

Preservice teacher perceptions of instructional rounds

School-University
Partnerships

Madelon McCall, Kenley Ritter and Abigail Gardner

Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to determine the perceptions of preservice teachers (PSTs) on the effectiveness of instructional rounds as a clinical experience in promoting awareness of student diversity and supporting the acquisition of professional knowledge (Essential 2).

Design/methodology/approach – The instructional rounds were implemented in a junior-level general pedagogy course prior to formal clinical experiences. Professional development school (PDS) personnel supported the course instructors by scheduling the classroom observations, supervising groups of PSTs and debriefing the PSTs after each observation (Essentials 4 and 8). The data were collected through an end-of-course survey of 18 secondary PSTs.

Findings – There were several themes that emerged from the analysis of data. First, the study revealed that PSTs credited the variety of campuses visited as supporting their awareness of student diversity and varied instructional strategies. Second, PSTs acknowledged that the instructional rounds supported their connection of theory to practice. Finally, over 70% of the participants noted that they most enjoyed in-person experiences in different classrooms to observe students and teachers in action.

Research limitations/implications – The findings for this study were specific to the teacher preparation program (TPP) utilized for the research. Each TPP requires different coursework and clinical experiences; therefore, the inclusion of instructional rounds may not be possible in all programs. Yet, the implementation of the rounds as a PST experience prior to clinical experiences is a strategy to consider to support the preparation of PSTs for their clinical experiences.

Originality/value – This study supports the continuation of instructional rounds at the teacher preparation program where the research was conducted. This research also informs other TPPs that strive to provide early clinical experiences that support PSTs' emerging perceptions of student diversity and applications of instructional knowledge.

Keywords Teacher education, Preservice teachers, Clinical experience, Instructional rounds

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Teacher preparation programs (TPPs) must approach teacher education with eyes wide open to changes occurring in the United States PK-12 public education system. Changing student demographics, the disruptions caused by the pandemic, teacher shortages, social unrest and student behavior issues each contribute to decisions concerning how best to prepare new teachers. University TPPs and school partnerships are key to providing knowledge and clinical experiences that support the growth of preservice teachers (PSTs) as they prepare to become teaching professionals (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation CAEP, 2022; Francies *et al.*, 2021; NAPDS, 2021).

As TPPs support PSTs in navigating ever-changing school challenges, the most effective and adaptable teacher may well be the one exposed to multiple and diverse school and classroom environments and instructional experiences during teacher preparation courses and clinical experiences. An issue is exactly how and where the exposure and experiences

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should occur. Using a situated learning context of teacher learning, an instructional rounds experience can support learning across multiple contexts and in multiple settings. This approach would allow PSTs to learn principles of teaching and how those principles apply in practice so that general principles learned in one situation can become “intertwined collections of specific patterns that hold across a variety of situations” (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 13). An understanding and awareness of cultural norms and school differences in determining the most effective instructional strategies are important components of the PST clinical experience. Developing that understanding and awareness in PSTs depends on university teacher education programs and school partnerships (Banks, 2015). Utilizing a professional development school (PDS) partnership provides the context and structure for developing opportunities for multiple and diverse experiences.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to determine the perceptions of preservice teachers on the effectiveness of instructional rounds in promoting awareness of student diversity and supporting acquisition of professional knowledge. The choice to use instructional rounds in a non-clinical based course supports the need for different types of experiences to prepare future educators to serve in different types of schools (Essential 2). The decision to include PDS faculty and staff representing multiple schools was based on collaboration with PDS partners in responding to a need for observations of instructional practice and the racial, socioeconomic and cultural student differences in area schools before PSTs began their formal clinical experiences in the junior and senior year (Essential 4 and 8).

Promoting awareness of school differences and student diversity was supported by the choice to include observations at two high schools and two middle schools representing two demographically different districts. The emphasis of the instructional rounds was on observing classroom strategies that supported the development of positive classroom environments and student–teacher relationships (STRs) and observing effective strategies that promoted acceptance, support and celebration of student differences.

Relevant literature

While the process of using instructional rounds did not originate with teacher preparation programs, the practice has the potential to prepare PSTs to become effective teachers, including the ability to connect theory to practice, support all learners and become reflective practitioners. The education model for the instructional rounds is based on the medical rounds model, which supports medical interns learning in a clinical setting to improve practice (Lee, 2015). Instructional rounds as a practice for educators to learn in a clinical setting emerged for a similar reason but has been used by K-12 administrators primarily to address whole district or whole school improvement (City *et al.*, 2009; Fowler-Finn, 2018; Roberts, 2013). The school improvement model promotes teacher professional growth by allowing in-service teachers to observe other educators and then reflect on and discuss their observations in support of improving professional practice and student learning (Lee, 2015). There are skeptics as to the effectiveness of the City *et al.* (2009) instructional rounds model due to “issues relating to pedagogy, expertise, and process” of those conducting the rounds (Williamson & Hodder, 2015, p. 54). Yet, the purpose of solving district-wide problems of practice and supporting the learning of all participants is supported by the City *et al.* (2009) model (Roegman & Riehl, 2012). Del Prete’s (1990) model indicates that the purpose for instructional rounds in PST education is “to understand and learn from teaching and learning in a specific context at a particular point in time, in its effort to make practice open and shareable, and in its integration of practice, observation, inquiry, and multiple voices and perspectives” (Goodwin *et al.*, 2015, p. 38). The Del Prete model is most applicable to PST education as the emphasis is on contextual learning and not solving district or school problems.

The observation of other practitioners and their professional practices is the basis of instructional rounds for PSTs, yet the reflection on the observations is the key to improving practice. Preservice teachers can work together in small groups, under the guidance of other teachers and TPP faculty, to apply educational theory to practice and both question and collaboratively reflect on what they observed (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Westheimer, 2008). Goodwin *et al.* (2015) define the practice of PST instructional rounds as including “one or more practicing teachers, a group of 3–6 pre-service teacher interns, and one or more education faculty members” (p.38). The small group structure, purposeful observation and guided debriefing is a model for PSTs to observe in multiple schools and in different classrooms as an addition to traditional TPP clinical experiences preceding the formal classroom placements. Purposeful instructional rounds that include a reflection component can support the growth of PSTs’ personal and professional growth before they begin their formal TPP clinical experiences.

How, when, where and for what purpose the instructional rounds are implemented varies with each TPP. While emphasis in teacher education is not on addressing district or school improvement yet stating that the purpose is solely to improve preservice teacher education is too vague. A study conducted in Australia described a program that used instructional rounds for the purpose of exposing PSTs to effective teaching practices (Moran, 2014). Since clinical experiences in schools vary in quality and effectiveness, this program sought to provide multiple experiences for PSTs to observe district innovations in specifically identified classrooms with accomplished teachers (Moran, 2014). The multiple-experience model provides more exposure for PSTs to observe and discuss the multiplicity of practices that occur in K-12 classrooms.

Reagan *et al.* (2017) cite the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010) as supporting instructional rounds to gain professional knowledge. The Wake Forest University teacher residency program utilized instructional rounds and narrowed the focus of the rounds to evaluate specific instructional strategies (Reagan *et al.*, 2013; Baker & Milner, 2016). Another well-known program, the San Francisco Teacher Residency program, utilized instructional rounds to strengthen the connections between the theory taught in PST coursework with educational settings in an urban school district (Williamson & Hodder, 2015). Both TPPs narrowed the purpose of the instructional rounds to address specific goals for their programs.

While some TPPs could add an additional clinical experience course, it is often not feasible. When additional courses are not possible, programs must consider where to embed additional clinical experiences into existing coursework. The addition of clinical experiences requires TPPs to consider how the clinical experience is structured and what will be required of partner schools and TPP faculty. Instructional rounds could become a feasible option for additional clinical experiences in TPPs. The protocol used at the University of Northern Iowa (Nielsen, 2022) embedded instructional rounds in existing coursework and utilized a university employed clinical experience coordinator and an in-service teacher to lead the instructional rounds. The rounds included an introduction to observations, the observation of specific teachers and debriefing session and included sharing the results of those observations with the host teachers. The participants in that program indicated that the instructional rounds were beneficial as a component of an early clinical experience. The PSTs were given access to classrooms that they would not normally be privy to and they were able to discuss their observations with peers who had observed the same lesson. PSTs mentioned that they were able to see multiple ways of teaching, classroom management techniques, organization and classroom arrangements to enrich their teacher education knowledge and dispositions (Nielsen, 2022, p. 128). If TPPs determine that an additional clinical experience is needed, the first decision is to clearly determine the purpose of the experience. If that purpose includes the need for earlier exposure to different schools and multiple classrooms, then embedding instructional rounds into existing classwork is an option.

In addition to providing supplemental clinical experiences to PSTs coursework, instructional rounds allow PSTs the opportunity to observe in classrooms on multiple campuses, with diverse student populations. When coursework and experiences are not designed to prepare PSTs to teach diverse populations of students, they “tend to experience culture shock or an unhealthy attitude to ‘save’ their students” (Banks, 2015, p. 62). Exposure to multiple schools and grade levels, even if the experience is short in duration, like in instructional rounds, can better prepare PSTs to teach in different school environments than a traditional experience of observing only on one campus. Adding a reflection component to those experiences can then promote conceptual change and support the personal transformation of PSTs regarding their views of culturally diverse students (Larkin, 2012; Kondor *et al.*, 2019; Mezirow, 1991). The process of instructional rounds provides PSTs with experiences in different campus settings which they can draw on in their future clinical experiences and teaching placements.

Study context

The site of this research was a private southwestern university that offers a four-year secondary education teacher preparation program. This TPP partners with area urban and suburban school districts for clinical experiences. The TPP research site requires a one-semester junior-year spring clinical experience where PSTs are placed at one school in a content-specific classroom for approximately eight hours each week. The senior-year experience is a full day, two-semester experience, most commonly at a school that is different from their junior-year clinical experience. Throughout the program, the PSTs complete clinical experiences on only two different campuses. Clinical experiences on only two campuses limited PST knowledge as to how schools and classrooms with dramatically different demographics can function very differently, while still promoting a positive school and classroom environment and high student achievement. The program faculty determined that the courses and experiences offered by this program did not provide requisite exposure to different schools or diverse student populations and decided that a variation on instructional rounds could be included in a fall junior-year course to expose PSTs to diversely populated schools and better prepare PSTs for their formal clinical experiences and growth as preservice teachers.

In spring 2020, the teacher education professors met with PDS principals and district coordinators to discuss expanding the role of the schools to include hosting instructional rounds in support of a junior-year instructional rounds experience. Those involved in the discussion envisioned the instructional rounds as an opportunity for PSTs to observe and reflect on instructional strategies that supported high school and middle school student achievement at the four demographically different PDS sites. The proposed instructional rounds included opportunities to observe the use of differentiated instruction, culturally responsive pedagogies, social-emotional learning strategies and supports for Emergent Bilinguals and special education students. This article discusses the data analyzed from the implementation of four in-person instructional rounds in fall 2022.

Methodology

An instrumental case study was chosen as the research method for this study. An instrumental case study serves the purpose of defining a case through contextual research on a phenomenon (Yin, 2013). For this research, the case is the use of instructional rounds to promote the acquisition of professional knowledge and awareness of student diversity for one group of PSTs. The case was bounded by the inclusion of one section of 18 PSTs participating in a junior-level teacher education course during the fall 2022 academic semester.

The data from a survey completed by the PSTs at the end of the fall 2022 semester (see [Appendix A](#)) provided evidence for the effectiveness of instructional rounds occurring at four demographically different middle and high schools. The survey determined the perceptions of preservice teachers on the effectiveness of instructional rounds in promoting awareness of student diversity and acquisition of professional knowledge, specifically instructional strategies supporting student learning. The survey data also informed improvements to future iterations of the course. The following research questions were posited to substantiate the purpose of this study.

- RQ1.* How do instructional rounds support preservice teachers' awareness of student diversity?
- RQ2.* What are the perceptions of preservice teachers regarding the learning opportunities provided during instructional rounds and the effectiveness of those rounds in providing experiences to support professional knowledge and growth?
- RQ3.* What did preservice teachers enjoy most and least about the instructional rounds and what changes did they propose to the format of the instructional rounds that would make them more effective in promoting their learning as a preservice teacher?

Researcher positionality

The primary researcher was the course instructor in fall 2022 and taught the research course for seven years prior to this study. The second researcher was a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at the university and both taught and supervised secondary PSTs in the program. The third researcher was an education master's student who had completed the university undergraduate TPP in May before joining the research team in the fall of 2022. The third researcher also participated as an instructional rounds supervisor for two of the four rounding experiences.

Site selection and instructional rounds structure

The sites chosen for this research study were from two neighboring districts (one urban and one suburban). Instructional rounds took place at one middle school and one high school in each district. The four sites were chosen because of established PDS partnerships and existing relationships with the campus administration, as well as the school diversity in terms of student ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special education population and percentage of Emergent Bilingual learners ([Table 1](#)). Permission to conduct the instructional rounds was granted by the PDS district liaison for each of the two districts and by the campus principals. Each site included both a University Liaison (UL) and Site Coordinator. The primary role of the UL was to serve as the faculty representative on the PDS campus and communicate campus and PST needs and expectations to the TPP during the junior spring-semester clinical experience. The primary role of the Site Coordinator was to collaborate with the university faculty and to provide daily observational and instructional support for the junior PSTs during that same experience. Those roles expanded with the inclusion of a fall-semester instructional rounds' implementation at four schools. The PDS ULs and Site-Based Coordinators from each of the schools volunteered as instructional rounds supervisors for all four instructional rounds, providing additional opportunities for the students to debrief with PDS professionals between classroom observations and at the conclusion of the instructional rounds (Essential 8).

SUP

Characteristic	CCMS (%)	UHS (%)	MMS (%)	MHS (%)
<i>Ethnicity</i>				
African American	22.7	18.4	11.8	11.6
Hispanic 14.3%	71.1	75.2	24.9	23.8
White	4.7	5.2	54.7	56.7
American Indian	0.0	0.1	0.3	0.1
Asian	0.1	0.1	4.3	4.7
Pacific Islander	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.1
Two or more	1.3	1.0	3.9	3.0
<i>Other</i>				
Eco disadvantaged	95.8	90.6	33.2	27.7
SPED	14.3	7.5	14.3	9.8
Emergent Bilingual	25.0	15.2	1.7	1.4

Table 1.
2022–23 PDS campus
demographics

Source(s): Table created by authors

The instructional rounds at the four schools were implemented as a course requirement in a general pedagogy course. The instructional rounds generally followed the protocol of what is commonly referred to as teacher rounds, using in-service teachers, preservice teachers and faculty members (Goodwin *et al.*, 2015). There were 18 PSTs enrolled in the course during fall 2022 and the rounding groups included three to four PSTs accompanied by one supervisor, therefore five groups participated in each rounding experience. The rounds were supervised by at least one course instructor, campus PDS UL, campus PDS Site Coordinator, in-service teacher, or the master's student included as one of the three researchers for this project. A supervisor always accompanied the groups during the instructional rounds. Each campus provided 10–12 classrooms for rotations so that groups could observe three different classes over two class periods. The rounding groups of four students and one supervisor spent approximately 20 minutes in each of three classrooms (see Appendix B). The PDS campus UL and Site Coordinator scheduled the observed classes based on administrator recommendation and individual teacher permission. There were no specific content area requirements for the observed classes, therefore PSTs observed a variety of classes. The schools provided a space (the PDS room, library, or cafeteria) to convene the whole group of PSTs both for instructions and introductions before instructional rounds and then again to debrief the rounding experience. The ULs and Site Coordinators were each assigned to one group of PSTs and shared supervision and debriefing responsibilities.

Instructional rounds were conducted at each of the four schools one time during the fall semester. Table 2 provides the schedule of the instructional rounds and the course content topics. The topics were discussed in class prior to the instructional rounds to prepare students to purposefully observe for specific instructional strategies and classroom culture differences.

Participant selection

The participants were 18 junior-level secondary certificate PSTs enrolled in a general pedagogy course. All participants were undergraduate education majors or were seeking education minors/concentrations. To protect the identities of the participants, no demographic data were requested nor were the student responses designated by major/minor or content area. The university Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that the study was exempt, and consent was obtained from each of the 18 PSTs participating in the designated course.

Week	Topic
1	Teacher–student relationships
2	Social-emotional learning/Behavior management
3	Legal and ethical requirements for educators
4	Instructional rounds #1-Suburban high school campus
5	Differentiation of instruction/Culturally relevant pedagogy
6	Instructional rounds #2-Urban high school campus
7	Instructional models and strategies
8	Assessment and data analysis
9	Instructional rounds #3-Suburban middle school campus
10	Emergent Bilinguals
11	Instructional rounds #4-Urban middle school campus
12	Special education/504

Table 2.
Course content and experiences

Source(s): Table created by authors

Data collection

The PSTs recorded their observations during the instructional rounds (see [Appendix C](#) as an example) and submitted a reflection about their experience upon completion of each round (see [Appendix D](#) as an example). The reflection submission was assessed as a course requirement and was based on information recorded in the observation document. The two documents were not part of the data collected for this study, but the PSTs referenced their instructional rounds observation forms and reflections while completing the end-of-course survey (see [Appendix A](#)). The survey questions were included as part of the final exam for the course. The survey provided an opportunity for PSTs to share the knowledge gained during the experience of the instructional rounds and allowed each to share their perceptions as to the effectiveness of those rounds. PSTs were instructed to exclude any identifying campus or teacher information in their responses. The data were coded to protect participant confidentiality. The coded data were stored in a password-protected file only accessible to the researchers. Because the data collection was limited to a single submission of PST perceptions, there were no physical, psychological, legal, social, or financial risks to the subjects. The PSTs had the option of declining consent for participation in the survey and there was no impact on their grade in the course for so choosing. The third researcher obtained the consent forms from students before they completed the final exam. The consent forms were not available to the course instructor until after the semester grades had been submitted.

Data analysis

The purpose of the data analysis was threefold: (1) to reveal information concerning the effectiveness of the instructional rounds in promoting PST’s awareness of student diversity, (2) to determine the perceptions of the PSTs on the effectiveness of the instructional rounds in supporting their professional knowledge and growth and (3) to inform future iterations of the course in utilizing instructional rounds by examining what PSTs enjoyed most and least about the experience and their recommendations for changes.

The initial data cleaning and organization process occurred in multiple steps. As the first step in the data analysis process, the third researcher disaggregated the data from the three question categories into Excel. After fall 2022 grades were submitted, the primary researcher determined that all students provided consent and then anonymized the survey data to assure student confidentiality. The open-response data were added to three identical spreadsheets so that the three researchers could independently analyze the information. Each researcher used the spreadsheet to identify common words or phrases utilizing in vivo coding. The primary researcher then compiled the three sets of independently determined

codes into one common coding system. Finally, the three researchers met to discuss the common coding system and to agree on any changes to that system. The codes were used to categorize responses and develop themes for each of the research questions. This was a cyclical and iterative process, which is often a characteristic of qualitative data analysis (Bergin, 2018). Themes were developed inductively as there was no preconceived notion of the analysis results.

Findings

The data collected from the end of course survey provided evidence for the three research questions: (1) how the instructional rounds supported PSTs' awareness of differences in student diversity, (2) the PST's perceptions of the learning opportunities provided during the rounding experience and the effectiveness of the rounds in providing experiences to support professional knowledge and growth and (3) what PSTs enjoyed most and least about the instructional rounds and any changes they proposed concerning the effectiveness of the instructional rounds. There were several themes that emerged from the data analysis. First, the study revealed that PSTs credited the variety of schools visited as supporting their awareness of student diversity, particularly noting how those student populations were different from their own middle and high school experiences. Second, PSTs acknowledged that the instructional rounds provided evidence for the importance of creating a positive classroom environment and the importance of interactive and student-centered pedagogy. Finally, over 70% of the participants (15/18) noted that they most enjoyed physically participating in different classrooms to observe students and teachers in action and 56% (10/18) indicated that they would prefer more observations in their chosen content certification areas. We share these findings by providing evidence for each research question in the following sections.

PST awareness of the differences in schools and student diversity

Survey question one provided evidence for the [first research question](#) regarding how instructional rounds supported PST's awareness of differences in student diversity. Two themes developed after analysis of the data, including the PSTs' observations of the differences in student diversity at the four schools and the differences between PSTs' experiences during the instructional rounds and their own high school experience.

Multiple PSTs referenced the importance of visiting four different schools in two different districts. The PSTs commented that they learned more about the campus and student differences of the urban and suburban communities through the instructional rounds experience. Two participants explained, "I think the biggest thing that I became aware of was how different the cultural and socioeconomic breakdowns at schools all within 15 minutes of each other were" and "I realized that campuses would be more diverse, but I was surprised at just how much cultural variety there was. It was a really positive experience to see the unique identities of different campuses and different students." PSTs noticed student diversity on each campus. One PST reflected, "By visiting multiple different campuses that encapsulate different types of students, I believe that the instructional rounds did a great job impacting my awareness of student differences," and "These instructional rounds impacted my awareness of campus differences because they made me aware of how much the community impacts the make-up and operation of a school." The PSTs also noticed the effects of that diversity on instruction. One PST added:

Instructional rounds were super beneficial in making me more aware of cultural differences and how they affect classroom dynamics. It is super important for the teacher to be aware of these diverse groups of students and to relate their lesson plans to not only one ethnic group but everyone in the room.

Another student discussed inequities in student and classroom resources, “I think it is shocking to see first-hand the differences and inequities in education there are right in the city I’m currently living in, but it made me even more excited to be in the classroom and show my future students the power of education.” The data supported that the instructional rounds at different schools provided multiple exposures to student and school differences.

PSTs noted that the instructional rounds also provided a perspective different from their own high school experience. Over fifty percent indicated that this was their first experience in a diverse public middle or high school and without the instructional rounds they would have only their personal experiences to reference. One PST stated:

Instructional rounds were extremely impactful for me. Growing up I went to a private school and never saw public school student diversity. Although private schools can have diversity too, I never saw the same kind of diversity. Seeing the diversity in these schools opened up my eyes and taught me a lot about the diverse student populations that I could be educating in the future.

Another student noted “It made me aware that when I teach, it will not look the same as when I went to school because each school is different.” The experience of the instructional rounds provided PSTs with different perspectives of the schools where they would complete their clinical experiences and provided a perspective different from their personal school experiences.

All PST responses to the first survey question were positive responses indicating the importance of observing multiple schools in multiple school districts. One PST summarized the importance of that experience:

The instructional rounds impacted my awareness of differences in campus cultures and student diversity by allowing me to see what makes different groups of students thrive and how supports in instruction and the attitudes of teachers contribute to their success. It also made me realize how diverse school populations are. I knew they were but growing up attending a smaller public school in an area where much of the population is white, I encountered diversity, mostly in Latino populations and low-income families. It was not until walking into larger schools I began to comprehend some of the realities of these differences. It was evident in schools that had many high-risk students how much relationships were emphasized. Also being able to watch how different students of presumably similar backgrounds acted differently re-emphasized to me how people cannot put any individual into a one-size-fits-all category.

The PSTs recognized that the instructional rounds experience at four different schools provided exposure to different campuses and examples of student diversity at schools different from their own school experiences.

PST perceptions regarding learning opportunities and experiences

The second survey question supported PSTs’ perceptions regarding the learning opportunities and experiences provided during instructional rounds to support their professional knowledge and growth. The two themes that emerged included the importance of creating a positive classroom environment, including both the physical and social aspects and the importance of interactive and student-centered pedagogy.

Preservice teachers noticed how effective physical aspects of a classroom environment contributed to the overall positive climate. One PST commented that the effect of the physical classroom space was surprising:

I’m not very good at decorating, but after observing different classrooms, I’ve realized how important it is to create an inspirational and positive environment. The colors and inspirational quotes had more of an impact on the learning environment than I had anticipated.

The instructional rounds also provided the opportunity for PSTs to compare different physical classroom environments and observe the effects of classroom organization on the learning experience:

As a future life sciences teacher, I was inspired by the [*science*] teacher at [*school*] in how she established a positive social and physical learning environment by using diagrams, graphic organizers, and a supply station. Supply stations and graphs are impactful physical environment tools for her students because they make materials and information more easily accessible for all her students and contribute to their academic success. In addition, the teacher created graphic organizers for her class to fill in during the lecture, which is a more entertaining note-taking strategy that aided different learning styles. Lastly, this teacher included timeframes, which allowed her students to stay focused and efficient during class.

The observations of different classroom environments provided opportunities to support PSTs' understanding of how and why a positive classroom environment is influenced by classroom decor and organization.

The PSTs also observed examples of the STR in support of creating a socially positive classroom environment. They noted that good STRs were essential to effective instruction and specifically that the teachers who appeared most effective during the instructional round observations were those who modeled positive relationships with students. One PST observed that the "strictly disciplinary power dynamic" often associated with teachers was not how most teachers they observed approached their students. The PSTs saw how each teacher incorporated unique strategies for supporting their students, often requiring the teacher to, as one participant stated, "set aside the content and attend to the needs of their students." Equally important was the PSTs understanding that taking an interest in the personal lives of students could occur without losing the professionalism required for a positive STR:

During instructional rounds, I learned how teachers can appropriately have a balance of being approachable/friendly to students but still maintaining professionalism and your students having respect for you. Many of the teachers that I observed had something that I described as "contagious compassion towards their students." This is one area I feel like I needed to learn more about and grow in, because as a teacher, I really want to be the cool teacher that everyone loves. While this is not wrong to do, you need to also maintain your professionalism as a teacher, or else your students will not respect you. In the instructional rounds, it was clear to see that students both had friendly interactions with their teachers, but also treated them with the utmost respect.

The instructional rounds provided opportunities for PSTs to observe at least twelve different teachers in four different schools over the course of the semester, exposing them to multiple examples of STRs and positive classroom environments.

The second theme determined from survey question two was that PSTs professional knowledge and growth in becoming a teacher was supported by observations of effective pedagogy. PSTs in this study did not have the opportunity to observe different public school classrooms prior to this course. They felt that the instructional rounds provided relevance and an opportunity to see an application of what they had learned in their previous education courses. One participant shared a big-picture view of pedagogy in noting that "All teachers teach differently because they are each unique, just like their students." This same PST also observed that "students were much more involved when the [*instructional*] strategy was student-centered." The survey responses supported the need for teachers to use a variety of instructional strategies and that certain strategies appeared to work better in some content areas. One participant recognized the need to grow professionally by noting:

I am going to need to incorporate a variety of activities and give the students many opportunities to interact with one another and move around. Some of the most successful middle school classrooms I observed seemed chaotic at first, but it became clear after a few minutes that it was actually organized chaos within healthy boundaries. I am going to need to continue to grow in the area of being comfortable amidst organized chaos, but I am excited to learn this skill and grateful that this realization came before starting the TA [*teaching associate*] and intern experiences so I can start preparing in advance.

This PST concluded that the inclusion of a variety of collaborative activities was an important contribution to a new teacher's knowledge and growth. Observing student-centered classrooms and collaborative activities reinforced what the PSTs had learned about pedagogy in prior courses.

The PSTs connected the positive physical and social classroom environment, teacher/student relationships and the use of effective pedagogy as contributing to their professional knowledge and growth. One PST noticed that "making the first 5 minutes [of class] meaningful to student learning sets the tone for the rest of the class." This participant also shared that the intentional use of the time between classes and at the beginning of each class "let the student know that they are seen and heard" and that the students would be more engaged in class. Another PST summed up the thoughts that several other participants also shared by stating:

A classroom would not be a classroom without all of the unique backgrounds of the students that make up that classroom, and it is the duty of the teacher to create meaningful lessons and an intentional classroom environment that fosters deep rooted connections between the students and the teacher.

The data supported the PSTs' understanding of the physical and social classroom environment. Additionally, PSTs observed that intentional pedagogy and strong teacher/student relationships support effective classroom management and student learning.

PST reflection on instructional round effectiveness

The third and fourth survey questions provided evidence for the final research question exploring what PSTs enjoyed most and least about the instructional rounds and what changes they proposed to the format of future iterations of instructional rounds that would make them more effective in supporting their development as a preservice teacher. Over 70% of the participants (15/18) noted that they most enjoyed physically being in different classrooms to observe students and teachers in action. There was some overlap in what students enjoyed least and 56% (10/18) of the PSTs suggested that they would prefer more observations in their chosen content certification areas.

All PSTs indicated that they enjoyed the instructional rounds experience, particularly observing a variety of classrooms in different schools. They indicated that the exposure to multiple classrooms provided opportunities to observe positive STRs, a variety of effective instructional strategies and an application of what they learned in previous education courses. The PSTs enjoyed the format of the instructional rounds, including the campus principals' introduction at the beginning of the rounds and the supervisor debrief after concluding the experience. Several PSTs noted that visiting each PDS campus before the junior-year spring clinical experience also relieved some of their anxiety about what to expect. PSTs discussed that they enjoyed experiencing the dynamics of a classroom and being able to observe effective teaching even before they began their clinical experience. One PST shared:

I think that it was just fun to see teachers in their element enjoying their job. As college students, we have a lot of anxiety about the future and what teaching is really going to be like. We hear positive things from our professors about how rewarding it is and how much fun it can be but there is always the looming consideration for possible issues in the classroom. I think it was just very reassuring to see how much those teachers that we observed loved their jobs.

Another PST discussed that the instructional rounds confirmed her excitement in becoming a teacher:

I got a lot of ideas for my own classroom, and it made me most excited to get my own classroom. After I went home from the first instructional rounds, I was telling my roommate how much it reminded me that I wanted to teach and made me so excited and gave me something to look forward to.

The instructional round experience in actual classrooms provided a format for discussion, supported the PSTs' desire to become a teacher, alleviated some of their apprehension about their clinical experiences and introduced them to administrators at the schools where those experiences would occur.

In addition to the aspects of instructional rounds the PSTs enjoyed most, survey question three provided data concerning the PSTs' least favorite parts as well. While multiple PSTs shared that they appreciated visiting a variety of classrooms and content areas, many shared that they least enjoyed that aspect and would have preferred to only observe in their content certification area. The data from the fourth survey question provided additional observations concerning what PSTs enjoyed least about the instructional rounds experience and they offered multiple suggestions for format changes. The most often cited suggestion was to form content-specific groups and concentrate on observation in specific content areas. While several PSTs noted that it was "valuable" to observe in different content areas and that they observed instructional strategies that work in all content areas, they would prefer to concentrate on observing in classrooms of subjects they will teach.

PSTs also indicated that they did not enjoy merely observing and would have liked interacting more with the teachers and students. Additionally, PSTs preferred observing in classes where students did not work independently. The PSTs felt that they could not observe effective teaching strategies if the teacher was not directly interacting with students or if students were not working collaboratively. The PSTs mentioned that they did not enjoy walking into a classroom without knowing the entire story of that classroom, "I wish that we would have gotten either a short bio or a Q&A time to understand each teacher's practices." Several PSTs also stated that they felt awkward and uncomfortable entering a classroom unannounced. Others shared that perhaps a longer observation time would allow for a "better understanding of how the classroom functions." One student thought the experience was tiring and applied that observation to their future teacher well-being by observing:

Perhaps what I enjoyed the least about the instructional rounds was how tired I was afterward. However, this was also a helpful part of the experience. If I was tired after simply observing classes for an hour, I will definitely need to be intentional about getting enough sleep when I start teaching. I also found working out to be a good way to clear my head after the observations, so I can be intentional about making time for that in my schedule, too.

PSTs shared that while it was great to have a guided observation instrument to document observations (see [Appendix C](#)) specific to course content (i.e. 504, special education, or emerging bilingual accommodations), many accommodations were difficult to observe without prior knowledge about specific students.

The PSTs provided additional suggestions for better coordinating the purpose of the instructional rounds with the classroom teacher and for improving the logistics of the experience. Suggestions included asking teachers to provide information addressing the instructional strategies that would be observed and why those strategies were implemented. One PST noted, "I think knowing the 'Why?' behind doing something as a teacher is important to seeing the bigger picture, and I think it would have allowed me to draw deeper connections into how I want my future classroom(s) to operate." Another PST proposed that a short briefing before entering the classroom would have supported purposeful observations. One PST suggested that the timing of the rounding experience better aligns with campus bell schedules. This PST felt that it was important to "see the beginning of one class, the middle of one class, and the end of one class." The PST responses to the fourth survey question provided them the opportunity to share how instructors might improve future iterations of the instructional rounds experience.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the impact of middle and high school instructional rounds (Essential 2) on PST awareness of differences in student diversity and to determine the perceptions of the PSTs on the effectiveness of the instructional rounds in supporting PST professional knowledge and growth (NAPDS, 2021). The case study also provided information from PSTs concerning the most and least enjoyable aspects of the instructional rounds experience and how those experiences might be improved. The following paragraphs provide an overview of the importance of the findings as applicable to each of the three research questions and a brief discussion of unanticipated outcomes.

PST awareness of the differences in schools and student diversity

The [first research question](#) determined how instructional rounds impacted the development of PSTs' awareness of school differences and student diversity at those schools. The instructional rounds were implemented to provide exposure to multiple schools instead of exposure to the two schools the PSTs would be assigned to during their formal clinical experiences. Exposure to multiple schools and schools different from the PSTs' personal experiences is important before they begin those clinical experiences.

The PSTs enrolled in this program had a variety of personal educational experiences, including public and private schools, home schools, large urban and suburban schools and rural schools. PSTs expressed that their view of education was based on personal experiences and realized that the schools where they will complete the required clinical experiences may differ greatly from their personal experience. One of the participants indicated that the instructional rounds provided exposure to different types of schools with a diversity of students, "Seeing the diversity in these schools opened up my eyes and taught me a lot about the diverse student populations that I could be educating in the future". It is important to note that this realization occurred during a course that preceded any formal clinical experiences in the TPP and could only have occurred through observations of multiple schools and classrooms.

PST perceptions regarding learning opportunities and experiences

In support of the [second research question](#), the PSTs stated that the instructional rounds experience promoted their development of different perspectives on varied classroom management and instructional practices in support of professional knowledge and growth. The instructional rounds provided opportunities for PSTs to visit actual classrooms in both urban and suburban schools so that they could observe practices learned in their education classes. This finding is reflected in the San Francisco Teacher Residency program, which utilized instructional rounds to strengthen the connections between the theory taught in PST coursework with educational settings in an urban school district (Williamson & Hodder, 2015). The PSTs observed that a welcoming classroom, intentional pedagogy and strong STRs promoted both effective classroom management and student learning. The PSTs observed that effective teaching practices were important regardless of the campus, content area, or teacher. Data collected from PST observations of effective teachers in different school settings support the work of Moran (2014) in determining the importance of clinical experiences in multiple schools through observations of specifically identified classrooms with accomplished teachers.

PST reflection on instructional round effectiveness

The findings related to the [third research question](#) provided information to support possible changes to the next iteration of the instructional rounds. The responses to what was most enjoyable about the instructional rounds provided support for the continuation of that

experience prior to the PST clinical experiences. The PSTs most enjoyed the in-person experience at the schools and in different classrooms. The PSTs indicated that they were anxious when beginning clinical experiences in schools that differ from their personal experiences and the instructional rounds helped to alleviate some of that anxiety by including time with school principals, visiting multiple schools and classrooms and debriefing with their classmates and instructors. The debrief that occurred with classmates and instructors immediately after the instructional rounds experience provided a non-judgmental space to discuss what PSTs observed. The least enjoyable aspects of the instructional rounds included that PSTs felt as if they were interrupting the classes by being present, they did not always observe what they felt to be positive, effective teaching practices, and several PSTs said they would prefer to observe only in their chosen content area.

Response to the PST survey

In response to the data provided by the survey, the researchers determined that the course instructors can better prepare the PSTs for the instructional rounds experience. A pre-survey is proposed for the next iteration of instructional rounds to uncover PSTs' prior conceptions about the culture and diversity of area schools and the PST's personal experience in middle and high schools. The PSTs will then be required to research the demographic information of each school before participating in the instructional rounds.

The opportunity to host instructional rounds at the four selected secondary schools strengthened the partnerships between the university and those schools. The instructional rounds would have been very difficult to schedule and supervise without the contributions of the ULs and Site Coordinators (Essentials 4 and 8) as they participated in each instructional round, regardless of their campus assignment (NAPDS, 2021). The PSTs worked with each of the ULs and Site Coordinators during the experience and benefitted from their knowledge and expertise. Knowledge of how the instructional rounds are implemented will support the ULs and Site Coordinators to better prepare participating classroom teachers for the instructional rounds experience. The classroom teachers can be tapped for additional supporting information concerning the lesson learning objectives, context of the lesson and instructional strategies that PSTs observe during the instructional rounds. Several PSTs suggested that the instructional rounds could be improved if classroom teachers met with them either before or after the rounding experience. The course was designed and implemented as an afternoon block course, offered from 1:25–4:10 pm. The rounds were scheduled to end at the close of the school day so that meetings with teachers could occur. The participating schools changed their bell schedules that same year, instituting a later ending to the school day. That ending time occurred too late for PSTs to meet with the classroom teachers and remain within the university class schedule. While the time of day the course is offered cannot change, the instructors can work with the classroom teachers to determine how TAs can debrief with them concerning their observations.

The PSTs also suggested the instructional rounds would be most beneficial if they could observe more classes in their content certification area. Arranging for content-specific observations is already difficult due to public school classroom schedules and the timing of a one-time school visit, but the course instructors can schedule at least one rounding opportunity with PSTs grouped by content area. The instructors can provide an opportunity for the content-specific classroom teachers to meet with students, possibly utilizing a virtual format for either pre- or post-conferences between the PSTs and classroom teachers. The PSTs learn instructional and classroom management strategies from teachers of multiple content areas and should complete varied observations, therefore the instructional rounds on the other three campuses will remain varied in both grade level and content areas. The variety of observations will support PSTs in forming a holistic view of teaching and learning and

provide a foundation for them to formulate their personal philosophy of education. This supports the [Del Prete \(1990\)](#) instructional round model for teacher education, which indicates that instructional rounds for preservice teachers should promote learning by their observing the “integration of practice, observation, inquiry, and multiple voices and perspectives” ([Goodwin et al., 2015](#), p. 38). Determining how to include the classroom teacher to promote PST knowledge and growth, regardless of content area, is an important consideration for future iterations of the instructional rounds.

One of the unanticipated outcomes of the instructional rounds experience was how excited the participating classroom teachers were to be chosen for the observations. The researchers discovered that the rounds were also a great tool for improving teacher morale. The PSTs provided hand-written thank you notes after the observations and several teachers shared that the notes provided needed encouragement. The instructional rounds also proved to be an excellent tool for increasing mentor capacity at the partner schools. The course instructor, UL and Site Coordinator identified several teachers observed during the instructional rounds as future mentors for the TPP. As a result of the informal input from teachers chosen to participate in the instructional rounds, the researchers will implement a survey of teachers used in past iterations of the instructional rounds to determine how those teachers view the instructional rounds regarding their own professional practice and their future consideration in becoming a PST mentor. That survey will also include asking for classroom teacher input concerning how the instructional rounds can be implemented more seamlessly to prevent interruption of instruction. That survey data would provide additional information to consider when planning future iterations of the instructional rounds.

Implications

The findings for this study were very specific to the TPP utilized for the research. The coursework and clinical experience structure are different for each TPP, therefore inclusion of instructional rounds before formal clinical experiences may not be feasible outside of this program. Yet, the implementation of instructional rounds as a PST experience prior to the clinical experiences is a strategy to consider in support of PST preparation for teaching diverse populations of students and to provide opportunities for PSTs to connect theory with practice.

One limitation of this study was that only one section of the course in which this research occurred was offered in the fall of 2022, limiting the number of research participants was limited to those enrolled in that one section. This was the first in-person iteration of the instructional rounds and will serve as baseline data for future iterations of research. A second limitation was that the primary researcher was also the instructor and although the survey was anonymous, some students may have felt pressured to answer the survey questions in a positive manner.

This study has implications for future iterations of instructional rounds at the TPP where the research was conducted. The PST feedback collected via the end-of-course survey provided evidence for the continuation of the instructional rounds experience. A delimitation was that the instructional rounds only occurred at current secondary partner schools. That was a deliberate boundary set because the support of the UL and Site Coordinator was a scheduling necessity. Both were instrumental in obtaining the campus principal’s consent, teacher’s consent and scheduling of the observations.

This research will inform other TPPs that strive to provide varied and effective courses and experiences for their PSTs. The format of the instructional rounds will vary for each program depending on the course sequence and structure of clinical experiences required. If the TPP supports clinical experiences in only one type of school or community, whether it is an urban or suburban district, it is incumbent on the TPP to examine whether a myopic approach to teacher preparation supports development of teachers who can thrive in any

school environment. The feedback obtained from the junior PSTs in this research support that instructional rounds contributed positively to their awareness of differences in student diversity and supported their professional knowledge and growth. We will continue to implement the instructional rounds and utilize the feedback from the PSTs in this round of research to inform a more effective iteration for the next group of PSTs in our program.

Conclusion

The teacher preparation program utilized for this research continues to redesign their program to best support the development of effective and professionally persistent teachers. The goal is to prepare teachers who are not only exemplary but who are prepared for the current challenges in PreK-12 education. Exposure to multiple populations of students and different schools can better prepare preservice teachers for teaching all students. The experience of observing different classrooms of students and different teaching styles in a non-specific format allowed the PSTs in this study to compare schools, student populations and teaching styles collaboratively and more holistically. This TPP is currently examining the possibility of returning to a two-semester junior clinical experience which could negate the need for instructional rounds during the junior year. The success of the instructional rounds in supporting early preservice teacher experiences has been so positive that we are now examining the possibility of including the rounds in courses taken during the sophomore year. While instructional rounds provide only brief exposure to different student populations and different schools, providing a foundation for celebrating school and student differences is key to preparing the next generation of teachers.

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Appendix

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Corresponding author

Madelon McCall can be contacted at: madelon_mccall@baylor.edu

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