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Round and round: Examining teaching residents' participation in and reflections on education rounds

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ABSTRACT

In teacher preparation, the education rounds model has the potential to facilitate opportunities for preservice teachers to engage as part of a professional community and inquire into their teaching practice. This qualitative study examines the education rounds model in a graduate-level teacher residency program in New York City. We analyze how a cohort of 20 preservice teachers framed their teaching practice and reflected on opportunities for learning through education rounds. Findings suggest that the education rounds process highlighted gaps in preservice teachers' understandings of how, when, and why to use particular instructional strategies and principles. However, in most cases, education rounds supported the development of tools to study teaching in and with a community of learners.

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1. Introduction

Across international borders, high-quality teacher preparation is a shared and mutual desire for national leaders and educators. Since 2011, the International Summit on the Teaching Profession has brought together representatives of more than 20 countries to exchange best innovations, challenges, and strategies needed for designing new approaches for teacher preparation in the 21st century (Goodwin, 2014; Stewart, 2012). Within this context, policy makers and educational organizations have called for clinically based approaches to teacher preparation that “are fully grounded in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses” (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010, p. 1). In the U.S., these calls have been echoed by federal and state agencies (NRC, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2009; New York State Department of Education, 2011), and have been accompanied by a barrage of recommended practices that support clinically based teacher preparation (e.g., NCATE, 2010; Watts & Levine, 2010).

One recommended practice to support clinically based teacher preparation—designed as supervised observations involving preservice teachers in clinical settings—is education rounds (Watts & Levine, 2010).¹ Analogous to medical rounds (Roegman & Riehl, 2012), the education rounds model in teacher preparation includes some combination of experienced

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¹ Education rounds are also called “instructional” rounds (e.g., City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Elmore, 2007) or “teacher rounds” (Del Prete, 2013). For purposes of this paper, we use “education rounds” and “rounds” synonymously.

and/or preservice teachers observing each other and investigating questions or problems of their teaching practice. Education rounds have been increasingly implemented in preservice teacher preparation programs across the United States (Del Prete, 2013) and internationally (Bowe & Gore, 2012; Gore & Bowe, in this issue). Yet despite recent interest in the model, there is little empirical research on education rounds in teacher preparation, how preservice teachers participate in education rounds, or how the process supports their learning and development as novice practitioners.

This study attempts to address these holes in the literature by examining an increasingly prevalent practice in clinically based teacher preparation. This study builds on our previous study on the implementation of education rounds in a teacher residency program (Reagan, Roegman, Goodwin, & Zuckerman, 2013). In our earlier study, we found considerable variability in the ways in which preservice teachers (known as “residents”) approached education rounds. Specifically, through participation in education rounds, some residents focused on specific teaching strategies, while others framed their teaching practice in relation to their students as learners. Furthermore, in our analyses of two residents’ reflections on rounds, we found contrasting ways in which residents investigated their teaching practice and participated in a broader professional community.

Building on these findings, this qualitative study extends this work by exploring the ways in which a cohort of 20 residents, who were enrolled in a clinically based 14-month graduate-level teacher residency program, participated in and reflected on education rounds. We look deeply at how residents framed teaching and learning when they participated in rounds and how they reflected on opportunities for learning through education rounds.

In this article, we introduce the fundamental assumptions of our work and offer a conceptual framework drawing on Feiman-Nemser’s (2001, 2012) “central tasks for teacher learning.” Next, we describe the teacher residency program, the residency program’s education rounds model and the methods of this study. We organize our findings around opportunities for preservice teachers to frame learning through rounds and conclude with a discussion offering implications of this work internationally.

2. Theoretical framework

The fundamental assumption underlying this study is that “learning to teach (and teach well) is a continuous process that gradually unfolds over time” (Cochran-Smith, Barnatt, Friedman & Pine, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2008; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, et al., 2005; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005; cited in Reagan et al., 2013, p. #4). Furthermore, we acknowledge the role of preservice teacher education is to lay a foundation for “beginning teaching and preparing novices to learn in and from their practice” (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 1016). In other words, as we have argued elsewhere, it is the role of teacher education to seed the habits of thinking and doing that are associated with good teachers and teaching, and to prepare preservice teachers for beginning competent teaching (Reagan et al., 2013).

We extend our previous work to address whether and how preservice teachers’ knowledge and habits of thinking push them to locate, contextualize, and examine their knowledge within a community of teacher learners. In doing so, we draw on Feiman-Nemser’s (2001, 2012) continuum of teacher learning. Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues that in order for schools “to produce powerful learning opportunities for students, we [as teacher educators] have to offer more powerful learning opportunities to teachers” (p. 1014). Feiman-Nemser describes these opportunities as “central tasks of teacher learning” that are unique to different phases of teaching, ranging from preservice teacher preparation through the professional development of experienced and expert teachers. Here, we focus on two central tasks of preservice teacher preparation: (1) developing a beginning repertoire; and (2) developing the tools and dispositions to study teaching. We see education rounds as one of many opportunities in clinically based preservice teacher preparation that can support the development of pedagogical strategies and the investigation and improvement of teaching practice within a broader community.

2.1. Developing a beginning repertoire

Our review of the literature suggests that learning to teach must be anchored in subject matter, learning, students, pedagogy, communities, and political terrain (Cochran-Smith, 2006). Yet the process of transitioning from preservice teacher to novice teacher takes time for new entrants to teaching (and any profession) to make sense of all that they have learned in preparation, and to recontextualize it to fit new, current—and shifting—realities. With this in mind, teacher educators must build learning experiences and scaffolds into curriculum that are specifically designed to help preservice teachers bridge theory with practice, enabling preservice teachers to make explicit connections between what they are learning in courses, and what they are attempting to enact in their teaching practice (Reagan et al., 2013).

In preservice teacher preparation, Feiman-Nemser (2001, 2012) describes this process as forming new visions of what is possible in teaching and developing a beginning repertoire for teaching. This repertoire can be defined as what Wasley, Hampel & Clark (1997) call “a variety of techniques, skills, and approaches in all dimensions of education—curriculum, instruction, assessment—that teachers have at their fingertips to stimulate the growth of the children with whom they work” (p. 45). Specifically, Feiman-Nemser (2001) argues,

Preservice preparation is a time to begin developing a basic repertoire . . . this means becoming familiar with a limited range of good curricular materials, learning several general and subject specific models of teaching, and exploring a few approaches to assessment that tap student understanding. The focus should not be on variety for its own sake, but on helping teacher candidates figure out when, where, how and why to use particular approaches” (p. 1018–1019).

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