Reassembling teacher professional development: the case for Quality Teaching Rounds

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Reassembling teacher professional development: the case for Quality Teaching Rounds

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ABSTRACT
Conventional professional development, while still in full swing in many places, has been widely maligned for its passive approach to learning, its failure to address local differences, and its often single-event format. While the corrective move to more collaborative models of professional learning has been heralded, few empirical studies to date have demonstrated impact on classroom practice or student learning outcomes. What is missing in both approaches, we argue, is a focus on pedagogy that guides teachers' efforts at improvement. To address this absence, we elaborate our 'reassembled' approach to professional development, Quality Teaching Rounds. We argue that bringing together approaches to teacher development that privilege collaboration, community, and context with a substantive pedagogical framework will deliver more powerful professional development that makes a substantial impact on practice and produces measurable effects.

Introduction

Although teacher professional development is big business, with billions of dollars and hours invested globally, there remain many concerns about its impact. The conventional transmission style of professional development, while still in full swing in many places (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Luke & McArdle, 2009), has been widely maligned for its passive approach to learning, its failure to address local differences, and its short-term, often single-event format (Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2004; Hawley & Valli, 1999). Whether through direct contact with 'experts' or consultants, or indirectly through 'train the trainer' or 'cascade' models (Hayes, 2000), the neglect of local contexts and practitioner knowledge raises significant problems of buy-in and implementation fidelity (Cohen & Ball, 2001; O'Donnell, 2008). It is not surprising that conventional approaches have produced few measurable effects on teaching practice or student outcomes and, in general, are considered ineffective for improvement, reform, or 'reculturing' purposes (Avalos, 2011; Borko, 2004; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Meiers & Ingvarson, 2005).

Over recent decades, there has been a subsequent corrective swing toward collaborative modes of professional development on the basis of their greater capacity to provide social
and cultural support for teachers, attend to local and relevant concerns, and enable teachers to collectively construct knowledge in a sustained way (Bolam et al., 2005; Louis, 2006). And yet, few empirical studies of collaborative professional development have demonstrated impact on either classroom teaching practice or student learning outcomes (Cordingley, Bell, Evans, & Firth, 2005; Desimone, 2009; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Some of the constraints to effective professional development are structural, such as available resources (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Supovitz & Turner, 2000), or cultural, such as limited openness or trust among teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Louis, 2007). However, in our view, one of the most significant constraints lies in the dominant conception of professional development itself. As we shall argue, even in its more collaborative forms, professional development initiatives often fail to provide sufficient support to help teachers learn and to make a substantial impact on their practice of a kind that will produce measurable effects.

There are several reasons why this might be so. First, respecting teachers’ judgement and thus providing less prescription in collaborative approaches (Slavit, Holmlund-Nelson, & Kennedy, 2009; Stewart & Brendefur, 2005), plus acknowledging the ‘situatedness’ of teachers’ knowledge (Carter & Doyle, 1989; Leinhardt, 1988), has made an agreed knowledge base for teaching elusive (Berliner, 1992; Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002; Waxman, Weber, Franco-Fuenmayor, & Rollins, 2015). Second, teaching is such a profoundly complex activity, characterised by multidimensionality, simultaneity, and unpredictability (Jackson, 1968), that figuring out what constitutes good teaching at the local level can take up so much time as to be counterproductive and frustrating. Third, teachers bring such a diverse range of beliefs and experiences to their collaborative work (Wilson, Rozelle, & Mekeska, 2011) that reaching agreement can be fraught with tension to the point where relationships are strained and ‘agreement’ forced or feigned. Fourth, reaching agreement is often impeded by the underdeveloped language teachers have for talking about their work (Chen, Mason, Staniszewski, Upton, & Valley, 2012; Elmore, 2007; Little, Gearheart, Curry, & Kafka, 2003).

To address some of these enduring challenges, we call for a reassembling of ideas about what makes effective professional development. We use the term ‘reassembling’ to suggest a refocusing of the way we think about professional development, rather than arguing for an entirely new approach. That is, we aim to respect and use what is already ‘known’ and valued in this field of educational research and scholarship, but strengthen it by directly addressing the means by which teachers are to engage in collaborative analysis and refinement of their practice. There is a broad consensus that effective professional development approaches involve teachers as both learners and teachers (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995), are needs-supportive (Aelterman et al., 2013), take place within the school day (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001), are integrated into practice (Garet et al., 2001), are coherent with school and system policies (Desimone, 2009; Ingv Carlson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007), and focused on transforming practice, rather than accountability (Kennedy, 2005). But how each of these principles is to be realised in practice remains unresolved.

This paper is not designed to provide another systematic review of effective professional development. Rather, we aim to illustrate our argument by examining the strengths and weaknesses of two popular collaborative approaches to professional development: professional learning communities (PLCs) and ‘instructional rounds’. We identify critical omissions that need to be addressed in reassembling professional development before
outlining our approach, known as Quality Teaching Rounds. We argue that combining a strong pedagogical framework with the current emphases on community, context, and collaboration will have greater impact on teacher learning and teaching practice. Quality Teaching Rounds is conceptualised as an approach designed to strengthen the impact of professional development.

**Professional learning communities**

PLCs have been widely heralded as meeting teachers’ needs for collaborative learning in order to reform practice and improve student achievement (Bolam et al., 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Diverse views abound on what PLCs are and their relationship to a wide range of other concepts, including ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991), ‘school-based teacher learning communities’ (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), and ‘PLCs within schools’ (Louis, 2007; Stoll & Seashore Louis, 2007). In broad terms, however, PLCs typically approach knowledge as much more fluid and uncertain than conventional forms of professional development, valuing teachers’ capacities to name and solve problems in collaboration with colleagues who understand the context (local community, student profile, subject matter, and so on). This perspective is encapsulated in Day and Gu’s (2007) assertion that ‘schools are the primary site for teachers’ professional learning’ (p. 427).

PLCs are typically characterised by: shared values and vision; collective responsibility for student learning; reflection on practice; and, collaborative as well as individual teacher inquiry (Bolam et al., 2005; Vescio et al., 2008). At their most productive, PLCs are seen as: enabling a local focus; building the respect, trust, and confidentiality that are conducive to breaking down ‘privatism’ in teaching; and, supporting participants to engage in rigorous and challenging inquiry into practice (Bolam et al., 2005). This combination of features is seen to produce an environment for professional learning that reduces teachers’ concerns and fears in the process of refining practice.

However, while trust, respect, and support are characteristic of effective and ‘mature’ PLCs, these qualities are not easy to enact. As a result, strong facilitators are often considered to be important in PLCs, needing knowledge of psychology as well as pedagogy in order to guide meaningful collegial inquiry (Louis, 2007). Even where strong trust and relationships develop in PLCs, some researchers have found that these qualities can stifle reform (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Teachers can be so supportive of each other that critical analysis and innovation are avoided in the interests of maintaining harmonious relationships. And yet, despite a paucity of empirical research documenting positive effects of PLCs on teachers, teaching practice, or student achievement (Desimone, 2009; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009; Vescio et al., 2008), advocacy of PLCs in many educational jurisdictions remains strong, often uncritically.

Most scholarship on PLCs has either: (1) emphasised the social and cultural needs of teachers by focusing on the development of ‘community’; or, (2) tried to address the difficulties of shaping productive professional conversations by focusing on processes, such as protocols (Elmore, 2007). These are critical aspects of professional development that we want to retain in our reassembled model. However, in much of this work, the form of professional development (collaboration, communities of practice) has taken precedence over the substance (what teachers are to study or focus on). Indeed, PLCs often leave the substance wide open, subject to personal idiosyncrasies and externally driven concerns.
that may not address the specific needs of teachers and students. Alternatively, PLCs focus exclusively on subject knowledge without establishing an agreed view on teaching in general. This means that teachers have little shared basis for doing collaborative work (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001).

If PLCs are to have greater impact on teacher learning, we propose some re-assembling of how they are constituted and what they do. The most critical element is an agreed knowledge base for teaching in general. In our view, the potential of PLCs can be enhanced and dependence on facilitation expertise can be reduced with stronger guidance for the substantive work to be done in PLCs, a recommendation we also make in relation to instructional rounds.

**Instructional rounds**

Elmore’s (2007) adaptation of medical rounds, known as ‘instructional rounds’, has gained currency particularly in the USA, Canada, UK, and Australia for its capacity-building potential in schools. Educators have been cautious about comparing medical education strategies with the needs of school teaching (Hargreaves, 1994), especially given the relative lack of certainty and specificity in the professional knowledge base and language of teaching. However, Elmore (2007) argues that, for the most part, educators are no different than psychologists who, despite epistemological diversity, have managed to acculturate their profession with clinical mechanisms for refining practice.

The instructional rounds approach, as described in Elmore’s (2007) work with the Connecticut Superintendents’ Network, as well as more recent applications elsewhere (City, 2011; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009), links problems of practice with improvement efforts. Instructional leaders, such as superintendents, principals, teachers, and union leaders, conduct observations of representative lessons (usually for 20–25 min per lesson). They focus on the interactions among teacher, students and content – ‘the instructional core’ – in an attempt to build an evidence-informed pedagogical profile of a school. The dual purpose of this analytical ‘audit’ is to provide schools with an analysis of a specific problem of local practice and enable the system to focus resources for reform in a coherent manner. By using local evidence, participants in instructional rounds identify needs of the classroom, school, and district, and establish direction for the ‘next level of work’ (City et al., 2009).

Procedural protocols are designed to keep observations and subsequent conversation non-judgemental, focus on teaching rather than teachers, and ensure each participant’s views are considered by the group. For example, after the group has completed observations, the ‘debrief protocol’ requires them to ‘share observations of each classroom [they] visited’ and to ‘[h]elp each other stay in the descriptive (not evaluative) voice’. Observers are encouraged to clarify their views with evidence by responding to such questions as, ‘What did you see/hear that makes you think that?’ (City et al., 2009, p. 119). Such non-judgemental and evidence-based discussions are also vital to our reassembled approach.

The instructional rounds approach addresses a common difficulty faced by PLCs – reaching agreement about what happened in a classroom or what was observed or, indeed, what to discuss. However, Elmore and his colleagues identify two related challenges with this evidence-based approach on which we build. First, educators are rarely, if ever, asked to describe practice without judging it and find it extremely difficult to operate in the descriptive mode (Elmore, 2007). Second, there is no agreed conception of good teaching and learning to guide instructional rounds. As its key proponents report:
We have worked, collectively and separately, in dozens of school districts where there was no common point of view on instruction, where ten educators from the same district could watch a fifteen-minute classroom video and have ten different opinions about its quality, ranging the full gamut from high praise to excoriation. Gaining an explicit and widely held view of what constitutes good teaching and learning in your setting is a first step toward any systematic efforts to scaling up quality [emphasis added]. (City et al., 2009, p. 173)

Our reassembled approach takes on this challenge of moving toward an ‘explicit and widely held view’ (City et al., 2009). Without a shared understanding of good teaching and learning, we are not surprised that Elmore (2007) found the impact of instructional rounds on practice to be ‘initially spotty, uneven and slower than [h]e wanted’ (p. 24). He expresses confidence in instructional rounds as a means of creating a productive environment for the work of continuous pedagogical improvement. But the requirement for the people who work in schools to do things they do not know how to do (Elmore, 2002) is left unattended and highlights precisely the point where our reassembling of teacher professional learning intervenes. We argue that teachers need more direct guidance for their analysis and improvement efforts. This is not to adopt a deficit view of teachers. Rather, it recognises that teacher learning (like student learning) requires input, structure, and feedback (Coe, Aloisi, Higgins, & Major, 2014; Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

Quality Teaching Rounds: towards more productive collaboration

We call our ‘reassembled’ approach to teacher professional development Quality Teaching Rounds (Bowe, Gore, & Elsworth, 2010). This approach combines the strengths of PLCs (attention to local context, community, and applicability) and instructional rounds (attention to evidence and collaboration) but, crucially, adds a particular pedagogical framework. This combination of features is designed to both guide teachers in critical analysis of the quality of their teaching and generate collegial support among teachers through engagement in an enterprise directly oriented at professional learning and enhanced classroom practice. ‘Professional learning’ is understood broadly here to include attitudinal, intellectual, and behavioural change (Evans, 2014) as we elaborate in the sections below.

Structured professional learning: conducting Quality Teaching Rounds

Quality Teaching Rounds involve teachers (and school leaders and/or student teachers) working in PLCs, typically in groups of four to eight. A ‘round’ is comprised of three sequential sessions that occur on a single day. The first session engages teachers in discussion of a professional reading, typically selected by one of the participating teachers. The aim is to develop a shared basis for their professional conversations and learn more about one another’s beliefs and values about teaching and learning, thus enriching their conversations and strengthening the shared basis for analysis. The reading session affords teachers the opportunity to bring ideas and perspectives to the group that they value, thus encouraging breadth of knowledge and professional autonomy.

The second session involves classroom observation, in which one PLC member teaches a lesson that is observed by all other members of the PLC, again to provide a shared basis for discussing teaching and learning. Over a period of several weeks, every PLC member, regardless of years of experience or institutional position of authority, takes their turn to
host a round. In each round, teachers reflect not only on that lesson, but how it relates to their own practice and to teaching at their school in general.

The third session involves all PLC members, including the host teacher, coding and then discussing the lesson using the Quality Teaching framework (outlined below). Unlike coaching or mentoring where the main aim is to provide the teacher with feedback (Kennedy, 2005; Smyth, 1991), the aim here is for all participants to experience and describe what happened in the classroom, as a basis for their collaborative analysis of teaching practice more broadly. The framework facilitates analysis at a level of specificity that is intended to quickly engage participants in rich conversations, guided by a particular conception of good teaching and learning.

Matters such as confidentiality, note-taking during observations, and interacting with students during lessons are negotiated by the group to help teachers feel more rather than less comfortable about the deprivatisation of their practice. These negotiations are designed to help build trust and counter the well-documented reluctance of teachers to open up classrooms for peer observations (Elmore, 2002; Little, 1990) and/or to adopt a level of politeness that avoids critical analysis of their practice (Hargreaves, 1994).

Supporting the knowledge base: the pedagogical framework

The pedagogical framework we use in Quality Teaching Rounds is the Quality Teaching framework (NSW Department of Education and Training [NSW DET], 2003). This pedagogical framework provides a knowledge base for teaching and structures all observations and post-lesson discussions. It was derived from Newmann and Associates’ (1996) work on Authentic Pedagogy and an extensive synthesis of research on aspects of pedagogical practice that make a difference for student outcomes (Ladwig & King, 2003).

Grounded in analysis by teachers and researchers of hundreds of lessons (Ladwig, 2007, 2010), the framework addresses matters of curriculum (such as depth of knowledge, knowledge integration, treatment of knowledge as fact or socially constructed), student engagement (such as investment in the work, self-regulation, and control over aspects of learning), social justice (such as inclusive classrooms and inclusion of non-dominant cultural knowledge), and pedagogical practices (such as providing explicit criteria for the quality of work and opportunities for elaborated communication) (see Table 1). That is, the framework offers a comprehensive account of teaching, rather than being narrowly focused on a single problem of practice or part of practice. It is designed to look at teaching holistically and comprehensively.

We argue that a comprehensive framework like Quality Teaching is important in enabling teachers to see the relevance of their individual and collective analysis for their own lessons, classrooms and students, to recognise how the ‘various components of the knowledge base

Table 1. Dimensions and elements of the quality teaching framework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual quality</th>
<th>Quality learning environment</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>Explicit quality criteria</td>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td>Cultural knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematic knowledge</td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher order thinking</td>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Inclusivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metallanguage</td>
<td>Students’ self-regulation</td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive communication</td>
<td>Student direction</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
... relate to each other in ways that have crucial bearing on the basic pedagogical question of what gets taught and how’ (Johnston & Goettsch, 2000, p. 463). The conceptual breadth of the Quality Teaching framework is critical, we argue, in helping teachers to navigate the daily complexities of teaching, while its three-dimensional structure helps make the complexity more conceptually manageable.

The framework focuses teachers’ attention on three dimensions of pedagogy, ‘Intellectual Quality’, ‘Quality Learning Environment’, and ‘Significance’, each consisting of six elements as depicted in Table 1. Where teaching quality, defined in this way, is occurring, student achievement improves measurably (Gore, 2014; Ladwig, 2007) and equity gaps narrow, especially enduring gaps between students from high and low SES backgrounds and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Ladwig, Gore, Miller, Griffiths, & Smith, 2007).

A key feature that distinguishes this framework from many others used in teacher evaluation is that each element is framed as an inquiry question to direct teachers’ observations and discussions. In relation to the element of Deep Knowledge, for example, teachers ask ‘to what extent does the knowledge addressed in the lesson focus on a small number of key concepts and the relationships between them?’ In relation to the element of Explicit Quality Criteria, teachers ask ‘to what extent are students provided with clear criteria for the quality of work they are to produce?’ And in relation to Cultural Knowledge, they consider ‘to what extent do lessons regularly incorporate the cultural knowledge of diverse social groupings?’ These kinds of questions enable teachers to discuss not only what they see in a lesson, but also what they believe and value about good teaching. ‘Definitions’ of each element provide a reference point as a common basis for teachers’ deliberations (see examples for Deep Knowledge and Explicit Quality Criteria in Appendix 1). Hence, the substance of the analysis is guided by the Quality Teaching framework in a way that is simultaneously comprehensive enough to encompass teachers’ concerns, manageable enough to give focus to their thinking and practice, and open enough to enable their critical engagement (Bowe & Gore, 2012).

The Quality Teaching framework is neither a simple formula to be adopted by unthinking or disenfranchised teachers, nor a framework that stipulates a singular approach to effective teaching (Gore, 2007). Rather, it draws attention to the purposes to which classroom practices are put. As Askew, Brown, Rhodes, Wiliam, and Johnson (1997) assert, the ‘purposes behind particular classroom practices are as important as the practices themselves in determining effectiveness’ (p. 5). Naming the dimensions of Quality Teaching foregrounds the purposes of achieving intellectual quality, a quality learning environment, and significance for students. In so doing, it engages with teachers’ existing theories, values, and beliefs (Desimone, 2009; Timperley et al., 2007), and focuses their analysis in ways that can produce intellectual and attitudinal change, not just behavioural change (Evans, 2014; Guskey, 2002).

Achieving specificity: coding as a basis for analysis

To illustrate the ways the Quality Teaching framework provides teachers with concepts, associated language, and fine-grained indicators of quality to help them describe and analyse local classroom-based evidence, we consider how the coding process works. Teachers individually code lessons, using the 18 elements of the framework, ideally soon after the lesson is over. Next, they take turns to articulate their thinking in reaching a particular code – what they observed in the lesson, what evidence they drew on to make their determination, how
they understand or interpret a particular element. After every teacher has shared their views, the group attempts to reach agreement about the best code for that element in that lesson, before moving to the next element. The point is not to quickly agree on a code but to interrogate their assumptions, to carefully consider outliers and alternate views, and to explore what it might take for a lesson to achieve a higher code in that activity. These discussions among PLC members of the three dimensions of Quality Teaching typically take between one and two hours which guards against quick and simplistic judgements of teaching.

The 1-to-5 coding scale for Deep Knowledge is detailed in Figure 1 to illustrate how the framework provides scope for analysis, judgement, and debate.

In deliberating about Deep Knowledge, for example, teachers observing a lesson might ask: What constitutes significant ideas in relation to this topic? What were the key concepts of this lesson? What happened during the lesson that might be considered superficial or unrelated? Who brought the knowledge to this lesson – teacher, students, both? Teachers’ access to a ‘definition’ of Deep Knowledge both provides a starting point for their deliberations and helps move toward a shared understanding of good teaching.

We are aware that using a 1-to-5 coding system risks the critique of producing performative culture (Ball, 2003) or subscribing to narrow ‘scientistic’ approaches to improving teaching (Brophy & Good, 1986; Gage, 1989). We argue, on the contrary, that the numbers,
and their associated descriptors, are crucial in providing a basis for professional conversations among teachers at a level of specificity that guides both their critical analysis and their collective refinement of practice. Without specificity, there is a risk of asking teachers to reflect without providing them with a solid theoretical frame of reference against which to assess their practice (Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2011). Any text can be taken up and used in multiple ways: a 'text does not determine its meaning so much as delimit the arena of struggle for that meaning by marking the terrain within which its variety of readings can be negotiated' (Fiske, 1987, p. 269). Quality Teaching Rounds protect against a reductive numerical coding by insisting on sustained time for teachers’ conversations about each element. The numbers are the means, not the ends, to productive conversations.

A key benefit of this approach is that PLC members can come from any subject area and any year level and still participate fully in the coding and the professional conversation. Indeed, being non-expert in a particular subject or being inexperienced at working with students of a particular age can enrich the conversation, because such teachers are more likely to raise questions that might be overlooked by more experienced teachers. In this way, Quality Teaching Rounds are designed to assist teachers in a school or district to support each other in collaborative analysis of practice and help build a sense of collective responsibility for student learning (Louis, 2012). While some researchers argue for subject specialist frameworks to enhance the teaching of specific content (Grossman et al., 2001; Waxman et al., 2015), we argue that a framework like Quality Teaching not only creates opportunities for genuine collaboration across a school, but is applicable across grades and subjects.

The Quality Teaching Rounds approach is unapologetically directive about the substance of inquiry and analysis. Using the Quality Teaching framework means that the substance is not as open as is favoured in many other collaborative approaches. Nor is it closed in the way of much conventional professional development which tells teachers what to do. Rather, the framework expands the range of issues to be addressed by drawing teachers’ attention to aspects of practice they otherwise might not notice. At the same time, it circumscribes a comprehensive set of issues for analysis and provides concepts and language with which to engage in rich professional conversations, all the while not excluding other matters from becoming a focus of the analysis as they are raised by teachers. In short, Quality Teaching Rounds offer a guide for teachers’ observations, thinking, and discussion while relying heavily on their own knowledge and local insights. While the goal is to enhance teachers’ classroom practice, the processes of Quality Teaching Rounds do much to provoke teachers’ attitudes and their intellectual engagement with the work of teaching. As Borko and Putnam (1995) argue, ‘successful professional development efforts are those that help teachers to acquire or develop new ways of thinking about learning, learners and subject matter’ (p. 60).

**Working collaboratively for professional learning**

We have argued that Quality Teaching Rounds represent a reassembling of core elements of effective teacher professional development in ways that address the main fault-lines of many other approaches (lack of shared knowledge base, difficulty in reaching critical analysis) while retaining their strengths (building community, collaboratively focusing on student learning, minimising judgement through clinical inquiry processes).

The intent of Quality Teaching Rounds is to empower teachers, with enhanced capacity to engage in collaborative work with colleagues to improve teaching and learning. Such
productive collaboration is foundational to their ongoing professional learning. This impact on teacher learning depends on teachers embracing the new approach as ‘a better way’ (Evans, 2014) that will help them to think, feel, and act differently as teachers – to reconceptualise what it means to teach. Evans (2014) observes that recognition of a better way is not necessarily sought, but ‘once discovered, it immediately reveals what was previously unrecognised’ (Evans, 2014, p. 187). The Quality Teaching framework can provide such a better way.

But as Sartain, Stoelinga, and Brown (2011) note:

An observation tool cannot promote instructional improvement in isolation. A rigorous instructional rubric plays a critical role in defining effective instruction and creating a shared language for teachers and principals to talk about instruction, but it is the conversations themselves that act as the true lever for instructional improvement and teacher development. (p. 41)

Clearly, there is an abundance of pedagogical frameworks to draw on (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010; Coe et al., 2014), each with potential to focus teachers’ analysis of practice. However, given that most frameworks (including ours) are based on researcher knowledge rather than practitioner knowledge, they are inherently at risk of being considered irrelevant by teachers. Frameworks can also overwhelm teachers when they are too detailed and can deskill teachers if they believe they must rigidly follow particular classroom routines. Their value will depend on the degree to which they resonate with teachers, how they are utilised, and how they impact on teachers’ work.

We recognise that observing and being observed by colleagues and applying the Quality Teaching coding scales for fine-grained analysis are potentially the most challenging aspects of participating in Quality Teaching Rounds. This is especially likely to be the case in contexts where teachers are not used to opening their classrooms to others or where ratings of teachers have been used to make employment decisions, leaving teachers wary of any process that might be used to judge them.

However, the Quality Teaching framework and Quality Teaching Rounds processes are designed to ensure that judgements of teaching focus on a specific lesson (a point in time) and collective practice (how many of us engage in similar practices?) rather than judgements of individual teachers. Importantly, teachers typically find that the Quality Teaching framework affirms much of what they are doing and provides them with positive feedback of a kind that is often missing from their professional lives. Indeed, it helps fill a void in which many teachers lack a clear sense of what they are doing well and how good they are at teaching.

**Conclusion**

We have argued that one of the key constraints to effective professional development lies in the dominant conception of professional development itself. This dominant conception, evident in many contemporary approaches to teacher development, like PLCs and instructional rounds, is premised on respecting teachers’ capacities and valuing collaboration. Underpinning these premises are three key beliefs that: (a) teachers have the resources to identify and solve their own problems, they just need time to collaborate; (b) discussion among teachers (and other educators) based on evidence gathered through observation will produce gains/improvements; and, (c) teachers are able to work collaboratively in doing hard analytical work. While these are at least partial truths, with potential benefits
for teachers and their students, each of these beliefs about professional development relies on the particular confluence of people and processes for their success.

We have also argued that if professional development is to have more impact, we must not only respect the value of collaboration within local contexts, but also, crucially, support teachers to engage in the work of critically analysing and refining teaching practice. Most current approaches to teacher development produce improvement in incremental ways, for this topic or this class or this teacher. Quality Teaching Rounds, underpinned by a strong pedagogical framework that can support teachers to analyse and reconceptualise their practice, has more transformational potential than many other processes, scaffolds, or frameworks used in collaborative professional development. Designed to enable deeper forms of collaboration, build stronger professional community, and contribute to teachers’ understanding, confidence, and satisfaction in relation to their own and their collective work, we contend that such a ‘reassembled’ approach is worth pursuing in the quest for more effective professional development for teachers. This would mean experimenting with PLCs, instructional rounds, and other collaborative approaches, to investigate their impact when greater attention is given to the substance of teachers’ work. Naturally, the concept of Quality Teaching Rounds, argued for in this paper, must also be subjected to rigorous empirical investigation (see Gore et al., 2015).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Julie Bowe is an academic, deputy programme convenor and PhD candidate in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia. Her research interests include teacher professional development, pedagogical reform and learning technologies. With her PhD supervisor, Jennifer Gore, Julie was involved in the conceptualisation of the Quality Teaching Rounds approach to teacher development and professional learning. This work has led to a cluster randomised controlled trial, a research study that examines the impact of Quality Teaching Rounds on teaching quality in a large number of public schools in the New South Wales state of Australia and on which Julie is a co-principal investigator.

Jennifer Gore is a professor in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle, Australia and a visiting professor at the Institute for Education at Bath Spa University. Her educational and research interests consistently centre on quality and equity, ranging across such topics as teacher socialisation, reform in teacher education, pedagogical reform and teacher development. Widely published and cited, Jennifer’s current major research projects include a longitudinal study exploring the formation of educational and career aspirations in the middle years of schooling and a randomised controlled trial investigating the impact of Quality Teaching Rounds.

References


**Appendix 1. Example definitions of elements in the Quality Teaching framework (NSW DET, 2003)**

**Deep knowledge**

Knowledge is deep when it concerns the central ideas of concepts of a topic, subject or Key Learning Area (KLA) and when the knowledge is judged to be crucial to the topic, subject or KLA. Deep knowledge is evident when either the teacher or the students provide information, reasoning or arguments that address the centrality or complexity of a key concept or idea, or when relatively complex relations are established to other central concepts.

Knowledge is shallow when it does not concern significant concepts or key ideas of a topic, subject or KLA, or when concepts or ideas are fragmented and disconnected superficially by the teacher or students, or when there is no clear focus on an important idea or concept. This superficiality can arise from trying to cover large quantities of fragmented information that results in the content covered remaining unconnected to central ideas or concepts.

**Explicit quality criteria**

High explicit quality criteria is identified by frequent, detailed and specific statements about the quality of work required of students. Explicit quality criteria become reference points when the teacher and/or students use the criteria to develop and check their own work or the work of others.

Low explicit quality criteria is identified by an absence of written or spoken reference to the quality of work expected of students. Reference to technical or procedural requirements only (such as the number of examples, length of an essay or the duration of a presentation) is not evidence of explicit quality criteria.