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A closer look at the practice and impact of “rounds”

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ABSTRACT

A practice that is gaining momentum in many countries in the world is “Rounds,” also known as Teacher Rounds, Instructional Rounds, or Education Rounds. Rounds engage educators in communities of practice, engender critical reflection, and support mutual learning. However, though promising as a way to focus learning in, from, and about teaching practice, Rounds has been the subject of comparatively little theoretical analysis or empirical study. It seems timely then to look at this emerging practice. This special issue delves into the conceptualization and practice of Rounds in the U.S., U.K., and Australia by theorizing around the idea, providing portraits of implementation, and sharing research that has emerged from enactments of Rounds with both pre-service and in-service teachers.

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1. Quality teachers: The holy grail of education

In the upcoming *International Handbook of Teacher Education* (Loughran & Hamilton, Eds.), [Kosnik, Beck, and Goodwin \(forthcoming\)](#) take a look at teacher education reform on an international scale. Their review offers insight into the wide range of activities taking place around the world in countries that represent all levels of development and a diversity of economies, cultures, governments, histories, etc. It seems that there are few nations that remain unconcerned about educational improvement, especially in terms of teacher quality – what it means, how to attain it, how to keep it – and most are proposing or adopting a range of initiatives, policies, programs, legislation, and practices. This is not surprising in the wake of multiple international assessments, such as PISA and PIRLS, that offer countries one (possible) type of metric to measure themselves against their global neighbors, and research that increasingly points to strong teachers as key to student achievement and performance ([Buchberger, Campos, Kallos, & Stephenson, 2000](#); [Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2013](#); [Darling-Hammond, 2000](#); [Hattie, 2003](#); [International Alliance of Leading Education Institutes, 2008](#); [International Reading Association, 2008](#)). While it is hard to summarize in a simple statement or two the myriad reform efforts focusing on teacher quality, countries as diverse as Poland, Singapore, and China, seem invested in professionalizing teaching and consequently, are re-thinking professional development for teachers so as to support collaborative learning among them, mentoring and induction programs, teacher research and leadership, teacher observation, and reflective practice ([CIEB, July 14, 2014](#); [National Institute of Education, 2009](#); [Zhao & Zhu, 2006](#)). These efforts all aim to promote and develop teachers as efficacious, thoughtful professionals who are engaged in learning communities where they examine and learn from classroom practice,

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both their own as well as the practice of their peers. Examples of such efforts that are gaining in popularity and finding widespread implementation include lesson study, (e.g. Lee & Ling, 2013; Perry & Lewis, 2009), professional learning communities (e.g. DuFour, 2004; Lieberman & Miller, 2008), action research and teacher inquiry teams (e.g. Hughes, Kerr, & Ooms, 2005; Nelson, Deuel, Slavit, & Kennedy, 2010), and teacher-to-teacher mentoring and induction programs. One strategy that is gaining momentum in the U.S. as a promising practice, and is gradually gaining traction elsewhere in the world is “Rounds,” alternatively called – among other names – Teacher Rounds, Instructional Rounds, or Education Rounds. Similar to the practices listed earlier, such as lesson study, Rounds¹ engage educators in communities of practice, engender critical reflection, and support mutual learning among practitioners (Allen, Roegman, & Hatch, 2015; Chew, 2013; City, 2011; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Del Prete, 2013). It is also, potentially “one of the most valuable tools that a school or district can use to enhance teachers’ pedagogical skills and develop a culture of collaboration” (Marzano, 2011, p. 80). It seems timely then to look more closely at this emerging practice—how it is being conceptualized and practiced on three different continents.

2. The practice of rounds in teacher education

The practice of Rounds where physicians visit and discuss the cases of individual patients, is “planted deeply in the pedagogical roots of medical education” (Chew, 2013, p. 18) as a way to make the process of diagnosis and treatment transparent and open to discussion and examination. Rounds engage cross sections of medical personnel – doctors, interns, medical students, nurses – in collectively examining medical cases by gathering and assessing evidence through a variety of perspectives, for the purpose of addressing perplexing problems. The practice of Rounds in teacher education is more recent, an effort to adapt the medical idea in a way that similarly uncovers, and similarly engages, participants in an inquiring, clinically-based, and context-specific process of learning. To some extent, the practice comports with protocols of reflection and inquiry, which aim similarly to link teacher learning to classroom learning (e.g., Duckworth, 2006; McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2007), encourage critical reflection and deliberation, and build communities of practice (Wenger, 1998).

3. Rounds prototypes

Applied in teacher education, the practice of “Rounds” usually takes place in a classroom, in a school, or in a related teaching-learning situation. The general purpose of the Round, who is involved in the Rounds process, how involvement is structured, how a particular Round is framed, and the protocol followed, vary somewhat depending on the particular Rounds model. The variations in use draw principally from two Rounds prototypes represented by the work of Del Prete (1990, 1997, 2010, 2013), and City et al. (2009).

3.1. Del Prete rounds model

Working with school-based colleagues, Del Prete (1990, 1997, 2010) developed a Rounds model expressly for teacher education, both pre-service and in-service. Refined over time, the model was designated “Teacher Rounds” (2013). The Teacher Rounds model has a close analogy to medical rounds in its purpose to understand and learn from teaching and learning in a specific context at a particular point in time, in its effort to make practice open and shareable, and in its integration of practice, observation, inquiry, and multiple voices and perspectives. It is supported by the literature on teacher reflection (Schon, 1983), inquiry (e.g., Duckworth, 2006; Evans, Stubbs, Duckworth, & Davis, 1981; Weinbaum et al., 2004), and collaboration (e.g., Carroll, Thomas, Fulton, & Doerr, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001).

In pre-service teacher education, Teacher Rounds typically bring together one or more practicing teachers, a group of 3–6 pre-service teacher interns, and one or more education faculty members. Practicing/experienced teachers may host a Teacher Round, both for their own purposes and to model the process for teacher interns; teacher interns host their own Teacher Rounds as well. Each Teacher Round is framed by contextual background on the students and curriculum, a teaching–learning rationale and focus, and an inquiry, usually in the form of questions regarding practice (“practice-centered inquiry”) and student learning (“learning-centered inquiry”). Following the protocol, the host of the Teacher Round explains the context and rationale, the planned learning, and the related inquiry – with participants invited to ask clarifying questions – and indicates to what extent and with what purposes in mind members of the group will observe or interact with students during the actual teaching/learning experience. The “post-round” conversation is a time for sharing and reflecting on observations relevant to the Rounds inquiry and other topics, which the host of the round (or others) may introduce in response to the teaching and learning that occurred. In the Del Prete formulation, Teacher Rounds take place within and across partner school sites, intentionally cross-fertilizing perspective and knowledge.

¹ For simplicity sake, we use the term “Rounds” to encompass the various conceptions, formats, procedures, and labels that have come to be associated with different Rounds models.

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