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**Learning Rounds: to what extent does the theory of
Learning Rounds relate to practice in Scottish
schools and theoretical models of professional
learning communities?**

by
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for the degree of Master of Education**

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Abstract

Learning Rounds is a new form of classroom observation, a continuing professional development (CPD) activity for educators where the learning taking place occurs for the observer of the process, not the teacher being observed. It originated as Instructional Rounds in Harvard, and was developed in Scotland by the National CPD Team and the Scottish Centre for Studies in School Administration (SCSSA), with the help and support of the Scottish Government. It has taken root in Scotland and is implicated in the review of teacher education, Teaching Scotland's Future. At the point of writing, there is little available research or reporting on the practice, therefore this study seeks to find out more about the practice; where it sits as a theoretical model when pitched against the wider body of literature on collaborative CPD and professional learning communities, and how as a model the theory behind it relates to the practice of it in Scottish schools. Working within a mixed methods orientation and a case study design, data was gathered from four schools in different local authorities through a survey and recordings of the discussion part of the process. Analysis was carried out using a thematic coding approach. The findings of this study suggest Learning Rounds share certain common features with other models of professional learning communities, but the protocols which offer a means of translating the theory behind the model into practice have been inadequately understood and translated into practice. Most notably, the wider dimensions of school and system-wide improvement are largely being side-lined in favour of personal improvement, and there is a language conflict at the heart of the process which indicates a need for a deeper understanding of why remaining non-judgmental through the process and using the descriptive voice are inter-dependent and essential to the process if potential benefits from it are to be realised.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The system of classroom observation known as Learning Rounds is a form of collaborative continuous professional development (CPD) which is gaining popularity in schools in Scotland. It emerged after a visit by Richard Elmore to Scotland as part of the Government – funded *Thought-Leaders' Programme, 2005-2008* during which he described the process of professional learning networks, known as instructional rounds networks in the US. This process was honed and adapted, and through the leadership and facilitation of the National CPD team and SCSSA, with the support of the Scottish Government, it evolved into Learning Rounds in Scotland.

As the Learning Rounds Toolkit (2010, p.5) explains:

“Learning Rounds is a new kind of collaborative professional learning. It involves teams of staff observing and learning about and from teaching practice across the school. Observers create a base of evidence describing what they have seen. There are no evaluative comments or value-laden points. The team then discusses how they, their school or authority will use the data to bring about improvement for learners.”

Although certain conditions must be in place and protocols followed in Learning Rounds, the process is essentially a straightforward one, and the claims made by it are bold. Through this process it is claimed that collegial practice will develop and that Learning Rounds...“can deliver high quality, sustainable improvements in the learning experiences of pupils in a range of context.” (Learning Rounds Toolkit, 2010, p.5).

The Policy Context

An increasingly sharper focus on teachers' continuous professional development (CPD) activities has come about over the recent decade, especially since The McCrone Agreement; A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century (TP21). The TP21 agreement may well be mostly associated with a significant salary increase along with a simplified career and salary structure, and formalisation of entitlement to non-class contact time across all sectors. However, one strand of the McCrone Agreement (Scottish Executive Education Department, 2001) also addressed issues under the heading 'professional development'. This included the recognition of CPD as a professional entitlement, with 35 hours of CPD per annum built into teachers' contracts, and the expectation that every teacher would maintain a professional development portfolio (Fraser, et al., 2007). The notion of CPD as an entitlement, and part of the teachers' contractual obligation was a new concept, and heralded a new era whereby unlike in previous times, where CPD did not feature as part of the contractual arrangements of teaching, the entitlement to, or responsibility for CPD, became part of the teachers' role. Since the introduction of this CPD entitlement, there is anecdotal evidence to suggest a move away from a limited understanding of CPD as set pieces (Donaldson, 2011) towards a deeper understanding of enhanced professionalism. There is still a continued need, however, to encourage deeper understanding of complexities of CPD amongst the profession, the range of opportunities which can be defined by this term, and the impact of CPD activities on the learning experiences of students.

More recently, the entirety of teacher education in Scotland has been reviewed and reported on in the form of the 'Teaching Scotland's Future' report (2011), authored by Professor Graham Donaldson of the University of Glasgow, formerly of HMIE. This report looked extensively at the continuum

of teacher education, including both pre-service and in-service stages. With an eye on building capacity among teachers and improving the learning of the young people of Scotland (Donaldson; 2011), a wide-ranging set of 50 recommendations was offered in this report, most of which are underpinned by the theme of career-long teacher capacity building. Interestingly, all of the reports' recommendations have been accepted by the Scottish Government, in whole, in part or in principle. Specific reference to Learning Rounds in the context of "hub schools" (Donaldson: 2011, pg112) as sites of partnership collaborations involving teachers, researchers, teacher educators and students, suggests that the Learning Rounds model has potential to influence the thinking around possible implementation of some of these recommendations.

Additionally in the context of Donaldson's recommendation 33, which states that CPD activities should be "shifting from set-piece events to more local, team based approaches, which centre around self evaluation and professional collaboration" (Donaldson, 2011; p.96), Learning Rounds appear to assume a certain significance. When pitched alongside ever-tightening financial constraints which are presently throttling school expenditure on CPD, a practice such as this could neatly be seen to fulfill a development need for teachers, whilst also responding to current policy imperatives, as above.

The research focus

Given the spotlight it finds itself under as outlined above, it may come as a surprise to learn that there has been little research into this practice in Scotland, and there is little available in terms of either descriptive or evaluative reports at national or local level. This study, then, seeks to find out more about this current practice called Learning Rounds; where it sits when pitched against the wider body of literature on collaborative CPD and

professional learning communities, and how as a model the theory behind it is relating to the practice of it in Scottish schools, through posing the following questions:

1. Is there consensus in the literature about what effective collaborative learning communities look like?
 - a. What features and characteristics are shared across the different theoretical models of collaborative learning communities?
 - b. To what extent do Learning Rounds relate to the theoretical models?
2. To what extent does the practice of Learning Rounds in Scottish schools relate to the theory and protocols behind it?
 - a. Is there awareness of the theory and protocols of learning rounds?
 - b. To what extent are they understood and enacted in practice?

This study will outline a consideration of the relevant literature relating to models of professional learning communities and collaborative approaches to CPD, followed by a discussion of the methodology underpinning it. The findings will then be presented and discussed and it is finally concluded with a retrospective glance and suggested recommendations for educators interested or already involved in the practice.

Chapter 2: Literature

To what extent is the practice of Learning Rounds consistent with theories of Professional Learning Communities?

Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the literature on collaborative CPD as it relates to the practice of Learning Rounds. I will consider what is said in the literature about collaborative CPD practice in general and situate Learning Rounds as practice in this context, outlining the method of selection for the literature. I will also explore some of the assumptions which are made around taking part in this practice. I will look at some theoretical models which support it; namely Wenger's community of practice model, and other models described by Church (2006) in conjunction with Jackson and Temperley (2006), Nelson and Slavit (2007), Trotman (2009), Turbill (2005) and Varga-Atkins, Qualter and O'Brien, (2009). In taking account of these models I will examine the convergent and divergent characteristics across these major theories as they relate to Learning Rounds and identify the key where agreement or disagreement is apparent by highlighting 3 commonalities within the body of literature considered.

Selecting the literature

This study is grounded in a review of literature relating to collaborative practice in teacher professional development and communities of practice. The starting point for the literature was the bibliography of the key text for Learning Rounds "Instructional Rounds in Education" (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009) and extrapolated from there. Running alongside this a professional subscription to the Professional Development in Education

Journal was available to me and a search here for articles on collaborative working provided a rich seam of thought. Frequently referenced authors within these articles allowed a further opening up of the area. Other journals such as the Journal for Educational Change were explored in a similar way, and personal contact with one author allowed for some relevant documentation to be made available to me. Even within these parameters it quickly became apparent that the volume of relevant literature on this subject was vast, so refining criteria had to be put in place. Of course communities of practice exist out-with education and literature relating to different non-educational professional contexts was also considered, but the size and scope of this study did not allow for further investigation of a comparative nature such as this. As this study is related to teachers' professional development, and this was formalised as a concept and a contractual entitlement in 2001 (McCrone, 2001), I decided that unless compelling, either through the resonance of the findings or similarity to the focus of this study, literature from before this point wouldn't be considered. Finally, relevance to the Scottish context also needed to be apparent, so literature from a Scottish, then UK context was prioritised.

Defining the terms

To avoid any ambiguity the issue of definitions may be best articulated at this stage in order to ensure clear and shared understandings of the terminology used.

Continuing professional development (CPD), or also, professional development, usually encompasses a range of formal and informal experiences and opportunities, which enable school professionals to improve their own teaching practice encompassing the intellectual, personal and social domains (Fraser et al. 2007; Hoban, 2002). Professional development in

this sense is very much akin to the concept of 'professional learning' in that it is understood as a non-linear on-going process rather than as an outcome of linear, one-off training events (Hoban, 2002; Varga Atkins et al, 2009; p.242). There is perhaps a further consideration to be made however in distinguishing CPD and 'professional learning.' In Conlon (2004, p.116), CPD is described as "a broad term that covers all forms of teachers' professional learning, whether formal or informal, within school or out of school, self-directed or externally prescribed." The term 'professional learning' however implies a form of 'teacher agency' which can diverge from management expectations (O' Brien & Weiner in Noble, 2010) of what professional development should be. In these terms Learning Rounds could be perceived as both a CPD practice and a professional learning experience. However, as the problem of practice which forms the focus of the activity is frequently centred on school or authority improvement priorities, the term "collaborative CPD" seems to be a more appropriate term to describe the developmental activity taking place in this context.

Collaborative CPD: an overview

Literature relating directly to Learning Rounds as practised in Scotland is scant. Nonetheless, as a practice involving groups of educators working together to collectively identify a problem of practice; subsequently take part in observations, debriefs and discussions aiming to create a consensus around next steps relating to the original problem (City et al 2009), it can be argued that it sits comfortably within the rubric of collaborative models of CPD. It is therefore this body of literature which is most relevant for consideration in this study.

Collaborative CPD is understood to refer to the shared activity undertaken by professionals working together in contexts such as professional learning communities as described above. Cordingley et al (2003) define collaborative

CPD in straightforward terms as “teachers working with at least one other related professional on a sustained basis;” providing a workable interpretation which has been adopted for the purposes of this paper.

Professional learning communities are generally understood to consist of groups of professionals jointly engaged in a shared activity which focusses on one or several problems of practice. Stoll et al (2006, p.223) go further and define professional learning communities in broad terms as“a given group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an on-going, reflective, collaborative, inclusive, learning-oriented, growth-promoting way. “

Whilst collaboration has been tacitly understood to be a “good thing”(Trotman, 2009, p.342), there is perhaps a need to share wider understandings of the processes involved inside this practice and also understand what are the differences and similarities across the theoretical underpinnings of these collaborative learning communities? Bearing in mind the first overarching aim of this research project, i.e. how the practice of Learning Rounds in Scotland relates to the theories of collaborative learning communities. This gives rise to some further questions upon which this review is based as follows:

1. Is there consensus in the literature about what effective collaborative learning communities look like?
2. What features and characteristics are shared across the different theoretical models of collaborative learning communities?
3. In what ways do Learning Rounds relate to the theoretical models?

In a review of the literature on professional learning communities Stoll et al (2005) observe that research in this area in the UK is a twenty first century phenomenon, perhaps reflecting a need for new approaches to organisational behaviour in response to accelerating rates of change in the increasingly globalised society. In support of this, Jackson and Temperley (2006) emphasise the need to recognise today's society as one which is knowledge-rich, bringing a greater requirement than before to make tangible the connections between areas of knowledge and practice relating to it. Understanding of professional collaborative practice might consequently be seen as a distinguishing or a desirable characteristic of the twenty-first century educator.

This is not to make an unqualified argument for collaborative practice per se, however. In recent years, it would appear that the term *collaborative practice* has become part of the everyday lexicon of educators in Scotland, and beyond. In addition, professional learning communities or practitioner networks are becoming increasingly common across the teaching profession to the extent that:

“You can't turn around in a schoolwith any kind of improvement agenda without bumping into some kind of network. Some are effective, but some are merely repackaged dysfunctional meetings which fail because they are disconnected from instructional improvement “(City et al, 2009 p 5).

The authors here raise questions of the quality and effectiveness of such practice, and also perhaps more subtly, what actually happens inside these communities? Under the rubric of managing change and teacher capacity, Fullan (2007) makes an argument for learning communities advancing and

supporting the process of personal development in a social context, and pitches this development against the oppositional concept of isolationism. He also cautions against an unchallenged acceptance that this practice is by default, effective. While explaining how the process of creating and nurturing purposeful learning communities is capable of a reculturing of the profession (Fullan, 2007), Fullan draws on McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001 (in Fullan, 2007) and highlights the dangers of collaborative activities taking place inside communities which reinforce bad or ineffective practice. Wenger et al (2007) also warn against introspection and more broadly- against the often uncontested positive overtones associated with the notion of “community”. The danger of introspection is an issue that needs to be taken into account in relation to Learning Rounds, and is more generally one of the major considerations to be made in reviewing the literature relating to models of collaborative CPD.

So, having thus far established an overview of the understandings of collaborative CPD and professional learning communities, with some caveats, I shall continue with a more in depth examination of the processes within them as reported from the literature and as they relate to Learning Rounds.

Commonality 1: Inside the PLC – interactions

In considering in greater depth the key factors contributing to or inhibiting the effectiveness of teacher learning in collaborative settings, Trotman (2009) claims *network-learning* and *community* are ill-defined , not commonly understood terms, and that assumptions are made about professionals’ capacity effectively to engage in collaborative practice. This he attributes to a lack of attention to network practices and the fact that an understanding of

these practices and of change management processes is not sufficiently valued by participants in his study (Trotman, 2009; p.352). Wenger et al (2002) describe a triadic set of essential features underpinning their model of communities of practice and these are: domain, community and practice, but specificity of the practice or the interactions taking place is negotiated by the community.

Interactions in the Church (2009) model of knots and threads are represented by the threads, which link the participants through communication, shared ideas, information and relational processes – even problem resolution and conflict (Jackson and Temperley, 2006:p 8). The threads also carry knots, which in this model represent the common activity of the community: its shared purpose or purposes.

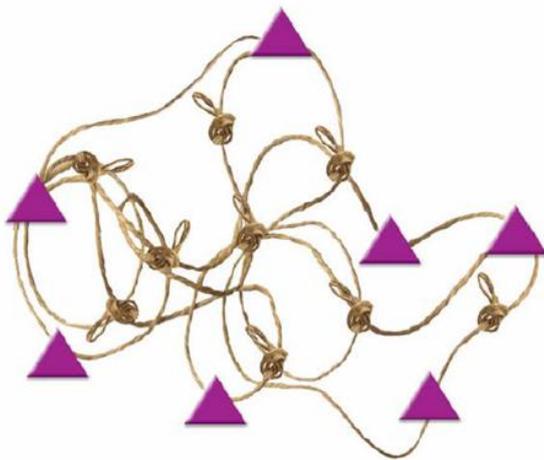


Fig. 1: Image reproduced by kind permission of Madeleine Church

The knots work and strengthen the threads connecting the participants together. The metaphor is an interesting one since it brings to the fore the importance of action as a shared activity across the community and highlights the need for even distribution of force: if weight or force is distributed unevenly across the net some threads (relationships, connections) will wear and break. If knots unravel, the threads are also loosened and some

participants marginalised. If the knots (or the participants) exert excessive tension on the threads they will wear out.

Nelson and Slavit (2007) also pay attention to this in expressing what participants actually do inside collaborative communities is not always obvious. This is something which has been described as being locked inside a “black box” (Little, in Nelson and Slavit; 2007). A detailed analysis of the dynamics at work inside professional learning communities was undertaken by Nelson and Slavit (2007). The study comprised five case studies examining five PLCs working through a collaborative inquiry process, within a situated perspective. Similar to Learning Rounds this study has the focus on teachers and their learning as the agents of change, and the process itself as the innovation rather than an end to be achieved. Their conclusions resonate with much of what is claimed by Learning Rounds, while also highlighting some potential challenges this model faces. Through observing the process of participation in these communities of inquiry, the authors identified values-based, trusting and respectful professional relationships as crucial to progress, and saw that.....

“Most of these teachers had little experience with looking closely at student work or other forms of classroom data... We saw them struggle to make explicit their tacit beliefs about teaching and learning; to co-construct a vision for high-quality mathematics or science teaching, to recognize gaps between the vision and the reality of any given classroom and to critically examine the impacts on student learning” (Nelson and Slavit, 2007, p.37).

Trotman refers to this as a sense of “strategic withitness” (Trotman, 2009; p.352) which involves a strong sense of role definition; conceptions of community and awareness of change management processes among other

factors. Awareness of this he claims adds value and advantage to the networks. In apparent contrast to this, the Learning Rounds model offers a clear set of protocols for engaging in the process. These include (among others):

- Remaining non-judgmental throughout the process
- Recording observations in a descriptive voice
- Focussing on the learning, not the teacher

In this respect, the focus on protocols of practice of the community may be seen a factor which could potentially enhance the effectiveness of the Learning Rounds model in offering a basis for terms of engagement for participants, a need identified by the studies referred to above. Whether this is enacted in theory or not is a question for the research stages of this study. In most professional collaborative practice, it is fair to say verbal interactions are likely to feature. Turbill, (2002) claims that professional dialogue is a key structure in collaborative learning of any sort, and there are assumptions which are made about educators' capacity to engage with this which need to be articulated. Accepting challenges in dialogue and engaging in open and honest discussions which go "beyond the land of nice" [City et al, 2009, p 76] can test personal and professional relationships. The authors claim here is that educators have a strong culture of being "nice" to each other (p76) and thereby infer that challenging conversations or courageous questions in professional dialogue may often be sidestepped in order to preserve personal relationships and superficial harmony. This is an interesting component of Learning Rounds which sets it apart from other collaborative learning practices, in that it holds to the enforcement of one of the non-negotiable principles of the practice: that of the use of the descriptive voice, i.e. a non – judgmental voice, in recording observations and later discussions. The descriptive voice can therefore be understood as essentially a device, or "tool

for focussing on what was said or done, not on the inferences and judgements triggered by the observation” (City et al, 2009, p.76). The authors claim the purpose of this device as a protocol is to “provide...alternative verbal structures that set aside normal defaults” (City et al 2009, p.77), ‘normal default’ being understood as a tendency to avoid difficult or challenging conversations. These additionally, according to City et al (2009) underpin a professional culture among educators which prohibits people saying anything unpleasant to each other. Possible inhibitors to these conversations such as, for example imbalances of power, or unevenly aligned perceptions of permission within the group may cause difficulties in interaction for many educators. If, however, the focus of the exchange stays true to the evidence of observations as they relate to a given aspect of practice (City et al, 2009); providing a neutral basis for the conversation, grounding it in the previously agreed non-judgmental foundation, this may then be helpful in addressing the ‘capacity to engage in dialogue’ issue to which Turbill (2005) and Nelson & Slavit (2007) refer.

Commonality 2: Creating the community: focus on processes by which professional learning communities come into being.

In creating a community of practice, Wenger et al describe how it is important to acknowledge the tension that becomes of attempting to maintain the balance between “discovery and imagination – discovering what you can build on and imagining where that can lead” (Wenger et al. 2002; p72). The implication here is to be mindful of existing networks or connections which are focussed on a relevant area of practice. This will involve knowing or finding out who is interested in the area of practice, who discusses it with whom and how strong the relationships are. Ignoring this

resource could result in alienating potential key members of the proposed community and failing to capitalise on existing knowledge and enthusiasm. However, the authors suggest the tension arises when this is balanced with appealing to new members who will bring new ideas to the community. The suggestion in Wenger's model is of an open, but engineered membership of the community. Wenger's model of communities of practice offers different "degrees of participation" (Wenger et al, 2002, p57). This model has been developed as a metaphor for situated learning and it allows for different levels of participation, whereby some community members demonstrate high levels of commitment and participation (core) and some choose to stay on the periphery (lurkers). Some features here such as building on existing networks as the basis for the community and allowing for different levels of participation (participants can take part in a learning round through being observed only – having no input at other stages) may appear to be in alignment with Learning Rounds. The Learning Rounds model suggests dialogue and an opting in process (City et al, 2009 p. 67) as a means of supporting new members to join. Wenger's model acknowledges the existence of an implicit hierarchy in the structure of the group, with a core set of members who may be seen as holders of expertise in a given area. Although degrees of participation can be seen as a common factor the notion of hierarchy within the community is not so clear in the learning rounds model, where the emphasis in the literature is more on disassociating role definition from the group membership –i.e. all educators, in promoted management, administrative or teaching posts working together in a common practice. (City et al 2009, p.4) Movement in an outwards direction from the core membership is inferred in the Wenger model, but not in the learning rounds model. Peripheral members by definition will be less engaged in the community's activity than core members, possibly creating a

disequilibrium which could have an impact on the culture of the community in terms of sense of belonging, commitment and participation. However, the advantage of allowing degrees of participation also creates a potential pathway towards greater involvement for those in the margins and blurs the boundaries. Wenger acknowledges that this allows for more fluid interaction both within the community and in the wider domain, and creates a greater sense of open-ness and inclusiveness (Wenger et al, 2002). The rounds ripple effect refers to a similar process of growth, whereby once the practice takes root, other educators will want in, or will want their own network (City et al, 2009 p65).

Ways of joining the community

Becoming a member of a Learning Round community is an opt-in process (City et al 2009) with interest often being generated by a champion. The decision to join has to be consciously made but not enforced. For Wenger et al (2002), enforced participation is also seen as undesirable, but more support is given to peripheral members – he describes successful communities as ones who “build benches” for those on the side-lines (p57). The notion of support for peripheral players in the Learning Rounds model is less well developed: visiting existing practitioners engaged in the process and engagement in dialogue (City et al p67) are suggested as ways of drawing participants closer to the core of the community in a similar way to different degrees of participation as in the Wenger (2002) model. In contrast to this participation in Trotman’s (2009) two-phase collaborative project took the form of invitation into the NCSL sponsored programme and subsequent to this a tendering process identified participants. Jackson and Temperley’s (2006) networked communities work within a different participatory rubric

again, where participation took place at inter-school network level, and it is not clear how belonging to these networks was effected.

Commonality 3: Considering the operational domain of professional learning communities

Moving to scale: from intra-school to inter-school

There is an implicit assumption in the literature that Learning Rounds will operate as an inter-school enterprise. "Networks" in the Learning Rounds contexts refers to groups of educators (and possibly other associated professionals) from different establishments working collaboratively through the process of identifying a problem of practice; observation of practice; debrief discussion and establishing the next level of work. (City et al, 2009 p100). The authors claim that this practice "supports instructional improvements at scale, not just pockets of good teaching in the midst of mediocrity" so working simultaneously at *inter* and *intra* school level is an integral feature. The implication here is that impact of the practice will be compromised if the process is not operating in this way. Supporting the argument that moving to a larger scale not only improves outcomes at inter school level, but collaboration at this level might even be necessary for progress at intra-school level, Jackson and Temperley in their study of Networked Learning Communities (larger-scale networked learning communities composed of multiple schools) suggest that;

"Between school networks may, in fact, be both the catalyst and context for the internal redesign required to generate professional learning networks within schools." (Jackson and Temperley 2006; p.12)

They set out their case in the context of an increasingly interconnected world where;

“the school as a unit has become too small-scale and too isolated to provide rich professional learning for its adult members in a knowledge-rich and networked world. A new unit of meaning, belonging and engagement – the network – is required.” (Jackson and Temperley, 2006; p.1)

The study of the interplay between school based and networked professional development by Atkins et al (2009) also made relevant claims about the learning that goes on in collaborative contexts. The main claims made are that professional learning occurs best when there is a positive interplay between school-based and networked learning experiences, and the role of facilitation is influential in creating the environment which helps professionals see connections between the two. The authors conclude that positive school culture and intra-school collaboration are as important for the success of networked CPD as the quality of the CPD itself (Atkins, O’Brien et al 2009 p 265), and, in alignment with Harris and Jones (2010), City et al (2009) and Lieberman and Grolnick (in Atkins et al, 2009) that facilitation is essential to create the necessary culture to allow connections to be made between the different domains.

In examining the networked schools domain, Trotman (2009) establishes three challenges to practice in this dimension, one of which considers a level beyond what the other models have discussed so far:

1. development of the affective domains in collaborative network activity is a neglected area;
2. research at this level brings professional challenges to educators but could offer new possibilities for school self – evaluation;
3. The next stage to this collaborative work could be a wider inter-agency network.

Personal domains and domains of others: examining personal and external dimensions.

Turbill's model for professional learning focuses not so much on the structure of the community where the learning takes place, but the interaction of four identified domains of knowledge, each of which operate inside two dimensions: the personal and the external. (Turbill, 2002) The four domains in Turbill's view are: 'my personal theory,' 'my personal theory in practice,' the 'theory of others' and the 'theory of others in practice.' In this model, The participant-learner has to articulate their theories of learning at a personal level, i.e. sharing insights into their own thinking, beliefs and values (Turbill, 2002, p97) and working in an "inside-out" direction, also articulate how these translate into their own practice. This is required also in the "outside in" dimension where:

"Practitioners have opportunities to hear and see the theory and practice of others....current research and the thinking of others, including the views of their peers" (Turbill, 2002, p97)

The interesting aspect here for this particular study is the scope for professional learning at the intersections of these domains. Wenger et al (2002) refer to the most interesting learning taking place at the outer edges of communities, where they begin to intersect with one another and create new domains of knowledge, such as 'psycho-linguistics' being born out of the convergence of communities of practice of both domains. The spaces in-between are where collaboration, reflection and sharing happen, and the "interplay" of these conditions can, it is claimed, underpin sustained professional learning" (Turbill, 2002 p97). As a model for learning this resonates with aspects of Learning Rounds and other models, like, for example Jackson and Temperley's (2006) claim that inter-school networking

may actually be a necessary condition for the most effective professional learning at individual and intra-school level. Trotman also makes reference to the need for

“the development of individual and collective reflective consciousness as fundamental to meaningful collaborative practice”
(Trotman, 2009; p344)

There is a question that remains to be answered however in relation to Learning Rounds and that is one of conceptualising Learning Rounds as a discrete school activity; do practitioners go far enough beyond the boundaries of their own learning settings to fully capitalise on collaborative practice as it is described and demonstrated in the available literature?

Summary

In this chapter I have critically examined the concept of collaborative learning and the challenges and assumptions around it as a concept. I have looked at theoretical models of collaborative communities, and then established a broad outline of how collaborative learning is understood and examined dominant characteristics of collaborative communities as entities and processes. I have highlighted points of convergence and anomalies between the theory of Learning Rounds and collaborative learning more generally around the following themes;

- Inside the PLC – interactions;
- focus on processes by which professional learning communities come into being;
- the operational domain of professional learning communities,

and established that within this framework there are commonalities across all the models considered in terms of;

- attending to operational processes within networks and learning communities
- aiming to move the focus of the work of the community or network to beyond the immediate school or personal domain,

There is also divergence in how the communities or networks come into being.

In spite of the fact that the theory of Learning Rounds appears to align itself with only some elements of more widely understood collaborative learning theories, this analysis suggests that the attention it gives to process could go some way to illuminating practitioner understanding of collaborative

working. It has demonstrated- degrees of alignment with a small number of theoretical models in the field and as such should hold its own as a model for collaborative teacher professional learning.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will be subdivided into two main parts: in the first section I will put forward an understanding of research philosophy as it relates to this study and discuss the methodology underpinning it. In the second section I will describe the implementation of the study along with the methods used to gather and analyse the relevant data and consider the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches and tools.

The Research Paradigm

Learning Rounds is a bounded system which is school-based and a specific, complex, functioning thing (Stake, 1995). These characteristics invite an emphasis on holistic treatment of phenomena (Stake, 1995) which is an appropriate approach to a research problem such as this. Learning Rounds therefore lend themselves neatly to case-study research, and the problem posed invited a detailed analysis of a complex, bounded and functioning system. This study will work within a mixed methods design and a case study orientation.

Affinities with interpretivism; considering pragmatism; rejecting positivism

The practice of Learning Rounds itself is inherently interpretivist. It is a fairly recent phenomenon, having evolved from a visit by Professor Richard Elmore as part of the Scottish Government's Thought-Leaders Programme in 2009. As its protocols indicate, the practice is not intended to be used as an external performance evaluation or improvement tool (Learning Rounds Toolkit, 2010) rather it is expected that the participants involved will volunteer for the process and take responsibility for the focus,

implementation and follow-up from the round. To identify potential outcomes of the process in order to explain or test them for reliability or predictability would run contrary to the principles of Learning Rounds. As a practice one of its main purposes is to discuss people's interpretations of what they see in learning situations. This fundamental purpose is at odds with a positivist philosophy whereby the "objective reality is out there waiting to be discovered" (Denscombe 2010 p 120). Assuming a positivist philosophy may therefore involve an untenable leaning towards a methodology that does not sit comfortably with aspects of this practice. It can be assumed that Learning Rounds, when implemented in a way that is consistent with the recommendations in the literature, is an iterative process, grounded in an interpretivist epistemology which does not seek to objectively measure ... but seeks to express a social creation (Denscombe, 2010); the outcome in this process, and the process itself is a negotiated construct born out of social interaction and individuals' understandings of reality. In addition to this, the interest here is in how groups of people make sense of a reality (Denscombe 2009) and interpret it for themselves, from their own social and historical perspectives. However, the overarching aim of this study is to attempt to establish *to what extent the practice of Learning Rounds is consistent with theories of professional learning communities*. This suggests that it may not align itself totally with an interpretivist stance. Although the practice itself and some aspects of the study (how learning rounds are being interpreted) are clearly interpretivist by nature, some aspects of what this study is attempting to achieve are not. Only under a pragmatic epistemology position can these two philosophically divergent approaches be accommodated. It would therefore be inappropriate, on the basis of the wider aims involved to assume either a positivist or interpretivist disposition towards this study. It aligns itself much more closely to a

pragmatic stand - point so it is this epistemological position the study assumes.

Design rationale

A firm grounding in literature (see previous chapter) has been established through comparing various different models of learning communities with the model that is proposed in Learning Rounds and identifying what are the convergent and divergent features. Participants in the process are questioned on their understanding of the Learning Rounds process via an online survey. This will serve to provide some illumination in a theory-building manner; consistent with the underpinning interpretivist epistemology as to how exactly Learning Rounds are being interpreted in practice and how far the theory of the model relates to practice. The key question which frames this part of the study is as follows:

To what extent does the practice of Learning Rounds relate to the theory and protocols behind it?

The key components for expressing these questions will be:

- an online survey tool;
- a recorded non-participative discussion;

Both of which are elaborated upon in the following section.

Data collection and analysis

The two research tools provided a basis for data gathering: the online survey sought to provide broad picture of how learning rounds are being understood in general terms; the recorded discussions provided a means of establishing how Learning Rounds were being implemented in practice. Each of these tools will now be introduced.

Research tool 1: Online survey

The starting point for the collection of data was the online survey. This survey was sent to a contact person in each of the participating schools. It was designed to gather general information about the role of participants (whether part of management or teaching teams in school); what the broader understanding of Learning Rounds was among a population who had experienced it, and awareness generally of the protocols involved in the process and adherence to them through asking the following questions (see figure 2 below)

Fig. 2

1. *What is the role of the leader of Learning Rounds (LR) in your school?*
2. *What made you want to take part in a Learning Round?*
3. *Have you taken part as:*
 - a. *An observer?*
 - b. *An observed teacher?*
 - c. *A co-ordinator?*
 - d. *A facilitator?*
4. *As a participant in LR did you feel involved in the planning and carrying out of the process?*
5. *Was it a useful learning experience?*
6. *Did you take part in a briefing before the LR took place?*
7. *Are you aware of the research behind LR?*
8. *Were the protocols of LR explained to you?*
 - a. *focus on learning not teacher*
 - b. *volunteering for the process*
 - c. *the instructional core at the heart of the process*
 - d. *using the descriptive voice*
 - e. *remaining non - judgemental throughout the process*
9. *Were these protocols observed?*
10. *Do you feel LR enhanced your:*
 - a. *Personal practice – in terms of your own professional development and understandings of learning*

b. School practice – in terms of collegiality, better shared understandings across the school community

c. System wide learning – in terms of new learning about the efficacy of the system at school or authority level

In what way did the process enhance your learning as above?

It was not specifically aimed at those participating in this particular study, but at a wider population including previous participants of learning rounds in each school. It was kept short, possible to complete in five minutes or less. The data gathered from this survey was collated on a question by question basis (see figure 2, p25) Some responses offered numerical data which have been quantified and the qualitative data were collated and coded thematically using a thematic analysis procedure within an inductive approach (see below).

Research tool 2: Recorded discussion

The second tool was the non-participative discussion. This tool was designed to allow for an understanding of how a part of the Learning Rounds process was being carried out in practice. Four recordings took place of post-observation feedback discussions with up to 12 participants in each one, making for complex transcribing work. In attempting to allow for the most natural conditions for the discussion to proceed and for an accurate picture of the teachers' understanding and implementation of the process to emerge, I did not participate in the discussion. All the discussions were recorded on a mobile phone with files later being transferred to a computer and converted into mp3 format. As above, the discussions were then transcribed, coded and analysed.

The time frame for the data collection is cross-sectional, in that information captured relates specifically to a point in time and is not longitudinal.

Data analysis procedures

The data were prepared for analysis in different ways. As the survey was designed to offer a broader perspective it made sense for this to be the starting point for analysis. It provided a basis of practitioner understanding of the process of learning rounds which addressed the research objective of establishing how far practice is being related to theory. The survey data offered a mixture of numerical and qualitative data, so the numerical data were collated and processed through Excel to produce visual representations in the form of charts and graphs. The qualitative data were transcribed in preparation for thematic analysis.

Using the model described in King and Horrocks (2010) a three-stage process of analysis was undertaken involving descriptive and interpretive coding, which led to the identification of over-arching themes. Starting with the qualitative data from responses to question 2 which sought to elicit participants' motivation to engage with the learning rounds process, this data set was closely read and coded and a set of initial codes emerged. When considering the other qualitative data from the survey responses and recorded discussions, these codes were repeated and some further ones generated. Saturation was reached when codes started repeating themselves and they were then laid out and grouped around common themes.

The codes applied to the qualitative data reduced it to a manageable form and meaning was assigned to it with the themes it generated. A fuller discussion of the processes and meanings associated will be dealt with in the findings chapters.

Population and sampling

Because Learning Rounds is an opt-in process which is, in theory, not mandated by local authorities, selecting the sample population involved knowledge of which schools may be involved in the process at the time I was ready to gather the data. The method for selection was unorthodox in that timing, not experience or profile was of the essence and followed a convenience sampling model (Blaxter et al 2010). Having previously identified schools that were planning this did by no means allow me to rely on them. Two of the four schools identified early on in the process decided against going ahead this year. One suggested a replacement school; one further school was identified via a posting on my personal learning network on the social networking site, twitter. The remaining two schools had been identified by personal contact through third parties. Having realised early on in the data gathering process that the volume of data gathered in the recorded discussions and interviews was disproportionate to the size of this study, I revised the number of sites of research to fit more appropriately from six to four schools.

Piloting

Piloting took place with the online survey tool. Colleagues with both knowledge of learning rounds and technical knowledge of online surveys trialled the survey and gave feedback which resulted in omission of one question, and expansion of another and various technical modifications to make the survey more compact and user-friendly. This also gave an indication of the time spent completing the survey, which was useful to mention to participants, as I was mindful not to take up too much of their time. As the recorded discussions had no interventions on my part other than

to set the recording device, it was not considered a useful exercise to pilot this data-gathering method.

Ethical considerations

The study conforms fully to ethical guidance advice, and as it does not involve contact with young people or vulnerable adults, represents a fairly low-risk activity. Nonetheless assurances have been made to protect the identity of all participating schools, teachers and authorities through the use of pseudonyms. Voluntary informed consent (SERA, 2005) was obtained via the approved participant information sheet (see appendix 1) and participants will have access to the data if required and have the option of taking part in the post publication debriefing session. There are further issues which needed to be considered however, involving being mindful of bureaucratic overload (SERA, 2005) and avoidance of undue intrusion (Denscombe, 2010). Piloting procedures ensured that time spent on completion of the survey was kept to a minimum. There is also an overlap here with problems encountered in identifying the sample for this study. As a convenience sampling method was used (Blaxter et al, 2010), the participants were selected on grounds of whether or not a learning round was taking place in their school. Although this posed difficulties for the sampling aspect of the study, it did ensure that the research was taking place within normal and routine aspects of people's lives (Denscombe, 2010) thus minimising disruption for participants.

Transferability/ generalizability

As a small – scale study of a particular practice in only 4 settings, there are little grounds for claims of representativeness across schools in Scotland. The

mixed methods qualitative approach did not seek fully measurable, testable and checkable (Denscombe, 2010, p189) data which could be easily generalized. However, transferability to other contexts may be possible taking into account the particularities of the factors involved here especially individual schools' and participants' motivation for engaging with the Learning Rounds process.

Scope of study and limitations

It is important to recognise the constraints which are limiting the scope of this study. Firstly, the data gathering is dependent on schools being involved in the Learning Rounds process at the time the researcher is ready to gather data. This has proved limiting in the number of sites of research it is possible to engage with, therefore the sample involved has been selected on no particular criterion other than availability. Secondly, there are often justified expectations that professional development activities such as Learning Rounds have a clear link to improvement (Learning Rounds Toolkit, 2010)), but as a small scale study the focus here cannot be permitted to wander into these other, more apparently relevant-to-practice ideas and will remain focussed on theoretical links, providing a sound theoretical basis from which it may be possible for further study to proceed. Thirdly, although care has been taken to ensure that the questions probe deeply into understandings of this practice it must be acknowledged that a broad portrayal of this practice is not being presented here; this case-study represents a focussed view of a new process in a small number of schools who are involved in a practice which attracts a small number of participants in a time-limited frame, perhaps leaving it vulnerable to criticisms of representativeness.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find out to what extent the practice of Learning Rounds in Scottish schools relates to the relevant literature (rq 1a and rq1b)

1. Is there consensus in the literature about what effective collaborative learning communities look like?
 - a. What features and characteristics are shared across the different theoretical models of collaborative learning communities?
 - b. To what extent do Learning Rounds relate to the theoretical models?

And to the theory and protocols behind it (rq 2a and rq 2b)

2. To what extent does the practice of Learning Rounds in Scottish schools relate to the theory and protocols behind it?
 - a. Is there awareness of the theory and protocols of learning rounds?
 - b. To what extent are they understood and enacted in practice?

In this chapter I will attempt to show how themes have emerged from the range of data gathered and present the findings of this study using a mixture of text and graphics as they have arisen and in relation to the aim stated above and specifically research question 2a and b:

- c. Is there awareness of the theory and protocols of learning rounds?
- d. To what extent are they understood and enacted in practice?

The survey was intended to provide a context for the study by illuminating a broad landscape of teacher understanding of the Learning Rounds process, including who is involved and what are their perceptions of the process. Perhaps most significantly in relation to rq 2b above, what is their understanding of its principles in theory and in practice and the perceived effect it may have had on their professional learning? This therefore is a logical place to start. I will present the findings from each of the questions sequentially. The further qualitative data from the recorded discussions give a more detailed picture and will be considered in the final part of this chapter.

The survey: a broad landscape

The survey was distributed to all four schools involved in the research study via email. Within these schools I requested that it be sent to all former and present participants of a Learning Round. The survey was completed entirely anonymously so no breakdown of the figures is in any way possible.

Number of respondents: $n=50$ and responses are as follows:

Who and why? Questions 1 & 2

The first question shows us which category of educator within the school is taking responsibility in the Learning Rounds process and the results can be

seen in responses to question 1

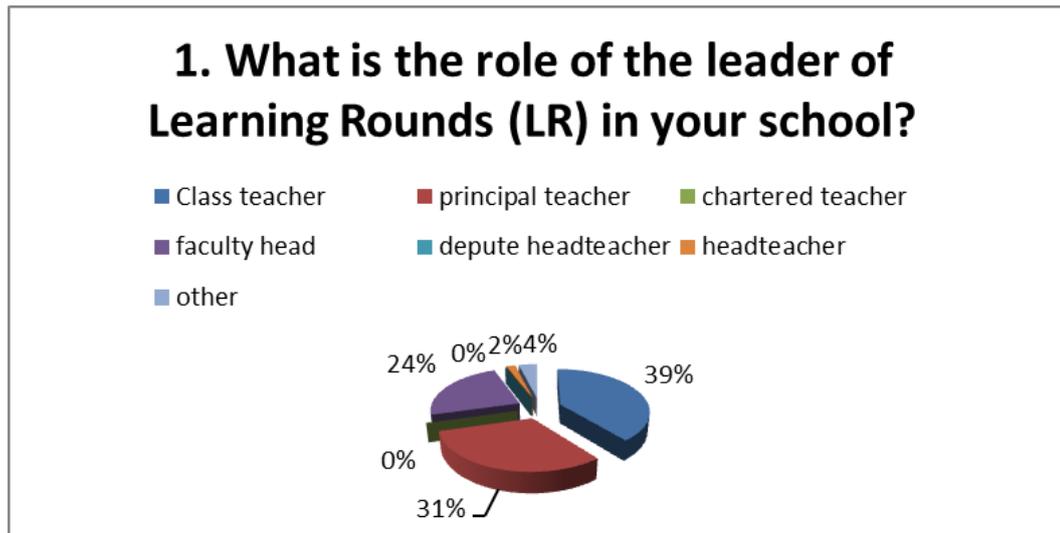


Chart 1

Of the the “other” responses, 2 identified themselves as Quality Improvement Officers, one as Literacy coordinator and one respondent didn’t believe there was a leader of the process. This figure is not in alignment with the % reponse for this category; it can only be assumed that two of the respondents entered a reponse in the “other - please specify” field without giving a value in the checkbox field “other.”

Using codes as described in the previous chapter, the qualitative data from responses to question 2 (what made you want to take part in a Learning Round?) were analysed and a summary of reponses can be see in figure 3. The answers given were limited by the amount of space in the survey’s electronic field, so some were one or two word answers, some a sentence of no more than two lines. As such it was easy to identify frequently – recurring words; they were noted and patterns of convergence developed around ideas of:

- Observing practice in a general way, observing other practitioners in the totality of the observation and seeing either practice, classrooms or subjects outwith one’s own classroom setting.

- Tips and teaching strategies were frequently mentioned; these were understood to be quick fixes or specific things teachers do either with specific pupils or responding to specific needs or situations; the idea of becoming a better teacher through the process, or considering the process as part of a more formal CPD obligation or programme.
- Some participants saw value in discussion with colleagues, and the wider school perspective
- Non voluntary participation

Fig. 3

Descriptive codes	Total participants <i>n</i> =50	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Observing practice</i> • <i>Observing practitioners</i> • <i>Seeing other classrooms or subjects</i> 	<i>n</i> =23 or 46%	<p><i>"I was keen to observe more experienced teachers"</i></p> <p><i>"To observe good practice in other subjects in the school"</i></p> <p><i>"Observe the various learning and teaching happening across the school."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>looking to gain tips and strategies</i> • <i>CPD</i> • <i>Self – improvement</i> 	<i>n</i> =18 or 36%	<p><i>"always looking for tips and different approaches"</i></p> <p><i>" gain teaching tips"</i></p> <p><i>"Always aiming to be better teacher"</i></p> <p><i>"improve my practice as a teacher"</i></p> <p><i>"for my own personal CPD"</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Interest in broader or whole school improvement or issues</i> • <i>Willingness to be involved in discussion with colleagues</i> 	<i>n</i> = 7 or 14%	<p><i>"thought it would broaden perspectives"</i></p> <p><i>"To identify whole-school issues"</i></p> <p><i>"To promote collegiate working"</i></p>
Did not volunteer	<i>n</i> = 7 or 14%	<i>"It was a whole school initiative"</i>

		<p><i>suggested by HT"</i></p> <p><i>"It was part of staff development"</i></p> <p><i>"We didn't get to choose"</i></p>
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Role of those taking part and engagement: questions 3, 4 & 5

Question 3 shows the breakdown of the role of role participants in the process:

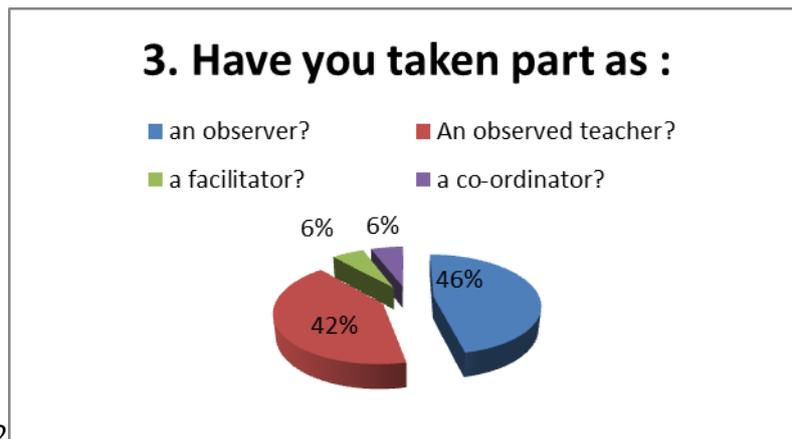


Chart 2

Question 4 shows the degree of engagement with the process: (chart 3)

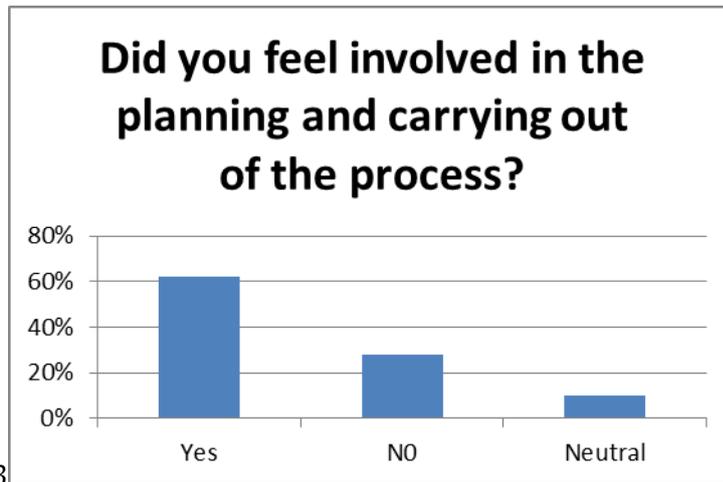


Chart 3

Comments on q4 responses

Of the 31 positive responses, 3 qualified their answer as a positive experience of being an observer only.

Of the 14 negative responses 6 qualified their answer as not being involved in the planning stage only.

Question 5(chart 4) below gives a broad indication of how useful the experience was for participants.

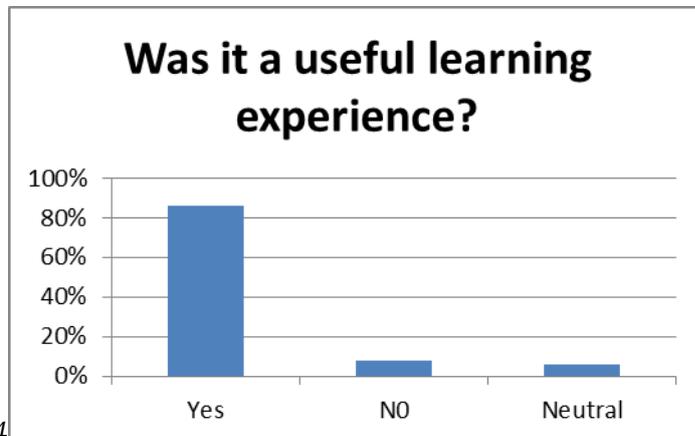


Chart 4

Comments on q5 responses:

Of the 43 positive responses 4 qualified their answer with a statement about usefulness corresponding to role as observer only.

Of the 4 negative responses, 3 qualified this answer as being related to their role of observed teacher.

Linking theory and practice: looking at background preparation in questions 6 & 7

Questions 6 and 7 relate to briefings and background to the process.

Question 6 sought to establish if, inline with protocols stated in the Learning Rounds Toolkit.....“all staff are briefed on the purpose and process associated with Learning Rounds. This is essential if all colleagues are to feel fully involved in the approach” (Learning Rounds Toolkit, 2010; p.9).

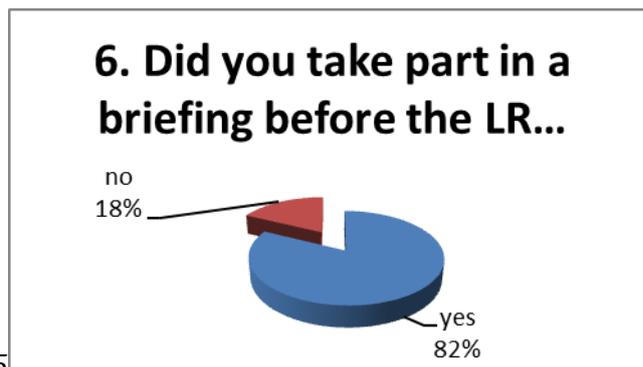


Chart 5

82% of respondents replied positively to this question and 18% negatively.

With regard to how aware of research behind the process, question 7

responses indicate that 51% are aware, 33% are not aware and 16% aren't

sure.

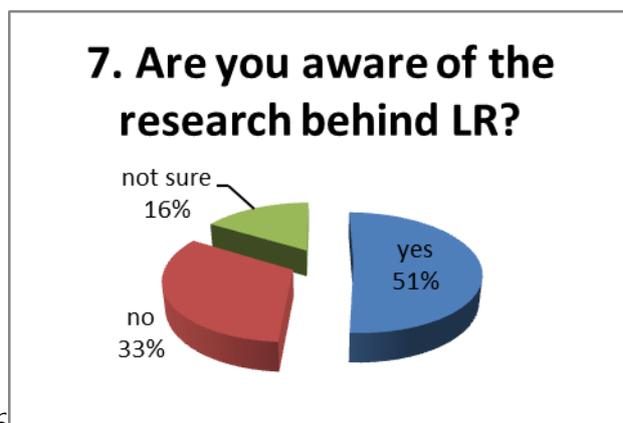
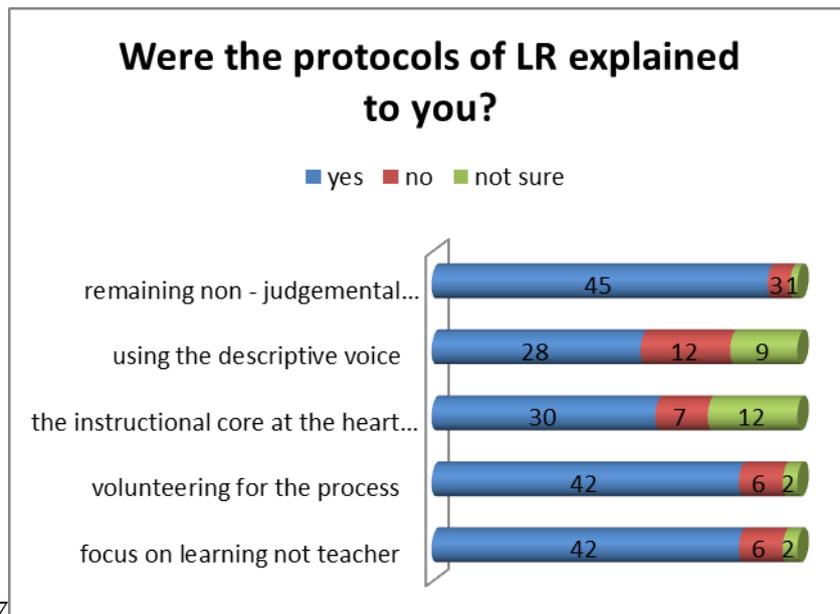


Chart 6

In addressing rq 2a: Is there awareness of the theory and protocols of Learning Rounds? This issue is one that is likely to be raised in briefing meetings prior to the process being carried out. Responses suggest a significant majority (82%) do take part in a briefing beforehand, but this leaves a remaining 18% not having had this opportunity. What is shared in these briefings cannot be assumed, but it is clear that it is unlikely to be the theory or background to the process, with only 50% reporting awareness of the research behind the process.

Questions 8 & 9: theory and practice: protocols

Survey question 8 attempted to reveal an understanding of what level of awareness of the protocols currently exists and responses are illustrated in chart 5. How far this awareness carries over into practice (rq 2b) is shown in chart 7:



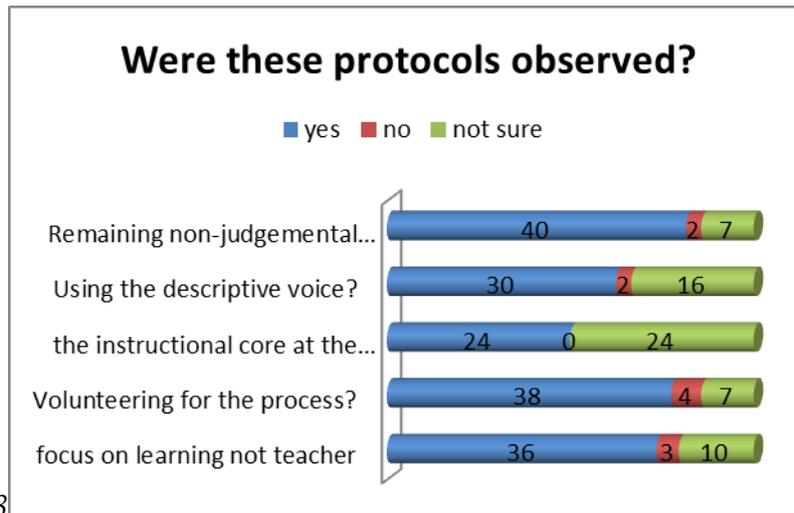


Chart 8

Question 9 addresses how far the Learning Rounds experienced has enhanced aspects of professional learning at three different levels amongst the participants. Further elaboration can be found in chart 9:

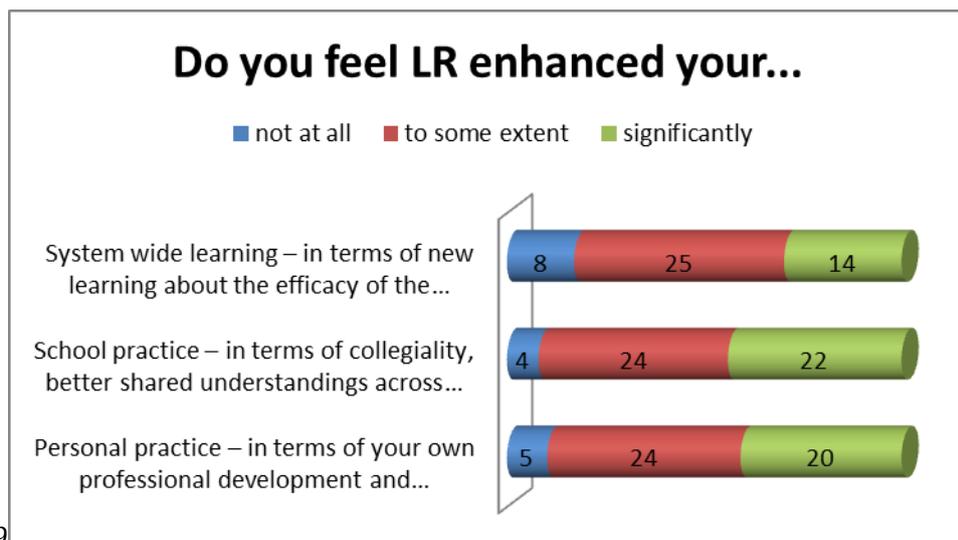


Chart 9

Qualitative data provided a more detailed picture of how learning may have been enhanced as described above. The data were coded and are presented in figure 4 below. Frequently recurring words, phrases or ideas emerged and converged around ideas as follows:

- Self improvement; a focus on improving personal practice
- Collecting tips, ideas and strategies from other practitioners

- A greater understanding of teaching and learning processes or reference to pedagogy
- Valuing the learning gained by observation of the specified area of focus, e.g. sharing learning intentions
- Valuing the opportunity to discuss practice with colleagues
- Valuing the wider whole school improvement focus
- Seeing system –wide benefits
- Limited or no enhancement to learning

codes	Responses :total participants <i>n</i> =50	Examples
Self - improvement	11 or 22%	<i>"I felt I have observed learning in ways that can be utilised in my own classroom."</i> <i>"more aware of my own practice and how I engage pupils in my classroom"</i>
Gaining tips and strategies	9 or 18%	<i>"It gave me some excellent ideas"</i> <i>"Good ideas"</i>
Enhanced understanding of learning or teaching	8 or 16%	<i>" It has also been extremely useful in terms of my understanding of how students learn"</i> <i>"enhanced understanding of learning at different levels"</i>
Learning through focus on an aspect of practice	5 or 10%	<i>"More focussed on the learning and not the content"</i> <i>"prompted me to remain focused with sharing learning intentions and success criteria"</i>

Through discussion and working with colleagues	7 or 14%	<i>"It was a good chance for colleagues to talk specifically about learning and teaching." "Discussion with colleagues"</i>
Learning in terms of whole school practice	6 or 12%	<i>"feeling part of a wider community, even as part of a school, not simply a department; this process reinforces the whole-school approach" "feeling part of a wider community, even as part of a school, not simply a department"</i>
Learning at system-wide level	2 or 4%	<i>"I have learned another strategy to assist schools to improve" "It was good to have colleagues from other schools and sectors involved in the process as they brought new insights."</i>
Limited or no learning	4 or 8%	<i>"the process was of little benefit to my learning" "It allowed discussion on L&T strategies that were considered effective. But only in a limited way."</i>

Fig. 4

Recorded Discussions

All four discussions were recorded as they happened, then were transcribed and analysed using the same thematic coding approach. This set of data gave an insight into how participants engaged with the discussion part of the process, and the discussions were recorded in their entirety and fully transcribed. In two cases 8 people took part in discussions and in the remaining 2 the number was greater although one recording was made

without the researcher being present so the actual number is not known. What is presented here is a picture of the codes which emerged from the discussions with a focus on ones which were common to all of them.

School A was the least experienced with the process, and not surprisingly this was reflected in comments made relating to procedural issues.

Participant d expresses this: "...we've not actually got someone who's done it before so we're a bit working in the dark here," and participant a also refers to lack of experience: "obviously we've never done it before; this is where the advice of x would be helpful." There was also some concern over the method of recording the observations which was shared with participants in school c: (school c, participants e, f and c)

"...but do we mention the primary – secondary divide?"

"I don't think that was part of the aim"

"I don't think it was"

The same issue of identifying which observations were made in which class featured in school a's discussion: "what I was meaning was the headings – awareness of learning purpose....what was our view of that, rather than isolating each class?"

All the schools involved commented on the procedural issue of timing of the observations and made reference to the fact that this left them with an incomplete picture: (school d, participant e) "I think that comes down to the fact that sometimes you only seen half of a lesson," and school b (participant d): "that was the problem of coming in halfway through....you weren't sure of what the learning intention was and things like that," participant a, school c attempts to articulate the problem for the feedback to staff: "so shall we say

something along the lines of...in lessons, in a few lessons where we viewed a complete lesson.....where whole lessons were observed?"

The problem described above sometimes gave rise to speculation or speculative comments such as (school b participant c) "I was in at the start so that's possibly why I saw those." And speculative comments arose more generally from all the discussions, for example, participant g, school b: "I said that earlier, yeh I said there would be a significant proportion disengaged" and school c, participant c: "it's fine to start them off on the lesson but you can guarantee that about 80%, 90% of them will not refer back to it (the learning intention) unless you actually say to them to check." School a, participant e: "it wasn't clear what their previous knowledge was, my own assumption was that there was maybe too much, too many different things in the one activity..."

Judgement words and evaluative comments featured in all the discussions; what follows is a sample from each. School a: "... high quality activities!" "... that activity was very carefully thought out" "I thought that was really clever" "...that was a wee bit concerning," School b: "I thought it was good enrichment;" "I thought it was a really good strategy;" "I liked it;" "I thought that's brilliant." They occurred with slightly less frequency in schools c and d but were present nonetheless: "...what was good in maths...;" "No I think it's good because in my opinion people should be reflecting daily on what you've done;" "Good pupil teacher relationships;" "It was clear to me in the 4 lessons I saw that behaviour was managed very quietly and very efficiently."

There was variance in the description of the observations across and within each school, with both evidence based description and non – evidentiary comments occurring in all:

In school a, participant f describes something she saw in very broad terms with no specific evidence to explain what she means: "it was very active, there was lots of things happening...lots of incidental learning happening, but the children were engaged, nobody was isolated and they were very happy and very content." And later the same participant gives more specific description on an observation: "one of the class had differentiated learning intentions and success criteria that changed, they would be the same for one or two then they'd move on to something else and the teacher would change it...there was little whiteboards so they'd be working within wee groups and with the success criteria ...a couple of times it would be wiped off and a new success criteria would be put up." In school c there were quite frequent reminders about the need for evidence in the feedback; "you can't really count that as evidence;" and, "we can't make a statement that it did happen, we have to be factual." In the context of a discussion about peer assessment descriptive evidence is given: "we walked in and there were sentences on the board and they hadn't been given their homework back...and there was mistakes on the board and they had to say... they knew how many mistakes in each sentence, and the pupils were identifying the mistakes..." but there were non - evidentiary comments which did not give detailed description such as; "I do agree with the fact that with the younger classes there certainly was a lot more repetition and reinforcing what was happening." And in school d: "we saw plenty of encouragement of individual pupils in most classes."

Concerns over negative-sounding comments also emerged from the discussions. Participants in school d frequently made reference to "sounding negative," or "well that's a negative so should we say...." and also in school a; "this is not a criticism" and school c there was evidence of concern

over how feedback might be interpreted: “it’s hard because I don’t want people to think they should be doing that in every lesson.”

Having set out the findings I will now discuss them in greater detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

I will now examine the findings of the previous chapter in detail and in the same terms as set out previously: starting with the findings from the survey, then focussing more closely on each of the main themes emerging from the qualitative data as a whole, framing this within the context of the research questions and cross referencing to the literature as appropriate.

The broad landscape: the basic protocols

It is understood from the literature relating directly to Learning Rounds that the communities created to enact them should conform to certain features; these are learning communities, owned and led by teachers (LR Toolkit, 2010) where pre-existing hierarchical relationships within the groups or networks are dissolved in favour of a more equitable 'working together in a shared practice' approach. A conflict with this underlying principle is evident, therefore, when we consider that responses to the survey tell us leadership of the process has belonged significantly (61%; see chart 1, p33) to promoted members of staff: principal teacher, faculty head, or head teacher. In a similar vein, participation in the Learning Rounds process is officially voluntary. Looking at motivation for taking part in the process however, the survey reveals that 16% of participants did not volunteer (see figure 3, p34). If leadership of the process belongs significantly to those already in promoted posts and participation is mandated, it is difficult so see how some of the features mentioned above can occur. This conforms neither to the Learning Rounds model of participation (City et al, 2009), nor to the Wenger model of participation; both of which view enforced participation as undesirable (Wenger et al. 2002) These responses also begin to give an

indication in relation to rq 2 that divergence from the protocols is becoming evident, even at these basic levels of structure and participation.

There is further tension emerging when we consider the motivations for taking part.

The predominant motivation for participants wanting to take part in a learning round is in order to observe the practice of others (46%); 16% of participants view the process as a means of gaining tips and strategies for their own teaching; 12% were motivated by a wider perspective than their own classroom setting; Only 4% were motivated by the idea of working collaboratively with colleagues.

What is significant here is the focus on personal gain, whether through observation of others of gaining tips and strategies. Supporting comments from recorded discussions such as "I'm always thinking about how I could take things to science," and "I could definitely see that working in my class" (school b) reinforce this. The wider dimension of "supporting systems of instructional improvement, not just isolated pockets of good teaching in the midst of mediocrity" (City et al, 2009 p5) seems to have been eclipsed by the desire for self-improvement.

When the overall picture of learning gain at the three levels of personal, school-wide (collegiate) or system-wide is considered (see chart 9, p39) the dominant measure across all three domains is "to some extent." Values for these responses paradoxically do not match with the qualitative responses to the question asking respondents to elaborate in what way this might have happened. The majority perspective in the qualitative responses (40%) shows that Learning Rounds enhance learning in personal terms: either

through observations of practice generally or by gaining tips and strategies. A smaller proportion of responses made reference to the wider aspect of enhanced understanding of learning and/or teaching (16%). Responses reflecting learning gain beyond the personal dimension through discussion or working with colleagues and the whole-school perspective amounted to 26%. 8% of responses reported limited or no learning gain and 4% of responses reported learning at system-wide level. This could be because it may be more difficult to articulate what system-wide improvement looks like, but looking at the data as a whole there seems to be stronger suggestions pointing to a bias towards seeing the process primarily as a means of personal improvement. The diagram below (*figure 5*) illustrates how the coded data collectively feed into the wider theme of personal professional improvement.

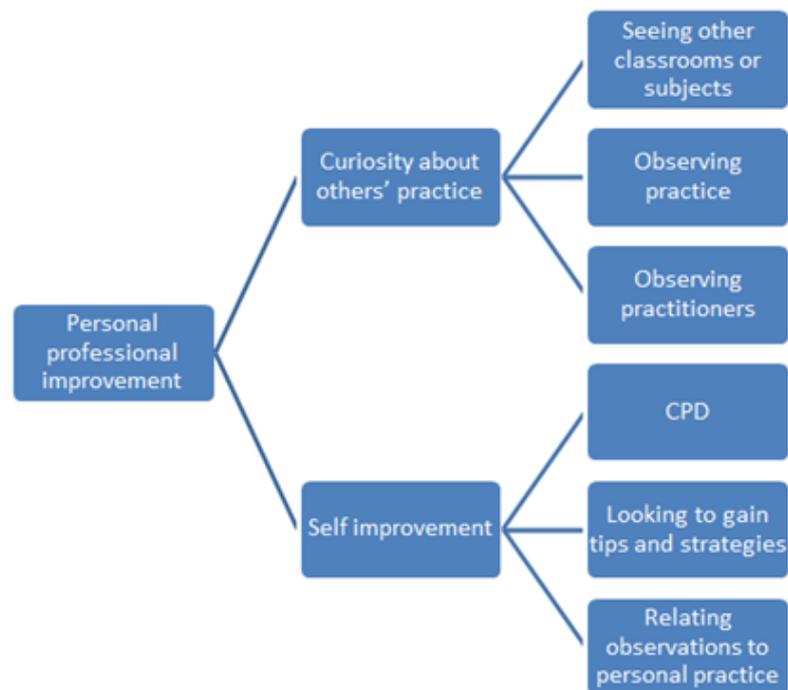


Fig. 5: Theme 1

There are two problems with this. Firstly, as the literature has illustrated, Learning Rounds are a collaborative and not an individual activity, and

although as City et al. (2009) maintain, individual learning is good for individuals and should not be discouraged, Learning Rounds are not generally deployed only to benefit individual learning, or solve a problem for individual teachers. Rather they are more concerned with evening out “the variability of student learning across classrooms” (City et al, 2009, p.127). So although personal gain from the process is an accepted benefit, the fact that wider collective benefits do not appear to feature or be valued to the same extent could indicate either a lack of understanding of the process, the aims of the process, or a disconnect (rq 2a and 2b) between theory and implementation. Secondly, again with reference to the literature Jackson and Temperley (unpublished) suggest, the benefits of collaborative CPD can be amplified when allowed to operate beyond the personal, or intra-school domain; Atkins et al,(2009) also make claims of the positive interplay between school – based learning and networked, or beyond–school learning. If inter-school networking is actually be a necessary condition for the most effective professional learning at individual and intra-school level, then moving beyond the level of personal professional improvement through Learning Rounds is a must.

A closer look at procedural concerns

As a collaborative practice, Learning Rounds pays a lot of attention to behaviours and protocols inside the community enacting the process. This has been identified in the literature as a potential area of significance for professional learning communities more widely (Nelson and Slavit, 2007), with suggestions that the capacity to engage with the collaborative process and network practices (Trotman, 2009) is not an inbuilt skill bestowed upon all educators as they enter the profession, but rather one that needs development. In this respect, Learning Rounds stands out as a collaborative

practice which does elaborate a “set of protocols and processes for observing, analysing discussing and understanding instruction that can be used to improve student learning at scale (City et al, 2009, p.3).

To varying degrees in the recorded discussions, participants expressed awareness of certain procedures, but also some uncertainty over actions to take, especially in relation to feeding back the collated evidence to their colleagues. Given that the schools taking part in this study had varying degrees of experience with the process, this may not be surprising, but uncertainty featured across every discussion and when considered in relation to what we already know about awareness of protocols this merits further elaboration. Comments relating to the actual engagement with the process occurred across three of the four discussions. For school a, many of these focussed on the lack of experience with the process: “we’ve never done this before, this is where x’s advice would be helpful” and “we’ve not got someone who’s actually done this before so we’re a bit working in the dark here.” The uncertainty was not restricted to inexperienced schools, however. In school c uncertainty over identifying people involved was apparent: “I don’t know how to word it without either identifying an individual or making people feel like they’re not doing it, just, you know, more specific, you know, you’re giving a specific point of one person doing it...” And although in school b a participant mentioned “I don’t want to talk about that person” all five observed colleagues had been named in the course of the discussion.

The tone of the feedback was a concern for many of the participants. In school d many (n=9) comments were qualified in the discussion with phrases such as “we actually put, but it’s not a negative thing, we only saw one type of questions: ” “But again you have to be careful not to put it in a negative

way” and “Can I just say I don’t think that was a criticism.” Concern over how the feedback would be understood featured also in school d’s discussion: “I think what I was trying to say when I said I didn’t want judgment was I didn’t want secondary staff to take any sort of offence.” As well as operating well and truly within the “land of nice” (City et al, 2009; p 76), all of these show varying degrees of awareness of the procedures involved in the practice of Learning Rounds, and reflect uncertainty or concern with them, so the over-arching theme of procedural concerns emerged from this cluster of repeated codes.

Some of the codes inevitably overlap; some were understandably concerned with process and carrying out the discussion, especially school a, which was pioneering the process in the local authority. Some pointed towards a concern about how feedback to staff would be interpreted. This cluster of codes can possibly reveal more to help understanding of rq 2a and 2b, and it is illustrated in diagrammatic form below (*figure 6*).

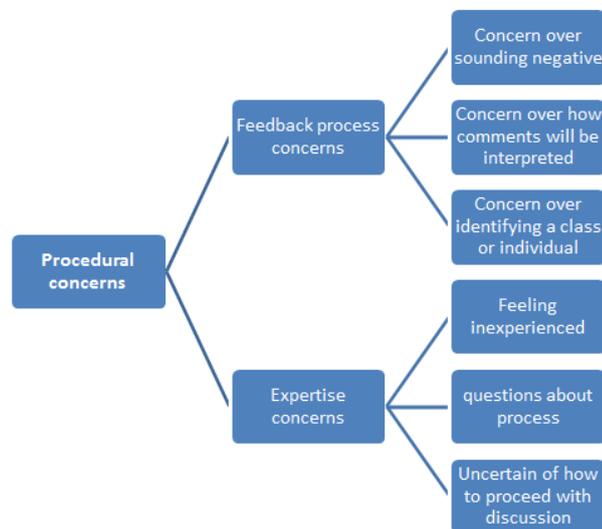


Fig. 6: Theme 2

A closer look at the protocols

The issue of protocols, how they are understood and implemented is proving to be an interesting one. Protocols provide a means of engagement with the collaborative process (Nelson and Slavit, 2007), and as Trotman (2009) identified, a lack of attention to what goes on in collaborative practice and assumptions made about participants' capacity to engage with it can have an impact on the effectiveness of the community or network. It is interesting to look at survey responses to shed some light on what is going on in Learning Rounds in broad terms. The degree of insistence on protocols in Learning Rounds is one of its distinguishing features when compared to other models of learning communities. Establishing awareness of them is one of the general aims of this study, as expressed in rq 2a and rq 2b. In terms of how far protocols were explained to respondents, the non-judgemental aspect of protocol was the most widely explained at 90% (See chart 7, p38). However, remaining non-judgmental requires the use of the descriptive voice, but far fewer respondents (56%) indicated awareness of this protocol. More (84%) had awareness of the requirement to focus on the learning taking place, not on the teacher. When putting this into practice however, these values decreased quite significantly - to 80%, 30% and 72% respectively (see chart 8, p39). It is clear then, that protocols are mostly or partly being explained, but even when participants acknowledge this, they are not enacting them in practice. This informs rq 2a and rq 2b and could clearly be classified as a theory into practice failure, and this will be explored in more detail in the following section.

Classes and teachers are anonymised in Learning Rounds to encourage observers to focus not on the teacher but on the causal relationship between instructional practice and student learning. To name them would reduce the

process to a matter of...”taste or style, having little, or no consequence for student learning, trivialising “the importance of teachers’ practice and its cumulative effect on student learning,” (City et al, 2009, p.160). One example of a comment made in discussions indicated that participants were more concerned with personality and staff “taking offence” (school c) if comments were made which led to identification of a particular setting being possible. Further to this, many comments in school d’s discussion were prefaced with comments such as “this is not intended as a criticism” or “it’s not a negative thing...” suggesting that there is a concern over appearing critical, or over how feedback will be accepted. Essentially these comments illustrate the significant challenge educators face when having to go “beyond the land of nice, ” (City et al, 2009, p.76) and also highlight a potential misunderstanding of the need to separate the person from the practice they are observing, which links back to the concern over identifying(or not) people involved in order to minimise anticipated sensitivities. In addition to this it also belies a tendency to ignore the causal relationship between what the teacher does (not who the teacher is) and what consequently constitutes a good result in the classroom (City et al, 2009) .There is perhaps a need for a reculturing of the observation process here; it could be possible that teachers are so conditioned in experiencing observations in an evaluative way through existing quality improvement procedures at school, authority or national level that they need to spend much more time familiarising themselves with the processes involved in this particular protocol. Whatever the reason, there is a disconnect between the suggested protocols of observing and feeding back; of engaging in discussion and of separating teacher from teaching and what is happening in practice.

Language conflict

Across all four of the discussions judgement words and phrases in the context of describing practice, such as: "I thought that was a brilliant way of doing it" (school b); "what was good in maths..." (school b); "I've written down on that one then quality of the questioning, actually, some challenging questions, yeah, really good questioning.." and "it was hard to form an opinion on that" (school a); were all notable for the frequency of their occurrence. There was some awareness expressed by a much smaller number of participants of what language is appropriate in these discussions, such as this participant from school a: " I was impressed by that ...am I allowed to say impressed? But I was. "

The issue of using judgmental language did feature in two of the discussions; a small number of exchanges centred around the apparent tension some participants were experiencing between judgment and observation: "you're not judging, you're merely stating a fact" (school c), and "I think what we're doing here is we're seeing some as being negative – it's not negative it's just a statement of fact ... in some classes we saw that in others we didn't. It doesn't mean it's a bad thing" (school d); in spite of this judgmental language persisted in all the discussions.

In attempting to justify observations made, many participants again, across all the discussions speculated about why certain things might be happening, instead of using the descriptive voice to describe what they were actually seeing. In relation to describing a starter task a participant in school b describes something that isn't happening: "I think they could take too long if you made it too hard a task...." and in school a the participant imagines a reason as coming from a previous lesson in the observation she is making: "they hadn't had enough opportunity to just experiment with things in a

previous lesson and I think that's where the confusion was coming from." Continuing the language theme there were frequent observations made in all four discussions which did not describe practice in an evidentiary way as illustrated by the following quotes: "she was pitching questions appropriately;" (school d) "there's an opportunity to work at their own increased pace;" (school b) "it was right in front of your eyes the level of differentiation;" (school a) "there was a lot of competition" (school b). All of these quotes reflect a conflict with language protocols of remaining non-judgmental and using the descriptive voice to provide evidenced based feedback in the process and so the overarching theme which binds them together emerged as "language conflict" as illustrated below-figure 7. Further investigation of this will follow.

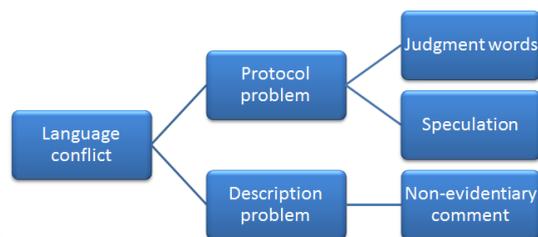


Fig. 7: Theme 3

Being non-judgmental was the most widely understood of the Learning Rounds protocols discussed in this study, and also the most consistently carried out in practice, according to the survey (see charts 6 & 7:p37, 38)). It was surprising, then, when looking at the data from the recorded discussions that judgment words or phrases occurred in all four discussions, sometimes frequently, sometimes very frequently.

"In a couple of classes I was really impressed with the likes of children taking ownership of their learning and leading from within groups" (school a).

“I would say I saw good examples of teacher personality and effective use of humour. There’s obviously a relationship, pupil teacher relationships are very, very strong and being used. I thought one good example was being used to gee-up a pupil and encourage a pupil to take part and I thought that was very effectively done as well and that all homes in on the pupil-teacher relationship which I thought in all classes it was very, very strong, “ (school d);

“It was just good. I really enjoyed it” (school b).

This is obviously seriously at odds with the principle of remaining non-judgmental through the process, in spite of the fact, as discussed before, there is acknowledgement of the idea. Compounding this problem, there were also many instances where using the descriptive voice to describe what was being seen seemed also to challenge all the discussion groups. The descriptive voice is closely allied to remaining non-judgmental in the process. Descriptive evidence is one of the non-negotiables in Learning Rounds terms. It is the key to success of the process and is the core practice upon which it is based. (City et al, 2009) It supports the discipline of observation in allowing participants in the process to share a common language and understanding to describe the causal relationship between teaching and learning (City et al, 2009) so with only 30% of the survey respondents acknowledging its use in practice, the frequency of judgment words and also speculative phrases could be explained. Speculation occurred in all four discussions with participants either guessing, assuming, or extrapolating backwards or forwards to explain the reason for something they observed, e.g.:

“In their minds they knew there should have been a link but they were confused over what kinds of questions to use” (school a)

“I’m assuming those books are their own choice or possibly guided by the teacher towards their level” (school b)

“But I think that comes down to the fact that sometimes you only seen half of a lesson” (school d).

Unsurprisingly, this also points to the fact that statements were being made in the discussion which were not backed up by evidence or description. The need for descriptive evidence in this process should now be apparent. It is what participants use to construct their shared knowledge and vision of what effective instructional practice looks like (City et al, 2009, p10) and as Nelson and Slavit (2007) similarly suggest, it can provide a language for educators around which to build their beliefs about teaching and learning and construct their vision for high quality instruction. Lack of it disables the whole process, and although there are examples of descriptive evidence in the discussions, they are outweighed by comments which conflict entirely with this language protocol in terms of using judgements and non-evidentiary statements, such as all of the above. It would appear then, that in practice there is a significant language protocol conflict which informs the research questions and might point to a lack of understanding, both in theory and in practice of this part of the process.

Summary of conclusions

It would appear from these findings that discrepancies occur between what is intended in Learning Rounds as indicated by the theory, and what is happening in practice in schools. In the following concluding chapter I will explore these discrepancies in a little more detail and summarise this study with some reflections and recommendations.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to establish insights into a process for collaborative teacher CPD which has recently been imported into Scotland and has taken root in many schools and local authorities, and about which there is little research at the time of writing. It sought to locate the practice within the wider body of literature on collaborative CPD and in particular on professional learning communities and compare the practice as a theoretical model with other models of this type. This question is addressed by the literature review. Further to this it sought to examine the relationship between the theory and the practice of Learning Rounds and the summary of its principal findings are set out in relation to the research questions below

1. To what extent does the practice of Learning Rounds in Scottish schools relate to the theory and protocols behind it?
 - a. Is there awareness of the theory and protocols of learning rounds?

There are paradoxes in the awareness of the theory and protocols of Learning Rounds. Participants are being briefed about the process but only half are aware of the research behind the model. Awareness relating to protocols of taking part (volunteering) does not translate in the same terms into volunteering for the process in practice. The observational protocol of remaining non-judgmental during the process is considerably greater than awareness of the other protocol upon which the observation is dependent, i.e. using the descriptive voice. In a similar paradox, awareness of the protocol of focussing on

the learning, not the teacher, is greater than awareness of the instructional core at the heart of the process which provides the framework linking instruction, task and learning to be observed, and shifting the focus onto the learning process.

b. To what extent are they understood and enacted in practice?

Evidence from this study suggests that Learning Rounds protocols are largely not being enacted in practice. There are varying degrees of engagement with them across schools either with some experience or no experience of the process. In terms of participation, there is evidence to suggest that a significant proportion of participants do not volunteer for the process and that the process is being mostly led by staff in promoted positions, raising questions about how far this can be a teacher- owned and teacher- led process. The process is also being understood primarily by participants as a means for personal professional improvement and very little as a collective or system –wide process for improvement. The most significant divergence from protocols however is with language being used in the process. Although participants acknowledge the non-judgmental protocol, they have difficulty either understanding and/or using the tool which is designed to help them achieve this: the descriptive voice. Without a coherent, shared evidence base from which to proceed, the formulation of the next steps in the improvement process in the terms of theories of action will be problematic. There is consistent evidence to suggest that they have difficulty with this in practice and use language in the discussions which is loaded with evaluative judgement, even when they believe themselves not to be doing so.

From this it can be concluded that the theory of Learning Rounds is not adequately understood and the basic protocols associated with it are not

being enacted in practice. As such, the resultant benefits of school and even system-wide improvement as claimed in the literature cannot be guaranteed.

Critical reflections

At the outset of this study, my inexperience as a researcher distorted my estimation of what may be achievable within the scope and permitted length of this write-up. On reflection, and with the knowledge I have gained in both the processes of Learning Rounds and educational research, I would limit it to a closer focus on one or two specific aspects of the practice, such as use of language, or ways of participating, and construct more searching questions on these specific themes. I would use similar tools, but attempt to gather survey responses ahead of the rest of the research process, as this gave a good indication of broad understandings, which could be investigated more deeply in interviews. I believe the non-participative discussions provided rich, authentic, representative data, and I would repeat this exercise in a similar way, perhaps with different stages of the Learning Rounds process, for example looking at the theory of action stage where feedback to the whole school is given and next steps identified.

Implications and recommendations

This study did not seek to examine the effectiveness of the process of Learning Rounds or to construct a hypothesis built around the relationship between the deployment of protocols and the potential benefits to teachers or learners of the Learning Rounds process. These would be rich and interesting areas of potential further study for the academic community to consider, as well as an examination of how Learning Rounds work in different contexts, e.g. higher or further education; or the challenges educators appear to face in

remaining non-judgmental in the observation process. Instead, it looked only in a limited way at the relationship between the theory and practice of Learning Rounds as a collaborative CPD activity in the context of other models of collaborative CPD, and the relationship between the theory and practice of the process itself. As such it makes no claims about the impact of the process on learning of students or of teachers, or the effectiveness linked to enactment of or engagement with the recommended protocols. However, conversely, on the basis of findings in this study, I believe it is fair to suggest that if insufficient attention is given to the protocols and processes involved, then the chances of realising any of the claimed benefits i.e. school improvement and stronger collegial relationships (City et al, 2009) will be impeded. For school and authority leaders, attention to protocols is likely to ensure that Learning Rounds do not become corrupted into yet another means by which deficiencies in classroom practice are identified and deficient teachers are “fixed” (City et al. 2009). Leaders of Learning Rounds and all interested educators would do well to familiarise themselves in greater detail than occurs at present with the basic protocols like, for example the descriptive voice. Preparation with colleagues through discussion and perhaps, in this example, rehearsing the use of it - with each other or with videoed observations, may help to ensure shared understanding and a common language with which they can identify high quality teaching and learning to take them to the next stage in the improvement process.

A final thought

Although this study has established that there is a disconnect between the theory and the practice of Learning Rounds, there is undoubtedly much enthusiasm among the wider community of educators in Scotland for it, and I am mindful, as its author, not to detract from this. I hope instead that

interested educators might benefit from the insights and recommendations it offers and that it will serve to support them in their engagement with the practice.

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Appendix 1:

Participant Information Sheet

Name of department: Professional Studies in Education

Title of the study: To what extent is the practice of Learning Rounds in the Scottish schools consistent with the theories of professional learning communities?

Introduction

My name is Catriona Oates, I am a former teacher, national CPD adviser and now post graduate student at the University of Strathclyde. I am conducting this investigation as a research project for my final M.Ed dissertation.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The purpose of this investigation is to find out more about the practice of Learning Rounds. Learning Rounds are gaining in popularity across many local authorities in Scotland and because it is a fairly new, innovative and collaborative CPD practice, the main aims of this study are:

- to undertake a closer examination of Learning Rounds as a collaborative CPD practice or opportunity
- to ascertain the extent to which the practice of learning rounds in Scottish schools is consistent with the model in the literature.
- to identify any limitations of this model.

Do you have to take part?

It is entirely your decision whether or not to take part in this small scale investigation. If you decide to take part and later change your mind you can withdraw without worrying about any consequences.

What will you do in the project?

If you agree to take part, this is what will happen.

You will be asked to complete a short online questionnaire.

You will be invited to meet with me for an interview about Learning Rounds which will be recorded. The interview will take place in your school and will last no longer than half an hour.

You will be observed taking part in a post –Learning Rounds group discussion which will be videoed.

No payments will be made for taking part in this investigation.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been chosen because your school has had experience of Learning Rounds and is planning to carry one out soon. This information was shared by a senior manager in your school through the CPDNetwork. If you have indicated that you are going to take part in the Learning Round in your school this identifies you as a potential participant in the investigation.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

It is necessary to ask for a small time commitment from you to take part in this investigation over an above the normal requirements of a Learning Round. This will be roughly 20

minutes maximum to complete the questionnaire and 30 minutes for the interview. The observation will be recorded as part of the programme of Learning Round. There will be no risks incurred in the process and no other demands on your time will be made.

What happens to the information in the project?

The data collected will be collated and analysed using coding methods and published electronically in a dissertation. It will be destroyed after publication. All authorities, schools and participants will be anonymised and pseudonyms used.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here.

What happens next?

If you are happy to be involved in the project, you will be asked to sign a consent form to confirm this.

If you do not wish to be involved then thank you for your interest so far..

Once the data from all participants has been gathered, analysed and written up, a debriefing session will be held in your school for anyone interested to attend. Attending this session is entirely voluntary and does not count as a part of the investigation. Once complete, a synopsis of the project will be made available electronically via my blog and the Edonis online community of educator-researchers. Contact me for further information if required

Researcher Contact Details:

Please don't hesitate to contact me should you require any further information

Catriona Oates

Catriona.oates@strath.ac.uk OR catrionaotes@gmail.com

Mobile:07941 154534

Chief Investigator Details:

Carey Philpott, senior lecturer

University of Strathclyde

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Southbrae Drive

Glasgow G13 1PP

Carey.philpott@strath.ac.uk 0141 950 3505

Thank you for reading this information sheet

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde ethics committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee

Research & Knowledge Exchange Services

University of Strathclyde

Graham Hills Building

50 George Street

Glasgow

G1 1QE

Telephone: 0141 548 3707

Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form

Name of department:

Title of the study:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.
- I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time.
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available.
- I consent to being a participant in the project
- I consent to being audio and video recorded as part of the project [delete which is not being used] Yes/ No

(PRINT NAME)	Hereby agree to take part in the above project
Signature of Participant:	Date

Appendix 2

Sample transcript: school d discussion

School D discussion. LR focus – Pupil Experience

A So I think I probably should start by saying we don't want to have anyone identifiable by what they said. What's reported should always be positive.....and we have to have evidence for it .. you should be able to justify...what you have evidence for. Most of you have done this before – I'm sure it will all be good.. if anyone says the words good, wonderful, bad , we'll slap each other (laughter)

So someone like to start off? Remember if you disagree with anything please say so

B In all classes we observed development of skills for example, team work, communication, practical skills

A does everyone agree with that was there any groups that have any of that in a different column

B In all classes we saw full pupil participation

C Yes engaged pupils

B in all lessons we saw a range of questioning skills being used, we did put a little thing there where it was mainly recall and testing understanding

I would say that was in most classes) agreement)

A Should we move that to the most column?

B Yeh I would be happy to move it to most as well

D we actually put, but it's not a negative thing, we only saw one type of questions we put in no classes we saw open questions but that wasn't in a negative way it was because of the nature of the tasks

B And I would have to agree with that, because that's why we put mainly recall

A so is it in no classes you saw open questions or

B No real open questioning.. I would agree with that

E Can I just say I don't think that was a criticism... just because of the nature of the lesson

B Appropriate open questioning

B In all classes we saw appropriate questioning to the lesson it was all classes but it was the nature of the lesson as well

B In all classes we saw controlled behaviour (agreement)

B I've also got in all classes, when you ask the pupils, they were all fully aware of the task and what was expected of them they all knew what they were doing, completely.

E would say in some classes that wasn't the situation

B so put that in most

E thought it was in most classes... but it was quite easily clarified..

B 2 more we saw groupwork in all lesson (not in all lesson) so, in most

E But I think that comes down to the fact that sometimes you only seen half of a lesson

B and we saw appropriate use of ICT in all classes

E Very good use of ICT

B Very good use t n happy to go with that

C I have that in some classes so
 B in most then if it's ...
 E the other ones we had for all then were students being fully engaged in their activities (I had that as well)
 B we had that in most
 E Was it that in most classes students were fully engaged or was it in all classes most students were....
 B It could be in all classes the majority of students were fully engaged
 E good classroom management was another one we got in all classes
 B yes I would agree with that
 C Active learning we felt we saw in all classes
 B we've got that in most
 A Shall we put it in most? (agreement) What sort of things do you mean by active learning?
 C Up and about and doing
 B Physically moving about the class – collect information at one point and transfer it to another part of the classroom
 C Experiments, yep
 B Also where they were going through a thinking process you could see they were having to think
 A What other things for involvement?
 D Can we say fantastic ... not allowed to say fantastic relationships
 B we've got that in most – good relationships
 A Not everyone saw it
 B Most Good pupil teacher relationships
 C we saw plenty of encouragement of individual pupils in most classes
 A all agree on that?
 B Yes - positive praise I've got that in most
 C We said that we saw plenty of challenge and extension for the pupils in most classes
 B We had that in some
 A What did the other groups think?

 D we had that for some... differentiation
 A shall we say in some classes we saw challenge and extension? Is differentiation not different from challenge and extension?
 D We I think differentiation and extension are the same thing, just opposite ends of the scale or extension is differentiation
 H meeting their needs
 B Differentiation appropriate to the learning?
 D But again you have to be careful not to put it in a negative way not to ... it wasn't that they you can't say that some ...classes at the beginning weren't into it wasn't that they weren't challenging them challenging them they were just setting the scene
 B but this is just like a snapshot
 A So maybe what we should be saying is in.... most or all challenge and extension, differentiation where needed?

A Could we take out the differentiation part and say in most classes we saw differentiation by outcome?

G I think if I was ... some classes where a whole class approach to things at which point if all the class is on the same task then you've still got the challenge in that task with a varied outcome, it can be differentiated by outcome which we saw in the whole class approach, the differentiation was there even if it wasn't different pupils doing different activities in different task it was differentiation by outcome so I would have said I saw differentiation in most classes

B we did talk about...it was mainly differentiation by outcome that we were seeing

A so shall we say most? All? Differentiation where needed in the most column?

B could we take out the differentiation we saw (challenge extension) and say differentiation by outcome?

E I think what we're doing here is we're seeing some as being negative – it's not negative it's just a statement of fact ... in some classes we saw that in others we didn't. It doesn't mean it's a bad thing

D We still wanted to say some – it wasn't a bad thing but we didn't see it even by outcome ... and maybe for the task that was relevant

A But surely that would be covered by where needed?

D : I think it's where it's appropriate

H In places where it could be it's in most or all

Agreement

A For example in the maths we seen (no no you're not allowed to mention subject!) Laughter

C we saw high expectations of work and behaviour in most classes

B yes I would agree

A How did you know that sort of happened cause that sort of a judgement?

C well in one class we went to people had behaved inappropriately with a different member of staff and it was made clear to them their standard of behaviour should be good for whatever member of staff and for their work when there was slap dash work they were encouraged to improve

A so that would be engaged in task and producing neat and tidy work (agreement)V we also had on teacher say they expected them to produce high standards.. it was said overtly wasn't it (agreement)

D and another teacher said if you don't have the necessary equipment you will not be able to get the answers you need (that's all about pupils coming prepared) that's just being honest and the pupil just accepted it, didn't challenge itand another thing you were saying about expectations again with no specific example at one point pupil came it and the teacher just had to say the name and the pupil went out no disruption

A So should be adding.....in no classes we saw lessons disrupted (agreement)

You've got that haven't you?

A it's always nice to have it in twice

G It was clear to me in the 4 lessons I saw that behaviour was managed very quietly and very efficiently. There wasn't ever a scene made If one pupil was causing a problem or an issue it was managed in a quiet way that didn't involve the rest of the class chipping in it was very efficiently done

B Effective.. positive behaviour management

J We talked about teacher personality comes through in most classes (LB we've got humour) teachers have that relationship with the children

A So teacher –pupil relationship, teacher personality?

B and use of humour ... was good?

J We've got that and specific praise for specific students

H I would say I saw good examples of teacher personality and effective use of humour. There's obviously a relationship, pupil teacher relationships are very very strong and being used.. I thought one good example was being used to gee-up a pupil and encourage a pupil to take part and I thought that was very effectively done as well and that all homes in on the pupil-teacher relationship which I thought in all classes it was very very strong

A if we need to extend it , what we've got there, tell me

H I think humour used appropriately for encouragement

D We put in most classes pupils without uniform

F I'd have said some

F In no classes there was 100% uniform

A Well that's a negative so should we say.....

B I'd have said some for the uniform... for the snapshot that we got

F no one class where everyone was in uniform

E Can I say further to that in the classes that I saw I felt they weren't being challenged about not wearing their uniform it was just being overlooked... we just asked whether it was because of the unusual situation with other teachers in your room... for consistency across the school

E :We didn't mention it at all under pupil experience.... Hear a few whisperings why have they got that on

A In most classes we saw pupils without school uniform

E That sounds like there were loads of them without it on

B Some pupils not in full school uniform yeh in most classes
(Agreement)

B In most classes we saw a visually stimulation environment...displays etc there was stimulus material in most classes that could have been used directly in the lesson

We felt in some classes there were displays that reinforced... a form of praise, showed how well the pupils had done .. in some

A So examples of outstanding pupil work (yes)... that's probably got value added judgement

G I would say in some of the classes either in whiteboard or learning walls either the learning intention or intentions were clearly visible on display the whole time I was there so they could always look at it

B We've got that for some as well

E In some classes we saw explicit LIs agreement

B I've got in some classes we saw visible LIs

E is that up there? Just say explicit LI's so it's up there and spelled out

C saw people telling the class what the LIs were but we also saw them displayed and so there's a difference

A We saw explicit LIs and we saw LIs being shared?

So the explicit LIs displayed and the im most LIs shared verbally

H I saw them being reinforced

B I've put that in some for plenary and review

H I didn't see a plenary because of the actual timetable

We we got 2 end lessons...

G I saw in most a link made to prior learning but I only in some saw a road map to future learning

B I Would agree

J I saw good use of names, behaviour management and giving instructions

D we were discussing that though and it's not a negative thing but in some classes teachers didn't know the names because they'd only just got the classes... so we couldn't really comment on that without being negative because they'd only just had them for a week

Agreement

A We've added .. there was S6s just turned up for the 1st time today

Any more

B In most classes we saw an element of personal choice for the pupils either choosing within a task or choosing a different task, in most lessons we definitely saw some form of choice

G I've got some

D we had none but not in a negative way because it was basically what we observed

B And in most classes we saw timed activities

F Prob most yep times were given

H yeah times get mentioned you have certain time to do this

B Made it a bit more structured

H We had and this is not a negative.. in some classes we saw an SLA working effectively with teacher and pupils..

A so is that where a SLA was there it was clear to us they knew the task and were working with the children. In some classes we saw AFL and peer assessment

All : In some

B Linked with that we saw co-operative learning approaches agreement

A So if I put AFL/ peer assessment

D self assessment, but not in a negative way it was just what was being asked of the kids at the time

B Do you want examples of the co-operative learning?

Yeh

B The main things were giving roles and setting groups.

A any other examples of co-operative learning?

H element of choice in working on task?

E No what we mean is just working on their own. Individual working rather than in groups

H In some we saw individualised working

G you could phrase that as in most you saw either individual or groupwork as appropriate to task rather than just some and some

B So where you've got the group work there at the top or individual as appropriate

A Should that actually be in all or just still in most?

B Well if you include the individual part it should be all

E Why don't we just make it a range of working methods in all classes

A Appropriate working... what are we saying?

H A range of pupil working methods in all classes

B Either individual or groupwork there you go

[C Leaves]

B I don't have any more

A any "no"s

B I don't have any

H Can I mention behaviour

D didn't see any confrontation..

E In no classes we saw any discipline issues at all

D we went through the list you gave us the check list ... You asked about wait time – we saw no large wait times... people gave questions pretty quickly didn't give them much time to think about it ... but it's not a negative it's just because there was no open questions

Agreement

B yes it does link to the question...

F Even when it's a closed question you can still allow wait time... if you don't allow wait time you're nudging for the answer and you're hurrying them up so even if it's a closed question you can still have wait time

E we had the rapid fire questioning

D I don't think it was in no classes then I think it was in some classes the teacher did

E I didn't think it came across as an issue... there wasn't any cases where you thought they should have waited longer there was none of that

G as an extension to that I would say that in some classes I saw targeted questions to specific pupils and in some classes it was to the class and that had a knock on effect on wait time, as without a hands up policy the pupil that was fastest with the answer, there's the answer and that takes the wait time away from pupils who, so in the classes where there were targeted questions there was more of a wait time for pupils to give the answer and when there wasn't targeted questions there wasn't the wait time to give pupils who needed therefore another pupil had gone bang there's the answer

D so there was no expectation for all pupils to get the answer

A closed and rapid response, does that cover that or... I've also said, used target pupils?

G yeh though I'd say in some it was targeted

A Is that all sensible?

E have you got in that, it was quite good we saw it was like challenges in a competitive sense

D Competition element... Yes that was good

A Some most all?
B It was highly motivating
H They did enjoy that...It was in a positive way
G Positive competition yeh
A Any other question or observations anyone would like to add?
E I would like to say that I would like to see a whole lesson from start to finish.. I feel sometimes you don't get a full picture of a less
F Why the range of subjects? It tends to be the...
A I think the only departments that haven't been observed at all are PE, music?
B Who's willing to volunteer....Is there any way it can become school policy - Become a hufty?
E Or do it with other schools
A There will be staff that haven't been involved have been music ML and....inaudible
H Could I also add to see a particular part of a lesson, to see an introduction, co-operative learning, a specific part of a lesson
A So we want specific activities
H Or a specific part of a lesson, the instructional lesson
Bell goes
E There is technology in the school that you'd like to become aware of, sharing becoming aware of thingsIt generates that opportunities for training. Can I also add in no classes did we see pupils using their planners if it could be something that could be established in primary school it could become good practice
B Could that be in all the lesson we saw there wasn't homework set? No reason for the planners to be out
A I've added use of planners effectively
B I get annoyed about it as well they've never got them.