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Discussion

## Examining education rounds through the lens of lesson study

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### 1. Introduction

The practice of Education Rounds and Lesson Study share a common purpose: they both seek improvement in teacher quality and student learning through cycles of observation, reflection and discussion. While arising from different contextual realities, both forms of teacher professional development are rooted in a shared belief in authentic learning through problems of practice grounded in real live experiences and class lessons. Each is a response to how difficult it is to change teachers' ways of knowing and doing. The literature is replete with examples of the failure of school and curriculum reforms to bring about pedagogical transformation in classrooms (Hoetker & Ahlbrand, 1969; Berman & McLaughlin, 1976; Hogan et al., 2013) and the inadequacy of teacher education programmes to provide much needed theory-practice links for their student teachers (Korthagen, 2010). Lewis (2015) has lamented the fact that while so much is already known about how to help U.S. students reach high levels of achievement, this knowledge is not applied in most school settings and scaling up is a central challenge in education. Reagan, Chen, Roegman and Zuckerman argue that teacher educators must “build learning experiences and scaffolds into curriculum that are specifically designed to help pre-service teachers bridge theory with practice, enabling pre-service teachers to make explicit connections between what they are learning in courses, and what they are attempting to enact in their teaching practice” (this issue).

Both Education Rounds and Lesson Study work at the interspaces between theory and practice and seek to bring teachers at both pre-service and in-service levels to see beyond their classrooms to consider the larger questions and visions of education in their growth as reflective practitioners. This commentary examines Education Rounds through the lens of Lesson Study and explores convergence and commonalities as well as divergence and differences in these two tools for teacher development and learning, by examining their forms, purposes, protocols and outcomes. This examination hopes to raise questions for researchers and practitioners to consider in improving the quality and sustainability of these forms of teacher professional learning.

### 2. Education Rounds and Lesson Study: meanings & purposes, forms & protocols

“Education Rounds” is used purposively in this commentary to encompass the several forms of rounds discussed in this special issue—instructional rounds, teacher rounds, clinical instructional rounds, quality teaching rounds, and education rounds. The concept of Education Rounds, whether instructional, teacher, quality teaching, or clinical, is borrowed from

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medical rounds where interns follow attending physicians on their rounds in teaching hospitals. The use of rounds in the medical profession is designed to help medical interns learn and improve their practice. Similarly, in education, the practice of rounds has been adopted for the purpose of educators to work together to improve teaching and learning. Each of the articles in this issue offers insights into how researchers used Education Rounds with pre-service and beginning teachers steeped in learning the ropes of what it means to teach and how to teach. While the goals are similar, the forms they take and the protocols they utilize differ from programme to programme, as well as from Lesson Study.

Williamson & Hodder describe the San Francisco Residency programme and its use of Clinical Instructional Rounds as “a tool for deepening candidates’ understandings of students, classrooms, schools, and the systems that support urban youth” (this issue). Reagan et al. use an Education Rounds model in (and developed by) a graduate level teacher residency programme in New York City to “provide an opportunity for their pre-service students to make connections between teaching practice and broader ideas of teaching and learning” (this issue). Gore, Bowe, and their team in Australia created a variation of Education Rounds to provide support to beginning teachers, “to develop their confidence, enhance the quality of their teaching and to build their capacity to continually learn” and to “respond to global concerns about high levels of attrition and burnout among early career teachers” (this issue). Roegman and Riehl examine the use of Education Rounds as a mechanism for helping pre-service teachers develop shared knowledge and norms about teaching. The goal of the use of Education Rounds in all the four programmes described in this issue was to improve the teaching practice of beginning teachers through observations, discussion and reflections of lessons, grounded in broader ideas about education, teaching and learning.

Ellis, Gower, Frederick and Childs make a distinction between Instructional Rounds and Teacher Rounds, with Instructional Rounds tending to be more hierarchical in nature involving “principals (head teachers), superintendents (local education officials) and teachers coming together in order to generate improvement at a system (school network or district) level” (this issue), whereas Teacher Rounds are more teacher-directed with the teachers often coming from the same school to explore common problems of practice in collaborative ways. This distinction between Instructional Rounds and Teacher Rounds however tends to be blurred as Instructional Rounds have evolved over time. According to City (2011), in Instructional Rounds groups of colleagues meet regularly over time much like a network, define a problem of practice connected to an improvement strategy, visit classrooms in small groups, debrief after the observations and identify next levels of work. These networks need not be hierarchical and may include staff members teaching the same subjects with a focus on a shared issue, or they may just consist of groups with a common time to plan. The practice of Instructional Rounds may have started with administrators working with administrator peers and teachers to bring about system level changes in school districts but it has evolved to becoming more popular with teachers leading the way in their own schools, and in its evolution has become closer to Lesson Study which is a teacher-directed form of professional development and learning.

The approach in New South Wales, Australia, termed Quality Teaching Rounds by Gore and Bowe (this issue), calls for the addition of two features: a discussion of a professional reading, and the coding of an observed lesson using a “Quality Teaching Pedagogical Framework”. They also include the observation of a full lesson, which differs from Instructional Rounds where the visiting team traditionally moves from lesson to lesson, staying in a class for about 15 min or so. The structuring of observations and post lesson discussions by the Quality Teaching (QT) framework derived from Newmann and Associates’ work on Authentic Pedagogy is fundamental to QT rounds. Teachers individually code lessons using the 18 elements of the framework before they come together for a discussion. The use of QT rounds implies the need for extensive training of teachers in the framework and a fair amount of time spent discussing their coding of their observations, since the aim is not so much to “quickly agree to a code but to interrogate their assumptions, to consider carefully outliers and alternative views and to explore what it might take to achieve a higher code in that activity” (this issue). The authors did not share in their paper the challenges faced by teachers in being involved in QT rounds although the 39 beginning teachers in their project spoke of QT Rounds in positive terms.

So how similar or different is Lesson Study to Education Rounds in meaning, forms and protocol? Lesson Study has its origins in Japan in the 19th century and has since gained international attention and momentum in many countries around the world (Lee, 2011). The appeal of Lesson Study lies in the recognition that teacher learning is most effective when situated in the context of real lessons (Lee & Lim-Ratnam, 2014). This is where Lesson Study shares a common focus with Education Rounds. Discussions about student learning are based on evidence derived from the enactment of lessons—research lessons, supported by “knowledgeable others” who could be senior teachers, principals, university teacher educators, and researchers (Lee & Lo, 2013). Both Education Rounds and Lesson Study share common purposes. They are about changing practice, improving the quality of teaching and learning in classrooms, or what City et al. (2009) refers to as the “instructional core”, providing opportunities for teacher learning and development as well as for collegial support in professional learning communities. Crucial to Lesson Study and the concept of Education Rounds is the professional learning arising from the shared understanding among the group of teacher observers as they reflect on and talk about the observed lesson(s). The shared context of the observed lesson(s) provides a common platform from which professional deliberations can take off.

There are four types of Lesson Study in Japan as described by Lewis and Takahashi (2013)—(i) school-wide Lesson Study where “each grade level or grade band plans and conducts one or two research lessons per year, focused on a shared school-wide research theme, and observed and discussed by all the teachers and administrators in the school”; (ii) district-level Lesson Study which allows teachers to participate in a Lesson Study group focused on specific subject matter and these teams “meet once a month after school and conduct semi-annual research lessons open to all teachers within the school district”; (iii) national school-based Lesson Study where teachers in a national school affiliated to a university “open up their practice

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