

ROUNDS

PUTS TEACHERS IN CHARGE OF LEARNING

By Vivian Troen and Katherine C. Boles

Most people are familiar with the practice of medical rounds, in which interns and mentoring physicians visit patients in an institutional setting, observe their various conditions, discuss what they observed, and analyze possible treatment options and outcomes. In the medical profession, making these rounds is viewed as a significant and highly important form of professional learning.

While medical rounds for physicians and instructional rounds for teachers — called Teacher Rounds to distinguish it from the practice of rounds by administrators — are not precisely the same, the comparison is a shortcut way to begin thinking about what constitutes this kind of school-based professional learning.

Teacher Rounds is a strategy many schools use as part of a comprehensive program for improving teaching and learning. Teacher Rounds is based on these core assumptions about what it takes to create a culture of professional growth and learning:

- Teaching practice is best when it is public and collaborative.
- Teaching is strongest when teachers collect data and act on it rather than rely on intuitive judgments.
- Teachers who are self-reflective about their teaching are more effective teachers.
- Significant improvements in teaching practice occur slowly, in small steps.
- Development of teacher leadership improves instruction.

The practice of Teacher Rounds is professional learning that embodies all of these assumptions.

WHY DO ROUNDS?

Teacher Rounds is an advanced form of critical collegueship — a professional learning environment that helps teachers expose their classroom practices to other educators and enables them to learn from data-driven feedback offered from a stance of inquiry.

During Teacher Rounds, teachers teach individual lessons while other teachers in their rounds group observe. Through rounds, more experienced practitioners can pass on knowledge and experience to the less experienced. There



PROCESS

are opportunities for both veteran and novice teachers to learn, and those opportunities are encouraged.

The teachers — one of whom is the group’s facilitator — are in control of the process of observing, analyzing, learning, and making a strategic commitment to change their practice based on what they have learned.

ALIGNED WITH STANDARDS

From now on, educators will devote a fair amount of time struggling with the “what” of the Common Core State Standards. Schools will hire outside experts to provide workshops and other events designed to help teachers learn how to change their practice in order to implement the Common Core. But there is little chance that this professional learning will help teachers figure out how to embed the Common Core State Standards into their practice — and professional learning will certainly not focus on how teacher collaboration can play a central role in teachers learning how to teach to those standards.

Here’s something to think about: While the focus of the Common Core State Standards is on teachers’ *teaching*, the Standards for Professional Learning, developed by Learning Forward with contributions from 40 professional

associations and education organizations, are focused on teachers’ *learning*.

Learning Forward’s widely accepted multilevel set of standards “outline the characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. The standards make it explicit that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels” (Learning Forward, n.d.-b). The Standards for Professional Learning call for “professional development that fosters *collective responsibility* for improved student performance” (Learning Forward, n.d.-a).

Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning help create the conditions so that teachers will learn what they need to learn in order to improve teaching and assist all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards.

This does not guarantee that all teachers will be equally effective. But it does create an intellectually stimulating climate and a process through which educators’ collaborative learning and mutual accountability can focus on improved student performance. This will enable educators

to consider learning as an integral part of their work week, and the standards posit that teacher learning “must be as easily accessible in their schools as walking to a room down the hall” (Mizell, 2008).

By design, Teacher Rounds is perfectly positioned to give teachers the tools, skills, strategies, and supports they will need in order to align their practice with the Standards for Professional Learning and thus open the door to the Common Core State Standards. The table on p. 24 shows how the core elements of the Standards for Professional Learning align with Teacher Rounds.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT ROUNDS

1. Lay the cultural groundwork.

- School leaders (principal, assistant principal, deans, department chairs) should regularly observe and give teachers explicit feedback that is focused on teacher growth. Make it clear that this feedback is not connected to evaluation.
- Talk with small groups of teachers about plans for Teacher Rounds, collect their concerns, and then address them as the plans for rounds develop.

2. Assess teacher strengths.

Who can serve as a Teacher Rounds group facilitator? Look

for faculty who:

- Are respected by other faculty;
- Have skills in observing teaching;
- Have the temperament suited for a facilitator (good listening skills, good social cognition, not overbearing, good collaborator, not afraid to push people gently); and
- Understand that teacher leadership as exerted through Teacher Rounds facilitation is a delicate cultural process of balancing authority and collegiality.

3. Choose the best candidates.

The best candidates for Teacher Rounds are:

- Teachers who are willing to participate and desire to improve teaching practice;
- Teachers who have had satisfactory evaluations and are secure in their jobs;
- Those whose participation will reinforce the credibility of the process for administrators and other teachers.

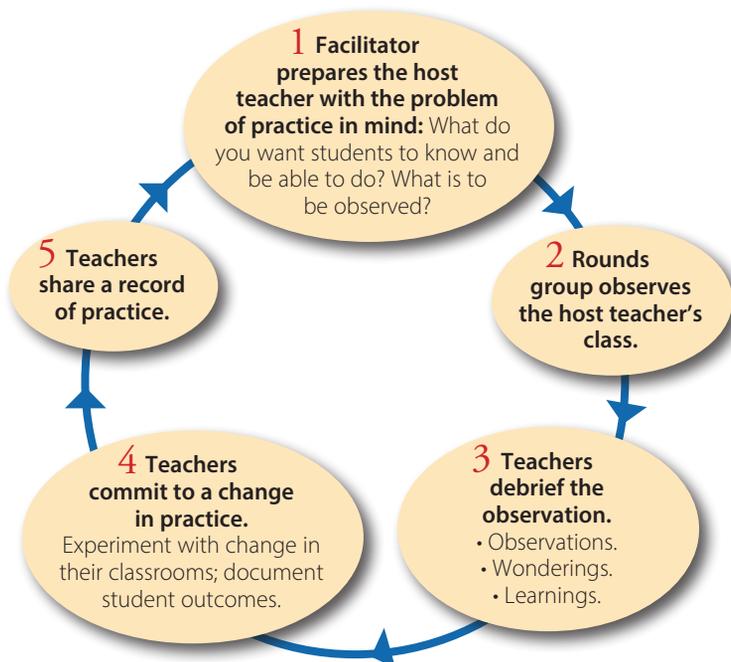
4. Provide support.

Build in time for reflection and mutual support among those planning, running, and facilitating Teacher Rounds. This might include an outside coach/consultant with experience in running a successful Teacher Rounds program.

The figure at left illustrates the five stages of the Teacher Rounds process.

THE ROUNDS PROCESS

Rounds group identifies the problem of practice it will work on for a year. Then the rounds cycle begins.



Source: Troen, V. & Boles, K.C. (in press). *The power of Teacher Rounds: A guide for facilitators, principals, & department chairs*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press & Learning Forward.

ROUNDS IN ACTION

Let’s examine the work of the teachers in a grade 3-5 Teacher Rounds group. They have identified a problem of practice, which they developed after agreeing that their math students lack persistence and perseverance in using mathematical discourse. After discussion, they understand that this problem is closely aligned to a Common Core Standard: constructing viable arguments and critiquing the reasoning of others. This key practice becomes the focus of their Teacher Rounds group, and they use the following strategy.

STEP 1

The Teacher Rounds group learns how to observe a lesson on video.

STEP 2

The group develops its problem of practice:

Teachers do not consistently provide *daily differentiated rigorous tasks that encourage students to explain their mathematical thinking and build math fluency.*

The group begins its work on the problem by investigating the following question:

How do we use Number Talks (a newly adopted math program in the school district) to plan math discussions that enable students with different math abilities to explain their thinking and build fluency?

Possible areas of focus for the observers:

ALIGNMENT OF TEACHER ROUNDS TO STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

STANDARD	CONNECTION TO ROUNDS
<p>LEARNING COMMUNITIES</p> <p>Core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in continuous improvement. Develop collective responsibility. Create alignment and accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commits to collective improvement through observations, feedback, and targeted action. Focuses on “our” students instead of “my” students. Adjusts and improves practice, holding all participants accountable for their work.
<p>LEADERSHIP</p> <p>Core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop capacity for learning and leading. Advocate for professional learning. Create support systems and structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds capacity of teachers to serve as facilitators. Defines the role of facilitator; requires the skills of a teacher leader. Develops a culture in which teachers are willing to make their practice public and transparent. Creates collaborative structures for work with peers to support mutual learning through rounds.
<p>RESOURCES</p> <p>Core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize human, fiscal, material, technology, and time resources. Monitor resources. Coordinate resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses internal resources by developing teachers to learn with and from each other. Experiments with and monitors new teaching strategies in classroom teaching. Achieves the highest levels of return for teachers and students through a low-cost, high-impact professional learning initiative.
<p>DATA</p> <p>Core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze student, educator, and system data. Assess progress. Evaluate professional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives teachers opportunities to collect data from students and peers during an observation. Develops teachers’ capacity to assess instruction and analyze results. Evaluates professional learning by using records of practice as a focus tool for teacher learning. Uses data from student and teacher classroom practice.
<p>LEARNING DESIGNS</p> <p>Core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply learning theories, research, and models. Select learning designs. Promote active engagement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides job-embedded collaborative learning. Encourages teachers to voice their concerns about their teaching; teachers are receptive to learning from one another. Offers group-developed online resources in Google Docs; includes videos and records of practice. Implements facilitator coaching. Specifies professional reading.
<p>IMPLEMENTATION</p> <p>Core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply change research. Sustain implementation. Provide constructive feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Applies change research; teachers create an action plan, take action in their classrooms, refine action based on feedback. Provides ongoing professional learning for teachers regardless of years in the field; recognizes the importance of continuous improvement for all teachers. Extends, refines, and sustains learning through specific feedback.
<p>OUTCOMES</p> <p>Core elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meet performance standards. Address learning outcomes. Build coherence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aligns with Common Core as well as any school or district initiative; can be focused on implementation of the initiative. Reinforces teachers’ observation and analysis skills; coordinates these to adjust practice and assess growth. Links professional learning to student learning with a focus on student content standards.

Source: Adapted from **Learning Forward. (2011). Standards for Professional Learning**, p. 61. Oxford, OH: Author.

- How does the teacher model the use of high-level math vocabulary so students can use it independently when they explain their thinking?
- How does the teacher listen to and follow her students' math thinking?
- What procedures are in place to allow students to share their thinking?
- What conditions are present that foster a safe learning community?
- How is student communication encouraged and valued?

STEP 3

- A. The host teacher completes a host teacher preparation form. A sample of this form is at right.
- B. The host teacher videos her class doing Number Talks.

STEP 4

The teachers convene a Teacher Rounds debrief meeting using a Debriefing Protocol (see box on p. 28).

Observation: Teachers report what they've seen (without interpretation), with a particular focus on their agreed-upon problem of practice.

Wonderings: Teachers wondered about these things that could impact their practice.

I wonder:

- How I'm going to make sure kids are using the most effective math tool rather than the one they're most comfortable with.
- How I'll keep track of what happens during one Number Talk and how it affects the next one based on what happens.
- How I get students with a communication disability to express their thinking.
- How I can get students to commit to try new or different strategies.

Teachers share their learnings:

- I want to emulate four quadrants (a method of recording on the white board) so students could see that there were differences among strategies.
- There's a benefit to writing what students were saying while they were saying them. I learned it's important to connect those two things while they're doing them.
- I want to emulate some of the language she used as students defended their answers or when a student realizes he or she made an error. There was no judgment in words or tone.
- I want to emulate the clarifying questions she asked.
- I learned that the kids seemed to be fine with the routine — fine with the expectation that they were not being recognized for the quality of a response.
- I want to emulate the pace of the lesson. The video is only about 7 minutes long and 20 out of 24 students answered.

HOST TEACHER PREPARATION FORM

1 Review or explain the problem of practice.

With the goal of building on number relationships to solve problems while building efficient strategies, we will investigate how we use Number Talks to plan math discussions that enable students with different math abilities to explain their thinking and build fluency.

2 Provide context for the lesson.

- What is the task?

Using mental math, students will solve the equation $368+191$.

Students show a visual cue when they are ready with a solution, and students signal if they have found more than one way to solve the problem.

This form allows students to think, while the process continues to challenge those that already have an answer.

I collect answers correct/incorrect and record answers. Students share their strategies and thinking with their peers.

- What is your role as the teacher?

My role is to act as a facilitator, questioner, recorder, and learner in addition to creating a safe and accepting classroom community.

- What are the students going to be doing?

Students will reason with numbers and make mathematically convincing arguments. Students will be listening to their peers' responses and sharing mental math strategies.

3 On what should the observers focus their attention?

- How do I listen to and follow students' math thinking?

- How do I encourage and value student communication?

- What conditions are present that foster a safe learning community?

It felt brisk, but not rushed. I think there was enough time. At the end of the round, each teacher makes a commitment to make a change in practice.

Commitments:

- I commit to doing Number Talks with my own group and the lower group together. I'm going to attempt to do it with the whole group with fractions and see what happens. I want to facilitate so my students share air time.
- I'm going to try to do Number Talks with nonjudgmental words and tones — neither positive or negative.
- I'm going to try to do Number Talks with less check-in with students to see how that affects the pacing.
- Instead of writing in quadrants and numbering the different strategies, I will ask students to name the strategy and record that. To build the skills of the four silent students, I'll video one student in an individual Number Talk, video again in a few weeks, then tape him in a group.
- I'm going to do Number Talks in small groups. I will see if it works well. I want to do it in small groups before I do it as a whole class.

STEP 5

The next Teacher Rounds meeting begins with records of practice that teachers bring to report on their commitments. Two examples:

Video 1: The teacher videoed a student who had had trouble participating in Number Talks. Her video shows her escorting him to the white board and tutoring him by practicing a Number Talk. She felt that individual attention could build his confidence. Indeed, when he wasn't working in the whole class group, he did better than she thought he would. (This is evident on the video, her record of practice.) She wondered about trying a few Number Talks with students who weren't as confident as the others. In a subsequent record of practice, she showed that some of the more silent students participated more actively in the whole group activity.

Video 2: The teacher is working on pacing, and there is a picture of solutions on the white board. The question she is working on is finding a balance between brisk pacing vs. ensuring that a majority of students understand. She said she is particularly interested in this because she teaches students in the bottom third of math performance for the grade. The host teacher's video reflected her commitment to combine two groups of students. This artifact was supplemented by a second artifact — a photograph of the whiteboard.

The teachers see that taking the time to work a handful of high-yield strategies into their routines brings significant gains to their students.

CONTINUAL TEACHER LEARNING

Successful schools — whether charter, traditional, or independent — have features in common: a clear mission, talented

PROTOCOL FOR DEBRIEFING SESSION

1. All observers take a few minutes to review notes and jot down specifics on the lesson with a focus on how the lesson attempted to address the problem of practice.
2. Teacher reflects on the lesson. Teacher explains what his or her goals were for addressing the problem of practice, in what ways goals were or were not met and shares data on what students learned. (5 minutes)
3. Observers share data from the observation.
 - Part 1:** What did you see? Descriptive data only. (10 minutes)
 - Part 2:** What do you wonder about during the class? (10 minutes)
 - Part 3:** Host teacher responds to those wonderings/questions he or she chooses while participants are silent. Host teacher reflects aloud on ideas and questions that seemed interesting. (2 minutes)
 - Part 4:** What did you learn? (6 minutes)
4. Commit to how you will modify your instruction based on what was learned during the observation and debrief.

teachers, time for teachers to work together, feedback cycles that lead to continuing improvements. That's what the practice of Teacher Rounds promotes — a structure and process by which talented teachers work together with an expectation of continual teacher learning and student improvement.

REFERENCES

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