

# Teacher Candidate Perceptions of Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds

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Field experience is at the heart of many teacher education programs in America. The early field experiences teacher candidates receive can set a foundation for future success in their teacher education program and even throughout their teaching career. The students in this study were enrolled in a university in a rural Midwestern state and 90% claimed residency in that state. The Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds were embedded in a 25-hour early field experience to provide a small group of teacher candidates with the opportunity to see multiple elementary teachers teach in their own classrooms in real time. Teacher candidates used a discussion protocol to debrief what they witnessed and reflected on how the experience influenced their learning about teaching. Over a two-year span, the teacher candidates who participated in Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds were surveyed to ascertain their impressions of the instructional rounds experience. The survey also asked teacher candidates about the potential impact of Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds on their future teaching practice. The survey results indicated that the time spent in the instructional rounds process was time well spent.

**Keywords:** early field experience, instructional rounds, teacher education

Field experiences are an important part of a teacher candidate's matriculation toward a degree and licensure in teaching (Voytecki et al., 2020). Elementary teacher candidates (TCs) participate in a variety of field experiences, which may include emphasis on classroom environments, curriculum areas, mentor teacher examples, and real-time hours spent working with students in the classroom. Additionally, TCs may have memories from their own K–12 experiences that may influence their knowledge base of teaching.

I have three aims in this paper: (a) to describe a process called Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds based on the City et al. (2009) framework of instructional rounds, (b) to report on teacher candidates' perspectives on the process, gathered through an anonymous survey, and (c) to conjecture about how involvement in Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds benefited candidates in a rural school setting.

## Instructional Rounds

Teacher effectiveness leading to student achievement is at the heart of instructional rounds methodology. Meyer-Looze (2014) declared instructional rounds worked best when there was a system-wide improvement process that focused on specific embedded goals. Each goal should address a need that had been identified through data analysis and linked to the school's vision. In a more pragmatic sense, Solan (2020) indicated that student achievement results from instructional rounds, when teaching learning and teacher self-efficacy is aligned. Instructional rounds foster collective teacher learning at the forefront rather than the individualistic improvement cycles that can be prevalent in educational settings (City et al., 2009).

In rural schools there can be limited resources and opportunities for professional development. Instructional rounds can be a way to offset these potential scarcities; they can afford teachers, as well

as administrators, opportunities to learn from each other through what City et al (2009) calls “holding up a mirror” (p. 37). Additionally, Elmore (2007) found that individual schools can benefit from instructional rounds. Isolated rural school districts that include instructional rounds can cultivate a culture of teacher efficacy, which, in turn, can positively impact student achievement.

Bringing instructional rounds to the early field experience level required modification to the City et al. (2009) instructional rounds framework. The Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds (EFEIR) offered teacher candidates the opportunity to observe an experienced teacher, in real time, then discuss with other TCs what they witnessed. This process provided the TCs an opportunity to:

- view multiple grade level teaching examples,
- practice observational skills through note taking,
- experience a group debriefing protocol to discuss and reflect on their observations, and
- provide feedback to the host mentor teacher.

In this article, I first describe the literature surrounding instructional rounds. I then shift focus to discuss how the EFEIR TCs were exposed to the modified form of preservice teacher instructional rounds during their field experience. I then describe the survey results before segueing into comments regarding future directions for EFEIR.

### Literature Review

Instructional rounds incorporate cycles of observation, reflection, and discussion that work to enhance teacher quality and student learning (Lee, 2015). The instructional rounds process was first developed by Elmore (2007) through the Connecticut Superintendents Network. He focused on the rounds process medical practitioners conducted and how it could be implemented in education. A group of 12 Connecticut superintendents formed a network and agreed to meet once a month to visit one of their schools to observe classrooms specifically looking at a problem of practice. Elmore recounted how, through

a series of protocols, the superintendents who participated in the network observed classroom instruction, presented their notes from their observations, and discussed what they had witnessed. From the basis of Elmore’s work, City et al. (2009) wrote *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*. In this influential text, the researchers provided information on how instructional rounds could be implemented in different contexts. They asserted that “the rounds process is an explicit practice that is designed to bring discussion of instruction directly into the process of school improvement” (p. 3). The instructional rounds process can be adapted for use with a wide range of school personnel groupings.

The central framework to instructional rounds comprises the four steps shown in Figure 1: (a) identification of a problem of practice, (b) observation of teaching, (c) debriefing the observation, and (d) identifying the next level of work (City, 2011; City et al., 2009; Meyer-Looze, 2014; Philpott & Oates, 2015; Teitel, 2009).

The four-step process presumes the availability of documents from the school and district, such as mission and vision statements, goals, and school improvement plans. More specifically, Meyer-Looze (2014) concluded that rounds were most successful when they were focused on stated goals and objectives within the improvement plans adopted by the leaders of the school or district.

As an aside, I believe that a key element underpinning the nexus between instructional rounds and student achievement is Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE). Wilcox et al. (2014) studied rural high school graduation rates and the impact that CTE had on the students’ performance. They noted that “teachers in the higher-performing schools spoke of being encouraged to take the risk to innovate to meet student needs, and administrators spoke of how receptive teachers were to new ideas” (p. 9). The school culture of high-performing schools in rural environments has a significant alignment with Collective Teacher Efficacy CTE (e.g., CTE Technical Assistance Center of New York, 2012; Harris et al., 2020).

**Figure 1***Framework for Instructional Rounds*

Step	Characteristics
1. Identification of a Problem of Practice	Instructional core is the main focus Needs to be observable and high leverage Connected to school improvement goals Within the school district's control
2. Observation of Teaching	Not evaluative Needs to be precise Focused on instructional core Linked to problem of practice
3. Debriefing the Observation	Describe what was observed Analyze the data Conclude what the students were learning
4. Identify the Next Level of Work	Share the district's process for action Share the district context, what's currently going on Brainstorm the work for next week/month/year Connect suggestion to the district's process for action

Does school culture drive CTE, or does CTE drive a school culture? This question is outside the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that each is a factor in teacher and student success.

### **Instructional Rounds in Preservice Teacher Contexts**

Instructional rounds, also known as teacher rounds (Del Prete, 2013), education rounds (Goodwin et al., 2015), or rounds (Regan et al., 2017), have been proposed by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010) as a technique that could benefit TCs as they gain knowledge of teaching (Reagan et al., 2017). Reagan et al. (2013) studied how residency programs implemented instructional rounds. They found there were many different approaches. Teaching rounds were organized at Wake Forest University to allow TCs to see master teachers' teaching practices. The TCs chose to analyze specific instructional acts during this procedure.

Student participation was used to evaluate these teaching behaviors (Baker & Milner, 2016). Reagan et al. (2015) studied a residency program with graduate students in New York City and how educational rounds impacted the participants' understanding of teaching and learning. At one university, faculty used video to record teachers in rural settings so that TCs could view multiple teachers with a critical eye for a myriad of teaching competencies (Voytecki et al., 2020). The aim of faculty in each program was to provide numerous teaching examples to their TCs.

### **Field Experience Context**

The EFEIR process was an activity embedded within a teacher education required 25-hour field placement course. The course was scheduled for a full semester with each course including a maximum of 18 TCs. However, the required placement was only for 8 weeks of the 16-week semester so class members were randomly assigned to either the first

8 weeks of the semester or the second 8 weeks of the semester, resulting in a maximum of nine TCs in the school at any point. Each of the TCs was assigned a volunteer mentor teacher who hosted them for their required 25-hour field experience. During weeks 2 through 7, TCs worked directly with their mentor teacher and the classroom students. It was during these weeks that TCs were pulled out of their mentor teacher's classroom to join the other TCs in the school to participate in the EFEIR process.

### **EFEIR Process**

In my role as field coordinator, I contacted all general education teachers in the host school the week before the placements occurred to inquire as to their interest in volunteering to host an EFEIR observation. Teachers did not have to be hosting a TC to be eligible to host an EFEIR. Since the focus of elementary early field experience is not content specific, the content of the teaching during these instructional rounds observations was of no consequence.

The EFEIR included a 15-minute teaching segment by a host teacher, which was witnessed by the TCs, as well as a post-observation debriefing. Once in the classroom, the TC's utilized an observation form (see Appendix) that I provided to note what they saw, noticed, and heard during the observation. Prior to entering the classroom, the TCs were instructed to observe for teaching strategies and organizational arrangements or dispositions they could incorporate in their future teaching experiences. At the end of the observation, the TCs left the classroom and reconvened in a group space in the school to complete the rest of the observation form individually. The TCs were asked in the last section of the observation form to identify a specific observation through a sentence taken from Harris (2017): "Because the teacher \_\_\_\_\_, the students were able to do \_\_\_\_\_." To conclude the observation form, the TCs had an opportunity to write questions and conjecture about how the EFEIR observation impacted their learning about teaching.

### **Debriefing Protocol**

To wrap up the EFEIR, I conducted a 30 to 45-minute debriefing in which TCs shared what they observed and learned from the EFEIR host teacher. The debriefing protocol followed a round-robin format where one TC at a time stated an item they saw, noticed, or heard. The protocol allowed for three cycles of statements by the TCs (Harris, 2017). During the sharing of observations, I jotted down each stated observation on a blank EFEIR observation form (see Appendix) to record the discussion.

After all the TCs completed their observation forms and the discussion had concluded, each TC turned in their form to me. I made copies of the observation forms for the host teacher and met with them the next day. During that meeting, I highlighted the common themes of the observations from the TCs. Each TC and host teacher were informed that the observations were non-evaluative in nature and would not be shared with school administration.

### **Framework for EFEIR**

The framework of EFEIR was grounded in the practice of the City et al. (2009) instructional rounds process shown in Figure 1. The EFEIR process is described in Figure 2, and Figure 3 provides a comparison between the City et al. instructional rounds process and the EFEIR processes.

As shown in Figure 3, EFEIR differs from the City et al. (2009) process of instructional rounds in several ways. EFEIR takes place early in the TCs teacher education program as opposed to during a TC's internship. EFEIR is not conducted with a view to sustaining a system-wide process of school improvement by means of the instructional rounds process as City et al. intended. The fourth step of EFEIR, as shown in Figure 2, is focused on providing the EFEIR host teacher with feedback regarding what the TCs saw during their observation. Instructional rounds with an experienced teacher as observer might entail observation for an entire class period; EFEIR was strictly limited to 15 minutes.

**Figure 2***Framework for EFEIR*

Step	Action
1. Brief Introduction of the Observation Form	University field coordinator hands out observation form TCs instructed to only write notes in the top section during the observation TCs told about focused observations, looking at one thing a time TCs state some things to look for in the classroom, e.g., whom teacher calls on, what is on the walls, where does the teacher look, where is the teacher stationed in the classroom, etc.
2. Observation of Teaching	University field coordinator walks TCs to host teacher's classroom TCs spread out around classroom 15-minute observation TCs note what they "Saw," "Noticed," and "Heard" during the teaching
3. Debriefing the Observation	University field coordinator leads debriefing protocol Each TC reads something they observed. Go around the group three times. No comments by others in the group. University field coordinator notes what TCs read Protocol ends with a discussion of questions TCs had and what they learned
4. Host Teacher Review	University field coordinator makes copies of TC observations University field coordinator highlights common observation themes University field coordinator meets with host teacher to discuss common themes

**Figure 3***Difference Between City et al. (2009) and EFEIR*

Step	City et al. (2009)	EFEIR
1. Identification of a Problem of Practice	Different action. EFEIR allows TCs to observe what they want and has them use a uniform recording form.	Brief Introduction of the Observation Form
2. Observation of Teaching	Same action, but there could be different foci of observation and time allotments for the classroom visit.	Observation of Teaching
3. Debriefing the Observation	Same action, but there could be different protocols used to debrief.	Debriefing the Observation
4. Identify the Next Level of Work	Different action. City et al (2009) step allows for instructional rounds group to make decisions on next level of work. EFEIR step focuses on the field coordinator meeting with the host teacher to review the TCs.	Host Teacher Review

### Method

The purpose of my study was to examine TCs' perceptions of the positive and negative aspects of EFEIR and how the process might impact their future teaching. I gathered qualitative data through an anonymous Qualtrics survey provided to each TC who participated in my study.

### Setting and Participants

EFEIR was conducted over the course of four semesters that included eight field experience classes and a total of 83 TCs. Each field experience class was divided into two sessions with a maximum of nine TCs in each. Each TC spent six weeks at the school, spending at least 25 hours in their assigned mentor teacher's classroom. These hours were part of the 80 required hours of field experience prior to internship. Table 1 illustrates the basic organization of each of the eight field experience classes. EFEIR was an exercise embedded within the second of three required field experiences prior to internship.

The host elementary school was in a rural Midwestern city of 40,000 residents and was one of seven elementary schools in the district. The host school served approximately 650 students and employed 25 general education classroom teachers. The host school also employed 10 paraeducators as well as a school counselor, associate principal, and principal. The host school had a long history of supporting early field experience students. As evidence of their commitment, in the four semesters on which my study focused, 21 of 25 (84%) general education

teachers volunteered to host a TC for the 25-hour field experience.

The TC participants in my study were enrolled at a university of approximately 11,000 students located in the same rural Midwestern city as the elementary school. Ninety percent of the students at the university claim residency in this rural Midwestern state. The TC participants were sophomores and were in the middle of their teacher education journey. Many had attended elementary schools smaller than the host elementary school. Some TC participants came from rural communities with fewer residents than the population of the host elementary school. Each of the TC participants was admitted to the institution's Teacher Education program prior to enrollment in the early field experience.

### Broader Perspective

To provide broader perspective, two years following EFEIR, all the TCs in this cohort will conclude their teacher education journey by completing a full-semester internship experience. Ninety percent of internship placements will be completed in one of the nine regions in the state; the other 10% will be completed in out-of-state or international locations. Approximately 67% of school districts in six of the nine regions in the state enroll fewer than 1,000 students (Iowa State Department of Education data).

**Table 1**

*Field Experience Semester Class Organization*

Session A First 8 Weeks	Session B Second 8 Weeks
W1 seminar with Field Coordinator	W1 seminar with Field Coordinator
W2–W7 in mentor teacher's classroom	W2–W7 in mentor teacher's classroom
W3 EFEIR	W3 EFEIR
W5 EFEIR	W5 EFEIR
W8 wrap up seminar with Field Coordinator	W8 wrap up seminar with Field Coordinator

*Note: Two classes per semester; "W" is the abbreviation of "Week"*



## Study Setting

At the host school, a total of 12 teachers and at least one teacher from each of the seven grade levels volunteered to host an EFEIR session. Each of the host teachers held a degree in elementary education and a master's degree in various educational fields. Each teacher had more than 10 years of experience in the classroom at the time they hosted the TCs for an EFEIR session.

A field experience coordinator, who was employed by the university, monitored the TC participants and their colleagues throughout their participation. The field experience coordinator had 22 years of experience at the K-6 classroom level, 18 years of experience at the university level, and held a doctorate in education. As the field coordinator, I visited with the TC participants and their colleagues each day they were in a classroom. My visits to classroom included conversations with TCs about experiences working with children, what teaching and classroom management strategies they witnessed, and what questions they had about the field experience process.

## Data Analysis

Following the completion of EFEIR, TC participants in my study and their colleagues were provided with the opportunity to complete an anonymous Qualtrics survey addressing their EFEIR experiences. The survey consisted of four questions:

1. What are the positive aspects of EFEIR?
2. What are the negative aspects of EFEIR?
3. What impact, if any, did EFEIR have on your learning about teaching?
4. The 30-40 minutes spent during EFEIR was time well spent/time not well spent. (Choose one.)

Forty-eight TCs responded to the survey, and, given qualitative nature of the data, I decided to code the responses in Nvivo (<https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/home>) to “[break] down the initial responses into discrete parts” (Saldaña, 2009). The first code I assigned was what I perceived to be the main idea of the comment. Then, I assigned a code identifying one of five

thematic categories: instruction, environment, organization, experience, and reflection. Given the open-ended nature of the data, it was common for a response to warrant my assigning more than one of the thematic category codes to it. Samples of TC participant responses to Question 1 are illustrated in Table 2.

I devised the five thematic category codes based on my observations of the TCs during the EFEIR notetaking and debriefing phases. As discussed above, I was prepared to assign more than one thematic code to each TC's survey response. My preparedness to do so was in accord with Saldaña's (2009) qualitative research principles. My experience with applying my pre-determined thematic codes to the data validated their applicability.

I looked for specific attributes in assigning a thematic code to a response. For example, I assigned “instruction” to comments that focused on the teaching the TC reported observing during the observation. I assigned “environment” to responses that focused on the classroom organization, or posters on the walls, or other tangible classroom elements. I assigned “organization” to responses that focused on the host teacher's classroom management or the EFEIR process. I assigned “experience” to responses that focused on the TC's experience during EFEIR. Finally, I assigned “reflection” to those responses that drew a comparison to the experiences the TC had in their assigned field experience classroom with their mentor teacher.

## Results

The anonymous Qualtrics survey was completed by 48 of the 83 TCs (57%) and included three open-ended and one binary-choice question. The coded results from my coding of the first three questions are shown in Table 3.

The low response rate may have been influenced by the anonymous nature of the survey, that its completion was not a class requirement, or that there was no inducement to respond. I noted that a further 17 responses had been partially completed. If those 17 responses were from distinct

individuals, the response rate would have risen to 78% (65 of 83 TCs).

### Findings

Tables 4, 5, and 6 summarize my findings in relation to the responses to the first three questions in the Qualtrics survey. “Instruction” and “environment” codes dominated the positive characteristics of EFEIR. It is possible that, in these early field experiences, TCs went into the host teachers’ classrooms narrowly focused on the instruction they were seeing. Indeed, there may be a link between the “instruction” and “environment” codes. They appear together in 16 of the 48 (34%)

favorable remarks regarding EFEIR. Quotes 1 and 2 in Table 4 typify the TC’s responses in this category. In these statements, “room set up” or “how they run their classrooms” suggested to me a focus on “environment” while “method of teaching” and “teaching styles” suggested a focus on “instruction.” In Quote 3, the TC mentioned “hands-on” teaching. I interpreted this as an interesting way to describe entering the classroom and seeing the teaching with their colleagues. Prior to entering the classroom for EFEIR, the TCs were instructed to look for things that they might be able to use in their own classrooms someday. This frame of reference may have influenced these remarks.

**Table 2**

*Sample of Implementation of Coding Process*

TC Response	First Code	Thematic Code
It allows you to get into another teacher’s classroom and see how they had their room set up as well as see their style of teaching. I think observing many different teachers is important in helping you find your teaching style.	Room arrangement	Instruction
	Style of teaching	Environment
I was able to see different types of teaching in different classrooms. I picked up and many classroom management strategies and learning techniques that may be useful in my own classroom.	Another classroom	Environment
	Teaching styles	Instruction
Instructional Rounds were a huge positive aspect to me as a future educator. It showed me how teachers at different levels run their classrooms and their teaching styles. I learned that grades can be learning similar things but taught differently and there is still a lot of success.	Teaching styles	Environment
	Different grade levels	Instruction



**Table 3***Frequency of Thematic Codes Assigned to TC's Responses*

	Question	Instruction	Environment	Organization	Experience	Reflection
1	Positive aspects of EFEIR	31	29	3	3	7
2	Negative aspects of EFEIR	1	6	28	4	0
3	Impact of EFEIR on TC learning about teaching	28	16	3	2	3
	Total	60	51	34	9	10

In sum, I coded 60 of the 73 positive aspect comments as exhibiting either an “instruction” or “environment” focus. This conformed to my expectation, given that the TCs were in the early stages of their teacher education program. I suggest it is reasonable that TCs would instinctively look initially at the teacher’s instructional actions and the instructional context when observing an experienced teacher in their own classroom.

### Question 2

The second question on the Qualtrics survey asked TCs about negative aspects of EFEIR. Supporting quotes from the TC’s responses are shown in Table 5. There were 39 responses to this question, and the code I most readily assigned was “organization,” with 28 instances out of 39 responses (72%). One TC’s comment summed up the general feeling I gained from the survey respondents: “it took time out of the classroom we were working in.” Another stated, “it takes time away from you in your own classroom, and you can’t teach a lesson during that time slot either.” I

was interested to note that, in the TC’s responses both “too much time” and “not enough time” were stated as negative aspects to EFEIR. There were 30 negative survey responses related to time, 20 (67%) of which mentioned being out of their mentor teacher’s classroom as a negative. Quote 1 in Table 5 alludes to this criticism. The remaining 10 (33%) responses asserted that there was not enough out-of-the-classroom time devoted to EFEIR.

Quote 2 in Table 5 mentions the shortness of the EFEIR: “you don’t get to stay in the classroom very long.”

In the one response that did not mention time, one TC wondered if what they were seeing was reality for the classroom. Other responses that highlighted negative aspects of EFEIR focused on the observation form, the flow of the classroom being impacted by a group of TCs watching from the back of the room, the leaving of the mentor teacher’s classroom, and the number of adults in the host teacher’s classroom when EFEIR was taking place.

**Table 4***Typical Positive Aspects of Instructional Rounds*

Quote	Response
1	It allows you to get into another teacher's classroom and see how they had their room set up as well as see their style of teaching. I think observing many different teachers is important in helping you find your teaching style.
2	Instructional Rounds were a huge positive aspect to me as a future educator. It showed me how teachers at different levels run their classrooms and their teaching styles. I learned that grades can be learning similar things but taught differently and there is still a lot of success.
3	You get to experience hands-on teaching experiences at a welcoming school. You can observe how teachers guide their students in a no-pressure situation for you. You get to know the teacher and their atmosphere of the classroom so you get to see a wide array of situations throughout the rounds.

**Table 5***Typical Negative Aspects of Instructional Rounds*

Quote	Response
1	It took some time out of my classroom and being with my mentor teacher and the children that I was working with.
2	You don't get to stay in the classroom very long so you have to soak in as much information as you can. We also only visited two classrooms so we did not get to see how the whole school functions as time would not permit that.
3	I think one of the biggest negative aspects might be that the time that is being observed might not be 100% reflective of how the class normally functions. For example, we are only there for a few minutes, so the short amount of time might not be accurate for how the class might normally function. Also, we could be entering the classroom at a time that is disruptive or different from their normal routine.

### Question 3

The final open-ended question on the Qualtrics survey inquired about what impact EFEIR had on the TC's learning about teaching. I coded 85% of the responses to this question as "instruction" and "environment." From my perspective, the responses provided several different examples of what TCs would take away from their EFEIR experience. One TC mentioned the importance of being yourself when you teach (see Table 6, Quote 1). This TC's comment was meaningful to me because I believe that TCs tend to want to emulate other teachers and follow a role model. However, to become successful teachers, TCs have to find comfort with their own teaching style and with their teaching dispositions. The TC from whose response I excerpted Quote 1 was aware of that developmental imperative.

Another TC looked at the impact in terms of the classroom environment. In Quote 2 in Table 6, it is clear to me that this TC had come to the realization that active engagement by the teacher with the students is paramount to effective teaching.

Moreover, they were aware that it is not only important for the teacher but also the children that they learn to gently correct each other. Their response highlights the essence of the environment in the classroom this TC observed.

Finally, another TC's response highlighted the general overall view they took away from EFEIR and the teaching practice they observed. Stepping into the practical environment to see how a particular teacher addressed the circumstances with which they were confronted helped this TC to build their knowledge of teaching at different grade levels from their current assigned field experience. This is a valuable aspect of EFEIR since the TCs could be certified in up to eight different grade levels through current state credentialing.

On balance, it seems to me that the majority of TCs' interactions with EFEIR were positive. It gave them the opportunity to observe new teaching techniques and classroom management practices as well as giving them a window into their potential careers as teachers. EFEIR afforded the TCs an opportunity to observe in an authentic classroom

**Table 6**

*Typical Responses Highlighting Projected Impact on TC's Teaching Practice of EFEIR*

Quote	Response
1	I think it showed me that every teacher teaches in a different way. Not one teacher, I observed, taught with the same methods or used the same strategies. It showed me that when I am placed in a classroom that I have free range to teach my way and not to compare myself to other educators.
2	It really taught me the importance of classroom management and to be involved with the children as they learn. When teaching a lesson, it really needs to be fun and engaging because it keeps students focused on what is going on. The environment needs to be fully positive because it gives students the power to not be shy when answering a question. One room that sticks out the most to me is the room where the teacher had the students come up to the board and write down a math problem and solve it. This student did have an error, and her peers used positive words in telling her what she did wrong and how she could fix it.
3	Instructional rounds impacted my learning about teaching by allowing me to see other teachers and their effective teaching methods. I was also able to see a variety of grades and the ways approaches to teaching differ when the grade level changes.

environment. It gave them the chance to make connections between what they were learning in the university classroom, the reality of teaching, and their future as a teacher.

#### Question 4

The final question on the Qualtrics survey inquired about the TCs' thoughts regarding the time spent in instructional rounds. This closed-ended question prompted TCs with "the 30-40 minutes spent during instructional rounds was..." and they had the choice of two responses: either "time well spent" or "time not well spent." Interestingly, given their comments about the negative aspects of EFEIR, 45 out of 48 (94%) TCs indicated that EFEIR was time well spent. This near-unanimous positive assessment when confronted with a binary choice is somewhat confounding given the participants' responses to Question 2, which were much more nuanced. Of course, a binary choice is not conducive to nuance, but I wonder:

- When a TC began the survey, did they feel compelled to respond to every question? This question comes to mind because eight (17%) of the TC participants stated there were no negatives to EFEIR. Another four (12%) of the respondents didn't respond at all or responded with "none." Did 75% of the TCs respond because they thought they had to do so?
- Were TCs torn between the EFEIR process and their mentor teacher's classroom? The answer to this question, I believe, is that some were torn. In response to Question 2, 19 out of the 48 respondents indicated being absent from their mentor teachers' classroom caused some issues for them. The issues ranged from not being able to get a "flow" that day to not being able to see their mentor teacher teach a subject they were going to have to teach in the next week.

The responses to Question 4 supported the comments TCs made in response to Question 1. It is reasonable to assume there is a connection between these two questions. The EFEIR process was seen as positive and assisted TCs see more clearly their potential as teachers.

#### Limitations

One limitation of EFEIR, as well as instructional rounds in general, is the necessity of obtaining the trust of regular classroom teachers to let a small group of young future teachers witness their teaching. Even the most experienced teachers may feel uneasy and anxious about being observed by others, even if it is a non-evaluative observation. The classroom teacher must maintain a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) to make this experience a positive one for all involved.

Lee (2015) made mention of three other possible limitations for sustaining rounds in education. First, the amount of time required for organizing, planning, and debriefing the rounds process takes can be difficult to find. Teachers are inundated with many demands on their time during the school day. Next, if preservice teachers are asked to observe practicing teachers, there could be issues because of their differential levels of practical teaching knowledge. Roegman and Riehl (2015) expressed concern that the practicing teachers' expertise may be overlooked because preservice students may lack the knowledge to understand why such instructional methods are more ineffective than others (Lee, 2015). Does the instructional rounds process lead preservice teachers to adopt a single point of view of good teaching? If common forms of teaching frameworks are used to observe teaching during rounds, TCs may determine there is one method of good teaching. They could overlook the fact that there are many forms of teaching success in the classroom that exist (Lee, 2015). This is a programmatic question that should be considered before scaling up instructional rounds to any teacher education program.

#### Overall Comments

The anonymous TC survey indicated that the participants considered EFEIR a beneficial program for their early field experience. The TCs 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. TCs 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. When asked if the EFEIR was worth the time, 94% of the survey participants agreed that yes, it was worth the time. The EFEIR increased the number of general education teachers the TCs had an opportunity to observe teaching from one to three. Based on the work of City et al. (2009), the EFEIR process allowed 83 TCs to view not just their field experience mentor teacher but also two additional teachers in action.

Another element of the EFEIR process that TCs mentioned often in their survey responses was that of time. Seventy-seven percent (30) of the negative comments about EFEIR referenced time as some of the TCs (33%) wanted more time in the classroom during EFEIR. Other TCs (67%) thought that the time away from their field experience classrooms was an issue. I can readily see that time could be an issue when pulling students from what they see as their role in a process to immerse them in another classroom, especially when they are heavily focused on the practice of teaching. During my informal discussions with EFEIR host teachers, several mentioned that they would like to schedule time with the TCs following the observation to debrief about their observation. I can see the potential for this to benefit both the TCs and host teachers in the EFEIR process, but, again, time would be a barrier to be overcome.

My informal survey of the university internship coordinators from around the state revealed that approximately 50% of interns are hired by a school district within the region they interned. Rural school districts seem to hire those interns who successfully complete their internship in that district. This is not a surprising revelation given the current teacher shortage, the advantage that districts have of being able to see interns teach prior to extending an offer of employment, and the advantage the interns have of being able to know something of the district prior to potentially accepting that offer. The value of TCs having experience with an instructional rounds process prior to their internships thus could benefit both the TCs and the rural school districts they serve.

Experience with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills of observation, debriefing, reflecting, collaboration and questioning that are embedded in EFEIR might make graduates more valuable to a rural district that has a need to create professional development opportunities from within. I believe it cannot be overstated that teacher education at universities can impact change in school districts through their graduates. Teacher education, according to Häkkinen et al., can be a potent channel for triggering long-term change and supporting the integration of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills into daily educational activities (as cited in Valtonen et al, 2021).

Finally, the significance of instructional rounds, according to City et al. (2009), rests in bringing “direct discussion of instruction into the process of school improvement” (p. 3). If the term “school improvement” was replaced with “teacher education,” the relevance of EFEIR might be heightened for all schools.

### **Future Directions**

There are several ways the EFEIR program could be modified to fit other field experiences. A cross-school visitation rotation might be something worth looking at. Also, my study was conducted at a rural midwestern elementary school, but a similar experience could be completed in a middle or high school also. However, to expand this program comprehensively, allowing time for TCs and host teachers to talk about the lesson would be advantageous. Perhaps online video conferencing could allow for TCs and host teachers to discuss the observations virtually, at different times of the day. As I have mentioned over and over, time is often a barrier to discussion and reflection.

Finally, the intrinsic benefits of this process on TCs could be studied. Would this process enhance the dispositions of TCs in a way that would be advantageous to those entering the teacher workforce in a rural school? Could these TCs bring a different mindset to school communities that have limited access to professional development? A deeper dive into these questions may be well worth the time.

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**Appendix****Early Field Experience Instructional Rounds Observation Form****I saw...****I noticed...****I heard...**

Because the teacher \_\_\_\_\_, the students were able to \_\_\_\_\_.

*What questions come to mind as you observed the teaching segment? You do not need to complete all three questions blanks.*

1.

2.

3.

*How will this observation impact my learning about teaching?*