Teaching Rounds: A Professional Development Strategy for Improving Physical Education Teachers' Understanding of Their Teaching

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Abstract: A key premise of professional development is that it works. But there are few studies showing that teachers and students benefited from teacher professional development with some notable exceptions in the physical education literature. Moreover, there is little evidence that professional development maintains after it is concluded. I have concluded from both the literature and my experience that professional development (a) should be a continuous process rather than an event, (b) focus primarily on improving student learning and (c) and that it can have meaningful benefits for teachers. In this article, I present a professional development process called teaching rounds that is designed to meet these three criteria.

Keywords: *Physical education, teaching, professional development*

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INTRODUCTION

I have been involved with teacher professional development my entire career. Some projects have been small-scale, both short and longer-term efforts, while others have been multi-year and larger scale endeavors. I have used a variety of themes including developing communities of practice, enhancing pedagogical competence in teachers, teaching curriculum models and strengthening the content knowledge of teachers and all manner of combinations of these of these themes. The professional development efforts have been both teacher-led, and expert-led. In many of these efforts teacher and often student data have been collected to determine if the professional development made a difference in teacher practice or learning. Some efforts have made a significant change in teacher practice, and student learning, some have made small changes, and some have made no changes. What has been commonplace, however, is that the effects for the most part, were often not long lasting, seldom more than a few years and often only a few months. The

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reasons for this are numerous, and they are not the same for each occurrence, but the most common include, (a) a loss of existing support from either a university or the district typically tied to a loss of funding, (b) a lack of teacher motivation to continue the work tied to the previous rational, and (c) because professional development almost always involves more work on top of what teachers are already doing, and teachers are already doing a lot in their day-to-day teaching. These conclusions have been clearly reported in the literature and not just in physical education, but in most subject matters (Desimone & Stuckey, 2014; Patton & Parker, 2015; Ward & Doutis, 1999).

The work of other colleagues who work in the area of professional development together the teachers I have been fortunate to work with, have led me to a set three core conclusions that have been reported variously in the literature, and which I suspect most individuals who work in the professional development field would acknowledge.

Professional Development as a *Continuous Process* Rather Than an Event

Many years ago, I read a multiyear study conducted Fouts (1999) in Washington State. He and his team examined school restructuring and student achievement in 51 elementary, 14 middle/junior high, and 10 high schools. In all, a total of 75 schools and 2197 teachers. Among the things he and his team examined is what teacher reforms influenced student achievement. They examined the use of technologies, pedagogies, curriculums, and organizational elements such as schools within schools and the like. What struck me about this research was that a primary conclusion was that it wasn't the effect of any one the reforms across the years of the study that impacted student learning! It was the fact that teachers were constantly reassessing their practice and making changes. Some changes worked and some didn't. But it was the fact that teachers were engaging in the effort to make change. As Little (2002) noted that,

> Conditions for improving teaching and learning are strengthened when teachers collectively question ineffective teaching routines, examine new conceptions of teaching and learning, find generative means to acknowledge and respond to difference and conflict, and engage in actively in supporting professional growth" (p. 917).

This notion of being an ongoing student of your teaching is a common finding in much of the professional development literature in our field (Doutis & Ward, 1999; Patton & Parker 2015).

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Professional Development Should Focus Primarily on Improving Student Learning

I have argued for much of my professional life that if professional development is designed to improve student learning it must demonstrate that it does so. Yet a longstanding finding has been that most professional development does not result in improvement in student learning (Desimone & Stuckey, 2014; Doutis & Ward, 1999; Ko et al., 2006). There are, however, some professional development efforts that demonstrated teacher change leading to student learning or improved moderate to vigorous physical activity in a lesson (e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Ward et al., 1999). These successes have clear lessons. The professional development that has demonstrated student learning has focused on improving teachers' pedagogical skills, content, and curricular knowledge.

Professional Development Can Have Meaningful Benefits for Teachers

It is clear that student learning is the raison d'être for professional development and as such as a field it should be the primary criterion for judging the effectiveness of professional development efforts. However, as study after study demonstrates, there are often good outcomes for teachers from their engagement in professional development (Deglau et al., 2006; Doutis & Ward, 1999; Hagenah et al., 2022; Patton et al., 2013). Among the benefit for teachers reported from these studies are, is the satisfaction and pride in sharing practices with peers, mentoring by experienced teachers (i.e., leadership) of newer teachers (i.e., guidance and support), the collegiality of being a part of a professional community, growth as a teacher, and understanding their subject matter better and how to teach it. All of which leads to increased competence, confidence, and the perspective that as a teacher they are not alone either in their experiences, or as an individual. It is for this reason that as much as I argue for professional development to improve student learning, I also recognize its importance in creating supportive and learning environments for teachers. Most professional development occurs with people. As the late Richard Elmore noted:

> Professional development that is likely to have the biggest impact has a reciprocal relationship between the time you spend with your colleagues in classrooms trying to solve instructional problems and then reflective time outside of classrooms to think about what you're going to try next. The corollary to that is the most powerful professional development occurs in real time around real problems in real schools involving real people who actually have to make decisions about what to do on a day-to-day basis (cited in Crow, 2008, p.43).

Teaching Rounds

Of all the various professional development efforts I have seen and participated in, one of the more successful has been *teaching rounds*. It has to my knowledge not been discussed in the physical

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education literature to date. Teaching rounds is an evolution of an idea that is commonly used in medical schools. I suspect we have all seen on a television series, or perhaps experienced, a group of medical interns arriving at the bedside of someone who has been admitted to hospital. Medical rounds involve interns or specialists coming together to discuss the patient's condition and to coordinate care. Typically, a patient's case is presented to the group by either a resident physician or a nurse. The results of medical procedures, and tests are discussed. The goal is to judge what has been done to date, determine the effects, and to establish a goal in moving forward. City et al., (2009) revised the practice of medical rounds calling it instructional rounds and applying it. Their focus was for superintendents and teacher leaders observe teachers to better understand teaching and learning in schools in order to improve learning at scale within and across districts.

Gore and Richards (2021) further revised the concept calling it teaching rounds to refer to teachers working with teachers to examine their teaching practice. Teaching rounds offers a structure for teachers to work together to identify and solve common problems related to teaching and learning in systematic, purposeful, and focused ways.

In my work with teachers in physical education, I have combined teaching rounds with the critical friend discussion protocols (Storey & Wang, 2017). A *critical friend* is a fellow teacher (or teachers) who provides both support and challenge in conversations, and relative to work products of teaching. Typically, this occurs in the context of a small group of teachers. In this remainder of this article, I discuss the process I have used, the benefits and how it can be refined and extended as it is used repeatedly. A teaching 'round' consists of three stages. I have conducted these stages in graduate classes with teachers and in recurring professional development meetings. The stages represent one cycle that can and should be repeated.

The First Stage

The first meeting engages teachers in a discussion of *problems of teaching practice*. Problems related to management, instruction, curriculum, or content. The purpose is to allow teachers to self-identify particular practices that they wish to (a) learn, such as a new curriculum, (b) refine, by becoming better at using a pedagogy or management strategy, or (c) extend, such as becoming more ambitious in the use of the curriculum. Once the problem is identified I typically regroup the teachers into groups that are focusing on similar problems ideally groups of 4-5. But this doesn't always work out this way, and I might have smaller sized groups or teachers in a group who are working of different practices. At the end of session one, teachers should have identified their focus, and the group and the facilitator typically me can provide addition readings. Most often this occurs after

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the session where I might email articles to the teachers that have been suggested by the group members or myself. I typically complete the first stage in one or two sessions, but there is no reason why it might take longer if teachers need more time to prepare.

The Second Stage

Between the first and the second stage each teacher has read their materials and developed a plan to work on the teaching practice to address the problem. In the second session they present their plan in detail to their group. The group provides feedback and support. I give teachers 10-15 minutes to do present and around 20-30 minutes of group discussion. Teachers should talk about rationales for using their practices, expected outcomes, and procedures. Much of this is what Shulman (1987) called *pedagogical reasoning*. Pedagogical reasoning involves teachers reasoning to themselves and others using arguments for or against the use of a teaching practice. Teachers must make many instructional decisions in a lesson and in their planning and pedagogical reasoning can make clear to them and others their "*Why*". Teachers should leave this session with a clear plan or modified plans based on feedback from the group and their own reflections from the interactions during the session.

The Third Stage

Prior to this stage, each teacher should have implemented their practice. It should be captured on video (i.e., phone camera or video camera). Teachers have used non-participating student, peers, or school staff to video. It is not necessary to video a whole class, but that can happen, and teachers can select from the video the salient sections. What is needed is an example of the teacher practice and student responses to that practice. Teachers then review the video and come to the class prepared to talk about and show the video. I usually allow no more than 7-10 minutes of video. This session uses modified the critical friends discussion procedures in the following way.

- Before starting I select one member of the group to review the process at the outset, even if everyone is familiar with it. I do this review the first time and then provide a script for consistency for a group member to do this moving forward. This person manages the time limits precisely and participates in the discussions. This person also has the role of adjusting discussion time slightly depending on the content of the discussion.

- The teacher presents to their small group, revisiting what they are trying to accomplish, presents the video clip and finishes with a brief analysis. This takes a total of 20 minutes. During the presentation and video no one may interrupt.

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- Next the presenting teacher remains quiet, listens, and takes notes. The group critically analyses the presentation. Discussing the goal of the presenter and the video. They should give feedback that is both positive and constructively critical. The feedback should be given in a supportive tone and the teachers should provide practical suggestions. I try to limit this to 10 minutes, but it often goes longer.

- Finally, the presenter and group can discuss together the issues. This often involves clarification and more planning by the presenter. Typically, 5-10 minutes.

- Once teacher is finished the next begins until each teacher has gone through this process. It is rare for me to get through more than two people per group per session. So it may take two sessions for stage 3.

- I finish each session with a debrief pointing out positive aspects of the feedback and efforts.

The time limits I use, are just what I have used, they can vary according to your needs. The cycle over the three stages begins at the next meeting at stage two if there is to be refinement and extension of the practice. It is not always true that the teacher is reporting good outcomes that they wish. Sometimes it is a case of let me share what happened and why I think it didn't work. That is fine. This is a process that is cyclical over time. It is hard to predict how long a teacher may stay with a practice before moving to a new one. My experience has been most teachers take at least four cycles, and often more, to be gain an understanding the nuances of a practice. But once this finishes a new problem of practice can be addressed. It has been my experience that teachers work at difference paces. I have some that will stick with a practice such as curriculum for a semester or year and others who are focusing on smaller problems and practices that will change in 3-5 cycles. What has impressed me with teaching rounds is that the practices tend to stick with the teacher far better than other approaches I have seen.

CONCLUSION

Professional development is work. And it is work that is not completed upon graduation from a teacher education program. Yet teachers are busy. If we expect teachers to engage in professional development it must be effective and have the potential for longevity. As such it should meet the three criteria: it should be a continuous process rather than an event, it should focus on improving student learning, and it should have meaningful benefits for teachers. Teaching rounds is one professional development approach that can produce these outcomes.

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