



# Time to Talk about Teaching: The Power of Quality Teaching Rounds



*Lloyd Bowen reveals some of the possible benefits for teachers of being involved in the Quality Teaching Rounds process. . .*

Teaching, at its best, is a highly collaborative profession where we work together focused on student learning and wellbeing. Often our professional discussions revolve around the routine issues of the school day – “Who is on the oval during lunch? Can someone cover my classes so I can take my Year 9s on an excursion? Has anyone been sent to ‘buddy room’ today? Please read the teacher organisation for next week’s athletics carnival. Don’t forget to complete your mandatory training!”

These conversations are all important and form part of our day-to-day work as teachers. The excursion and athletics carnival can contribute to a child’s overall experience of school but when do we have meaningful discussions about the way we teach – our pedagogy?

## What is Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR)?

Quality Teaching Rounds (QTR) is a high-impact approach to professional learning that provides time and structures for teachers of all career stages to engage in meaningful analytical discussions about pedagogy. Collaborating within a safe Professional Learning Community (PLC) of three (or ideally four) participants provides teachers with the time, concepts and language to collegially analyse and discuss pedagogy (Bowe & Gore, 2017), applying the lens of the Quality Teaching model.

A significant feature of QTR is its applicability across all learning contexts. PLCs can be formed across Key Learning Areas KLAs and stages, as well as across school sites and campuses, demonstrating that QTR is a powerful approach to meaningful collaboration within, and across, school settings.

<p>Quality Teaching Rounds are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focused on the impact of teaching on student learning</li> <li>• a respectful, safe forum for discussing practice</li> <li>• confidential</li> <li>• an opportunity to build professional relationships, trust, and respect</li> <li>• an approach to facilitation</li> <li>• collegial and inclusive, with all PLC members contributing</li> <li>• informed by rigorous research</li> <li>• an opportunity to enhance our teaching</li> <li>• deep discussions built on the Quality Teaching model</li> <li>• impactful, improving teaching quality and teacher morale</li> </ul>	<p>Quality Teaching Rounds are not:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an inspection</li> <li>• focused on the teacher</li> <li>• a scoring exercise</li> <li>• focused on numbers</li> <li>• a performance appraisal</li> <li>• dominated by one member of the PLC</li> <li>• a fad or gimmick</li> <li>• expensive, especially given their demonstrated impact</li> </ul>
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Where there are four teachers in a PLC, a set of Quality Teaching Rounds occurs over a total of four days, ideally spaced one to two weeks apart.

The PLC stays together for at least one set of Rounds, with each member hosting a lesson observation for the other three members of the PLC (Bowe, 2016).

Each day of Rounds contains:

- **Reading discussion** that helps develop a shared knowledge base and build a sense of professional community;
- **Observation** of one PLC member teaching a lesson. Importantly, out of respect for teachers and for the teaching-learning process, an entire lesson is always observed;
- **Individual coding** by all participants, including the observed teacher, so that everyone comes into the collaborative analysis informed and ready to take part in a diagnostic conversation; and,
- **Discussion** of the observed lesson, and of teaching in general, drawing on the language and concepts of the Quality Teaching model and working towards a shared view of each element. All members of the PLC, including the observed teacher, take part in this discussion.

## Why does QTR work?

### QTR Structures the knowledge base for teaching

Most of us, throughout our careers, have been on both sides of feedback discussions based on professional opinions. Sometimes these conversations are helpful, but they can often err towards polite subjective refrain, providing no clear path forward as to how we can improve our teaching. Rarely do they involve us, as the teacher, in the lesson analysis.

QTR respects teachers, ensures active involvement of all PLC members in all components, and provides teachers with clear direction for future practice.

*I really like the way that you actually have the [Quality] Teaching framework there as the basis.... It's not just a matter of "that lesson worked well". It's not a free-for-all discussion. It is actually guided by the framework which is really good because you've got that common language and everybody kind of understands where you're coming from, and I think I really valued that. (Jade, primary teacher of 1 to 3 years) (Gore et al, 2017)*

The evidence-based Quality Teaching model was developed by James Ladwig and Jenny Gore from the University of Newcastle for the NSW Department of Education. The model provides a comprehensive account of the pedagogical practices teachers employ, organised into the three dimensions of Intellectual Quality, Quality Learning Environment and Significance. It acknowledges the complexity of teaching and, in doing so, provides a conceptual knowledge base for teachers to talk about pedagogy and to guide practice (Gore et al., 2017). This deep thinking and analytical reflection using the Quality Teaching model as a lens empowers us to talk about teaching using a shared language.



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## *Flattens power hierarchies to enhance collaboration*

Gore et al. (2017) inform us that the underlying power dynamics and hierarchies within a school enable some teachers to dominate discussions, sometimes obstructing successful collaboration. QTR flattens these hierarchies by ensuring all teachers participate fully throughout the process. Everyone teaches a lesson, everyone observes, and all PLC members code the lesson and contribute to discussion through the lens of the Quality Teaching model. By doing so, all teachers fully engage in the learning and, given the shared vulnerability of opening their classrooms to colleagues, help to create a safe environment in which to discuss pedagogy (Bowe, 2016)

*I think in terms of impact on myself and my colleagues and the kids, I think really this [QTR] has been the biggest winner to be honest [because we're] ... breaking down the barriers, going into other peoples' classrooms to share – that collegiate feeling. The kids, probably giving them a more engaging set of activities and the way that I present the work in the classroom – just more thought goes into that. And I think as a whole school initiative, you know, everyone's involved so everyone seems to be on board and we have that common goal to work towards.' (Michelle, secondary teacher of more than 24 years) (Bowe, 2016)*

Time for individual coding and analysis of the observed lesson is incorporated within the QTR process. Participants are provided with valuable space to consider the lesson through the Quality Teaching model, preparing the PLC members to make meaningful contributions to the lesson discussion. All PLC members formulate descriptions of the teaching they observe, informed by the Quality Teaching model. Through the mechanism of turn-taking within the discussion, the playing field becomes even and the contributions of all PLC members, regardless of their teaching experience, are valued.

## *Enhances relationships to build a culture of learning among teachers*

PLC members, through their shared, full participation in Quality Teaching Rounds, build a professional relationship, and often friendships, that help foster future collaborations. Although the focus of Rounds is squarely on improved pedagogy, there are many accounts of fresh insights about colleagues and about teaching that form the basis for change and future collaboration.

*I think that it allows me to see colleagues in a different light, and even just be able to go into their classes. I learned a lot, and to have those conversations, those professional discussions and the discourse, was brilliant. I learned so much from those. (Karen, secondary teacher of 19 to 21 years). (Bowe, 2016)*

Typically, PLCs involve teachers from across stages and KLAs working together, treating teaching holistically, and, therefore, authentically. With the emphasis on pedagogy, QTR recognises that what teachers know always will be mediated by the teaching that happens in the classroom (Gore et al., 2017).



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## **Why take part in Quality Teaching Rounds?**

### **Teachers believe it helps student learning**

Participants in the major suite of research studies that have investigated the effectiveness of QTR (Gore, 2018) deeply value the experience. Whilst a current randomised controlled trial, led by Professor Jenny Gore, Dr Drew Miller, Dr Jess Harris and Dr Elena Prieto (University of Newcastle) is investigating a causal link between QTR and student outcomes, we know from previous studies that schools and teachers believe participation in Rounds does help student learning.

*They said, "Oh well? this class just can't do that" ... and I'm going, "But I'm giving them the option to achieve, I'm giving them the point". That's what I think is brilliant about this, and that's why the Year 7 group are so happy, because they're achieving, and they're able to show it to an audience now, and sort of say, "We did this!" and "Look at this!" (Gore et al, 2017)*

### **Improves collaboration**

After participating in the collaborative processes of Rounds, teachers report being able to transfer the learning gained to their individual practice and to the work in which they engage collectively (Bowe, 2016). Teachers often form strong working relationships with the other members of their PLC. Collaboration not only occurs as part of the Rounds process but often continues after its completion.

*It's been the best PD that we have had because one, it has substance, and two, it has inbuilt in this delivery ... an opportunity to see each other teach and that has brought about an openness to change. (Bowe, 2016)*

### **Improves teacher morale and sense of recognition**

Participation in QTR leads to improved morale and a greater sense of feeling valued by one's colleagues. Teachers in the 2015 randomised controlled trial indicated significantly increased morale after participating in Rounds when compared to the teachers who had not. Teachers in the same study also reported a stronger sense of feeling recognised for the good work they do (Gore et al., 2017).

## **Where to next?**

### **QTR in Schools**

To successfully implement Quality Teaching Rounds, it is important that schools have at least two teachers completed a two-day workshop prior to commencing Rounds. Schools and teachers interested in implementing Quality Teaching Rounds can register for one of many workshops being held across NSW this year and next at [www.newcastle.edu.au/qtr](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/qtr).

Alternatively, email the University of Newcastle's Teachers and Teaching Research Centre at [QTRPD@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:QTRPD@newcastle.edu.au) to organise a workshop in your local area. Teachers in small and remote schools will shortly have opportunities to participate in a fully online digital mode of QTR, including the two-day workshop; for further details email [QTR@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:QTR@newcastle.edu.au).



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## QTR Research

The current research being conducted by the University of Newcastle has the fundamental aim of building capacity for improving teaching across the entire workforce of Australian teachers, including teachers in settings that have traditionally faced barriers to accessing professional development. To find out more about this research, or sign up to participate in the current studies, visit [www.newcastle.edu.au/qtr](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/qtr).

## References:

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***Lloyd Bowen has recently returned to being Head Teacher Teaching and Learning in a southern Sydney high school. He has spent the last 12 months as one of the Department of Education's Quality Teaching Rounds Project Advisors working with the University of Newcastle on their Building Capacity in Australian Schools project. In this role he trained teachers and schools in the successful implementation of Quality Teaching Rounds. He has previously worked in schools in Mount Druitt and the Sutherland Shire as a teacher, teacher mentor and head teacher.'***