

The Power of Teacher Rounds

A Guide for Facilitators,
Principals, & Department Chairs

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Foreword by Richard F. Elmore



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All materials and resources related to *The Power of Teacher Rounds*—including reproducible figures, tables, handouts, worksheets, and appendices—can be found at <http://www.corwin.com/powerofteacherrounds>

Introduction

Getting From Then to Now

Want to know what’s happening with education in America? Well, everything . . . and nothing. That is to say, while education reform initiatives regularly come and go, we seem to be stuck with a model of education that dates back to the 19th century, with its culture of personal rather than shared accountability. This is a model that stubbornly resists substantial improvements, with schools populated by teachers and school leaders who are not taught the basic skills, knowledge, and value of collaboration but are nonetheless increasingly called on to form teams, join groups, and mentor others.⁵

We believe that for school improvement to take place—meaning improvements in teaching and learning—there must be opportunities for teachers to move from an increasingly archaic model of individual responsibility to a more collaborative model of collective responsibility.

Consider this: In the three decades since publication of the education survey *A Nation at Risk*, there have been extensive changes to education policy—standards-based reform, pay for performance, No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, more testing, more evaluation, charter schools. And yet nothing seems to work. Today, 1 in 4 Americans fails to earn a high school diploma on time, and the United States lags behind other countries in the percentage of young people who complete college. Former education secretary William Bennett puts it bluntly: “If there’s a bottom line, it’s that we’re spending twice as much money on education as we did in 1983 and the results haven’t changed all that much.”⁶

Despite significant efforts and hundreds of millions of dollars spent on “improvements,” we have little to show. Why? It is our position that in the perpetual scramble to improve the education of children, a critical component of education reform has almost always

been ignored, no matter what reforms have been created. The component of *collaboration* is the missing ingredient in the preparation of teachers, which is vital to the success of meeting those reforms. And now, we have something called the Common Core State Standards. This broadly comprehensive initiative shows great promise, but its implementation is already proving to be an enormous challenge.

Implementing the Common Core State Standards

Will the Common Core State Standards move us beyond *A Nation at Risk*? Not unless we help teachers by giving them the understanding and support they need to implement them. We would suggest that what is most needed is a conceptual change among educators at all levels. That is the fundamental philosophy behind these standards: a move away from the belief that imparting and memorizing information is the primary goal of classroom teaching and toward the understanding that what's important is *making sense* of that information.

A common question among teachers is, *What do my students need to know and be able to do?* Teachers may arrive at their answers in a number of different ways. But most often the missing second question is, *What do I, as their teacher, need to know and be able to do?*

That's where Teacher Rounds comes in, because Teacher Rounds is a low-cost, high-impact strategy and a powerful tool for implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Basic Ideas About Teacher Rounds

Throughout this book, we will most often refer to Teacher Rounds simply as Rounds, or sometimes Faculty Rounds. This is to distinguish rounds conducted by teachers from instructional rounds,⁷ which may be conducted, for example, by members of interschool networks consisting of principals, union representatives, district administrators, superintendents, and often teachers.

Teacher Rounds

- creates a framework for critical collegueship;
- builds norms for collaboration;
- supports and assists veteran teachers, as well as the less experienced;

- reduces isolation and promotes collaboration;
- helps develop a shared vision of good teaching;
- makes student learning the focus of the group;
- provides a venue for problem solving; and
- facilitates the sharing of successful practice.

A word here about what is meant by “critical collegueship”: A model for critical collegueship⁸ specifies three norms that should be reflected in teacher talk and exchange if the professional learning community is to reflect growth and student learning.⁹

1. Teachers need to be open to discussing conflict and expressing different views about teaching. This conflict, if it is useful, is “productive disequilibrium.”

2. Teachers need to become increasingly familiar (and comfortable) with ambiguity.

3. Given the open conflict and ambiguity that, it is hoped, will strengthen and not weaken community, teachers must seek a collective commitment to continue their work together amidst the ambiguity and conflict.

About This Book

The chapter headings are fairly self-explanatory, and a quick read will reveal the *what*, *why*, *who*, and *how* of implementing Teacher Rounds. Inside the chapters, however, things can get somewhat more complex. If the theoretical and practical sometimes seem to collide in workshops, activities, diagrams, cases, tables, worksheets, videos, cases, and guides to case analysis . . . well, there is a method to the layers of interwoven ideas and concepts and—stick with us—it will all begin to make sense once you absorb the basics and start putting some of the tools and planning into action.

This is a guidebook, designed to make available and accessible lots of different components, at different times and for different purposes. But it does come with a warning label:

Significant and lasting change can happen only over time,
with persistence and work.

The good news is, we have seen how Rounds can transform teachers' lives and improve their practice. We know it can be done, and this book is a compendium of those learnings and strategies acquired in the process of helping Rounds groups become successful. So dig in.

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