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Preface

The professional world of teachers is beset by a storm of seemingly conflicting forces. On the one hand, teachers are urged to reflect, to collaborate, and to build strong professional learning communities. There is, in fact, ample testimony of the power of teacher collaboration for enhancing the professional well-being and practice of teachers (see, for example, Carroll, Fulton, and Doerr, June 2010; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005; Fullan, 2007; McLaughlin and Talbert, 2001; Troen and Boles, 2012). There is strong evidence as well that students benefit when their teachers work together reflectively in a culture of mutual support and trust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). But this theme in teachers' work exists in disheartening tension with the rising system of prescribed and controlled curricula and its pressing demand for testable and measurable results, with teachers, just as their students are, increasingly subjected to narrowly conceived evaluation schemes in the name of accountability.

This is not to suggest that curricular rigor and student performance are questionable academic priorities or that there is no need for accountability—far from it. But when they become monolithic concerns, as they are in the lives of so many public school teachers, they diminish if not exclude other enriching and, arguably, essential factors in learning. They funnel the lives of teachers and their students into narrowing channels of work and possibility. They encourage institution centeredness rather than person centeredness: they feed bureaucracy rather than personal commitment, integrity, and community. At their worst, they impose a simplistic corporate ideal of efficiency, production, and evaluation on what is a complex human and cultural endeavor influenced by an array of factors, not least whether students have healthy and stable personal lives. Even when more nuanced, the solutions of the day tend to reduce the idea of education to what is quantifiable rather than to align it with what is

desirable in terms of capabilities of mind, character (or “heart”), and participation in our democratic civic culture.

It is important for a book that aspires to make a contribution to the practice of teaching to start by stating where it stands with respect to the current climate. As much as we might do better in developing schools and communities that live up to ideals of equity and opportunity for all students, I question, along with many of my colleagues, whether education in any meaningful sense will be improved with greater measurement of teachers and students as the driving theory of change. There is another path, one that strives to honor our democratic values and the teaching profession, that strives to tap our deepest human capacities, and that treats all students as if they were our own children. On this path, we keep in view our core purpose to develop the mind, character, and civic responsibility of each student and a core belief that each is capable and worthy beyond our ken. We strive to create a space—a culture—in which we can live and work honestly, respectfully, reflectively, and inquiringly, individually and together, according to our fullest vocational aspiration. We learn to guide and sustain each other. We show accountability by taking coresponsibility. Instead of focusing first of all on effectiveness and results, we concentrate our practice on knowing and serving each student here and now as a growing thinker, reader, writer, speaker, and responsible actor. Faced with the inherent complexity of this task, particularly in distressed locations, we strive for shared insight and understanding, the mutual development of capable practice and expertise, and collaborative action. Out of our commitment, mutual respect, mutual support, and integrity we strive to make an educational community, one as strong in its warm regard for and ability to draw out all that is best and possible in students as in its sense of educational purpose.

Teachers need learning practices which uphold the integrity of teaching—which respect and honor its challenge and responsibility. They need practices that can be applied in their own classroom, school, and partnership contexts, practices they can call their own. In the midst of a culture saturated with quantitative information, they need practices that focus on the personal and qualitative: practices through which they act and think as professionals who care about, regularly examine, and think through their complex work deeply, practices which also help them to form a true learning community. This book introduces one practice—Teacher Rounds—meant to support collaborative learning centered on student learning and the practice that fosters it. It suggests the value, for students as well as for teachers, of a culture in which teachers learn together, in their own classrooms, to

develop insight, capable practice, and expertise, as compared to a culture driven by reductive notions of effectiveness and results.

A Teacher Round

A group of five secondary teachers, including one preservice teacher, commandeer a table in a cramped basement space that doubles as a meeting place and cafeteria. One teacher provides a handout and soon after begins to explain goals and challenges that he or she is addressing in an upcoming class. It is a customary scene at the school—the prelude to a Teacher Round. Teacher Rounds have long been a core professional learning practice for the teachers, a way to bring theory, practice, context, and expertise dynamically together.

The teacher who begins is the host teacher for the Round. He or she passes out copies of a Round Sheet to members of the group, who read it silently. The host teacher then reviews key aspects of what is on the sheet:

- a background section that sets the curricular, academic, and social context of the learning and teaching that the group will observe;
- a learning focus section that describes the focus of student and teacher learning; and, critically,
- a “round inquiry” that asks for evidence relevant to understanding the learning and teaching.

Members of the Round group intermittently ask for clarification or elaboration or try to bring assumptions and details more fully to light. The host Round teacher indicates whether group members will observe or interact in some specified way with students once the class (the actual Round) is underway. After about 15 to 20 minutes, the preround discussion is complete, and the Round group moves upstairs and enters a classroom. Each member takes up a different observational post in a chair alongside a group of three students. The Round begins and the next hour or so is spent in close observation or interaction with students and in note taking.

When the class ends, the Teacher Round group reconvenes in an empty classroom (the teacher meeting room or hallway are alternatives). The postround discussion starts. The host teacher shares his or her initial thoughts about what happened relative to the focus of learning and his or her expectations and goals. Attention then turns

to the questions the host teacher formulated to frame the Round inquiry. Different members of the Round group offer observations corresponding to the first of the Round questions; they take each question in turn, with particular observations sometimes leading to a more general reflection on practice based on the learning or teacher action in question. Group members compare notes on the engagement and learning of individual learners. They discuss various aspects of the designed learning process in relation to the actual dynamic of learning. The host Round teacher concludes with his or her takeaways and ponderings and implications for the next day's teaching. Then, Round participants give the host teacher their written notes corresponding to the Round questions. After 20 minutes or so the group breaks up.

In broad outline this is a Teacher Round as practiced in partner schools with Clark University and in other schools adopting the practice; Teacher Rounds are also woven into the Master of Arts in Teaching program at the University (Del Prete, 1997 & 2010). A Teacher Round is a classroom-based collaborative learning practice shaped primarily by and for teachers to learn in, about, and from practice. It follows a simple protocol but calls into play a range of professional dispositions and skills, in particular observation, reflection, inquiry, and collaborative discussion. Also, as much as it may have value in and of itself, a Teacher Round usually does not stand alone; it typically integrates into a more involved learning process. The Teacher Round described above, for example, is an actual on-the-ground, in-practice segment of an ongoing conversation about teaching and learning in teacher teams. If the Round had been conducted by a teacher preparation student, then he or she might follow up by reviewing video footage of the Round, possibly with peers in a practice workshop, and writing a postround reflection. Even in this more extended process, however, the Round—classroom-based and teacher-framed—is the primer or touchstone, the place where idea, action, context, reflection, and reflective friends intertwine, where, to use the vernacular, the rubber hits the road.

Teacher Rounds, the Medical Model, and Practice-Based Education

Rounds are a staple practice in medical education. Yet, although educators such as Shulman (2004) have looked at the medical model to inform teacher education and practice, Rounds have not been

translated widely into a comparable practice in teacher learning. A version of Rounds was introduced in two different professional development school start-ups in Massachusetts in the late 1980s. The Clark version derives from one of them (Del Prete, 1990). Others, some drawing on the Clark model, have introduced Teacher Rounds in their teacher preservice programs (see Appendix B).

Recently, Harvard educators have developed a model of instructional rounds designed to understand a school's or school system's instructional practice through the eyes of a team of observers (City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel, 2009). But instructional rounds are fundamentally different from the more collaborative and highly contextualized—indeed, more personal and intimate—Teacher Round model presented in this book. Instructional rounds are conducted by a team of educators, drawn from networks with a common interest in improving instruction at a systemic scale, who visit classrooms within a particular school at a point in time in order to gather and share classroom-based observations relevant to a problem of practice that the school or a district is trying to address. A Teacher Round, in contrast, is led by a teacher in her or his classroom; it is conducted mainly by, for, and with teachers as a reflective, inquiring, and collaborative learning process. Whereas instructional rounds glean broad characteristics of practice in a school, a Teacher Round strives to understand teaching and learning in detail and depth, in context, so that participants might better understand and develop their own practice. At the same time, the two models of rounds have an important similarity and complementarity. They overlap in particular to the extent that they are practices dedicated to understanding teaching and learning by making the practice inside classrooms more open, visible, and understandable.

The Teacher Round model, as in the case of instructional rounds, draws from the medical model. It aims similarly to uncover practice—to make it more transparent and accessible. It is also a means for sharing knowledge about practice and considering jointly problems of practice. Like a medical round, in which different levels of expertise may be present, a Teacher Round incorporates multiple perspectives to bring more know-how to bear on the questions regarding practice which inevitably arise. And, also similar, a Teacher Round occurs in context, in real time. Both types of round link knowledge of a particular case to the development of practitioner knowledge more broadly. Both, finally, support the development of knowledge and practice as a collective action.

But the differences are significant. As Shulman (2004) pointed out, “The practice of teaching involves a far more complex task environment than does that of medicine” (p. 258). Knowing the individual is important to both teacher and physician, but teaching is complex precisely because a teacher is confronted with many learners and their various differences, whereas a physician normally can focus on one patient at a time. Cohen (2011) explains the complexity in terms of the “predicaments” of teaching, among them the “uncertainties and surprises” that arise due to its nature as a human endeavor. Teacher Rounds can unpack the complexity in a moment in time by bringing many eyes and ears to the process and can lead to greater insight on how to work within it. Moreover, Teacher Rounds can meet the need, in the face of teaching’s complexity, for versatility, responsiveness, and adaptability in teaching practice by informing and building the practice repertoire of teachers—that is, by helping them to see and develop multiple ways of adjusting practice in view of the developmental, academic, cultural, and personal traits and needs of particular learners or groups of learners.

Potential Benefits of Teacher Rounds

A Teacher Round is designed to support collaborative teacher learning in, from, and about practice, in an actual classroom. It entails observation, reflection, and inquiry. While the primary actor is the teacher who hosts the Round in his or her classroom, a Teacher Round engages all participants in learning. Round participants stand to gain in developing acuity in close observation; in learning the value of descriptive rather than normative accounts of classroom activity; in grounding interpretation and assessment in observed evidence and contextual knowledge; in developing habits of reflection, personalization, and thoughtful inquiry over and against cursory judgment; in deepening understanding of the complexities and possibilities of practice as well as the work of particular learners; in the development of their own insight, practice, and expertise, including their repertoire of ways to understand and respond to different situations and different needs; and in their experience of a professional learning community.

Teacher Rounds bring teaching and learning into detailed focus. They help bind teachers together in a common effort to share and develop practice that works best for students. They help develop shared understandings of what learning that engages students fully

looks like and what leads to it. In a given school, they can become a staple force in building and maintaining a student-centered professional learning community, as they are at University Park Campus School (see Chapter 5). Teacher Rounds can also play an integral role in teacher preparation, planned so as to support and guide students in their development as beginning teachers and collegial learners (see Appendix B).

This Book

This book is a conceptual and practical guide to Teacher Rounds. Its purpose is to explain and illustrate Teacher Rounds and their value in professional learning so that others may use them. It presents guidelines for practicing Teacher Rounds and illustrates them with examples involving both practicing and preservice teachers and what can be learned from them. Teacher Rounds can be implemented at any level and in virtually any setting. The detailed examples in the book are drawn from teachers, with varying degrees of experience, including teacher interns, working at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels in public urban schools that partner with me and my colleagues. As I mention in introducing the teachers and their school settings, the schools share a similar demographic profile, with large percentages of students who qualify for the federal free or reduced lunch program and who are nonnative English speakers.

Teacher Rounds are about teaching and learning; it is important, therefore, to articulate the relationship between the two. The first chapter offers a perspective on teaching and learning and how Teacher Rounds fit into it. After this conceptual beginning, Chapter 2 introduces the Teacher Round protocol—the step-by-step guide to a Teacher Round—and illustrates the steps in action. Chapters 3 and 4 offer detailed examples of Teacher Round learning at the high school and elementary levels, respectively. Although they are differentiated by school level, both chapters are relevant to understanding the Teacher Round process at any level. Chapter 5 portrays the Teacher Round learning process at University Park Campus School, an exemplary, high-performing urban secondary school which has long integrated Teacher Rounds into its professional learning culture. Drawing on the school's example, the chapter illustrates how Teacher Rounds can be used as a schoolwide practice by teachers and for teachers in order to build transparency, cohesion, coherence, and expertise in individual and collective practice. Chapter 6 explores more in-depth

the processes of teacher inquiry, observation, and reflection that are so central to Teacher Round learning. The final chapter highlights what it takes to build a culture in which sharing and collaborating on the development of practice for the sake of student learning is a powerful norm. Appendices provide examples of start-up and preservice Teacher Round programs, as well as a convenient short version of the protocol. By the end, if you have come to value them, you should be fully ready to incorporate Teacher Rounds meaningfully into your own world of reflective practice.