

The History and Progression of Manual Rounds: A Structured Peer Observation Process for Teachers in Urban School Settings

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ABSTRACT: Research shows that half of all teachers working in urban school settings leave the profession within five years, and many who choose to leave are the ones who are most effective (Coggins & Diffenbaugh, 2013.) Manual Rounds, a structured peer observation process based on the established practice of instructional rounds, was implemented at Manual Academy in 2010 to strengthen teaching practices and enhance student learning experiences in the classrooms of teachers new to an urban school setting. Project improvements were made incrementally over three years' time, with a different Manual Rounds model launched in the fourth year. This article offers an overview of instructional rounds before describing the history and progression of Manual Rounds from various stakeholder perspectives including administrators, experienced teachers, new teachers, and Bradley PDS facilitators. We believe the case study shared in this article will offer other school-university partnerships insight and ideas for designing and implementing their own instructional rounds processes.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #3/Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need; #4/A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants.

“Our new teachers could really use some help,” confided Manual Academy’s principal during an early September meeting to discuss professional development school (PDS) projects for the school year. “Many have never taught in a high need, urban setting before, and they’re being eaten alive!” This conversation, which first took place in 2010, led to the creation and evolution of a collaborative professional development model designed to strengthen teaching practices and enhance student learning experiences in the classrooms of new teachers as part of Manual’s school-university partnership with Bradley University. This article describes the history and progression of what came to be known as Manual Rounds, a structured peer observation process based on the established practice of instructional rounds (City, 2011; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Marzano, 2010/2011; Marzano & Toth, 2013; Teitel, 2014).

Background and Rationale

Bradley University, a private, comprehensive university in Peoria, Illinois, serves 5,700 undergraduate and graduate students in five colleges: business, communication and fine arts, education and health sciences, engineering and technology, and liberal arts

and sciences. The Bradley Professional Development Schools (PDS) Partnership, coordinated by faculty in Bradley’s College of Education and Health Sciences, was established in 1995 to create an extended learning environment that addresses and responds to the changing needs of P-20 learners. Funded by the William T. Kemper Foundation-Commerce Bank, Trustee and the university, the partnership serves eight elementary, middle, and/or high schools near Bradley University.

All of Bradley’s eight PDS sites serve high-needs student populations, defined in part by the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act as schools “where at least 30% of students come from families with incomes below the poverty line” (Teach.com, n.d., para. 1). Research reminds us that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often face emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues not experienced by students from more advantaged environments (Jensen, 2009). Indeed, many students enrolled at Bradley PDS sites often demonstrate disruptive behaviors that interfere with their own learning as well as that of their school peers. In addition to a significant number of classroom management issues, many students at Bradley PDS sites are academically at-risk as defined by the partner school

district as students who are eligible for free or reduced lunch according to federal guidelines and perform academically two or more grade levels below their peers.

Manual Academy, the Bradley PDS site featured in this article, is a grades 7-12 middle and high school with an enrollment of 800 students. According to the Illinois Report Card [IRC] (2014-2015), 84% of students enrolled at Manual live in low-income households. Moreover, only 58% of Manual students are ready to graduate in four years.

According to the 2013 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher, only 39% of teachers feel “very satisfied” with teaching – a significant decline from 62% in 2008 (Scherer, 2013.) Moreover, research shows that half of all teachers working in urban school settings leave the profession within five years, and many who choose to leave are the ones who are most effective (Coggins & Diffenbaugh, 2013.) Indeed, between 2009 and 2015, Manual Academy’s teacher retention rate ranged from 43% to 75% (see Table 1). Of the new teachers hired by Manual each year, many are under-prepared for the challenges of working with urban, at-risk students because they are fresh out of college, new to an urban school setting, or both. So, when Manual’s principal asked the Bradley PDS Partnership for new teacher support, Manual Rounds was created to support these new and/or new-to-Manual teachers (hereafter referred to as “new teachers.”)

Instructional Rounds

The term “rounds” is based on the hospital rounds approach that medical interns take with experienced doctors during their final years of medical school (City, et al., 2009). The concept was embraced by the Manual principal, academy leaders, and teachers after attending a district-wide presentation by Dr. Tom Roy, professional development specialist for the Marzano Group.

Marzano (2011) describes instructional rounds as one of the most valuable tools a school or district can use to enhance teachers’ pedagogical skills and develop a culture of collaboration. The purpose of instructional rounds is not to provide feedback to the teacher being observed, although this is an option. Rather, the primary purpose is for teachers to compare their instructional practices with those of the teachers they observe. The chief benefit of this approach resides in the conversation that takes place among observing teachers following the observation as well as in subsequent self-reflection (City, 2011).

Instructional rounds combine three common elements: classroom observation, an improvement strategy, and a network of educators (City, 2011). First, observers identify a “problem of practice” on which to focus during the observation. Next, they divide into small groups to observe in classrooms for approximately 20 minutes per class. During the classroom visit, observers record specific, nonjudgmental notes about what the host teachers and students are saying and doing related to the identified problem of practice. Following each classroom visit,

Table 1. Manual Academy Teacher Retention Rates Before, During, and Following Manual

Implementation	Academic Year	Teacher Retention Rate (All Teachers)
Before Manual Rounds	2009-2010	51%
During Manual Rounds	2010-2011	56%
During Manual Rounds	2011-2012	62%
During Manual Rounds	2012-2013	62%
During Manual Rounds	2013-2014	43%
Following Manual Rounds	2014-2015	75%

the observers and the host teachers analyze the observation notes, looking for patterns that lead to suggestions for improvement. Following the experience, the host teachers incorporate insights gained and suggestions generated into their teaching practice (City, 2011; Tietel, 2014) and observers reflect on questions such as the following: 1) As a result of what I saw today, which aspects of my teaching do I feel were validated? 2) As a result of what I saw today, what questions do I have about my own teaching? 3) As a result of what I saw today, what new ideas do I have? (Marzano & Toth, 2013).

It is important to emphasize that, while having the same eventual goal, instructional rounds differ from supervision in that rounds are inquiry-based while supervision is evaluative. During teacher evaluation, learning is expected only by the person being evaluated; during instructional rounds, everyone participating is expected to learn. Moreover, during teacher evaluation, the primary focus is on the teacher being evaluated and suggestions for improvement are provided by the evaluator. During instructional rounds, the primary focus is on instruction and the classroom environment, and accountability is peer-to-peer (City, 2011).

The greatest benefit of instructional rounds is that the process allows teachers to take charge of their own learning. Other benefits include focusing on the work of teaching and learning, building common understanding of effective teaching and learning, providing data that informs professional development and continuous improvement, and reducing variability in instructional practice schoolwide (Marzano & Toth, 2013; Teitel, 2014;).

Challenges of instructional rounds include the possibility that teachers who know each other well may stay in the “land of nice” with one another rather than work at developing the nonjudgmental, descriptive observation notes and analyses that are the foundations of rounds. In addition, some teachers may not even notice ineffective routines or practices because they are immersed in the culture of the school, struggling to come up with suggestions for doing things differently to contribute to improvement (Tietel, 2014). Both challenges can be minimized through careful preparation, structure, and support as to the purpose and strategies to be used in instructional rounds. Distance and objectivity also can be achieved when those providing feedback are not directly affiliated with the school.

Case Study Research and the Larger Context

In reflecting on the process, goals, and outcomes of Manual Rounds, we (the co-authors) used a case study method to “derive an up close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single case set in its real-world context” (Bromley, 1986, p. 1). This method of investigation seems especially appropriate given the realities that this case is “set within its real-world context where the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not obvious” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The case employed here is descriptive in nature because we sought to describe the course of events in collaboration over a four-year period (Yin, 2009).

School district, state, and national contexts of education during the four-year period about which we report were tumultuous and rapidly changing. The idea of rounds originated with one principal, who left the district for another position after the first year of the project. The principal who replaced her was receptive to the idea of initiating rounds despite the reality that the idea was not originally hers.

The first year of the Manual Rounds project, a new superintendent took the helm. This superintendent initiated many changes during her five-year tenure in the district. The state education association was actively seeking Race to the Top funding resulting in rapid implementation of a research-based teacher evaluation process. Given that Danielson’s framework for teaching was the only such method widely available, the vast majority of school boards and teacher unions adopted Danielson. While implementation of a new teacher evaluation system has turned out to be positive in the long run, initially all teachers, but especially new teachers, were unsure of the professional expectations that faced them. Finally, at the national level, pressure to adopt Common Core State Standards by making significant instructional changes permeated the culture. The combined factors of a new principal, superintendent, evaluation system, and radical shift in teaching and learning brought on by Common Core created an environment of high uncertainty for new teachers embarking on an already challenging teaching position.

The collaboration between Bradley University and Manual Academy was the unit of analysis in our case. Over the four years during which Manual Rounds took place, there were multiple individuals involved as the principal and Bradley PDS site coordinators adapted the rounds process to meet shifting needs. One year after the project ended, the Bradley PDS faculty who participated in Manual Rounds gathered existing data and debriefed the experience with the principal and teacher liaison involved in the project during its last year. Throughout the writing of this manuscript we (the Bradley PDS partners, the principal, and the teacher liaison) shared drafts and made numerous revisions to ensure the accuracy of the final, published article.

The Progression of Manual Rounds

Manual Rounds was first implemented at Manual in 2010. The project targeted two goals: 1) to support new and new-to-Manual

teachers toward effective instructional and classroom management practices and 2) to strengthen teaching practices and enhance student learning experiences school wide. Although Manual Rounds was carefully kept separate from the district’s teacher evaluation process, the desired outcomes were 1) for new and new-to-Manual teachers to achieve a minimum rating of Satisfactory in all areas of their annual performance evaluation and 2) for new and new-to-Manual teachers to remain at Manual for more than one or two years. Due to the confidentiality of individual teacher evaluations and teacher employment records, assessment of Manual Rounds was limited to an annual participant survey and school-level teacher retention rates as reported by the school district.

Year One: 2010-2011

In its first year, Manual Rounds was a self-directed, voluntary process that was loosely coordinated by Bradley’s PDS site coordinator and one Manual teacher. The Manual teacher liaison was also the school’s teacher union representative, which ensured that the peer observation process did not violate the union contract in any way. In October 2010, an introductory presentation for all interested teachers was followed with an invitation for both new teachers and Manual experienced teachers to participate. Five, month-long observation “windows” were designated, and new teachers made arrangements to observe in a Manual experienced teacher’s classroom, for at least 45 minutes, while students were present, at least one time within each window. For each round, new teachers were responsible for finding an experienced teacher to observe, scheduling the observation, and showing up to observe on the scheduled day and time. Following each classroom observation, new teachers completed a one-page written reflection in which they listed three things they could adapt to their own classroom along with other insights and interpretations related to the observation (see Figure 1). If they wished to do so, the new and the experienced teacher could also meet to debrief the observation, but this was not required.

During the first year, all Manual teachers were required to gather once a month, before the start of the school day, for what the school called “Buzz” meetings. Although mandatory, these meetings were not typical staff meetings. Rather, they brought Manual teachers and administrators together for the purpose of sharing information, asking questions, and making announcements in a fairly relaxed atmosphere. Because the Buzz meetings were already on the calendar for the year, and since the majority of teachers in the school were participating in Manual Rounds, follow up discussion about new teachers’ classroom observations and reflections was integrated into the monthly Buzz meetings. To facilitate discussion, the Bradley PDS site coordinator assigned one broad discussion topic (e.g., student motivation, classroom management, differentiated instruction, etc.) to each table. Groups of four to six teachers would discuss the topic for about ten minutes; then they would move to another table and discuss a new topic for another ten minutes. With ten minutes at

Name:
Date:
Subject:
Three things I can adapt to my own classroom:
1.
2.
3.
Reflection about teaching and learning:

Figure 1. Manual Rounds Reflection Sheet

the beginning of Buzz for general announcements, four topic/table rotations, and ten minutes of whole group discussion at the end, each Buzz meeting lasted about one hour. These meetings were the extent of how the Manual Rounds classroom observations were debriefed during the first year of implementation.

During the 2010-2011 school year, 33 new teachers and 17 experienced teachers chose to participate in Manual Rounds. According to the 2010-2011 annual participant survey, the first year Manual Rounds model had several strengths. The self-directed/volunteer approach offered flexibility in scheduling and selecting classrooms to observe, and the written reflections served as documentation that new teachers could submit as evidence of professional development. Moreover, the volunteer approach was well-received by both new and experienced Manual teachers. One participating teacher commented, "I liked getting ideas on how to deal more effectively with the students by watching others do it. I liked getting ideas about how to teach my content by watching others."

During the 2010-2011 school year, Manual's teacher retention rate improved from 51% to 56%. However, the project's first year also had several weaknesses, which were reflected through the participant survey responses. New teachers had to observe during their planning time, and the loose structure and oversight of the observations did not provide the necessary support for teachers who needed more intensive, one-on-one instructional coaching. Additionally, the Buzz discussions were not related to Manual Rounds, other than the fact that many teachers participating in the discussions were also participating in Manual Rounds.

Year Two: 2011-2012

The 2011-2012 school year brought a new principal to Manual Academy. Although the new principal was interested in continuing and building upon the rounds model started a year earlier, the project did not get started until January 2012. The same classroom observation and written reflection processes were used, but due to the late start only four month-long observation windows and four after school discussion sessions were designated.

During the 2011-2012 school year, 22 new teachers and 18 experienced teachers participated in Manual Rounds. A major change implemented in the second year was that all new teachers were required to participate while experienced teachers were again given the choice of participating. In addition, more structure was added to the process. A Manual Rounds directory and handbook were created so that new and experienced teacher roles and responsibilities were clear and new teachers could easily find experienced teachers to observe based on desired criteria (e.g., subject area taught, schedule, etc.)

Structure was also added to the after school meetings to connect more explicitly the classroom observations to the debriefing sessions. After school discussion sessions were designated specifically for Manual Rounds participants, and each session modeled a different small group discussion strategy: K-W-L, in-basket assistance, five-minute chat, and higher order/interpretive questions. Led by the Bradley PDS site coordinator, small groups of new and experienced teachers engaged in each discussion strategy using new teachers' classroom observations or questions about teaching, learning, and classroom management as springboards for discussion:

K-W-L. During the K-W-L discussion, new teachers self-selected topics related to effective teaching and learning before identifying what they already knew (K) and what they wanted to learn (W) about the topic. Next, in small discussion groups, they shared their K and W notes with experienced teachers who in turn offered suggestions and other insights on the topic, which the new teachers added to their notes as what they had learned (L).

In-basket Assistance. During the in-basket assistance activity, each new teacher described a problem related to teaching and learning with which he or she was currently struggling to a small group of new and experienced teachers. After listening to the problem and asking clarifying questions, group members offered suggestions and insights about which each new teacher made notes and identified one or two strategies for adaptation and/or implementation.

Five-minute Chats. During the five-minute chats, one broad topic related to effective teaching and learning was designated to each table in the room. Broad topics included classroom management, engaging students in discussion, and teaching with

technology. For five minutes, all new and experienced teachers engaged in discussion around their assigned topic. Then, groups rotated to the next table and discussed a new topic for five minutes. During the course of the meeting, small groups engaged in discussion on six to eight different topics, with time for whole group discussion and closure at the end of the meeting.

Questioning Strategies. During the discussion focused on higher order and interpretive questions, participating teachers read a short passage describing an episode of effective teaching and learning before engaging in discussion based on 15 questions written in alignment with a guide for eliciting higher order thinking. In addition to generating discussion around the teaching episode, new and experienced teachers were given a copy of the guide as well as the 15 example questions to use as a model for posing higher order and interpretive discussion questions in their own classrooms.

The increased structure was an improvement to Manual Rounds during its second year. Additionally, participation continued to flourish. Again during the 2011-2012 school year, 22 new teachers and 18 experienced teachers participated, although experienced teachers' attendance at the after school discussion meetings averaged about 25 due to other after school commitments. Weaknesses during the second year included the extremely late start and the continued limitation of new teachers having to observe during their planning time. Additionally, although the after school discussion sessions were more structured and focused than the previous year, they still were not timely and did not relate directly to new teachers' classroom observations. For this reason, Manual Rounds still did not provide enough support for some of Manual's new teachers.

Although the 2011-2012 participant survey responses indicated that the vast majority felt that Rounds had helped them to become more effective teachers (100%), gain insight about effective teaching practices (90%), and supported their professional growth in the areas of classroom management and instruction (95%), lack of time was identified as a major obstacle by several teacher participants. When asked what would improve the Manual Rounds experience, four teachers suggested more time during the school day to conduct the classroom visits, and three suggested changes in the group meeting time and/or duration. Moreover, a two teachers felt that the after school meetings were ineffective, but for opposing reasons. One teacher wrote, "The meetings often did not deal with the observations in the classroom" while another stated, "We need more objective-based exercises at meetings. Leaving topics open for the participants to bring suggestions is not conducive to furthering our education." Manual's 2011-2012 teacher retention rate was 62%, up four percentage points from the previous year.

Year Three: 2012-2013

During the third year of Manual Rounds, even more structure was added. The same classroom observation and written

reflection processes as the previous two years were continued, but with two major changes. First, Manual experienced teachers were required to apply if they wanted to open their classroom to new teachers for observation. This change was implemented by Manual's principal in order to ensure that new teachers were observing in classrooms where effective teaching and learning were taking place. Second, Manual took full responsibility for the coordination of Rounds, including the selection of experienced teacher participants, developing a year-long schedule of observation windows and debriefing sessions, planning the debriefing sessions, and communicating with Rounds participants. Previously, these duties were coordinated as a collaborative effort between a designated Manual teacher liaison and Manual's Bradley PDS site coordinator, but by the third year the principal was ready for the school to take primary responsibility for the project.

Unfortunately, the changes resulted in several problems, the first of which was very low participation by Manual experienced teachers. During the 2012-2013 school year, 20 new teachers and only five experienced teachers participated in Manual Rounds. New teachers were required to participate, but very few experienced teachers were willing to take the time to complete the newly-adopted Manual Rounds mentor teacher application form, which required them to list and provide evidence of their area(s) of teaching strength. This resulted in new teachers having no classrooms to observe. By January, several experienced teachers were hand-selected by the principal to open their classrooms for observation by new teachers, and the observation windows and after school meeting dates were established. However, in addition to the extremely late start, the discussion sessions were attended by new teachers only, which significantly limited the opportunity for new teachers to learn from experienced teachers. By April and May 2013, attendance at the after school discussion meetings was less than 50%, reflecting waning teacher commitment to the Rounds process.

A second factor that worked against Manual Rounds during the 2012-2013 academic year was the fact that a new Bradley PDS site coordinator had been assigned to Manual. In addition to being unfamiliar with the Manual Rounds concept and history, the new site coordinator did not take an active leadership role in the project in deference to the principal and teacher liaison. Of the four after school debriefing meetings that were held during 2012-2013, the Bradley PDS site coordinator led only one. The remaining meetings were led by the Manual Rounds teacher liaison. Moreover, no Manual Rounds participant survey was conducted at the end of the 2012-2013 school year since so few teachers had fully participated in the project. Even so, it was clear to the principal, the teacher liaison, and the Bradley PDS site coordinator that requiring experienced teachers to apply to serve as Manual Rounds mentor teachers and relegating the Bradley PDS site coordinator to a supporting role had weakened the effectiveness of the project. Despite all of

these factors, Manual's 2012-2013 teacher retention rate remained steady at 62%.

A Revised Rounds Model

After annual format changes over three years' time, the revised Manual Rounds model was launched in 2013 following a brainstorming session in early August between the Manual principal and the two Bradley PDS site coordinators involved in the project between 2010 and 2013. The revised model of Manual Rounds was designed to supplement and extend the professional development Manual's new teachers had begun receiving as a part of their job responsibilities. Each Wednesday, all new teachers participated in customized professional development led by two experienced Manual teachers. Early in the school year as part of the professional development process, each new teacher completed a self-assessment of teaching practice based on Danielson's framework for teaching to establish a baseline measure for professional growth and guide professional goal setting (Danielson, 2013). With primary focus on classroom management and classroom environment, each professional development session targeted a particular research-based teaching practice including "bell ringers," transitions, procedures, learning targets explicitly stated for students, and exit tickets (Marzano, 2007).

Four professors from Bradley University's Department of Teacher Education and Department of Leadership in Education, Non-Profits, and Counseling served as facilitators for the revised Manual Rounds model, two of whom were the Bradley PDS site coordinators who had participated previously. Three of the four professors were trained and experienced in teacher supervision and evaluation; the fourth professor regularly observed Bradley student teachers completing their capstone clinical experiences in Manual classrooms. Each Bradley PDS facilitator was assigned three to five new teachers with whom he or she met every one to three weeks between September and November to lead the Rounds classroom observations and discussions.

Four full day substitute teachers were hired by Manual to cover the new teachers' classrooms on Manual Rounds days. Each class period, the substitute teachers moved to a different new teacher's classroom to relieve him/her of teaching responsibilities for the period. In cases where more than four substitute teachers were needed, Manual teachers free on planning time would help cover the classes. In the meantime, each of the four Bradley PDS facilitators was responsible for leading one morning or one afternoon session. For example, on designated Tuesdays, one Bradley PDS facilitator led classroom observations and subsequent discussion in the mornings and another did so in the afternoons. On designated Thursdays, the third and the fourth Bradley PDS facilitators did the same.

Each Manual Rounds session lasted two and one half hours. In preparation for each session, the Manual Rounds teacher liaison worked with the principal to prepare an agenda

for the day that included teachers' names, their room numbers, and the titles of the classes they would be teaching during the observation block (see Appendix A). In addition, the principal specified one or more areas of focus for the day's observations, usually related to the research-based teaching practices most recently shared during the Wednesday professional development sessions. The agenda was provided to all participating new teachers, Bradley PDS facilitators, and classroom host teachers on Monday of the observation week. In this way, the host teachers could prepare to model the area(s) of focus during the classroom visits, the new teachers and the Bradley PDS facilitators knew what to look for during the classroom visits, and the Bradley PDS facilitators could prepare discussion questions and gather relevant materials to share with new teachers following the classroom observations.

Each Manual Rounds session began in a conference room where each Manual Rounds group (i.e., the Bradley PDS facilitator and three to five new teachers) met a few minutes before the scheduled start time. Each small group used this time to review the observation schedule and areas of focus and articulate additional strategies or qualities they wanted to look for during the day's observations. With an informal plan established, the group would begin their rounds, which usually involved three 30-minute classroom observations.

Each Manual Rounds group observed in each classroom together, at the same time. In preparation for four to six visitors, chairs were set out ahead of time by the host teachers to minimize distraction. To avoid disrupting the class, all visitors took notes, but very little discussion took place during the observations themselves. Immediately following or between observations, discussion among the group members took place informally, but most of the discussion occurred during the scheduled debriefing time at the end of each session.

Each debriefing session was structured by the discussion questions prepared in advance by each Bradley PDS facilitator based on the area(s) of focus for that week. While each Bradley PDS facilitator structured these sessions in his or her own way, all generally opened with a discussion of what participants had observed in relation to the area(s) of focus and then transitioned to other observations participants had made. Often during the debriefing sessions, the new teachers asked questions and expressed concerns that they may not have been comfortable asking the principal or their academy leader (i.e., assistant principal) such as, "I've tried using checkmarks on the dry erase board to give students warnings about talking out of turn, but they just laugh" or "My students refuse to participate in classroom discussions, even when I arrange them into small groups." Sometimes, the new teachers themselves were able to answer one another's questions. Other times, the Bradley PDS facilitator offered information and insight in response to the new teachers' questions, comments, and concerns.

An important aspect of the debriefing sessions was emphasizing professionalism and confidentiality. The Bradley PDS facilitators encouraged the new teachers in their small

groups to speak openly, but discouraged outright criticism and gossip. Moreover, the Bradley PDS facilitators reminded the new teachers during each session that what they had observed during the classroom visits and what they discussed during the debriefing sessions could be (and should be) reflected upon in writing but should not be shared with others outside of the small group.

A total of 32 people, including new teachers, experienced teachers, and Bradley PDS facilitators, participated in the revised Manual Rounds model during the fall 2013 semester. In a survey administered in December, 83% of the new Manual teachers who participated reported self-reflecting about their teaching and 70% reported trying something new in their classroom following each Manual Rounds session. Of all participants surveyed (including the host teachers and the Bradley PDS mentors), 74% felt that Manual Rounds helped them grow professionally in the areas of classroom management and instruction. Although this percentage was lower than percentages in previous years, the teachers who responded to the survey expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to see fellow teachers “in action.” In fact, the experienced teachers who opened their classrooms for observation commented that they would have liked an opportunity to get out and observe one another as well.

The greatest challenge encountered during 2013-2014 was the perpetual lack of substitute teachers available to cover classes so that the new Manual teachers could participate in the classroom observations and debriefings. In the 2013-2014 participant survey, four teachers expressed discouragement about this. One teacher wrote, “Key problem: Availability of subs to cover classes so that everyone can participate without worry.” Another teacher wrote, “Next year, please ensure that classes are covered so that everyone can participate as scheduled.” Perhaps in part due to these challenges, Manual’s teacher retention rate dropped to 43% during the 2013-2014 school year.

Lessons Learned and Future Directions

During the 2014-2015 school year, Manual Academy again experienced a change in leadership. Just before the school year began, a new principal was appointed and the Manual Rounds teacher liaison who had coordinated the project for four years chose to retire. These changes in personnel, paired with changes in district-wide priorities, led the new principal to postpone the start of Manual Rounds until later in the school year. Unfortunately, the project was never launched in 2014-2015 and has not continued since.

In debriefing the entire Manual Rounds experience, we considered both the annual teacher participant survey responses and the annual teacher retention data kept on file by the school district. While the survey responses generally affirmed that Manual Rounds supported the school’s new teachers, Manual’s teacher retention rates improved only

slightly during the project and actually dropped to a low of 43% the last year the project was implemented (see Table 1). However, one year following Manual Rounds teacher retention improved significantly to 75% (see Table 1). Although the school’s teacher retention rates are based on all (not just new) teachers, and although the teacher retention rates cannot be attributed exclusively to Manual Rounds, these percentages provide a source of objective data for assessing the effectiveness of the project. With that acknowledged, other factors that may have influenced Manual’s teacher retention rates include retirements, district transfer practices, and changes in school leadership.

Rounds Implementation, 2010-2015

We attribute this partial success of Manual Rounds to several challenges that occurred over the project’s four years of implementation, including time constraints, weak connections between the classroom observations and the debriefing sessions, sometimes unclear roles for shared coordination of the project, limited resources (especially substitute teachers), and the need for differentiated professional development and instructional coaching to address individual teacher needs. Through our debriefing of the experience, we identified several lessons learned:

1. Prior to launching Manual Rounds, everyone involved should have had a much deeper understanding of what instructional rounds are, the philosophy and purposes behind instructional rounds, and how to most effectively participate in the instructional rounds process. This could have been accomplished with an opening session that provided an overview and rationale for the project.
2. Each year, as changes were made to Manual Rounds, everyone involved should have been invited to participate in the discussion of proposed changes as well as the reasoning for making such changes. The end-of-year participant surveys could have been used as a springboard for discussion among all Manual Rounds participants in preparation for the next school year, which likely would have increased teachers’ feelings of ownership in the project.
3. In addition to improving the format, the goals and desired outcomes of Manual Rounds should have been revisited and refined each year. Focusing on the goals and outcomes more so than the activity itself would have supported more rigorous project assessment and may have motivated more teachers to participate in Manual Rounds (especially during year three).
4. Collaboration between the Manual principal, the Manual teacher liaison, and the Bradley PDS site coordinator would have been strengthened by greater communication and sharing. This could have been

accomplished through more frequent meetings, regularly-scheduled e-mail messages, carbon copies of e-mail messages, and/or transparent sharing of all Manual Rounds documents. Such increased collaboration would have ensured that everyone responsible for leading Manual Rounds was informed of all the details. In addition, this would have increased the chances that necessary resources (e.g., after school meeting facilitators, substitute teachers, etc.) were available when needed.

5. Finally, although Manual Rounds was connected to general effective teaching practices during the first three years, and to areas of focus related to the district's teacher evaluation tool during the fourth year, the project would have been even more effective if it had been explicitly connected to other professional development initiatives available to new teachers. If the project is resurrected in the future, it should be coordinated with school- and district-wide professional development offerings, interdisciplinary team and department initiatives, and instructional coaching opportunities for new teachers.

Closing Thoughts

This article describes the history and progression of Manual Rounds from various stakeholder perspectives, including administrators, experienced teachers, new teachers, and PDS facilitators. Despite its differing formats over four years' time, Manual Rounds has remained consistent with our school-university partnership's guiding belief that the Bradley PDS Partnership should employ a wide variety of activities, including interactive professional development processes such as instructional rounds, to foster effective teaching and support student learning in the classrooms of teachers new to an urban school setting. In reflecting on the four years of the project described in this article, the former Manual Rounds teacher liaison writes, "It was a project that, I think, was very helpful to Manual teachers, both veterans and those new to the building. Rounds gave us an opportunity to talk to each other in a non-threatening and non-evaluative setting about the victories and the challenges of our jobs." Hopefully, at some point in the future, Manual Rounds will be resurrected. In the meantime, we believe this case study will offer other school-university partnerships insight and ideas for designing and implementing their own instructional rounds processes. ^{SUP}

Appendix A: Manual Academy Rounds Agenda

(All names are pseudonyms.)

Vision: Pride in educating each student PREPARED and INSPIRED to contribute to the world.

Mission: The mission is to redefine teaching and learning that ensures each student reaches his or her fullest potential.

Tuesday Group 1 (7:30-9:45 a.m.)	Tuesday Group 2 (12:30-2:30 p.m.)
October 22, 2013	October 22, 2013
<u>Bradley PDS Facilitator:</u>	<u>Bradley PDS Facilitator:</u>
Dr. Lee N.	Dr. Amanda T.
<u>New Teachers:</u>	<u>New Teachers:</u>
Michelle R.	Ashley P.
Donna V.	Mark S.
Paul M.	Victoria L.

Today's focus area during observations is **Questioning Strategies**.

Group 1 will meet in the counseling center conference room to begin, then proceed with the following observation rotation Tuesday morning:

Time	Host Teacher	Room	Subject
8:00-8:20 a.m.	Ms. Kristina G.	222	Spanish I
8:25-8:45 a.m.	Mrs. Julie R.	132	English II
8:50-9:10 a.m.	Mr. William A.	136	Drafting
9:15-9:45 a.m.	Debrief in counseling center conference room and then return to your normal schedule.		

Group 2 will meet in the counseling center conference room to begin, then proceed with the following observation rotation Tuesday afternoon:

Time	Host Teacher	Room	Subject
12:50-1:10 p.m.	Mrs. Breanna M.	237	Keyboarding
1:15-1:35 p.m.	Mrs. Pam C.	173	Child Development
1:40-2:00 p.m.	Ms. Jody S.	206	Eighth Grade English
2:05-2:30 p.m.	Debrief in counseling center conference room and then return to your normal schedule.		

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Martha Ewan-Skorczewski, instructional interventionist at Manual Academy, served as the school-university liaison for Manual Rounds from 2010 to 2013.

Patricia Chrosniak, associate professor in the Department of Teacher Education at Bradley University, especially enjoys PDS projects related to adolescent literacy.