Introduction

Virtual Rounds (VR) can be the most valuable process a teacher or leader utilizes to enhance their pedagogical content knowledge while simultaneously creating a broad network for professional growth. The primary purpose of Virtual Rounds is to allow leaders and learners to enhance their craft through digital collaborative dialogue. Invited panelists from around the school, district, region and world can offer immediate feedback pertaining to leading and learning. The merit of this process resides in the dialogue among observing panelists before, during and following each observation, which can be recorded and blogged for further skill enhancement.
Why?

Virtual Rounds prompt, much needed, professional dialogue with school personnel and experts from beyond the school walls, which will enhance methodology aimed at improving identified problems. Current qualitative research supports professional development through PLCs (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008); however, the effect of a real time, virtual PLC has yet to be fully revealed. Exploring the effects of Virtual Rounds are necessary, as educators and leaders are constantly searching for answers to long stemming concerns and rarely have the opportunity to engage in collaborative dialogue about specific practices in their classrooms and schools.

As digital collaboration through professional learning networks are spreading throughout the country, the technology is available to connect and converse before it’s too late. As the dialogue surrounding teaching and leadership development practices is often described as spotty, detached and irrelevant to local trends (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008), it is the opportune time to transition from traditional to today. Nonetheless, as local PLCs have produced a positive effect upon pedagogy (Leithwood, 2013; Hefner, 2011), school districts with consistently implemented Virtual Rounds should experience a similar effect upon teaching, learning and leadership.

According to research conducted by Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011), every educator should participate in a “rounds” process, which is non-evaluative and collaborative. Respected colleagues, coaches and content area experts are excellent candidates to enrich a conversation during each Virtual Round.
Hosting a Virtual Round

In order to host a VR a governing committee in a school, comprised of educators and leaders, must identify a problem practice that needs to be improved. This problem practice must be supported by existing data. For instance, creating and facilitating differentiated learning centers in an elementary language arts class may be an area of weakness revealed through multiple measures (student performance reports, formal observations, exit slips, etc). A model classroom teacher would be identified and invited to serve as the observed educator (OE). Observed educators (OE) and/or leaders (OL) must volunteer to be observed and participate. These volunteers shall understand the process is designed for collective growth through conversations, not to cast judgement or condemn. Each person involved in a Virtual Round is expected to benefit from the event. Virtual Rounds will be video recorded to allow peers to benefit from the focused dialogue.

Panelist would be recruited according to expertise and interests. The number of panelist should be limited to seven to allow for collaborative discussion and active participation. At least one panelist shall be an identified teacher or leader who needs/desires development in the observed practice.

A hosting platform must be identified prior to extending invitations. Numerous platforms allow for this type of collaboration so explore and play to find the tool best suited for your venture. Most platforms allow for an invitation link to be sent in advance of the joined observation. It is important the panelists explore the platform prior to the observation to avoid unexpected obstacles such as, downloading exe files; audio and camera faults; as well as the sheer uniqueness and intricacies of each tool.
Collaboration

In order best prepare for a VR event explain the problem practice to the panelists and the OE/OL before the event (at least 48 hours). This preparation allows panelists to conduct research, if necessary, to improve the professional dialogue. A simple design framework, which clearly identifies the problem and need for improvement is essential.

Figure 1.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Practice</th>
<th>Evidence of Problem</th>
<th>Previous Suggestions</th>
<th>Goal</th>
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</table>
| We are not seamlessly teaching the elements of reading while utilizing language based approaches along with meaning based methods. | · 25% Reading in GL: DRA2 & SRI  
· 10% Proficient: WCPM  
· Avg Lexile -75  
· Formal Observations identify as consistent area of weakness. | · build native language  
· explicit skill instruction | To provide teachers will strategies to increase students literacy in language arts. |

Next, establish norms for the group and the process. Norms should be similar to classroom rules. Limit the amount to five or less. Be specific, positive and direct. Norms should not require a lengthy paragraph to understand the purpose, which is to conduct an effective and efficient Virtual Round. Begin each round with a review of norms.

figure 1.2

Sample Norms

1. On Time, Every Time
2. Share the Air; Balance Participation
3. VRs are designed for engagement.
4. If we can read it, reference it; don’t repeat it.
Influence

Virtual Rounds are a mechanism to connect learners and leaders. This process promotes problem solving, collaboration, communication, innovation and creativity. The focused dialogue and ability to record allow the lessons learned to live for others. Capturing a teaching moment for the world to review is not only powerful but necessary to advance our profession.

Platforms

- Google Hangouts; Zoom.us; and WebEx will be used as hosting and recording tools.
- GAFE will be used to share content via docs/slides/sheets and host the video library of VRs.

References


