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# 1

## The Practice of Teaching and Teacher Rounds

### Aiming for the Sweet Spot

**T**eacher Rounds are meant to support teachers in understanding student learning and in developing their practice individually and collectively. Several fundamental questions, therefore, frame the work of Teacher Rounds: what do we teach for, and how do students learn deeply and well? How do our ideas about what we teach for and about learning shape teaching practice? How do we gain expertise in the practice of teaching, and what can school and other professional communities do to help develop effective practice? Big questions such as these do not always get the attention they deserve in the pressured world of teaching, professional learning, and accountability. This chapter starts from the premise that we need to consider them if we are to make professional learning—more specifically, Teacher Rounds—truly worthwhile and powerful. That said, the questions are challenging and complex: what follows is a broad response intended to put Teacher Rounds in larger perspective and encourage reflection and conversation.

## **What Do We Teach for and How Do Students Learn Deeply and Well?**

Baseball players recognize the sound of the sweet spot, the deep resounding thwack that occurs when bat and ball meet true, propelling the ball outward with every bit of the force generated by the hitter. If there is a sweet spot in teaching, it may be at the point where the teacher gives a student or students just what they need to move forward on their own in purposeful and meaningful learning. Teachers and their students usually know when they are working well in the sweet spot: it is a space of optimal learning and growth, where students realize and exercise their full capability, and where teaching is equitable and learning rings authentic and true.

Thomas Merton (1958) wrote, “Your life is shaped by the end you live for.” The same might be said about teaching: your teaching is shaped by the end you teach for. Teaching for the sweet spot is much different, certainly, from teaching for the test. In teaching for the sweet spot, teachers are not trying to run up a score but to support students in their full intellectual and personal development. To be sure, they want students to move forward in their learning and to develop important capabilities that standardized tests are meant to measure. But they do so by teaching for a quality of experience and breadth and depth of learning that respects and engages students fully as the young human beings they are.

What happens when students are learning in the sweet spot? First and foremost, they bring themselves fully and trustingly to learning, their whole attention absorbed in something interesting and meaningful. They work hard, maybe excitedly, to figure out something in the world of knowledge, to test ideas of their own, and to understand. They exercise their minds to the utmost, forming critical habits. They discover the efficacy of their own effort, perhaps in the face of a challenge that seemed daunting at the first moment of encounter, planting seeds of future commitment and persistence in learning. They experience, in an affirming way, their own capacities as learners and as people. In their work with others, they learn about the challenge and power of collaboration, communication, and community as well; they may even learn something about what they live for and how they can contribute to the well-being of the communities they live in. When teaching for the sweet spot, teachers support students in their personal and intellectual as well as knowledge development: they help them discover who they are and the persons they can be as well as what they can know and what they can do.

## How Do Our Ideas About What We Teach for and About Learning Shape Teaching Practice?

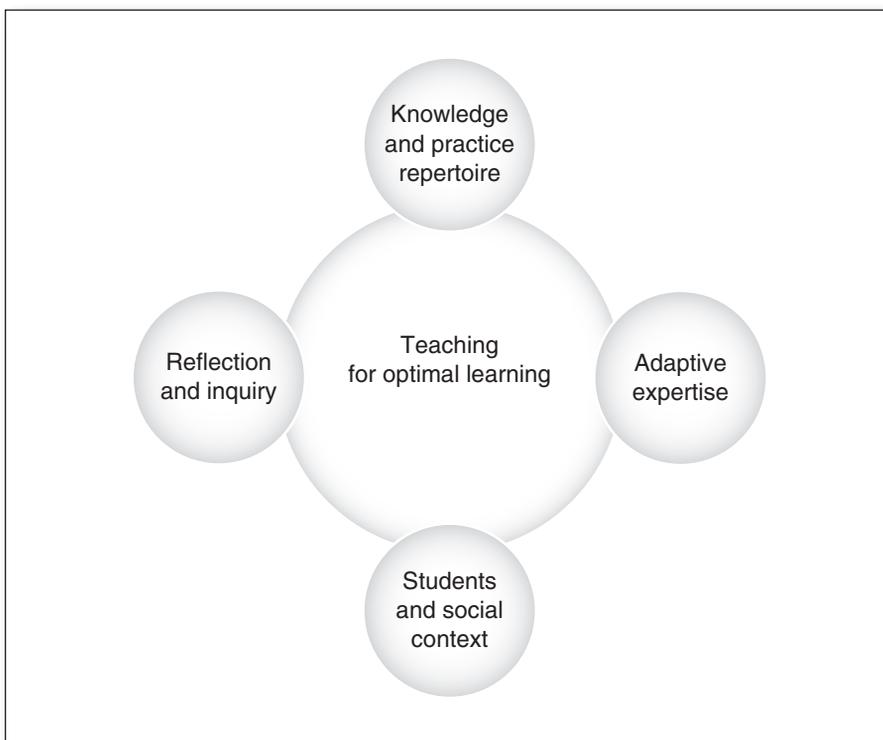
Teaching for the sweet spot entails engaging and supporting all learners, with their different strengths, needs, personalities, social and cultural backgrounds, and dispositions, in meeting common learning goals, all in a particular social context and moment in time. Teachers call on different kinds of knowledge in this practice. They need to know what to give, how, and when. This knowing is an outgrowth of other knowing: knowing, first of all, their own beliefs and assumptions about learning; knowing students well and knowing, as it is often expressed, “where they are”—what they are thinking, feeling, and needing vis-à-vis their learning; knowing where, in terms of curriculum and learning goals, students need to go; and knowing pedagogy, content, and academic discipline with enough virtuosity and versatility to be able to create, at any given moment, in the face of student strength as well as need, a likely and meaningful path of learning for each student. Teachers, in other words, have to be equal parts passionate orchestrator and empathetic listener, thoughtful framer and strategic adaptor; they have to be nimble, shaping, yet at the same time, responding thoughtfully and purposefully, and occasionally with artful improvisation, to what is happening within the sphere of action defined by subject matter, students, and learning goals.

When teachers try to be otherwise, whether from conviction or to conform to an external mandate, when, for example, they try to approach learners and learning as if they can be subdued and herded down a single linear path, their effectiveness, ironically, is apt to get waylaid. Teaching for the sweet spot means supporting students on paths of learning that take into account who and where they are. It means opening and adjusting to the challenge, surprise, and the “uncertainty,” as Cohen (2011) characterizes it, inherent in the process of engaging different minds and personalities in meaningful learning. In teaching, the unplanned and unexpected make regular appearances; the question for a teacher is what can be learned from them and how to respond. In this respect, teachers can claim some kinship with a batter in baseball: batters, too, must combine desire, skill, and judgment; calculating and adjusting as balls are thrown at different speeds, angles, and places with different motions by different pitchers at different times during the ebb and flow of the game; and decide in the moment whether a connection with the sweet spot of the bat is likely.

The multiple forms of knowledge that intertwine in teaching for the sweet spot can be called a teacher's knowledge and practice repertoire. A teacher's ability to adjust—to act so as to support particular students in the sweet spot of learning in a given moment—can be called adaptive expertise. More specifically, adaptive expertise refers to a teacher's ability to assess and respond effectively to what different students are thinking, doing, and needing, in a particular context (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005, pp. 76–77). Figure 1.1 represents the interaction of these dimensions of teaching practice together with the critical processes that inform them—reflection and inquiry.

The dynamic of framing and adapting which characterizes a teacher's practice is very much in evidence in the Teacher Rounds presented throughout the book. Kate, for instance, must decide how to respond to a student's seemingly logical but faulty mathematical reasoning (see Chapter 2). Leann considers how to push for deeper analysis of literary theme in response to her students' comments (see Chapter 3). Margaret intervenes when a second grader struggles with a particular word during guided reading but refrains in another instance (Chapter 4). Momentarily at a loss, Sue must assess the value

**Figure 1.1** Teaching for the Sweet Spot



of pursuing her young students' utterly unexpected response to a reading (see Chapter 4). Kyle judges that a small group's struggle is productive and decides to affirm their effort and draw back rather than provide explicit guidance (see Chapter 5). The Teacher Round process helps draw attention to challenging and consequential moments of decision making such as these; it focuses many eyes and ears on the thinking and action involved, helping to make the learning of students and the practice of teaching more transparent. In other words, it engages the knowledge and practice repertoires and adaptive expertise of participants. There is much at work in the process: Teacher Rounds help teachers practice and develop the habits, skills, and knowledge which teachers call on as they frame and adapt to student learning; the habits, skills, and knowledge which help them better understand and respond constructively to what students are thinking, doing, and needing.

### **Habits, Skills, and Knowledge of Effective Practice**

In responding and adapting to what they see, hear, and learn in their classrooms, teachers such as Kate, Leann, Margaret, Sue, and Kyle consider the present need in light of their prior experience and knowledge—they engage in a process of reflection. In their effort to understand where students are they use personalization skills: they observe, they attend closely, they inquire into, and they assess individual student learning. In facilitating different ways for students to support each other's learning and to learn together, they foster and tap the power of the class as a learning community. Understanding these ingredients of teaching expertise will help in understanding the Teacher Round process and its potential to inform and develop practice.

#### *Reflection*

In the actual act of teaching, the process that teachers use in responding to what students are thinking and doing can be described, in the terms used by Schon (1983) in *The Reflective Practitioner*, as "reflection-in-action." They are responding to "the unique case" defined by each student's or student group's particular interaction with subject matter (p.68). John Dewey (1938) might add that this reflective process entails both "observation and memory," as teachers try to understand and respond to the present case in light of prior experience (p. 64). They construct, in Schon's words, a theory of the unique case, act on it in a way calculated to support student

engagement and learning, and in learning from what happens, swing or miss, go about adding knowledge to memory; in other words, go about building adaptive expertise.

All the basic forms of knowledge that teachers use—knowledge about students, subject matter, pedagogy, context, and their own assumptions—enter into the reflective process and determine the potential effectiveness of a teacher’s adaptive action. In a Teacher Round, teachers have an opportunity individually and together to understand and learn from this internal dynamic of practice. They do this partly by practicing some of the personalization skills which build personal knowledge about students and the ability to support them.

### *Personalization*

*Education*, in its Latin origin, means to draw out, not to pour in. In this sense, education is profoundly personal: there is something in all of us worth every effort of drawing out. Call it, perhaps, our individual genius, that combination of unique and shared capacities that we all have which are worth discovering, cultivating, refining, expressing, and contributing as part of our development as educated persons in a democratic society. It is one of the joys of teaching to see evidence of these capacities emerging every day—a sudden or slowly nurtured insight, a conviction formed from careful study, a shy but perceptive voice, or an idea of what makes something work or what might make something work better. Teachers draw them out all the time: teaching is preeminently a personal and personalizing process.

Personalization starts with regard for each student as a whole thinking and feeling person full of personal capabilities and cultural strengths, full of hopes, feelings, predilections, and wonderful, perhaps yet-to-be-discovered, potentials; and with concern for the well-being and learning of each student. In personalizing, teachers strive to know each student well and to understand what each is thinking and doing in the context of classroom learning and, to some extent, why. This knowledge informs a teacher’s effort to engage students trustingly, fully, and meaningfully in learning; it also informs the effort to harness the strengths of each student in support of the learning of his or her peers and the classroom community as a whole.

The great educator, Horace Mann, sheds light on what personalization in teaching means. In 1840, in a passage remarkable for its pedagogical insight, especially for its time, he wrote,

. . . the mind of a teacher should migrate, as it were, into those of his pupils, to discover what they know and feel and need; and then, supplying from his own stock, what they require, he should reduce it to such a form, and bring it within such a distance, that they can reach out and seize and appropriate it. (as cited in Cremin, 1957, p. 46)

Tolstoy, who started a school for peasant children in mid-nineteenth century Russia, had a similar idea: “The best teacher will be he who has at his tongue’s end the explanation of what is bothering the pupil. These explanations give the teacher the greatest possible number of methods, the ability of inventing new methods and, above all, not a blind adherence to one method . . .” (as cited in Schon, 1983, p. 66).

Both Tolstoy and Mann imagined a personalized pedagogy, one consistent with the sweet spot of learning. Both anticipate later theories of learning, such as Dewey’s progressivism and Piaget’s constructivism, in which students are seen as active knowers and the teacher is a keenly observant and active supporter, in which practice is molded by what and how students are learning. They both also set a high standard: to determine the “mind” of a student in the sense of discovering what each knows and feels and needs, and to respond constructively, requires considerable attentiveness, empathy, and adaptive expertise. The teacher, therefore, must follow in order to lead; is cast as a guide who, paradoxically, follows the path of students’ learning—their minds and dispositions as they navigate the terrain of subject matter—in order to determine how to help them go further. “Mind reading,” in a certain sense, is one of the challenges that a teacher concerned about the learning of each student must strive to meet.

Teacher Rounds, structured so as to bring multiple eyes and ears to bear in understanding students’ learning and what supports it, ask each participant to practice, to some degree, the critical skills involved in personalization as Mann and Tolstoy understood it: close observation, together with its indispensable allies—attending, empathizing and relating, assessing, and inquiring.

*Observing, attending, empathizing and relating.* Dig into the root meanings of observation and attentiveness and one finds that they are closely linked terms: observation derives partly from the idea of “attending to.” To attend to something means combining observation with care and thoughtfulness; it means an effort to relate, to take an empathetic stance to students’ learning, to try to grasp their experience intuitively as well as intellectually and to step momentarily into

their shoes. Openness and empathy help in transcending any intellectual or personal bias that might prejudice a teacher's effort to understand what different students are thinking, doing, and needing.

The poetry of Mary Oliver, so full of natural images etched in wonder, as if they were newly born, suggests what openness and attentiveness in a classroom can mean. She declares that paying attention "is our endless and proper work." "How important it is," she writes, "to walk along, not in haste but slowly, looking at everything . . ." (Oliver, 2003). For Oliver, to be attentive in the world means to look at everything so as to let it in as it really is, so as to see it in its wonderful fullness. In a similar way, paying attention in the classroom means momentarily suspending or at least constraining our predispositions about what students might or should be thinking; it means increasing the possibility for seeing and hearing what the student really knows, feels, and needs or, at the very least, for identifying what in a student's thinking would be helpful to understand better, paving the way for inquiry. "Pay attention. Be astonished. Talk about it," Oliver exhorts in another poem (Oliver, 2008).

So often, observation in classrooms means something much more limited—cataloguing, for example, what students or teachers do or say. While this approach often yields helpful information, it stays more or less on the surface of what is possible to know. For example, we may be able to count the number of students who are searching in a text for some information to confirm or disconfirm an idea, but are we able to say how they are making sense of what they are reading—how they are constructing the meaning of the text? We may be able to determine how many students provide an answer, but can we say how each one came to it and what each understands, and what meaning each student's method of understanding might hold for others and the work of teaching-learning? We might be able to talk about who was right and wrong, but can we identify learning opportunities gained or lost, and how?

When observing, attending, and relating, a teacher might not be astonished, in the sense that Mary Oliver uses the word, by a student's intuition or glimmering of understanding or insightful question, but might be enlightened. There are numerous examples of such teacher enlightenment, and most teachers can point to their own. Consider, for example, Vivian Paley's warm and astute observations of young children at play, which led her to understand the powerful learning that occurs through storytelling: "Above all, I think, the continued observation of children at play demonstrates the importance of make-believe as the thinking tool children use" (as cited in National

Association for the Education of Young Children, 2001). Or consider the insights of Lisa Delpit, who reminds us in her most recent book to heed and leverage all that children, who may not come to school with the skills typical of middle class children, “do know and bring with them to class,” such as “maturity in problem-solving, an ability to do what is needed in difficult situations, an understanding of real-world problems” (Delpit, 2012). Teachers who appear in the chapters that follow, such as Kate, Leann, Sue, Margaret, and Kyle, are keen to know and support the capabilities, approaches to learning, and developing minds of their students, and invite their colleagues to help through Teacher Rounds.

*Assessing and personalizing: Exercising our “quads.”* Assessment, evaluation, and testing often get conflated, as if they all mean the same thing. But assessment in its original and intended sense, as reflected in its root meaning of “sitting by,” has little to do with the other two. Assessment is one of the skills teachers use to personalize. In assessing students, teachers sit literally and figuratively beside them so as to have the best possible vantage point for understanding what and how they are thinking and what they need. Expressing this view, Kate, a high school history teacher, says she has her best days teaching when her “quads hurt” (K. Moylan, personal communication, May 23, 2012). Teaching so that one’s quads hurt is not simply an intellectual matter. In sitting by their students, teachers communicate their regard, respect, and commitment and learn to relate; they build trust. They learn firsthand some or all of what they need to address in order to sustain students in the optimal zone of their own learning, so that they develop understanding, capability, and a sense of self-efficacy.

When teachers attend caringly and openly to the learning of students—to what and how they are thinking in relation to the subject matter at hand, to what they respond to and engage in, to what supports and challenges them, to what they struggle with and why—they value and make students’ explanations of their ideas and how they arrived at them a normal occurrence. They follow students’ personal paths of learning and map out likely ways for them to move forward toward greater subject matter understanding and appreciate and relate more fully to who they are. The student’s experience, too, is transformed: if their engaged thoughts and experience have such importance, then so in a profound sense, do they; and so might their learning be that much more worth pursuing, be worth a few swings and misses of their own.

In the process of Teacher Rounds, where the work of observing, attending, empathizing, relating, assessing, and mapping out is momentarily shared, teachers may not only develop knowledge of student learning meaningful in the context of a specific class but also generate insight into curricular and learning possibilities with wider application—for starters, in the practice of other Teacher Round participants and their classrooms. The Rounds Day at University Park Campus School, portrayed in Chapter 5, illustrates this potential.

*Inquiry.* Focused inquiry is a powerful tool in a teacher's effort to understand an individual learner or group of learners and teaching-learning more generally. Focused inquiry means turning learning and practice goals, observations, intuitions, and reflections—including challenges, theories about what will engage particular students, certainties and uncertainties, puzzlements about student engagement or performance, disappointments, concerns, hopes, and, yes, astonishment and wonderment—into questions and finding ways to answer them in a particular moment or over time. When teachers inquire, they become deeper learners of student learning, as well as of curriculum and teaching; they tap the potential to learn in and from practice.

Inquiry into student learning and teaching practice, in its actual context, is an essential component of Teacher Rounds. The Round Teacher, the teacher who hosts the Round in her or his classroom, formulates the Round inquiry, literally a set of questions or directions on what to look, listen, or ask for in the course of teaching-learning, as described in the next chapter. A teacher's Round inquiry usually links to learning goals, observations, and assessments about particular student's learning, or to particular practices or aspects of practice. The inquiry helps members of the Round group act as collaborative observers working to uncover and understand what is happening and to what effect.

## **Turning Classrooms into Authentic Learning Communities**

It is not possible, of course, to attend closely to every student in a class of students at every moment. But, teachers can create moments for attending closely and can implement ways to elicit student thinking, to make it visible. Furthermore, they can enlist students as witting or unwitting accomplices, in the process helping them to clarify and sharpen their own thoughts and ideas, and

become respectful cobuilders of a community of mutual inquirers and knowledge seekers.

Students become willing collaborators in their teacher's effort to understand and respond constructively to what they know, feel, and need, to the extent they learn to trust that who they are, including their ideas as well as their confusions, will be respected, and that they are considered a valued part of the learning process; to the extent they learn increasingly to explain their reasoning and listen to each other's ideas and ask for clarification as needed; to the extent they develop the habit of recognizing and using appropriate evidence to support their reasoning and to fulfill a commitment to know honestly and truthfully; to the extent they develop the habit of digging out and questioning their own assumptions; to the extent that they have multiple opportunities and ways to express what they understand and know and are unsure about; in other words, to the extent that they are part of an authentic thinking community.

Teachers turn classrooms into thinking communities in which every student's thinking is valued and made visible to the teacher and peers in manifold ways. Walk into Jill's 4th grade classroom, and pairs of students are reading passages to each other from books they have chosen to read, each time explaining what they understand or do not understand, what connections they make to their own experience or previous reading, and what questions they have. In Kate's 8th grade mathematics classroom, you might ask a student to share a "Dear Confused" letter he or she is writing to explain how to solve a math problem to "Confused"—a fictional creation who is stymied for one reason or another. Listen intently in Pete's 9th grade English class, and you might be discomfited by long moments of silence that are a normal part of learning there, as student thinking gestates or gets formed in the process of trying to write it down. Sit beside a small group of students who are in Meghan's 12th grade English class reading Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. You will hear each share a question for peer consideration that grows out of some specific confusion or musing each had in comprehending the language, the storyline, the character's development, or some thematic element (see discussion of one of Meghan's Teacher Rounds in Chapters 5 and 6). Each of these moments affords an opportunity for the teacher to listen to and to see manifestations of student thinking; in other words, to migrate into their minds, just as they are, with the same attentiveness that the poet Mary Oliver has for the world that she has learned to let in and relate to, just as it is.

## How Do Teachers Develop Expertise?

Learning how to hit a baseball on the sweet spot of the bat with some consistency requires enormous dedication as well as patience. Hitters learn partly by approximation, swinging and missing one time, and recalibrating for the next. Their practice entails considerable study and reflection as well as repeated action and experience, as they learn the art of the pitcher and refine as necessary their approach. Since hitting is a very public act, there is ample opportunity for hitters to share and discuss their experience with observant colleagues and, through analysis and reflection, to build the knowledge which will inform their next instant of judgment at the plate.

Teachers, too, whether preservice or in-service, need opportunities to practice, analyze, inquire into, and reflect on their teaching with others. This, in fact, is a core principle of what Richard Elmore (2004) refers to as a “consensus view” of powerful teacher learning. The consensus view holds that “teachers learn through social interaction around problems of practice” and that the development of new practices requires “support for collegial interaction . . .” (p. 109). This widely accepted principle is exemplified in the standards of Learning Forward (2012), a leading organization in the field that emphasizes the importance of “learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.” In the paradigm of professional learning espoused by Learning Forward, teachers are active and central figures; they help determine what learning will be most beneficial and how.

## The Challenge of Collaborative Learning

As much as teacher collaboration focused on enhancing practice and student learning is valued, it has yet to be fully established as the norm of professional learning; nor necessarily is it effective when it is implemented (see discussion in Fullan, 2007). There are a host of factors that help explain the challenge of effective implementation and that are helpful to know in thinking about how to integrate collaborative learning practices such as Teacher Rounds fruitfully into professional life: collaboration must confront a stubborn pattern of teacher isolation in the profession; collaboration must have the concerted and sustained support that organizations such as Learning Forward recognize as essential components of success; collaboration must connect to what matters in practice and pass the bottom-line test of enhancing the learning of students.

Among the historical and cultural factors, the theme of teacher isolation stands out. For reasons that have as much to do with the way a teacher's day is structured and the way the work of teaching has been conceived as with the psychological vulnerability of teachers, the profession has had difficulty evolving a culture and practice of working together. In his classic study, *Schoolteacher*, Lortie (1975) delineated some of the colluding and constraining forces, which reverberate still. These include a teacher's overriding concern, in the face of uncertainty and challenge, for what will serve immediate needs ("presentism"); loyalty, partly out of concern for securing the present, to the status quo ("conservatism"); and a tendency, fed by the other two forces, to keep the classroom door closed ("individualism").

Lortie's study spawned considerable effort, in the name of school reform, to break through teacher isolation and establish more collegial norms of behavior; the prevailing theory of change, according to Hargreaves (2010), was "Eliminate individualism and you cure conservatism." But, as Hargreaves and others have learned, this formula can be applied simplistically, with zeal to promote collaboration resulting in forced or highly directed teaming, or what Hargreaves labels "contrived collegiality." When teacher collaboration is subject to top-down control, increased standardization of curriculum and teaching, and narrow accountability measures, then teachers have more reason to resist than to participate. Imposed collaboration can foster more conservative individual behavior even as it feeds a less collegial, less democratic, more conservative institutional philosophy. Students' education can suffer as much as teacher professionalism under these circumstances.

There is a cautionary tale in the work of Hargreaves and others for those who would support teacher collaboration. Collaboration by itself will not enhance teacher learning any more than it will student learning. Collaboration needs a valued common purpose, some measure of self-direction, and shared responsibility and accountability. It needs to start with and nourish trust among participants and trust between teachers and any overarching leadership or institutional structure (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). It needs to be founded on respect for teachers as professionals and for the challenging work of teaching. It should enable teachers to act with vocational integrity and build a common approach to equitable practice. Principles such as these are part of the consensus view of professional learning designed to improve student learning.

Examples of powerful collaborative learning experiences for teachers are documented in the literature. A report from The National

Commission on Teaching and America's Future (Carroll, Thomas, Fulton, and Doerr, 2010) testifies to the strong positive relationship between valued teacher collaboration and student performance. In a similar vein, Hargreaves (2010) reports on work in Finland, where teachers participate in a largely self-regulated collaborative culture. Recent work by Troen and Boles (2012) on the power of teacher teaming adds to this growing body of testimonials. The challenge is to make these documented positive experiences the norm of professional life in schools—to turn Lortie's triad of presentism, individualism, and conservatism into reflective action, genuine collaboration, and progressivism. The critical work, in other words, is to help teachers develop learning communities which enable them to learn in, from, and about their own practice in relation to student learning; it is equally important for those preparing to become teachers to learn in such communities (See Appendix B). The Teacher Round process can play a significant role in this work.

### **Teacher Rounds and Collaborative Learning in and From Practice**

The Teacher Round process provides a focused and grounded way for teachers to share, develop, and understand practice in relation to how and what their students are learning. It is distinguished as a collaborative learning practice in that it takes teachers directly into their classrooms, into the heart of the dynamic of teaching and learning—of framing and adapting, of personalizing and reflective action. The process engages and contributes directly to the development of knowledge and practice repertoires and adaptive expertise. It supports the development of a community of reflective and shared practice among teachers and helps teachers understand and develop a powerful parallel learning culture for their students.

Teacher Rounds play this role at University Park Campus School (see Chapter 5), where they occur routinely. Teachers at the school trust and value Teacher Rounds as a powerful mode of colearning and mutual support. This view prevails partly because important conditions for collaborative teacher learning are met there. Most notably, teachers as well as students are valued as thinkers and central actors in their respective realms of work, and teacher learning at the school is centered on students and their learning. As a result, Teacher Rounds do not stand alone in supporting professional learning. They are aligned with other collaborative efforts: teachers regularly examine student work and evaluate student progress

together and use what they learn to plan and implement strategies for supporting students within and across grade levels. They also coplan curriculum and have developed their own criteria for evaluating their classroom practice.

Teacher Rounds, like any form of teacher collaboration, fulfill their potential to enhance the knowledge, habits, skills, and development of practice when, as at University Park Campus School, there is mutual agreement among all concerned on their purpose, their value, and how they will be carried out; when, in effect, there is a professional compact. Figure 1.2 provides a sample of what teachers, school leaders, preservice students and their mentors, and other collaborators might discuss and agree to.

## Harvesting the Wisdom of Practice

We live during a time in which technology, so impressive in its capacities, increasingly interconnects with our lives. No doubt influenced by the allure of what technology can do, we have become increasingly accustomed to thinking in terms of technical solutions

**Figure 1.2** Sample Teacher Rounds Compact

As collaborators in professional learning, we pledge to:

- respect and maintain our integrity as teachers, that is, the integrity of the teaching vocation;
- conduct Teacher Rounds solely for the purpose of learning in and from practice together about all students and their learning and what supports it;
- strive in our learning together to:
  - understand our beliefs, goals, and rationales and how they are manifest in our teaching;
  - mutually develop essential habits and skills of practice, including reflection, observation, attentiveness, relating, assessing, and inquiry;
  - develop our understanding of what defines, creates, and sustains a zone of optimal and powerful learning for each and every student;
  - share and develop our knowledge and practice repertoires and adaptive expertise—that is, our ways to frame, understand, and respond to what students are learning and need in order to help them to move forward for good purpose on their own; and
  - help each other work in the sweet spot of teaching and learning;
- strive to build trust, openness, and a community of reflective practice through our colearning; and
- model for students the attitudes, beliefs, expectations, and habits of a strong culture of learning.

to problems. Sometimes we conflate technical and technological with scientific, to make them thereby somehow more credible; science may inform technological improvement and vice versa but by no stretch do they mean the same thing. Sometimes a solution that is not technical is deemed to be deficient, unworthy of serious consideration. This line of thinking can lead to oversimplification of complex problems and complex practices such as teaching. Indeed, the work of teaching has not been immune to the bias towards technical solutions in the culture. Together with the influence gained by a corporate command-and-control model of institutional behavior, the idea that teaching-learning can be subject to a technical and testable process of evaluation and improvement has carried considerable weight in educational policymaking.

But, as characterized in this chapter, teaching is a complex and contextual practice and preeminently a reflective, dynamic, personal, and communal one. To treat it simply as a technical practice reduces its wonderful and rich human complexity and challenge, reduces its potential to touch each student's life significantly and profoundly, and reduces the idea of education to mere training. Teaching is learning everyday—with a fair share of swings and misses—how to engage and contribute to the development of the minds of particular students and their capacities as human beings. Such immediate work is framed by curricular expectations and understandings, such as the Common Core State Standards, and can be informed tremendously by more distant work—by the insights and knowledge of others. But, within its guiding frameworks, the practice of teaching is developed through felt and carefully reflected-upon experience, a process that becomes more informing to the extent that it is carried out with others attuned to its complexity, possibility, and everyday context, and who work collaboratively, in intentional ways, to learn in and from it.

What teachers learn individually and together by exercising habits of reflection, personalization, and inquiry builds their knowledge and practice repertoires and adaptive expertise, taps and develops, borrowing from Lee Shulman (2004), the wisdom of practice. As teachers' understanding of the possible pathways of student learning grows, they can better relate to what and how each student is engaged; as their repertoire of ways for responding to and guiding students on their pathways grows, they are better able to keep students in a zone of optimal and purposeful learning; as their capability to work with students both individually and in groups grows, they are better able to help build their capacities as learners who increasingly can help themselves and each other.

Not all practice is wise. But, as on the baseball field, there is wisdom in practice that aims for the sweet spot and wisdom, too, in working together carefully to harvest it. The Teacher Round protocol, explained in the next chapter, is meant to be a collaborative harvesting tool.

## Questions to Consider

- With what do we agree or disagree with respect to the view of teaching and learning presented in this chapter? What would we change or add?
- What is our view of powerful student learning? What does it look and sound like?
- What does teaching centered on the sweet spot of practice look like?
- What powerful teaching and learning practices will we try to implement and learn more about through the Teacher Round process?
- What will be our “Teacher Round compact?”