide improvement. Research on the Connecticut rounds network showed a struggle with the problem of balancing a focus on helping the school with a focus on participants' development. Superintendents in the network seem to recognize their own learning about teaching based on participating in IRs. They continued to have questions about ways that leaders can drive instructional improvement on a large-scale (Rallis, Tedder, Lachman, & Ehnore, 2006) similar to the target district. All educational professionals engaged in the IRs process have a role in observation, identification of classroom and school-wide patterns, identification of opportunities for improvement, and collaboration (Learning Through Instructional Rounds, 2017).

This project study may be useful to the local educational setting by defining the IRs process. I also define problem-solving in the schools. I address the questions of if and how IR implementation at the local level has affected problem-solving practices in all classrooms across the target district and how school personnel view any changes in the organization, structure, and/or student participation in classrooms as related to problem-solving at the target district.

Continuing school-wide improvement, building a common understanding of effective teaching and learning, reducing variability and focusing on the work, providing data and informing professional development, and enhancing interaction among and between educators are reasons to implement IRs. Improving instruction at all levels, in all

subjects, for all students is an additional reason to implement IRs (Fowler-Finn, 2013). IRs are the means by which the goal, higher level problem-solving skills across the district, can be achieved.

Researchers have been refining the definition of problem-solving as an essential life skill for decades. In 1969, Skinner (as cited in Robbins, 2013) proposed that there are two stages involved in the problem-solving process. Problem identification is the first step in the process. Researchers ask interrogative questions about the problem and their own knowledge. The second stage of problem-solving according to Skinner is the process of creating a solution for the identified problem, where the researcher asks results-oriented questions regarding the process itself. Skinner stated that the behavior utilized to bring about a change is the essential element in problem-solving, and the response to the problem is the solution (Robbins, 2013). IRs are a process that forces professionals to define problem-solving and problems within a district (Gillard, 2014).

Leaders in the professional learning community movement have proposed that high levels of student achievement are directly linked to educators who work collaboratively in schools with professional learning community cultures (Aguilar, 2014). Thus, one is left to ask why many teachers still choose to work in isolation, behind closed doors. IRs bring teachers and administrators together to discuss what is happening in their schools and classrooms. The IRs process develops a learning environment built upon collaboration (Aguilar, 2014). The modern history of teaching finds teachers working alone in their classrooms, teaching their students. As the field of education continued to evolve, research showed how effective the teaching and learning processes became when

teachers were able to open their doors and trust colleagues and administrators to come in and engage in the learning process as collaborators. In one elementary school studied by Akhavan (2005), teachers build trust in one another, promoting the collective educational team to support one another. Aguilar (2014) shared that through the IR process, teams of teachers and administrators worked together. Everyone had an equal and shared responsibility. Atkinson and Bolt (2010) found that peer observation among teachers is most effective when collegial respect and trust are evident as well as a shared common focus on the improvement of teaching and learning. The three key elements to peer observation success are the voluntary nature of the program, collaboration, and feedback regarding teaching and learning practices (Atkinson & Bolt, 2010). IRs take the evaluation out of purposeful observation, as teachers find themselves observing one another to improve practice (Gunn, 2017).

In the field of education, there is a constant demand for improved student performance. Improvement is a continuous process that is developmental in nature and requires participants to share their different knowledge and skill sets (Elmore, 2005). Finch (2018) shared that IRs involve a process that promotes continuous improvement in the classroom and in the school with all stakeholders having accountability. Schools must work collaboratively and build a continuous improvement process into their daily routines and practices. As stated in one recent study, the best recipe for success includes a commitment to a sustained direction over a period of time along with collaboration and collegiality (DuFour, 2011). Collaborating and building a shared vision while focusing on

a common problem of practice improves student learning while also improving teaching and leadership (Finch, 2018).

Research Questions

In 2011, the target district began the implementation of IRs as an instrument of improvement, identifying problem-solving as the educational outcome most in need of improvement. I developed two basic questions for this study:

RQ1: In the view of school personnel, what influence(s), if any, has the IR process had on problem-solving practices in all classrooms throughout the target district?

RQ2: In the view of school personnel, has the implementation of IRs changed the organization, structure, and/or student participation in classrooms as related to problem-solving?

Review of Literature

This review of literature is divided into two subsections. The first section provides the theories that frame the study, and the second outlines and synthesizes the current literature showing what is currently known in the field about the main topics I investigated in this study. In any study, it is important to find the most current literature. I used the following databases to collect materials for review: Education Research Complete, ERIC, Dissertations and Thesis, Google Scholar, Mental Measurements Yearbook, ProQuest, Sage, Science Direct, Teacher Reference Center, and Thoreau. Search terms included but were not limited to *21st century skills, classroom observation, Common Core, in-service teacher education, instructional improvement, instructional leadership, instructional rounds, medical rounds, observation processes, pedagogical*

strategies, problem of practice, problem-solving, professional learning community, professional networks, Project Zero, rounds, Race to the Top, school improvement, and teacher observation.

Conceptual Framework

I used Bandura's (1977) social learning theory as the framework for this study on IRs. Like medical rounds, IRs are intended to improve practice through observation. Bandura (1977) stated that behavior is learned from one's environment through the process of observation. Both medical rounds and IRs are fully observationally based. According to Balmer (2006), teaching at the bedside during attending rounds is considered fundamental to medical education.

Attending rounds date back to the days of Osler, who recognized the bedside, not the classroom, as the place where medicine is truly taught and learned. Teaching at the bedside during attending rounds is a powerful venue because it allows for direct teaching to take place while encouraging clinical skills and gaining knowledge about the medical field. It also aids interns in bedside manner and how to think and act like a doctor. Balmer, Master, Richards, Serwint & Giardino (2006), purported that teaching at the bedside during attending rounds is medicine's signature pedagogy. That is, it is an approach to teaching that is inextricably identified with preparing trainees for the medical profession.

The medical rounds model was built upon the premise that residents learn by doing. They spend time observing doctors in practice, asking questions as treatment is being prescribed. Teunissen, Scheele, and Scherpbier (2007) found that residents truly

learn by doing while in the workplace. They found that learning begins at the participation stage, which leads to a reciprocal and interactive process of understanding, leading to growth in knowledge (Teunissen et al. 2007). Further, they found that residents value the interaction on the job with doctors who are in practice and find this observational learning more valuable than the traditional textbook teaching methods in classrooms. Observing a doctor in practice in a hospital emergency room provided deep, rich learning that textbooks cannot begin to explore.

City (2011) found that the medical rounds model is similar to a model in which teachers observe other teachers in practice as a professional development tool. If doctors build their knowledge base and gain professional proficiency via the medical rounds model, then this model should be utilized to aid in the teaching and learning process with teachers in education. The model is referred to as IR. This practice combines classroom observation, a network of educators and educational professionals, and a chosen improvement strategy is known as the problem in practice. It is considered an inquiry process with a goal of the observer walking away having learned something in the process. The goal of rounds is not to fix a teacher or teachers, but rather to understand why a certain problem of practice is occurring as well as to observe what is happening in classrooms.

Elmore is credited with the creation of IR as a process of inquiry based upon description and analysis rather than evaluation. According to Elmore (2003), all professions address the ways in which practitioners stay current with continuous developments in their field while they continue practicing clinical skills. Most

professions have various ways in which they do this, including journals, meetings of professional associations, conferences on specific issues, and so on. Medicine is distinguished by multiple professional learning practices known as rounds. Education has far fewer opportunities to engage in a collaborative inquiry of practice to improve overall systemic change. Medical rounds, according to Elmore (2007), are responsible for building and nurturing the sustainability of professional culture. This formalized process involves practitioners in shared practice. The established protocols and structures allow persons and practitioners to separate from the practice. This encourages a deeper and more critical involvement or engagement with the practice itself and leads to continuous improvement. (2007). Elmore credited his deep admiration and inspiration of the medical rounds model as the basis for the IR model.

Medical rounds have been traced back to Hippocrates, the fifth-century BCE Greek physician. Hippocrates believed that empirical evidence and examination was the most effective way in which an aspiring physician could learn about medicine and the medical practice. He also held that apprenticeship is the best way for doctors to gain knowledge in their field (Harvard University, 2003).

Teaching at the bedside during attending rounds is medicine's signature pedagogy. This approach to teaching best prepares trainees for the medical profession (Balmer et al., 2010). Stanley (1995) shared that medical ward rounds are a critical method by which teaching and learning occur for medical students. In a study on ward rounds, Grant et al. (1989) surveyed 608 doctors. Between 41 and 51% of participants

reported ward rounds to be the most heavily relied upon teaching and learning tool in practice.

Attending doctors describe their experiences during residency as gradually changing as they gain personal on-site knowledge. The accumulation of experiences is somewhat of a gradual growth process enabling them to more accurately gather and organize relevant medical information eventually increasing their ability to arrive at appropriate managerial decision affecting patients (Teunissen et al., 2007).

In a qualitative study, using a grounded theory approach, conducted by Balmer (2007), twenty-one attending doctors who engaged in ward rounds with interns note progress that the interns display as a result of observing medicine in practice prior to applying book skills. Attending doctors share that residents are learning while they are working when engaged in rounds. In a case study conducted on a 22-bed general pediatric unit in an urban hospital, Balmer et al. (2006) interviewed attending physicians, senior residents, and interns regarding the medical rounds model. One key finding was that "teaching at the bedside during attending rounds is a pedagogical ideal entrenched in pediatric education" (Balmer et al., 2006, p. 1106). While the researchers found that a great deal teaching and learning take place during rounds, they also noted that time is a critical drawback. The number of patients required to be seen by attending physicians limits the amount of quality interaction and communication between attending physicians and interns. Teunissen et al. (2007) shifted the focus from attending physician to interns in their qualitative study. Fifty-one obstetrics and gynecology residents who were members of teaching hospitals participated in seven focus group discussions. The

discussion focus was placed upon how the residents learn as well as the factors that they feel most influence their learning. The most evident theme was the role of interaction in the learning process (Teunissen et al., 2007). Teunissen et al. (2007) concluded that residents learn when they put theory into practice. Work-based activities are the point at which participants in any activity actually learn. When interpretation and construction of meaning, part of an interactive process, are employed, then growth in personal knowledge occurs (Teunissen et al., 2007). Medical rounds are intended to improve practice through observation.

Review of Broader Literature

Instructional rounds. IRs, a term borrowed from the normative and technical practice of rounds in the medical profession, is a practice that combines observation of classrooms, an improvement or improvement strategy, and a network of professionals. In the case of education, the network is composed of superintendents, principals, and educators as the three elements of improvement (Teitel, 2014). The purpose of conducting IRs is to enable all to understand instructional practices thoroughly and to do their jobs more effectively, with connections to learning. Medical rounds are not as system focused as IRs (Harvard University, 2003). City (2009, 2011), hopes for rounds to "challenge the current view of education and conceptualize the role of the practitioner within education" (p. 38). IR are based upon the instructional core, or the relationship between and among students, teachers, and tasks for not only educational leadership but also reform with an overarching goal of improving the overall quality of teaching and

thus learning (City et al., 2009, Fowler-Finn, 2013) and are more than a simple walk-through.

Problem of practice. The goal of rounds, according to City (2011) and Fowler-Finn (2013), is not placed upon fixing teachers or problems, rather understanding what is happening in classrooms across a school or a district. The process relies heavily on structured protocol. A group of professionals gather and identify a possible essential problem of practice. The problem of practice is the keystone of the IR process on which observational data will be gathered. The problem of practice is a high leverage topic or educational practice, focused on instruction or instructional practices that a school identifies as a focus that the team collectively care about and choose to understand more deeply. The problem of practice is observable and can lead to action while connecting to overall improvement (City, 2011 & Teitel, 2014). In Worcester, MA, Del Prete (1997) and a team of educational administrators identified employee development of teachers as an essential problem of practice and began rounds to build a stronger professional culture as well as to enhance the overall teaching and learning process. Following his research on rounds, Del Prete (1997), shared the idea of rounds promoting teachers spending time in other teachers' classrooms, observe one another's teaching and learning, as well as classroom environment. IRs are beneficial to both the observer and the teacher being observed as colleagues can provide valuable feedback to one another. This process allows teachers to share ideas. IRs are an excellent form of professional development and provide ample opportunities for modeling (DelPrete, 1997). DelPrete (1997) shared the ability to observe peers and see teaching and learning in action as the most valuable parts

of the rounds process. In addition, learning from colleagues while having the opportunity to provide and be provided with feedback is invaluable. This feedback carries the interactive approach into the teaching pedagogy and also into professional development in practice (Troen & Boles, 2014).

Elmore, along with his colleagues, formed a network of school superintendents in the state of Connecticut in 2001 at Harvard University. They identified collaborative assessment of student work as the essential problem of practice in the *Rounds at Project Zero* study (Harvard University, 2003). Following the identification of the essential problem of practice, rounds are pre-arranged with both observers and those being observed. Both rounds groups undergo an orientation in which the observers are assigned a specific observational task. One observer is assigned the task of observing the teacher, one is assigned to observe what the students are doing, and the final observer is assigned to observe the task. This means that the observer will focus only on the assigned category. The observer who is focused on the students will never take observational data on what the teacher is doing or what the task is. Next, brief 20 to 25-minute observations, also known as walks, take place. It is critical that all observers maintain focus on their specific observational assignment. Rubrics are not used to guide the observation because the goal is to gather descriptive data. Fine-grained, non-judgmental observational descriptive notes and data specific to the assigned role are taken. Specific and descriptive evidence is most helpful to move the work forward and build trusting and respectful relationships with those who are observed, often colleagues. All team members are trained in the art of scribing fine-grained observational data prior to the observations.

An example of the difference between generic data collection and fine-grained, non-judgmental data taken by the observer with a focus on students:

- Generic observational data: The students were engaged in the task.
- Fine-grained, non-judgmental observational data: three out of four students at the workstation completed the task in a 2-minute time period.

Following the brief observation, the team transitions to the next classroom. Each team will observe between 3 to 5 classrooms during the cycle. During the transitions between observations, communication among and between observers on each team, as well as across teams, is strictly prohibited. All observational data regarding what they saw and what they thought is reserved for the debriefing session. Guild (2012) and Teitel (2013) cited the importance of observers maintaining the presence and consideration for the effectiveness of the Three Rs- rigor, relevance, and relationship. Following the observations, observers meet and debrief. The purpose of the debriefing session is to allow the team to reflect on the teaching and learning that was observed. The team is able to identify common themes and move the work forward by generating ideas for implementation. One distinct difference between the medical model and the IR model is the observation of instruction in the IR model drives the next level of work. This does not occur in the medical model (Harvard University, 2003).

During the debriefing session, the team will focus on building common language as well as an understanding of teaching and learning as defined by the team and the expelled expectations. It is at this point in the process that the school district's strategic plan, mission, and vision statements become a guiding force. These documents aid in

maintaining a clear and distinct focus for the team. The final step in the process is reporting observational data back to the source: teachers, principals, schools, and district. The source then uses the data shared to implement change and address the essential problem of practice ultimately improving the overall teaching and learning. The host implements actions proposed and the IR process then begins again with a new essential problem of practice (Harvard University, 2011). The process can be adapted to any purpose or context as defined by the essential problem of practice decided upon by the group. The process itself can be repeated as often as the team sees a need for change in the overall teaching and learning process. Crews and Zenger (2001) reported on a pilot study in which student teachers spend time observing in-practice or master teachers. Immediately following observations, the pair debriefs and provide feedback to one another. Student teachers prepared essential questions of practice and used these questions to guide their observations during the rounds process. Data were collected through an exit survey from 200 out of 303 students teaching interns. These students were all in their final semester prior to the education program. The survey measured student levels of confidence, their use of a variety of teaching strategies, content competency, and their classroom management. A Likert scale was used to allow students to rate their abilities on each area on a scale of 1 through 5. Student teachers shared that the rounds model is a way to enhance their internship and also help them reflect on and continue to develop their personal teaching styles. Exit data concluded rounds provided opportunities to see multiple master teachers in practice, encouraged interaction between themselves and seasoned, veteran classroom teachers, provided the first-hand experience

in fine-grained, non-judgmental observation, ability to utilize questioning, and also their ability to reflect upon best practice strategies of the experienced teachers in a supportive and also a collaborative environment. Rounds also allowed student teachers to see how multiple teachers manage classrooms and provide ideas and strategies for student teachers to implement in the classroom (Thompson & Cooner, 2001).

In "Using ESOL Rounds to Prepare Middle-Level Candidates for Work with English Language Learners written by Virtue" (2009), it is found that the IR approach offers benefits which include learning experiences which are embedded in the teaching and learning observed in classrooms, reflective dialogue can occur, and diverse perspectives from all team members are shared during the reflective, debriefing process, allowing for true analysis of pedagogy.

21st-Century skills. Critical thinking and problem-solving have both been integral components of progress throughout history. Early humans had to problem-solve to survive; building shelter and creating primitive tools. As humans evolved, advanced additional changes took place, agricultural advancements, exploration, aviation, medical vaccine creation, and more (Rotherman, 2010).

Sheninger and Murray (2017) refer to the unsettling social and economic changes during the first half of the 19th century as a pivotal turning point for our nation in many ways. As communities began to grow larger and center around rising factories one-room schoolhouses began to evolve along with the family units. The 20th Century saw industrialization of society. The job force required just that, force. Industry included routine, manual, and physical labor. With the turn of the 21st Century came a

technological explosion. As the 21st Century continues to progress, the nation's labor force continues to grow proportionately in jobs which are engaged in or that emphasize expert thinking, problem-solving, or communication tasks that are too complex for computers to do (Dede, 2009). Computers began to do much of the work and those in the workforce were being trained to work with computers as a tool for getting the job done.

As technology continues to increase in manufacturing and production so too does technology continue to increase within our schools. Sheninger and Murray (2017) proposed eight keys to designing schools for tomorrow's schools, today. Key number six focuses on technology and how it must be leveraged and used as an accelerant for student learning. They go on to share that relevant, meaningful, applicable learning must be omnipresent. Through the effective use of technology and technological tools, Sheininger and Murray (2017) shared that collaboration, social networking, researching, and reviewing lead to higher levels of student learning and conceptual mastery of higher-level problem solving as well as creativity and strong critical thinking skills (2017).

According to Lye and Koh, (2014) Kindergarten through grade 12 students who participated in their study are building computational thinking skills which are problem-solving skills through the use of computers and computer science. Participants were taught the concepts of computer programming which goes above and beyond simple coding. Programming builds three dimensions of computational thinking: computational practices, perspectives and concepts, all essential to successfully meeting 21st-century skills (Lye & Koh, 2014).

Salpeter (2008) shared that the technological progress in our society requires students to become critical thinkers, problem-solvers, and decision makers. Students need to know how to think outside of the box and apply their knowledge to new, unusual, and unforeseen problems. They also need the ability to analyze information and process new ideas. Magana (2017) shared the evolution of technology in schools leading to the present day. Technology and digital tools in classrooms, when used effectively, have the potential to see students acquiring skills, aptitudes, literacies, and competencies like no other generation (Magana, 2017).

Alismail and McGuire (2015) analyzed various strategies and learning technologies and concluded that with the introduction of Common Core Standards an integration of 21st-century skills in education became a framework. Alismail and McGuire (2015) advocate for the advancement of critical thinking, social skills, core academic understanding and knowledge, and problem-solving in today's schools. According to them, a 21st-century curriculum should encompass thinking, innovation, knowledge, media, technology real-life experiences, collaboration, and problem-solving. They advocate for a problem-based learning approach to teaching and learning. This allows students to analyze and discuss real-life situations and topics. Problem-based teaching forces students to investigate a variety of problems, review and analyze data, formulate judgments and provide explanations of solutions to problems presented to them (Alismail & McGuire, 2015).

Problem-solving. Reed (2000) defined problem-solving as a process that occurs mentally. Problem- solving requires analysis and discovery. Overcoming obstacles

through multiple processes and overcoming various obstacles leading to the resolution to the problem and ultimately a solution are all attributes of problem-solving (Reed, 2000). Unique situations require strategy and thus problem-solving. Bardach and Patashnick (2015) saw problem-solving as an eight-step process. This process is one of trial and error and those in the midst of problem-solving will move in and out to the eight steps, sometimes in order, sometimes out of order and sometimes steps will need to be repeated (Bardach & Patashnick, 2015). The eight steps include defining the problem, gathering evidence, creating alternatives, choosing criteria, predicting possible outcomes, exploring trade-offs, focusing in and making a decision, and finally sharing the results of the process (Bardach & Patashnick, 2015). Often, people need to research a problem, gather all the required information, and then apply their knowledge factually to generate a solution to the problem. Sometimes, the solution to a problem is based upon a person's creativity and insight. Some researchers at the American Psychological Association refer to problem-solving as a cycle that follows a series of seven steps beginning with identifying the problem. Next one must define the problem. Then a strategy or approach to solving the problem is generated. After that information is organized. Resources are then allocated. Progress is monitored and finally, results are evaluated (Dobson, K., Hays, P. & Wenzel, A., 2015).

In a longitudinal study at McMaster University (Robbins, 2011), three standard approaches to problem-solving which are frequently utilized in general education classrooms were identified as highly ineffective. These approaches include

1. Giving students open-ended problems to solve independently.

2. Writing sample problems on the board and providing students with sample problems and solutions.
3. Inviting students to solve predetermined problems on the board in front of their peers.

Hwang, Hung, and Chen (2014) conducted a study on a peer assessment-based game development approach to improve students learning, motivation, achievements, problem-solving ability. On thousand six hundred and sixty-seven sixth grade students participated in the experimental study. Eighty-two of the participants were assigned to the experimental group. This was the peer assessment-based game development group. The remaining 85 participants were placed in the control group. This group learned with the traditional game development approach. It was found that the students in the experimental group were better able to answer open-ended questions. This group also perceived the peer assessment-based game development a more effective strategy leading to higher perceived creativity, motivation and deeper thinking skills.

Whinbey, Lochhead, and Narode (2013) shared that problem solving, reasoning, and analytical thinking are critical attributes. Teaching students to be good thinkers is important and rote memorization, while it does have value, must supplement the ability to problem solve. There is not a documented consensus on how to effectively teach these skills. Research shows that educators and employers both value the goal of creating strong and effective problem solvers yet there is little to no consensus on how to achieve this goal.

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Outcomes. As more and more educators and educational entities begin to engage in the IR process, different responses will be created to address the challenges posed. This will enact the process in ways that meet the needs of the problems and situations. Elmore's (2007) model of IR was initially utilized by superintendents and central office staff. This model is now being adopted by other groups, such as teachers and support staff. As more and more constituents utilize the model, different challenges will be generated (Harvard University, 2003). Marzano shares that pedagogical teaching skills and collaborative cultures are enhanced by the implementation of the valuable tool of IR (Marzano, 2011). He has also found through his implementation and research of IR that the use of rounds provides teachers with opportunities to collaborate and communicate with their colleagues in a non-threatening, non-evaluative way thus excitement and energy is stimulated, almost immediately.

IR advocates including City, Del Preete, and Elmore have all found IR to of great benefit to educational organizations who engage in the process. IR have potential and promise for engaging educational professionals in conversations about the teaching and

learning process while helping them provide feedback to colleagues, creating a common language, and shared practice. Rounds also encourage collaboration across districts, building larger collaborative educational networks (Harvard University, 2003).

Research needed. To date, little formal research on the implementation or impact of IR has been conducted. However, the research on medical rounds is vast (Harvard University, 2003). Formal research has been conducted on medical rounds. The IR process was created to not only model but also to emulate the medical rounds process. Therefore, medical rounds research may have some correlation to IR. In the field of medicine, a shared language has been built, an understanding of the work exists, a distinct body of knowledge is evident, and best practices are followed all of which the field of education lacks. This requires teachers to put together their own reform efforts and resort to what they believe to be best practice. Administrators have also relied on reform efforts having divergent purposes. It is not always clear in education what needs to be done to make instructionally sound decisions. There always seems to be a level of uncertainty (Elmore, 2007). Just as medical rounds are useful for building and sustaining norms of medical practice, evaluating the effectiveness of practices face-to-face, and instating people into practice, IR can create very similar goals and objectives by building a shared understanding, creating norms, and articulating instructional practice (City et al., 2009).

In 1975, the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE) developed a set of standards regarding medical program evaluation and on-going evaluation of programs. In 2011, the standards were updated. The goal of program

evaluation, according to the JCSEE is to answer the question, 'What is the success and from whose point of view?' According to Ruhe (2012), program evaluations can inform future decisions about currently implemented programs and possible program improvements. On-going program evaluations often evaluate a program leading to worth and merit, the inquiry of additional information related to the program, and making future recommendations for continued or discontinued use of programming (Ruhe, 2012). For this study, I was looking for possible influences that the IR process has had on problem-solving practices in all classrooms throughout the target district and if the implementation of IR has changed the organization, structure, and/or student participation in classrooms as related to problem-solving.

Applied research improves the quality of a practice or the way in which things are done with systematic inquiry, data collection, and the use of evidence to determine the worth of a program, a process, or a technique as well as to establish a basis for making decisions (Merriam, 2009, p. 4). The goal of an applied research, quasi-experimental program evaluation study conducted by Boer, Pijl, Minnaert, and Post (2013) study was

to address both short- and long-term effects that the intervention, Special Friends, had on typically developing young children's attitudes toward children of the same age with physical or intellectual disabilities. Results of the study indicated that there is the potential of an intervention implemented to influence the attitudes and opinions that young children have toward same age disabled peers. Additional results were reported, including the need for follow up research with improvements to the intervention could relate to long-term effects. Additional research is needed to investigate how parents'

attitudes and activities influence their children's attitudes toward children with special needs as well as how would the intervention impact attitudes and opinions of older participants. Stufflebeam (1983, p. 118) stated that the purpose of program evaluation is not to prove, the purpose is to improve. Education is a field in which constant improvements are made. Boer, Pijl, Minnaert, and Post's (2013) study is an example of this premise. The implementation of the intervention was proven to impact the participants' attitudes, but additional information was obtained to make the intervention more effective.

Macquarie University professional and academic staff implemented a series of seven educational interventions related to community-engaged research in a 2012 evaluative program study (Reed, 2015). Formatively, the evaluation provided evidence-based improvements, the impact as well as how the impact was achieved. This enabled researchers to improve upon the interventions and programs by identifying strengths as well as areas of need. Additionally, the evaluation provided evidence of the impact the interventions had upon social inclusion activities leading to continued funding of the program interventions, public support and overall interest of the interventions (Reed, 2015).

Programs are built to meet the needs of a certain group of stakeholders. Evaluation is a tool intended to make said programs work better or more efficiently for the stakeholders they are intended to serve. For this study, IR are the program and teachers and students are the stakeholders. The goal is to identify if the implementation of IR impacted problem-solving practices in all classrooms throughout the target district and

if so if the implementation of IR changed the organization, structure, and/or student participation in classrooms as related to problem-solving.

Implications

IR have the potential to be a process in which not only the target school district, but many school districts may engage to improve the overall teaching and learning process as well. IR have the potential to improve professional development and instructional practices in the field of education by focusing on a proposed problem of practice unique to each school in the target district as well as other districts that implement the IR process. IR could improve the way in which teachers and administrators observe teachers, students, and the task by enhancing the feedback process in a fine-grained non-judgmental way. Professional development within a school or district stands to improve as problems of practice are identified and addressed through the IR process. Collaboration and communication among educational professionals and school stakeholders could improve as a result of the implementation of IR.

This project study stands to have an influence in the target district. The district plans to improve upon one problem of practice after another creating more prepared 21st-century problem-solvers, collaborators, and critical thinkers who are college as well as job market ready, should the DILT decide to continue utilizing IR The data collected indicates the effectiveness of the IR process in multiple areas but not in the area of problem-solving. The district may choose to continue to utilize the IR process to influence additional problems of practice to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Summary

IR, a process similar to the medical rounds model, is a relatively new process of improvement implemented in the target district in an effort to improve the teaching and learning process. The district identified the area of problem-solving as a district-wide problem of practice. The District Administrative Leadership Team (DILT) seeks to improve problem-solving instructional practices as well as student ability to problem-solve at all grade levels. While IR advocates including City, Del Preete, and Elmore have found the process to be of great benefit to educational organizations, little formal research has been conducted on instructional rounds and the relationship to improve student performance. This study assessed the effectiveness of the process in the target district. In the next section, methodology, demographic data related to the study are provided along with information about procedures for sample selection, data collection and data analysis. Measures were taken to ensure maximum validity and reliability.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gather perceptions of participants about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the IR process and if and how IRs influenced teaching, learning, and problem-solving. IRs were implemented in 2011 to improve students' problem-solving skills. Data generated during this implementation included documents, records of meetings, descriptive questionnaire results, and observations. A variety of original documents including, but not limited to, the fundamental instructional practices template, problem-solving template, field notes, and meeting minutes generated through the IR process were reviewed and used in this study. Finally, I qualitatively analyzed administrator and teacher online questionnaire responses and interview responses to identify what influence IRs had on problem-solving practices as well as if and how the organization, structure, and/or student participation in classrooms were impacted.

Research Design

I considered using various research methodologies. Quantitative methodologies were ruled out quickly as they are primarily experimental in nature in addition to being driven by hypothesis testing for generalization purposes. Quantitative methodologies also include significant amounts of numerical data and data analysis rather than the richly descriptive narrative data necessary for this study.

Researchers use qualitative methodologies to understand opinions and perspectives while looking deeply into the interpretations of participants. Qualitative research focuses upon process, understanding, and meaning. The primary instrument of

data collection and analysis is the researcher. Qualitative research is an inductive process, and the product is richly descriptive in nature (Merriam, 2009). Glaser and Strauss (1967), discussed that rather than testing theory through experimentation, as in quantitative research, they advocated inductively analyzing social phenomenon in qualitative research. Based upon the dominant theorists, and the need to follow an interpretive approach in order to discover meaning and value of IR, I decided that a qualitative methodology would best meet the needs of this study.

Brent (2018) presented five approaches to qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. I considered all five of these qualitative methods. While capturing experiences and perspectives of participants was necessary for this study, I found that the phenomenological method relied too heavily upon human experiences such as love, anger, and betrayal, which are emotionally driven and may include prejudices and assumptions (Creswell, 2008).

I examined narrative research as a possible methodology since much of the data I planned to collect would include participants' definitions, opinions, and experiences in a narrative form (Paschen & Ison, 2014 & Mertens, 2015) Upon deeper investigation, I found that narrative researchers seek use stories that people tell to understand the meaning of the experiences as revealed in their story (Merriam, 2008). This methodology was rejected because the focus is placed on participants' lives in the form of a narrative similar to an autobiography. Participants' personal stories were relevant, as the focus of this study was on IR.

I also considered using ethnographic methodologies. The term ethnography literally means "writing about groups of people" (Creswell, 2012, p. 461). Ethnographic research is based upon a process rather than a product and according to Merriam (2009) places a strong emphasis upon human society, culture, and customs; therefore, I chose not to use the ethnographic method.

An additional qualitative methodology I considered was grounded theory. Grounded theory is a design that researchers use when they desire to explain a process, change theory, and/or a method of comparative analysis (Glaser, 2014). For this study, I was not seeking to change a theory or develop a new theory therefore I rejected the grounded theory as a methodology.

Balbach (1999) stated that using case study methods are of particular value when evaluating the effectiveness of a unique projected program and understanding the program implementation in detail to help design future programs. Case studies are well suited to programs having an objective of learning from the process. Merriam (2009) defined case study research as "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (p. 43). Case study research is based on intensive examination of a person, an event, a process, an institution, or in the case. Case study research involves an empirical investigation of a phenomenon within its natural setting, incorporating multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003). The purpose of a case study is to study intensely one set (or unit) of something—programs, cities, counties, work-sites as a distinct whole (Balbach, 1999), in this case, the implementation of IRs. The purpose of this case study was to gather perceptions of participants about the effectiveness or

ineffectiveness of the IR process and if and how instructional rounds influenced teaching, learning, and problem-solving. I selected a qualitative case study design because it allowed for perspectives of teachers and administrators regarding the perceived effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the IR process and if and how IRs influenced teaching, learning, and problem-solving.

Participants

The target district is located in the eastern portion of a northeastern state. The district serves 8,152 students in 10 buildings, which include seven elementary schools (Grades K-5), two middle schools (Grades 6-8) and one senior high school (Grades 9-12). The student body is 80.8% White, 3.8% Black, 8.3% Hispanic/Latino, 5.1% Asian, 1.6% Multi-Racial, and less than 1% American Indian. Fifty-three percent of the graduating class of 2012 were attending 4-year colleges or universities, while 30%were attending 2-year colleges (community or junior). Two percent were attending business schools an nursing and/or technical schools, while 15% had entered the military and/or workforce.

The professional staff at the target district is comprised of 531 teachers and 488 support personnel. Eighty-five percent of the professional staff have earned a master's degree or higher. All professional employees are required to attend professional workshops, conferences, and complete an annual employee development plan with the goal of promoting professional growth. The district provides in house professional development opportunities and also encourages professionals to seek outside opportunities.

Access to Participants

I contacted the superintendent of the target district via phone. We scheduled a meeting at the district administration offices. I explained my study and he granted permission for me to use all 10 schools within the district in the study. To ensure that my role as principal at one of the schools would not interfere with the validity or reliability of the study, the superintendent and I agreed to exclude the building at which I am a principal from the study. He granted permission to reach out to all teachers, with the exception of those in my school, administration, and staff to request participation in this research study. To ensure that the study would not interfere with the teachers, administrators, and staff daily work responsibilities, all questionnaires and interviews took place after school hours.

After being granted permission from the superintendent, I contacted the head of Human Resources to notify her that I would be contacting all participants via district email. Due to confidentially requirements, individual employee emails were not provided. The director of Human Resources did, however, provide a generic school wide faculty email address for each school in the target district. (Ex. _TargetDistrictHighSchoolFaculty@TargetDistrict).

I made a personal phone call to each of the potential interview participants to discuss the purpose of the interview prior to conducting interviews. All participants were provided with informed consent forms prior to the time of the interview to assure them of their confidential responses. To ethically protect all participants, the face to face portion of the data collection was confidential. Names were not identified on the interview scripts

or notes. Guaranteeing confidentially added integrity to the process, which helps provide validity and reliability to the results.

Participants. Maximum variation sampling was the selected sampling strategy for the first phase of data collection, the online questionnaire. I emailed the invitation to participate in this phase of the data collection to potential participants (N = 456), including all in-service teachers, principals, and supervisors. They were invited to complete a brief 15 to 20-minute online questionnaire. The 456 potential participants that I invited to complete the questionnaire maximized the range of characteristics, thoughts, and opinions. There was less potential for error with the use of this larger sample size (Cresswell, 2012).

Questionnaire participants. I provided all potential participants (N = 456) with an email explaining the project prior to the receipt of the informed consent at the open of the online questionnaire to assure them of their anonymous responses. To ethically protect all participants, the online portion of the data collection was completely anonymous. Names and/or identifiers were not collected. Guaranteeing anonymity added validity and reliability to the results as I serve as a building administrator and wanted to ensure no undue influence or bias to results or otherwise put undue pressure on any subset of invited participants.

Of the 456 potential participants, 86 professionals (19%) completed and submitted the questionnaire. The roles in which actual participants (N = 86) held in the IR implementation varied. Fifty-four percent of participants held the role of the observer in the IR process. Fifty-three percent of participants were in the role of being observed, and

17% of participants have not yet been active participants in the IR process. It is important to note that actual participants (N = 86) who completed the online questionnaire may have been a part of multiple IR sessions, resulting in multiple roles. This means that some of the actual participants may have assumed the role of the observer in one or more IR session as well as the role of being observed in one or more IR session.

Table 1

Questionnaire Participants and Education Levels

Title	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants	Level	Number of participants	Percentage of total participants
Content area teachers	51	59.30%	Elementary school(K-5)	51	59.30%
Support teachers	12	13.95%	Middle school (6-8)	23	26.74%
Specialist area teachers (art, music, health wellness fitness, librarians)	5	5.81%	High school (9-12)	9	10.47%
Assistant principals	3	3.49%	Central admin.	3	3.49%
Principals	8	9.30%			
Central Office	3	3.49%			
Other	4	4.65%			

Interview participants. The pool of potential participants for the one to one interviews was comprised of:

- Two assistant superintendents
- One supervisor of elementary level special education
- One supervisor of middle level special education
- One high school level supervisor of special education
- Five elementary school principals
- Two middle-level principals
- One high school principal
- Five Instructional Support teachers

Following the procedures outlined above, I invited principals and assistant principals who were a part of the DILT in 2011 when IR was implemented in the district. Since the implementation of IR, attrition and administrative turnover within the district has been high. After careful consideration, I chose to use purposive selection because I wanted to get perspective from administrators and only those who were present in the target district when IR was implemented; this narrowed the participant pool down to 10 administrators. Of those invited, eight administrators agreed to participate in the one-to-one interviews.

- One middle school assistant principal
- One middle school principal
- One high school assistant principal
- Five elementary school principals

I called each administrative participant on the phone to share the purpose of the case study and discuss a time and location at which I would conduct the one on one interviews. A schedule of interviews was created which spanned a two-week time period. I considered interviewing administrative participants on neutral ground but after careful consideration decided on a more comfortable setting for participants. All interviews were conducted at the interviewee's home school and in their office. This was done to increase comfort levels for the interviewees. The interviews were limited to one hour or less per interview.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected in three ways in order to provide multiple layers of data in order to strengthen the findings and support conclusions. Data collection did not begin until I gained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB: Approval No. 06-16-16-0128104)

Online Questionnaire

The first method of data collection was an online questionnaire (Appendix B). I examined questionnaires and surveys including assessment surveys, Common Education Data Standard surveys, Effective Practices surveys, and the National Forum on Educational Statistic surveys (www.nces.ed.gov) as possible data instruments. Many of these surveys produced numerical, quantitative results and outcomes. These quantitative surveys would require analysis of student data. The purpose of this case study was to gather perceptions of participants about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the IR

process and if and how participants perceived IR influenced teaching, learning, and problem-solving.

After an exhaustive search of existing survey instruments, I did not deem any of the surveys appropriate. Through RMC Research Corporation, I was directed to an IR researcher. Finn (2010) authored a questionnaire entitled, *The Instructional Rounds Questionnaire for School Level Educators* as well as a second questionnaire entitled *the Instructional Rounds Questionnaire for District and Network-Level Leaders*. Finn developed both questionnaires through the RMC Research Corporation while conducting research on IR and the IR process. The questionnaires captured the principal, teacher, coach, and administrators' reflections, beliefs, knowledge, and understanding of the IR process. The questionnaires included Likert scale questions, open-ended questions, and free response questions which aligned with case study focus as well as the goals and outcomes of this study. I obtained permission from Fowler-Finn to use these questionnaires (See Appendix C). I placed questions from the questionnaire into an online site, SurveyMonkey, in lieu of providing paper copies of the survey. This allowed for a greater number of participants. Participants were able to complete this questionnaire in a setting of their choice as well as at a time of their choice. A mixture of question types; open-ended, free response, and forced choice Likert scale questions were included to vary the levels of respondent effort. The questionnaire was certified as methodologically sound. These questionnaires align with established professionally recognized standards and should lead to evidence indicating the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the IR process in the target district.

For this case study, I input the pre-established questions, field-tested by Fowler – Finn into SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey Inc. is a secure, online questionnaire builder with customizable design features and powerful reporting capabilities. The use of a Web-based questionnaire was selected as extensive data could be gathered from a large participant pool rather efficiently.

I sent an email to all teachers, administrators, and staff explaining the research project along with informed consent to complete prior to them receiving the questionnaire. Recruitment for the project began in July of 2017. The online questionnaire was sent via email to all potential participants (N=456) one day after the explanation of the research project email. The first recruitment window was left open for two weeks. At the close the initial two- week questionnaire window, a second email describing the case study was sent to all potential participants (N=456). This was done in an effort to remind the potential participants (N=456) about the online questionnaire and also to increase the number of responses. The second recruitment window remained open for one week. Again, after the second window closed, a third and final reminder email was sent to all potential participants (N=456). The third recruitment window remained open for 1 week. The four-week recruitment window closed the first week of August 2017.

Interview Protocol

One on one interviews were selected as the second phase of data collection technique for the study. Adding this method of data collection allowed me to focus in on the purpose, goals, progress, and success of the IR implementation. These semi-

structured interviews (Appendix E) included a mix of structured and open-ended ideal position questions to elicit information, opinions, thoughts, feelings, and impressions. These questions were modeled, with permission (Appendix D) from a study by Davis (2011), who conducted a study on the effect of IR in an Australian public school. The focus of the case study was to identify the ways in which principals' observational techniques and strategies, professional development preparation and implementation, professional dialogue with teachers, and best practice beliefs have changed as a result of the implementation of IR (Davis, 2011). The goal of this phase of data collection was to obtain administrative participant overall perspectives of IR.

Data Mining

The third and final phase of data collection was data mining of pre-existing IR documents created as a direct result of the implementation of IR at the building and district level. Data mining was not used to develop answers to research questions, but used for clarification of preexisting documents and definitions of problems of practice. An example of this was the FIP document which clearly defined each expected classroom teaching technique and strategy as defined by the district. A second example of the purpose of using data mining is evidenced by nine out of ten schools in the district that have conducted open IR where district level personnel, including teachers and administrators, from across the district, conducted the process. Each school created post IR feedback and debriefing noted which were reviewed. Additionally, four out of ten schools conducted internal IR where, building level personnel, including building level teachers and administrators, conducted the process. During the IR process, documents

including observational data: student, teacher, and task observational data were generated. Additional documents evolved during the IR process as IR debriefing sessions brought teams of observers and those who had been observed together to discuss the students, teachers, and task. Documents including, fundamental instructional practice tools, definitions of problems of practice, assessment of the current problem of practice, the focus of the work, next steps, and frameworks for teaching and learning changed as a result of the debriefing feedback provided. Data mining these documents provided descriptive information as well as provided a historical perspective, and the tracking of change or development of the IR process.

It was my intent to utilize multiple data collection instruments, questionnaires, interviews, and data mining to increase reliability through the alternate forms of reliability approach (Yin, 2014). Including a variety of evidence-based documents, artifacts, interviews, and observation (Yin, 2003) added strength to the study.

Due to the nature of this evaluative case study and the sequential data collection, all data were stored on electronic media, specifically, my private computer and was analyzed. Data was backed up on a flash drive and password protected. Following the conclusion of the study, data will be stored for a mandatory 5 years. Following the mandatory wait period, all data will be deleted from the computer and the flash drive will be destroyed.

Researcher's Role

I am currently a principal in an elementary school located within the school district where the study took place. I have been employed by this district for twenty-one

years. I began my career in this district as a teacher in the elementary school setting. I taught kindergarten as well as grades 1, 2, and 3 during my tenure as a teacher. In 2006, I accepted a principalship at the same district and have maintained the role as an elementary principal within the district for eight consecutive years. This role has advanced from teacher and teacher leader to that of an administrator at the elementary level.

Due to the extended period of time employed by the district, I have clearly outlined the role in this evaluative case study for all participants with the goal of reducing possible participant bias as a former teaching colleague as well as a current administrator within the district. The building in which I am a principal was excluded from the study to eliminate potential supervisor bias and also the potential harm that those participants would be exposed to.

My role in this study was not as a principal but as a doctoral student gathering information and data via the online questionnaire. The informed consent informed invited participants of my role in the district and assured confidentiality should they choose to participate in the questionnaire and confidentiality in the event that they were selected to be an interview participant.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this case study was to gather perceptions of participants about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the instructional rounds process and if and how instructional rounds influenced teaching, learning, and problem-solving. This approach was useful because these constructs are difficult to measure, quantitatively. I used a

qualitative approach to gather, transcribe, and analyze data. Data were analyzed upon completion of the online questionnaire and one on one interviews. I used a sequential method to analyze and code this descriptive data after participants completed the online questionnaire and the one on one interviews.

All online questionnaire participants and one on one interview participants were assigned a pseudonym, sorted, and placed into two categories, teacher or administrator. SurveyMonkey organized all open ended, free responses from the online questionnaire into line items which were copied and pasted onto an excel spreadsheet. I used Microsoft Word to record, verbatim, the one on one interview transcripts. Next, I used the Find tool to search key words in the transcript data as well as the one on one interview data. Each line item was then cut into a strip and pasted onto a manila folder for coding purposes.

Data mining of existing documents was used for clarification of preexisting documents and definitions of problems of practice at the district and school level. Data analysis procedures for the open ended and free response portions of the online questionnaire as well as the one on one interview data included preparation, organization, coding, the building of themes and shared findings. Likert scale data was placed on an excel spreadsheet, calculated and sorted from least to greatest.

Questionnaire Data Analysis

Open-Ended Questionnaire Data Analysis

The online questionnaire open ended responses were analyzed first as the one on one interviews took multiple weeks to schedule and conduct. Questionnaire results were automatically exported to both Excel and SPSS for ease of analysis. SurveyMonkey

filtered responses, conducted a text analysis, compared open ended responses, merged, graphed, and charted responses. The first step I took in analyzing the open-ended questionnaire data was to print out a hard copy of each completed questionnaire. I then read over each questionnaire to gain an overall perspective of the data. As I read through each questionnaire, I made notes on the hard copies and color-coded initial codes that emerged. Next, I cut the data into individual strips of data. These pieces of data were then placed into manila folders. Following multiple rereads I created a spreadsheet upon which I added the data from each folder.

Data gathered from the open-ended portion of the online questionnaire were coded and organized into categories based upon themes that emerged. As data were analyzed there was potential for many possible themes. The initial analysis led to many different codes including non-participants, strong advocates of IRs, those who strongly opposed IRs, cost measures related to IRs, professional development as a result of IRs, fundamental instructional practices, observation, problem- solving, evaluation, questioning, fine-grained non-judgmental communication, time and more. Following the development of initial codes, data were further analyzed and was placed into categories of file folders with individual labels, which might lead to themes. While this was a highly inductive process as I moved through the data analysis, data began to fall into similar themes based upon key words and phrases which in turn lead to a more deductive process as I reached saturation with these data. Through the coding process of the open-ended responses to the online questionnaire, I was able to narrow down the data from over thirteen codes to seven themes. I utilized an online qualitative data organization tool,

Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis, CAQDA (www.surveymonkey.com) to aid in the organization and analysis of data.

Likert Scale Data Analysis

The Likert scale questions on the online questionnaire were designed to gain participant perception of attitudes and beliefs prior to and following the implementation of IRs (Fowler-Finn, 2010). Following the four-week online questionnaire recruitment window, I used the tools in SurveyMonkey to sort, merge, and graph the Likert data. I sorted and calculated the means for Likert data from least to greatest. This data was placed into columns based upon participant responses concerning their experiences before and after IR implementation.

Interview Data Analysis

Upon completion of all eight one on one interviews, I analyzed the one on one interview data. The interview data were extensive. Administrators provided thorough responses to each question and clarification question. The first step of the interview data analysis was transcribing, verbatim, all recorded verbal feedback and handwritten interview notes onto separate spreadsheets for each interviewee. I listened to each interview three times to assure that verbatim transcribing occurred. Each administrator was assigned a pseudonym; Principal A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H. After creating individual spreadsheets for each interview, I read over all data to gain an initial impression of the data. As I read and reread the data, I wrote notes. Data and notes were color-coded based upon common phrases and perceptions. Next, I cut and pasted data from each administrator transcript in a Microsoft Word document, which was broken

down by each interview question. Then, I printed the data and physically cut it into pieces. Next, I placed individual slips of data on manila folders as data began to fit into similar categories. This was done independently of the folders created from the questionnaire data. After the multiple read throughs, codes emerged including; effective components of IR, ineffective components of IR, time commitment, monetary commitment, and growth. Following each read through, I was able to place data into common themes. At times, pieces of data were moved from one folder to another as some fit into multiple codes. This process was repeated at least eight times. I was able to begin to merge the data from the questionnaire with the interview data. Finally, the pieces of data were glued onto manila file folders with themes listed at the top.

Triangulation

Three views of the data, open-ended responses, Likert responses, and interview responses were used together to confirm and validate of the findings. The two forms of data in the online questionnaire, and face to face interviews were the primary data collections methods, used to provide multiple perspectives to triangulate the findings. The online questionnaire was the primary source of data collection. This tool provided feedback in the form of Likert scale data as well as open-ended responses from eighty-six teachers, administrators, supervisors and staff members in the target district. The one-to-one interviews of district administrators provided more in-depth open-ended responses regarding the administrator's perceptions of IR, validating themes found in the 2 forms of data from the questionnaire. Finally, analysis of the notes taken following the

implementation of each schools IR sessions and the FIP increased the understanding and validity of findings.

Data Analysis Findings

This section contains the data analysis findings that answer the research questions. An overview of themes that emerged from the analysis of data from the online questionnaire, including Likert questions and open-ended responses. This is followed by findings from interview transcripts. All findings are presented in narrative, qualitative form.

Overview of Likert Data

Before the open-ended questions and interview data were analyzed for themes, the Likert data were analyzed, descriptively, to provide triangulation, and a fuller picture of the participants' perceptions.

Table 2

Time Investment Tables

Amount of time spent weekly observing teaching and learning before and after IR implementations

	Less than 5%	5-10%	10-20%	20-30%	More than 30%
Before IRs	56.76%	15.85%	10.98%	6.10%	7.32%
After IRs	48.10%	17.72%	11.39%	11.39%	11.39%

(*table continues*)

Amount of Time Spent Weekly in Conversation About the Instructional Core

	Almost never	A few times a month	A few times a week	Every day
Before IR	6.17%	40.74%	35.80%	17.28%
After IR	6.41%	20.51%	46.15%	26.92%

Amount of time outside of the classroom spent on teaching and learning

	None of our time	Some of our time	Most of our time
Before IR	4.88%	71.95%	23.17%
After IR	1.30%	48.05%	50.65%

Before the implementation of IRs, 57% of participants spent less than 5% of their time on a weekly basis observing the teaching and learning process. This percentage decreased to 48% of participants spending less than 5% of their classroom time being spent on observing the teaching and learning process after the implementation of IRs. Additionally, the seven percent of teachers who reported spending more than 30% of their time observing teaching and learning prior to the implementation of IRs, increased to 11% of participants investing more than 30% of their time observing teaching and learning.

Participants indicated that their level of investment in teaching and learning outside of the classroom has increased as a result of the implementation of IRs. Prior to the implementation of IR, 20% of participants reported that they spend most of their time outside of the classroom on teaching and learning while this percentage increased to 51%

of participants reporting that they spend more of their time on teaching and learning after the implementation of IRs. This information was supported by participants' responses in the interviews and are described more fully in Theme 2 below.

Data from both sections of the online questionnaire, Likert and open ended, indicated that teachers and administrators agree that participation in IRs has increased confidence in entering any classroom to observe teaching and learning, talking about classroom observations, and identifying next steps for improving content knowledge. Table 3 presents the Likert items associated with this conclusion.

Table 3

Confidence Tables

Confidence in Entering Classrooms to Observe Teaching and Learning

	No confidence	Little confidence	Moderate level of confidence	Great deal of confidence
Before IRs	2.53%	17.72%	55.70%	24.05%
After IRs	0.00%	6.58%	57.89%	35.53%

Confidence Level in Talking to Teachers About Classroom Observations

	No confidence	Little confidence	Moderate level of confidence	Great deal of confidence
Before IRs	2.47%	17.28%	53.09%	27.16%
After IRs	0.00%	6.41%	55.13%	38.46%

Confidence in Identifying Next Steps for Improving Content Knowledge at the School Level **(***table continues***)**

	No confidence	Little confidence	Moderate level of confidence	Great deal of confidence
Before IRs	2.47%	32.10%	56.79%	8.64%
After IRs	2.56%	14.10%	62.82%	20.51%

Confidence in Identifying Next Steps for Improving Content Knowledge at the District Level

	No confidence	Little confidence	Moderate level of confidence	Great deal of confidence
Before IRs	3.70%	28.40%	61.73%	6.17%
After IRs	1.28%	16.67%	62.82%	19.23%

Data from the open-ended portion of the online questionnaire as well as interview transcript data indicated a growth in confidence levels, as discussed fully below in Theme 3.

Likert data from the online questionnaire indicated that participation in IR has increased the ability to identify staff development for our teachers, coaches, and administrators that is directly linked to our school-wide needs in the instructional core.

Table 4

Ability to Identify Staff Development for Teachers, Coaches, and Administrators Before and After IRs Implementation

No ability	Some ability	Moderate ability	Great deal of ability
6.17%	50.62%	40.74%	2.47%
3.85%	20.15%	56.41%	19.23%

Prior to the implementation of IR in the target district, fifty-one percent of participants reported that they had some ability to identify staff development for teachers, coaches and administrators while this percentage decreased to twenty percent who felt some ability after IR. Additionally, two percent of participants reported that they had a great deal of ability to identify staff development while this percentage increased to nineteen percent of participants who felt that they had a great deal of ability after the implementation of IR.

Likert data indicated that participation in IR has increased the ability to direct attention beyond individual classrooms to also consider school-wide strengths and needs.

Table 5

Ability to Direct Attention Beyond Individual Classrooms to Consider School-wide Strengths Before and After IRs Implementation

	No ability	Some ability	Moderate ability	Great deal of ability
Before IR	8.54%	47.56%	35.37%	8.54%
After IR	5.06%	27.85%	48.10%	18.99%

Forty-eight percent of participants who took the questionnaire shared that they had some ability to direct attention beyond individual classrooms to consider school wide strengths. Following the implementation of IR, this percentage decreased to twenty-eight percent of participants who felt that they had some ability. Additionally, prior to IRs in the target district, nine percent of participants reported having a great deal of ability

directing attention beyond individual classrooms to consider school wide strengths while this percentage increased to nineteen percent of participants who felt a great deal of ability after the implementation of IR. These findings are further explored in Theme 4 below.

Overview of Themes

After I analyzed data from the Likert portion of the online questionnaire, I moved to open-ended question and interview transcript analysis to identify themes**.** Using words, phrases or text segmentation (Creswell, 2012), online questionnaires were categorized into headings. I categorized interview questions into themes. Major themes were identified and placed into categories based upon the two posed research questions. Findings are presented in the order they were collected. Likert data is presented first, followed by the qualitative themes developed from close analysis of the open portion of the questionnaire and also interview responses.

Theme 1: Observations

Traditionally in education, teachers have been observed by administrators for evaluative purposed. Observations are a key component of IRs. In the IR process, teachers find themselves observing other teachers, students, and the task in the classroom. Observations in IRs are not evaluative in nature. The perceptions of observations emerged from the data as a theme. Stakeholder perceptions of observation are explored below.

Participation in IRs has increased the amount of time spent weekly for the purpose of observing teaching and learning in classrooms. Participants shared that the IR process taught them that it is possible to observe others without passing judgment and without an evaluative purpose in mind. Allowing teachers to spend time observing other teachers has become more comfortable as teachers know that this is a valuable experience intended to help others improve practices. The theme of observation, while discussed often in the interviews, also appeared through several of the specific Likert items in the questionnaire. Prior to the implementation of IRs, 28% of participants reported that they were substantially informed of how well their students were learning as a result of observation. After the implementation of IRs, the percentage of participants who reported that they were substantially informed of how well their students were learning as a result of the use of observation increased to 47% providing further evidence of this theme.

Five teachers (Teachers A, C, D, H, L) reported in the open-ended portion of the online questionnaire, that walkthroughs and observations felt evaluative in nature prior to IRs implementation. Teacher A stated, "There is a way to observe someone without having to judge or evaluate them." Identifying constructive growth areas was previously viewed as negative and felt punitive. Administrator C shared in the open-ended online questionnaire that participation in IR has "increased the teachers and administrators' capacity to discuss and make meaning of all types of data about my school, flattering and unflattering has increased." Stakeholders are now better able to identify strengths and

needs and also reflect upon ways in which to move toward best practice and overall school and district improvement.

One participant added that more time needs to be allocated to teachers for the purpose of observing other teachers within their building as well as within the district. A common theme shared by administrators during the one on one interviews includes the growth in ability to conduct more focused observations. Observations are now more fine-grained and non-judgmental with a factual synthesis of what is actually observed. Observations are now conducted with a multi-tiered focus including what the teacher is doing (teaching), what the students are doing (learning), and the task (engagement). Administrators find that participation in IRs has increased the number of walkthroughs that are conducted within their building, as teachers now desire the observation, non-evaluative, feedback to improve the teaching and learning process in classrooms.

As the observational process between administrator to teacher and teacher to teacher evolved so too did the ability to assess student learning through observation. One of the three focus areas during observation, as defined by IRs, is that of the student. Teachers and administrators in the district report they have moved from focusing solely on what the teacher is doing during an observation to including what the students are doing. Based upon Likert scale question on the online questionnaire, participation in IRs has increased knowledge of how well students are learning through observation of student learning in classrooms on a regular basis. It was shared that students are now information providers during observations. Teachers and administrators now ask students what they are doing and also what they are learning during classroom observations.

Theme 2: Teaching and Learning Investment

Through data analysis of the online questionnaire and interviews, a second theme emerged. After the implementation of IRs, stakeholders shared that they perceived the amount of time that they spend observing and discussing the teaching and learning process has increased. These data are shared in this section.

Teachers and administrators shared that a strong shift in focus upon teaching and learning has occurred since the implementation of IRs within the district. Likert data from the online questionnaire indicates that participation in IRs has increased the amount of time during out of classroom work by adults, such as faculty meetings, spending more time on matters of teaching and learning.

According data provided by administrators A, C, D, and E, in the one on one interview, they are now building large blocks of weekly common planning time into teacher schedules. Monthly faculty meetings have taken on a completely different format. Administrator C reported in the one on one interview that monthly meetings are now considered professional development power hours at which teachers share best practice and coaching occurs. Quarterly in-service days have evolved into differentiated tiered learning opportunities specifically related to problems of practice.

Administrator B reported in the one on one interview that collaboration has improved and grown from teacher to teacher, administrator to teacher, and administrator to administrator. A higher level of trust among and between all stakeholders within the district has emerged as a result of the instructional round, specifically the debriefing portion of the process.

Administrators shared in the interviews that they now look through a different lens when they visit classrooms in their schools. Administrator F stated, "There is now a detachment from opinions when observations take place. There is an increase of objectivity during observations." Prior to participating in IRs an elementary principal, Administrator A, shared, "There was a tendency to quickly draw conclusions and make judgments about a teacher or the teaching observed. Now, there is a more global perspective. Observations now have an environmental focus, which includes the student, teacher, and task. Teaching is much more than teaching." Another principal (Administrator D) stated, "Conversations with teachers following observations are much more reflective in nature allowing both the observer and the teacher who had been observed to truly think about the teaching and learning that did or did not occur as a result of the observed lesson."

The instructional core is the combination of engaging students in the learning process, providing academically challenging content and improving teachers' instructional practice. It is the relationship between teacher, student, and content (City et al., 2009, p. 22). Based on the Likert data in the online questionnaire, participation in IRs has increased the amount of time weekly spent in conversation about the instructional core in the target district. Prior to the implementation of IR, 36% of participants reported that they conversed about the instructional core a few times per week while this increased to 46% of participants conversing about the instructional core a few times per week after IRs was implemented. This increase of conversation about the instructional core on a weekly basis provides further evidence of the validity of this theme. Additionally, 17%

of participants reported that they spent time daily conversing about the instructional core prior to the implementation of IRs. Following the implementation of IRs, the percentage of participants who engaged in conversation about the instructional core on a daily basis increased to 27%. After the implementation of IR, teachers shared their desire to work with their grade level team members to discuss teaching and learning more frequently but time was just not available to do so. One building principal (Administrator C) shared in the interview that she now builds her master schedules with time built into the schedule for common planning time for grade level team members. Principals across the district worked together to build grade level common planning time into each of their grade level master schedules. All ten schools now have a minimum of three common blocks of planning time per grade level weekly.

Theme 3: Professional Confidence Levels

Stakeholders shared that there was an increase in confidence levels following the implementation of IRs in the target district. This increase in confidence level included observations of teachers, observations of students, observations of tasks, conversations about observations with other professional staff, identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the school level and also the district level.

One teacher, Teacher J, reported that "instructional rounds has opened the door of opportunity for educators to recognize the broad diversity of knowledge and teaching practices available within the walls of their own school." Based upon the questionnaire, teachers are now more apt to see fellow educators as valuable resources in addressing the many challenges presented by the instructional core. Peers seem more likely to be open

with questions and challenges that affect them as teachers and see them as a support team and a storehouse of instructional best practices.

Prior to the implementation of IRs, 56% of questionnaire participants reported that they had moderate confidence levels entering classrooms to observe teaching and learning. This increased to 58% of participants feeling moderate levels after the implementation of IRs. Additionally, 24% of participants reported that they had a great deal of confidence entering classrooms to observe teaching and learning. Following the implementation of IRs, this increased to 36% of participants who shared that they experienced a great deal of confidence entering classrooms to observe teaching and learning.

Participant perception from the online questionnaire, both Likert and open ended, indicated that participation in IRs has increased the confidence level in talking to teachers about classroom observations. Observations are now more fine-grained and non-judgmental. This has impacted the way in which teachers and administrators discuss observations. Conversations about observations are factual and based completely upon evidence gathered during the observation. The conversations focus on what the teacher did, what the students did and what the task observed was. Teachers and administrators reported that following the implementation of IR discussions about observations became highly reflective in nature. All stakeholders are now analyzing the factual data gathered during an observation and reflecting upon what was most successful and where changes could be made to enhance the teaching and learning process.

Before IRs was implemented in the target district, 27% of participants reported that they had a great deal of confidence when talking to teachers about classroom observations. This increased to 38% of participants who felt a great deal of confidence in talking to teachers about classroom observations following the implementation of IRs. While teachers and administrators reported in the online questionnaire that IRs have impacted the confidence level in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the school level, questionnaire and interview data also support an increase in confidence levels at the district level. Following IRs, each school in the district now identifies a new problem of practice, each school year, to focus upon for school improvement and the district benefits. Monthly DILT meetings are now data-driven and goal oriented. Administrators share school-wide problem of practice progress with colleagues at monthly DILT. The DILT collaborates and builds district level growth goals. Teachers shared in the online questionnaire that quarterly in-service days are now more structured and focused upon best practice and improvement. This cross building, district-wide, collaboration time allows for large-scale improvements to be addressed. 71% of educators who participated in the online questionnaire believe that participating in IRs has helped with learning what they can stop, start, and/or continue in their role as a result of what they see in classrooms.

Participation in IRs has increased confidence in identifying next steps for improving the content knowledge of teachers as a whole at the school level, as was also identified in data from the online questionnaire. Teacher D shared that “interactions with colleagues following IRs were reflection focused. Now, we examine and reexamine

teaching and learning practices. Our goal is to refine our teaching practices." Teachers found collaboration time a time to build common goals and target school success. Asking questions about current teaching practices have become commonplace. With the high demands of today's learning environments, the need for practice and models like IRs ensure student success and teacher improvement and refinement. An elementary principal, Administrator B, reported in the one on one interview, "the IRs debriefing process has helped us and our building team identify school specific problems of practice. These are the areas we want to improve upon." A few examples provided by principals during the interviews include targeting differentiated instruction, modeling, questioning and understanding by design. 81% of educators who participated in the online questionnaire believe that when it comes to the IR network if they do not know something, others in the network will help them learn it and if among them they do not know something, together they can learn it. When asked in the one on one interview if participation in IRs had changed how administrators think educationally Administrator A, and elementary principal, responded, "Absolutely. It has increased the understanding of the value of administrators and teachers alike, getting into classrooms as often as possible to see teacher, task, and students in action in order to improve in best practice." Another principal, Administrator G, shared that the power of sharing has emerged across the district since the implementation of IRs. The IR process, as shared in the one on one interview, by Administrator C, an elementary principal, have guided each and every school within the district to have an owned school-wide educational practice upon which they now focus to improve the teaching and learning process. IRs helped Administrator

E, another elementary principal, help teachers through coaching. There has been a definite increase of differentiated instruction, the target problem of practice at the school, and he noted that small group instruction across the district has been increasing, as there is an overall awareness of best practice.

The theme of professional confidence levels, while discussed often in the interviews, also appeared through several of the specific Likert items in the questionnaire. Prior to the implementation of IRs in the target district, 56% of participants reported that they had a moderate level of confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the school level. Following the implementation of IRs this percentage increased to 63% of participants who shared that they were moderately confident. Additionally, prior to IRs, nine percent of participants reported that they had a great deal of confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the school level. This percentage increased to 21% of participants who reported that they felt a great deal of confidence after the implementation of IRs.

Participants were asked what level of confidence they had in regard to identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the district level. 28% of participants shared that they had little confidence prior to the implementation of IRs while this decreased to 17% of participants who felt little confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the district level after IRs implementation. Prior to implementation, six percent of participants shared that they experienced a great deal of confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the district level while nineteen percent of participants reported feeling a great deal of confidence after the

implementation of IR in the target district. This growth in confidence level supports the validity of this theme.

Theme 4: Professional Development

Teachers and administrators spend time each year learning how to improve the teaching and learning process through professional development. Data indicates that stakeholders' perceptions of professional development have changed as a result of IRs implementation. The theme of professional development emerged as stakeholders addressed their ability to identify what their school and what the district needed to focus upon to enhance teaching and learning.

Administrators then shared during the one on one interviews that many school-wide, as well as district-wide professional development opportunities, grew out of the implementation of IRs. The DILT is a network of educators, formed as a result of IRs, who meet over time to examine educational programming, teaching and learning practices, and collaborate often to build a common language and an understanding of teaching and learning practices (City, 2011). This group of professionals, initially called the Cabinet Team, had previously met on a monthly basis for basic information sharing and disbursement of district-wide news. Monthly DILT meetings are now driven by professional development guiding administrators to become more effective leaders within their schools and the district. Administrators shared in the one on one interviews that they now feel more confident in their ability to plan and implement professional development to their faculty and staff as a result of their membership in DILT and their participation in IRs. Administrator C, an elementary principal, shared that there is an increased

engagement in planning and implementing targeted problems of practice within the school including but not limited to questioning, modeling, problem-solving, and assessment.

Teachers shared in the open-ended portion of the online questionnaire that, prior to IRs, they traditionally had tunnel vision and spent most of their time focused on their classroom and the students within their classroom. Teacher Q reported that there is now a feeling of global perspective within the school. Peers seem more open and receptive to discuss questions and challenges, which may affect them. The school community is better able to perceive the totality of instruction as it is implemented across the school and the district.

Theme 5: Problem-Solving

While a great deal of positive feedback regarding the results of what has occurred within the target district as a result on the implementation of IRs has been shared in the online questionnaire and the one on one interviews, one major piece missing from the feedback was problem-solving. Teacher and administrator responses did not directly relate to the original problem of practice identified by the DILT, problem-solving. In the one on one interviews, administrators were asked if IRs changed teaching and learning related to our initial specific problem of practice, problem-solving? All responded similarly. The district has not been able to measure the progress of problem-solving within the district as a result of the implementation of IRs but all also elaborated stating that the original problem of practice was too broad. What is problem-solving? How can problem-solving be measured? How is problem-solving defined? Administrator H,

middle school assistant principal, shared in the one on one interview, “I believe that as a district we are better preparing our students to become problem-solvers by building a common language across all settings through the FIPs as well as targeting more specific problem-solving components such as questioning.” Administrator B, an elementary principal shared, “Students in the district, as well as the teachers, staff, and administrators are all better problem-solvers now than we were prior to IRs. IRs shifted our curricular focus on standards, common core, questioning processes, real-world examples al all have improved our overall scientific and mathematical inquiry.” Another, Administrator C, shared, “I do not think that we can prove that we are making progress in problem-solving through data collection but as a district, I feel that there is a dedication to creating better problem-solvers based upon the levels of critical thinking that students are demonstrating in STEM and STEAM.” Another, Administrator E, shared that “problem-solving may not be provable but questioning as a problem of practice was targeted by all schools in the second year of IRs. Our students and teachers have demonstrated a clear shift from lower level questioning to a higher level and more application-level questioning in classrooms.” Based upon what one administrator shared in the one on one interview, she sees in classrooms at her building, she believes that “progress is being made. Teachers have significantly increased collaborative practices, questions are shifting to higher levels, interaction and inquiry are on the rise and the data collected during IRs helps guide us to continue moving forward.”

Theme 6: Concerns with IR

Data from the online questionnaire as well as interviews indicated that stakeholders had concerns about the IR process. Stakeholders perceived concerns regarding IRs prior to implementation, as well as following implementation in the target district are explored in this section.

Concerns regarding the IR process emerged through the questionnaire, interview responses, and feedback. Teacher feedback pointed to a lack of professional development specifically related to the IR process prior to the implementation. Some shared that even though they were told that the observations were not evaluative in nature they still felt like they were on stage and evaluation was the goal. Some of the teachers who were observed were not provided an opportunity to participate in subsequent IRs and did not feel that they were a true part of the process. Teacher AB shared, "if I were given the opportunity to observe someone else in the process or, if I had been given specific feedback, I may have learned more."

Another concern that emerged from the data was that of the number of full IRs and follow up. Teachers seem to find great value in the process. Teacher X stated, "instructional rounds were done only once in our school and I was not selected to participate. Another teacher, Teacher M, stated, "I would like to see more sessions and opportunities to participate in instructional rounds." Another, Teacher J, shared, "as an observer in the IR process, "I enjoyed being a part of rounds. My role as an observer helped me learn a great deal about our school. I was not observed, and I am not sure how I would have felt being observed." Compiling the data after the observation took place and analyzing the data during the debrief process provided learning opportunities for the

teachers and for all other educators in the building. This teacher stated, "I feel like I am a better educator as a result of being a part of the process and I think it would be beneficial for myself and others to have additional IRs opportunities."

Administrative concerns regarding the IR process include the challenges of planning, logistics, and time. When asked if challenges or concerns were encountered during the IR process, Administrator D shared that the process is a large time commitment and found it difficult to stay the course. Another, Administrator C, shared that he/she wished there was more time to really digging into the process. There is limited time to analyze data, limited time to provide follow-up and resources, limited time to provide opportunities, limited time for planning and preparation. An elementary school principal, Administrator B, indicated that having a single administrator in charge of planning; implementation and follow up made the process cumbersome for that administrator.

The original format for IRs was highly protocol driven and found tedious amounts of detail embedded, which became the primary focus for some administrators. Administrator E reported that having the correct baskets to hold materials, the correct color sticky table, the correct peppermints, and chocolates, the correct markers and chart paper, etc. was a monumental task. This administrator, Administrator E, shared a level of concern for reprimand if he/she did not have the correct materials for the rollout of IRs as defined by higher level administration.

Conclusion

IRs are a complex process in which a team of educational professionals circulates through classrooms to conduct pre-arranged observations with a concentration on a specific topic previously identified as the problem of practice. Following the observations, the team conducts an immediate debriefing session at which time specific feedback on the focused observable problem of practice is shared. Themes are identified, and a proposed plan of action is created. This evaluative case study looked to determine the effectiveness of IRs in the target district. While the implementation of IRs in all grade levels at the target district did not define problem-solving and what problem-solving looks like in classrooms to meet the stated mission of creating students with proficient problem-solving skills, IRs appear to have had an effect on the organization in other ways both positive and constructive.

RQ1: In the view of school personnel, what influence(s), if any, has the IR process had on problem-solving practices in all classrooms throughout the target district? Based on the data, school personnel perceived that IRs has not had much if any influence on problem-solving at the target district. Participants shared that problem-solving was too broad of a problem of practice to address. The lack of clarity of a district-wide common definition of problem-solving was referenced in both the online questionnaire and the one on one interviews. Participants shared that while problem solving may not be provable but progress in this area is being made with all of the other themes that emerged through the analysis of data. The theme of *Problem-solving* best answers this RQ.

RQ2: In the view of school personnel, has the implementation of IRs changed the organization, structure, and/or student participation in classrooms as related to problem-

solving? The data indicate that school personnel perceived the organization had changed as a result of the implementation of IRs although not specifically related to problem-solving as the targeted problem of practice. The amount of time spent on observations increased following the implementation of IRs. The theme of *Observation* addressed this. The theme *Teaching and Learning Investment* addressed how participants perceived the increase in amount of time invested in conversations about the instructional core, and the quality of feedback regarding observations in the classroom have all increased and improved as a result of IRs. Teachers and administrators shared that their confidence levels in observing and providing fine-grained, non-judgmental feedback regarding observations have increased as a result of IRs addressed in the *Professional Confidence Level* theme. Participants reported that their capacity to discuss flattering and unflattering data has increased as a result of IRs. Data indicates that inquiry about the instructional core and professional development have increased as a result of IRs as shared in the *Professional Development* theme.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The target district implemented IRs in 2012 as a process to improve teaching and learning. The purpose of this case study was to gather perceptions of participants about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the IR process and if and how IRs influenced teaching, learning, and problem-solving. In Section 3, I discuss the case study development, the summative evaluation report and white paper, and project evaluation and implications. I chose a white paper project for this study. The white paper will be presented to the superintendent and assistant superintendents of the target district in which the study took place. While this evaluative case study did not take on a formal program evaluation model, the methods of data collection were evaluative in nature. Evaluation is essential when investigating the value, worth and merit of a program in addition to assessing if program goals are being met (Ruhe & Boudreau, 2011). I performed this evaluative case study to examine the influences, if any, that the IR process has had on problem-solving, academics, and pedagogy since implementation.

The study findings showed that IRs have had effects on teaching, learning, and pedagogy since implementation, indicating that continued implementation would benefit the district. Findings also indicated that there are areas of the IR implementation that could be improved upon as the stakeholders shared concerns with the process. It is evident that there is a need for a formal project evaluation of IRs and continued implementation with suggestions for process improvement. In consideration of the findings of this case study, I created a white paper in which study findings are to be

shared with the DILT along with recommendations for continued implementation and possible improvements. Project goals, rationale, a review of literature, implementation, timetable, and implications for social change are presented in this section.

The findings of this evaluative case study were complex, indicating that problem-solving within the target district may not have been affected by the implementation of IRs but that IRs affected a variety of other areas including observations, teaching and learning investment, professional confidence levels, and instructional core. I decided to use a white paper to share the research from the evaluative case study, explore solutions and aid in making decisions for future implementation of IR within the target district, all goals of a white paper (Cullen, 2018).

Description and Goals

The purposes for this white paper project were connected to the target district's implementation of IRs to address student problem solving in the district. Graham (2013) shared that white papers are an effective way in which to speak to a target audience as well as educate said audience on a topic. White papers are also written to help an audience solve a business or technical problem (Stelzner, 2013).The purpose of this white paper is to share feedback regarding the IR process as it relates to the teaching and learning process in the target district by focusing on the thoughts, perceptions, and values of all stakeholders. The project was designed to inform the DILT of stakeholder feedback and perceptions as well as propose recommendations for continued use of IR within the district as stakeholder feedback defined. The white paper was guided by the findings of two research questions I used to gain an understanding of the strengths and needs of IRs,

the influence that the process had on problem-solving, and possible changes in the organization as a result of IRs. The goal of an academic white paper is to educate and persuade a target audience (Mattern, 2013). The white paper will provide a clear description of the problem as well as suggested solutions for stakeholders. The white paper contains feedback from participants who completed the online survey as well as feedback from the one-to-one interviews with administrators in the target district. The data gathered from the online survey as well as the one-to-one interviews were complied, coded and grouped by themes. I then constructed the white paper from this data, which will provide opportunities for stakeholders to discuss the recommendations and decide if they would like to implement said recommendations. The white paper consists of an introduction, background, methodology, findings, recommendations, and a conclusion.

Rationale

The Young Adult Library Services Association (2013) defines a white paper as a project genre to address a problem. Based on the findings in Section 2, I selected a white paper (see Appendix A) as the genre to address the problem of this project study. After conducting the online survey and the one-on-one interviews, the need for a white paper emerged, as the goal of providing information to administration was identified. The white paper allowed me to present information to a target audience in the target district. The information shared in the white paper provides administrators with feedback and data that may help guide them in the future implementation of IRs in the target district. A white paper is a method by which important information can be communicated in a clear, concise, and persuasive way (Stelzner, 2010). The goal of this white paper is to

communicate the results of this research student to district level administrators, DILT, regarding the feedback provided from stakeholders. Stakeholder perspectives are valuable and are key to the proposed recommendations in the white paper. In the white paper, I explain the data analysis in a way that is understandable to all stakeholders. I address the problems of planning, logistics, time, problem-solving, observations and the observational process, and professional staff development.

Following the implementation of IRs, the district did not conduct a formal program evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the process. In this white paper, I provide the district instructional leadership team specific feedback from teachers and administration regarding their thoughts and opinions about the effects that IRs have had on them, teaching and learning, and problem-solving. The online questionnaire explored teacher and administrative perspectives of the IR process. Teacher perspective was valuable since teachers are one of three legs of the IR triangle: teacher, task, and student. The one-to-one interviews provided feedback from the perspective of administrators within the district.

Finally, I selected a white paper to address the local problem because its summary report allowed for data to be recorded and shared with the DILT to aide in potential informed district-wide decisions regarding the continuation of the IR process within the district. Recommendations for program modifications to increase the value of the process were made and shared in the white paper summary report.

Review of Literature

I conducted the research study was conducted to gather perceptions of participants about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the IR process and if and how instructional rounds influenced teaching, learning, and problem-solving. The goal of this literature review is to explore various presentation methods for the research project conducted on IRs. An initial search was conducted to find methods by which the findings of this study could be presented to the district decisionmakers. I decide to focus on the white paper as the method by which to present findings. It is important to note that there is limited research regarding presentation methods for qualitative research. Walden University's online library was the primary research tool I used throughout the project. Scholarly, current, peer-reviewed journal articles were researched by topic. Databases I used included Education Research Complete, SAGE, ERIC, EBSCOhost, dissertation database, and ProQuest Central. Extensive topic searches included the following keywords: *evaluation, program evaluation, formativ*e *evaluation, summative evaluations, white paper, qualitative research presentations,* and *position papers*. Searching these keywords led to the additional inquiry of topics including *evaluation theory, evaluation tree, educational reform, school improvement,* and *Bloom's Taxonomy.* This literature review includes peer reviewed research articles which were limited in the search. Many examples of white papers were found in the search, a few of which were grounded in education and educational research. The main purpose of a position paper according to Owl Perdue Online Writing Lab (2018) is to present specific findings on a targeted problem and then to propose recommendations based on findings. White papers do not

have a specific length and can be as formal or informal as the author would like for them to be to share the problem, research findings, and recommendations. A white paper is fiscally responsible method by which to report to decision makers, as the white paper does not require a significant monetary or time commitment (Lyons & Luginsland, 2014). Owl Perdue Online Writing Lab (2018) also noted that visuals and specific quotes and examples can be added to a white paper to make it more appealing to the target audience.

Constructing a White Paper

White papers should target a specific audience and can take on many different visual forms and have multiple purposes (Kantor, 2009). The white paper should be used to assist a target audience of decision makers about a specific problem and recommendations which support a proposed solution (YALSA, 2013). Kantor (2009) suggested that the white paper is often used as a marketing tool presented to an educated audience while influencing facts which validate claims while also building the trust of the readers. The findings and results of this study are presented in the white paper (see Appendix A). After the data was gathered and analyzed white paper writing began. The white paper follows a specific format to inform readers. The white paper contains an introduction of IRs and the research project followed by a section on the background of IR and district implementation of IR in 2012. A methodology section is included in the white paper followed by the findings of the research study. Finally, the recommendations which are based upon the research findings is included with a conclusion to bring the white paper to closure.

Implications of White Paper

Social change refers to the notion of progress and evolution, which can be motivated or driven by religion, culture, economics, technology, politics and in the case of this project study, education by shifting or altering the status quo. "Education is a constantly changing and multi-faceted endeavor (Ross, 2010)." Education is complex because the process of teaching and learning involves administrators, teachers, parents, and students to constantly challenge the way that things have always been done and create new, uncharted methods and models (Ross, 2010) such as IRs. The white paper is intended to propose solutions to problems. Sharing this white paper will inform the superintendent and assistant superintendents at the target district of perspectives of IRs shared by district stakeholders. This will open up dialogue among the decisionmakers to either continue or discontinue IRs in the district based upon the recommendations in the white paper which were made as a result of the research. My goal was to present unbiased information shared by participants in the study to the educated decision makers at the target district, another characteristic of a white paper (Hoffman, 2014). Hoffman (2014) noted that decision makers respond in a more favorable manner when information, findings, and recommendations are presented in a way that tailors these items to their particular needs.

Project Description

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The DILT currently has most of the materials and resources needed to implement the recommendations outlined in the white paper summary report. There will be a small

finance obligation associated with printing of the white paper for presentation purposes. These costs will include printing and binding. I am committed to dedicating time to sharing the white paper with first the superintendent(s) of the target district and if approved by these decisionmaker the full DILT. The proposed changes require a time investment for teachers and administration. Initial implementation of IRs, in 2012, required a significant amount of costly professional development provided by an outside contracted expert. One half of the original district instructional leadership team remains intact and fully trained, via train the trainer model. Most of the changes proposed in the evaluation summary report can be made without additional financial investment.

Implementation

When university requirements are met, my task will be to share the results of the study in a white paper with the district instructional leadership team. While there are recommendations in the white paper based upon the findings, it is beyond the scope of this project to make programming recommendations such as continuations, changes, modifications, or accommodations related to IRs. The goal of this project was to share the findings regarding the impact that IRs may or may not have had on teachers, students, and the organization as it related to problem-solving with the district instructional leadership team. The DILT may decide to implement some of the recommendations of the white paper summary report at a later date. However, a discussion of the possible next steps toward improving the overall quality of the IRs process within the district is provided in the following sections.

Proposal for Implementation and Time Table

The implementation of recommendations provided in the white paper summary report would begin when I share the report with the superintendent and assistant superintendents of the target school district. A one-hour meeting, at a time and date to be determined, will be scheduled with the superintendent and both assistant superintendents to review the white paper. Following this initial administrative review, the superintendent and assistant superintendents will have two weeks to review the white paper and prepare any questions, comments, or concerns they have with the recommendations found in the white paper. If the superintendent and assistant superintendents would like a meeting to discuss their feedback, an additional one-hour meeting will be scheduled to discuss feedback prior to sharing the white paper summary report with all DILT members at the first scheduled summer DILT meeting. This DILT meeting is scheduled to be a six-hour professional development opportunity for the DILT team. If the decision makers approve, one-hour will be designated for the white paper share out. The full administrative team will be afforded one month to review the white paper and prepare any feedback they may want to share. At the next scheduled summer DILT meeting, another six-hour professional development session, DILT members will be given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the evaluative case study, the data collected, and also the recommendations made in the white paper summary report. One-hour of this DILT session will be reserved for DILT members to collaboratively discuss recommendations and implementation steps if any.

Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers, Administrators, and Others

Conducting the evaluative case study and sharing the white paper summary report with DILT member were my primary roles in this project. Upon delivery of the white paper summary report, the administrative team will make recommendations. Based on those recommendations in the white paper, I will assume the role of consultant in the case of the administrative team needing any possible clarifications regarding the position shown in the white paper. Members of the DILT will be advised concerning the next steps to be followed in the district with IR. DILT members would need to decide if they will assume the primary role, at their designated school, in implementing the approved and agreed upon recommendations listed in the white paper summary report.

Potential Barriers

The primary barrier in continuing the IR process is the time commitment. The planning, implementation, and debriefing required in the process, all require a significant time commitment, from all stakeholders. Effectively planning an IRs session can take evaluators hours of intense preparation and the observation portion often involves an entire workday to complete. Building the two to three-hour block of time for the debriefing process on the day of the IRs is an additional time commitment. This is followed by several, separate two-plus hour, analysis meetings and finally professional development meetings. Davis (2015) shares that time is becoming more and more precious to educators as the adoption of common core state standards, which significantly increase rigor and accountability. As a result of this time crunch, educators are forced to find new ways to schedule planning and preparation within their daily schedules. While

"research shows that schools with the strongest PLC consistently generate higher student performance (Davis, 2015)," the time spent collaborating and communicating with colleagues seems to be decreasing.

A secondary barrier in the recommendation of a year-long continuation of IRs is the financial aspect. To effectively implement IRs, the district will need to acquire a minimum of eight substitute teachers per building on their assigned IRs date. The acquisition of substitute teachers will allow classroom teachers to attend the training and professional development sessions. Additionally, the use of substitute teachers will allow contracted classroom teachers to take an active role in the inactive role in the IRs process during the school day. This recommendation requires a commitment by the district to allocate funds for the substitute teachers' compensation.

A final barrier relates to the substitute teaching shortage in the state of Pennsylvania. As the unemployment rate in the state decreases so too does the ratio of substitutes-to-teacher. Data from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics shows that average fill rates remain at 90% while the district ratios approach 1:6 in 2014 compared to the 1:3 ratio from 2010 (Wert, 2014).

Project Evaluation

The project for this capstone was a white paper summative report in which the study and project were presented in an objective-based summative evaluation manner. The white paper was utilized because it allowed me to assess whether the results of the implementation of IR met the originally stated goals, objectives, and standards (Fitzpatrick, J., Christie, C., & Mark, M., 2009). Data gathered included thoughts,

perspectives, and values of stakeholders who may or may not have participated in the IR process within the target district. Collecting this summative data was found to be useful in identifying effective components of IRs as well as those components viewed as concerns in need of improvement found in the white paper summary report.

The effectiveness of IRs evaluative case study can be determined by the thoughts, perspectives, and values of stakeholders including administrators and teachers in the target district. The superintendent and assistant superintendents will be able to determine whether the recommendations provided in the white paper summary report are purposeful, meaningful, and feasible enough to warrant presentation to the DILT. Should the administrative team decide to use the white paper summary as a foundation to continue DILT, members of the DILT will review and make recommendations. Based on the findings of this project, the DILT may choose to move forward with a plan to implement all, some, or none of the recommendations provided in the white paper summary report. Additionally, after reviewing the report and team collaboration, DILT may have further recommendations or questions. My role as the evaluative case study researcher would be to answer DILT questions in addition to clarifying recommendations and/or findings.

The superintendent, assistant superintendents, and DILT are the decision makers and as such, they may decide that certain components of IRs and /or recommendations made in the white paper summary may require additional possibly more extensive research and/or evaluative processes. If the decision makers choose to implement all or some of the recommendations provided in the white paper summary report, an outcomes-

based evaluation could be utilized to determine the effectiveness of the implemented recommendations. One method of evaluation that could be discussed with the decisionmakers would be that of a cover letter which could be attached to the white paper upon which stakeholders could document informal comments, suggestions and feedback. Another possible method could be the inclusion of a survey to gather stakeholder feedback. If approved by the superintendent(s), the survey could be hard copy or on-line and presented to the DILT at the one-hour DILT session. In the event of a continuation of IR within the target district, this evaluative case study can be reproduced by stakeholders.

Implications for Local Community

IRs were implemented at the target district to improve the teaching and learning process specifically as it relates to problem-solving for students in all grade IRs will have a positive impact on social change within the target district. While the analysis of data does not indicate progress toward the ultimate goal of better problem-solving by the students, significant conclusions regarding internal change including improvement in professional development, communication and collaborations, observation and evaluation, and the ability to have conversations regarding which problems of practice should be addressed to enhance the teaching and learning process, emerged during data analysis.

The results of the case study provide DILT, administrators, and teachers a clear summary of the ways in which IR benefited the organization as a whole. The results indicate that the implementation of IRs increased the amount of time that administrators and teachers spend observing teaching and learning, having conversations specific to the

instructional core, and initiating conversation with one another about student learning. The results also indicate that administrators and teachers have higher levels of confidence in conducting observations of teaching and learning as well as talking about all aspects of observations. The implementation of IRs redefined the structure of the traditional faculty meeting at many schools within the district as well as professional development within the district. Finally, the results of this study indicate that based upon the feedback gathered during the IR process each building is better able to identify a problem of practice specific to their building and identify next steps for improvement.

Implications for Global Community

This evaluative case study has the potential to impact the teaching and learning process at neighboring K-12 districts through the implementation of their own form of IRs. IRs have the potential to be adapted to meet the needs of individual schools and school districts. If IRs can be implemented at additional schools it may lead to the identification of specific problems of practice in each school ultimately leading to targeted professional development for all stakeholders, increased communication and collaboration across the field of education, the building of foundational common language, and increased effectiveness of data analysis to guide best practice.

The results of the evaluative case study of IRs reach beyond the scope of public K-12 schools and districts to encompass private institutions, charter schools, community colleges, and universities. The implementation of IRs, based upon the findings of this evaluative case study, is likely to benefit administrators, teachers, students and the overall teaching and learning process at all educational institutions.

Conclusions

The IR process had been implemented within the target district in 2012 to improve problem-solving skills yet had not been evaluated up to this point. Many stakeholders speculated that the program was impacting the district as well as the teaching and learning process. Some suspected there were positive impacts while others suspected that there were not any impacts at all. Stakeholders questioned the original goal of improvement in problem-solving among students in the district as well as the value of the IR process. White papers are becoming a way in which researchers are sharing information, problems and solutions with stakeholders in education. This white paper will give stakeholders at the target district the perspectives of efficacy of the IR process as well as provide research findings and recommendations for future implementation based upon said findings. This white paper includes an introduction of IRs, background of IRs implementation in the target district, methodology of the research project findings of the study and recommendations based upon findings all in a clear and succinct manner per the definition of a white paper (Mattern, 2013).

In Section 4 of this project study, the reflections and conclusions of the capstone project are presented. The strengths of the project, as well as the weaknesses and recommendations, are offered to make a social impact. Additionally, the program evaluator's personal and professional growth is shared along with future research considerations.

Section 4

Reflections and Conclusions

In Section 4, I present the strengths and limitations of this evaluative case study on the IR process as it relates to problem-solving in the target district. Additionally, Section 4 includes an analysis of what I learned about project development, scholarship, and leadership. Finally, my personal reflections on the significance of what I learned, the importance of the process, and implications for future research are included in Section 4.

Project's Strengths

This project study began as an evaluative case study of IRs, a process that was implemented in the target district. The intent of the case study was to assess what, if any, influence IRs had on problem-solving in all classrooms throughout the district. Evaluating a program not only provides the merit and worth of a program but also enhance and /or improve the program while enabling stakeholders to make decisions about the future of the program with improvement being the overall desired result (Chyung, Wisniewski, Inderbitzen, & Campbell, 2013).

All stakeholders within the target district had a voice in this evaluative case study of IRs. The online questionnaire paired with the one-to-one interviews and data analysis provided me with qualitative viewpoints and information to generate various recommendations in the white paper summary. This summary will be shared with decision makers in the target district.

I determined and shared in the white paper summary report that IRs have had many positive outcomes within the target district including but not limited to guiding

teaching and learning, identifying problems of practice, solving problems within individual schools, professional development focus, and opportunities, and building common language across all schools and grade levels within the district.

The implementation of IRs has enhanced stakeholders' abilities to conduct fine-grained non-judgmental observations as well as provide specific feedback to one another. This includes administrator to teacher interactions, teacher-to-teacher interactions, and teacher to student interactions.

Project's Limitations in Addressing the Problem

This evaluative case study was originally intended to explore the impact that IRs had, if any, on problem-solving within in the target district. Data suggested that problem-solving was a narrow focus in addition to a difficult qualitative focus. Stakeholders indicated that problem-solving within the district may have been impacted but it was difficult to determine the relationship between IR and problem-solving improvement.

IRB approval of the online questionnaire was granted in July. Unfortunately, teachers leave for summer recess in June and many do not check their email over the summer. I sent the initial online questionnaire to participants during the first week of July. The timing of this initial questionnaire was less than optimal. A follow-up email, which included the online questionnaire, was sent to all participants during the first week of August. A third, and final email inviting stakeholders to participate in the study was sent during the first week of September. I believe that there may have been a higher participation rate if the online questionnaire were submitted to stakeholders during the month of May.

While 86 participants responded to the online questionnaire only nine of the 86 or 10.47% of total participants, were high school level educators. The high school in the target district traditionally experiences lower levels of participation in non-compensated activities in addition to voluntary positions within the district. Future research may lead to conclusions regarding this trend in the participation of high school stakeholders. Higher levels of high school participant feedback may have provided higher levels of overall district perspectives.

Recommendations for Ways to Address the Problem Differently

An evaluative case study was necessary to explore the effectiveness of IRs within the target district. I sent the online questionnaire to all teachers and administrators within in the district, while the one-to-one interviews were conducted with the DILT members. Randomly selecting teachers, across all school settings, to participate in one-to-one interviews may have increased participation in high school.

The overall goal for this study was to explore the impact, if any, that IRs had on the teachers, students, and the organization specifically in the area of problem-solving. Focusing on problem-solving narrowed the evaluation. Data indicated that problem-solving was not a measurable objective. The value of IRs reached deeper into teaching and learning, professional development, building common language across all settings, and observation skills. Using a quantitative research approach might have allowed for analysis of student problem-solving data prior to the implementation of IR and again after the implementation.

Another suggestion to address the problem would be to include students in the study. IRs have an observational component that finds observers focusing on teacher, task, and student. Gaining the student perspective on the IR process and problem-solving may have added an additional layer of data.

Scholarship

Scholarship is the pursuit of knowledge acquired through research, synthesis, practice, and teaching. To be a scholar, a person must explore history, assumptions, context, and practice while interacting with the world around them (Gurm, 2009). Prior to this project study, I did not have a scholarly disposition. The process that this project study has taken me through has instilled a deeper level of perseverance in achieving goals, a stronger work ethic, a pursuit of the advancement of knowledge, solving problems and truly making a difference in the work of education which is my passion.

Earning a Master of Science in Education required me to enhance my skills as a researcher and a practitioner, but the process of acquiring a Doctorate in Education has improved my research skills to a point of research becoming a part of my everyday life. Exploring peer-reviewed articles, scholarly journal article, dissertations, project studies, and educational books is now commonplace and more importantly a necessary skill to increase stakeholder buy-in for me as a leader. I now find myself proving the value of best practice as it relates to the implementation of professional development, curriculum, content, and programming.

The coursework and the residency requirements that were precursors to the project study were stepping stones which helped set the foundation for the process to

come. Learning to set goals and meet deadlines in addition to networking with others who were about to embark up this very intense journey were invaluable.

I have integrated all that I have learned in the coursework, the residency and the process of the project study into my personal and professional life. As the principal of an elementary school, I know that this process has improved my leadership skills. The Doctor of Education program has evolved my ability to be open-minded, reflective, and objective.

The desire to contribute to the organization and truly drive change in the system led me to take on a new opportunity, which posed as a challenge. As the principal of one of the highest achieving elementary schools in the district, I was quite comfortable. Things were just as they should be. Teachers, staff, students, parents, and the community were high performing, collaborative, and motivated. I was comfortable. I decided to pursue a change in building and requested that I be considered for the position of principal at the lowest performing elementary school within in the district. I know that I would not have embarked upon this challenge prior to the Ed.D. experience. I also know that I can make a difference and move this school forward and bring positive change along with me as my strength as a scholar has grown my skills as a leader.

Project Development and Evaluation

Completing the project study on a problem of practice within my district has allowed me to demonstrate my growth as a leader to all stakeholders within the organization. Providing the district with the white paper summary report proved my desire to help move our district from good to great. This has grown my reputation within

the district as a distinguished, transformative leader who has a strong ability to bring constituents and stakeholders on board as collaborative members of the problem-solving process.

The doctoral program has provided me with a level of confidence in my strength and skills as a leader that allows me to address problems of practice within in the organization, a skill that I did not possess prior to beginning the program. I am now a lead decision maker within the district rather than a compliant follower of directives.

At the district level, I am now more than a member of the DILT, I am one of seven planning team leaders. Having experienced the process of this project study, I am now taking a lead role in identifying district level problems of practice, setting district level goals for growth and improvement, proposing initiatives, and evaluating, and assessing progress.

The Ed.D. program has taught me the value of integrating research into the development of a project. As the principal and project leader of an elementary school, I am an integral part of the PLC as well as the data team. I am helping build an understanding of the value of constant data collection, analysis of data, and data-driven decision-making.

Project developers set goals, research, analyze, learn, are data-driven, value formative and summative evaluation and assessment, and look for ways in which they can contribute to making positive social change.

Leadership and Change

My doctoral research experience has proven to me that change truly is a difficult process. Change in education requires a great deal of patience, dedication, and devotion to research and analysis. All stakeholders have opinions and feedback to share, sometimes agreeable sometimes not. I have learned that not all educators share the same passion for social impact that I have. I have also learned that some choose status quo over educational reform to assure best practice. It takes a true leader to make a difference and one major attribute of a true leader is the ability to take a chance or a risk to make a difference. Change is not easy, but it is necessary to grow, and the field of education is a field in which growth is necessary. Sometimes you do need to work harder and not smarter.

Self-Analysis

The doctoral process has taught me a great deal about myself as a researcher, scholar, practitioner and project developer. Each step in the process provided a valuable opportunity to reflect upon the project, the outcome(s), and myself.

Analysis of Self as a Scholar

The process of completing this Project Study has improved my social interaction skills as well as my ability to make a social impact both professionally and personally. I now find myself asking, how I can make a difference in whatever it is that I am doing. A professional example of this would be how I recently handled a fundraising event within my school. As the administrator, I looked to all stakeholders to hear multiple ways in which each felt it would be best to run a Veteran's Day fundraiser for the Wounded

Warrior Project. The ideas swirled. Teachers, students, and parents generated a Balloon Launch. Upon announcing the plan, it was noted that community input was incidentally omitted, specifically those who had environmental concerns with latex being released into the local forestland. After hearing from this group of constituents, I researched alternative methods of Balloon Releases, held a forum to discuss options and together, we made an environmentally sound decision to purchase biodegradable balloons at an increased cost but with donations from the community. Prior to conducting this project study, I would have most likely moved forward with the original plan and simply not repeated the launch in future years. I have developed an understanding that it is essential to hear from all stakeholders when planning and implementing any type of large-scale process or in this case, event. Perspectives of all ages, races, religions, and beliefs were heard. The Ed.D. process at Walden has led me to become a keen to cultural competencies and how to appreciate multiple perspectives without judgment.

Research has become a part of my everyday life. When watching television with my family, I find myself listening to the commercials, which refer to research. I now ask who conducted that research? What was their purpose for conducting the research? How does the research make an impact on society? Teaching my children that the soft drink industry simply cannot conduct non-judgmental research on the benefits of sugar-free carbonated beverages because of a conflict of interest has become commonplace. I believe that I am now a more critical thinker when it comes to research-based consumption. I look to peer edited, primary sources, which include reliable and valid quantitative and qualitative data to support findings.

I have developed enhanced writing skills, which find me focusing on researching topics prior to beginning any written piece. When a thought is expressed or a belief is exposed, I find myself looking for research-based evidence to support my thoughts. At times, this can be challenging because the research contradicts my thoughts and beliefs, which now requires me to reflect and revisit. In turn, I have found that my technological skills have also improved through the project study process. I now pay closer attention to form and style, as it seems to increase the validity of written pieces. Additionally, I am better able to navigate the Internet and online sources as a direct result of the distance learning and online model that Walden provides students.

Looking to others for support is now common practice. In the event that I encounter an obstacle, I no longer hesitate to reach out to others for advice and/or support to resolve an issue. Looking back at myself as an instructional leader prior to beginning the Ed.D. journey, I was often sure that my thoughts, feelings, and decisions were best. Now, upon deep reflection, it is clear that I not only desire but truly value the thoughts, opinions, and feelings of others which help guide decision making. While I find myself looking to others, I also know that I take full responsibility for myself as a learner, a professional and also a global citizen.

I originally began this Ed.D. journey to earn a doctoral degree in education. This process has developed a passion in me to truly make a positive impact in this world. The research, which was conducted for this project study on IR will make a positive impact not only on the target district, but future research will lead to a global educational shift.

Analysis of Self as a Practitioner

I have developed stronger reflective practices as a result of this doctoral pursuit. I am better able to empathize with others as an increase in cultural awareness has occurred.

Listening and hearing are very different skills. I was always able to hear others but as I worked through the past few years at Walden, I found myself becoming better able to listen to others. Listening requires empathizing with all sides of a given problem and having the ability to relate to others.

As a doctoral student, I have gained an ability to better provide fine-grained, non-judgmental feedback to teachers who work under my leadership, parents of students within my building, students in my school, along with my children and spouse.

I believe that I can better analyze problems by identifying who was involved, what the circumstances were, when the problem occurred, where it occurred, and dig deeper into the why and how. This aids in the interpretation of the problem, which then leads to solving the problem. My goal is now problem solving, the transformation of the problem, and truly making a difference by providing solutions, research-based solutions to problems.

Analysis of Self as a Project Developer

I found my role as project developer to be extremely challenging. As a building principal who strives to be the very best leader for students, teachers, staff, parents, and community as well as a dedicated mother of five children who are all very active in school, it was difficult to allow myself the opportunity to focus on me as a learner and researcher. I found that putting myself first was almost hypocritical. As the extreme lack

of time became more and more of a frustration, I needed to find a way to balance my roles as mother, principal, and Ed.D. student. I learned that it was okay with my family for me to pursue my desire to make a difference in the world of education and educational leadership. I also discovered that the students, teachers, and parents within my school community valued my education and my platform more than I had known.

My high school diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and Principal Certification were all earned at traditional brick and mortar schools. Distance learning at Walden posed a bit of a challenge for me as I found myself to be more academically disciplined when face-to-face instruction took place. Reaching out to online resources was obscure, at first. After learning that all Walden supports such as library services, research services, advising services, and writing services were in place I gained higher levels of confidence and began reaching out for support and guidance as needed.

I relied heavily on building short and long-term goals that were more manageable to meet deadlines. Writing goals on a monthly calendar allowed me to celebrate daily, weekly, and monthly successes. It became essential to chunk assignments and submit in increments.

Approximately halfway through the project study, I found myself doubting the possibility of completion of the project. I relied heavily on colleagues who had worked through the Ed.D. journey as well as my first chair for support. I found that I needed to be more assertive. I needed to ask for help. I needed to ask for guidance. I needed to accept their encouragement. Listening to their stories of discouragement, failure and also

successes and acquisition I was able to dig a little deeper and persevere through the tough stages of the project.

Learning to navigate my way through this project study has developed my skills as a project developer on many levels professionally and personally. I have assumed additional leadership roles within in my district, which require systematic project development.

Concluding Reflections

As I reflect upon all that has occurred in my life within the confines of the time I have spent working through the Ed.D. process, over the course of the past six years, I find that the word that best describes this time and experience is *balance*. I have learned to balance my roles as a wife, a mother, a student, and a principal without sacrificing quality in any of the aforementioned roles.

Earning an Ed.D. has always been a personal goal. This process has taught me how to persevere like never before while teaching me how to set short term as well as long-term goals.

I have gained a higher level of self-confidence knowing that I was able to evaluate a program that impacted the teaching and learning process within the target district. I have the potential to be a change agent within the educational community.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The process of conducting this project study has been a valuable educational experience. IRs were implemented in the target district to address problem-solving. This process aided in the identification of problems of practice and moved the district forward

on multiple levels. The district was able to build a common language across seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and a high school.

Continued implementation of IRs within the target district will allow each school within the district to continue to identify problems of practice, specific to that school. As a collaborative team, the professional learning communities located in each school can work through the IR process and observe teaching and learning to support continuous growth and improvement.

As growth and improvement occur within the target district, IRs have the potential to make a larger social impact as neighboring schools may begin implementation to pursue continuous growth and improvement.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Instructional Rounds and Problem-Solving: An Evaluative Case Study explored the process known as IRs that were implemented to assess if problem-solving within the target district was improving. The evaluative case study of IR did not find evidence suggesting that problem-solving with the target district was improving. The evaluation did find a variety of subsequent positive impacts that the implementation of IRs had upon teaching, learning, and professional development.

All schools within the target district can learn from this evaluative case study and project development by exploring the areas which were most positively impacted by the IR process and identifying areas in which to improve.

The target district is one of the higher achieving districts in the area with a desire to move from good to great. Other districts, resembling the target district, stand to benefit

from the data collected in this evaluation of IRs. Additionally, districts that are not in the top achieving districts in the county stand to benefit as they too could identify a problem of practice specific to their district and implement IRs to improve and grow.

This evaluative case study of IRs should be a step in an evaluative cycle. As the process of IRs is implemented and problems of practice are identified by districts and individual schools, the process should be evaluated to assure that continuous growth and improvement goals are being met.

Summary

This evaluative case study began as an investigation of the perspectives of stakeholders within the target district in regard to the IR process and how the process impacted, if at all, problem-solving. The study acknowledged that the original problem of practice, problem-solving within the district, was not deemed to be measurable by stakeholders. The results of the study did, however, identify numerous positive impacts that the implementation of IRs had on the teaching and learning process within the target district. Recommendations based on the data collected were made and placed in the white paper summary report.

Section 1 described the local problem that prompted this study as well as the rationale for conducting this evaluative case study. A literature review exploring the conceptual framework, IRs, and problem-solving was embedded in this section. The framework specifically targeted the definition of IRs and the medical rounds model, which prompted the implementation of a similar process within the field of education. Problem-solving was also explored in the literature review.

In Section 2, the methodology of this evaluative case study was laid out. This included the setting, data collection procedures, and my role as the researcher. This study used a qualitative methodology in order to focus on process, understanding, and meaning. Due to the intensive examination of IRs, case study research was selected. Section 3 focused on the project itself. A literature review on evaluation and why this was the method of research for this particular study is included. Reflections were provided in *S*ection 4 regarding the evaluative case study and recommendations for continued instructional round implementations. This final section includes personal reflection on myself as a scholar, a leader, and a project developer. Future research opportunities and implications were included.

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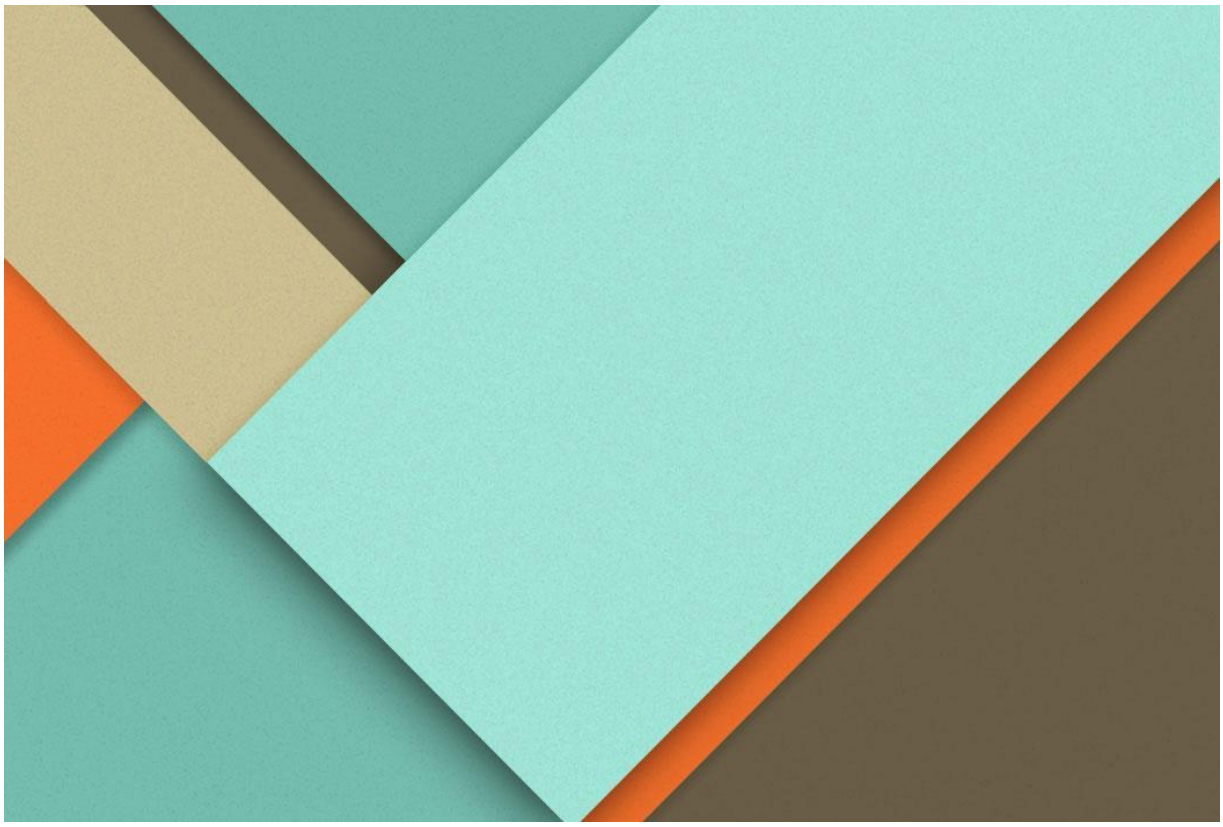
Appendix A: The Project



Perspectives of Instructional Rounds: A White Paper

07.09.19

Mrs. Cheryl A. Scalzo

Introduction

During the 2012 school year, a relatively new practice in the field of education, known as instructional rounds (IR) was implemented in the target district. The purpose of the implementation of IR was to gain an understanding of an identified problem of practice, problem-solving, within the district. The first two years, IR sessions involved a district implementation. IR then evolved and took a more in-house, school by school, roll out. While it seemed as though IR was well received by stakeholders and possibly was having an impact on teaching and learning the true impact and value of IR was unknown.

An evaluative case study is a systematic inquiry research method utilized to measure the quality of a program, activity, or policy. Data gathered is comprised of the opinions and values of stakeholders. The overarching goal is the improvement, in this case, the improvement in teaching and learning. The focus of this project study centered on the following research questions:

***RQ1**: In the view of school personnel, what influence(s), if any, has the IR process had on problem-solving practices in all classrooms throughout the target district?*

***RQ2**: In the view of school personnel, has the implementation of IR changed the organization, structure, and/or student participation in classrooms as related to problem-solving?*

This qualitative study involved gathering the thoughts and opinions of teachers and administrators within the district through online questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, and data mining.

This white paper is a comprehensive summary of the study and an explanation of recommendations resulting from the evaluative case study on IR. This report is intended to be an informative guide which recommends future IR options for decision makers within the target district to consider. In addition, this report suggests future research related to IR and ways in which the district can make the IR process more beneficial for all stakeholders.

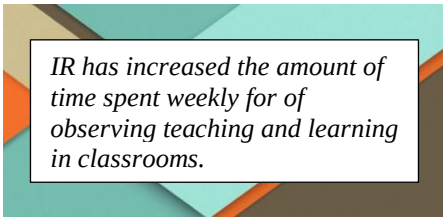
Background

DILT selected IR as a process to facilitate district-wide improvements. In 2012 IR was implemented district-wide. The IR process has been in use in the district for three years and has not been evaluated since inception.

IR is a process that was implemented to assess problem-solving within the target district. IR are a complex process in which a team of educational professionals circulates through classrooms to conduct pre-arranged observations with a concentration on a specific topic previously identified as the problem of practice. Following the observations, the team conducts an immediate debriefing session at which time specific feedback on the focused observable problem of practice is shared. Themes are identified and a proposed plan of action is created.

Methodology

This doctoral study was designed to investigate the IR process and addresses if the implementation of this process has generated academic, social, and/or pedagogical change throughout the target district. This qualitative study involved data collection in the form of thoughts and opinions of teachers and administrators in the target district.



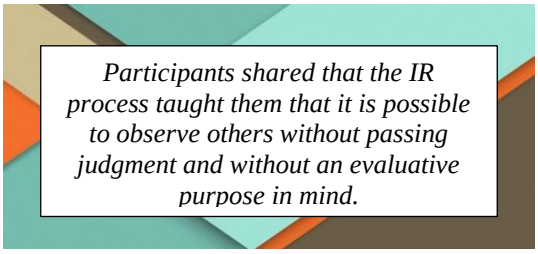
The findings in this evaluative case study include the results of the online questionnaire administered to 456 educational professionals and the one-to-one interviews that were conducted with eight administrators in the target district. All educational professionals at the target district, with the exception of the professionals employed in the building at which the researcher is a principal, were provided the opportunity to complete the online questionnaire. This was done to assure that constituents from all levels, elementary, middle and high school were represented. A number of 86 professionals (19%) of the 456 potential participants completed the online questionnaire. Of the 86 respondents 51 were elementary representatives, 23 were middle-level representatives, nine were high school respondents and 3 were central administration respondents.

A more selective process was utilized when inviting administrators to participate in the one-to-one interview. After careful consideration, it was noted that administrator attrition and turnover had reduced the number of principals in the target district who had experienced IR upon implementation in 2011. Therefore, ten principals who were a part of the initial implementation were selected to be interviewed and eight agreed to participate in the interview.

Findings

Participation in IR, based on research findings in this study, has increased the amount of time spent weekly for of observing teaching and learning in classrooms. The theme of teaching and learning investment, while discussed often in the interviews, also appeared through a Likert items in the questionnaire. Before the implementation of IR, 56.76% of participants spent less than 5% of their time on a weekly basis observing the teaching and learning process. This percentage decreased to 48% of participants spending less than 5% of their classroom time being spent on observing the teaching and learning process after the implementation of IR. Additionally, the 7.32% of teachers who reported spending more than 30% of their time observing teaching and learning prior to the implementation of IR, increased to 11.39% of participants investing more than 30% of their time observing teaching and learning, providing further evidence of the validity of this theme.

Participants shared that the IR process taught them that it is possible to observe others without passing judgment and without an evaluative purpose in mind. Allowing teachers to spend time observing other teachers has become more comfortable as teachers know that this is a valuable experience intended to help others improve practices. One participant added that more time needs to be allocated to teachers for the purpose of observing other Teachers within their building as well as within the district.



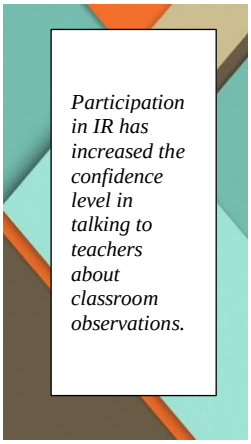
A common theme shared by administrators during the one-to-one interviews includes the growth in ability to conduct more focused observations. Observations are now more fine-grained and non-judgmental with a factual synthesis of what is actually observed. Observations are now conducted with a multi-tiered focus including what the teacher is doing (teaching), what the students are doing (learning), and the task (engagement). Administrators find that participation in IR has increased the number of walkthroughs that are conducted within their building, as teachers now desire the observation, non-evaluative, feedback to improve the teaching and learning process in classrooms.

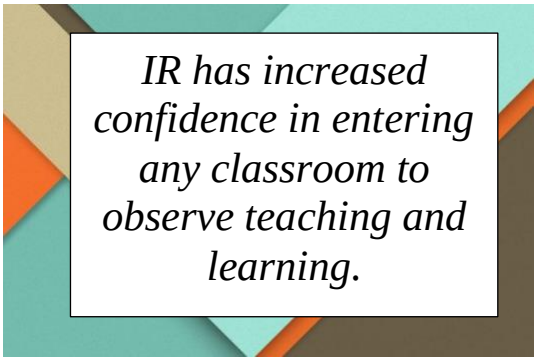
Participation in IR has increased the amount of time weekly spent in conversation about the instructional core in the target district. Prior to the implementation of IR, 35.80% of participants reported that they conversed about the instructional core a few times per week while this increased to 46.15% of participants conversing about the instructional core a few times per week after IR was implemented. This increase of conversation about the instructional core on a weekly basis provides further evidence of the validity of this theme. Additionally, 17.28 % of participants reported that they spent time daily conversing about the instructional core prior to the implementation of IR. Following the implementation of IR, the percentage of participants who engaged in conversation about the instructional core on a daily basis increased to 26.92%.

Participants indicated that their level of investment in teaching and learning outside of the classroom has increased as a result of the implementation of IR. Prior to the implementation of IR, 23.17% of participants reported that they spend most of their time outside of the classroom on teaching and learning while this percentage increased to 50.65% of participants reporting that they spend most of their time on teaching and learning after the implementation of IR, again supporting the validity of this theme. After the implementation of IR, teachers shared their desire to work with their grade level team members to discuss teaching and learning more frequently but time was just not available to do so. Administrators report that they now build their building level schedules with time built into the schedule for common planning time for grade level

team members. Weekly common planning time is at an all-time high within most buildings in the target district.

Teachers and administrators agree that participation in IR has increased confidence in entering any classroom to observe teaching and learning. Prior to the implementation of IR, 55.70% of questionnaire participants reported that they had moderate confidence levels entering classrooms to observe teaching and learning. This increased to 57.89% of participants feeling moderate levels after the implementation of IR. Additionally, 24.05% of participants reported that they had a great deal of confidence entering classrooms to observe teaching and learning. Following the implementation of IR, this increased to 35.53% of participants who shared that they experienced a great deal of confidence entering classrooms to observe teaching and learning.



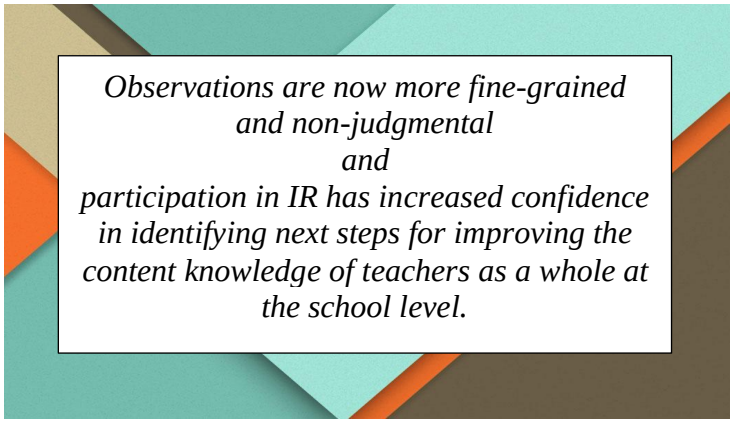


One teacher reports that IR have opened the door of opportunity for educators to recognize the broad diversity of knowledge and teaching practices available within the

walls of their own school. Teachers are now more apt to see fellow educators as valuable resources in addressing the many challenges presented by the instructional core. Peers seem more like to be open with questions and challenges that affect them as teachers and see them as a support team and a storehouse of instructional best practices.

The theme of observation, while discussed often in the interviews, also appeared through several of the specific Likert items in the questionnaire. Participation in IR has increased the confidence level in talking to teachers about classroom observations. Before IR was implemented in the target district, 27.16% of participants reported that they had a great deal of confidence when talking to teachers about classroom observations. This increased to 38.46% of participants who felt a great deal of confidence in talking to teachers about classroom observations following the implementation of IR. Observations are now more fine-grained and non-judgmental. This has impacted the way in which teachers and administrators discuss observations. Conversations about observations are factual and based completely upon evidence gathered during the observation. The conversations focus on what the teacher did, what the students did and what the task observed was. Teachers and administrators reported that following the implementation of IR, discussions about observations became highly reflective in nature. All stakeholders are now analyzing the factual data gathered during an observation and reflecting upon what was most successful and where changes could be made to enhance the teaching and learning process.

As the observational process between administrator to teacher and teacher to teacher evolved so too did the ability to assess student learning through observation. One of the three focus areas during observation, as defined by IR, is that of the student. Teachers and administrators have moved from focusing solely on what the teacher is doing during an observation to including what the students are doing. Prior to the implementation of IR, 28.05% of participants reported that they were substantially informed of how well their students were learning as a result of observation. After the implementation of IR, the percentage of participants who reported that they were substantially informed of how well their students were learning as a result of the use of observation increased to 46.84%.



Participation in IR has increased knowledge of how well students are learning through observation of student learning in classrooms on a regular basis. It was shared that students are now information providers during observations. Teachers and administrators now ask students what they are doing and also what they are learning during classroom observations.

Participation in IR has increased confidence in identifying next steps for improving the content knowledge of teachers as a whole at the school level. Prior to the implementation of IR in the target district, 56.79% of participants reported that they had a moderate level of confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the school level. Following the implementation of IR this percentage increased to 62.82% of participants who shared that they were moderately confident. Additionally, prior to IR, 8.64% of participants reported that they had a great deal of confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the school level. This percentage increased to 20.51% of participants who reported that they felt a great deal of confidence after the implementation of IR.

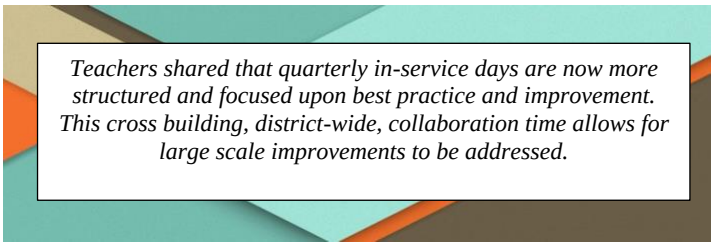
One teacher shared that interactions with colleagues following IR were reflection focused during which time they examined and reexamined teaching and learning practices, the goal, to refine teaching practices. Teachers found collaboration time a time to build common goals and target school success. Asking questions about current teaching practices have become commonplace. With the high demands of today's learning environments, the need for practice and models like IR ensure student success and teacher improvement and refinement. Administrators report that through the IR debriefing their collaborative building teams have identified school specific problems of proactive which they desire to improve upon. A few examples provided include targeting differentiated instruction, modeling, questioning and understanding by design. 81.25% of educators who participated in the online questionnaire believe that when it comes to the

IR network if they do not know something, others in the network will help them learn it and if among them they do not know something, together they can learn it.

While teachers and administrators report that IR impacted the confidence level in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the school level, questionnaire and interview data also support an increase in confidence levels at the district level. Participants were asked what level of confidence they had in regards to identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the district level. 28.40% of participants shared that they had little confidence prior to the implementation of IR while this decreased to 16.67% of participants who felt little confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the district level after IR implementation. Prior to implementation, 6.17% of participants shared that they experienced a great deal of confidence in identifying next steps for improving content knowledge at the district level while 19.23% of participants reported feeling a great deal of confidence after the implementation of IR in the target district. As each school identifies a new problem of practice to focus upon for school improvement the district benefits. Monthly DILT meetings are now data-driven and goal oriented. Administrators share school-wide problem of practice progress with colleagues. The DILT collaborates and builds district level growth goals. Teachers shared that quarterly in-service days are now more structured and focused upon best practice and improvement. This cross building, district-wide, collaboration time allows for large scale improvements to be addressed. 70.51% of educators who participated in the online questionnaire believe that participating in IR has helped with learning what

they can stop, start, and/or continue in their role as a result of what they see in classrooms.

Prior to IR, teachers felt like observations were evaluative in nature. Identifying constructive growth areas was previously viewed as negative and felt punitive. Participation in IR has increased the capacity to discuss and make meaning of all types of data about my school, flattering and unflattering has increased. One administrator reports that collaboration has improved and grown from teacher to teacher, administrator to teacher, and administrator to administrator. A higher level of trust among and between all stakeholders within the district has emerged as a result of IR, specifically the debriefing portion of the process. Stakeholders are now better able to identify strength and needs and reflect upon ways in which to move toward best practice and overall school and district improvement.



Teachers and administrators shared that a strong shift in focus upon teaching and learning has occurred since the implementation of IR within the district. Participation in IR has increased the amount of time during out of classroom work by adults, such as faculty meetings, spending more time on matters of teaching and learning. Administrators are building large blocks of weekly common planning time into teacher schedules. Monthly faculty meetings have taken on a completely different format. One administrator

reports that monthly meetings are now considered professional development power hours at which teachers share best practice and coaching occurs. Quarterly in-service days have evolved into differentiated tiered learning opportunities specifically related to problems of practice.

Participation in IR has increased the ability to identify staff development for our teachers, coaches, and administrators that is directly linked to our school-wide needs in the instructional core. Prior to the implementation of IR in the target district, 50.62% of participants reported that they had some ability to identify staff development for teachers, coaches and administrators while this percentage decreased to 20.15% who felt some ability after IR. Additionally, 2.47% of participants reported that they had a great deal of ability to identify staff development while this percentage increased to 19.23% of participants who felt that they had a great deal of ability after the implementation of IR.

Administrators shared that many school-wide as well as district-wide professional development opportunities grew out of the implementation of IR. The DILT is a network of educators, formed as a result of IR, who meet over time to examine educational

programming, teaching and learning practices, and collaborate often to build a common language and an understanding of teaching and learning practices (City, 2011). This group of professionals, previously called the Cabinet Team, had previously met on a monthly basis for basic information sharing and disbursement of district-wide news. Monthly DILT meetings are now driven by professional development guiding administrators to become more effective leaders within their schools and the district. Administrators share that they now feel more confident in their ability to plan and implement professional development to their faculty and staff as a result of their membership in DILT and their participation in IR. One elementary principal shared that there is an increased engagement in planning and implementing targeted problems of practice within the school including but not limited to questioning, modeling, problem-solving, and assessment.

The school community is better able to perceive the totality of instruction as it is implemented across the school and the district.

Teachers shared that, prior to IR, they traditionally had tunnel vision and spent most of their time focused on their classroom and the students within their classroom. Participation in IR has increased the ability to direct attention beyond individual classrooms to also consider school-wide strengths and needs. One teacher reported that there is now a feeling of global perspective within the school. Peers seem more open and receptive to discuss questions and challenges, which may affect them.

The three-tiered observation model of IR; teacher, student, and task has taken the focus off of what the teacher is doing in the classroom and shifted the focus to how the instructional core is impacting teaching and learning. Participation in IR has increased the collective inquiry about the instructional core. Prior to the implementation of IR, 35.80% of participants reported that they conversed about the instructional core a few times per week while this increased to 46.15% of participants conversing about the instructional core a few times per week after IR was implemented. This increase of conversation about the instructional core on a weekly basis provides further evidence of the validity of this theme. Additionally, 17.28 % of participants reported that they spent time daily conversing about the instructional core prior to the implementation of IR. Following the implementation of IR, the percentage of participants who engaged in conversation about the instructional core on a daily basis increased to 26.92%.

Participation in IR has increased the ability to direct attention beyond individual classrooms to also consider school-wide strengths and needs.

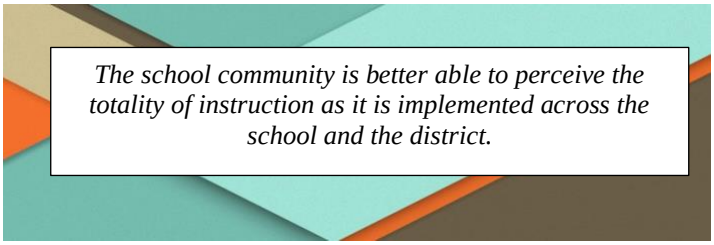
Teachers and administrators agree that the shift from simply focusing on what a teacher is doing in a classroom to including the engagement of a task as well as the role students play is critical. When asked if participation in IR had changed how administrators think educationally one elementary principal responded, "Absolutely. It has increased the understanding of the value of administrators and teachers alike, getting into classrooms as

often as possible to see teacher, task, and students in action in order to improve in best practice." Another principal shared that the power of sharing has emerged across the district since the implementation of IR. the teaching and learning

process. IR helped another elementary principal help teacher through coaching. There has been a definite increase of differentiated instruction, the target problem of practice at the school, and he noted that small group instruction across the district has been increasing, as there is an overall awareness of best practice.

While a great deal of positive feedback regarding the results of what has occurred within the target district as a result on the implementation of IR has been shared, one major piece missing from the feedback was problem-solving. Teacher and administrator responses did not directly relate to the original problem of practice identified by the DILT, problem-solving. In the one-to-one interviews, administrators were asked if IR changed teaching and learning related to our initial specific problem of practice, problem-solving. All responded similarly. The district has not been able to measure the progress of problem-solving within the district as a result of the implementation of IR but all also elaborated that the original problem of practice was too broad. What is problem-solving? How can problem-solving be measured? How is problem-solving defined? A middle school assistant principal shared that he believes that as a district we are better preparing our students to become problem-solvers by building a common language across all settings through the FIPS as well as targeting more specific problem-solving components such as questioning. An elementary principal shared that he believes that the students in the district, as well as

the teachers, staff, and administrators, are all better problem-solvers now than we were prior to IR. IR have shifted our curricular focus on standards, common core, questioning processes, real-world examples al all have improved our overall scientific and mathematical inquiry. Another shared that she does not think that we can prove that we are making progress in problem-solving through data collection but as a district, she feels that there is a dedication to creating better problem-solvers based upon the levels of critical thinking that students are demonstrating in STEM and STEAM. Another shared that problem-solving may not be provable but questioning as a problem of practice was targeted by all schools the second year of IR and our students and teachers have demonstrated a clear shift from documents lower level questioning to higher level more application-level questioning in classrooms across the district. Based upon what a final administrator sees in classrooms at her building, progress is being made. Teachers have significantly increased collaborative practices, questions are shifting to higher levels, interaction and inquiry are on the rise and the data collected during IR helps guide us to continue moving forward.



Concerns regarding the IR process emerged through the questionnaire and interview responses and feedback. Teacher feedback pointed to a lack of professional development specifically related to the IR process prior to the implementation. Some shared that even

though they were told that the observations were not evaluative in nature they still felt like they were on stage and evaluation was the goal. Some of the teachers who were observed were not provided an opportunity to participate in subsequent IR and did not feel that they were a true part of the process. One teacher shared that if he/she were given the opportunity to observe someone else in the process or if he/she had been given specific feedback more learning may have taken place.

Another concern that emerged from the data was that of the number of full IR and follow up. Teachers seem to find great value in the process but shared that IR were done only once or twice within their school and that they would like to see more sessions and opportunities to participate in IR. One shared, as an observer in the IR process, there were enjoyment and definite benefit as an observer. Compiling the data after the observation took place and analyzing the data during the debrief process provided learning opportunities for the teacher and for all other educators in the building. This teacher feels like he/she is a better educator as a result of being a part of the process and desires additional IR opportunities for self and others.

Students and teachers have demonstrated a clear shift from documents lower level questioning to higher level more application-level questioning in classrooms across the district.

Administrative concerns regarding the IR process include the challenges of planning, logistics, and time. When asked if challenges or concerns were encountered during the IR

process, one administrator shared that the process is a large time commitment and found it difficult to stay the course. Another shared that he/she wished there was more time to really digging into the process. There is limited time to analyze data, limited time to provide follow-up and resources, limited time to provide opportunities, limited time for planning and preparation. An elementary school principal indicated that having a single administrator in charge of planning; implementation and follow up made the process cumbersome for that administrator.

The original format for IR was highly protocol driven and found a tedious amount of detail embedded, which became the primary focus for some administrators. One reported that having the correct baskets to hold materials, the correct color sticky table, the correct peppermints, and chocolates, the correct markers and chart paper, etc. was a monumental task. This administrator shared a level of concern for reprimand if he/she did not have the correct materials for the rollout of IR as defined by higher level administration.

Recommendations

This qualitative project study was conducted to offer a comprehensive program evaluation of IR within the target district. The conclusion of the evaluation represents the overall perspective that IR are an effective process for all stakeholders. As such, it would be of benefit to the decision makers to consider the following recommendations to assure that schools within the district are improving the overall teaching and learning process through the identification of problems of practice.

Recommendation 1: Continue instructional rounds at all levels

Data collected for this project study indicates that all stakeholders found value in the IR processes at all levels.

- Conduct one, full scale, district level IR per year. This will allow stakeholders the opportunity to see teaching and learning outside of their school. District level rounds also allow stakeholders to get a wide-angle view of teaching and learning that occurs throughout the district. District level rounds also allow trained DILT members to model expectations while providing coaching opportunities and incidental professional development opportunities. DILT team members should take turns hosting and planning this level of rounds. This will allow leaders in the district to collaborate and learn from one another.
- Allow each school to conduct one building level IR per year. This would find central administration providing the necessary resources: substitute teachers, materials, and supplies. Administrators are also looking to central administration for assistance in planning the building level rounds with looser regulations. Understanding that each building has its own unique sets of needs.

Recommendation 2: Continue the DILT on a monthly basis

All administrators shared that DILT is a valuable professional development opportunity which helps prepare them to lead their teachers and staff toward overall improvement. Prior to the induction of DILT administrators shared that professional development was absent for professionals at their level. The learning that takes place during DILT,

according to the principals interviewed, is invaluable in turn keying professional deployment to their faculty and staff.

Recommendation 3: Continue the SILT on a monthly basis

Administrators are feeling more confident in leading their faculty and staff in identifying problems of practice specific to their buildings. Continuing SILT on a monthly basis allows teachers and administrators the opportunity to build collaborative practices, building level growth opportunities, and stronger overall culture and climate for learning.

Recommendation 4: Build time into the school year for all professionals to observe teaching and learning

One of the biggest themes identified in this program evaluation on IR was the significant increase in confidence of all stakeholders in the observation process. It is recommended that district administration building in opportunities for all professional to travel into classrooms outside of their building for the purpose of fine-grained, non-judgmental observations of teaching and learning. All professionals should be provided this opportunity bi-annually. This would require district administration to invest in the necessary resources, substitute teachers.

Recommendation 5: Build time into the school year for district level communication and collaboration

Time is the most evident obstacle in the way of collaboration and communication. It is recommended that district administration provide one full in-service day, per quarter, to allow all stakeholders to communicate and collaborate about building and district level goals.

Conclusion

Educational professionals within the target district have expressed feedback regarding the benefits gained as a result of the implementation of IR as well as the concerns related to IR. It has been proven, through this qualitative evaluative case study on IR that this process is highly effective in improving best practice across all settings within the target district. If district administration adapts the implementation of IR, this process stands to benefit the overall teaching and learning process at all schools within the district and move the district forward.

Appendix B: Instructional Rounds Questionnaire

Instructional Rounds Survey for **School-Level Educators** - Revised
Developed by Thomas Fowler-Finn, Instructional Rounds Plus; Susan Frankel, RMC Research; and Adam Tanney, RMC Research
June 24, 2010

This survey is designed to capture school-level educators (e.g., principals, teachers, and coaches) reflections on beliefs, knowledge, and skills within the Instructional Rounds process being implemented in your districts and schools.

There are no correct or incorrect answers; we want to understand your views on teaching and learning and your role facilitating improvement. You may skip any questions you do not feel comfortable completing.

Individual responses will be confidential and responses will be reported in the aggregate. The identifying information (Questions 23 & 24) is only for the purpose of tracking survey responses over time.

Section I. One way to understand your experiences with the Instructional Rounds process is to find out about attitudes and beliefs you had **before** and **after** participating. Please rate your attitudes and beliefs with the following statements.

	Less than 5%	5%-10%	10%-20%	20%-30%	More than 30%
1. **Before** participating in IR I spent …… amount of my time weekly for the purpose of observing teaching and learning in classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
After participating in IR I spend …… amount of my time weekly for the purpose of observing teaching and learning in classrooms.	1	2	3	4	5
2. **Before** participating in IR I spent …… amount of my time weekly in conversations about the instructional core.	1	2	3	4	5
After participating in IR I spend …… amount of my time weekly in conversations about the instructional core.	1	2	3	4	5

	Almost never	A few times a month	A few times each week	Every day
3. **Before** participating in IR I initiated and guided conversations about student learning with teachers……	1	2	3	4
After participating in IR I initiate and guide conversations about student learning with teachers ……	1	2	3	4

	No confidence	Little confidence	Moderate level of confidence	Great deal of confidence
4. **Before** participating in IR I had …… confidence to enter any classroom to observe learning and teaching.	1	2	3	4
After participating in IR I have …… confidence to enter any classroom to observe learning and teaching.	1	2	3	4
5. **Before** participating in IR I had …… confidence talking to teachers about my classroom observations.	1	2	3	4
After participating in IR I have …… confidence talking to teachers about my classroom observations.	1	2	3	4

	Not informed	Somewhat informed	Substantially informed
6. **Before** participating in IR my knowledge of how well students were learning was …… informed by observing student learning in classrooms on a regular basis.	1	2	3
After participating in IR my knowledge of how well students are learning is …… informed by observing student learning in classrooms on a regular basis.	1	2	3

	No confidence	Little confidence	Moderate level of confidence	Great deal of confidence
7. **Before** participating in IR I had …… confidence identifying next steps for improving the content knowledge of teachers as a whole at our school.	1	2	3	4
After participating in IR I have …… confidence identifying next steps for improving the content knowledge of teachers as a whole at our school.	1	2	3	4
8. **Before** participating in IR I had …… confidence identifying next steps for improving the instructional practices of teachers as a whole in our schools.	1	2	3	4
After participating in IR I have ……confidence identifying next steps for improving the instructional practices of teachers as a whole in our schools.	1	2	3	4

	No capacity	Some capacity	Great deal of capacity
9. **Before** participating in IR our school had ……. capacity to discuss and make meaning of all types of data about my school, flattering and unflattering.	1	2	3
After participating in IR our school has ……. capacity to discuss and make meaning of all types of data about my school, flattering and unflattering.	1	2	3

	None of our time	Some of our time	Most of our time
10. **Before** IR, during out-of-classroom work by adults, such as in faculty meetings, we spent ……. of our time on matters of teaching and learning.	1	2	3
After IR, during out-of-classroom work by adults, such as in faculty meetings, we spend …….of our time on matters of teaching and learning.	1	2	3

	No ability	Some ability	Moderate ability	Great deal of ability
11. **Before** IR I had ……. ability to identify staff development for our teachers, coaches, and administrators that is directly linked to our school-wide needs in the instructional core.	1	2	3	4
After IR I have ……. ability to identify staff development for our teachers, coaches, and administrators that is directly linked to our school-wide needs in the instructional core.	1	2	3	4

	Very uncomfortable	Uncomfortable	Comfortable	Very comfortable
12. **Before** participating in this IR network, I would have been ……. comfortable admitting to the other individuals in this network when I didn't know something and needed help.	1	2	3	4
After participating in this IR network, I am …….comfortable admitting to the other individuals in this network when I don't know something and need help.	1	2	3	4

	No ability	Some ability	Moderate ability	Great deal of ability
13. **Before** IR I had ……. ability to direct attention beyond individual classrooms to also consider school-wide strengths and needs.	1	2	3	4
After IR I have……..ability to direct attention beyond individual classrooms to also consider school-wide strengths and needs.	1	2	3	4

	Never	Sometimes	Regularly
14. **Before** participating in IR our school engaged ……. in collective inquiry about the instructional core.	1	2	3
After participating in IR our school engages ……. in collective inquiry about the instructional core.	1	2	3

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
15. **Before** participating in IR, I learned about matters of teaching and learning from other educators in ***my school.***	1	2	3	4
After participating in IR, I learn about matters of teaching and learning from other educators in ***my school.***	1	2	3	4
16. **Before** participating in IR, I learned about matters of teaching and learning from other educators ***across our district/network***.	1	2	3	4
After participating in IR, I learn about matters of teaching and learning from other educators ***across our district/network***.	1	2	3	4

Section II. Please rate your current level of agreement with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
17. Since participating in IR, I am learning what I can stop, start, and/or continue in my role, as a result of what I see in classrooms.	1	2	3	4
18. When it comes to our IR network, if I don't know something, others in the network will help me learn it, and if among us we don't know something, together we can learn it.	1	2	3	4

Section III. Open-ended questions

19. What, if anything, do you believe differently about teaching and learning since your participation in the instructional rounds process?

20. What, if anything, do you believe differently about your role since your participation in the instructional rounds process?

21. Since participating in IR has your school engaged in additional practices to talk about teaching and learning, such as changes in scheduling or reorganization to allow staff to examine student work and instructional materials?

    ___ No ___ Yes ___ Not yet Please describe
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

22. Please offer any other comments you'd like to make about your engagement in the instructional rounds process.
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

Section IV. General Information

23. Please identify your primary professional role. (Choose only one)
    ___ Principal
    ___ Teacher
    ___ Coach
    ___ Single School Curriculum Specialist
    ___ Other, please describe ……

24. How many sessions facilitated by Tom Fowler-Finn have you attended? _____

Appendix C: Permission to Use Instructional Rounds

Aug 20 15 06:14p Thomas Fowler-Finn 7813955401 p.1

August 19, 2015

Dear Thomas Fowler- Finn,

I am a doctoral student from Walden University writing my dissertation tentatively titled, Perspectives of *Instructional Rounds on Problem Solving: An Evaluative Case Study*, under the direction of my dissertation committee chaired by Dr. Michael Wronkovitch.

I would like your permission to reproduce the *Instructional Rounds Survey for School Level Educators* in my research study. I would like to use and print your study under the following conditions:

- I will use this survey only for my research study and will not sell or use it with any compensated or curriculum development activities.
- I will include the copyright statement on all copies of the instrument.
- I will send my research study and one copy of reports, articles, and the like that make use of this survey data promptly to your attention.

If these are acceptable terms and conditions please indicate so by signing one copy of this letter and returning it to me through postal mail, fax, or email.

Postal Address:
13 Timber Drive
Alburtis, PA 18011

Fax:
610-966-8349

Sincerely,
Cheryl A. Scalzo
Doctoral Candidate

I grant permission requested on terms stated in this letter:

Agreed and accepted: Thomas Fowler-Finn
Date: 8/21/2015

Mrs. Cheryl A. Scalzo
Principal
Jefferson Elementary School

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introduction:

I want to thank you for taking time to meet with me today. My name is Cheryl Scalzo and I would like to talk with you about your experiences participating in Instructional Rounds. Specifically, as one of the components of my overall program evaluation study I am looking to assess program effectiveness of Instructional Rounds and the impact upon problem-solving in the teaching and learning process in our district.

This interview should take less than one hour. I will be taping the session because I do not want to miss any of your comments. Although I will be taking some notes during our session, I can't possibly write fast enough to get it all down.

All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your interview response will remain with me and I ensure that any information I include in my report will not identify you as a respondent. Remember you do not have to talk about anything you do not want to and you may end this interview at any time.

You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as someone who has a great deal to share about Problem-Solving as well as Instructional Rounds. My research project as a whole focuses on problem-solving teaching methods and practices and ultimately the improvement of problem-solving skills in students at grade Kindergarten through 12 in our district with the implementation of Instructional Rounds.

Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

Are you willing to participate in this interview?

_____

_____ _____

(Interviewee) (Witness) (Date)

A. Interviewee Background

1. How long have you been in your current position at this institution?
2. What is your highest degree?_____

B. Instructional rounds questions

3. Briefly describe your role as it relates to instructional rounds.
4. Given your experience with IR, are you now looking through a different lens when you visit classrooms in your school.
5. Have you engaged in a professional discussion around teacher practice as a result of participating in IR?
6. Have you implemented anything new at your school as a result of IR?
7. Have you engaged in professional reading as a result of IR?
8. Has being a part of IR changed your thinking-educationally?
9. Has your knowledge of best practice improved as a result of IR?

10. Have you led any PD as a result of IR?
11. Have your observational skills improved as a result of IR?
12. Have you addressed a specific problem of practice been addressed through IR?
13. Have IR changed teaching and learning related to the specific problem addressed (Problem-solving)?
15. Have you experienced any challenges or concerns with Instructional Rounds?

Possible probing questions

i. Could you please tell me more about…
ii. Could you tell me more about your thinking on that?
iii. You mention… Can you tell me why that stands out in your mind?
iv. Can you give me an example of…
v. What makes you feel that way?

C. Closing Key Components
   a. Is there anything more you would like to add?
   b. I will be analyzing the information you and others gave me and submitting my findings to Walden University in partial fulfillment of my EdD Project Study. I will be happy to send you a copy to review at that time, if you are interested.

Thank you for your time.

Appendix E: Interview Transcript Protocol

Labeling Focus Group Transcripts

Individual interview transcript shall include the following labeling information at the top of the document:

- Interviewer:
- Participant:
- Date of Interview:
- Time of Interview:
- Location of Interview:

CONTENT

Audiotapes shall be transcribed verbatim (i.e., recorded word for word, exactly as said), including any nonverbal or background sounds (e.g., laughter, sighs, coughs, claps, snaps fingers, pen clicking, and car horn).

Sensitive Information

If an individual uses his or her own name during the discussion, the transcriber shall replace this information with the appropriate interviewee identification label/naming convention.

Documenting Questions and comments

Comments or questions by the Interviewer should be labeled with by typing I: at the left margin and then indenting the question or comment.

Any comments or responses from participants should be labeled with P: at the left margin with the response indented.

Start of Interview:

Interviewer (I):

Participant (P):

I:
P:
I:
P:

End of Interview

In addition, the transcriber shall indicate when the interview session has reached completion by typing END OF INTERVIEW in uppercase letters on the last line of the transcript.

Appendix F: Permission to Use Interview Questions

From: [redacted] **Sent:** Wednesday, August 19, 2015 6:43 PM **To:** Scalzo, Cheryl **Subject:** Instructional Rounds

Hi Cheryl, Please feel free to use whatever you like. I share everything as that's the type of teacher I am. I've been involved as a teacher in many rounds and have found rounds to be fantastic PD. Everyone on my staff is involved in rounds now at our school. Its a huge commitment but if you really want to change teaching and learning it works. The introduction of rounds as a tool for school reflection has been exceptional. All teachers from grads to experienced and leadership are part of the process and feedback has only been positive. My school is [redacted] and my principal is [redacted] We have YouTubes as well. Cheers [redacted]