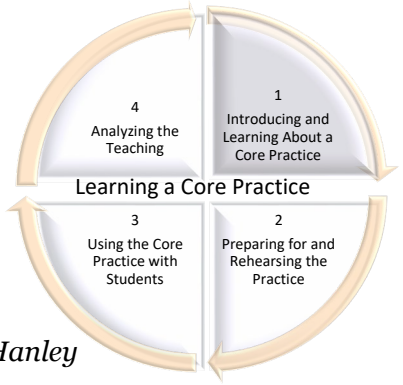
Core Practice Pedagogy: Instructional Rounds



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What?
What is this pedagogy?

Increasingly, schools are implementing a new form of professional learning activity known as 'rounds'—also referred to in the literature as Teacher Rounds, Instructional Rounds, Teaching Rounds, or Education Rounds (City et al., 2009). Like clinical rounds in medicine, rounds engage teachers in communities of practice, supporting critical reflection and mutual learning. They help educators look closely at what is happening in classrooms in a systematic, purposeful and focused way. While more commonly used with practicing teachers, there is emerging evidence of the benefits of rounds as a socializing practice for prospective teachers (Roegman & Riehl, 2015).

Though there are several variations, rounds generally begin with a 'prebrief' during which the purpose and focus of observations is set in relation to a problem of practice. Teachers then conduct observations of teaching and learning in one or more classrooms as teams, collecting data related to the problem of practice. This is followed by reflection and debriefing guided by protocols, which aid in identifying next steps and application to future practice.

While the use of observation is not new to teacher education and is often used as a feedback mechanism for teacher candidates, rounds are unique in that the learning of the *observers* is central, not the one being observed.

Why?
Why employ this pedagogy to support PSTs' understanding & use of core practices?

An apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) is insufficient preparation to teach. Similarly, merely sitting in the classroom observing how experienced teachers teach does not necessarily help PSTs learn to teach (Ben-Peretz & Rumney, 1991) as observing cooperating teachers does not always lead to analysis, reflection, and growth (McIntyre, Byrd, & Foxx, 1996). One of the well-documented problems of learning from observations of teaching is knowing what to look for, or how to interpret what is observed (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985). During traditional classroom observations, novices may not know what to attend to in looking at interactions between students and teachers. In fact, research on expertise suggests that part of what differentiates novices from experts is their ability to see and discern details in the classroom (Bransford et al., 2000). By decomposing complex practices, professional educators can help students learn first to attend to, and then to enact, the essential elements of a practice.

For inservice teachers, rounds have resulted in significant positive effects on teaching quality (sustained 6 months later) as well as positive effects on teacher morale (Gore, et al., 2017). For beginning teachers, rounds have promoted greater confidence, stronger professional relationships, a clearer vision of their goals and direction for their work, a deeper commitment to good teaching, and a feeling of being able to speak and contribute to the profession (Gore & Bowe, 2015). When used in teacher education, rounds have helped highlight gaps in PSTs' understandings of how, when, and why to use particular instructional strategies and supported their development of tools and dispositions to study teaching in and with a community of learners (Reagan et al., 2015). This, in turn, can enhance the instruction PSTs receive face-to-face in the teacher education classroom (Scherff & Singer, 2012) by challenging PST's assumptions about students, helping them develop broader understandings of teaching contexts, and examine problems of practice that are common in particular settings (Williamson & Hodder, 2015).

In terms of practice-based teacher education, the implementation of Instructional Rounds affords opportunities for PSTs to make focused and purposeful observations and to analyze multiple examples (representations) of enactment of a core practice and consider variations in the use of the practice within different classroom and lesson contexts, as well as within different grade levels. Through this, they can develop a more robust understanding of a practice, and the challenges they might encounter in enacting that practice.

Where?

In what context do you implement this pedagogy?

Rounds may be flexibly implemented in a variety of teacher education courses in which there is an existing practicum component or may be integrated as an activity in courses that do not include practicum experiences. PSTs need an opportunity to visit multiple classrooms in a single session to complete rounds.

How?

How do you engage PSTs in this pedagogy?

In the classroom: Begin with a prebriefing in which you discuss the particular core practice that PSTs will observe in classrooms. Set the purpose and ground rules for rounds, and introduce any specific note-taking protocols for to students. Note: Conducting a video-based practice round with students to familiarize themselves with data collection and analysis protocols can be helpful. Having students first observe the video and describe what they see, *then* provide them the lens of the core practice to re-observe the video and note differences in what they notice can be powerful in helping PSTs understand how to make more targeted observations that allow for rich analysis.

At the school site(s): At the appointed time, teams of 3-5 PSTs visit a classroom as non-participant observers, taking observational notes in relation to the problem of practice.

Back in the classroom: Working in their groups, PSTs should compare observations and denote any patterns—discussing these in terms of what they illuminate about how to implement the core practice, how it impacts student learning, and potential challenges in implementing the practice successfully. PSTs can share these analyses in a Gallery Walk format, followed by a whole-class sense-making discussion.

Next steps: Considering the implications of what they learn through rounds for their own implementation of the core practice is important. Implementing rounds prior to another task (such as engaging in lesson development and/or enactment) can provide opportunities for PSTs to strategize ways to enhance their enactment of the core practice.

Key Considerations

- Implementing rounds places little demand on classroom teachers, who do not need to prepare for the visit or interact directly with teachers.
- Rounds are not intended to showcase exemplary teaching, which places a greater burden on the teacher educator during the debriefing process.
- Some PSTs struggle to make nonjudgmental observations when participating in rounds initially. Conducting a video-based practice round in-class beforehand may help.
- The term 'problem of practice' has a negative connotation to some PSTs (conveying the idea of looking for problems, possibly contributing to the above difficulty) and so focusing instead on a 'core practice' and, after observing, the difficulties associated with implementing the practice may be more beneficial
- Your class size and size of small groups (3-5) will determine the number of classrooms needed
- Rounds are a collaborative process, so forming collaborative groups that function well is critical
- Visiting 3 classrooms for 20 minute intervals appears sufficient for collecting data about a specific practice
- It may be difficult to find instructional time slots in the school schedule that coincide to university class meeting times or that provide examples of teaching a particular discipline
- Observing recess, lunch, choice/free time or seat work may be relevant for some problems of practice, but do not necessarily lend themselves to examining core teaching practices

Rounds can be a powerful socializing process for PSTs; however, if not carefully implemented, rounds can actually confirm or reinforce PST's shallow understandings of teaching practice, rather than pushing them to consider teaching and learning more deeply. The organization and framing of rounds will constrain what PSTs are able to 'see' and learn in terms of the complexities of practice.

Classroom Vignette

This quarter, the twelve PSTs in a residency-model teacher preparation program at Lincoln Middle School are working on the practice of helping students *construct and interpret models*. Four PSTs have just entered Riley's classroom as she is in the middle of showing students a graph of CO_2 emissions data over time. Dr. Johnston has asked the observing PSTs to notice three things: 1) What does Riley do to elicit students' thinking about what the graph means? 2) What

does Riley do to model her thought process as she interprets the graph for students? 3) How do the students then apply their understanding to a novel question? While standing quietly at the back of the classroom, the PSTs take notes as they watch the students predict future CO_2 levels and what factors might impact them. After 20 minutes, Dr. Johnston and the PSTs thank the students and Riley for letting them observe, and they move on to Jorge's classroom. Jorge's students have just finished an activity using Slinkys to mimic electromagnetic radiation, and he is asking them what they observed about the wavelength, frequency, and amplitude of their "waves." The observing PSTs use the same three questions to focus their attention on how Jorge elicits students' thinking about the Slinkys' behavior, how he models his thought process about the relationship between wavelength and frequency, and how the students demonstrate their understanding of wave characteristics. During this time, another PST team observed two other classrooms with master teacher Mrs. Hooper. After lunch, the entire cohort gathers with Dr. Johnston and Mrs. Hooper in the conference room for a debriefing session. Dr. Johnston gives everyone sticky notes and asks them to describe what they observed, then post their descriptive "evidence" on poster paper that corresponds with the three focus questions. The PSTs then break up into small teams and work on sorting the evidence on one poster sheet into themes before labeling each theme. The small teams then do a gallery walk of the three poster sheets and look for patterns in the collected evidence. After this, Mrs. Hooper leads the cohort through a whole-group discussion of the patterns they identified. It takes some gentle reminders to keep the PSTs away from diagnosing "problems" and instead focused on the students' learning experience. To close the debrief, the PSTs suggest strategies and supports that would help students demonstrate their proficiency with interpreting models. Then, everyone shares something they learned or would like to try in their classroom.

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