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**Instructional Rounds and Teacher Social/Emotional Wellbeing:
Investigating the Regenerative Potential of Peer Observation**

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Upper Montclair, NJ

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

Instructional Rounds and Teacher Social/Emotional Wellbeing:

Investigating the Regenerative Potential of Peer Observation

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Abstract

This study focused on the regenerative potential of peer observation in a post-pandemic educational climate. Teachers shared that the culture of the profession was drastically changed during and after the pandemic partly due to the restrictions put in place that prevented colleague relationships from beginning or continuing and partly due to the negative public perception of teachers. As a result, this study aimed to discern how peer observation and modified instructional round practices might affect teachers' social/emotional wellbeing. Through interviews, rounds, and focus group meetings, teachers were willing to share their vulnerabilities around their feelings of loneliness and their yearning for more professional collaboration. The instructional rounds process ultimately led teacher participants to gain new instructional practices and to interact with their colleagues more frequently. This combination contributed to the increased teacher morale found in the data analysis. Implications for this study involve adjustments in teacher education programs, administrative and state policies, teacher voice in professional development, and potential future research focusing on teacher morale.

Keywords: peer-observation, instructional rounds, communities of practice, relational trust, social/emotional wellbeing, COVID-19 pandemic

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Next, I would like to acknowledge my critical friends Donna and Tara, without whom this dissertation would not be as robust. Their overall support of my career goals and my goals as a researcher have uplifted me throughout this process. They have both become dear friends in addition to professional colleagues for life.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge both the teachers I have had over the course of my education as well as the incredible teachers who were the participants of this study. I knew I wanted to work in education when I was a very young child and that passion continued because of the innovative and enthusiastic teachers I had throughout my education. The participants in this study were nothing short of amazing, selfless professionals. They not only gave up their time for me, but they also constantly checked in on me throughout the entire program. I cherish their friendship and appreciate their professionalism.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my selfless husband, Raphael, and to my three wonderful children, Benjamin, Evan, and Nicolas. Without their support to have the time to write and to let Mama do her homework, I would not have been able to accomplish this life goal of earning my doctorate. The encouragement my husband has given me throughout this process and his faith in me have been unwavering. I swelled with pride when my boys jumped around our living room after they heard I was done with Chapter 5 and knew we could spend more time together again.

I also want to thank my mother who has always been my cheerleader and who told me from a very young age that no matter what, no one can ever take your education from you. Her truly unwavering support of all of my goals in life has been a blessing that cannot accurately be put into words.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The faculty room in the library of the high school in which I work had been transformed from its original function as a collaborative workspace into a room of catharsis and complaining. “Warriors” was a term that came up far too often inside those four walls. The deep red, rust orange, and sunflower yellow window decals that spell out motivational phrases were lost among the heavy conversation about the need to protect students from danger and the burden of covering classes when someone decides it really is time to retire even though it is the middle of the school year. Earlier this year, I sank down into one of the leather chairs situated in this room with the goal of writing my lesson plans and trying to think of something innovative to keep my juniors engaged in the first full school year of their high school career because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Repeatedly, I was interrupted by person after person who stopped by with some emotional heavy load they were carrying at the time. Teachers are empathetic people by nature and strangers often tell me what it is that is worrying them, so some of these conversations did not come as a surprise. However, as friends, colleagues, and acquaintances joined me in the tiny faculty room that day, I wondered what could be done to allow teachers to feel the spark I know they once felt when coming to work. Teachers had often confessed their disappointment in the lack of interaction among colleagues. The energy that once came from sharing our best practices with one another and planning cross-curricular projects had been diminished from a fiery passion to a vulnerable smolder, easily suffocated by the current educational climate, something noted among numerous publications (Belsha et al., 2022; Panadero et al., 2022). This coupled with two decades plus (with no end in sight) of government reforms focused on teacher performance and student growth have put immense pressure on teachers that had little avenue for diffusion (Gu & Day, 2007).

The previously described experiences were so distressing to me that I knew I wanted to study how collaboration among colleagues might be a catalyst for necessary change. Over the course of my career, some of my best teaching ideas came from cross-curricular lessons with my colleagues. Even when I was not planning coordinated lessons, having the opportunity to meet for vertical articulation to discuss gaps in student skills and expectations of student writing, reading comprehension, analysis, and synthesis across grade levels provided me with so much insight into what my colleagues were teaching. The collegial relationships built among the faculty allowed for an ebb and flow of informal teacher leaders who shared their ideas during our common planning meetings. Wenger and Lave (1991) explored the idea of a “decentered view of the master as pedagogue [which] moves the focus of analysis away from teaching and onto the intricate structuring of a community’s learning resources,” (p. 94) which may be pedagogical or may be comprised of many other skills that educators need to create best practices in their classrooms. I felt strongly that teacher-to-teacher interactions should not only be mentor to mentee. That is to say, “that the effects of peripheral participation on knowledge-in-practice are not properly understood; and that studies of apprenticeship have presumed too literal a coupling of work processes and learning processes” (Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 95). Learning from colleagues did not need to stop after the first year or two of teaching when formal mentoring ended. Educators are expected to fulfill a certain number of professional development hours each year in order to maintain an active teaching license but are too often not encouraged to learn from one another and instead seek out consultants outside their own districts.

What was less clear was the reason for the differences in teachers’ engagement with their colleagues. Was it dispositional? Or was it related to the chance to learn from one another? Therefore, I reasoned that if the teachers had more of a structured opportunity to engage with

each other's practice within the space of the school day, there would be benefits to their socioemotional wellbeing as well. The camaraderie that comes from learning communities, however formal or informal, is a major component of the teaching profession and yet does not have a space in the school district where I taught. Rather than assume the only time for a teacher to learn from another teacher is during their mentorship, the goal of instructional rounds and the modified observation cycle that I proposed for this study was for a community of practice to develop without the set roles of mentor/mentee. Teachers learn from peer observations. Their teacher noticings of best practices, of classroom physical space design, of decor and wall hangings, and of teacher/student rapport are just some of the takeaways that teachers have when given the opportunity to observe their colleagues. From what I had seen in my own practice in previous school districts, teachers who had visited their colleagues' classrooms and shared in their instructional experiences tended to be more friendly to these colleagues in the hallways. They sought one another out on their preps to nonchalantly bounce ideas off each other for upcoming lessons or unit plans or behavioral interventions. In my experience, teachers who spent time with other teachers have had a visibly more positive affect than those who were unable to share in both their successes and challenges with their professional counterparts.

Research Questions

Therefore, in this study, I sought to determine what the relationship between social/emotional benefits and modified instructional rounds might be for high school teachers in the suburban school district where I taught. My overarching research question was: What are the connections between perceptions of school climate, personal histories with teacher observations, and enacting opportunities to learn through instructional rounds? I then sought to address the following sub questions:

1. How are the components of modified instructional rounds affected by the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale? How do teachers participate in and experience the modified instructional rounds?
2. What kinds of personal and collaborative benefits do teachers experience/report when they engage in modified instructional rounds in a high school?

At the very least, my hope was that modified instructional rounds would create the conditions necessary to engage in work that would increase teacher collaboration and benefit the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers. The purpose of this study was to find out whether this hope was indeed supported by the evidence. In the following section I give an overview of the statement and context of the problem that led me to do this research. Then, I provide an explanation of the modified instructional rounds model that I used in the study.

Statement and Context of the Problem

Teacher wellbeing in Keystone was reflective of many other schools in the United States in a post-pandemic educational climate. Klarna's year end teacher wellbeing data collection survey of 2,400 teachers found that while "57% of teachers entered the profession to prepare young people for the future, 80% of teachers have considered leaving the profession, and 1 out of every 2 teachers has had to seek external support for work-related stress or anxiety" (Costa, 2023). This same study found that "68% of teachers feel their mental health has a direct impact on their students" (Costa, 2023). In a 2021 EdWeek survey, a large majority of students and teachers agreed that the higher teacher morale is, the more enthusiastic they are in the classroom and therefore the more interested the students are (Will, 2021). The LA School Report September 2022 issue focused on how:

poor morale among today's educators might dissuade tomorrow's from entering the field.

This sets up possible future teacher shortages in an already thin market. Moreover, teachers who are stressed out are absent often, and educator burnout can harm student achievement. Together, these factors could hamper students' efforts to recover from pandemic-related disruptions to schooling. (Steiner, 2022, para. 3)

Therefore, while the study site was the district where I worked, this data could be applied to other schools and would likely highlight the same concerns related to teacher mental health and teacher burnout.

COVID-19 Pandemic and the Resulting Educational Climate

It is important to contextualize the current need for teacher interaction given the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent years of educational budget cuts have created the reduction of lead teachers and teacher leaders who typically would have been the ones to foster peer observations for the benefit of obtaining best practices and to witness the interaction between shared students and another teacher with the goal of adding techniques to a teacher's classroom management and student rapport repertoire. Then, the COVID-19 pandemic hit and moved classroom instruction completely online for the end of the 2019–2020 school year. The world of education toggled between in-person and virtual instruction for much of the 2020–2021 school year as the rates of transmission rose and fell. Therefore, the 2021–2022 school year, which still had some virtual days during the winter months when illness rates were often higher as a result of being indoors, was the first school year in two years where teachers had the opportunity to collaborate again. Many were apprehensive about being in close quarters with other adults for fear of getting sick or spreading COVID-19 to vulnerable family members. Isolation among faculty began to take a toll on teacher social/emotional wellbeing (Conley & Cooper, 2013). Touting teachers as heroes in public discourse was a fleeting compliment (Lacomba et al., 2022). Once student learning

declined and teachers were blamed for the learning loss, teachers' social/emotional wellbeing and teacher morale declined even further (Belsha et al., 2022; Brion, 2022; Costa, 2023; Dreer, 2022; Pandero et al., 2022; Steiner et al., 2022). When school closures began to make an impact on parents' job status, teachers were the enemy again and there was yet another dip in teacher wellbeing. Teachers frequently relied on one another for perspective on how to work through societal demonization of their careers and other inaccurate perceptions of what being an educator is really about, but they had not had the opportunity to connect in far too long, at potentially the most vulnerable point in their careers. Even if school districts are resistant to focus on teacher social/emotional wellbeing as opposed to student growth,

Research has also shown how teacher wellbeing could be an important determinant for student learning outcomes and wellbeing [and] as highlighted by the health promoting schools' perspective, an extension of the Ottawa Charter holistic definition of health promotion (World Health Organization [WHO], 1986), teachers' wellbeing is part of a wider process able to sustain, at the same time, the health of children, adolescents, and the entire school community (Moon, 1999; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Konu & Rimpelä, 2002 as cited in Converso et al., 2019, p. 2)

Teacher social/emotional health impacts teachers' wellbeing which in turn impacts students' wellbeing and the school environment as a whole (Eboka, 2017; Ellenberg, 1972). Teachers must be made a priority in the eyes of school district reform and professional development planning. Wenger and Lave (1991) explained that "Any given attempt to analyze a form of learning through legitimate peripheral participation must involve analysis of the political and social organization of that form, its historical development, and the effects of both of these on sustained possibilities for learning" (p. 64). Certainly, all administrators would support a

positive school environment, and if given an opportunity to bolster its climate, would take that opportunity. The obstacle in prioritizing teacher social/emotional wellbeing is that time is not provided for teachers to collaborate. As a high school educator, I saw firsthand the damage that isolation did on teenagers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. I was fairly certain the faculty members had also experienced those same emotions and feelings of isolation. The interactions from the faculty room described above were evidence that something needed to be done to support teachers. There are countless op-ed articles about the corrosive effects of teacher shaming that have come out of the pandemic (Thiers, 2021; Belsha et al., 2022). This coupled with teacher fatigue during the pandemic created an incredibly tense work environment:

Two years into the upheaval, [and] teachers are depleted. On top of the needs in their classrooms, teachers and their unions have faced scrutiny over school shutdowns, vaccine and mask mandates and Covid safety protocols, leading to labor strife in Chicago and elsewhere. Some teachers have begun having doubts about their ability to keep going. As three colleagues departed midyear for higher-paying jobs outside the classroom, Ms. Barros, who has taught for four years in Tulsa, found herself scrolling job listings earlier this winter. Like most, she's sticking it out.

"For a while, I was in that victim mentality of 'woe is me,' but I do have choices," she said. "And I'm choosing to stay because I love this." But America's schools remain fragile. As teachers catch their breath after the latest wave of Covid cases, many are teetering between cautious optimism and lingering exhaustion. (Belsha et al., 2022, para. 15–16)

Similar anecdotes were heard all across the United States and are certainly representative of the small New Jersey school district where I taught. There are urban school districts within my

county offering \$7,500 signing bonuses to teachers who commit to two years in that district.

Teachers are the foundation of all future leaders. As a society, we need them to stay in the classroom so that our children have strong role models and support systems and safe spaces to grow and learn. Teacher retention is also critical as more experienced teachers yield higher student achievement rates (Demir, 2021).

The pandemic created an immense burden on teachers beyond the realm of the health concerns it originally posed. Teachers were expected to continue business as usual using the video platform Zoom to engage children in their lessons. The mental health crisis that so many young people were affected by as a result of lack of social interaction and a large gap in time where mental health access was hindered by safety protocols correlated to a rise to school shootings and has therefore made teachers fearful of their own lives and those of their children (Belsha et al., 2022). Teachers are experiencing the impact of lack of social interactions just as much as their students. The structure of schools as currently set up is very isolating even without a pandemic (Lortie, 1975), and “the isolated culture of schools works against shared conceptions of problems and practices” (City et al., 2009, p. 10).

Teacher Morale and Social/Emotional Wellbeing

The lack of collaboration among colleagues and opportunities to share best practices is at the forefront of many conversations about the decline in teacher social/emotional wellbeing and the morale of teachers overall. Converso et al. (2019) described the gap in research on teacher morale (one piece of social/emotional wellbeing), defined teacher morale more clearly, and drew attention to the impact it has on student achievement. These factors were all part of my motivation to incorporate modified instructional rounds in my school district. Converso et al. (2019) stated:

Among the factors that could be identified as achieving positive occupational wellbeing outcomes, such as job satisfaction, engagement, or commitment, the concept of morale is one of the least studied. This concept refers to the presence of energy, persistence, cohesion, and cooperation, that reflects a positive psychological state of mind (Hart et al., 2000) and can represent an important indicator of individual and group wellbeing (Peterson et al., 2008). Concerning the school context, teacher morale (TM) should be regarded as the professional interest and enthusiasm displayed toward the achievement of individual and group goals within the school setting (Bentley & Rempel, 1980).

Therefore, it represents a form of a positive mental and emotional state that has the power to establish the character of a school. In addition, TM is considered one of the leading factors in determining the best functionality of a school (Eboka, 2017). (p. 2)

For the purposes of this study, drawing from the work of Smith (1966) and Hart et al. (2000), I defined teacher morale as the level of happiness, enthusiasm, and curiosity toward learning that teachers experience at work. This is just one part of their overall social/emotional wellbeing, but it plays a major role in teacher job satisfaction and in turn how teachers interact with one another, with their administrative team, and with their students (Bishay, 1996). Positive teacher social/emotional wellbeing, therefore, is not only beneficial for the teachers themselves, but also for the students in their classrooms and for the success of the school as a whole. However, when teachers become burned out because they are overworked or underappreciated, and “the burnout explanation fails to account for situations where the conditions of teaching change so dramatically that moral rewards, previously available in ever-challenging work, are now inaccessible” (Santoro, 2011, p. 1) teacher social/emotional wellbeing needs to become a

priority. It is important to note that teacher morale can be reliably self-reported to indicate the need for social/emotional support or to address the work climate in which they teach.

The need for teacher support was evident from my administration's perspective as well. There was much conversation among the faculty about the low morale as a result of the pandemic and the educational climate in the United States in general. My own administration's support for the present study can also be taken as evidence of the importance of addressing the issue of teacher morale.

Educational Observation Structure

The social organization of a typical school does not allow for peer-to-peer observations because of time restraints and schedule set-up. In addition, for the most part, there is an expectation that the administration knows the "right" way to teach and that teachers cannot seek to find it from one another. Given the opportunity, teachers do learn from one another through peer observations (Del Prete, 2013; Gore et al., 2017; Levene & Frank, 1993; Martin & Double, 1998; Meyer-Looze, 2015). Peer observations and teacher collaboration should be seen as readily available internal opportunities for professional development. When there is

Hegemony over resources for learning and alienation from full participation are inherent in the shaping of the legitimacy and peripherality of participation in its historical realizations . . . these relations generate characteristically interstitial communities of practice and truncate possibilities for identities of mastery. (Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 42)

Teacher observers in this study shared that they felt their colleagues were master teachers in a variety of ways and there were several takeaways from each peer observation in the modified rounds process. A major reason why the research of the modified instructional rounds, or observation cycles, was necessary was because what had been previously used in classroom

settings for teacher feedback was not an effective way of improving teacher practice. For instance, the walkthrough model that was originally supposed to be supportive of good teaching with quick, frequent visits to classrooms, “has become corrupted in many ways by confounding it with the supervision and evaluation of teachers. The purpose of some walkthroughs has been to identify deficiencies in classroom practice and to ‘fix’ teachers who manifest these deficiencies” (City et al., 2009, p. 4). One area of decline in teacher social/emotional wellbeing is a result of the punitive nature of walk-throughs. While they were not originally intended to “catch people” on an off day, walk-throughs give only a brief glimpse into a teacher’s whole day of teaching and have often been perceived as an opportunity to catch teachers doing less than what is expected of them. Bradley (2014) wrote that the difference between “Gotcha” and “Growth” is that “Gotcha” means that my principal finds everything wrong during the evaluation and tells me to improve while “Growth” means that I know what my strengths are, yet there is room for improvement” (p. 10). The feedback provided to the teacher is a mere snapshot of the rest of the lesson.

Risks of Educational Observation. It is important to attend to teacher wellbeing in order for teachers to grow professionally. And, it is difficult for teachers to maintain a high level of social/emotional wellbeing when they receive inconsistent observations from different observers. In Roberts’ (2013) description of the shift from learning walks/walk throughs to instructional rounds, for instance, principals could not agree on what instruction should look like, and, “in particular, they disagreed on what teachers and students actually do in rigorous classrooms. . . . In nearly every case [of video observations] there were as many principals who would rate a classroom as a 1 as who would rate the same classroom a 5” (p. 19). This inconsistency was reflected in teacher observations in the school district that was the site for this study as well. In fact, that was a frequent complaint of the participants in the study. Therefore, legitimate

peripheral participation (Wenger & Lave, 1991) was a helpful framework for revisiting schooling and the agendas that sometimes weave their way into classroom observations. For instance, “the organization of schooling as an educational form is predicated on claims that knowledge can be decontextualized, and yet schools themselves as social institutions and as places of learning constitute very specific contexts” (Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 39) that often have their own goals associated with the district’s mission. The district mission for all schools has a focus on students, as it should, and yet, might there have been a benefit to focus on teachers as well? Even though the focus of many school districts would not include a focus on teacher’s mental or social health, the implication of this study was such that the behind the scenes focus of district administration should prioritize teacher social/emotional wellbeing.

Benefits of Educational Observation. In education, we teachers know there is significant value in getting outside of our own classrooms to see teachers interacting with our students in different ways in different settings (Brown, 2018; City et al., 2009; City, 2011; Del Prete, 2013; Kahn, 2019; Melvin, 2017; Meyer-Looze, 2015; Prytula & Weiman 2012; Roberts, 2013; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999; Teitel, 2013). Using Wenger and Lave’s (1991) social learning theory, Brown (2018) sought to determine whether instructional rounds would increase teacher collaboration or improve teacher learning according to a set framework the school district designed. She found that teacher collaboration, respect for their colleagues, and professional relationships all improved after participating in instructional rounds. When participating in modified instructional rounds, teachers also saw different pedagogical strategies and, of course, what instructional content was being presented in other rooms. City et. al. (2009) and City (2011) explained that the purpose of instructional rounds is to gain a common understanding of language and what the system of education is doing to contribute to an identified problem of

practice so that there is a path forward to improve the problem of practice as a community of educators. Del Prete (2013) focused on the importance of creating a safe space for trust among colleagues as well as a positive school climate that welcomes genuine constructive criticism. As Kahn (2019) found, instructional rounds increased teacher reflection practices and professional conversations as well as improved teacher risk-taking with innovative instructional strategies. I considered that modified instructional rounds might encourage agency in the teachers and might create more of a sense of self-directed professional learning and a mutual learning in the way that communities of practice have been described (Wenger & Lave, 1991). The climate and structure of the educational environment significantly impacted the success of instructional rounds. Resistance to peer observations as a part of a culture of isolation and privacy have become common in education and were present in this study. A shift towards a positive climate would be required for successful instructional rounds to continue (Melvin, 2017). Continued practice of modified instructional rounds might be regenerative, helping teachers remember themselves and why they became teachers, with an added opportunity to spark their interest in their own growth. Inclusion in a professional learning community increases teacher growth in a variety of areas including their craft, moral, artistic, and scientific identities (Prytula & Weiman, 2012). The school climate needed and continues to need improvement in the site where this study was conducted. Teachers' craft and artistic skill, their moral and scientific identities had been lost in the negative culture of punitive observations and public mistrust of teachers as professionals capable of making decisions in the best interest of the children.

As a result of the fact that teachers in this particular school district's experiences with observations and evaluations had been inconsistent and had often been described as a "gotcha" rather than a growth opportunity, the path forward needed to include a way to show the value of

sharing teaching experiences. Teachers are not often given the opportunity to observe one another; that role is reserved for administrators only. When observations do occur, if they are only for the sake of data rather than for the goal of professional growth, the role of master is withheld from the teachers and teachers have no peers to look to for best practices. Teachers often do not seek peer observation in a way that is generative and engaging because the goal of “data-centric reform initiatives was not one of professional growth, but was instead a goal of direct fidelity of implementation of mandatory structured teaching practices” (Bradford & Braaten, 2018, p. 51). While teacher reflection on observation data is certainly an important part of professional growth, when the overall sentiment felt by the faculty is that the observation is intended to separate those who are strictly following the protocols from those who are not rather than on best practices in the classroom, teacher social/emotional wellbeing further declines.

The Use of Instructional Rounds in Teacher Learning

Within this study, I use the term instructional rounds as defined by City et al. (2009) as an adaptation and extension of the medical rounds model, which is used routinely in medical schools and teaching hospitals to develop the diagnostic and treatment practice of physicians. There are several versions of medical rounds, but in the most commonly used versions, groups of medical interns, residents, and supervising or attending physicians visit patients, observe and discuss the evidence for diagnoses, and, after a thorough analysis of the evidence, discuss possible treatments. The medical rounds process is the major way in which physicians develop their knowledge of practice and, more importantly, the way in which the profession builds and propagates its norms of practice. The rounds model embodies a specific set of ideas about how practitioners work together to solve common problems and to improve their practice. In the education

context, we call this practice *instructional rounds*, or *rounds* for short. (p. 3)

Therefore, the key features of instructional rounds relevant to my study were observing other teachers, writing descriptive lesson observations, and reflecting on colleagues' practice. I modified this structured practice of observation into what I call modified instructional rounds. The table below indicates the differences.

Table 1

Instructional Rounds Differences

| City et. al (2009) | Castelluber (2023) |
|---|--|
| The short and long-term goals were to improve teaching and learning through targeted feedback on an identified problem of practice. | The short-term goal was to create the conditions necessary to engage in work that would increase teacher collaboration and benefit the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers. The long-term goal was to improve teaching and learning through targeted feedback on teacher strengths. |
| Teams of observers set by the school | Teacher observers only |
| Feedback was constructive criticism. | Feedback was positive reinforcement. |

The observation cycle process was based on City et al.'s (2009) instructional rounds, but the major difference was that in traditional instructional rounds, the goal is to improve teaching and learning through targeted feedback on an identified problem of practice. The observation cycle process that I designed had only teachers as the observers, and their goals for observation

were not necessarily defined prior to their participation in the instruction round process. In some cases, they were looking to learn something specific from their colleagues. For instance, one observer visited a colleague's classroom who was very well-known for excellent rapport with students with the goal of picking up some methods to bring back to her classroom. Another observer visited a colleague's classroom with the goal of witnessing effective transitioning from one student activity to another. Yet another observer wanted to experience a creative writing class because she always found creative writing to be so foreign to her and she wanted to have a stronger grasp on how it might be taught. I prioritized teacher engagement, interest, and curiosity over constructive criticism, again reinforcing the hope that collaboration would improve teacher curiosity and overall social/emotional wellbeing. After the observations, the teachers who were observed would receive the positive feedback from their peers and would then have the opportunity to meet with the observers to share in more detail how they designed the observed lesson. Modified instructional rounds were a vehicle to help support social-emotional wellbeing.

The traditional form of instructional rounds focuses on a problem of practice that a school district identifies and is working to correct (City et al., 2009). There is much potential for improved teacher social/emotional wellbeing when teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate with one another and to have the time to discuss how other teachers manage student-led classrooms or initiate innovative lesson plans. It was my understanding from conversations with my colleagues that the original instructional round process that my administration said was unsuccessful was met with resistance because teachers were not given time to observe other teachers outside of their preparatory hour, which was already filled with plenty of other responsibilities, and because the evaluation model that was used focused on problems of practice rather than best practice that might be observed in another colleague's classroom.

While I could not ensure that the modified instructional rounds I had designed would improve teacher's social/emotional wellbeing and feeling of connection with others, I laid the foundation for collaboration among teachers. Modified instructional rounds were a starting point to reinvigorating teacher practice. Instructional rounds were "designed to develop a language and a culture for breaking down the isolation of teachers' practice" (City et al., 2009, p. 10) and had the potential to foster social/emotional support for colleagues as well. While observing other colleagues, teachers could form professional friendships where they could share how they approached certain content areas and move away from hoarding lesson plans for fear of another colleague getting recognized for an idea that was borrowed without credit. I proposed that carving out time for teachers to talk to one another about student progress and to engage in vertical articulation to determine how best to grow their shared academic program, for instance, would create a sense of interdependence that was not present in the educational climate in the school district study site. While this is also an argument for professional learning communities, that structure was also not present in the study site; therefore, the rounds process was a starting point for professional collaboration. For example, Jennings et al. (2017) studied the impact of a professional development program that they designed called Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE for Teachers), which they described as "a mindfulness-based professional development program designed to promote teachers' social and emotional competence and improve the quality of classroom interactions" (p. 1010). Through focused retreat-style programs that included yoga and meditation, CARE offered teachers training in stress reduction, burnout prevention, and restorative practice strategies. This study found that "CARE for Teachers had statistically significant direct positive effects on adaptive emotion

regulation, mindfulness, psychological distress, and time urgency” (Jennings et al., 2017, p. 1010) and equally as important, that

when teachers lack the social and emotional competences required to manage the demands of teaching, their well-being erodes and leads to a deterioration of the classroom climate . . . [yet] teachers with high levels of social and emotional competences are able to cope with the demands of the classroom, maintain a positive classroom climate, build and maintain supportive relationships with their students, and establish consistent classroom interactions that promote student learning. (Jennings et al., 2017, p. 1011)

Similarly, I wondered if modified instructional rounds might also support teacher learning and build a professional community because it could provide space for listening and compassion towards colleagues. It was important that the modified instructional rounds process be a positive experience given the fragile state the teaching profession finds itself in at present. As City et al. (2009) acknowledged, “Only if rounds develop a collaborative, inquiry-based culture that shatters the norms of isolation and autonomy . . . will rounds transform teaching and learning” (p. xi). There seemed to be a lack of collaboration and curiosity towards learning from one another in the district where I worked. There is value in the student growth and teacher pedagogical awareness that comes from traditional instructional rounds, which were designed to create an equitable learning experience for all students and to improve an identified problem of practice (City et al., 2009). I considered that there might also be value in focusing specifically on teachers’ strengths and what might improve their overall job satisfaction. The traditional instructional rounds process had an observation protocol where multiple observers are present in each classroom at one time, which can be overwhelming for the teacher being observed. The instructional rounds process carried out by City et al. (2009) was based on the medical rounds

process that included doctors observing their colleagues in practice and then discussing the medical rationale for the diagnoses and treatment plans with the goal of creating norms of practice. The modified instructional rounds process that I conducted was also modeled on the medical rounds process as far as the focus on colleague collaboration, support, and feedback.

Modified Instructional Rounds Model

An important distinction between the observation cycle that I conducted and the instructional rounds as City et al. (2009) described them is that in traditional rounds “*everyone* involved [in the rounds group] is working on their practice, *everyone* is obliged to be knowledgeable about the common task of instructional improvement, and *everyone’s* practice should be subject to scrutiny, critique, and improvement” (pp. 4–5). The process in this study focused on only the observer’s interest in the observee and/or the scheduling availability of both parties, which varied across classrooms and from observer to observer depending on their goal for peer observation. Although the observee received feedback from the observer, the teachers who were observed did not request feedback in advance on something in particular. Another important differentiation is that traditional instructional rounds may have observers in a variety of positions in district, some administrative, some not, and which “requires participants to focus on a common problem of practice that cuts across all levels of the system” (City et al., 2009, p. 5).

I kept the structure of instructional rounds in my study of modified observation cycles. Just as traditional “rounds is a four-step process: identifying the problem of practice, observing, debriefing, and focusing on the next level of work” (City et al., 2009, p. 6), the modified instructional rounds I designed had an identification step, an observation step, a debriefing step, and a focus for the next cycle of observations step. The major distinction is that the identification

varied across observers and in turn the focus for the next cycle varied across observers. I asked all the participants to keep evaluative words out of their observation notes, which meant that a problem of practice was not the focus of the observation or of the conversation on the debriefing within the focus groups. Given the well-known finding that teachers experience inconsistency in feedback from observers (City et al., 2009; Roberts, 2012), the modifications made to the rounds process in this study sought to maintain the element of judgment-free language in observations. This limited the likelihood that observations would be damaging to the observed teachers' socioemotional wellbeing, as noted in the case of my colleagues above. The district uses an observation model with set success criteria, but "teachers receive conflicting signals about what they are supposed to be doing, and they are forced to choose between competing ideas about what constitutes good practice, if they receive any feedback at all" (City et al, 2009, p. 8). Before the study was conducted, I knew that if teachers observed other teachers and there was time allotted for focus group debriefing with attention on discussing what teachers had scripted during their lesson observations and not on evaluative language, there would be collegial conversation about objective information from a variety of classrooms. This collegial conversation was very restorative for colleagues who rarely had the opportunity to collaborate or to discuss best practices with one another. The theories of action that City et al. (2009) created set up several if/then statements about how to apply theory to practice. Two that were relevant for my modified instructional rounds research were:

If I/we cultivate expertise in teaching and learning as the means for improvement student achievement, then teaching will be strengthened and more students will learn in deeper ways that better approach the "essential understanding" of the standards.

If I/we use data in systemic ways as a vehicle for examining school, classroom, and

individual student progress, then interventions will be targeted in focused ways and achievement will increase. (p. 47)

As a parallel to City et al. (2009) the modified instructional rounds if/then statements are: If I/we attend to the availability of teachers to participate in rounds as a means for improved teacher social/emotional wellbeing, then teachers will have an invitation to peer collaboration and camaraderie which will in turn strengthen their teaching. If I/we permit each teacher to select a lesson or teacher with a specific purpose that is rooted in the observing teacher's interests or self-reported desired area of improvement, then observations will foster collaboration that focuses on best practices without the need to define a set schoolwide problem of practice.

Teacher Decisions for Peer Observation

This study was designed such that participants would be teachers whose role was to be a member of a community of practice through legitimate peripheral participation. In this environment the goal was to learn from their colleagues; whether that was content-based, skill specific, or student-rapport focused varied depending on the participants interests and as it turned out based on scheduling availability. In all cases, the hope was that the collegial interaction would affect teacher social/emotional wellbeing in a positive way. Members who are in a community of practice also “consist of and depend on a membership, including its characteristic biographies/trjectories, relationships, and practices” (Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 55) rather than having a finite ending after a professional development workshop, for example. The hope was that the collaboration would ideally continue beyond the parameters of this study and would further support the social/emotional needs of teachers in the future.

Given the push towards a neo-liberal model of education focused only primarily on student test score improvements in the United States, I took the radical position that teachers

should be engaged in work that is not always directly related to student achievement, but connected to job satisfaction (Bishay, 1996; Evans, 1997). The social/emotional wellbeing of teachers is the driving factor behind so many decisions they make each day and their foundation for interactions with students as well.

For the purposes of this study, I included teacher morale as one element of the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers and drew from the work of Smith (1966) and Hart et al. (2000) who defined teachers' morale as "forward-looking and confident striving towards the achievement of a shared and vital purpose or goal" (Smith, 1966, p. 143) and "morale is a unitary construct, but believe that it is more accurately associated with the energy, enthusiasm, team spirit and pride that teachers experience in their school" (Hart et al., 2000, p. 213). The distinction between high morale as Smith (1966) explained relates to "a feeling of personal value and importance in the attainment of organizational goals. Freedom to act in accord with a sense of duty and responsibility—and internalized authority or ideal" (p. 143) and low morale, "a state of apathy, indecision, or insecurity in the majority of individual members when a school's stated objectives are neither perceived as of vital importance nor felt to be shared by staff members" (p. 144) was reflected in the school where this study took place in teachers who feel valued (high morale) and those who do not (low morale). Both Smith (1966) and Hart et al. (2000) addressed morale as a group phenomenon. Qualities of teachers who have high morale include tenacity, persistence, perseverance, enthusiasm, and "cohesion and co-operative functioning of the staff group" (p. 144). Teacher morale is not only important for the teachers as people, but also for the student body's wellbeing as high teacher morale is a prerequisite to good morale and proficiency among pupils (Demir, 2021; Smith, 1966).

In chapter 2, I present the conceptual framework of the study. I also describe the literature review. In chapter 3, I offer the methodology of the study. I explain how the data were collected. I review the methodology of this qualitative study. In chapter 4, I discuss my findings. Finally, in chapter 5, I analyze the data I collected, explain how it answers my research questions, and address implications of the study.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

In the following chapter, I begin by explaining the conceptual framework, communities of practice, through the process of legitimate peripheral participation. Then, I define traditional instructional rounds and their impact on teacher practice. Next, I define legitimate peripheral participation. Then, I discuss the implications of inconsistent observation feedback for teachers and explore the effectiveness of communities of practice as a way to increase social trust among teachers and school leaders. Finally, I discuss the literature on instructional rounds' effect on teaching practice and teacher retention as well as on teacher morale. The present literature addresses improved teacher effectiveness as a result of instructional rounds, but there is a gap in the literature about the social/emotional benefits of instructional rounds. I situate this study within the context of what has already been researched around legitimate peripheral participation. My participants were not all newcomers to the field. I did not have those considered "mature in practice" according to the legitimate peripheral participation model (Wenger & Lave, 1991), observing others who are "mature in practice" as well as some who were newcomers and a mix of those potentially as well.

Conceptual Framework: Legitimate Peripheral Participation and Communities of Practice

I used the terms legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice in this study to explain the origins of practices such as peer observation and the origins of what I ultimately sought to accomplish in my workplace, which was a professional learning community. I defined legitimate peripheral participation as the experience of learning from someone who had become an expert in a particular field. The learner was typically a novice to the field while the expert had more experience. However, a teacher with five years of experience may have something to offer to improve the practice of a teacher with twenty-five years of experience just

as the reverse may be true as well. Teaching as a profession is a primary example of how social interaction among colleagues generates learning. Wenger and Lave (1991) explained legitimate peripheral participation as a theory that resulted from “the attempt to clarify the concept of situated learning [which] led to critical concerns about the theory and to further revisions that resulted in the move to our present view that learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (p. 31). As Wenger and Lave (1991) elaborated on the uses of legitimate peripheral participation, they addressed its function in communities of practice:

There is a significant contrast between a theory of learning in which practice (in a narrow, replicative sense) is subsumed within processes of learning and one in which learning is taken to be an integral aspect of practice (in a historical, generative sense). In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice—as if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be located somewhere; learning is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world. The problem—and the central preoccupation of this monograph—is to translate this into a specific analytic approach to learning. Legitimate peripheral participation is proposed as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent. (pp. 34–35)

The engagement among teachers in the district where I worked was minimal. We met at department meetings and for district-led professional development that was often observation model-based. However, there was no real professional learning community in any department. Informal meetings among teachers within a department occurred in passing in the hallways or during lunches whenever there were a few minutes for teachers to engage in conversation. The standard—that learning is an integral part of a legitimate peripheral participatory experience—was a piece that was often missing from these informal meetings. There was no real goal of

learning from one another. Rather, the goal in these short exchanges was often checking on availability of resources or referencing pacing of the scope and sequence of the curriculum units. The only peripheral participation teachers had with one another was when a novice teacher was being formally mentored by a veteran teacher. The experience of legitimate peripheral participation can and should occur throughout teachers' careers. It is not just the work of novice teachers who have little experience with the practice of pedagogy.

While Wenger and Lave's (1991) research spanned many fields of apprenticeship, reflection on analysis of school learning as situated requires a multilayered view of how knowing and learning are part of social practice . . . [and understanding] that legitimate peripheral participation is not itself an educational form, much less a pedagogical strategy or a teaching technique. It is an analytical viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning . . . [which] takes place no matter which educational form provides a context for learning, or whether there is any intentional educational form at all. Indeed, this viewpoint makes a fundamental distinction between learning and intentional instruction. (Wenger & Lave, 1991, pp. 39–40)

I used Wenger and Lave's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice as the theoretical framework for my study because their writing focuses on learning from others with the goal of becoming one community with a shared set of skills and understanding of best practices for specific professions. The field of education already has a very established practice of matching student teachers with experienced teachers while student teachers are finishing their coursework at the undergraduate level. Even once a novice teacher begins their career, they are matched up with a mentor who is usually an experienced teacher who teaches in the same grade range, preferably in their content area and in their school,

although those two criteria are not always met for every novice teacher. Wenger and Lave (1991) differentiated between what they call a *learning curriculum* and a *teaching curriculum* (p. 97).

While the latter matches up with a more traditional observation model with an administrator observing a teacher, a *learning curriculum*,

. . . evolves out of participation in a specific community of practice engendered by pedagogical relations and by a prescriptive view of the target practice as a subject matter, as well as out of the many and various relations that tie participants to their own and to other institutions. (Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 97)

The focus of a community of practice does not necessarily need to always be founded in what content-specific knowledge an observer can learn from sitting in on one of their colleague's classes. There are other valuable experiences to be gained from peer observation. Rather, as Wenger and Lave (1991) explained

A learning curriculum is thus characteristic of a community. In using the term community, we do not imply some primordial culture-sharing entity. We assume that members have different interests, make diverse contributions to activity, and hold varied viewpoints. In our view, participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a *community of practice*. Nor does the term community imply necessarily co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group, or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (pp. 97–98)

This explanation of who belongs to a community of practice was particularly important to my study as it addressed the informal makeup of the group itself. Peers of different interests and

content areas and who have different roles in the district may all be part of a community that has a common interest in sharing practices and who, therefore, are willing to participate in instructional rounds. Schools are often “more concerned with furnishing the immediate social environment of the target action/interaction than with theorizing about the broader forces shaping and being shaped by those more immediate relations” (Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 55), but with a focused approach, communities of practice can develop organically as a result of instructional round participation.

Literature Review

To ensure that I fully explored teacher social/emotional wellbeing and all that it encompasses, I began by searching for articles on teacher morale. After I exhausted the sources of those search results, I used the references pages of the articles that focused most clearly on social/emotional wellbeing. Oftentimes those articles were about declining teacher morale and teacher attrition. I also wanted to include literature that already measured teacher morale to see if my study had already been researched. What I found was that the literature on teacher morale was only quantitative and therefore did not involve much in-depth analysis of why teacher morale had been steadily declining. I wondered if there were any efforts to improve morale or teacher social/emotional wellbeing. The results I found indicated that improved morale could be achieved but only if there was a culture shift in the school system and prioritization on teacher wellbeing.

This led me to the concept of instructional rounds as a possible vehicle for improved teacher morale. I knew that legitimate peripheral participation was the foundation for peer observation even though it was really focused on novice to master observation. I began reading about how peer observation could foster growth in practice. Once I had exhausted the articles

and books on that topic, I again began using the references from the sources that most closely aligned with my desired study focus to expand any nuances I might have missed. Once I uncovered that there were consistent researcher names when I cross-referenced teacher morale, teacher social/emotional wellbeing, peer observation, and school climate, I knew I had saturated the available literature on my topic and was ready to begin my proposal.

The themes of the literature review became: Communities of Practice as a Remedy for Isolation, Limitations and Unintended Consequences of Current Observation Practices, Social Trust Among Teachers and School Leaders, Teacher Social/Emotional Wellbeing and Effectiveness, Collaboration and Social/Emotional Wellbeing, Traditional Instructional Rounds Explained, Instructional Rounds and Teacher Practice, and Instructional Rounds and Teacher Social/Emotional Wellbeing.

Communities of Practice as a Remedy for Isolation

Scarce opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice already present in the field of education were exacerbated by the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers have always had difficulty finding free time for any reason during the day because of the amount of preparation time that is required for dynamic, engaging lessons on top of the demands of basic professional responsibilities of accurate attendance, grading, lesson planning, standards-based projects, and learning new technology. The substitute teacher shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic has only made teacher prep time less available as teachers are asked to cover colleagues' classes when they are absent. Department meeting time is being spent discussing new standardized assessments to determine students' skill levels as a result of lost instructional time and hybrid learning during the pandemic rather than meeting with colleagues to share instructional successes. Whatever small amount of time was present for teacher

collaboration in the past has been occupied by the above pandemic-response adjustments. I knew teachers might also benefit from the interaction with their colleagues specifically because it is social interaction that many people lost due to the pandemic. While collaboration in communities of practice always included social/emotional benefits, these meetings and discussions may be even more beneficial now. While, out of necessity, teachers have learned new instructional strategies with little to no training during the pandemic, establishing a targeted design for professional learning creates the most significant impact on teacher practice (DeSimone et al., 2013). During the study, there was no targeted design for professional learning in the school district that was the site of this study. As Buysse et al. (2003) explained, effective communities of practice allow for “documenting [of] experiences and interpretations of these experiences through journaling, engaging in discourse with professional peers to analyze problems and consider alternative viewpoints, and participating in collaborative research to address practical problems through systemic inquiry” (p. 268). Teachers did not have any organized documentation of their experiences with their own teaching let alone a collaborative experience with their colleagues.

Teachers had, in some ways, thrived and were more flexible in the classroom as a result of the malleable lesson plans and instantaneous adjustments that were necessitated over the last two years during the pandemic. Novice teachers with mentor teachers or colleagues who had an existing community of practice may have had a guide who was able to comfortably bring them along in virtual instruction break-out rooms. They may have had someone who was both willing and able to meet through video conferencing to reflect on lessons taught or observations. McDonald (1992) acknowledged that “access to practice other than [his] own . . . [allowed his] craft to [grow] more abundantly than it otherwise might have” (p. 10). He argued in reflecting on

his own practice that, “This is the gist of reading teaching, its minimal core: to step outside the room, figuratively speaking, and to search for perspective on the events inside” (McDonald, 1992, p. 11). One obstacle in achieving this outside perspective of inside events was the willingness to open one’s classroom to another colleague. The opportunity for peripheral learning in communities of practice (Wenger & Lave, 1991) was readily available for teachers in theory. In some ways, the pandemic may have made it even easier to access other teachers’ classrooms. It was possible to observe a teacher in a different state or even different country through remote video observation using tools such as Zoom. However, one necessary piece of successful instructional rounds and the opportunity for situated learning is relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) among teachers and within the school community as a whole; without it, communities of practice would not be successful. The entire school community must respect one another and feel that their voices are valued. The interdependence of administration, teacher, paraprofessionals, and all people who come in contact with students during the day must be acknowledged and the relationships fostered (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). The politicizing of medicine during the pandemic and the division that it created in society made elements of relational trust like personal regard for others much harder to foster (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Teachers needed to see the value in school reform as a result of collaborative practices like instructional rounds (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Previous attempts at:

engaging in policy-induced partnerships with practitioners . . . emanate[s] from differences in power and status between researchers and practitioners and the efforts required to develop a common language or a better appreciation of one another’s incentive systems and work demands. (Buysse et al., 2003, p. 264)

District incentives often fell on deaf ears because they did not seem to have any direct impact on teacher instruction. There was often very little conversation between administration and faculty about the purposes of policy initiatives or how they might help teachers or students. Buysse et al. (2003) provided a proposed solution to this divide through a new take on communities of practice as they “offer the most promise for altering the linear relationships through which information is handed down from those who discover the professional knowledge to those who provide and receive educational services” (p. 265). In this environment, both groups would be able to discuss what they know and witness of best practices and could make alterations accordingly. This builds on the work of Wenger and Lave (1991) to “consider new ways to promote dialogue and inquiry on this issue” (Buysse et al., 2003, p. 265). Instead of moving from an outer peripheral position of observation ultimately to the inner, central position of expert, there would be a give and take between the researchers and educators. Another benefit to communities of practice approach is that researchers and practitioners can address dilemmas as they arise in the classroom and propose actionable theoretical applications as well as observe their effectiveness.

Prioritizing teacher wellbeing through communities of practice could reduce feelings of isolation and provide a support network for teachers. With the collaboration of school administration, “appropriate assignments for new teachers, release time for mentor teachers, and other roles for teacher leaders at all stages in the continuum” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1050), legitimate peripheral participation from student and novice teachers and communities of practice among teachers of all experiences, could at least be addressed at the foundational level. This type of professional camaraderie could ultimately be a “connective tissue holding things together within or across the different phases of learning to teach” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1049) as

well as during professional communities of practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1043) where teachers could learn from one another. In order for teachers to gain successful professional learning that is targeted, specific to content, spread out over the course of a school year instead of just one day or a few hours, and perhaps most importantly, support through coaching or supervisors who do more than observe the teacher for specific protocols on an evaluation model rubric (Desimone et al., 2013, Kennedy, 2016), a community of practice must exist; relational trust must exist (Bryk & Schneider, 2003); and an open door policy for observees to come into classrooms must exist. Professional learning can only improve teaching if it is supported with the right combination of content, time, and follow-through. Then and only then will communities of practice and teacher to teacher observations help improve teacher morale.

Limitations and Unintended Consequences of Current Observation Practices

Another hurdle that needed be overcome in order for teachers to welcome visitors to their classrooms for constructive criticism was the hesitation that all feedback from observers would be negative. Originally proposed by Downey (2004) walk-throughs, or short visits to classrooms that are around three minutes in length, were designed to promote a culture of accepting frequent observation, collaboration, and reflective practice. Their iterations have changed drastically over the years and now often include checklists with much different intentions than Downey (2004) proposed.

Walk-Throughs. While the concept of walk-throughs seemed promising as an opportunity for teachers to get quick, frequent feedback about their lessons, the lack of a common understanding about what constitutes strong teaching made them ineffective and punitive in nature (Bradford & Braaten, 2018). Without a clear understanding of what the person administering the walk-throughs is looking for and without the follow-through of ways to

improve practice if there is something that an observer witnesses that needs additional attention, walk-throughs do not function as effective feedback for teachers or a method of potential professional learning. That is to say, “No matter how much policymakers and administrators frame teacher evaluation as being a developmental tool, teachers experience it as surveillance and constant measurement” (Garver, 2020, p. 641)

Inconsistent Observation Feedback. Teachers are expected to have observations throughout the course of the school year each year. At the beginning of their careers, a novice teacher usually has three to five observations each year. Ideally, these are intended to help the teacher improve their practice. However, in many cases, the feedback provided to teachers is inconsistent across observers. In some instances, like walk-throughs, teachers do not receive any feedback at all. Thus, even though “the purpose of the learning walks [is] to help the principals and schools improve instruction, . . . it [isn’t] clear how the act of observing the teachers would translate into more teacher knowledge about rigor, and subsequently, better instruction” (Roberts, 2012, p. 15) because the criteria for the walk-throughs was not provided to the teachers. As a result, teachers “receive conflicting signals about what they are supposed to be doing, and they are forced to choose between competing ideas about what constitutes good practice, if they receive any feedback at all” (City et al., 2009). If they follow the feedback provided by one administrator, but the next administrator to perform a walk-through or observation disagrees with the original observer’s assessment of the teacher’s performance, the teacher may end up with a poor performance observation as a result of inconsistent feedback from a walk-through. If the teacher is not provided with any feedback, there is nothing for the teacher to reflect on or to try to improve.

Sometimes, administrators have been trained to search for problems that jump out when visiting classrooms. In these cases, it is best “to unlearn their well-honed skill of deciding rather quickly what a teacher needs to work on and instead take off their evaluating glasses and look with fresh eyes to see what is happening in and across classrooms. Those who are unlearning need to be convinced that it makes sense to let go of their habits, assumptions, and competence in this area in order to try on a different way of approaching what goes on in classrooms” (City et al., 2009, p. 84). Perhaps engagement looks different in different classrooms. For instance, a quiet classroom does not necessarily indicate a failure of student engagement. Students might be very focused on a writing task or a grouped digital platform such as Padlet or NearPod. Just as a loud classroom does not necessarily indicate disorder or a teacher’s lack of classroom management. Students might be working in pairs or groups to share their ideas or create a complex economics plan to practice their business skills. A shared understanding of what high student engagement looks like, and the different forms it might take, are often lacking in the observation practices of administrators. This holds true for peer observations as well. For example, observers “probably have very different pictures of what “high expectations” or “confused” or “great” looks like. We might use the same language that another observer uses, but we might not mean the same thing. This reinforces our tendency to assume that shared language means shared belief, which is a dangerous assumption unless the shared language is grounded in shared evidence and dialogue” (City et al, 2009, p. 84). Engaging in modified instructional rounds where a shared understanding of look-fors and lesson description is present is one step to building a culture of communities of practice.

Social Trust Among Teachers and School Leaders

Social trust is a major component of communities of practice as well as the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers. For instructional rounds to be successful, there must be a shared vision between the teachers and school leaders about what great teaching looks like. Gore and Rickards (2021) aimed to determine whether or not professional development could strengthen teachers' "motivation, commitment, and resilience, all of which are essential to maintaining teaching at its best . . . [and to discover] What kinds of PD might best contribute to their professional renewal?" (p. 337). Their findings indicate that trust and respect between observer and observee were essential to the success of instructional rounds (Gore & Rickards, 2021). In 1993, Huberman argued that collaboration among teachers was not only ineffective and time-consuming, but in fact a hindrance to innovative professional practice. The concept of an artisan model of teaching community comes from the work of Talbert and McLaughlin (2002) who pushed back against Huberman (1993). Sometimes, school leaders create resistance toward innovation, perhaps inadvertently, when there is a focus on test score improvement and all district initiatives focus on increased student achievement. Talbert and McLaughlin (2002) suggested that the artisan community is an ideal combination of individual artisanship and a strong community of practice that uses the strength of the group to support teachers' practice and is the catalyst of innovation for those hesitant to adjust their way of thinking about instruction. I argue that the social trust needed among teachers and school administrators is the foundation of support for innovative teaching strategies as well as for a climate that encourages teacher peer observation.

As Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) noted, while the field education generally accepts the idea that "teachers who know more teach better" (p. 249), what constitutes knowing more and teaching better are not agreed upon concepts. They organize teacher knowledge into three

categories: “knowledge-*for*-practice”, “knowledge-*in*-practice”, and “knowledge-*of*-practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). The first has to do with the “formal knowledge and theory...*for* teachers to use in order to improve practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). The second, “some of the most essential knowledge for teaching is what many people call practical knowledge, or what very competent teachers know as it is embedded in practice and in teachers' reflections on practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). And the third, “Rather, it is assumed that the knowledge teachers need to teach well is generated when teachers treat their own classrooms and schools as sites for intentional investigation at the same time that they treat the knowledge and theory produced by others as generative material for interrogation and interpretation” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 250). How does a teacher gain these three components of knowledge? Cochran-Smith & Lytle (1999) believed that “what is needed in professional development are opportunities for teachers to explore and question their own and others' interpretations, ideologies, and practice . . . Fundamental to this conception of teacher learning is the idea that teachers learn collaboratively, primarily in inquiry communities and/or networks (Lieberman, 1992) where participants struggle along with others to construct meaningful local knowledge and where inquiry is regarded as part of larger efforts to transform teaching, learning, and school” (p. 278). Without a carved-out space for teacher peer observation and reflection, the culture necessary for successful instructional rounds cannot exist. In some cases

The ramping up of strong-arm educational reform [such as] in Australia and internationally communicates an underlying distrust in teachers' professional standing, judgment, and capability. This in turn produces high levels of professional vulnerability, stress, and dissatisfaction with working conditions (Gu 2014) and can alter the way

teachers understand themselves and their histories (Buchanan 2015). Unintentional though these consequences may be, their effect on teachers' sense of efficacy is significant. (Gore & Rickards, 2021, p. 349)

The sheer number of reform initiatives in education is staggering as any mid-career teacher can share. There is little stock held in them as they come and go so quickly in the field of education. In order to provide some sticking power for perhaps well-intentioned initiatives, teachers must be provided with “more respect, trust and, in particular, professional support of the kind that QTR provides” (Gore & Rickards, 2021, p. 349). Their analysis of experiences of mid-to-late career teachers who participated in Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR), “a form of PD that neither pathologises them nor centres on accountability but, rather, seeks to be respectful and regenerative” (Gore & Rickards, 2021, p. 349) indicated that teachers were supportive of the challenge that quality teaching rounds and all peer observation models pose and found the process both intellectually engaging and collegial. The Quality Teaching Rounds model has a minimum of four teachers who engage in peer-observation of one another's full lessons and who then code the observations collaboratively. All participants had been trained in the framework and the coding process. Gore & Rickards (2021) found that their control group indicated a decline in teacher morale (observed through survey data) while the teachers participating in quality teaching rounds improved their teacher morale over the course of the six-month study. The control group in this study also indicated a perceived decline in the way they were recognized by their administrators while the participants indicated a perceived increase in feelings of appreciation and reorganization by their administrators (Gore & Rickards, 2021). This relationship among those who participated in the study built a social trust among teachers and administrators and allowed for more fruitful discussions of teacher practice (Gore & Rickards,

2021). Social trust among teachers and school leaders is non-negotiable when the goal of school initiatives is teacher professional growth.

Teacher Social/Emotional Wellbeing and Effectiveness

When examining how teachers' social/emotional wellbeing is related to their effectiveness as a professional, we must prioritize individual teacher experience. Generally, "morale is often viewed as a group phenomenon (Milton et al., 1984; Smith, 1966, 1976), [but] a growing number of researchers recognise that the individual experience of morale is psychologically more meaningful (Doherty, 1988; Evans, 1992)" (Hart et al., 2000, p. 212) and can be used to determine a correlation between teachers' happiness and job satisfaction and their performance in the classroom (Bishay, 1996; Hart et al., 2000). As Senechal et al. (2016) noted, there is very little research on teacher morale and much more on teacher burnout and job satisfaction. What has been studied has been outside of the United States. Evans (1997), who conducted her research in the United Kingdom, defined teacher morale as "a state of mind determined by the individual's anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs which s/he perceives as significantly affecting her/his total work situation" (p. 832). The state of mind of teachers in 2022 is not one of peace and serenity. Gu and Day (2007) acknowledged fifteen years ago the lack of research on teachers' lives and their ability to remain resilient. They worked to discern the traits of teachers who were particularly resilient despite the constant reform, public perception of the profession, and constant assessments. In this process, they learned that teaching is an emotional profession and that in . . . the contemporary contexts for teaching [sic] a learning community is an important incentive that keeps teachers going. In pursuit of learning in the

“communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998), teachers could consolidate a sense of belonging and shared responsibility, enhance morale and perceived efficacy, develop aspects of resilient qualities, and thrive and flourish socially and professionally. (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1305)

Effective teachers must be recharged emotionally. They must be able to set aside whatever external concerns they have about their own lives and put their passion for teaching and learning into their lessons each day (Hargreaves, 1998). Without a very solid support system, this would be nearly impossible to obtain. Both teachers of the year (Bosso, 2017) and the resilient teachers that Gu and Day (2007) studied, referenced their need for a community to support them. Truly exceptional teachers who have the skill set and person emotional reserve to overcome all that educational reform sends their way coupled with the challenges of a lacking respect for their profession, and as of late, a global pandemic which required an entirely new set of skills in a matter of weeks, are who we search for in times of difficulty. It is “their resilient qualities [that] do not merely serve the developmental progression; indeed, at the heart of the process, they interact with negative influences and constraints and develop in strength together with teachers’ professional qualities” (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1305) and they are the teachers who all teachers look to when challenges arise. School leadership, staff collegiality, and positive teacher-pupil relationships were cited as the main reasons teachers were able to maintain their resilience and continue to be effective educators (Gu & Day, 2007). The modified instructional rounds process that I propose would foster the staff collegiality and resilience that the educational profession desperately needs at this current moment. Studying teacher social/emotional wellbeing might also provide avenues for further research on what leads to teacher attrition (Senechal, 2016).

The case for prioritizing teacher social/emotional wellbeing is well-supported by research even if the public disagrees. School districts measure student achievement growth throughout the school year and across many grade levels in order to provide families with data on the impact that their children's education has on their skill set (Converso et al., 2019). Schools prioritize improvement in student achievement, but do not focus on those who are responsible for helping students improve: the teachers.

One way of obtaining an accurate perception of teacher morale is a self-assessment tool that records the development of good teaching practices and teacher morale (Converso et al., 2019). In order to share these best practices and provide time for collaboration, school districts must see the value in creating communities of practice. Even if the focus, from a district perspective, is on student achievement, the wellbeing of a school on the whole is directly connected to the social/emotional wellbeing of its teachers (Mangin, 2021).

As a result, there should be significant attention paid to the teachers' social/emotional wellbeing. Mangin (2021) found that a strong professional culture where teachers feel valued and are supported is one area that can improve teachers' morale. Perhaps the lacking prioritization of professional interaction is cultural. The Japanese mode of lesson study (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999) reminds us that "teaching is largely a cultural activity [which] helps to explain why, in the face of constant reform, so little has actually changed inside U.S. classrooms (p. 103). Additionally, "the cultural nature of teaching might also help to explain why teaching per se has rarely been the direct focus of efforts to reform education" (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 103) even though it is the teacher who provides the instruction which ultimately improves or does not improve student achievement, the main focus on educational reform.

For example, Stigler and Hiebert (1999) pointed to a National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (CTM) initiative that specifically focused on effective practices of math instruction, but that also uncovered the misinterpretation of what the reform was intended to accomplish. This initiative highlighted two of the main shifts in education in the last twenty years, which has been to provide students an opportunity to work in groups more frequently and to provide more real-world connections to the material being taught. The flaw sometimes then becomes that the instructional practice does not shift to meet these reform suggestions and therefore their implementation fails in improving student achievement. As a result, “success [is defined] in terms of specific features or activities instead of long-term improvements in learning . . . reform recommendations might even worsen the quality of instruction” (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 109). Japan, on the other hand, has created a program with a much more gradual expectation for improved student achievement and that has student learning goals, a shared curriculum, administrative support, and teachers who are invested in improving their practice (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). The Japanese even have a word for continuous school-based professional development, *kounaikenshuu* (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). This process of professional development includes many areas of school improvement such as technology committees and grade-specific improvement as well as subject-specific goals.

In the United States, once teachers complete their teacher education programs, they are considered experts. The professional development that teachers go on to enroll in is not consistent across the country, state, or even school districts. The component of lesson study, or *jugyou kenkyuu*, is when “groups of teachers meeting regularly over long periods of time (ranging from several months to a year) to work on the design, implementation, testing, and improvement of one or several “research lessons” (*kenkyuu jugyou*)” (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999,

pp. 110–111) and therefore the group of teachers has a common goal. The work of Makoto Yoshida indicated that “Changing schools to support teachers’ learning requires changing the culture of schools” (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 144). It is important to specify that “a requirement for beginning the change process is finding time during the workweek for teachers to collaborate . . . two hours per week is a reasonable goal, at least initially” (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999, p. 144). Schools need to be restructured so that teachers have time to collaborate and visit other classrooms to see how their colleagues teach and, perhaps at the forefront of the shifting focus on student growth, is the acceptance of gradual improvement over time, which American culture often does not support (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). Bautista and Baniqued (2021) also studied the concept of lesson study with the focus on how to shift teachers’ mindset from competition to collaboration. The sense of community needed to support one another, their willingness to share their craft, as well as agree upon what constitutes quality teaching were all required for reflecting on their own practice and creating spaces for critical thinking among the faculty.

Regardless of whether or not the lack of communities of practice is cultural, for instructional rounds to create learning, there must be a foundation of trust among the faculty and administration. As Meyer-Looze (2015) wrote, “To effectively distribute the leadership that goes along with building leadership capacity, there must be a foundation of trust among the educators within the system” (p. 35). For Meyer-Looze (2015), the critical part of instructional rounds “was the attempt to level the hierarchical structure by acting as side-by-side learners and putting systems in place to support that change. These systems included the administrator and teacher pairings as a facilitator team, creating a set of norms for how the visits would be conducted, and the commitment of going through the entire visit and data analysis process together” (p. 37).

When there is not enough social trust among teachers to allow for communities of practice to develop organically, though, we must recognize that there are some teachers who are still willing to lead the communities of practice. In a study of New York State Teachers of the Year (Bosso, 2017), teacher leaders emphasized the need for support from administration, collaborative educational environments, opportunities for teacher leadership, and a seat at the table in the decision-making process that directly affected their roles as teachers. These teachers noted that their professional motivation, morale, and overall professional identity were directly affected by these factors. Perhaps teachers who have chosen to stay in the classroom and have been praised for their phenomenal pedagogical skill should be sought out for how to assess and improve teacher social/emotional wellbeing.

Rather than looking to formal teacher leaders who have left the classroom in order to hold leadership positions, it is helpful to look to informal teacher leaders who are still teaching and have made positive contributions to their schools (Gore et al., 2017). In particular, “Informal teacher leaders engage in activities like demonstrating new instructional strategies, observing and providing formative feedback to colleagues, actively participating in professional learning communities, encouraging teacher and parent participation in decision making, and modeling reflective practice” (Gore et al., 2017, p. 529). The informal mentoring relationship that teacher leaders develop is something that is undervalued in many schools. The most significant impact that informal teacher leaders have is the ability to successfully and quickly turnkey instructional strategies to their colleagues (Gore et al., 2017). They are trusted colleagues and therefore teachers are very receptive to their ideas as they are using these strategies in the classrooms in the same schools as the teachers who they are mentoring, albeit informally. Informal teacher leaders have strong, positive relationships with their colleagues, are reflective in their practice, and

continually seek out professional development, whether informal or formal in nature (Gore et al., 2017). The buy-in from the faculty is built-in to the relationship between informal teacher leaders and their colleagues in a way that consulting firms are unable to achieve and in a way that more formal teacher leaders are also unable to achieve simply because they are one step removed from the classroom environment. Another major benefit to informal teacher leaders is that the formal mentoring relationship typically ends within the first or second year of teaching. Teachers who are beyond their second year of teaching still need to obtain a certain number of hours of professional development per year in order to keep their teaching certification relevant, but outside of that minimum, teachers may not have as much interaction with their colleagues as a first- or second-year teacher would. The concept of instructional rounds fosters this missing interaction among colleagues. Modified instructional rounds provides time and space for collaboration. As this study shows, peer collaboration in turn can create a safe environment where social/emotional wellbeing can be supported.

Collaboration and Social/Emotional Wellbeing

Collaboration among teachers can be casual conversation about innovative ideas for lessons and still prove effective for instructional improvement. The literature on the impact that collaboration has on social/emotional wellbeing is thin. What has previously been studied is the connection between collaboration and increased effectiveness or productivity. For instance, de Jong et al. (2019) sought to determine how teacher collaboration might improve teachers' reflection on their own practice in a variety of different school contexts with a wide-ranging previous climate of collaboration. They found that

School features relevant for teacher learning refer to cultural and structural supports that exist at the school level (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). In a recent study, Admiraal et al. (2016)

pointed to several school-level supports, such as an open and collaborative culture, supportive leadership, and time and facilities to learn. Teacher characteristics entail prior knowledge, practices, experiences, and beliefs that they bring to their learning...

When teachers engage in learning activities, their knowledge, experiences, and beliefs can change which subsequently determines their future participation in learning activities (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). (de Jong et al., 2019, p. 2)

The effectiveness of short-term teacher collaboration initiatives has consistently shown that there must be a positive climate where there is willingness to share ideas prior to the institution of the initiative in order for any real improvement in collaboration to occur (de Jong et al., 2019; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2017). It is clear that in order for teacher collaboration to be successful, the environment of the school must have a focus on peer interaction and must actively seek opportunities for teachers to work with one another on a regular basis (de Jong et al., 2019). I proposed that once there is a culture of collaboration, there was an opportunity for regular teacher reflection, which will allow for critical conversations about best practices as well as a support system for teachers who are experiencing poor social/emotional wellbeing.

Cross et al. (2021) wanted to discern how to create a culture of collaboration among engineering educators in order to successfully integrate innovative instructional practices. In the process, an analysis of how the community of practice forms in order to replicate it in the future was also assessed. The features of creating a community of practice among the STEM faculty were invested faculty, support from the institution itself such as instructional initiatives, and a collaborative environment (Cross et al., 2021). The interest in participation in the initiative stemmed from a pre-existing desire to seek out other faculty members with a shared interest in fixing a problem or enhancing their instruction (Cross et al., 2021). Given that those participating

in my study will likely have an interest in collaboration, I am curious about how this may or may not impact their social/emotional wellbeing.

Traditional Instructional Rounds Explained

The process of instructional rounds typically involves a series of observations administered by school leaders such as supervisors, principals, curriculum directors, and superintendents. The goal of the instructional rounds process is to determine a problem of practice and to seek to train teachers in methods to revise their practice to remove the identified problem (City et al., 2009; Roegman & Riehl, 2012). As the instructional rounds are being conducted, the observer takes detailed, descriptive notes about what they see in each classroom they visit so as to provide the teacher with very specific feedback without jumping to conclusions and judgements about the effectiveness of the teacher. After the process is completed, the observers meet to review their notes on the observations and determine what they agree on as highly effective instruction. Only then is the professional development designed for teachers to hone in on a specific problem of practice and to work to address it (City et al., 2009; Roegman & Riehl, 2012). After the resources available to the district are allocated such that the teachers have the training needed, revisits take place and the process continues until the problem of practice has been resolved (City et al., 2009; Roegman & Riehl, 2012). This practice was created with medical rounds as its model. Just as medical rounds include doctors and their colleagues observing one another for the purpose of improving their practice for the benefits of the patients, instructional rounds include teachers and their colleagues observing one another for the purpose of improving student learning (City et al., 2009; Gore et al., 2017; Gore & Rickards, 2021; Kahn, 2019; Melvin, 2017; Teitel & Fowler-Finn, 2013). The idea that schools are a place for student learning is not one that would be widely contested, yet “the school systems and

public that surrounds them are just now recognizing that functioning effectively as an educator requires continuous learning over one's entire career . . . rounds is a powerful way" (City et al., 2009, p. 156) to achieve this continued progress toward professional improvement. Hospitals receive awards for patient-forward facilities and are identified as magnetic centers. Meanwhile, school funding is rarely allocated to professional development of its teachers. As City et al. (2009) highlighted, "putting instruction at the center of school improvement grounds decisions about structure, process, and resource allocation in the actual work of teachers and students in classrooms" (p. 157); modeling the medical rounds process is one way that schools can refocus their resources to provide the best possible educational experience for their students.

Instructional Rounds and Teacher Practice

While there is quite a bit of research on the impact that instructional rounds have on the observing teachers' own instruction (Brown, 2018; City, 2011; City et al., 2009; Kahn, 2019; Melvin, 2017; Meyer-Looze, 2015; Roegman & Riehl, 2012; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999), there is very little qualitative research on what impact instructional rounds has on teacher social/emotional wellbeing or teacher morale; many of the existing studies are quantitative in nature (Hart et al., 2000; Gore et al., 2017; Gore & Rickards, 2021; Smith, 1966).

We know that to grow professionally and to have a lasting impact on teachers, the main elements of quality professional learning are repeated sessions over a long period of time (Desimone, 2009) that also allow time for teacher reflection, discussion with colleagues, and opportunities to practice the new skills they have acquired (Garet et al., 2001). Therefore, the modified instructional rounds I propose, an extended professional learning experience over the course of a semester, present an effective form of improving teacher practice. Research tells us that repeated interactions with colleagues will yield more productive practice reflection than a

mere one-day workshop would. In general, professional learning that successfully improves teacher practice has “teachers [who] confront research and theory directly, [who] are regularly engaged in evaluating their own practice, and [who] use their colleagues for mutual assistance” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 11). Regular engagement is the key expression for measurable improvement of practice. As Darling-Hammond (1998) discussed extensively, global education systems where teachers spend time observing other teachers have the most robust lessons. She acknowledged that “Because schools in other countries provide for this kind of regular collegial exchange, teachers share knowledge and refine their practice throughout their careers . . . Without these supports, learning to teach well is extremely difficult” (Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 10). Her further research twenty years later on school-level collaboration continues to support that this type of collaboration is “effective in promoting school change that extends beyond individual classrooms . . . Teachers create a collective force for improved instruction and serve as support groups for each other’s work on their practice” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 10). When there is a country-wide appreciation for the “interdependence among standards, preparations, and supports” (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 297), teacher education and teacher development programs “provide a much-needed framework to ensure that quality teaching is supported in all schools and classrooms” (Darling-Hammond, 2017, p. 307). This is simply not the culture of the United States education system. Teachers are not valued members of society that they once were.

In the United States, it is not the norm for school districts to provide teachers with the time to observe other teachers. Common planning among teachers of the same subject area or grade level is also considered a luxury in most school districts. Even legitimate peripheral practice, an embedded part of the novice teacher mentorship, was hindered during the pandemic

because teachers were teaching remotely. Student teachers were unable to learn the many best practices that experienced teachers have in order to build relationships with students, to effectively manage a classroom, and to provide student-centered learning opportunities. While both novice and veteran teachers built up a new skill set during remote instruction, classes returned to in-person learning and some new teachers may not have the opportunity to learn from a mentor outside of a computer screen, and yet were in the classroom without a mentor. Hopefully this exact problem is never replicated due to a pandemic, but the lack of time or administrative support for instructional rounds unfortunately existed pre-pandemic.

City et al. (2009) developed the concept of instructional rounds to foster an agreed upon view of what high-quality teaching looks like as well as how to foster the replication of such teaching across all classrooms in a school district. They used their theory of action to develop teacher practice and stressed that

Like the process of observing and analyzing instruction, the process of developing and testing a theory of action works better when it occurs in concert with other people who have different ideas, whose experiences can be used to inform your practice, and who might know some things that you don't know. Strong norms of confidentiality and candor make collegial discussions of theories of action more powerful. (City et al., 2009, p. 56)

Brown (2018) was one example of someone who used Wenger's (1991) social learning theory and concept of communities of practice to test whether or not instructional rounds had positively impacted teacher practice. Brown (2018)'s case study of six teachers in Washington State indicated that instructional rounds strengthened teacher personal and professional relationships and provide clarity and a common language to discuss elements of teacher practice. The takeaway from instructional rounds as Roberts (2012) asserted, is "teachers' ability to identify

their own professional development needs on the basis of their own facilitation and consistent participation in rounds” (p. 156).

The key to real change in teacher practice is for teachers to be interested in participating in instructional rounds. There must be a perceived value in collaboration and communities of practice. If there is no foundation for a professional learning community within a school district, creating the momentum needed for teachers to participate in instructional rounds is quite challenging (Melvin, 2017). There must be a desire among the faculty for a collective willingness to change, which is supported by the school’s climate as a whole. Melvin (2017) found that giving teachers autonomy to determine a problem of practice was more effective in gaining their buy-in than if the administration had chosen the problem of practice and asked the faculty to use instructional rounds to identify it in specific classrooms. The traditional method of feedback for instructional rounds focuses on the school as a whole and the suggestions for how to improve the identified problem of practice (City et al., 2009) rather than providing individual feedback for teachers. This may be less helpful in providing concrete ways in which to adjust pedagogy in order to learn from instructional rounds (Melvin, 2017), which is why a modified instructional rounds approach may open doors for future individual feedback for teachers to grow their practice.

Instructional rounds are effective in providing schools with data beyond student achievement scores; they tell districts:

...what is happening (or not happening) in the classroom. High-performing schools don’t look solely at assessment data. They look at data in the classroom, including observational data around the instructional core. If rigor is not seen in the tasks teachers are asking students to do, then it is not there. It is best for a school or district to utilize

Instructional Rounds to better understand the learning that is and is not taking place from a developmental stance. Improvement is growth, and growth is a process, not an event.

Attention should be paid to all the learning experiences of each school as well as within the district and Instructional Rounds is a process that can facilitate this process. (Meyer-Looze, 2015, pp. 37–38)

Changing teacher practice through modified instructional rounds necessarily includes “the promotion of a culture of observation, a culture of student talk, and a general culture of accountability” (Kahn, 2019, p. 125). Teachers must be willing to reflect on their practice as well as be open to changing it (Kahn, 2019). In order to create this culture, communities of practice can be fostered to help develop the comfort needed among teachers to support and ultimately welcome peer observations.

Instructional Rounds and Teacher Social/Emotional Wellbeing

There is limited research on the social/emotional impact of instructional rounds on teachers; what has been studied is the impact on administrators not teachers. While the impact on administrators has been studied (Roegman et al., 2015), there was actually a statistically significant decrease in administrative collaboration as a result of instructional rounds. This was attributed to the fact that the superintendent did not require involvement in rounds in the second and third year of the study (Roegman et al., 2015). There was a reported statistically significant improvement in relationships among administrators with a particular focus on the increase in informal mentoring and conversation about the structure of observations at different buildings within the district (Roegman et al., 2015). I believe that participation in modified instructional rounds will have a similar effect on teachers’ relationships and sense of community. It is difficult to assess the social/emotional wellbeing or morale per say of teachers, but through qualitative

research, an overview of the school climate and the individual teachers' experiences will help provide a picture of the teacher experience at the site for the study. Smith (1966) suggested that researchers

identify certain factors contributing to the attainment of this proficiency where teachers possess and act in accord with a clear sense of purpose, where they work as a co-operative team, where administrators encourage the expression and implementation of teachers' initiative and ideas, and where these considerations have added lustre to the professional image and have given teachers a sense of personal reward in their work. (p. 145).

Converso et al. (2019) developed an Italian model of teacher morale measurement based on Hart et. al. (2000)'s School Organizational Health Questionnaire because they were concerned that "the excessive relevance paid to the negative aspects of the teaching work and the consequences in terms of psychological distress has mostly neglected the role of positive aspects that could influence wellbeing" (Converso et al., 2019, p. 1). The self-assessment tool was "developed with the aim of providing a broader emphasis on aspects concerning organizational behavior and human resource management within schools and, differently from the other tools, it could represent a more tailored, context-specific questionnaire for assessing teachers' needs" (Converso et al., 2019, p. 2). Their findings suggest that since "investing in positive school climates is a key issue in schools, for the reciprocity of teacher and student wellbeing . . . [as] healthy school environments improve students' growth and resilience, and, therefore, resilient students may strengthen future communities" (Converso et al., 2019, p. 5) it is important to have an accurate read on teacher social/emotional wellbeing for both the teachers themselves and the overall health of the school.

The value of qualitative research is particularly important to data collection on teachers' social/emotional wellbeing. The depth of personal experiences that qualitative data can collect provides a fuller understanding of what exactly about instructional rounds might be impacting teachers' social/emotional wellbeing. For instance, Bosso (2017) found that state Teachers of the Year found the most impressionable features of improved teacher wellbeing came from collaborative professional learning communities where teacher leaders were recognized for their skill set and where teachers had a role in the decision-making process of district initiatives.

There is very little empirical evidence of the impact that instructional rounds have on the social and emotional experiences of teachers or teacher morale. Both studies that touch upon teacher morale as a result of instructional rounds (Gore et al., 2017; Kahn, 2019) were quantitative studies that used surveys to assess the teachers' perceptions of their morale before and after participation in instructional rounds. Gore et al. (2017) determined that

access to a defined knowledge base for teaching enabled teachers to have discussions that felt 'safe' and 'depersonalised.'" This aspect of Quality Teaching Rounds, together with increasing confidence in their own and each other's teaching, helps to explain the growth in morale and sense of recognition for their work among the teachers in the intervention groups. (p. 109)

When Kahn (2019) aimed to discover "To what extent . . . participation in instructional rounds impact[ed] externalities (e.g., community, climate, culture, morale) for teachers and school administrators" (p. 95), in her quantitative study, she found that "regarding the impact of participation on externalities, such as the school community, climate, or culture . . . [there were] statistically significant different responses after participating in the cycle of instructional rounds" (p. 96). Gore and Rickards 's (2021) research on quality teaching rounds found that "mid-to-late

career teachers were open to change once they experienced a strong connection between participating in QTR, improving the quality of their teaching, and hence student learning” (p. 348), which is wonderful, but still does not address the social/emotional wellbeing of the teachers involved in the instructional rounds process. There are teachers who might be motivated to participate in the modified instructional rounds process for their own benefit rather than solely for the benefit of their students.

The results of this study have added to the current growing knowledge of the way in which instructional rounds impacted teachers’ social/emotional wellbeing. The modified instructional rounds process shifted the focus from a problem of practice to the skills that teachers excelled in and could potentially share in communities of practice or through professional learning communities in the future. The shared understanding of what quality teaching looks like mimicked the traditional instructional rounds process but differed in its attention to teacher quality of life rather than the improvement of student achievement. This study therefore helped to close the gap in research on how teacher social/emotional wellbeing can be fostered through collaborative efforts such as modified instructional rounds.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The approach taken in this study is grounded in the observation that teachers in my school seemed less likely to open their classrooms to others for constructive feedback than they might have in the past. This chapter explores the reason for using a qualitative methodology to determine how the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale relate to the components of modified instructional rounds. Qualitative methods are best used to explore data deeply and to address the nuances of participants' experiences during a study. Therefore, this study was a qualitative study.

In order to discern what kinds of personal and collaborative benefits teachers report when they engage in instructional rounds in a high school setting, I used a combination of peer observations, interviews, and focus groups to gather data about their experiences. I aimed to discover what happens to teachers' social/emotional wellbeing as a result of modified instructional rounds where the focus of the rounds was on peer observation for the sake of appreciation of other teachers' pedagogical strengths rather than for the identification of a problem of practice that needs solving. The literature already supports the fact that instructional rounds are an effective way for teachers to learn from their colleagues' teaching practices, classroom design, content pedagogy, and lesson structure (City et al., 2007), but not what social/emotional benefits teachers might have from the process of modified instructional rounds, which was the driving factor behind this study.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the rise and fall of teacher praise that is associated with the public view of educators has left teachers feeling defeated (Theirs, 2021). This coupled with the punitive nature of traditional observations and walk-throughs that have focused primarily on what teachers need to fix rather than uplifting them for their successful strategies, have made teaching a very challenging climate in which to work. During the data collection process of this study, several school shootings occurred, which caused added stress and unrest for teachers in the district where the study was conducted. The social/emotional wellbeing of teachers is a prerequisite to good morale and proficiency among pupils (Smith, 1966). The route to rejuvenation is often achieved through collaboration and professional learning communities where teachers can share in their successes and can learn from one another without judgment (Bautista & Baniqued, 2021; Brown, 2018; de Jong et al., 2019; Talbert & McLaughlin, 2002; Wenger & Lave, 1991).

Setting

I studied this process at a relatively small suburban high school in northern New Jersey, a district where I teach presently. I chose this site because I knew the existing morale of the teachers and felt that I could get teachers to participate. It is also representative of many nearby schools and would likely yield similar results as nearby school sites. Therefore, other northern New Jersey suburban schools may consider this research for their own schools and would be able to apply the parameters fairly smoothly. This school district had an interim superintendent and an interim director of curriculum and instruction at the start of the school year who both gave presentations on the importance of peer observations, sharing the wealth of knowledge teachers have with our colleagues (Marzano, 2011), and on positive education (Adler, 2016), respectively. This school year seemed to be an ideal time to study modified instructional rounds and teacher

social/emotional wellbeing given the administrative support that I had at the time of my study within my district. For the purpose of this study, I refer to the school as Keystone High School. The demographics of the school are typical for this part of northern New Jersey. The student population is about 550 students with the following makeup: 81% white students, 8.9% Hispanic students, 7.0% Asian students, 2.1% students who identify with two or more races, and .8% Asian American and Pacific Islander students. 56% of the students identify as male while 46% identify as female. There are 60 full-time teachers at Keystone High School.

Modification of Rounds Rationale

One method to achieve a regained social trust is through a modified version of instructional rounds. Traditional rounds that focus on a problem of practice are successful in demonstrating to teachers that a shared understanding of rigor and best practices through descriptive observations will yield increased student achievement (City et al., 2009; City, 2011; Jones, 1997). The basis for a modified version of instructional rounds stems from the association of constructive criticism and the impression of employer dissatisfaction that comes with the term instructional rounds. It is important to stress that this is strictly a perception concern given the stressed educational climate post-pandemic. However, because we know that instructional rounds are a proven method of creating transparency in school districts regarding what methods work best for student growth, the modified version of instructional rounds had the potential to create a transformation in teachers and to increase their morale. The need for the distinction laid in the protective nature of teachers at present. The goal of a modified version of instructional rounds was to provide an avenue for reception to observations both by peers and others within the school district. This needed to begin with an acknowledgment of the importance of teachers' roles in society and their positive impact on students. Peer observations that focused on what

teachers were doing well and what their colleagues could then bring back to their own classrooms was the starting point. I posited that a reversion to the perspective that teachers had when they first started teaching was the key to open admission into their classrooms. There was a willingness by some teachers to participate in the study, but the numbers were still quite low considering the size of the faculty. Only fourteen of a possible sixty teachers were initially willing to be observed by their peers. I wondered what the rest of the faculty's hesitation was and whether or not the participation of a few would have the power to positively influence the rest of the teachers.

My administration was cognizant of the state of teacher morale in the building and was very open to how best to support the staff's emotional wellbeing. When requesting course coverage for my colleagues who agreed to be participants in my study, my vice principal was very supportive of providing any proposed opportunities for teachers to observe other teachers, to interact with one another, and to support teachers' engagement with each other. I explained my research interests to him and said that teacher to teacher interaction might be a good place to start to give teachers a sense of community that we have really been missing the past two years. Initially he shared his hesitation as his own experience with instructional rounds years ago was not met with as much success as he would have hoped. He said teachers were not as motivated to partake in peer observation as he anticipated. I described to him as I have done here, my rationale for a modified version of instructional rounds (Table 1) that focused on teacher observation for the sake of learning about teachers' pedagogical strengths, student rapport, and/or genuine content interest in their colleague's subject matter.

The lesson observation practice I used in this study was adapted from instructional rounds (City et al., 2009) in order to support teachers in thinking about opening up their

classrooms in a new way that was not solely evaluative. In this study, the goal of the modified instructional rounds was to discern what teachers can learn and borrow from their peers. The teacher observers chose specific teachers' classrooms with a focus on something they wanted to learn from their colleague or an interest in their subject area, thereby setting a foundation that there is something to be learned rather than something to be critiqued. Before observations occurred, the group of teachers worked within a focus group to determine what goals they had for each observation cycle. There were three observation cycles with focus groups before the first cycle, after the first cycle, after the second cycle, and then after the third cycle. The focus group question responses were critical to the research design. The intentions of the modified instructional rounds and the structure of classroom observations needed to be co-constructed because of the teachers' previous experiences with observations.

Study Design

The methods used to answer the research questions are outlined here. In order to answer the question, "How are the components of instructional rounds affected by the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale?," I met with teachers before their initial round of observations. Rather than use the quantitative approach of a scale to measure teacher morale as other studies have done (Gore et al., 2017; Gore & Rickards, 2021; Hart et al., 2000; Smith, 1966), I investigated individual teacher experiences to provide in depth data about the "how" and "why," which allowed me to gain a "deeper understanding of experiences, phenomena, and context" (Cleland, 2017, p. 69). I asked them about their past experiences with observations, their current emotional experiences in regards to teaching and observation, their opportunities for collaboration, and their concerns about collaboration (if any) prior to their first cycle of instructional rounds. I recorded their responses and later coded their feedback using the

constant comparative methodology to determine their similarities and differences (Glaser, 1965; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To gather data on the question, “What kinds of personal and collaborative benefits do teachers experience/report when they engage in instructional rounds in a high school?,” I met with the teacher participants after each of the three rounds of observations in a focus group and recorded their responses in a researcher journal. I again used the constant comparative method to group the data results (Glaser, 1965; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

In this study, I planned to recruit 3-5 participants and ultimately had four teachers who observed their colleagues and seven teachers who were observed. I initially emailed the entire faculty as prospective participants in my research study about the relationship between teacher social/emotional wellbeing and instructional rounds. I explained the study as an observation of colleagues in the classrooms of their choice and interest. I outlined the parameters that there would be 5 one-hour meetings total that included both focus groups and debriefing sessions, which were audio recorded. I considered the fact that anyone willing to participate in my study was someone who was probably already open to collaboration, I considered self-selection bias (Heckman et al., 1998). I realized that not only did their decision to participate likely stem from their openness to collaboration, but also other factors such as their belief in the power of professional learning communities to transform instruction as well as a willingness to reflect on their own practice. They may also have had an awareness of their social/emotional wellbeing and a desire to improve it. Recent climate surveys at Keystone High School indicate that teachers arrive at work feeling defeated, tired, emotionally numb and reminiscing a time when things were different indicate a general sense of the poor morale. Participants engaged in one interview one-on-one with me to discuss their present state of morale and their reasons for their willing

participation in the study. As a colleague of the participants, I knew that my relationship with them might have impacted their willingness to participate.

Data Sources

The three data sources for this study were individual semi-structured individual interviews with all participants, peer-observations, and focus groups. The purpose of each data category is outlined below in further detail, but an overview of the data collection is presented in the following chart.

Table 2

Data Collection Summary

| Initial Interview | Instructional Rounds | Debriefs/Focus Groups |
|---|--|---|
| One 45-60 minute interview per participant to determine their current social/emotional wellbeing and their perspective on observations (both administrative and peer) | <p>Participants completed three 60 minute peer-observations of their colleagues between September 2022 and December 2022 as part of the modified instructional round process.</p> <p>Data from these observations was used in focus groups and debriefs to determine the focus of the next cycle of modified instructional rounds. The focus of the observations was on what colleagues can learn from one another rather than a critique of the observee.</p> | There were five meetings in total. One focus group was held before all observations were conducted, a debriefing session was held after the first round of observations, and one focus group was held after each of the three observations. Then, a final focus group for the purposes of data triangulation was held after all observations were complete. |

Interviews

I chose interviews as the beginning stage of my research data collection because I knew that interviews would give me the opportunity to ascertain what was going on in my participants' minds prior to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The main reasons that I wanted to begin with interviews were that I want to learn about past experiences that my participants had, I would be unable to replicate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108) and because I wanted to get a deeper understanding of the social/emotional wellbeing of my participants prior to the start of my study. Interviews were the best method of data collection for these goals. In order to determine how the components of instructional rounds were related to the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale, I needed to first determine what their experiences had been with instructional rounds. I also needed to understand how they perceived their social/emotional wellbeing before the start of the study. Since I also sought to determine what kinds of personal and collaborative benefits teachers experience/report when they engage in instructional rounds, I needed to conduct the initial interviews with my participants to determine what their experiences with collaboration had been like thus far and especially in recent months or years. In order to collect qualitative data with these goals in mind, I used semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 110). I was able to modify the order in which I asked the participants questions as well as adjust the questions that I asked based on their responses to previous questions and in order to maintain a natural flow of conversation. I also needed to use probes to further understand the responses that my participants provided (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I asked for more details, for clarification, for examples, and even used silence to provide thinking time for my participants as they considered their responses to my questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, pp. 122–23) see Appendix B.

Focus Groups

Participants were a part of a one-hour focus group before they observed their colleagues. They observed their colleagues three times for one hour each. Then, they participated in a one-hour focus group after each round of observations. Before the observation cycles, participants received a scripted version of the lesson that they planned to observe, which each teacher observee provided (see Appendix A). During the observation cycles, participants took descriptive notes on the lessons they observed. I provided a form for these notes as well as examples of descriptive observation note-taking as compared to evaluative observation note-taking. There was a particular focus on the objective nature of observations through scripting of the lesson rather than subjective judgements of how successful or unsuccessful a lesson appears to be (City et al., 2009; Roberts, 2012).

Participants attended a one-hour focus group after each observation, and a final debriefing session after all observations had been completed to review the data I had collected for member-checking purposes. All focus groups and debriefing sessions were recorded digitally, and notes were taken on paper during these meetings. Digital audio files were transcribed and then deleted. My researcher's journal was a place for notes that I collected during the interviews, initial focus group, and debriefing focus groups. Though I initially planned to take notes digitally, I found it difficult to engage with my participants while looking at a computer screen and instead opted for hand-written notes.

The topics raised in the post-observation focus groups were co-constructed with the participants so that the meaningful experiences that the participants had were at the forefront of our conversation (Charreire Petit & Huault, 2008). I did not want to fall into the trap where I "assume[d] that others involved in the same context also share assumptions about values and purposes" (Bertini, 2012, p. 2). I wanted to be sure that my participants had a voice in the

modified instructional rounds process as well as that they felt my data analysis and coding accurately depict their experiences. Additionally, I continuously returned to the idea that “focus groups are not used to generate multiple accounts of individual perspectives, but they explicitly rely on the group interaction to produce and collect interaction-based data” (Bertini, 2012, p. 2). As such, it was particularly important to remember that “since co-workers often assume concepts without discussing them with their colleagues, this can lead to misunderstanding which can be unfolded by the focus groups” (Bertini, 2012, p. 3). Their fruitful conversation and my probing questions when more detailed, nuanced conversation was needed, left little room for misunderstandings. While replicating this study would always yield at least mildly different results because different people would be involved, “focus groups can show some evaluations, approaches, and mechanisms that exist in the target population and they can provide a deep and differentiated characterization of these phenomena” (Vicsek, 2010, p. 137).

Focus Group Interviews

After the initial individual semi-structured interview with each participant, I conducted a focus group interview with all of the participants prior to their engagement in the modified instructional rounds process. My intention in collecting data in this order was to better understand my participants’ individual experiences, perspectives, and social/emotional wellbeing prior to the study as well as to apply the social constructivist perspective that comes out of a discussion of professional content and practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 114). For instance, when my participants were discussing their experiences with instructional rounds or collaboration, one teacher refreshed the memory of another on a collaborative experience they had; other teacher narratives triggered the recall of other experiences that two of the participants had forgotten to mention, but then shared. In some cases, the participants “refine[d] their own

views in light of what they . . . [had] heard” (Hennik, 2014, pp. 2–3) during the focus group discussion. Since collaboration was at the forefront of the study itself, the focus group portion of the data collection was particularly important. In addition to the content of the conversation that provided me with the participants’ views of the instructional rounds process and the effects on their social/emotional wellbeing, I also gained a better understanding of the impact that collaboration with colleagues had on their social/emotional wellbeing by witnessing their collaboration firsthand and having the opportunity to discuss it with them.

Debriefing

Debriefing also occurred after each round of modified instructional rounds. In order to prevent the overall data collection from only partially fulfilling the research questions (see Appendix A), I used debriefing “to identify gaps in the data collected and to redirect course” (McMahon & Winch, 2018, p. 3) as needed between the modified instructional rounds cycles. I initially intended for the debrief and focus group conversations to occur during the same meeting, but distinctly differentiated for the participants, however the first debriefing session took longer than anticipated as we ironed out how the process went overall. I began by asking the participants to discuss the logistical breakdown of their observations in order to come to a shared understanding of the data they had collected at the time. This was designed such that if a revision of the data collection process was needed, it would be addressed prior to the next round of observations. Following the debriefing meeting, the second focus group discussion consisted of their shared feedback on the instructional rounds process as it unfolded. This took shape and went in different directions as conversations naturally unfolded. Again keeping in mind the co-constructed nature of the modified instructional rounds process, the notes from the debriefings and focus group discussions tailored each round of observations to the needs of the participants.

For instance, the participants wanted to visit teachers within their own content area at first, however upon listening to the experiences of other participants in other classroom observations, decided that they wanted to visit a different teacher in the second or third cycle to see how distinct content areas approach instruction, classroom design, and student engagement. Some observations needed to be adjusted purely as a result of scheduling availability.

Researcher's Journal

During the initial interview, debriefing/focus group discussions, and final interview, I took notes on the participants' experiences with modified instructional rounds. I did not participate in the rounds process itself. Rather, my notes focused both on the teacher participants' experiences with peer observations as well as collaboration and their social/emotional wellbeing throughout the cycles of modified instructional rounds. I included my own reflections of their focus groups conversations as well as any decisions that I made as issues arose or new ideas surfaced as the study progressed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 254). For instance, the second and third round of modified instructional rounds occurred in pairs rather than one teacher observing one other teacher. The researcher's journal allowed for accurate recall of the conversations and helped to jog my memory of ideas as they arose rather than relying on remembering them days or weeks later at a new focus group meeting (Saldaña, 2015, p. 20). In order to confirm that my data analysis was trustworthy, as noted in the rationale for the constant comparative method, I used my researcher's journal to "(1) check [my] interpretations developed thus far with the participants themselves; (2) initially code as [I] transcribe interview data; and (3) maintain a reflective journal on the research project with copious analytic memos" (Saldaña, 2015, p. 36). The researcher's journal also provided me with a starting point for the initial In Vivo coding

process and was one of my sources for triangulation along with interviews and participant observation scripts.

Data Analysis

Since I used the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to code my data, I revisited the notes from my researcher's journal frequently. The constant comparative method of data analysis "can be described in four stages: (1) comparing incidents applicable to each category, (2) integrating categories and their properties, (3) delimiting the theory, and (4) writing the theory" (Glaser, 1965, p. 439). Its function is to create "a continuous growth process--each stage after a time transforms itself into the next--previous stages remain in operation throughout the analysis and provide continuous development to the following stage until the analysis is terminated" (Glaser, 1965, p. 439). Using this method of reviewing the data and coding it several times, I considered other categories that my notes, focus group conversations, or participant observation notes could be coded as and compared them. Glaser (1965) suggests that the researcher then stop analyzing and record a memo. I followed this plan of analysis and then integrated categories and their properties as noted in the next step of the constant comparative methodology process (Glaser, 1965). Glaser (1965) suggested that another research team member read the coding categories and share any differences that arise in the analysis process. Since I was the principal investigator in this study, I provided the participants with the codes I used for the grouped data that I saw as they emerged from our focus groups to confirm that what I had analyzed matched with the way in which they saw their experience with modified instructional rounds unfolding. I also looked to a critical friend to confirm my theories

based on the data analysis I conducted (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Senge, 1990). I felt confident that my coding was complete after delimiting my data by identifying a solidified theory and delimiting “the original list of categories for coding according to the boundaries of [my] theory” (Glaser, 1965, p. 441). I used theoretical saturation as a guide that my data were correctly and consistently coded (Glaser, 1965, p. 441) and used a critical friend once again to confirm the theoretical saturation. Ultimately, I had “coded data, a series of memos, and a theory. The discussions in the memos provide the content behind the categories, which are the major themes of the theory as written in papers” (Glaser, 1965, p. 443).

In my first cycle, I used descriptive coding and in vivo coding to determine the major ideas that were shared by my participants by focusing on the patterns that arose from their spoken words. However, like Saldaña (2015), I “wish[ed] to keep [myself] open during initial data collection and review before determining which coding method(s) – if any – will be most appropriate and most likely to yield a substantive analysis” (p. 60). In my second cycle, I used patterned coding/focused coding (Saldaña, 2015). I pilot tested my coding as Saldaña (2015) suggested “to assess their possibilities” (p. 65). I shared my findings with my participants to member-check the groupings and assumptions made in order to “solicit feedback on [my] preliminary or emerging findings from some of the people that” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 246) participated in the observations and focus groups. Once all the data was collected, I again requested feedback from my participants on whether or not they felt my codes accurately captured their experiences with modified instructional rounds.

Trustworthiness and Triangulation

To ensure that my study is valid and reliable given the nature of assumptions in qualitative studies that involve data grouping by similarities and differences, I invited my

participants to member-check my coded data (Saldaña, 2015). I continued to revisit the coded data after each round of observations and remained open to emerging themes as they arose. After all, “What is being investigated are people’s constructions of reality—how they understand the world . . . [;] there will be multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon, how they have made meaning of their lives, or how they have come to understand certain processes” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 243). Once I received my participants’ observation data, I took notes in my researcher’s journal about what themes I saw emerging. I coded the data using the In Vivo method (Saldaña, 2015) and again used member-checking to review my data analysis. I repeated this member-checking in my second cycle using patterned coding/focused coding (Saldaña, 2015) after each focus group and repeated it again at the end of the observation cycle process.

Using the constant comparative method increased “the probability that [my] theory [was] well integrated and clear” (Glaser, 1965, p. 444), which “in turn raise[d] the probability that it will be understood and believed credible” (Glaser, 1965, p. 444). I moved from the general overarching themes that emerged in the first stages of my data analysis to “underlying uniformities and diversities and to account for differences . . . [in order to] engage in reduction of terminology...to achieve mastery of his data” (Glaser, 1965, p. 444).

I used Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a guide for criteria of trustworthiness. Their outline for trustworthiness includes credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and authenticity (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I followed the same structure for modified instructional rounds as City et al. (2009) in order to keep the study credible. This meant there were many opportunities for conversation about the process of rounds as well as the potential impact on the observers’ instructional practices. The structure of the study also

followed City et al. (2009) and is dependable and repeatable. A critical friend's review of my data analysis made the study confirmable. While transferability will vary according to each setting where a modified instructional around process might take place, the usefulness of the process itself would be found repeatedly with varying impact in each district. This study was authentic as it included teachers with a variety of experience in the field who taught in four different content areas across all high school grade levels.

I considered that my rapport with my colleagues might have made them feel comfortable being honest with me if I had not captured their experiences accurately, but that that relationship might also make them less likely to share with me for fear that I would divulge their experiences to others. As accomplished professionals, although they are not qualitative researchers, I did think that they would share any discrepancies they saw with my researcher journal notes and their own beliefs about the data I had collected. However, since this was not a guarantee, I also shared my data and analysis with a critical friend who was an outsider and had no ties to my school district (Costa & Kallick, 1993; Senge, 1990).

I used triangulation, originally defined by Denizen (1978), and later explained by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as “the use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators, or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings” (p. 244) in order to ensure that my data analysis was valid and reliable. The use of multiple sources of data “is a powerful strategy for increasing the credibility or internal validity of your research” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 245). To achieve triangulation, I used my researcher's journal, the observation data from the modified instructional rounds, and the perspectives of my participants about the ways in which I had constructed initial codes, secondary, and tertiary codes.

Positionality

As a teacher who was employed in the district where my study was conducted, I had witnessed a significant decline in teacher morale in the last few years. It is fair to assume that the COVID-19 pandemic played a major role in this decline. I recognized my own pre-existing belief about the relationship between teacher collaboration and social emotional experiences of teachers. Whenever I had planned cross-curricular lessons with my colleagues, I always added to my own pedagogical repertoire. In some cases, this was with content knowledge related to the historical background of literature that I taught. In others I learned new approaches to lesson organization and innovative ways to help students with targeted mini-lessons. I also believe that the isolated nature of teaching needs to be intentionally combated with planned exchanges and time allotted for teacher interaction about best practices. As a positive person by nature, I find that I have to distance myself from those who have allowed themselves to become toxic educators who find fault in all that our administration does. A personal goal of mine in this study was to uplift some of my colleagues who seem to have lost their “why” as teachers and to improve the climate in my school district. I recognized that because I felt so strongly that collaboration among colleagues and observation of another teacher’s craft is a reinvigorating process, that may play into the way that I saw my participants' growth or lack thereof over the course of my study. I stuck to the constant comparative methodology very strictly (Glaser, 1965; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and continuously referred to Maxwell (2010) who described validity as “credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (p. 280). As addressed above, I used member checks and a critical friend to further prevent my positionality from impacting the results of my study.

I also acknowledged that my role as an insider/outsider might influence the study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Since I am friendly with many of my colleagues, I

realized that they might be willing to participate in the study because they saw it as a favor to me. In the same vein, if there were participants who volunteered and were not my acquaintances, I wondered if they would open up to me in the same way those who I am closer with might. I ultimately had a mix of acquaintances and colleagues closer to true friends.

Chapter 4: Findings

I came to this study on teacher social/emotional wellbeing through modified instructional rounds in a phase of my career when I was surrounded by hopelessness. Because all social interactions included heavy conversation about the dire state of affairs in education, I found myself hiding in isolation to grade papers or plan lessons, which I knew was exacerbating my negative social/emotional health. In conversation with colleagues, we frequently discussed whether or not we could continue our careers in education in this negative work environment, especially when the frequency of school shootings increased nationally, and we began to also worry about our safety. These experiences, among others, led me to the purpose of this study, which was to find a way out of the despondency and to search for a possible solution to the apathy from which I saw my colleagues suffering. I knew that these concerns and feelings were not isolated to my own school district, which was even more motivating because I arrived at this research with a fervent desire to make actionable change in my field. My goal was to introduce other teachers to something that had been done previously in a much more invigorated educational climate and to modify it in such a way that it would be willingly received in a very fragile, reluctant educational environment. I hoped to achieve this by creating a modified instructional rounds process and inviting my colleagues to participate in peer observations.

The participants in this study and I were colleagues in the same high school. Each participant was a teacher in a different discipline with a wide range of years of experience. Their

distinct perspectives provided engaging conversations during our focus groups and touched upon a variety of concerns about the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers in a post-pandemic educational era even as we met to ostensibly develop our practice. I sought to determine what the relationship between social/emotional health and modified instructional rounds might be for high school teachers in the suburban school district where I taught. My overarching research question was: What are the connections between perceptions of school climate, personal histories with teacher observations, and enacting opportunities to learn through instructional rounds?

Expanding upon the research of City et al. (2009), who aimed to break down teacher isolation and create a culture where problems of practice were identified and resolved through instructional rounds, the following sub questions emerged in my research:

1. How are the components of modified instructional rounds affected by the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale? How do teachers participate in, and experience, the modified instructional rounds?
2. What kinds of personal and collaborative benefits do teachers experience/report when they engage in modified instructional rounds in a high school?

Ultimately, the focus became on teachers' social/emotional wellbeing and overall morale rather than the modified instructional rounds process itself. This evidence indicated the need for teacher support was so critical that the process of rounds became a vehicle for this collaboration and camaraderie. This study consisted of three cycles of modified instructional rounds where teacher participants observed their colleagues for one class period each round. Prior to the start of the study, the participants and I met for individual interviews to gauge their understanding of the process of instructional rounds, to learn about their social/emotional wellbeing, and to discuss expectations of the study.

Before the first cycle of modified instructional rounds, we met for an initial focus group to discuss the social/emotional wellbeing of the participants collectively as well as to address the details of how the rounds process would be scheduled; we practiced how to script a lesson, which emphasized objective written observations and what not to focus on while observing, which de-emphasized subjective details. During this meeting, we also addressed what type of feedback would be provided to the teachers who would be observed. The decision to focus on teachers' strengths was unanimous; the rationale for this decision is explored in more detail later, but it is important to note that this was unwavering from the start. For introductory purposes, it is important to note that the participants felt that there was a lack of relational trust between faculty and administration which had caused teachers to associate observations with penalization. This has been ongoing for many years and only two participants remembered a time in their career in the same district when there had been a strong relational trust between teachers and administration.

Since the suburban school district in my study had a lot of administrative turnover in the last decade, and each new leader brought in new initiatives and evaluation models, the faculty's motivation to support new professional development initiatives was minimal as there was an undertone of a short-lived follow through of these programs. Teachers have resorted to trying to get through each year by "staying under the radar" as I have heard many colleagues say over the last few years. This was problematic for collaboration because when there are "embedded norms of privacy and a culture of isolation, teachers will receive rounds with some resistance as it opens up a focus on classroom practice" (Melvin, 2017, p. 1). This proved to be true as only fourteen members of a sixty-person faculty agreed to be observed by their peers.

If this process were to be repeated in the same district, professional development that addressed the strained relationship between faculty and administration as well as between different departments would need to be incorporated before instructional rounds could broach topics that would be seen as critiques. In order to create an environment in which participants could have the potential for the most growth at the time of the study, no critical observations were recorded during modified instructional rounds. In this study when I use the term modified instructional rounds, what I mean is that an individual or pair of teachers visited another teacher's classroom in order to witness their colleague's classroom design, rapport with students, instructional strategies, pedagogical content skills, or to see their own students in another classroom environment. This differs from the structure of traditional instructional rounds where there is an identified problem of practice within the district first and then that teachers observe their colleagues in order to see how they might rectify the problem of practice. The traditional rounds process has teachers and administrators observe colleagues who need support in overcoming the problem of practice as well as colleagues who have the skill set needed to remedy the problem of practice. Modifications made for this study were necessary because of the fragile educational climate at the study site.

In seeking to determine how the components of modified instructional rounds related to the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale, I built upon existing definitions of teacher morale (Evans, 1997; Hart et al., 2000; Smith, 1966), for the purposes of this study, and I defined teacher morale as the level of happiness, enthusiasm, and curiosity toward learning that teachers experience at work. Teacher morale is ultimately only one factor of teachers' overall social/emotional wellbeing, but it is a critical piece. A topic that arose frequently in the initial interviews was that teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic made

people feel more isolated and lonelier. Participants also agreed that administrative observations were frequently inconsistent and often seen as punitive rather than constructive or opportunities for improvement. There was no existing structure for shared ideas among colleagues, but teachers expressed interest in having this time. Participants unanimously agreed that teacher morale was lower than ever because of the educational climate in the United States (Belsha et al., 2022; Brion, 2022; Filho et al. 2021), so any effort to improve it would be a strong implication in the field.

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of the context of the study because of the significance that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the site and the participants. I also lay out the participants' roles and briefly address the initial interview findings in order to provide a clear context for the themes that arose during the data analysis. I then describe the study's nine major findings. The first two findings are related to the impact of the existing low morale at the site of the study and the uncovering of how that came to be: The Effect of Inconsistent and/or Punitive Observations and Understanding Teacher Motivation for Involvement: Improved Practice, Teacher Collaboration, and Increased Collegiality. The next theme is about the logistical obstacles the participants faced in trying to carry out the rounds process: Outcomes of Modified Instructional Rounds. Three themes addressed the variety of ways relational trust impacted the study, both as a missing piece initially and ultimately as one of the sources of professional growth for the participants: Communities of Practice Provided a Space for True Relational Trust, Relational Trust is Impacted by Positive Social Experiences, and Fixing Broken Relational Trust: Laying the Groundwork. Finally, two themes focused on mentorship in several capacities including informal style, an assets-based approach, and the desire for peer mentorship and a

community of practice going forward. These are: An Assets-based Approach to Mentorship and Ideals and Expectations of Professional Learning and Collaboration.

Isolation and Loneliness as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic

In a profession that involves a lot of interaction with other people, it might be surprising to those outside the field of education to learn that many teachers feel isolated on a regular basis and have been feeling that way for many years (Conley & Cooper, 2013). This is often a result of lack of collegial communication and collaboration (Conley & Cooper, 2013). While teachers spend their entire day interacting with students, there is very little, if any, interaction among colleagues within teachers' departments let alone outside of teachers' own disciplines. At one time in the school district where this study was conducted, spaces such as a faculty room or a teachers' cafeteria were social environments that allowed teachers to mingle with colleagues even if there were no structured co-curricular meetings. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers' professional growth skidded to a halt and

The dilemma of teachers not all moving in the same direction collaboratively was a consequence of the professional isolation during the height of the pandemic. As we know, the pandemic forced many of us to retreat, confined to our homes for almost an entire year. Many educators could only engage with their colleagues and students virtually during the 2020–21 school year. This compromised our human connections and ability to operate collaboratively. (Thompson, 2022, para. 4)

While the COVID-19 pandemic kept people of all professions apart from one another for safety reasons, teachers dealt with an added layer of isolation as they were asked to manage students who came in close contact with an infected classmate or athletic coach. At Keystone, there was also a very stark political divide about how the pandemic restrictions were handled. Many

teachers separated themselves from one another based on who felt mask-wearing was an objectionable obligation and who did not. When teachers contracted the virus, they were required to stay home from work and use their sick days for the time while they were unable to work, which also caused a lot of resentment when colleagues were convinced that they had contracted COVID-19 from another colleague or a student who was not reported for lack of isolation when they had been around an ill classmate. Unfortunately, the environment at Keystone became bleak rather quickly in the weeks and months that followed March of 2020.

Teachers' desire to have more interaction with one another came with an awareness of teacher vulnerability coupled with a return to pre-pandemic administrative evaluation observations. The combination of a somewhat delicate faculty and the pressure to create a classroom environment that mimicked students' educational experience prior to such a traumatic event caused quite a bit of hostility between teachers and administration. Only two participants, both of whom had been teaching for over twenty years, remembered a time at Keystone where there was open dialogue between teachers and administration without the fear of retribution.

Wenger's communities of practice framework (1998) guided the structure of this study because of its widely cited and powerful explanation of how social learning functions. The communities of practice definition that guided this study on modified instructional rounds was: "Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). This framework has three parts: the domain, the community, and the practice (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015). For the purposes of this study, the domain was comprised of high school teachers, the community, or "the group of people for whom the domain is relevant" (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015, para. 7), which was the

school at large as well as other secondary education teachers in similar districts, and the practice was teaching.

After the initial focus group, teacher participants observed one of their colleagues. Some observed colleagues based on scheduling availability while others sought out a specific teacher who had a skill that the observer wanted to witness. The second and third round of modified instructional rounds were completed by pairs of teachers who observed one colleague each. This decision for a shift in the number of teacher observers came as a result of a desire for more collegiate conversations about the modified instructional rounds process as well as a desire for further triangulation of the data after it had been coded initially. While pairing up teachers for observations posed a bit of a scheduling hurdle due to the rotating drop schedule at Keystone High School and teacher duties that also rotated, there were two pairs of teachers who had the same prep period. I was able to cover a teacher duty for one of the participating teachers while she paired up with another participant to observe a lesson. If Keystone were to implement the modified instructional rounds process in the future, teacher schedules would probably be the biggest obstacle in widening the scope of modified instructional rounds.

A secondary goal of the initial focus group was to reiterate that only positive observational data would be shared with the observee. The participants were concerned that if the observee teachers were present at future meetings that some might feel “less than” if a colleague was praised more vocally. Therefore, the group decided that notes of positive observations would be shared with the observee after each round of modified instructional rounds. Teachers were pleasantly surprised to receive the feedback from the participants and shared via email and vocally that they were happy to have someone highlight their strengths even if it was during a peer observation. The themes that arose are organized according to the

communities of practice framework structure originally set forth by Wenger and Lave (1991) and then expanded upon by Wenger in several later publications (1998, 2010), some with collaboration, as noted (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2015, 2020). This framework takes the reader through the modified instructional rounds process by connecting the participants' involvement with what the literature has already said about instructional rounds while pinpointing the specific experiences they had and how they contribute to the existing research. The four participants in this study volunteered to participate after I reached out to the entire faculty for interest. One teacher had forty years of experience in education, another had over twenty years, another had over fifteen years, and one had over a decade of experience; none of the teachers were particularly close to any of the others.

Beginning conversations during the initial focus group session began with the teachers' morale. These conversations expanded on responses from the participants' interviews. Erica's contribution to the conversation on teacher morale focused on a lack of effort put forth to address teacher morale on a day-to-day basis. She said she appreciated that I was asking about her morale as a teacher because she did not feel that teachers' social emotional needs get nearly the attention that they should. She said:

Teachers are people too. And just like the students, you know, teachers come through the doors in the morning and walk out the doors in the afternoon. From and to with a whole set of problems, challenges, worries, juggling acts that nobody else in the whole building may even be aware of . . . We need support. We need people who we know maybe we can rely on even if it's just to vent for five minutes or if it's, you know, to connect with some kind of a helpful resource that's really really needed . . . You know, we all have

lives outside of here . . . Plus, in this profession, you really don't even have time to go to the bathroom, let alone you know, I could really use 10 minutes sitting talking with somebody or I'm so upset . . . I just need to shake this off for five minutes or . . . I know such and such colleague went through the same thing a couple of years ago. I just, I know it would be so helpful if I could just talk to him or her but there is no space for that.

(Initial Interview, 9/14/22)

This desire to be heard and feel supported came up again and again in this study. During the opening day presentation given by the interim superintendent at the start of the school year, there was a much more positive overture than in years prior. This may have helped this study because it may have created a more welcoming environment at the start of the school year when the study began. For example, Sophia shared that in years passed she had gone home crying to her husband wondering if she had made the right choice in working in that district, but this opening day, she tried to “find the positive things because being positive is what keeps you going and helps support your social emotional wellbeing” (Initial Interview, 9/12/22) and she “did feel like that was a complete different start to the year and it made me excited to be here again” (Initial Interview, 9/12/22). Sophia’s response honed in on the importance of work culture. A welcoming, buzzing work environment that is “Fully embracing a theme of reconnecting to the school’s collective ‘why’ and recommitting to each other as a team can help address what many school leaders have witnessed in the aftermath of pandemic school building closures” (Thompson, 2022). This study has shown how important it is to take into account the educational climate after the COVID-19 pandemic and how critical it is to prioritize teacher wellbeing when implementing professional development plans. Building relational trust among faculty and between administration and teachers are two main takeaways from this study.

Below is a timeline of the three cycles of modified instructional rounds that encompassed this study. Modified instructional rounds has been abbreviated to MIR.

Table 3

Data Collection Timeline

| Participants | Initial Interviews | Initial Focus Group | First Cycle of MIR | 1st Debrief Meeting | Second Cycle of MIR | Focus Group 2 | Third Cycle of MIR | Final Focus Group |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Sarah | 9/16/22 | 10/3/22 | 10/6/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/18/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/9/22 | 1/23/23 |
| Sophia | 9/12//22 | 10/3/22 | 10/4/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/17/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/13/22 | 1/23/23 |
| Henry | 9/15/22 | 10/3/22 | 10/4/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/17/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/13/22 | 1/23/23 |
| Erica | 9/14/22 | 10/3/22 | 10/6/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/18/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/9/22 | 1/23/23 |

The awareness of time as a primary inhibitor of collaboration helped shape the structure of the modified instructional rounds process. I reached out to the administration to request relief of contractual duties whenever possible and offered to cover participants' contractual duties myself, if need be, in order to provide them time to observe their colleagues. I followed the instructional round model (City et al., 2009) in that I kept the focus on colleague collaboration,

support for one another, and feedback about the process overall. I used the terms legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice with the participants to explore the foundation of peer observation practices. I defined legitimate peripheral participation earlier as the experience of learning from an expert in the field (Wenger & Lave, 1991) but Wenger and Lave explicitly explored the novice, expert relationship. In this study, the teacher on the peripheral did not need to be a novice teacher and the observee was not necessarily an expert in the field. During the modified observation rounds, the participant with the most experience, Henry, observed three teachers with significantly less teaching experience than he had. Sophia, the participant with the fewest years of teaching experience, observed three teachers with more experience than she had. Peer observations in this study were well outside the traditional educational structure of allowing novice teachers in their first two years of teaching to observe their mentor or other experienced teachers.

The Effect of Inconsistent and/or Punitive Observations

The first theme that emerged from the interviews and initial focus group was that administrative observations were inconsistent and often seen as punitive rather than constructive or opportunities for improvement. Teachers felt anyone coming into their classrooms was there to judge them and as a result, many teachers were very reluctant to participate in this study given the necessary vulnerability required for those who were involved. The negative and punitive observations that the participants described took place prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the focus group conversations were primarily about observations that did not take place during the pandemic. That distinction was important to note because the culture of the building was well-established prior to the pandemic; therefore, while the educational climate rapidly declined upon the return to school in 2021, the feelings participants had about being

observed predated the effects of the pandemic. The participants agreed that it was difficult to reflect on their practice when one observer gave them a high score and praised them for their content knowledge and student rapport while a few weeks later another observers' feedback was scathing (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22). There were four instances during the initial focus group in which teachers shared their frustration about the lack of experience that administration had in particular subject areas or in classroom instruction in general. For instance, Sophia noted that "it is difficult to take feedback from someone who does not even understand the language that I am teaching while they are observing me" (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22). As a former administrator, Henry's take on the state of administration prior to the modified instructional rounds process was:

And to me, that's the whole point. That's . . . the missing piece in education is recognizing that I realized that I shouldn't be in administration, even though I was pretty good at certain aspects of it. I wasn't good at the administration part of it. I was good at the visionary part of it. I was good at sitting down and mentoring. I was good . . . at these big pictures, but the everyday stuff, I hated it . . . but unfortunately, people . . . then get stuck into a situation where, you know, I'm here, now what do I do? You know, in my contract that said, I could go back into the classroom anytime I want it. Not every administrator gets that contract, but I knew there was a chance that I wasn't gonna like it. And, you know, it's again, it's recognition and people get stuck in these jobs. And if you're an administrator and you're making this amount of money, yeah, it's hard to, it's hard to give that up and, and people look at it as like, why would you give up the job once you have it? The money's not worth it, you know, and so, but a lot of people see that stepping back

into the classroom as a personal failure. You know, and so I think people get stuck in their roles. (Initial Interview, 9/15/22)

The idea that administrators had lost touch with what being in a classroom is really like in terms of the ways that they observe teachers was a common topic of conversation in the initial interviews. This speaks to the boundaries that had been set by the participants in this developing community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Another comment Henry made during the initial interview process was, “And after 40 years in the classroom, somebody that taught for five years 15 years ago is not relevant, unfortunately, to what's going on in the classroom today” (Initial Interview, 9/15/22). Henry is a unique participant because of his previous role as an administrator; he had the ability to broker (Wenger, 1998) and cross over from teacher to administrator in his mind.

In the same vein, Erica noted that when in conversation with one of the current administrators, he said that “there wasn't a ton of success in the past where people had the option to go into other people's classrooms” (Initial Interview, 9/14/22). She shared that, from his perspective, people were not very interested in seeing other people teach. I would argue that that was probably not the reason there was little involvement. It was likely more related to time constraints, an issue that is addressed later in my analysis of the findings, or perhaps the fact that the administrator Erica was referencing, did not have the ability to broker his role and could not obtain the needed buy-in for teacher interest in peer observation. The changing educational environment and the lack of social interaction specifically that has occurred as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic may have meant that teachers were more interested in observing their colleagues than they were previously. This desire was complicated, though, by some teachers' reluctance to be observed for fear of being judged. As Henry commented, the idea that administrators had not been teachers in over ten or even twenty years in some cases made it

difficult for them to have an accurate understanding of what current educators were experiencing and what their current desires might be. Therefore, a colleague-observer might be more desirable.

And yet another layer to the participants' frustration was founded in the observation model that Keystone had chosen. When expanding on his thoughts about the observation model at Keystone, Henry said:

I think the challenge with any observation model is that managers, good teachers, coaches, psychotherapists, psychologists are good because of their personality not because of what they learned in a book. And so, people that are mentors or leaders generally, that is not developed in the classroom, it's developed by experience. So, when you have a simpler model, the people that are good leaders are more able to lead because they're not spending 10 hours on stupid paperwork that they just have to get through. And so, I feel that the feedback was better. And I feel that the management was better. And you know, there's no kind way to say this. I can't imagine that some of the people that are, you know, doing these observations, some of them I've witnessed in the classroom . . . We know many of them went into management because of the money because they found their job less than satisfactory. (Initial Interview, 9/15/22)

Sarah had a similar view of the observation model that was used at Keystone during the study. She said, "The observation model that we are presently using imposes a methodology focused on group work which absolutely has advantages. But in the case of science, and presently chemistry, there are also opportunities to enhance student learning by direct instruction, which is not perceived as a positive in this observation model" (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22). Henry and Sarah were both very pleased when the district decided on a new observation model midway through the school year. When the new observation model was decided on, I recorded in my researcher's journal that

“all of the participants were grateful to have the opportunity to narrate their lesson” (Researcher’s Journal, 1/28/23) as well as with the decreased length of the pre- and post-observation forms in the new model. Another complication to the administrator-only observation model present at Keystone was that observers may not speak the language that the teacher is teaching while being observed. If a colleague who also taught the same language conducted a peer observation during a modified instructional round, Sophia would be able to receive very targeted feedback, but an observer who does not speak the language of instruction has limited capability in helping Sophia grow her practice. For instance, Sophia said, due to the nature of the courses she teaches:

They can observe my teaching and my pedagogy in the classroom because of all the questions we have to answer beforehand, and I give them my lesson plans and I break down what I'm doing and so they can follow along with what's happening. But as far as what I'm teaching and the content of what I'm teaching, they wouldn't know if I were to teach something incorrectly [because it's in a different language]. (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

Sophia said that she had only ever been observed by someone who spoke the language being taught twice in her four years at Keystone. In addition to the language barrier, Sophia was also frustrated by the fact that there had not been a lot of feedback on how to address issues in her class to come out with a better outcome. For example, she said that her final observation at the end of the year last year was in May and there had been a comment about the number of students on their cell phones. She was frustrated by this feedback because:

when I asked the observer during our post observation when I read that comment, and I asked like what she would recommend for how to, you know what to do . . . The administration doesn't put a lot of emphasis on it being important that we have a policy

about cell phones in the class, so sometimes I worry that if I implement my own policy that I could have repercussions on myself that is not supported outside the room. So, her recommendation was nothing. She said, ‘Well the school has a policy on the cell phones, and it should be being adhered to in all the classes.’ And as an untenured teacher, I worry that I put myself in a predicament with the cell phone situation. (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

While Sophia was sharing this experience, I noted in my researcher’s journal, “this is not the first time that someone shared this with me” (September 2022); the suggestions on teacher participants’ observations were not as pragmatic as they would have liked.

For instance, in the library teachers’ lounge, at the end of each round of administrative observations there was always at least one person discussing the feedback they were provided by administration. It seemed that in many instances the teacher talking about their own observation results was seeking feedback from other teachers in the room wondering if they had also received similar responses from the same administrator. When the other teachers in the room at the time said that they had been scored similarly or were given the same commentary after an observation, the initial teacher seemed satisfied, and the conversation changed topics. However, whenever someone in the room admitted that the observation they received was different and suggested that the initial person might have been targeted by the observer or on the opposite end of the spectrum, might have been given inflated scores because they were well-liked, the conversation would continue. Teachers wanted to feel as though there was consistency with observations and that there was some level of inter-rater reliability. The reality was that regardless of the consistency or inconsistency, the teacher gained no professional learning from these observations.

Teachers Had a Fear of Being Misunderstood

The model at Keystone where tenured teachers were only observed twice a year really lent itself towards misunderstandings. Two hours of teaching out of an entire school year of instruction is only a small snapshot of a teacher's professional skill. There are dire consequences for being misunderstood and one of these consequences is a lower teacher morale.

In addition to punitive observations, participants shared that they had inconsistent observations by different observers. When I asked Henry if his observations were consistent across observers, Henry said that they were not and that he had even brought one of his observations to the former superintendent because:

The comments were contradicted by the number; that the comments indicated a high[ly qualified score] and the number indicated an average [score] and you know, and I said well, that's partly because I know that you've instructed people to you know, give lower numbers so they can show growth over the year. But . . . if I'm not good, I'm probably not good consistently. If I'm decent, I'm decent consistently. And every once in a while, I'm gonna hit a home run. But if you hit a home run, you should be recognized for that. You know, and if you're a high performing school, your teachers are high performing all the time; they're not getting significantly, you know, after 40 years, I'm not getting better from September to May. You know, it's just not happening. (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

Henry did not believe that a teacher could show significant growth over the course of the school year if they were already strong teachers. Henry also shared that in his experience as a former administrator it was much more common to do more walkthroughs than formal observations which had given him the chance to mentor teachers who needed more support. I noted in my researcher's journal, "Henry often mentions the more relaxed, more frequent nature of the observations he did

as administrator and his belief that those types of low stakes observations were most effective in providing feedback for teachings as well as witnessing teacher growth” (9/13/22).

Henry’s previous school had a much different culture where doors were open, and administration walked freely in and out of classrooms. He shared that teachers were comfortable with this environment (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22). As Henry was describing his positive work culture because of this open-door policy, Sophia jumped in to say, “I actually had to get in the habit of keeping the door closed because I got, I got like reprimanded that my door was open because of like the security” (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22). There was a clear association between observations and negative feedback that three of the four participants expressed. This association was an obstacle in expanding the peer observation pool of observees as any observation from another person caused some teachers to put their guard up (Bradford & Braaten, 2018; Garver, 2020). It was evident based on participants’ responses both in the initial interviews and their first two focus groups that the vulnerability needed to welcome observers into the classroom for modified instructional rounds was only shared by a small percentage of the faculty at Keystone.

Understanding Teacher Motivation for Involvement: Improved Practice, Teacher Collaboration, and Increased Collegiality

This theme explored the central reasons why the four participants agreed to partake in this study, including what they felt they could get out of the study. Teachers expressed a variety of reasons for their initial interest in observing colleagues: engagement strategies, classroom management, content delivery, teacher/student rapport, lesson architecture, classroom activities with students of the same grade, content interest, teaching style. The area listed most frequently was classroom management. Teacher participants generally just wanted to regain the collegiality

that they once associated with their workplace, but which had increasingly dwindled over the last five years.

Motivation

Sophia said that her reasoning for observing the first person she saw teach was “he’s such a laid back, just nice guy in general. And I’m like, I wonder how that reflects in the way he speaks to students and how he teaches his students . . . I never hear about him in my classes. Like I never hear the kids talk about him” (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22). In her observation of this teacher, she noted that the students were working independently for the most part and the teacher was facilitating the lesson. Sophia shared that even though she had access to the lesson plan, it was difficult as an outsider to the discipline to understand what the students were doing and whether or not they were on task because the work was on the computer. This response echoed the concern about administrative observation data inconsistencies (Roberts, 2012). Observers, even with a lesson plan on hand, may have had difficulty understanding the student learning process or lesson steps without access to the specific program the students used during an observed lesson.

When asked about what the motivation for observing a colleague in the same department would be, Sophia shared:

I would just like to see how another teacher teaches the same exact topic that I teach, especially because she’s a native speaker . . . Also, when I think back on when I started, I mean, the last time I observed somebody teach Spanish was student teaching, so it’s interesting to think Oh wow, I haven’t observed another person teach my content area in eight years. That’s a long time. (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22)

Erica chimed in to say, “We’re all in our little silos, the doors shut. We hardly even have time to use the restroom let alone have any sort of real collaboration with one another” (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22). It was clear she had not observed anyone in her own content area in recent years either.

Erica provided her views about the type of person that would be voluntarily involved in instructional rounds in general. She noted that opening up one’s classroom makes the teacher vulnerable and so humility would be helpful. She said it might be someone who would say:

Listen, I am not I'm not the world's best teacher necessarily . . . I don't expect that you're coming in to observe me because you, you think I'm like the majesty of the teachers. But you know, hey, come in and definitely see what I do. But also, let me come in and see you and tell me you know what, you know what you were doing today? I just went and I tried that and it didn't work or I got stuck where you're getting stuck and here's what really helped me; so, it just, it's all in this the true spirit of collaboration and helping each other. I think it's great and that's one thing that this industry, this this profession, is, it's hard, especially at the high school level, where we're generally more siloed. (Initial Interview, 9/14/22)

Henry reflected on his role as mentor to a novice teacher. I had never seen him so passionate about anything we have ever discussed together (Researcher’s Journal, 9/16/22). He said:

teaching is like putting your money into someone else's bank account. If you wait for them to write you a check, you're going to be sorely disappointed. It's going to come; it's going to come out of the blue; it's going to come 10 years from now; somebody's going to send you an email or a letter or a card saying you know . . . you changed my life. So, and we work in isolation, so there is no real effort for that. (Initial Interview, 9/15/22)

All the participants' desire to better themselves and to be role models for their colleagues should the modified instructional rounds process be carried out in the future, in addition to their heartfelt depictions of what teaching really is, demonstrated their desire to work in a collaborative environment.

Reluctance

The interest in observing colleagues supported the notion that teacher participants felt modified instructional rounds had the potential to be beneficial for their social/emotional wellbeing. However, non-participant teachers working in the same school district may have been reluctant to participate because they had very little interaction with their colleagues and were therefore not as willing to have a peer observe their lessons. One area in particular related to the school culture that seemed to have affected the reluctance of teachers who chose not to participate is the surface level connections that many colleagues have with one another because of the lack of collaboration. Even the teacher participants recognized how this missing camaraderie among the faculty created a cooler school climate. For instance, Sophia said:

I also feel like before people would be welcome to having like whoever, whenever in their class observing them, there has to be things that are implemented in the building to bring everybody together in a way that like people know each other and will feel comfortable with each other. (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22)

Interestingly, Sophia drew on the fact that teachers' attitudes towards having others in their classroom was related to how healthy a school's culture was and yet, as this study showed, in order to improve school culture, openness and collaboration must be present. The shift in culture and willingness is the heavy lifting of real school change that, I argue, might begin with modified instructional rounds.

While traditional instructional rounds (City et al., 2009) observer groups agree to participate as a community to work towards solving a problem of practice, observers and teachers do not necessarily have a working relationship beyond their willingness to work towards school improvement. The participants in this modified instructional rounds study indicated that without at least some relationship with a colleague who would potentially visit their classroom, there would be a level of uneasiness (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22). Teachers reported that the educational climate at Keystone made any sort of discomfort intolerable.

Teacher participants were aware of their own hesitation in having a colleague observe them even though they were comfortable with the set group of people in the study observing them. This may have been because they felt the other three people were like-minded and would be focusing on each other's strengths rather than weaknesses. Perhaps Erica said it best when she told me that "the people who can support you and help you and 'unsticky' you know, get you unstuck are here. I think we do have tremendous power to help each other and learn from each other, but a lot of us are also very scared" (Initial Interview, 9/14/23). Teachers have been so conditioned to be on-guard when someone is observing them that they are unwilling to be observed by colleagues for fear of being judged as less than another teacher or worse for fear of being exposed to an administrator for something that an observer witnessed in their classroom (Researcher's Journal, Initial Debrief, 10/24/22). In addition to the fear of being judged, teachers also shared that they struggled to take any feedback from administration seriously because there were always new expectations depending on the observer or depending on the changes in administration (Researcher's Journal, Initial Debrief, 10/24/22). An interesting perspective that Henry shared at the start of the instructional rounds process was that:

people work at UPS for their entire life. They make a lot of money. It's a mindless,

numbing, dangerous, dirty job, but they don't leave. Because there's no expectations. I just got to come in and make sure that trucks are loaded or unloaded, and the boxes get in the right place. There's no emotional investment. I'm not changing anybody's life. I'm not expected to change anybody's life. I'm not expected to get better every week. I'm just expected to hit this every week. And if I hit that every week, the target never changes. I have to be 80% effective every week and every year that I'm 80% of the effective 80% of the time I'm getting a raise. The target never changes. Here the targets are always changing. (Initial Interview, 9/15/22)

While Henry shared that he enjoyed the rewards of being a teacher and the role that he played in that career path, he also reflected here on how much more challenging it is to work in a field that requires constant adaptability and target achievement when that target is always moving. The “ever-changing expectations” (Henry’s Initial Interview, 9/15/22) that Henry pointed to are also evidence of the school culture and the frustration the faculty felt at the start of the study.

Building Relational Trust

Erica touched on the topic of relational trust as a key component in what motivated her to participate even though she did not use those exact words. Relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) played a pivotal role in the success of this study of modified instructional rounds. The openness of the faculty members who were willing to have their colleagues observe them through the modified instructional rounds process was the foundation of peer collaboration efforts and seemingly increased social/emotional wellbeing of the participants. It is important to note that the participants did arrive at the study with an open mind and an eagerness to assist in the success of the study, in part because of the relational trust I had already built with them.

Erica, in particular, said, “I’m always happy to, to help you. That’s one reason” (Initial Interview, 9/14/22).

I appreciated the participants’ willingness to help me of course, but I also wanted to know what they hoped to get out of the process in order to answer my second research question: What kinds of personal and collaborative benefits do teachers experience/report when they engage in modified instructional rounds in a high school? Instructional strategies were one of the most common responses for participant-motivation. Sophia shared that she hoped to “learn some new teaching methods and some new approaches to the students” (Initial Interview, 9/12/22). She reflected on the fact that “it’s easy to get stuck in the same process of how you pair students . . . or for what activities you form groups, things like that” (Initial Interview, 9/12/22). Witnessing someone else’s class group methodology was something that piqued her interest.

Sarah wanted to learn different perspectives of approaching lesson structures. She also said she was willing to offer to help her colleagues and to create more departmental bonds. She said:

And it’s all about a comfort level, to have discussions with people. We’re not evaluating. We’re not judging. We’re sharing and once people get comfortable with that forum, I think that that will make a better working environment. (Initial Interview, 9/16/22)

The focus on providing only positive feedback was readily accepted and supported immediately during the initial focus group meeting (10/3/22) but came up again and again as a critical response to the subquestion: “How are the components of the modified instructional rounds related to the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale?” As Guskey and Link (2022) concluded, teachers need feedback to be “meaningful, helpful, and non-threatening [or] their practices will not change” (p. 47). The low-stakes practices of peer

observation created a relational trust between the teacher observer and the teacher being observed. The repeated focus on an assets-based approach to mentorship was an added buffer to promoting actional change through peer observation.

When I asked Henry about what he was hoping to get out of the modified instructional rounds process, he said he was hoping it would be like coaching had been for him. He had honed in on the skill of helping athletes demonstrate significant growth in short periods of time and felt that skill would transfer to peer observation and personal implementation as well. He highlighted that he feels teaching is heavily influenced by the personality of the teacher. He said:

So, my classroom experience is not going to be the same as someone else's because it's based on my personality. So, somebody walks into my classroom and sees what I'm doing. I don't wouldn't expect them to do it, but they just see that this is how I do it. And if it works, they may pick up something. And if I go into somebody else's classroom, I'm probably going to pick up something . . . So, I think it's, you know, I think it's beneficial just to break down barriers. So, this creates the scenario that we should have anyway, but everybody's gonna help you because it's you. (Initial Interview, 9/15/22)

All of the participants shared in one way or another that they felt that collaboration would definitely be a stepping stone to improved teacher social/emotional wellbeing. For example, in the second focus group, Henry said:

One of the things I like about doing stuff like this and when we did the touchy feeling things, the uh, social emotional thing that went away pretty quickly, is that you learn from each other . . . You came up with this thing with the sticky notes, right? But that's awesome. That got us here to this conversation. (Focus Group 2, 11/2/22)

In Henry's case, I wondered if the rounds process might give him an opportunity to articulate in more detail what he could learn from a colleague and use in the future so that he might then pass it on to another teacher. Modified instructional rounds might have helped Henry or someone like him in the process of reflecting on why he designed his lessons a certain way or the way in which he communicated with students and thinking through the adaptations he made to learn from those decisions or to mentor someone else using those reflective practices.

Erica relayed that she asked administration about having grade level meetings to provide teachers with time to meet with teachers outside of their own departments and the response was that they could be held after faculty meetings. Erica said:

We don't need it added on. We need it in place of something that isn't helpful like PD that we haven't had a say in. But this, this has been really valuable. It's a space that we can share and work things through. I have really loved this. (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23)

In general, these focus groups provided teacher participants with the opportunity to have targeted conversation with colleagues. The topics of the focus groups varied depending on which observation the teacher participants were discussing, but in each meeting there were side conversations that happened organically that also built on the relational trust the participants had with one another.

Peer Collaboration

Wenger (2010) stressed that as members of a community of practice work together, over time, they create a "set of criteria and expectations by which they recognize membership . . . which includes joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire" (p. 180). Whether or not the participants actively recognized their desire for collaboration and academic discourse could not be ascertained at the conclusion of the study, but it was clear that the participants did

create a space where relational trust and peer collaboration was established and truly flourished. For instance, Erica shared in her initial interview that in order for her colleagues to be more open to collaboration and to create a more positive school culture, simply providing unstructured time would not have been enough. She said:

I think there has to be a little shape to that. Because . . . I think if we had, okay, here's your unstructured hour for teacher wellness or whatever. I think there are people who would complain and say, Oh, great, thanks. Give us time to do nothing . . . or say, I'm gonna leave, right? . . . I also think there's something nice to having a pre grouped . . . because maybe the five women who never talked to anybody else . . . if you could kind of spread them out and everybody could maybe make some new friends or have a positive experience that wasn't kind of overshadowed by maybe, you know, a dynamic wasn't necessarily positive. (Initial Interview, 9/14/22)

However, by the end of the study, all four participants were brainstorming how they could logistically observe their department counterparts in the future as well as which department members in other content areas might be helpful in supplementing their courses.

The four participants agreed upon the purpose of modified instructional rounds (joint enterprise), made their own norms for the focus group meetings, and all participated (mutual engagement), and used standard and widely accepted educational terminology in observation notes as well as focus group discussions (shared repertoire). Teacher participants wanted the modified instructional rounds to “focus only what the teachers are doing well as a way of building up teacher’s morale” (Researcher’s Journal, 10/3/22). During the first focus group meeting, all four teacher participants agreed that they “would provide feedback to their colleagues in written form to prevent any one of the observees from feeling lesser than another

colleague if they heard feedback from everyone aloud” (Researcher’s Journal, 10/3/22). We reviewed the observation feedback form prior to their first round of observations and all teacher participants were comfortable scripting a lesson as well as noting pedagogical strengths. Example notes from the observations included jargon such as “lesson objective, soft timer, teacher-talk, asynchronous instruction, classroom climate, flipped classroom” (Researcher’s Journal, 1/30/23). These collective elements of the modified instructional rounds process demonstrated the teacher participants’ willingness to and capability of fully engaging in the collaborative efforts of the study.

Participant morale increased as the study progressed. Teachers mostly vented during the initial focus group at the start of the study, but in the final group they were eager to share with the other participants what they had seen in the classrooms they observed as well as what takeaways they had for their own lessons. Teacher morale, or how teachers perceived their anticipated work satisfaction *was* (emphasis added) based on how their own priorities and needs were met (Evans, 1997), was identified as particularly low by all participants in their initial interviews.

Teacher resilience, I argue, was directly related to teacher social/emotional wellbeing. For example, feedback from the initial interview process told me that all four participants were struggling with their own resilience. Sophia said, “I just feel like everyone is so sad all the time here” (9/12/23). Erica shared, “I’m happy in my classroom and in my teaching, but when I interact with other people I can tell that they’re not happy. I don’t do well with negativity” (9/14/23). Henry told me “Every day I come to work and I think, is it Friday yet?” (9/15/23). Sarah said, “I just come to work and do my job and go home” (9/16/23). Elias (2023) wrote that teachers must be shown compassion and appreciation in order to prevent teacher attrition. The

educational climate of the study site certainly did not convey compassion to the four participants. There were instances of appreciation via lunches set up by the parents and emails of appreciation from the administration, but the four participants did not express that they felt appreciated at work. And yet, the teacher participants in this study were all midcareer or further and remained resilient despite governmental policy reform, the changing perception of teachers in the public eye, and increasing prioritization of assessments and data tracking. This resilience was built up by a community of like-minded individuals (Gu & Day, 2007; Wenger, 1998) who felt a sense of responsibility to continue their mission to better the world around them.

All four participants shared in their initial interviews that they had a desire to improve education and return to a work environment that fostered collaboration while simultaneously demonstrating appreciation towards teachers. The participants each shared why they were willing to engage in the modified instructional rounds process in the first place. Sophia said:

Um, I really love teaching. I love the concept of teaching. I love that you can share and teach someone to understand something that they never thought they could . . . I feel like I'm always learning how to better interact with people in general . . . I just find education is essential to life . . . So, anything that helps me learn how to be a better teacher, which I feel like this what you're doing, you know, teachers coming to observe us being able to observe like I think you can learn a lot from observing someone else teach even if they have nothing to do with what you teach, because I have done it in the past, and I did find it really beneficial. So, I think it's interesting. Happy to learn from it. (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

Later in the initial interview, Sophia shared that she had voluntarily observed her peers earlier in her career in a different school district (Initial Interview, 9/12/22). When asked if her experience

of participating in peer observations impacted her decision to participate in this study, she said that she would have participated anyway, but that she was eager to participate because she remembered how much she had benefited from peer observation earlier on in her career (Initial Interview, 9/12/22).

Sarah said she wanted to participate, “Because I think collaboration is very important. No one can really succeed in isolation. And I really, I like working with my colleagues” (Initial Interview, 9/16/22). Sarah raised the importance of collaboration in her view several times in her initial interview and again in the focus group sessions. When Erica was asked about her reason for participation in the study, she said:

I just would love to share anything that I do . . . and I'd love to learn from other people.

What works for them. You know, one thing I'll add is we all have those students who we don't know how to effectively reach and sometimes all it takes is, you know, talking to somebody who said, ‘Oh, you know what I've done in that situation, or I had that student last year and here's what worked really well.’ . . . Another reason is just, you know, I believe in the, the power of positivity and people, and I think great things happen when people come together, and I think that my professor was right, this is the loneliest job.

(Initial Interview, 9/14/22)

The engagement, imagination, and alignment elements of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) are three ways that members showed that they belonged to the community at hand.

Teacher participants worked together, reflected on their practice, and planned toward the same goal of peer collaboration and collegiality, which all align with the principles of communities of practice.

Peer collaboration, when teachers meet with other teachers to work towards a common goal, in essence a form of mentorship, has the potential to have a domino effect in the field of education. When mentoring is done properly, there is a profound lasting impact on the mentee. Thus, “Formal mentoring can . . . be the gateway to informal mentoring and can give proteges the background, experience, and motivation to be mentors in the future” (Ragins, 2017, p. 242). Peer collaboration also aligns with Ragins’ (2017) description of extraordinary, high-quality mentorships where “interactions become places for mutual discovery and learning, and influence shifts from hierarchical states of ‘power over’ to collaborative states of ‘power with.’ Expertise is seen as fluid and based on ability and knowledge, rather than on hierarchical position” (p. 232) and there is room for reciprocal growth. This nonhierarchical mentor/mentee relationship contradicts the more traditional mentorship roles where the mentors are the experts and mentees have nothing to offer their mentors. The participants in this study were very open to taking on the role of learner even though this was not a formal mentorship relationship. For instance, in Erica’s initial interview, she said:

And you know what, when people, when students come to my classroom and they say, ‘Oh, I had so and so last year, she was the best teacher ever!’ I want to go sit in that teacher’s room. I want to go, I want to know like, What is she doing? Not because I want to copy it, but it might inspire something in me that I can do. And you know what, even if I do copy it, so what and I bet that teacher would be the first person to say, ‘Yeah, copy it, and let me know if you’d come up with something better and share it back my way.’

Yeah, so I think it’s important. It’s important work. (Initial Interview, 9/14/22)

Erica’s desire to collaborate with a colleague and learn through legitimate peripheral participation in a fellow teacher’s classroom even before the study started and her comments

about feeling comfortable having someone visit her classroom as long as they were coming in with an open mind and not seeking to criticize her was evidence that she was less reluctant to the process of modified instructional rounds than the other participants had been.

Outcomes of Modified Instructional Rounds

In this study, the hindrances were mostly logistical relating to schedule availability, teacher time, and the number of teachers who were willing to be observed by their colleagues. The benefits were that relational trust was built among the participants and a new community of practice had begun to develop. The culture of practice had not historically included any collaborative teaching at Keystone. Teachers were given the opportunity to observe their peers if they wanted, but only on their own preparation time, which was precious time that teachers needed to plan their lessons and grade assignments.

Time Constraints and Teacher Reticence

At the start of the study, I had assumed that there was a lack of desire to learn from other members of one's department, let alone other colleagues in the building, but my participants contradicted this notion in the initial focus group (10/3/22). This misunderstanding, or attribution error (Kennedy, 2010) where I mistook a contextual factor for the individual characteristics of the teachers helped bolster the evidence that making assumptions as to why teacher morale is low without further investigation is dangerous. All four participants agreed that what might have appeared to be a lack of interest in collaboration with colleagues since peer observations were quite rare at Keystone, was actually often an issue of time constraints and overall hopelessness about the way teachers are viewed by society and by community members (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22). Participants reported during their initial focus group that they had little motivation to do more than what was contractually asked of the faculty (10/3/22). While the participants

agreed that there were some people resistant to cross-curricular collaboration, vertical articulation, and peer observations, the participants felt no one in this study was in that group. Henry and Erica were clear that they believed their department colleagues and others would love to have more time to work with each other but that they were always occupied by other professional responsibilities on their preparation period that that is often impossible (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22).

In Keystone High School, there was no schedule or professional development structure that allowed time for shared ideas among colleagues even though the value of providing teachers time to collaborate is widely known (Buysse et al., 2003; de Jong et al., 2019; Desimone, 2009), but all four teacher participants stated that if they had the opportunity to observe one another in place of a duty during the day, that they would have signed up and that they believed many other people would too (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23). None of the participants had ever participated in a true instructional rounds process, but some had experiences that were more informal where a colleague stayed in their classroom during their preparation period and in that case a special education co-teacher wanted some extra resources and best practices for the shared content that both teachers taught. Erica elaborated on this experience and shared that early on in her career her in-class support teacher happened to hear a lesson she was teaching and asked if she could come observe her, informally. Erica grinned as she relayed the encounter to me:

And later, she asked me some things about it. And she said, ‘Oh, I have this you might be interested and she said, you know, do you think I could come back to the next class, you know, tomorrow?’ And so, she ended up sitting in on a lot of classes, primarily because she was very interested in the content and sort of turn keying with her population. You know, in a different way. It was just, it was a fresh way to approach you know, sort of the

same old content and a great collaboration and ultimately friendship grew out of that because we just had so much respect for each other and so much, positivity. And I think, for me, that's a huge aspect of collaboration. (Initial Interview, 9/14/22)

Erica and her colleague developed a strong friendship and are still in touch today. Erica said that they continuously share new educational findings with each other. Erica's willingness to have her classroom door open to visitors is not shared by many of her colleagues, though.

After all of the rounds had been completed, Henry shared that he felt: it would be valuable for people to do it. And, again, you know if you're getting somebody relieved from a duty to do that, even if it's just a couple times a year, you know, the people that have six classes, it's hard to give up their prep or there you know, whatever to do that because they're buried. So, I think, I think that it's valuable. You know, not everybody has the temperament that I have just to walk into somebody's class and see what they're doing for five minutes. And so, I think, setting up a program to do that and allowing people to do it and let it count as PD. (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23)

Even with Erica's positive view of peer mentorship, she raised the point that she always felt like there was unfinished business as a teacher, which might have otherwise led to her deprioritizing voluntary observations if she were not a part of the study. She said she felt others might have been interested, but just could not have set aside the time to commit to it. She said that the only time she was ever given the opportunity to formally observe a colleague was when she was student teaching. As someone who was interested in this research herself, Erica inquired about the professional development opportunities available at Keystone. She told me:

our administration claims that coverage will be provided for anyone who wants to observe other teachers . . . that that has always been the way, and I'm like, nobody knows

that. I don't think that that has always been the way. So, I'm not sure if that's actually the case, and we're all just unaware or if that was said to me because of this study or was it something that administration really embraced. You know, hey, go do that. That's awesome. Even still, I feel like a lot of the teachers may, myself included, may not take advantage of that. Because of everything that just keeps getting put on our plates. Yeah. So it's kind of like that would be awesome. But that's the one block that I'm not with this class. And then . . . I need to read whatever I'm in or whatever. (Erica Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22)

Erica's willingness to be vulnerable and share that even in the future she would not necessarily continue to informally observe her peers because she felt as though she was always behind because of class interruptions or student absences or just to give herself the opportunity to be better prepared for class was very telling early on about the openness that the community of practice that I was hoping to create was beginning to form. Sarah agreed with Erica's thinking about the lack of time, "Yeah, almost like when you get a sec, but yes, like, now I'm behind on that" (Sarah, Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22) and Erica chimed in with, "I, that's just my first thought. And I think it's the constant war being given to us. That causes the frustration that led to the climate" (Erica Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22). The culture of frustration and climate at Keystone High School certainly impacted the way that the participants experienced the instructional rounds process because they suggested that they were only willing to participate because it was a favor to me. They shared in a variety of examples that they have the desire to participate in modified instructional rounds in the future, but that the time must be provided, and the culture must change if administration wants to support that work.

One significant obstacle in the study was the list of teachers willing to be observed. This was no different than the challenges that arose in the traditional instructional rounds model where Roberts (2012) wrote, “We have had folks walk out, cry and just plain refuse to participate” (p. 158). For example, there were several teachers that the participants were interested in observing who did not agree to be observed. This was a hindrance for departmental observations as well as for scheduling of the modified instructional rounds process. For instance, Sophia reported that after her first round of observations:

I guess I just felt like I didn't have as much to see. Like there was a lot of time that I, wasn't necessarily, there was not much to comment on. Because it was kind of seeing the whole class. You know what I mean? Like, other than little tidbits of like things you'd say specific students or questions that students would ask or things like that, but wasn't like observing different activities within the same lesson. It was the whole, it was like the same for the whole time. (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22)

When I asked Sophia to elaborate on how that might have impacted her instruction, she said that she was impressed that the students worked so diligently for extended periods of time, but that she was not able to discern what student learning took place. She shared that given the fact that her students are learning a new language in her classroom, she would not have structured large chunks of time for independent work but considered it since that the students were able to work for lengths of time in the class she observed, it might be something she would try in her own classroom. She continued:

The only thing I will say is when I was about 15 minutes into the observation I was like this is probably not the class I should have observed because it was, the lesson was, the kids were already set up . . . They were creating, creating an app, so every student was

kind of in a different phase of where they were working, and this teacher was sort of just you know, circling and helping individual students and making sure they were staying on task and facilitating, so there was no like, specific instruction followed by an activity . . . So, I kind of felt like, maybe I should have observed a lesson where I got to see more of like students interacting and the teacher interacting with the students. (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22)

Sophia's concern about possible takeaways from a lesson where she knew she would be witnessing very little teacher/student interaction told me that she would not have wanted to adopt that style of lesson if she knew she was being observed by an administrator. In other words, she did not feel an outsider could effectively assess student achievement in the lesson she observed. When I circled back to this assumption, she said that if there were more low stakes opportunities to be observed, she would be much less worried that someone would feel she was not doing enough just from one lesson they witnessed. This response also speaks to the difficulties of undoing the observation process that was so ingrained in Sophia's mind. Even in a low stakes peer observation, she did not feel as though she was seeing teaching in that particular classroom.

When asked who chose that block, Sophia said that she chose that day because it lined up with her preparation period. I wondered if there was anything she might have taken away from seeing a class that worked so well independently. Sophia said, "That's the hardest thing for me teaching language is that like the lessons for students actually learn the language they have to be student centered because they have to functionally try to use the language and it's so hard because with the levels I teach. I always find that like kids are just way too distracted and way too unmotivated to focus." (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22). Erica agreed with Sophia's observation that some of the younger students have difficulty when they are given a lot of

freedom to work independently. Erica responded, “Yes, they’re checking their phones or whatever it is, but they’re not engaged” (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22). Even though Erica and Sophia were discussing a negative shared experience, they were also forming a stronger relationship and working towards a stronger community of practice by identifying the concerns they wanted to problem-solve together. Erica and Sophia’s conversation began to build on each other’s frustration to work towards a solution. For instance, Sophia said, “Yes! Exactly. We have so many obstacles in getting into the lesson. Even if we want to make a student-centered lesson, that doesn’t mean it will work in real time” (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22).

This seeming lack of willingness to be vulnerable also spoke to the status of teacher morale at the start of the study. A number of potential participants who told me they were unwilling to participate because they did not want anyone to witness something that could be misconstrued or reported to administration and used for retaliation. There were enough teachers who were willing to be observed in order for the study to continue, though, and this perhaps gave the observers an opportunity to see someone else teach who they may not have otherwise interacted with in that type of setting.

Communities of Practice Provided a Space for True Relational Trust

The participants built a community of practice as they observed their colleagues and met for focus groups, which provided the opportunity for them to be vulnerable with one another and to form bonds that went beyond superficial hellos in the hallway. Some of the initial conversation in the first focus group was prescriptive and focused mostly on the topics of the lessons teacher participants observed as teachers shared their observations notes and takeaways from their first cycle of instructional rounds.

The second focus group was after the second round of modified instructional rounds where teacher participants had observed their colleagues in pairs. These conversations focused on the observed teacher's skill strengths and classroom grouping, but also provided space for Sarah and Erica, who taught in two different departments and who had no scheduled time for collaboration, to discuss things like teacher/student relationships and how that impacts the classroom environment. Sarah said, "Joe's rapport with his students really makes the class enjoyable to watch" (Focus Group 2, 11/28/23) and Erica followed with, "Yes! I was enamored at his teaching style. The students were all captivated. It was such a pleasure to see his energy and enthusiasm and to watch the students' responses to that" (Focus Group 2, 11/28/23).

As the conversation among the four participants continued, it was clear that they not only enjoyed having the opportunity to share their observations, but also the energy of the conversation was elevated as they became excited telling the rest of the group what their experience was like in another teacher's classroom.

Teacher Morale Had Not Always Been So Low. Each participant was interviewed about their experience with observations, with peer interaction, and about their current and past social/emotional wellbeing as a teacher. It was clear that their social/emotional wellbeing had not always been so fragile. I wrote in my researcher's journal that most participants reflected on times early on in their careers where they were much happier coming to work and felt an overall higher level of teacher morale. For instance, Henry said, "we used to come to work happy to be here. I looked forward to teaching" (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22). Sarah said, "Under previous administration there was a different work environment. It was more relaxed" (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22). Erica reflected on her time in another building and said, "it was like a family there. Everyone met every week, and it was just like a work family" (Initial Focus Group,

10/3/22). Three of the four participants had been in the site district for over fifteen years and clearly felt that the educational climate had shifted in recent years.

While the focus of my study was not on student achievement, improved teacher morale has the potential to increase teacher retention, and teacher morale does impact student achievement, which is also beneficial for schools looking to improve teacher morale (Bishay, 1996; Black, 2001; Converso et al., 2019; Ganihar & Hurakadli, 2005; Hipp & Huffman, 2010; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Jones, 1997; Protheroe, 2006). When teachers are satisfied with their jobs and overall feel supported and valued, then they are more likely to have more patience with their students and may be more likely to create innovative lesson plans or use formative assessments to analyze student data to improve future lessons (Demir, 2021; Franzel et al., 2018; Jennings et al., 2017). Prior to conducting this study, I knew that using detailed observation data to examine school and classroom practices could promote conversation about successful teaching and skills such as excellent activity transition or classroom spatial organization. I posited that these conversations, if reflected upon and then applied in practice by the observer, might have a positive impact on student achievement. There was no guarantee that any participant in this study would take what they had observed in their colleague's classrooms and apply it to their own practice, but I was hopeful that the collegiality that was once at the forefront of the teaching profession could be fostered again. At the very least, my hope was that modified instructional rounds would create the conditions necessary to engage in work that would increase teacher collaboration and benefit the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers.

In the initial interviews, I learned that none of the participants were very familiar with instructional rounds though all had had some experience with the process even though they did not know it by name. This helped shape my understanding of what their intradepartmental

connections had been, or in this case, had not been. All participants had informally observed a colleague outside of the mandatory observations in the mentoring timeframe that is required to obtain a state license, but rarely saw their colleagues teach and never provided their colleagues with feedback on their teaching unless they were mentoring a new teacher.

One participant, Henry, was an administrator in another school and had both informally and formally observed the teachers he oversaw as well as informally observed colleagues when he was a teacher. The primary goal of the initial focus group was to ensure that the participants understood and had examples of how to objectively script a lesson rather than use evaluative language. We practiced that process together as well as used examples in conversation of subjective language versus objective language, but as this study showed, teacher participants were easily able to “block out everything except what they [could] actually observe students and teachers doing in classrooms” (Roberts, 2012, p. 31). This objective note-taking ensured that no evaluative language was used in their observation notes. The conversation that followed each cycle of modified instructional rounds began to focus on how teachers should lift one another up and tell one another what they really admire about their classroom instructional skills. Erica said, “People may know they are doing a good job, but it’s nice to hear that. It’s even nicer to hear that from someone whose opinion you really value like a colleague” (Focus Group 2, 11/28/23).

Roberts (2012) stated that instructional rounds have the power to change a school’s culture. This power starts with acknowledging teachers’ strengths. Instructional rounds: has transformed school cultures from one in which an administrator evaluates and provides professional development recommendations with little follow-up, to observation of practice and next-level-of-work recommendations, with teachers leading the actual professional development. By noticing and using the strengths of teachers, we

have all learned to value the knowledge that already exists in our schools. (Roberts, 2012, p. 156)

Although this study provided only one semester of rounds, the culture shift of valuing teacher strength and allowing them the opportunity to weigh-in on professional development decisions did not occur. This may have been because as a teacher researcher I was not in the role of professional development coordinator and did not have the opportunity to provide feedback on professional development decisions going forward. The study did show that teachers wanted to be involved in the professional development decision-making process.

Relational Trust was Impacted by Positive Social Experiences

When I asked the participants about how the process of instructional rounds made them feel, all of the teachers expressed a level of comfort in the classrooms where they observed. While they may not have used the language of relational trust, the kinds of social bonds they had built with their colleagues prior to the observation of a lesson allowed for a low stakes peer observation, and aligned with what we know about relational trust. In the first round of observations, one participant was observing one other teacher. However, conversations after the initial debriefing session it was determined that paired observations of one teacher might provide a richer experience post-observation round. This proved true and added an extra layer of comfort for the observers. After Sophia's solo instructional round, she shared that:

I, I felt comfortable. Yeah. The kids acknowledged that I was there. I just said. Oh, yeah.

Don't worry about it. I'm not. I'm just, I'm learning today and I acted like I was a student in the class with work because it was a coding class. And I really know nothing about coding . . . I felt comfortable. I probably wouldn't have felt as comfortable with other

teachers that I don't speak to or, you know, know as well. (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22)

Sarah added that “they [the students] knew me, some of them. Many of them have had me and yes” (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22) that added a layer of emotional safety for her as an observer as well. Erica said that her reason for choosing the first teacher she observed was “In the English office I can hear all the great stuff going on. And, and you know, just also being in the same discipline, I wanted to see what an [teacher in my department] later looks like” (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22).

When the teachers who were observed were given the feedback from the lessons the participants observed, I asked them about how they felt while other teachers were in their classrooms. All six teachers said that they felt perfectly comfortable having colleagues in their classrooms and expressed that they would not have signed up on my initial interest form if they had had any hesitation about participating in the modified instructional rounds process. One teacher said, “It was so refreshing to get positive feedback from a colleague that I trusted and valued” (Researcher’s Journal, 11/30/22). Another said, “I wish people would come in to see me teach more often. It’s so crazy that we are evaluated on an entire school year in an hour or two of lessons” (Researcher’s Journal, 12/8/22).

Observing other colleagues helped build bonds among teachers and disrupt the culture of their practice. Teachers expressed that they reflected on their own risk taking in the classroom and shared that they were able to push their own boundaries or typical lesson structures after seeing their colleagues teach. The process of participating in modified instructional rounds gave teachers the opportunity to disrupt the culture of their practice (Roberts, 2012). Teacher participants who tried out new instructional methods reflected on modified instructional rounds

as the inspiration for this risk-taking. For instance, Erica felt hopeful when she saw a group of senior students participating in group discussion independently without any teacher interaction beyond facilitating the task at hand. Erica shared:

I would say this was a surprise. I struggle this year with my students' maturity levels.

And I'm finding if I give them a little too much rope. They, you know, like they can't

handle too much freedom and it was, it was pleasantly surprising to see how students two years older than mine, handle that. That length of rope that they were given . . . It was

really refreshing to see, you know, that is possible. (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22)

As Erica was explaining her relief in seeing a higher grade level's maturity in the classroom and how that impacted her own social/emotional wellbeing knowing she could be teaching that grade level next year, this sparked Henry to reflect on his colleague's observable social/emotional wellbeing in his day-to-day interaction with other teachers. He said:

What I got out of this so far is I'm one of the only people in the building that's not broken.

Like, like everybody in our department would get out of here in five minutes. Or like,

Joe, it's a struggle for him to walk in the door. And he can't wait to get out. And he's

really good at his job. He's just so frustrated. That's a shame. But how many other people feel like that? . . . This is my 40th year . . . I've watched myself evolve as a teacher and a

coach, and I recognize this as a job. You know, it's a job and I don't take it home with me, but when you have an administration that's not supportive and parents that are, you know, not satisfied . . . It's tremendously frustrating . . . but my students don't frustrate me.

They're just kids . . . You know, my standards of what I want academically are for me and my kids. You know, I teach. I do my job. If they respond, they respond. If they don't, they don't. If they choose to do the work, that's great. If they choose not to do the work,

I'm gonna hold their hands to try to drive across the finish line. (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22)

Henry's point that he does not let his students frustrate him because they are just kids was something he brought up in each focus group. This perspective that his students are still learning and growing, he shared, is what helps him prevent teacher burnout.

When Erica heard Henry talk about how difficult it can be to see colleagues struggling with their career path, she said, "I love the whole, I love the collaborative aspect of it and the cross-content area aspect of it. I think there's so much that there's so much benefit to sharing in each other's professional joy" (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22). Given the clear low morale of many of the teachers at Keystone, it was refreshing to hear Erica talk about sharing in someone else's professional joy. In the climate of the study, it provided a glimmer of hope that the culture could be improved, and collaboration could be fostered with the help of just a few motivated individuals such as Erica.

Seeing Students in a Different Environment. Both new instructional strategies and stronger collegial bonds were gained from the process of modified instructional rounds in this study. I noted in my researcher's journal that, "teachers felt one of the most beneficial parts of the modified instructional rounds process was that they had the chance to see their students interacting with different teachers and in unique environments" (11/28/22). Roberts (2012) stated that "Rounds offers teachers opportunities to see their own students in other classrooms behaving in different ways and performing a range of academic tasks: there is no greater tool in changing belief systems" (p. 157). Teachers were eager to share their methods for helping a student who struggled to pay attention for long periods of time with their colleagues. For instance, Henry saw his own students in the class that he and Sophia observed together. Sophia asked Henry what he

would have done differently than what David did in the class they observed together where students were off task several times during the lesson. Henry said, “well, I just tell them sometimes you just have to listen. You don’t get to do group work in college. They also know where they stand with me because many of them have had me before” (Focus Group 2, 11/28/23). Sophia also shared that it was refreshing to see a student in a class that showcased their strengths even though her content was difficult for that particular student (Focus Group 2, 11/28/23).

As teachers began to build relational trust during our focus groups (Bryk & Schneider, 2003), there was an increase in their vulnerability in conversations about their social/emotional health. In order for this shift towards “curb[ing] frustration . . . staff must exert more energy on solutions rather than becoming engulfed in the existing problems. As a school, we fostered a culture of encouraging courageous dialogue about staff concerns to avoid the proverbial toxic break-room discussions” (Thompson, 2022). The culture of practice did change for the participants even if only marginally given the time frame. They built the foundation for future collaboration and self-reflection during peer observations.

Fixing Broken Relational Trust: Laying the Groundwork

I return here as to why the process of instructional rounds lends itself to social/emotional wellbeing in general. Teachers expressed that if the divide between administration and faculty could be bridged, there would be a better work environment. In order for a professional community of practice to take hold at Keystone High School, the space between teachers and administration needs to be closed and mutual trust must be created and nurtured. When communities of practice can be fostered rather than have the only transfer of professional information come from administration to teachers (Buysse et al., 2003), there will be new ways

to discuss what teachers know and notice of best practices and together changes can be made correspondingly (Wenger & Lave, 1991).

Henry had the most to say on this topic and told me that, “there was a conscious decision to separate people; we used to go to breakfast with the vice principals” (Initial Interview, 9/15/22). The teachers, police officers on shift, and administrations would all have breakfasts on Fridays, but that:

was cut out so automatically. Now you have a whole group of people that have never had a human common conversation with, with their boss. And so I think one of the and again, the private school has a different set of metrics; our goal was to create a community. And we did successfully and when I go back there, 20 years later, and some of the people are still there, that sense of community is there and I still, I socialize as much with some of the people that I haven't worked with in 20 years as I do with the people that I work with here . . . So, it's just a greater level of trust. (Initial Interview, 9/15/22)

A survey within the school showed the divide between teachers and administration created a culture that lacked relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003) at Keystone High School. Henry's specific understanding of how that shared community created a different work culture in his past experience spoke to the lack of relational trust at Keystone. Sophia also spoke to the culture at Keystone. She said that while she understood that there are contract guidelines that require weekly meetings for the school, she shared:

I feel like human kindness and care is lacking. I'm not going to waste your time just as you wouldn't waste my time. So, to me if we are contracted to be here from 2:30 to 3:30, but we have a meeting that ends at three o'clock because there's nothing left that we have to do, like we should be released. (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

She did elaborate and add that she does realize from an administrative perspective:

when they're being poked about things that are in the contract that they don't feel like as being you know lenient or understanding, so it becomes like this, like cat and mouse game of like, well, we do this to you, you do this to us. And that just breaks down morale.

(Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

The low morale addressed earlier was recognized by all participants as a major hurdle in the improvement of teacher work satisfaction and I would argue in teacher retention. Schools that do not have strong relational trust have a much more difficult time disrupting their culture of practice (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Henry shared that in a previous school district, he participated in two retreats with the administration and faculty: one before the start of the school year and one after. The retreat focused on a specific target for the school year that year; for instance, some were on writing and specifically matched people who did not typically interact with one another so that they had an opportunity to get to know each other more and to build some connection between a larger breadth of people. Henry also reminisced on the many holiday parties that he had attended over the years where:

the kids had a half a day and we hung out in the library, and you know, had corned beef and cabbage, Irish coffee, you know, and so you socialized, so you had, the barriers were broken down, and even where we occasionally had some managers that were not easy to work with, you found a side of them in those situations that you wouldn't have found otherwise. (Initial Interview, 9/15/22)

This team-building and trust-building was intentional in Henry's past district. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has completely erased much of the progress education has made in the last decade or two. The physical separation, the political divide that was present as a result of the

pandemic restrictions, and frankly the fear and mistrust that pervaded so much of everyday life has really disbanding the progress of educational professional development (Conley & Cooper, 2013; Thompson, 2022).

An Assets-Based Approach to Mentorship

The participants had a strong desire to highlight only what the teachers they were observing did well. I called this assets-based approach to mentorship because teachers wanted to focus on the positive role they could have for one another as colleagues. In the initial focus group, all four teachers expressed a need for professional support and appreciation. Sarah said, “What we need is for people to uplift us. We are doing great things, but other people don’t know because they haven’t had a chance to see them” (Initial Focus Group, 10/3/22). In my initial interviews, I noticed a striking need for “positivity” (9/12/22; 9/14/22; 9/15/22; 9/16/22). For example, Sophia said:

It’s hard to get up and go to work when you feel like you’re not being effective and when you feel like you don’t belong to something. So, I think the camaraderie in this building needs a lot of work. I feel like the PD should be focused on building relationships amongst the faculty and the administration and coming together more . . . I find that I always have to just keep telling myself that you’re doing the best that you can and you have the students’ best interest in mind and that’s all that matters . . . because you know morale is a big thing and last year morale was awful. It made me never want to come to work. And that’s not me. (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

I addressed in the statement and context of the problem that while focusing on teacher job satisfaction (Bishay, 1996; Evans, 1997) might seem like a radical approach that in fact it was a primary factor in the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers as professionals and as individuals

and therefore the state of teacher job satisfaction at the start of the study and throughout the rounds process, would be included in my data collection. While teachers must have strong content knowledge and pedagogical skill sets in order to positively impact their students' growth, this study has bolstered the extant literature that relational trust is also needed in order to create a work environment conducive for teachers to both embark on and continue to revisit how to improve their craft (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). As is evidenced in this study, teachers who do not have relational trust with one another or with their administration will not seek out collaboration with their colleagues.

The Risk of Emotional Vulnerability During a Social Space of Threat. Though the study participants were all confident, competent teachers who were willing to engage in the modified instructional rounds process, there were sixty faculty members on staff at Keystone and only fourteen were willing to be observed by their colleagues. It was clear based on my conversations with those who did not volunteer to participate that many teachers were not willing to risk their own emotional vulnerability in a space where they felt threatened or feared retribution. For instance, one conversation I had with a colleague at lunch focused on her desire to help me, but her fear that if she did participate then she would risk “being under a microscope by administration” (Researcher’s Journal, September 2022). Even in a healthy educational environment, comparatively speaking, Roberts (2012) admitted that:

While most feedback regarding participation in the rounds process has been positive, involving adults in rigorous work that is complex, ambiguous, thought-provoking, and personally or emotionally challenging has its share of tribulations. We have had folks walk out, cry, and just plain refuse to participate. (pp. 157–158)

This pushback from educators was exacerbated tremendously in a post-pandemic educational culture. I wondered where the foundation of trust had come from then for those who were willing to participate in this study. After the first round of observations where teacher participants observed a colleague of their choosing, Sophia gave the group feedback about why she was comfortable observing the math teacher whose class she observed. She said:

I think [Ian] was comfortable because I was comfortable. Because we actually do say hello, how are you and have conversations outside of the classroom. But if I were to observe, you know, I don't know I can't think of anyone like Mr. Stevens, say, I don't know him . . . I've never had a conversation with him. So, like I would feel uncomfortable observing his class, and he might also be uncomfortable having me there.

(1st Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22)

Sophia raised the concern that not all teachers knew each other well enough to be open to feedback from their colleagues let alone constructive criticism. During the first debriefing session after the first cycle of modified instructional records were complete, I recorded in my researcher's journal that when one of the participants raised the issue of a lack of community in the school building, the other three participants agreed that there were not a lot of opportunities for teachers to build relationships with their colleagues. Erica told the group that she had worked in another building in-district previously and had had a much more collaborative work environment in which weekly grade-level meetings were standard. Henry shared that he had worked in a different school district where there were more low-stakes administrator walk-throughs and by and large more social events among the faculty, which he felt built up the school's positive culture. In general, as a profession, we have underestimated how poorly teachers are feeling after the pandemic, which is why traditional professional development is not

going to work in this environment; we need relational trust. I explore the need for relational trust for successful implementation of peer observations in further detail later in this chapter, but the level of vulnerability needed for professional criticism is inaccessible when teachers have not recovered from the trauma COVID-19 caused. As Roberts (2012) wrote in reflection on the success of the traditional instructional rounds process:

Teachers describe rounds as a reflective process that is grounded in observing their colleagues and students and that impacts the teachers' practice without their feeling evaluated. They report shifts in thinking regarding the types and levels of academic tasks Lakeside needs to offer students, feeling a sense of mutual accountability with colleagues and engaging in deep and instructive conversations about how to improve student learning. (p. 157)

There is learning that happens when people are not uncomfortable that will lead to being able to be uncomfortable, so we needed to focus on building a space of vulnerability again. Without the willingness to take accountability for improving their own practice, I wondered what motivated teachers to participate in this study.

Teachers Craved Connection. The discovery that teacher social/emotional wellbeing and morale were low prior to the study ultimately evolved into a theme I define as teachers' need for support and a sense of community after plunging into a post-pandemic educational climate. What follows here are examples of how this theme emerged from the data. It was evident that the students at Keystone, like many schools in the U.S., needed extra support socially and emotionally after the return to a "normal," post-pandemic school year. Similarly, even though teachers have more coping mechanisms as adults, the participants all agreed that teachers lacked emotional support at Keystone as well. They also acknowledged that, generally speaking, many

teachers seemed more negative as people than they were before March of 2020, even though there had not been much teacher turnover over the last two years. The impact of the pandemic on teachers' morale came up twelve times in the initial focus group alone (Researcher's Journal, 10/3/22). Participants agreed that certainly there were people who sought out problems unnecessarily, but another teacher who taught at Keystone, but who was not part of this study, was questioned about a social media post he had written about feeling lost as a teacher in the current educational climate. He shared that he felt much less passion as a teacher twenty years into his career than he did when he first started teaching. Many other teachers confided in this teacher that they also felt downtrodden and lacked passion in their day-to-day instruction but did not have the courage to say so publicly. The phrase "teaching is not what it used to be" was brought up in the first-round focus group before the initial observation round (First Focus Group, 10/3/22). Teachers described their morale as low before any of the modified instructional rounds had been conducted.

The existing literature on how instructional rounds impacts the observing teachers' own pedagogy is quite robust (Brown, 2018; City, 2011; City et al., 2009; Kahn, 2019; Melvin, 2017; Meyer-Looze, 2015; Roegman & Riehl, 2012; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). It is clear from these studies that when given an opportunity to observe another colleague and work collaboratively with another teacher whether interdepartmentally or intradepartmentally, teacher practice improves. This collaboration in turn creates a stronger professional culture, which has the potential to improve teachers' morale (Mangin, 2021). However, there is very little qualitative research on how the process of instructional rounds specifically affects teacher social/emotional wellbeing or teacher morale. The existing studies are quantitative and involve mostly surveys (Gore et al., 2017; Gore & Rickards, 2021; Hart et al., 2000; Smith, 1966). Therefore, I sought to

fill this gap in the literature using a qualitative methodology that would provide a richer, deeper understanding of how instructional rounds might function to support teachers' overall social/emotional wellbeing.

When asked what was important about teacher social emotional wellbeing, Sarah said:

I think it's just gotten more acute with my perspective. I often say we, as teachers, or people in general, should not go through life with blinders on. And I often think sometimes, given the situations we've recently gone through, the blinders have actually closed in so we're not aware of our periphery, nor what's right in front of us sometimes. We are, the clientele we're dealing with at the high school level, are very emotional, anything can happen to them at any time. And that can cloud their ability to succeed within the classroom . . . We have to be aware of that and as the adults in the classroom and not exacerbate that situation for them . . . Maybe give them the proper avenues to go to. It's all about frustration. (Initial Interview, 9/16/22)

Sarah's focus on the different environment in which we all found ourselves post-pandemic and how that impacted teacher/student interaction was telling of her awareness of the shifted educational culture as well. Sarah's focus on how the teacher should behave in the classroom regardless of what they are dealing with outside of school was a shared perspective of the rest of the participants. The "leave it at the door" approach to daily classroom experiences was identified as a necessary part of the profession in her view. However, written peer observation data from the round process provided evidence that some teachers were willing to talk about their personal lives with their students, for instance, how they spent their weekend with their families, while other teachers did not discuss anything outside of the content for the course. Classrooms where teachers' rapport with students aimed to check in with their students'

wellbeing were also classrooms that observees described as “a welcoming environment where students clearly felt comfortable learning and expressing themselves” (Second Focus Group, 11/28/2023).

As described in chapter four, the four participants relayed during their interviews that their social/emotional wellbeing was impacted by their morale, their support from administration, and the way that they felt as they walked into work each day (Initial Interviews 9/12/23, 9/14/23, 9/15/23, 9/16/23). Sophia shared how all of these elements intermingle on the average work day:

I think that there’s a big teacher burnout because of the fact that you are hired as a teacher, there’s just so many things that are expected of you . . . and I think teachers get overwhelmed by just you know how much you have to do outside of the classroom. . . I speak to so many of my friends that work in all different kinds of fields and they don’t think about their jobs on the weekends. Not only do we do work outside of work, but we don’t even get support while we’re at work. (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

Throughout the focus groups conversations, teacher participants reported that their social/emotional wellbeing did significantly affect their job satisfaction, which had a domino effect on teacher-to-teacher interaction as well as teachers’ interactions with administration and perhaps more importantly, students. These findings were supported by other current research that stressed the shift in the use of social/emotional learning programs (Elias, 2023).

Rather than simply implementing a socioemotional learning program to foster a community environment, in order to “function at our best, learn to our capacity, and relate to those around us in satisfying ways . . . teachers need to be seen and heard, contribute, be reassured and have optimistic future-mindedness, be understood with empathy and compassion,

receive and give caring, kindness, help, and appreciation” (Elias, 2023, p. 1). The participants said that they felt their own mood in the classroom was impacted by their morale on a day-to-day basis (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23).

When asked to describe their morale prior to the start of the study, participants mostly talked about how they felt when they came into work in the morning. One person described feeling a sense of dread on some mornings or an overall feeling of complacency sometimes. Another person said that when she hears the expression “living the dream” she is particularly turned off to the person speaking and is even offended by someone who, as she describes, is so ungrateful to have a job that they would sarcastically describe their work experience using such language (Erica Initial Interview, 9/14/22). Erica shared that this sarcasm was present in many of her daily conversations, which resulted in a negative work culture for her. A third participant said she just tries “to stay below the radar” (Sophia Initial Interview, 9/12/22) so as to avoid any interactions with administration that could result in retribution. Three of the four participants shared that they are uncomfortably aware of always being on camera and feel the sense of being watched impacts their social/emotional wellbeing (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22). One participant said she was not unhappy to come to work, but she came to do her job and then she left without any strong connection to the work that she does (Initial Debrief Meeting 10/24/22). Even with these descriptions of their social/emotional wellbeing, the participants were willing to partake in the modified instructional rounds process. It was evident that the teachers wanted to have improved morale, but that they were not sure where to turn to go about creating a positive work environment.

While student interest and engagement were certainly at the forefront of the role of education, teachers were arriving at Keystone High School for work feeling downtrodden. This

study was meant to offer a space that might support teacher participants in reflecting on their practice in a way that would feel personally meaningful. Teacher job satisfaction prevents attrition, and I knew that it would allow for “reconnecting to the school’s collective ‘why’ and recommitting to each other as a team” (Thompson, 2022, p. 3) both of which were necessary for school growth.

Teacher Identified Schedules as a Source of Burnout. One reason for the burnout that the participants described was provided by Henry at the final focus group session. He was reflecting on year after year schedule changes for veteran teachers as well as last minute schedule shifts prior to the start of the new school year. Certainly, flexibility is an important trait that teachers have in the classroom. However, the preparation required for a teacher to be fully prepared to teach a new course must not be understated. After all three cycles of modified instructional rounds were complete, and we sat in the final focus group discussing the study overall as well as the educational climate in the winter of 2023, Henry said:

This started with a conversation we [he and a colleague] had, and he says, Why is everybody burned out? I said, Well, in this district, especially. So many people are new teachers every year because your classes are changing. And that was dynamic: teach something different every year . . . like the astrophysics professor at Princeton doesn't get assigned to teach freshman chemistry . . . You know, my schedule changed the first day of school for the fourth year out of the last five. (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23)

The other three participants agreed that the changing schedules at the last minute was one very frustrating element of their current positions. When schedules were set in the past, teachers shared materials at the end of the school year and had lesson plans at least skeletally structured by the beginning of the school year. In my researcher’s journal I wrote, “Participants shared how

important it is to teachers' social/emotional wellbeing to consider taking into account how a last-minute schedule change would affect their professional motivation as well as their mental health" (1/24/23). As teachers shared their own experience with last minute schedule changing or even planned schedule changing that did not match their educational background or personal strengths, it became clear that the participants felt they did not have a voice in the schedule decisions, but they would have liked to at least express their schedule preferences with administration for the following year (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23). This increased loss of autonomy and from the participants' perspective, mismanagement of their skill sets, also negatively impacted teachers' social/emotional wellbeing. The conversation during the final focus group indicated that teacher morale could be improved if teacher perspectives were taken into account, if teacher interests and content strengths were considered during scheduling, and if teachers were, generally speaking, made as much of a priority as the students were. Incorporating modified instructional rounds into teacher professional learning is one way to prioritize teacher growth while piquing their interests and highlighting their content strengths.

Ideals and Expectations of Professional Learning and Collaboration. The fourth theme of my findings was that the participants in the modified instructional rounds revealed a clear desire for mentorship beyond the novice years. Mentorship for the first two years of a teacher's career is structured such that the mentee can be a peripheral participant in their mentor's classroom. However, in this study participants were all veteran teachers with a minimum of ten years of teaching experience and yet they wanted the opportunity to have a colleague mentor and/or to be a colleague mentor for someone who was not necessarily a brand new teacher. Recent research on the mentor and preservice teacher relationship revealed that "through the observation of mentors, [pre-service teachers] . . . have understood the importance

of other attributes that a teacher should have, such as hospitality, communication, responsibility, and accountability (Kurti, 2023, p. 479), focusing on qualities that extend beyond pedagogical skills. The legitimate peripheral participation process in which preservice teachers engage is often focused on foundational elements of classroom structure such as norm-making, classroom management, and classroom expectations. Many novice teachers have pedagogical content knowledge expertise from taking thirty credits of higher education classes in that subject area, but practice interacting with students to build a rapport and creating a strong classroom management structure is gained through experience or observation of others who do these things well. The art of teaching, or the way in which teachers interact with their content material and their students (Simpson et al., 2005) was the focus of much of the conversations in the focus groups after the second round of modified instructional rounds (11/28/22). Sarah and Erica raved about their college who “gives very clear directions, defined benchmarks, told the students this is the style of how you’re going to write and here are the limitations to work within and then he let them go, you know. And they flourish” (Sarah, Focus Group 2, 11/28/22). When speaking to Henry about their paired observation of Harrison, Sophia said, “I think he established good relationships with each individual student, so they actually want to please him” (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22). Henry agreed and elaborated, “We sit in the same classroom and we treat the kids totally different. He’s kind and gentle and warm . . . they work for both of us, but he is much nicer” (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22). This conversation was full of laughter and smiles as teacher participants reflected on their colleagues’ strengths.

The participants enjoyed the opportunity to experience their colleague’s artistry in the classroom. They collectively shared that they were reinvigorated by seeing their colleagues’ overall happiness while doing something they clearly loved and were meant to do (Final Focus

Group, 1/23/23). This realized value (Wenger, 1998) that they had an acquired skill set and shared knowledge that they procured during their participation in modified instructional rounds was demonstrated in their conversation during the final focus group. For instance, Erica said, “The whole thing was so valuable just to see other teachers how they handle certain things, how to handle certain kids . . . there’s so much that we all have in common in terms of what we face. Sometimes, you just need a fresh perspective, and I just thought it was really, really valuable” (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23). Sarah agreed and said, “It allowed me to reflect and have something else to compare difficult scenarios to” (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23). Sophia shared their perspective and said, “When you observe other teachers, and you see how they handle things, and you’re like, okay, so we’re dealing with the same scenarios” (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23). This reassurance and shared practice helped participants set new success criteria for modified instructional rounds, which Wenger (1998) referred to as reframed value. This recognition and explanation of the new success criteria helped create further participant buy-in.

Kurti (2023) argued that “mentor teachers should engage pre-service teachers in observing and modeling after their teaching with attention to having them replicate it in their classrooms. Then, their interaction should be direct and focused on providing constructive feedback on pre-service teachers’ performance” (p. 480). This novice modeling expert practice aligns with Wenger and Lave (1991)’s legitimate peripheral participation but what has been much less explored in the available research is how teachers who are beyond their novice years of teaching learn from their colleagues (Bambino, 2002; Levene & Frank, 1993; Martin & Double, 1998; Samson & McCrea, 2008, Sinkinson, 2011; Vidmar, 2005). I aimed to fill that gap with a specific lens on the way in which teachers’ social/emotional wellbeing was affected by the modified instructional rounds model regardless of how long they had been teaching.

Additionally, this study addressed the domino effect of learning from colleagues and then gaining a deeper understanding of not only their practice, but who they are as people. While the goal of mentorship is to guide a novice teacher into the field pragmatically, in other studies “mentors and mentees described the importance of mutual trust and respect. They indicated that the mentoring relationship was most likely to be successful if it was reciprocal and based on shared interests and an established relationship” (Ssemata et al., 2017). Communities of practice have always required a safe space for teachers to share pedagogical successes and failures. Certainly “learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice” (Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 31). It became clear in this study that the lack of safe spaces had prevented shared best practice and therefore had also prevented stable social/emotional wellbeing for teachers at Keystone High School.

I learned that teachers do want to work collaboratively with one another, but that there is no time carved out for teacher collaboration, which is a well-developed observation about the barriers to professional learning communities (Hargreaves, 2019; Killion, 2016). For example, Sarah shared:

We used to have team level meetings, freshmen. Talk about your student problems. Now, I heard in guidance, people recently, teachers, would vent their spleen, be done with it and walk away. And the feeling administratively from guidance also was we didn't follow through and the expectation was they were going to take care of it when there was no follow through on either side. It was a good avenue, but I don't know. Like we never heard back from the guidance person who was taking the notes on the student. What's the next step? (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22)

While the grade level meetings Sarah referenced above were about students and not necessarily about course content or other professional learning topics, they were opportunities for teachers to meet with one another and discuss strategies of how to handle a shared student body. Students benefit from seeing that teachers have relationships too and that they are also talking about them, not in a negative way, but that teachers collectively have a vested interest in their students' success.

The interdependence and idea sharing that exists in high-quality mentorship relationships identified by Ragins (2017) aligns with Henry's explanation of how he found value in the process of modified instructional rounds as well as what future potential an expanded program might comprise. He said, "This is really good stuff. We have to prioritize the relationship between teachers and administration in order for it to work" (Final Focus Group, 1/23/23). Henry also touched again on the need for low stakes observations and his suggestion to use it as a form of professional development would probably be well-received.

Desire for Structured Professional Development with Colleagues. Sophia noted that she wished there was more deliberate professional development. She shared that the only collaboration with her colleagues occurred two days before the school year to address vertical articulation among high school teachers and the types of technology that seemed to work best with the students. She said:

I think it would be more helpful if we had more meetings or more PD during the year where we got to meet as a as in like the elementary and middle school, high school world language teachers because it is a sequential, it's sequential . . . I also think that curriculum should be written as a department during PD during this full year. I don't think one one individual writing curriculum is effective whatsoever. Especially if you don't teach

that like that level, right? (Initial Interview, 9/12/22)

Teachers expressed interest in the idea of having set time to meet with their colleagues. Sarah shared that most meetings are on the fly in the hallway or for a few minutes during a lunch together. She also expressed her frustration that while there is an hour every fourth Monday for department meetings, those are usually filled with administrative foci and her colleagues who coach do not attend if they have practice. She said: “And there's, sometimes people have different drawers for their time that they have to implement or use that time for because they've lost a prep for an IEP meeting for example” (Initial Interview, 9/16/22). All four participants said that they would love to have the time to just meet with their departments with their own agenda as opposed to one that was set without their input. Although the participants did not use the words professional learning community, their descriptions of what they wanted out of professional development efforts was time to meet with their colleagues about whichever shared need they had at the time.

Teachers Found Pedagogical Lessons Through the Instructional Rounds. When participants were asked if there was anything in particular related to their practice or otherwise that they wanted to discuss after participating in instructional rounds, their responses were that they found it most beneficial to observe teachers who “have the same group that I see in class and see how other teachers mold the experiences for them” (Sarah, Final Focus Group 11/28/22). In some cases, the peer observation process helped teachers reflect on their own decision-making when it came to student interactions. Sarah noted that the teacher she observed handled the students they both shared similarly, which reinforced her confidence in her own pedagogical techniques. (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22). Sophia had a similar experience in her second cycle of modified instructional rounds. She said:

I think it just gives me new insight on seeing other teachers work with the same students sometimes because things that you know, might frustrate me or things that I feel like I'm alone in my classroom, once I see other teachers experiencing similar things, it's like okay, I'm not alone. It really is like a reflection of the community, reflection on this grade level, or whatever the case may be, or that student is that way for them too. Or, or sometimes just seeing, oh, well, that seems to really work well with this group of kids, maybe I could try something similar. And see if I have that impact, you know, my classroom. (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22)

Sophia was reassured by the fact that the students she shared with the colleague she observed in her second cycle of modified instructional rounds also behaved similarly in that classroom as they did in Sophia's classroom. She was specifically eager to see other colleagues' classroom management techniques with the hopes that she could implement them in her classroom.

Sarah's initial interest in observing a departmental colleague was related to student-centered classroom structure. She told me, "I've always liked how her, her students are always doing. And she really tries to keep the teacher-talk to a minimum. So, I really wanted to see that progression through the whole class" (Initial Debrief Meeting, 10/24/22). In Sarah's observation notes, she wrote, "The lab turned into a good natured competition, which encouraged students to compare data across groups. Students followed procedures seamlessly and were efficient in completing the lab" (First Round Observation 10/6/22). In all four participants' observations notes, there was some comment about students transitioning from one part of the lesson to another.

In addition to the classroom management strategies and student-centered lesson plans, teacher participants also found concrete pedagogical structures to bring back to their own classrooms. For instance, Erica shared:

I tend not to show a lot of like, I hate showing movies period, because the kids can't handle it . . . but I thought that was a really nice idea to kind of build on . . . those shorter videos . . . to show something, talk about it and build on it, wrap it all up. I thought that was it was. . . like a multi-modal and the kids clearly were engaged as a result. (Focus Group 2, 11/28/22)

When the participants had the opportunity to share their takeaways from each cycle of observations, each took away at least one instructional strategy from a colleague he/she observed over the course of the study.

Witnessing my colleagues' low morale at the start of the study was difficult but motivating. As I interviewed them and learned about their experiences in the field of education, I grew alongside them. Throughout the modified instructional rounds progress, I watched the participants lift up other teachers and share the best practices they saw through legitimate peripheral participation. I saw firsthand the shift in conversations about the challenges of the educational climate and the obstacles they faced each day to conversations that highlighted their colleagues' strengths in the classroom.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

Teacher social/emotional wellbeing is not typically the focus of school district professional development. This study, taking place as it did in a post-pandemic educational climate, began with the premise that teacher social/emotional wellbeing ought to be the focus of school district professional development in order to create a school culture that will actively work towards professional growth. The purpose of this study was to determine how the modified instructional rounds process might impact teachers' social/emotional wellbeing. The challenges of pandemic-induced isolation, inconsistent administrative observations, and a lack of collaboration among colleagues affected the school culture of the study site.

The study aimed to address these concerns and boost teacher morale within a challenging educational landscape. During this study, teachers were asked to participate in three cycles of modified instructional rounds where they observed colleagues and provided them with feedback on their instruction, specifically focusing on what they were doing well. The modifications of traditional instructional rounds (City et al., 2009) were made after recognizing teacher vulnerability and resistance to evaluative observations at the study site.

While some might contend that constructive criticism with best practice examples grows teacher practice (Kennedy, 2016; Killion, 2016; Kurti, 2023; Levene & Frank, 1993; Martin & Double, 1998; Marzano, 2011; Melvin, 2017; Meyer-Looze, 2015; Teitel, 2013), it was clear as I engaged with the participants that ignored the socioemotional needs of teachers, as has been common in the past would not have been successful after the trauma of COVID-19 in this particular setting. It is equally clear from my study that professional development may need to change as a result of the isolation and societal criticism educators experienced during and shortly after the pandemic, something I explore further within this chapter. This study provided insight into the teachers' experiences during the modified instructional rounds process as well as shed light on the fragility of educator vulnerability. The findings suggest that in order to create a professional culture where teachers are again vulnerable enough to experience discomfort in order to grow their practice, relational trust between administration and teachers must be restored.

This chapter explores my findings and their implication on teacher professional development as well as teacher education. The chapter is structured as follows: first, I revisit my research questions and findings; next, I focus on the way in which communities of practice were used to build a professional culture at Keystone; third, I address the limitations of the study and my own positionality and reflexivity; and finally, I underscore the implications of my findings on administrative planning, policy making, teacher education programs, and administrative education programs.

Summary of Findings and Discussion

The previous chapter delineated the existing school culture at the study site as well as how the rounds process influenced teacher social/emotional wellbeing. In order to uncover to

what extent modified instructional rounds would change their teaching or overall morale, I sought to answer the following sub questions:

1. How are the components of modified instructional rounds related to the socio-emotional experiences of teachers and their subsequent morale? How do teachers participate in and experience the modified instructional rounds?
2. What kinds of personal and collaborative benefits do teachers experience/report when they engage in modified instructional rounds in a high school?

My findings suggest that it appears that modified instructional rounds may have to be initiated by someone who has deep levels of relational trust with the participants as a result of the shifted educational climate post-pandemic although it is not a precondition for participation. The evidence for this claim is that several participants stated their willingness to be a part of the study was because I was the researcher and we had formed a rapport. Teachers reported that modified instructional rounds were beneficial to their social/emotional wellbeing and also provided them with instructional strategies that they compiled to implement in their own classrooms in the future. I describe three main takeaways about how modified instructional rounds impacted teacher social/emotional wellbeing. Low teacher morale as a result of a negative school culture prevented wider breadth of teacher involvement initially, but those who were involved in the study: one, created a community of practice where true relational trust began to generate; two, established a desire to collaborate with one another; and three, set up the groundwork for future school culture improvement.

As I mentioned in chapter one, rounds offer the possibility of regenerating teachers' enthusiasm in their practice. Instructional rounds require that participants share a common goal of professional growth (City et. al., 2009; City, 2011), create relational trust among colleagues

such that the teachers in general welcome genuine constructive criticism (Del Prete, 2013), and increase teacher reflection in order to foster future risk-taking with innovative instructional strategies (Kahn, 2019).

This section focuses on the way in which the rounds process appeared to build and strengthen the relationships within communities of practice, which led to a more robust professional culture at Keystone. In this study, the social learning theory guided the situated learning (Wenger & Lave, 1991) that teachers experienced while observing their colleagues. While recent research has recognized the changing educational climate and the need for more practical, pedagogical instructional at the undergraduate level (Hamman-Fisher & McGhie, 2023), this study applied the situational learning theory to seasoned teachers' professional learning as opposed to education students at the college level. The theory of action of this study was that by focusing professional interactions on the instructional core and the socioemotional needs of the teacher participants, the instructional rounds process would be effective because they occurred in conjunction with people who had different ideas, whose experiences were used to inform one another's practice, and who knew some things that other participants did not know. The interplay and overlap of teacher isolation, perception of education in the public eye, and observation experiences all affected teacher morale.

Teacher isolation and the lack of informal conversations about lessons or possible cross-curricular content in conjunction with the modified instructional round process and reflection on the best practices witnessed as well as the concluding cross-curricular conversations forced a shared vision among colleagues grappling to keep their heads above water. Society's view of teachers and negative administrative observations have also contributed to teacher attrition. The desire to form professional learning communities came out of a need for support. Teacher

attrition, a shared vision, and professional learning communities are all elements that impact teacher morale. While teacher attrition negatively impacts teacher morale, a shared vision for the success of a school and professional learning communities positively impact teacher morale. Teacher morale, I argue, is of critical importance to the success of a school. Teachers are as important as the students in the buildings where they teach. School climate and compounded expectations have the potential to drive away the most qualified teachers who have the highest ability to improve student achievement, which is, understandably, the primary goal of most school district initiatives. While this study only took place in one suburban high school in New Jersey, the data speaks to the wider literature on instructional rounds, professional development, and teacher learning. Teachers need social/emotional support just as much as they need instructional support. For teacher learning to take place, teachers need to be ready to accept new knowledge. Modified instructional rounds could be an avenue to provide a community of practice that would foster teacher social/emotional support and therefore would provide an avenue for teacher learning.

Teacher Morale and Communities of Practice

What is too often overlooked, however, is the focus on supporting those who will increase student achievement: teachers. Teacher morale and communities of practice have a multifaceted relationship. Understanding the connection between teacher morale and modified instructional rounds requires an awareness of the sense-making process that happens as teachers bring their own experiences to professional learning communities. Rather than assume that teachers learn a skill and then apply it regularly in their classrooms, we must take into account that as a relational profession, there are many other factors in the profession of teaching that impact the success of a teacher's practice on any given day and especially over the course of a

career. When discussing the ways in which teacher morale was affected by modified instructional rounds, it became clear that “considering the various components of the classroom—the students, the teacher, the content, the classroom, and so on—as working collectively to shape teaching practices, rather than viewing them as discrete variables that are independent of one another” (Strom, 2015, p. 322) was the best way to fully capture all of the participants’ experiences with the rounds process. The modified instructional rounds process had a similar goal to the traditional instructional rounds process (City, 2011)—that of reflecting on teacher practice—with the objective of creating professional learning communities that did not exist at the study site. What follows is an exploration of the themes that arose from the fruitful discussion among the participants before, during, and after their participation in modified instructional rounds.

Teacher Learning Benefits Both Teachers and Students

In Kahn’s (2019) qualitative study, which included teachers and administrators searching for a way to improve the problem of practice of too little or too simplistic oral student responses for instance, there were statistically significant different responses from the participants after they took part in a cycle of instructional rounds and no distinct pragmatic takeaway could be applied with an expectation of similar results. More recent research on quality teaching rounds (Gore & Rickards, 2021) discerned that veteran teachers became open-minded about changing their practice once they saw that engaging in instructional rounds improved their teaching and in turn their student’s learning. Neither focused specifically on the social/emotional wellbeing of the teachers involved in the instructional rounds process. I proposed the idea that there were teachers who might be motivated to participate in the modified instructional rounds process for their own benefit rather than solely for the benefit of their students. Underneath this idea is the

even more radical notion that if we support teachers in their own learning, students will benefit. The movement towards data collection and analysis in teaching has meant that studies focus on student outcomes (Kahn, 2019; Protheroe, 2006; Riordan et al., 2019) in very narrow ways and there is little focus on teacher wellbeing or teacher satisfaction for its own sake. While no one in my study stated that they volunteered to participate because of that benefit, they all shared in their own ways that the process of modified instructional rounds did improve their social/emotional wellbeing, which is becoming increasingly more present in recent research as a result of the damaging effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Lacomba et al., 2022).

Teacher Wellness as a Priority

This study demonstrated the potential contribution of the importance of fostering teacher wellness through opportunities for professional growth in observing other teachers. Therefore, if we as a field wish to address the issue of teacher attrition, focusing on teacher wellness through such professional growth opportunities ought to become a priority. Heightened awareness of teacher social/emotional wellbeing has been addressed in many post-pandemic educational periodicals. For instance, Principal David Arencibia shared that “Building a school culture that staff members don’t want to leave is a long process that takes a real commitment from administrators, but the hard work pays off” (Peetz, 2023, para. 1). Arencibia described the importance of creating a set of core values that prioritizes student achievement and teacher wellbeing equally, which allowed him to retain over 50% more teachers than in previous years (Peetz, 2023). Highlighting the value of the overall school community is necessary for teaching retention and for a positive school climate.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation as Learning

I chose Wenger and Lave's (1991) legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice as the theoretical framework for this study specifically because their research underscores not only the benefits of learning from experts, but also with the united intention of becoming one community with a shared skill set and conception of best practices. As was highlighted in their first chapter, Wenger and Lave (1991) described legitimate peripheral participation as a theory that resulted from "the attempt to clarify the concept of situated learning [which] led to critical concerns about the theory and to further revisions that resulted in the move to our present view that learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice" (p. 31). Legitimate peripheral participation is learning, which means that creating opportunities for legitimate peripheral participation, such as through modified instructional rounds, creates opportunities for learning. Wenger and Lave (1991) noted that "legitimate peripheral participation is proposed as a descriptor of engagement in social practice that entails learning as an integral constituent" (pp. 34–35). As a result, there are complexities in identifying what elements of communities of practice helped to initiate or support legitimate peripheral participation.

However, a correlation that can be made is that without any structure to informal meetings between and among colleagues, there is little likelihood that true learning is occurring because there would be no legitimate peripheral participatory experience taking place. The interaction among colleagues at the study site prior to the study consisted of short hallway or lunch meetings, which were often immediate needs-based and focused on resources availability or correct contacts for problems that need resolving. Wenger and Lave's (1991) study traversed many fields of apprenticeship; therefore, the function of "legitimate peripheral participation is not itself an educational form, much less a pedagogical strategy or a teaching technique"

(Wenger & Lave, 1991, p. 39), but rather “this viewpoint makes a fundamental distinction between learning and intentional instruction” (Wenger & Lave, 1991, pp. 39–40). What they are describing is the difference between learning how to teach by reading educational theory and watching a colleague teach an actual lesson. The experience of legitimate peripheral participation at this study site was previously reserved for mentors and mentees only. The findings of this study indicate that legitimate peripheral participation can and should occur throughout teachers’ careers. It is not just the work of novice teachers with little to no experience with pedagogy. Mentorship between colleagues should be fostered well beyond the two-year novice teacher mentor/mentee contract required in New Jersey. Time should be allocated for teachers to participate in legitimate peripheral participation through peer observation.

Job Crafting

Post-pandemic education has not returned to its full capacity as evidenced by student test scores (Tomkowicz et al., 2022), teacher shortages (Lücker et al., 2022), and other measures (Filho et al., 2021). Relational trust between teachers and administrators is strained, and little faith in administrative decision-making negatively impacts the culture of entire school districts. Slemp et al. (2015) found that through “several desirable outcomes, such as job satisfaction, work engagement and employees’ work performance . . . job crafting positively predicts employee wellbeing” (p. 972). While the extant research on job crafting was wider spread than just in education (Deer, 2022; Slemp et al., 2015; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001), relational crafting (Tims et al., 2012), when people change with whom they interact and the depth of those interactions in order to improve their social community, is hindered when teachers do not feel valued by their administration; in turn, the school climate is negatively impacted (Dreer, 2022). Therefore, when teachers find that a school climate no longer meets their job crafting needs, they

will seek employment elsewhere. At the site of this study, three teachers and one staff member left the school seeking a more positive work climate (Researcher's Journal, July 3, 2023).

The effectiveness of instructional rounds is well-studied and requires a school “to tie rounds to the professional development needs and school improvement plans in a cyclical process in which each informs the next” (Roberts, 2012, p. 156). To reiterate these findings addressed earlier, “The most powerful outcome for schools instituting rounds has been in teachers’ ability to identify their own professional development needs” (Roberts, 2012, p. 156). It was clear during this study that the teachers had the desire to work collaboratively with one another, but that they were not yet open to receiving criticism of their practice or providing any constructive criticism to their colleagues. Teacher learning could begin once teachers moved from isolation to collaboration and were able to support one another’s professionalism (Conley & Cooper, 2013). As was iterated in chapter 4, this foundation was essential before constructive criticism could be introduced because there was such resistance to any examination of teacher practice.

Practical solutions came in the form of learning how other teachers interacted with their shared students. Participants also learned different pedagogical techniques such as short-video integration to keep student attention and to create relevant, innovative lessons. They reflected on best practice for transitions from teacher talk to student applications of the instructional topic of the lesson.

The impact on teacher social/emotional wellbeing came in the form of vulnerable conversation topics in focus group discussions as well as a shared, welcomed realization that their colleagues were also dealing with the same teacher wellness concerns as they were. Teacher professional learning ought to be systematized and made to be an ongoing part of teachers’ work

lives. It is impactful and it is important both for the teachers' wellbeing and the students who will ultimately benefit from a happier, healthier instructor.

Limitations

It is important to keep in mind that a limitation of the focus group analysis was the impact that participants had on one another (Vicsek, 2010). For instance, one participant might have said something that changes another participant's perspective and might change their response to the group as a whole (Vicsek, 2010). While the teachers all expressed an improved understanding of their colleagues by participating in the modified instructional rounds process, the ideas raised to allow for more unstructured time for teachers to spend time with one another were implications for the field and would be taken into consideration for the future.

Positionality and Reflexivity

My own identity as a researcher who knew the participants before the study is important to the implications of the study if it were to be replicated. The four participants in my study were colleagues with whom I had built personal relationships. They openly said that part of the reason they participated in the study in the first place was to help me complete my degree. As I addressed in chapter 3, I had seen the decline in teacher morale in the few years prior to the start of this study because I was teaching in the same district. I knew how that was impacting my own instruction and overall affect at work. I also knew how it was affecting my colleagues, many of whom were my personal friends, and I drew a lot of motivation from the desire to improve teacher morale for myself and for my colleagues. In conversation with other students in my cohort in my doctoral program, declining teacher morale was a topic of many conversations. I knew that this issue was wider spread than just my school district. I also knew that my own experiences with peer observations were incredibly beneficial to my own practice, but also to

strengthening my camaraderie with my colleagues. All of these factors of reflexivity have likely influenced the outcomes of my study to some degree. Future studies of modified instructional rounds and teacher morale would likely be conducted by someone whose passion for improving teacher wellbeing had driven them to explore different avenues for strengthening teacher morale and therefore would also potentially be affected by the same lens as I had while conducting this research.

Implications

My study demonstrated the participant teachers' association of observations with negativity because their experiences with them have been punitive or they have received inconsistent feedback from different observers, teachers have low morale and as such their social/emotional wellbeing suffers. In order for modified instructional rounds to have the best possible outcome if teacher morale is low and teachers do not feel supported, efforts must be made to improve teacher morale. Preparation for modified instructional rounds must also include the logistics that could potentially hinder success. For instance, a system must be in place that would allow for teachers to observe one another without significant disruption to the students that would ultimately create more paperwork for the teachers who did the observations; otherwise, their interest in future peer observations would wane if it meant they would lose more preparation time in order to keep their students on track. One suggestion might be to hire adequate substitute teachers to cover classes, or to pay teachers to cover one another's classes interdepartmentally. Perhaps creating a teacher duty where a faculty member could cover classes that would not cause the teacher to lose their preparation period would support the design and also keep school climate positive. Changes that adopt "the cultural nature of teaching" (Stigler &

Hiebert, 1999) and underscore the importance of teachers' societal role as has been done in Japan with their mode of lesson study (Bautista & Baniqued, 2021; Stigler & Hiebert, 1999) may be necessary for improved teacher social/emotional wellbeing as well as for successful instructional rounds. Since the conclusion of the study, many colleagues have inquired about the process of modified instructional rounds and have asked the participants what they found valuable. This is encouraging with regard to the study's future implications.

Ultimately, the themes discussed in the section in chapter 4 titled "Fixing Broken Relational Trust: Laying the Groundwork" is at the crux of projecting any professional development goals, including modified instructional rounds. The COVID-19 trauma significantly affected teacher wellbeing of everyone who works in schools. For some teachers, their experiences during this time have left them both personally and professionally changed. In order for us to begin to heal this trauma, research must be done to determine how to build communities of practice that provide spaces for true relational trust and that not only allows for positive social experiences among teachers and administrators, but also builds time for such interaction with intentionality. This study showed that participant teachers wanted to take on an assets-based approach to mentorship going forward because they saw how collegiality improved, how collaboration increased, and how they gained ideas to improve their own practice going forward. There is clear evidence from this study that indicates that teachers would like for the mentorship role to continue beyond novice years of teaching. Mentorship and peer collaboration create collegiality. The value gained by observing a colleague does not halt after two years of classroom instruction. This study is consistent with the wider literature on teacher professional learning (Feiman-Nemser, 1998, 2001; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) that ongoing colleague collaboration strengthens both teacher practice and teacher wellbeing.

Here I address the implications of my findings on administrative planning, policy making, teacher education programs, and future research on modified instructional rounds. The school culture of this study's site may have elevated the association that a negative work environment would prevent teachers from being vulnerable in a way might not be true for other schools. The consequences, then, are that these results may not be applicable to other schools with a different school climate. Whether or not the need for informal peer interaction can be generalized to other schools that might be interested in using the modified instructional rounds protocol based on these responses is limited to the similarities of the participants and their group dynamics (Vicsek, 2010). The ultimate success of the modified instructional rounds process rests on the future interest of a broader network of teacher participants. Otherwise, the effectiveness of modified instructional rounds to create a culture of learning at Keystone High School or any other school will cease to exist (City et al., 2009).

However, given the extensive research on post-pandemic education (Chen & Lee 2022; Lemon & McDonough, 2023; Peetz, 2023), there are indications that this study would likely have similar results in other schools (Costa, 2023). The participants in this study were not alone.

The community of practice initiated during the study did not flourish in the way that an ideal community of practice might. This was likely a result of the resistance inherent in the number of people who were willing to be observed. Chen and Lee (2022) built up the existing research (Day & Gu, 2014; C. F. Mansfield et al., 2016) that "Teacher resilience is not an innate concept and seems to be a by-product of environmental, work-specific and personal contexts" (p. 891), but specifically focused on the contextual factors post-pandemic, which impacted teacher resilience; these are made up of "working conditions (Q. Li et al., 2019) and supportive administration and colleagues (Johnson et al., 2014)" (p. 891). Chen and Lee (2022) highlighted

the way in which teacher resilience impacts teacher job performance in a post-pandemic educational climate. While they recognized previous research that identified the correlation between teacher continuity and student achievement growth, I argue that with too little effort put into teacher social/emotional wellbeing, teacher continuity is at risk.

If teacher social/emotional wellbeing becomes a major focus of district goal setting going forward, “school systems and individual schools should be examined for potential ways of contributing to an excellent school climate” (Dreer, 2022, p. 10) in the same ways in which they are evaluated for methods to improve student growth or teacher professional development. Teachers who have sufficient relational trust with their administration and are open to constructive criticism can reflect on what they need to improve their practice. It is not an easy feat to develop and cultivate a strong relational trust among faculty and between faculty and administration. I want to also clarify that just because relational trust exists, does not mean that instructional rounds will be successful. However, there is greater opportunity for success if teachers feel supported and administration values teachers’ input. The teachers involved have already expressed their interest in continuing the process of modified instructional rounds in the future.

Administrative Planning

The most significant implications of my findings are for those engaged in administrative planning. The previously accepted methods of teacher observation evaluations where teachers would receive lesson critiques and would be given suggestions of best practices to incorporate in the future cannot be applied as they once were. This study demonstrates that the four teachers who participated needed time to bond with other teachers and to rekindle relationships that foster collaborative work environments. The implication here is that administrators need to take into

consideration the ways teachers are feeling damaged, stressed, and under pressure at work. This requires initiatives to productively support teachers in order to create the necessary relational trust between administration and teachers as well as among teachers. For instance, professional development at the start of each school year might focus on teacher wellness or an interactive school-wide challenge. It would be important to provide teachers with options for their own professional learning, though. Some teachers may want support in content knowledge development, specific teaching strategies, or technical training that they perceived to be a higher priority. In this study, the participants had a sense of their wellness as it intertwined with their professional practice, and thus it was well received. This awareness might also explain, in addition to school context factors, the reason why other teachers chose not to participate in the study.

My role in education has shifted since the start of the study and I have benefited immensely from the research findings. As a new administrator, I have checked in with each of the new teachers prior to the start of the school year to determine if there was anything they needed before the students arrived. I made it a goal of mine to introduce myself to everyone in the building in the first two weeks of school. In every conversation with teachers, I ensure that the faculty know their concerns are my top priority. There is no set professional development goal for the new school district. Therefore, I have begun reaching out to teachers to determine what type of professional development they would find most helpful. After all, the aim of professional development regardless of the district is to improve teacher practice, but if teachers are not given the opportunity to express their own professional needs, it is unlikely for their practice to improve. This study demonstrates support for the notion that teachers need autonomy

and agency in their professional learning experiences in order to foster investment in that learning.

Another benefit of modified instructional rounds is that high quality, effective teachers could serve as successful professional development leaders to improve teacher practice among their colleagues. Additionally, the value evidenced here that peer collaboration can have on teacher social/emotional wellbeing could be prioritized when administration is designing teacher schedules. The change from bureaucratic to professional approach in creating communities of practice must be acknowledged and adhered to in professional development planning. Teacher voice should be included in the professional development goals of any school and teacher support should be provided throughout the school initiative. This might come in the form of meetings but might also come in the form of duty relief to provide teachers more time to meet with their colleagues. Teachers must feel they work in a place where they are trusted and where risk-taking is not only supported but encouraged. And finally, the school climate must foster appreciation for teacher participants after the modified instructional round cycles are completed in order for the model to be successful in the future. Teacher social/emotional wellbeing cannot be improved without recognition of their value-added to the school culture (Talbert, 2009).

Policymakers

A second implication of this study is for policymakers. In New Jersey, public school teachers are required to participate in 25 professional development hours each year. It would be beneficial for policymakers to consider mandating that five of those hours include peer observation. This would particularly benefit novice teachers, but as this study shows, could also promote collegiality among teachers of all levels. In order for this to be successful, policymakers would also have to provide a supportive structure for this opportunity to exist; this might mean

ensuring that districts have access to high quality substitute teachers. I propose that whenever possible, teachers should be provided the opportunity to observe their colleagues in a structured and supportive way. It is clear that teacher participants' experiences with the modified instructional round process were positive. The participants overwhelmingly agreed that time with other colleagues is far too infrequent. Teacher professional learning should include time for teachers to participate in modified instructional rounds.

Teacher Education Programs

A third implication is for teacher education programs. In order to better prepare preservice teachers for independent classroom instruction, teacher education programs should ensure that the prospective teachers observe teachers in a variety of subject areas, not just the content area that they plan to teach. There is value in witnessing a variety of instructional strategies from several professionals as opposed to just one or two teachers with whom the novice teacher is assigned as a cooperating teacher. Additionally, novice teachers need to practice how to observe well, how to give feedback, and how to see their colleagues' classrooms as learning laboratories (Taylor & Klein, 2015). Teacher education programs should also consider seeking out partnerships with school districts who see the value in peer observation, the growth it can provide, and the overall professional culture that it cultivates. Within teacher education programs, prospective teachers might have assignments that specifically focus on cross-curricular lesson planning with a classmate of a different major. In 2017, the state of New Jersey mandated 175 hours of clinical contact time prior to a full-time clinical semester (New Jersey Educator Preparation Programs, 2017). Practicing communicating across content areas will promote a more connected work culture when these students become teachers.

There are many campus-wide initiatives to focus on student wellness at the college level, which should also be prioritized by education program departments nationwide. The social/emotional wellbeing of preservice teachers should be a top concern of teacher education programs; tools for coping with the educational climate could aid in lower teacher attrition if new teachers know who to turn to for support and how to distance themselves from the public perspective of educators. As preservice teachers begin to look for teaching positions, teacher education programs can support teacher continuity in nearby school systems by making school climate a focus of prospective teacher interviews.

Teacher shortages are a true concern for the future of institutional learning in the United States. If teacher wellness is made a priority even as an undergraduate or continuing education student who matriculates in an alternate route program, teachers will have a foundation for ways to reflect on their own wellbeing before a work environment becomes detrimental to their practice. For instance, preservice teachers or alternate route teachers might participate in a discussion with classmates about one thing that each person does to promote their own self-care, learning, or growth. It is important to consider self-care in ways that involve taking a daily or weekly walk outside, meditating regularly, or exercising a few times a week, but also in its deeper meaning as well such as how we invest in our work in ways that are joyful and meaningful. Conversations that support the importance of teacher social/emotional wellbeing and intradepartmental communication should hold equal weight to the skill of writing a successful lesson plan. Additionally, graduate programs geared towards administration should also set the precedence that the need for positive teacher social/emotional wellbeing is as important as their other workplace compliance issues.

Teachers

Increased teacher voice is also an implication for this study. As a researcher, I identified a problem, proposed a solution, and worked with my colleagues to make change for the better while I was teaching. Teachers are just as capable of initiating professional development as administrators are, yet their voices are often less heard. Teachers should consider using their expertise to raise awareness of the concerns that they see in their schools. This may make initiatives like instructional rounds more successful because teachers may more easily buy into a professional development concept designed by a colleague. Attrition may decline if teachers create a space to voice their concerns and ensure that their social/emotional wellbeing is prioritized.

Future Research

A fifth implication, that on future research of modified instructional rounds, should consider the relational trust between administration and teachers and as well as among teachers. If future research occurs in a school where teachers and administrations have open conversation about their own wellbeing and job satisfaction, opportunities for professional growth will have a higher success rate. Such research should return to a *learning curriculum* defined by Wenger and Lave (1991) as a distinct “community of practice engendered by pedagogical relations and by a prescriptive view of the target practice as a subject matter, as well as out of the many and various relations that tie participants to their own and to other institutions” (p. 97). The previous and widely recognized *teaching curriculum* (Wenger & Lave, 1991) where administrators observe teachers may not be the most effective way of creating professional growth and sustained educator change. The community of practice framework (Wenger & Lave, 1991) entails an initial goal, a revised goal, and a willingness to continuously revisit workplace goals. In school settings, this perspective is essential to the success of a modified instructional rounds protocol

where school climate, teacher work satisfaction, and teacher social/emotional wellbeing are constantly equal to the goal of student achievement in school reform. An endless amount of self-care will never make up for an institution that does not value teachers as people beyond their work performance.

Looking toward the future use of modified instructional rounds, which may be necessary as a scaffold to traditional instructional rounds, when school culture is supportive and teacher social/emotional wellbeing is prioritized, the rigor of the rounds process could be increased. If this modified instructional rounds process were to be supported in the future at Keystone High School, for instance, there would need to be more team-building activities that allowed teachers to get to know one another better and to build relational trust among the faculty who might otherwise be hesitant to participate. Once the vulnerability required for successful participation in instructional rounds has been established, more rigorous involvement in the rounds process can begin. For instance, Roberts' (2012) second year of rounds, "worked with the rigor course participants in developing a *rounds* -> *inquiry* -> *rounds* approach. We were interested in providing teachers with opportunities to research and develop an inquiry cycle focused on a course of study aligned with their problems of practice" (p. 156). Future research on modified instructional rounds should prioritize the schedule availability for teachers who are interested in peer observation. School-wide or even district-wide support might be necessary in order to allow for ample peer observation opportunities given restricted schedule availability in many schools.

The research will be beneficial for school administrators who are interested in providing more opportunities for teachers to collaborate with one another and improving their teachers' social/emotional wellbeing. Future research might also take into account Darling-Hammond's research (2010, 2013) on how to improve teacher evaluation for effective instructional practice

improvement in conjunction with this study to determine how to support teachers' social emotional wellbeing through collaboration and modified instructional rounds. This research would help answer a question the lingered at the end of the study: how can modified instructional rounds grow into organic professional learning communities or help shed light on teacher needs?

Conclusion

In chapter 4 I addressed that many professional development efforts focused on the potential learning loss that students had as a result of disrupted academic instruction (Uyar & Kadan, 2022), yet in constructing those efforts, teachers' needs were not prioritized. To reiterate, the motivation for this study was an identifiable need for teacher support in the study site. Brown (2018) found that teacher collaboration, respect for their colleagues, and improved professional relationships are common results after participating in instructional rounds. In this study, teachers had difficulty with the low participation of the faculty at large. Providing time for teachers to observe their colleagues and then even more time for peer collaboration and reflection for future practice may not be an achievable goal in the short term in the current educational climate where teacher shortage is so high. Immediate needs of districts such as class coverages may not allow for the full implementation of the modified instructional rounds process. Nonetheless, this time is critical to teacher professional growth; therefore, all efforts to make space for legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice should be prioritized. Any initiative that puts the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers as the primary focus will aid in the prevention of teacher attrition and a more welcoming work environment.

Teacher participants who completed the modified instructional rounds cycles self-reported that their socio-emotional wellbeing improved as a result of their peer observations and collaborative experiences with their colleagues. Their subsequent morale also improved because they were able to build a camaraderie with their colleagues that allowed for a stronger support system within the building. Teacher participants reported improved personal wellbeing and a more collaborative work environment after engaging in modified instructional rounds. Their professional growth was made a priority, which in turn improved their social/emotional wellbeing.

Therefore, in order for real culture shifting to occur, we must begin with teachers learning to collaborate in low stakes ways. One method for this collaboration would be modified instructional rounds. Another might be non-punitive walk-throughs. They are not as open to criticism and professional suggestions as they were before the pandemic, and it may take years to return to that place of vulnerability again. There must be a conscious effort to support teachers' social/emotional wellbeing and build relational trust between teachers and administration before the school culture at Keystone will shift.

Conclusions that can be made as a result of this study are that teacher participants' social/emotional wellbeing were positively influenced by their observation of and collaboration with colleagues as well as when time was provided for a true community of practice to exist. Ultimately, a culture of professional growth is a necessary precondition for peer observations to have the desired impact.

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Tables

Table 1

Instructional Rounds Differences

| City et. al (2009) | Castelluber (2023) |
|---|--|
| The short and long-term goals were to improve teaching and learning through targeted feedback on an identified problem of practice. | The short-term goal was to create the conditions necessary to engage in work that would increase teacher collaboration and benefit the social/emotional wellbeing of teachers. The long-term goal was to improve teaching and learning through targeted feedback on teacher strengths. |
| Teams of observers set by the school | Teacher observers only |
| Feedback was constructive criticism. | Feedback was positive reinforcement. |

Table 2*Data Collection Summary*

| Initial Interview | Instructional Rounds | Debriefs/Focus Groups |
|---|--|--|
| One 45–60-minute interview per participant to determine their current social/emotional wellbeing and their perspective on observations (both administrative and peer) | <p>Participants completed three 60-minute peer-observations of their colleagues between September 2022 and December 2022 as part of the modified instructional round process.</p> <p>Data from these observations was used in focus groups and debriefs to determine the focus of the next cycle of modified instructional rounds. The focus of the observations was on what colleagues can learn from one another rather than a critique of the observee.</p> | <p>There were five meetings in total. One focus group was held before all observations were conducted, a debriefing session was held after the first round of observations, and one focus group was held after each of the three observations. Then, a final focus group for the purposes of data triangulation was held after all observations were complete.</p> |

Table 3*Data Collection Timeline*

| Participants | Initial Interviews | Initial Focus Group | First Cycle of MIR | 1st Debrief Meeting | Second Cycle of MIR | Focus Group 2 | Third Cycle of MIR | Final Focus Group |
|--------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Sarah | 9/16/22 | 10/3/22 | 10/6/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/18/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/9/22 | 1/23/23 |
| Sophia | 9/12//22 | 10/3/22 | 10/4/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/17/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/13/22 | 1/23/23 |
| Henry | 9/15/22 | 10/3/22 | 10/4/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/17/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/13/22 | 1/23/23 |
| Erica | 9/14/22 | 10/3/22 | 10/6/22 | 10/24/22 | 11/18/22 | 11/28/22 | 12/9/22 | 1/23/23 |

Appendix A

Lesson Observation Protocol – adapted for Modified Instructional Rounds

Steps prior to the lesson

1. *Learning focus of observation.* This might be different for everyone. For example, *I want to go into the classroom specifically to observe _____ . I know this teacher does this really well (content, engagement, student rapport, etc.) _____.*
2. *Sharing of lesson plan.* The presenting teacher who will teach the lesson shares a copy of the lesson plan with all observers prior to the day of the lesson.
3. *Introduction.* The facilitator briefly introduces the protocol goals and norms and distributes a copy of these steps.
4. *Check-in.* Immediately preceding the lesson, the presenting teacher ensures that the observers have a place to sit in the class and are apprised of any changes to the lesson plan.

Observation of the lesson.

5. Observers record evidence during the lesson, which may include teacher actions, student actions, room environment, teacher movement, evidence of student learning, etc. The goal is to record objective data to be used later in interpreting events in the classroom. Interpretive notes may be recorded as well but should be separated from the objective data (e.g., in a sidebar, in parentheses, etc.). An example of judgmental vs. non-judgmental observation will be provided to observers prior to the observation.

Debrief and Analysis after the lesson

6. *Analysis of the lesson.* Each individual transcribes lines of observation data to Post-it notes. About 15-20 notes per person are usually adequate. They sort their notes into larger categories, searching for patterns in the data. Sorted notes are placed together on a whiteboard, and the final task is to develop category labels for each group. Each observer shares their results with the rest of the observers and provides a justification for the label using the data. The presenting teacher is present but does not speak. (30 minutes)

7. *Response: Warm feedback:* Warm reactions emphasize the strength of the presenting teacher (5 minutes)
 - Don't criticize or compliment.
 - Name what seemed effective in the lesson or what seemed to work well; provide supporting evidence for these points.
8. *Reaction.* The presenting teacher reacts to any responses he/she/they choose(s) and is reminded that the response is not meant to answer questions but to talk about her or his thinking. During this step, respondents may not speak unless asked questions. (5 minutes).

adapted From *The Power of Protocols: An Educators Guide to Better Practice* by Joseph P. McDonald, Nancy Mohr, Alan Dichter, and Elizabeth C. Donald
dbl 1/30/15

Appendix B

Modified Instructional Rounds Social/Emotional Wellbeing Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. What subject(s) do you teach?
3. What grade level?
4. How would you describe the experiences that you have had with observations in this school district?
5. What are your experiences with instructional rounds? If you haven't had any experience with instructional rounds, what do you know about the process? How would you describe instructional rounds and their function?
6. What are your experiences with collaboration with colleagues?
7. How would you describe any professional learning community that you have participated in or still participate in?
8. What has been your experience with professional development in this district?
9. What professional development experiences have you had that were powerful? Lasting?
10. Why are you willing to participate in this study?

11. What are you hoping to get out of this process?
12. What is important to you about teacher social/emotional wellbeing, and why?
13. What are your concerns going into the study (if any)?