CHAPTER 5

Doing Rounds Part 1:
Problem of Practice and Observing

There was a buzz in the room as rounds was about to begin. Principal Randall Lewis stood at the front of the library, where the network had gathered for coffee, muffins, and conversation before the official start to the day. “Welcome to Jefferson Middle School. We're excited to have you here today to help us with our problem of practice. We're also a little nervous. Well, maybe a lot nervous, but that's okay. We're proud of our school, and we know we have a lot of work to do. I've told the teachers that this is about my learning and the network’s learning, and that we're going to get lots of good information from having so many eyes and ears in our classrooms.”

Randall asked his colleagues to take out the handout in their folders describing current school and district initiatives. “In the spring of last year, we rolled out a new literacy initiative that has required a radical shift in teaching strategies for many of our teachers. A year later, we’re trying to understand what we’ve learned and what we haven’t yet mastered and whether it’s translating into different kinds of learning for students.” After Randall described the problem of practice, he pointed group members to their schedules to learn which observation team they would join and where they would visit: “The classroom numbering in the school is quite creative, so if you get lost, your best bet is to ask a student.”

The participants gathered their belongings, grabbed a school map and observation schedule in one hand and some paper for taking notes in the other, and found and greeted the other members of their observation team. There was a sense of anticipation—much like a group of scientists about to embark on field work for data collection.
After a network has prepared itself by learning about the instructional core and theories of action, launching a network, and developing the discipline of seeing, it is time to engage in the practice of rounds. It is time to go into schools and classrooms. In this chapter and the next chapter, we describe a "typical" rounds cycle and its related learning goals. Although each network has put its own stamp on the rounds process, there is a set of common elements that are consistent across all instructional rounds networks: a problem of practice; observation of practice; observation debrief; and the next level of work. Adding an element into the mix could still remain true to the rounds model. Taking out any one of the four elements, however, would no longer constitute rounds. These elements of the rounds practice are summarized in table 5.1. This chapter elaborates on the first two elements of rounds: identifying the problem of practice and observing the practice.

Rounds has two primary learning goals that inform each other:

1. Build skills of network members by coming to a common understanding of effective practice and how to support it.
2. Support instructional improvement at the host site (school or district) by sharing what the network learns and by building skills at the local level.

Especially in the early development of a network, many network participants primarily focus on the second of these two goals—how can we help the people who are hosting the visit? This is a laudable and important goal, but it is not the only goal. Rounds visits help the network develop as a group that, over time, builds a rich sense of what they hope to see in classrooms, agreement about what they are actually seeing, and strategies for how to make the hope the reality. Rounds also helps all the individuals in the network, whether they are the host of a visit or a colleague participating in the visit, sharpen their understanding of the instructional core and their personal theory of action about their role in improving it. If rounds does not meet all these goals, the network won’t last long. It takes a lot of time and energy to participate in rounds, and if the only benefit were to the host, that would probably not be enough to sustain participants, especially since in most networks, each participant only hosts once every two or three years. More often, rounds does meet all these goals, but sometimes participants aren’t aware of how much they’re learning, since their focus tends to be outward rather than inward. There are multiple ways to help participants focus both outward and inward, as we describe in this chapter and later in the book.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Problem of Practice</strong></th>
<th><strong>Observation of Practice</strong></th>
<th><strong>Observation Debrief</strong></th>
<th><strong>Next Level of Work</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School identifies a problem of practice that</td>
<td>Observation teams collect data that is</td>
<td>Observation teams discuss the data:</td>
<td>Brainstorm the next level of work:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• focuses on the instructional core;</td>
<td>• descriptive not evaluative;</td>
<td>• <strong>Describe</strong> what you saw.</td>
<td>• Share district-level theory of action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is directly observable;</td>
<td>• specific;</td>
<td>• <strong>Analyze</strong> the descriptive evidence (What patterns do you see? How might you group the data?).</td>
<td>• Share district context, including resources, professional development, and current initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• is actionable (is within the school/district's control and can be improved in real time);</td>
<td>• about the instructional core;</td>
<td>• <strong>Predict</strong> what students are learning. If you were a student in this class/school and you did everything the teacher told you to do, what would you know and be able to do?</td>
<td>• Brainstorm the next level of work for this week/next month/by the end of the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• connects to a broader strategy of improvement (school, system).</td>
<td>• related to the problem of practice.</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Brainstorm suggestions for school level and for district level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Network adopts the problem of practice as the focus for the network’s learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Tie suggestions to the district’s (and school’s) theory of action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional Steps to Support This Element of Rounds**

- Provide school- or district-level context for the problem of practice.
- Describe optimal teaching and learning in relation to this problem of practice:
  - What would students be doing/saying?
  - What would teachers be doing/saying?
  - Create a working draft that captures the ongoing development of the group’s learning.
- May include a specific format for observation note-taking or a set of guidelines:
  - What are students doing/saying?
  - What are teachers doing/saying?
  - What is the task?
- Use affinity protocol to group the data.
- Use external standards to group the data.
- Ask additional questions:
  - What do teachers need to know to support optimal learning (described in the working draft)?
  - What does the school/district need to know to support optimal learning?
  - Build a working draft of what optimal teaching and learning look like at the school and district level (What are teachers, principals, and central office administrators saying/doing?).
PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

The first step in rounds is to identify a problem of practice that the network will focus on during the rounds visit. A rich problem of practice

- focuses on the instructional core;
- is directly observable;
- is actionable (is within the school’s or district’s control and can be improved in real time);
- connects to a broader strategy of improvement (school, system);
- is high-leverage (if acted on, it would make a significant difference for student learning).

In short, the problem of practice is something that you care about that would make a difference for student learning if you improved it. The problem of practice is a critical component of rounds for several reasons: It helps focus the attention of the network—“Of all the things we could pay attention to in classrooms, we’re going to focus particularly on [questions, task, talk, etc].” It also helps make it more likely that the visit will be fruitful learning for both the hosts and the network participants. We have repeatedly found that problems of practice that don’t meet the above criteria (i.e., they are not based on a current dilemma facing the faculty and administration, avoid what’s hard to talk about, or attempt in scattershot fashion to cover everything hosts have questions about) aren’t as useful as they could be. Figure 5.1 presents some examples of problems of practice.

DEVELOPING THE PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Where does the problem of practice come from? It is not a whim and does not emerge from thin air. It comes from data, dialogue, and current work. The problem of practice is grounded in some kind of evidence, preferably shareable evidence (in other words, not just the hosts’ hunch, which is probably grounded in observation but is not in any form to share with the network). It’s something the hosts are already working on or think they might need to work on. School and district improvement plans are often good resources for problems of practice, though sometimes those documents are more about compliance than about what the system is actually working on.

For example, at a school that was concerned about the learning of its special education population, the problem of practice flowed naturally out of related work.
Our children often aren't getting opportunities to practice thinking, work with one another, or engage in problem solving through different types of modalities. As a result, our students are often unmotivated, unfocused, and off task. Lessons aren't consistently meeting the motivational and learning needs of students.

- What is the nature of the task?

When trying to solve unfamiliar word problems, not all students apply what they're learning in math lessons. Teachers feel frustrated that the students don't use what the teachers have taught. Students don't make connections between the teachers' lessons and the task they are supposed to solve on their own. Teachers may not be checking for comprehension frequently or in meaningful ways during the lesson.

- How do teachers know what students know during the math lesson you see?
- What would students know and be able to do from the math lesson you see?

Seventy percent of our students in special education did not pass the state test last year. In particular, they did not do well on the open-response questions in both math and English language arts. In many cases, they left those problems blank. We may not be providing these students with enough practice on open-response questions. We may be providing too much assistance so that when they have to tackle these prompts on their own, they do not know where to start.

- What kinds of tasks are students being asked to do in class?
- What are the different ways you see students begin assigned work in class?

The school shared with network members the following list of objectives the school had to prepare to make AYP (adequate yearly progress) in one year and to surpass AYP the next:

- To decrease the achievement gap between special education students and regular education students at our school.
- To have our special education students attain achievement levels as high as the state's special education students.
To have all regular education students increase their level of performance on the state test by one level. To achieve this, we are focusing on two areas of weakness indicated by our analysis: math vocabulary (grades K–5) and number sense (grades 6–8).

The school then shared some questions it was asking and wanted the network to investigate:

- Are we, as adults, modeling the use of high-level math vocabulary related to our TERC/CMP (math curriculum) lessons so that students can be observed using it independently in their own speech?
- Overall, in any class, are all children involved in a high-level task? A high-level task can be defined as being (1) standards-based (using the science, TERC/CMP, or Literacy Collaborative curricula), (2) of high interest to the students, (3) hands-on whenever possible, (4) a task that pushes their thinking in some new way, and (5) a task that demands that they apply their knowledge. This question comes as a result of our achievement gap between regular and special education students. Special education students should be able to be observed doing the high-level tasks, but with accommodations to allow them to be successful.

The problem of practice emerges over several conversations at the host site and between the hosts and the facilitator:

- The hosts brainstorm some possible problems of practice.
- The facilitator helps the hosts hone those possibilities into a draft problem of practice that will be fruitful for both the hosts and the network.
- The hosts refine the draft, sometimes with more assistance from the facilitator, into final form.

The process is very iterative and may include other conversations and revision.

For the first step, hosts immediately run into the question of whom to involve in the brainstorming process and how to involve them. At a minimum, the host principal will be involved, and if it is a superintendents' network, the superintendent will also be involved. Beyond that, it's up to the hosts' discretion. Sometimes, the hosts will involve a few other people from a variety of roles, including central office personnel (e.g., deputy superintendent, head of professional development, head of a particular content area that the district is focusing on) and school-level staff (e.g.,
assistant principal, teacher leaders, instructional coaches). Some hosts use existing structures, like a school or district leadership team, to start the conversation about possible problems of practice, and others put together a group of teacher leaders particularly for the rounds visit. Some hosts have a broad conversation (e.g., whole-school faculty meeting), and others limit the conversation to a couple of people. We’ve seen a principal invite faculty members to brainstorm ideas for the problem of practice and write them on sticky notes. Then the principal took these sticky notes to an instructional leadership team meeting, where the team grouped similar ones together and chose one to focus on. We’ve also seen a superintendent and a principal meet and decide on the problem of practice on their own.

These choices depend heavily on context, and there is not one “right” approach. Nevertheless, it’s critical to think about teachers’ role in the process of articulating a problem of practice as they are the ones whose practice is being directly observed and who quite rightly will be wondering what to make of all these educators visiting their class. We’ve also found it easier and usually more meaningful to share the resulting data with faculty who have been involved in requesting it from the beginning.

However they do it, the participants emerge from the first step with a short list of possible problems of practice. Participants often find it helpful in this stage to see examples of problems of practice so that they get a sense of what rich problems look and sound like.

In the next step, a facilitator helps the hosts take the raw material of the brainstorm and shape it into a refined problem of practice. Some questions the facilitator might ask early on in the conversation include these:

- What are some of the strengths of your school? What areas need to be strengthened?
- How do you know about these strengths and weaknesses? What are your sources of data? How do you know whether you’re making progress in these areas?
- What else have you been learning from these sources of data?
- What is puzzling to you about the data?
- What has felt challenging? What does your faculty continue to grapple with?

As the facilitator hears the hosts’ ideas for the problem of practice, where those ideas come from, and the context of the host school or district, he or she is also reflecting back to the hosts what is being heard and offering language to capture
their ideas: "What I hear you saying is . . . Is that right?" "It sounds as if we have several possibilities for a problem of practice: X, Y, Z . . . Which of those feels like one you want to dive into?" Often, the facilitator's role is to help narrow down the possibilities, which presents an opportunity to consider both host and network needs. Since one of the goals of rounds is to deepen the network's understanding, the facilitator is thinking about where the network is in its development. Sometimes, the hosts are thinking about this, too, but most hosts find it hard to think about their own needs and those of the network at the same time. It often works better for hosts to focus on their own work while the facilitator thinks about the interests of the wider network. The facilitator might steer the host more toward one idea if it's something the network has been discussing or would move the network to a deeper understanding of learning and teaching—it is still authentically a problem for the hosts and is one that will help the network. The problem of practice always comes from the hosts, not the facilitator.

For the final step in the process, it's helpful to have some time for the problem of practice to simmer. Does it meet the criteria of a rich problem of practice? Does it feel relevant and meaningful? Is it narrow and focused enough? Is it clear? Can plainer language replace any jargony words? Sometimes, the hosts will bring the problem of practice back to a wider faculty at this point. Once the hosts and facilitator are satisfied with the problem of practice, it's time to attend to other preparation for the visit (see exhibit A.4 in the appendix for information on some of the logistics required for a visit).

CHALLENGES TO DEVELOPING A PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

There are several common challenges that emerge when a network develops a problem of practice. Many of these challenges are simply issues of degree. For example, statements of the problem might be too detailed or too general; the hosts might provide too much or too little context for a problem; or networks might have insufficient skill or knowledge to adequately address a problem of practice. Let's take a look at some of the most common challenges.

Too Much Packed into the Problem of Practice

It's common for hosts to want the network to look at many things, in part because we all have several problems we care about at any given moment and it's hard to pick one. This is especially an issue early on for the network when everyone is
learning how to do instructional rounds: The hosts will not yet see the value of focusing, and the network is not very skilled yet and thus will struggle to handle multidimensional problems and several questions for inquiry. After gaining some experience and skill, a network might be able to keep several questions in mind while in classrooms, but initially, it's helpful to have one question. What's the one problem that is at the root of the others, or that you most care about, or that you think is the most high-leverage? Even when the group is more experienced and skillful, it's hard to hold on to more than three questions or areas of focus while in classrooms. Early in our own rounds practice, we allowed hosts to name up to six questions, and we found ourselves having conversations that were less helpful for the school or the network—there was just too much to gather and discuss—and we ended up being shallow instead of deep.

Implementation/Audit Syndrome

Frequently, hosts went the network to look for evidence of something the hosts have been trying to implement, like literacy strategies or a new math curriculum. There is a fine line between using rounds as an audit of whether people are doing what they're supposed to be doing (not okay) and using rounds to find evidence that the instructional core looks as it should if the implementation were happening (okay). In other words, what would you expect to see in classrooms if the new math curriculum were being implemented well? One simple strategy for shifting the conversation is to focus on the kind of learning you want to see, as opposed to what kind of teaching you expect to see—in short, focus on students, not teachers. Sometimes, going back to the problem being addressed or the kind of learning you want to see can be helpful (e.g., students are engaged in too much procedural math and we want them to understand concepts, or we want students to be independent readers and writers). Similarly, grounding in data can help. Why are you interested in checking on this issue? What do you already know about it?

In one school we visited, the district had invested heavily in professional development around literacy strategies. It knew from self-reports and observations that teachers were doing the required number of strategies. The district thought that neither the teachers nor the students had internalized the strategies, so after conversation, it reframed what had initially been an implementation check to the following questions:

- What literacy strategies are students using?
- In what ways do teachers teach literacy strategies?
Note that rather than asking “Do you see . . . ?” questions that could be answered yes or no, they asked questions that were more open-ended and that prompted network members to collect evidence in those areas.

In another network, the host school had engaged in a year of professional development around “higher-order questions” (according to Bloom’s taxonomy of educational objectives), and it wondered whether the network observers would see any evidence of those questions. The school articulated its problem of practice: “Students aren’t performing at high levels and teachers are primarily focused on recall and procedure.” The focus questions were “What questions do you hear?” and “Who is asking or responding to them?” Note that the problem of practice doesn’t ask for evidence of higher-order questions; it opens the focus a bit wider because the host school wanted to collect all the questions and then be able to examine them and see the distribution of what kinds of questions were being asked. In the de brief of the classroom observations, it quickly became clear that most of the questions were focused on recall and procedure, though there was more of a range of questions than when the school first started working on questions. This prompted a conversation both in the network and later at the school about the growth that was evident in practice as well as what the next level of work should be after considering the data.

Some of the implementation/audit tension is about framing and intent—are we going into classrooms to learn about the instructional core (interaction of teachers and students and content), or are we going into classrooms to check up on teachers? If the former, it’s rounds. If the latter, it’s not rounds. Implementation audits may have a place in your improvement strategy, but they’re not rounds. Rounds are supposed to be about puzzles and shared inquiry and seeing every piece of data as a learning opportunity and as a guidepost on the Road to Support, not as thinly-disguised accountability. We don’t do rounds to other people. We do rounds for ourselves and for our students. We do rounds together. If it feels like it’s being done to someone, it needs tuning.

Too Broad or Vague Statement of Problem
The more specific the problem of practice is, the more specific and helpful the observational data and the recommendations in the next level of work will be. Vague problems of practice lead to vague observations and recommendations.

One host we worked with didn’t want to focus her colleagues on a particular issue—in her words, she didn’t want to bias them and wanted their take on the
whole picture. Thus, she gave them several questions that were variations on the three core questions we started with: What are teachers doing and saying? What are students doing and saying? What is the task? These are fine questions to use as a starting place, but they don't focus on any particular element of practice. As a result, the data and conversation produced are wide-ranging and a product of what each individual in the network values rather than what the host wants help with. The same network had wonderful, productive conversation in response to the above prompt about what questions they had heard and generic, unproductive conversation in response to these general questions.

It's not biasing the group to ask the participants to focus when they're in a classroom—the focus helps people be better observers. In fact, in this case, the host had particular problems of practice in mind (as we all do, even if they're implicit in our minds) and wanted to see if her colleagues would notice the same things without prompting. The feedback was too wide-ranging to serve as confirming or rejecting.

Hosts often want some verification of what they think they're seeing in their own system. The best way to check that is to be clear about what the problem of practice is and see what evidence your colleagues collect around it. A teachers union vice president underscored this idea when she explained what evidence meant to her: "I see it just as data. If you go back to the problem of practice that was generated by the teachers, you see what they want it [instruction] to look like. All we're doing is giving them the snapshot, and the learning is for them to take this and do something with it. We are careful to say—no value judgment—just say what it is. Just say what we saw."

Unlike other collegial conversations that may be biased by preconceptions, conversations during rounds are entirely evidence-based and therefore not as susceptible to individual agendas. If there isn't evidence, that will come out in the debrief.

**Too Little or Too Much Context**

Sometimes general questions can work if the context is specific. For example, "What is the task?" can be a rich question for a network, but it helps to know what some of the evidence around student learning looks like and what the system has been working on. With any problems of practice, it helps to have some context.

At a minimum, it's helpful to know some basic information, like how many students and teachers are in the host school and district, demographic information, and student performance highlights. Sometimes, the hosts also share information about special programs or features of the school or district (e.g., multigrade
classrooms, inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education, Chinese language program, arts focus). The guiding principle is, What do network members need to know before they observe? Later on in the rounds process, the hosts may share more information, like what they have been doing to address this problem of practice. We find that network members are unlikely to read several pages of context, but are likely to read a one-pager, will pay attention to hosts giving the context aloud, and will refer back to any context write-ups (e.g., data charts) as they debrief and discuss the next level of work.

**Network with Inadequate Knowledge or Skill for the Problem at Hand**

If the problem of practice is something the network has not engaged before, the network must ask whether it needs any kind of knowledge, skill, or common understanding to address the problem of practice. If the answer is yes, the network must decide whether participants need it before they go into classrooms, or whether they can attend to it at another point, like after observations and debrief, but before the next level of work. We investigate this question more completely in chapter 7. When designing the problem of practice, the network must consider and plan for this question. If the problem requires more knowledge and skill building than the network has time for, then it might make sense to choose a different problem of practice. This is rarely the case in our experience, but sometimes, a more generic framing can shift a problem into something the network can engage.

**Observation of Practice**

The purpose of visiting classrooms is to gather data directly on the work of teaching and learning. This will be the raw material that participants use throughout the day's learning.

Often for rounds, there are no specific note-taking tools—just blank notepads. On other visits, schools may provide specific sheets for note-taking, depending on the problem of practice and the kind of evidence that the hosts would like to gather. They may want observers to keep tallies or to organize their notes in a way that will be most useful to the school after the visit. Some networks develop their own observation sheets to use across all visits.

Each rounds visit, before setting off into classrooms for rounds visits, we review our observation guidelines:
- Listen; don’t interrupt the teacher or disrupt the lesson.
- It’s fine to ask students questions as long as it seems appropriate at that point in the lesson.
- Talk with other network members during the debrief, not in classrooms or the hallway.

Networks make their own variations of these guidelines. While they are in classrooms, the goal of observation teams is to collect meaningful data without disrupting the learning. Talking with each other (even in a whisper!) in classrooms is disruptive and disrespectful, and we agree to hold off discussing what we’ve seen until the formal debrief after all the observations. Hallway talk tends to be evidence-light and judgment-heavy (e.g., “Wasn’t that great!” “I’d be so bored if I were a student in there!”).

Observation teams of four to six people then spread out across the school. (See sample observation schedule in table 5.2.) They file into classrooms and generally look for an unobtrusive place to stand as they orient themselves to the classroom. Some schools set up folding chairs at the back of the room; in other schools, network members slip into extra desks or lean against a filing cabinet. In either case, the position is only temporary, as observers will want to move around the classroom to see the work of a range of students and, when appropriate, to talk with students. In some schools, the teacher leaves extra copies of the current assignment in a stack for network members. In all schools, the teacher is encouraged to continue with his or her lesson as the visitors enter; no introductions or acknowledgments are needed.

One of the best ways to understand what’s going on in the instructional core is to talk with students, which we highly recommend unless the teacher is directly instructing them. Some network members will feel very comfortable asking students questions, and others will need some help knowing what kinds of questions to ask. Brainstorming what to do when you’re in classrooms, and in particular, what questions to ask students, is a good activity for the network to do together. Here are some of our favorite questions:

- What are you learning? What are you working on?
- What do you do if you don’t know the answer or you’re stuck?
- How will you know when you’re finished?
- How will you know if what you’ve done is good quality?
### Table 5.2: Sample Schedule of a Rounds Visit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th>Group 3</th>
<th>Group 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carole L.</td>
<td>Joe D.</td>
<td>Larry B.</td>
<td>Russell C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barbara V.</td>
<td>Candace D.</td>
<td>Mike A.</td>
<td>Robin H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard E.</td>
<td>Jack H.</td>
<td>Sarah F.</td>
<td>Chris S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinnie M.</td>
<td>Linda M.</td>
<td>Laura M.</td>
<td>Kathy W.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:10—9:35</td>
<td>Rm A3, Gr. 1, Park</td>
<td>Rm E3, Gr. 6 Math/</td>
<td>Rm A6, Gr. 3, Rodriguez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Science, Attes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:35—10:00</td>
<td>Rm B7, Gr. K, Kleindorf</td>
<td>Rm A3, Gr. 1, Park</td>
<td>Rm E5, Gr. 6 Spanish,</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Costa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00—10:25</td>
<td>Rm E7, Gr. 7 SS, Lawrence</td>
<td>Rm A2, Gr. 2, Gomez</td>
<td>Rm A4, Gr. 3, McConnell</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:25—10:45</td>
<td>Rm A2, Gr. 2, Gomez</td>
<td>Rm E7, Gr. 7 SS,</td>
<td>Rm E1, Gr. 6 Skill</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lawrence</td>
<td>Building, Attes</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 5</th>
<th>Group 6</th>
<th>Group 7</th>
<th>Group 8</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mary E.</td>
<td>Pat B.</td>
<td>Kate C.</td>
<td>Tim G.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joellen S.</td>
<td>Barbara B.</td>
<td>Liz C.</td>
<td>Maryann M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe P.</td>
<td>Damon S.</td>
<td>Paulette J.</td>
<td>Mary R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carolyn T.</td>
<td>Debbie S.</td>
<td>Nancy M.</td>
<td>Ed Mc.</td>
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<td>9:10—9:35</td>
<td>Rm E1, Gr. 6 Humanities,</td>
<td>Rm E8, Gr. 7 ELA,</td>
<td>Rm E6, Gr. 8 Math,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Heller</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>Mozzer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:35—10:00</td>
<td>Rm E8, Gr. 7 ELA, Baker</td>
<td>Rm B6, Gr. K, Fellino</td>
<td>Rm C5, Gr. 5, Jerumal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00—10:25</td>
<td>Rm B7, Gr. K, Kleindorf</td>
<td>Rm D3, Ungraded, Watson</td>
<td>Rm C3, Gr. 4, Lawry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:25—10:45</td>
<td>Rm A1, Gr. 2, Hunter</td>
<td>Rm B7, Gr. K, Kleindorf</td>
<td>Rm C1, Gr. 4, Schlavone</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We usually thank students for sharing their work and speaking with us at the end of an exchange. Student responses provide valuable data that observers write down to share with their colleagues later.

One dilemma that observers often face is whether to do any one-on-one instructing when they are conversing with students. While you’re talking with students about what they’re doing, you may notice that they are struggling with an assignment or are factually incorrect or are on to an interesting idea. You might feel that you could extend or redirect or lower their frustration level if you just put your teacher hat on and asked a question or pointed out something. Do you do it? Or does that skew your data or interfere with the teacher’s turf? You are there as an observer, not as a teacher’s helper, so now is not the time to be Super Teacher. Nevertheless, all of this work is to help students learn, so if the student you’re talking with could use a little help as a learner and you have an idea about how to guide him or her (not do the work!), there is no rounds rule against it. We’ve done so ourselves many times. We are educators, after all. We just try to remember that we’re there as observers and to save our superhero tendencies for when we’re thinking about how to help the whole system help each of those learners.

Tips and Takeaways

Here are a few tips about the problem of practice and observing. Again, the point is that you are trying to improve learning in a network, not evaluate any educator.

* *Don’t aim for the “perfect” problem of practice.* The network will get better at designing problems of practice over time, and the problem does not need to be perfect to be useful. If it meets the criteria of a rich problem of practice described earlier in the chapter, it will be helpful.

* *Look down, not up.* When observing in a classroom, focus on what students are actually doing, not what the teacher has asked them to do or what the conversation seems to be about. Remember the principles of the instructional core and the role of task and how it predicts performance. You have to see how students are engaging with the task to get a good picture of the instructional core.
Focus on students, not the teacher. When in classrooms, most educators' natural tendency is to focus on the teacher. Focusing on the teacher is a bit like watching the ball in a basketball or football game or watching the conductor in a symphony—a lot that's happening away from the ball or the front of the room matters for the result. Again, with the instructional core, you're interested in the interactions of teacher, student, and content, not just any one piece. You still want to collect evidence about the teacher, but in our experience, most people don't need to be reminded to do that. People do have to be reminded to focus on students. This is particularly challenging if teachers are doing most of the talking during an observation. However, the data on what students are doing in these classrooms while the teacher is talking could still be quite revealing.