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Improving Instructional Practice Via Walkthrough Implementation: A Superintendent Centered Perspective

Michael J. Celoski
Seton Hall University, mceloski@verizon.net

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Improving Instructional Practice Via Walkthrough Implementation:
A Superintendent Centered Perspective

by

Michael J. Celoski

Dissertation Committee

Anthony Colella, Ph.D., Mentor
Barbara Strobert, Ed.D.
Walter Campbell, Ed.D.

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of the requirements for the degree of
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APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Michael J. Celoski, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this Spring Semester 2018.

DISSEPTION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor: Dr. Anthony Colonna 3/10/18

Committee Member: Dr. Barbara Strobert 3/20/18

Committee Member: Dr. Walter Campbell 3/20/18

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate’s file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions and reflections of former and current superintendents of suburban public school districts throughout the state of New Jersey regarding their districts’ use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve instructional practice. Comprehensive, in-person, semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight superintendents. The participants were purposefully selected based on their qualifications, their willingness to participate in the study, and their experience using the walkthrough protocol.

Utilizing interview questions that were steered by the study’s three overarching research questions, the researcher was able to delve deeply into the perceptions and reflections of the eight participants pertaining to the value of walkthrough implementation. Through the process of qualitative data analysis, congruent categories and themes were constructed. These categories and themes allowed the researcher to take an exorbitant amount of qualitative data and convert it into a narrative that ultimately addressed each of this study’s three research questions.

This study identified fundamental categories and themes that are associated with classroom walkthroughs. Key walkthrough components include length and frequency, data collection, non-evaluative intent, look-fors, and feedback. Possible obstacles to walkthrough implementation include time, prioritization, and trust. Instructional leadership practices associated with walkthroughs include coaching, professional development, data-driven decision-making, visibility, and culture building. Overwhelmingly, all eight superintendents supported the notion that when used correctly, walkthrough implementation is an effective strategy to improve instructional practice.
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late parents, Joseph and Estelle Celoski. To my father, thank you for never doubting that I could do it even when I doubted myself. You selflessly sacrificed yourself and worked so incredibly hard to take care of your family. You were always so supportive of my educational aspirations and I just wish that you were here to see me graduate one last time. To my mother, I never had the chance to say this, but my admiration of you as a teacher is the reason why I chose to become one. You were the kindest, most loving soul I have ever known. You were my best friend and I miss you dearly, but I am sure that you are still with me every step of the way. My love for the both of you is eternal and I sincerely hope that you are proud of this accomplishment and for the man I have become. Till we meet again...
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Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

Background

The concept of school accountability—the process of evaluating school performance on the basis of student performance measures—is not new (Figlio & Loeb, 2011). With the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and the legislation’s subsequent reauthorizations over the past fifty years that have led to the recently adopted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), school districts throughout the United States are continually held to higher standards of ensuring that all students are afforded an appropriate and meaningful education (Wardlow, 2016). With research clearly showing that teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement (Ny, Konstantopolous, & Hedges, 2004), greater than both parent education and race combined (Auchter & Parkerson, 2011), it is of utmost importance to ensure that a school’s teaching staff is performing at an optimum level.

With this increased demand on school accountability and student achievement, school leaders must shift roles. Administrators need to shift from the role of manager to that of instructional leader, with the ultimate goal of increased student learning (Goldhorn, Kearney, & Webb, 2013). In order to successfully transition into an instructional leader, it is imperative that administrators be visible in classrooms continually assessing teacher performance and student learning. Substantial amounts of time must be properly expended in the classroom setting and pertinent conversations regarding best teaching practices must regularly take place with all teachers (Hoy & Hoy, 2006). The most efficient manner of accomplishing these objectives would be through the use of classroom walkthroughs (Downey, Stefy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004).
Classroom walkthroughs are short, informal classroom visitations where administrators gather information that can be used to encourage focused, reflective, and collaborative adult learning (Kosanovich & Miller, 2010). The information gathered will allow administrators to take on the role of instructional coach. An opportunity to provide formative feedback and in turn open collegial discussion on observed instruction and student learning will be afforded (Marzano, 2007). These essential follow-up conversations must be non-confrontational in nature in order to build high trust levels between teacher and administrator. Administrators must engage and question teachers without being critical or demeaning, with the sole purpose of making positive change in instructional strategies (Bushman, 2006).

Conducting walkthroughs on a regular basis not only improves student achievement (Skretta & Fisher, 2002), but also raises the achievement of other stakeholders such as teachers and administrators (Moss & Brookhart, 2013). In addition to student and educator achievement, other worthwhile administrative benefits ensue. According to Weber (2007), “walkthroughs are an excellent way to keep current on what is being taught in the classrooms, head off any parent concerns, quell discipline issues, and show the faculty and students that you care about them” (p. 1). Although the raised stakes of school accountability have caused many frustrations and obstacles for all members of the school community, when walkthroughs are appropriately implemented to address external mandates, students learn, teachers thrive, and administrators become transformative leaders (Bloom, 2007).
Statement of the Problem

In order to meet the newly mandated challenges set forth through the recently adopted *Every Student Succeeds Act* (*ESSA*), educational leaders throughout the United States are charged with the task of increasing student achievement for all students across all grade levels (Cook-Harvey & Stosich, 2016). Given the continued lack of time and resources afforded to many school districts from the national, state, and local levels of government (Baker, Farrie, Johnson, Luhm, & Sciarra, 2017), educational leaders must continue to utilize cost efficient pedagogical practices in order to address this increase in school accountability (Cook-Harvey, Darling-Hammond, Lam, Mercer, & Roc, 2016). One such cost-efficient administrative practice that has been utilized by educational leaders over the past two decades is the classroom walkthrough (Weber, 2007). Numerous studies have been conducted examining the many different facets of walkthrough implementation, but a true lack of investigation from the point of view of school superintendents is glaring.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions and reflections of former and current superintendents of suburban public school districts throughout the state of New Jersey regarding their districts’ use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve academic instruction. The resulting data obtained from semi-structured interviews provide in-depth insight regarding these superintendents’ perceptions and reflections on the effectiveness of walkthrough implementation as a means to improve instructional practice. In addition, a detailed description of the key
components and intricacies of an effective classroom walkthrough as determined by these educational leaders has been detailed. Any possible obstacles that may hinder an administrator’s ability to regularly utilize walkthroughs as a means of informal teacher evaluation have also been examined with ensuing feedback as to how one can minimize these distractions.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to address the following research questions in an attempt to descriptively identify how classroom walkthrough implementation ultimately impacts instructional practice:

1. What are the key components of classroom walkthroughs as identified by superintendents?
2. What obstacles may exist that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis?
3. In what way, if any, do classroom walkthroughs ultimately impact administrators as instructional leaders?

**Conceptual Framework**

As per Merriam (2009), a conceptual framework “is the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame of your study… and is derived from the orientation or stance that you bring to your study” (p. 66). The framework of one’s study will draw upon the concepts, models, and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation. It will in turn generate the problem of the study, specific research questions, data
collection and analysis techniques, and how one will interpret his/her findings (Merriam, 2009). The key conceptual frameworks relevant to this study are Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) and its educational counterpart, classroom walkthroughs.

MBWA was first practiced in the business world during the 1970s by Hewlett Packard co-founder David Packard (Tanner-Smith, Jordan, Kosanovich, & Weinstein, 2009). Peters and Waterman (1982) discovered that top companies such as Hewlett Packard that had managers who engaged in interacting with employees and customers were more successful than those who practiced isolated management. The authors believed that organizational success was attributed to leadership that wandered outside the office. In interviews with outstanding CEOs, Peters and Waterman “learned that this was the way the leaders stayed abreast of operations, enabling them to anticipate problems before they happen” (Streshly, Gray, & Frase, 2012, p. 2). As a matter of fact, these executives were not wandering at all. They were engaged in dynamic leadership of their companies (Streshly, Gray, & Frase, 2012).

MBWA aids organizational success by ensuring that the manager receives potentially unchanged information pertaining to the employees, as well as the organization. This most importantly enables the provision of proactive solutions to organizational issues before they degenerate into problems (Peters & Waterman, 1982). “MBWA leaders know that people are the most important asset of an organization and that being with them, communicating with them, and acting on what they say will boost morale” (Streshly, Gray, & Frase, 2012, p. 3). These leaders learn much more about the heart and soul of their companies than others who deprive themselves from wandering around and intermingling with employees – the lifeblood of all successful organizations.
The classroom walkthrough borrowed MBWA from the business world and modified it to fit the needs of education. “Educators have enhanced this concept by adding data gathering to the wandering around, including taking note of specific instructional practices during short visits to classrooms” (Schomburg, 2006, p. 546). Classroom walkthroughs and data gathering allow administrators “to engage in dialogue with teachers regarding instruction in ways that go beyond the required formal observations” (Schomburg, 2006, p 546).

In public schools, the best administrators spend a large part of the instructional day “wandering around” classrooms bringing individual members of the school community – teachers, instructional aides, parents, students, and administrators – together in the pursuit of excellent schools (Streshly, Gray, & Frase, 2012). Carolyn Downey, one of the leading authors and researchers on classroom walkthroughs, asserts that in order for classroom walkthroughs to be effective and lead in the pursuit of excellent schools, they must be:

- Informal – Avoid filling out checklists, and take notes only to help recall details later.
- Brief – Observe classrooms frequently and keep the visits short.
- Unannounced – Arrive without advance notice to avoid a staged lesson.
- Focused – Concentrate on the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction and how their decisions affect students’ learning. For teachers who need help, suggest one or two things they can try.
- Non-evaluative – Keep visits collegial and cooperative. Assure teachers that the purpose of your visit is continuous improvement throughout the school.
• Reflective – Ask teachers to reflect on their instructional decisions and strategies. Occasionally invite teachers to a follow-up conversation to discuss ways to improve practice (DeBoer & Hinojosa, 2012, pp. 3-4).

According to Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston (2004), brief yet focused walkthroughs followed by collaborative, reflective dialogue is a very powerful change agent. The ultimate purpose of walkthroughs in their eyes is to support teachers in becoming responsible and self-analytical individuals who are continuously improving their practice. By implementing appropriately administered classroom walkthroughs, the following ten highly desirable results can be expected:

• Enhanced teacher satisfaction as defined by higher frequency of “flow” experiences.
• Improved teacher self-efficacy.
• Improved teacher attitudes toward professional development.
• Improved teacher attitudes toward teacher appraisal.
• Increased perceived teacher efficacy of other teachers and of the school.
• Improved classroom instruction.
• Improved teacher perception of principal effectiveness.
• Improved student discipline and student acceptance of advice and criticism.
• Improved teacher-perceived effectiveness of the school.
• Increased student learning across socioeconomic and cultural lines (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004, p. 149).
Design and Methodology

After receiving permission from eight of the twenty contacted suburban public school superintendents in the state of New Jersey, semi-structured interviews of the select superintendents were conducted examining their perceptions and reflections toward the utilization of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve instructional practice. The superintendents were purposefully selected based on their qualifications, their willingness to participate in the study, and their experience using the walkthrough protocol.

The interviews took place in-person with interview locations and times taking place at the convenience of the participants. Interviews ranged from 30-60 minutes in length and were steered by nine interview questions. The interview questions were designed from a review of the literature and in consultation with a group of experts in order to help answer the study’s three underlying research questions. A digital recording device was utilized in order to allow the researcher to remain attentive at all times and aid with correctness. Interviews were promptly transcribed and shared with the participants to help check for accuracy. Through the use of pseudonyms, the confidentiality of the participants and their corresponding school districts has been ensured.

The interview transcripts were close read and coded with the intent of recognizing and understanding themes. These themes ultimately served as the foundation for the creation of categories directly related to the study’s three research questions. The categories were presented in the form of a descriptive account with the hope of establishing clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data. Through the use of qualitative methodology, the researcher was able to report the personal accounts and varied perspectives of the participants.
Significance of the Study

Although there have been numerous studies that have examined the effectiveness of the classroom walkthrough and the perceptions of its use from the points of view of principal and teacher, there is a profound lack of research done examining the superintendent’s role in this pedagogical practice. Responsibilities such as the hiring and evaluating of administrative staff, managing the budget, and the implementation of board policy are many that come to mind when one lists the many obligations of a superintendent. Yet none of these have such a dramatic effect on student achievement as a superintendent’s responsibilities to conduct proper staff evaluation and the subsequent hiring decisions that are based on these results (Waters & Marzano, 2006). This study was chosen due to the significant lack of research on classroom walkthroughs from the point of view of superintendents.

Not only are many superintendents involved in the yearly, summative evaluations of teachers across all grade levels, many take on an even more hands-on formative approach. Just like the countless principals and supervisors that utilize classroom walkthroughs as a method of informal teacher assessment, many superintendents also incorporate this instrument into their daily schedules by conducting classroom walkthroughs themselves. This study not only examined the expectations that the selected superintendents have towards its use by others, but it also gave them the opportunity to self reflect on their own use or lack of use of the classroom walkthrough. Not only did this study help fill a void in classroom walkthrough research from the point of view of the superintendent, but it additionally is an asset to educational leaders who may choose to implement this tool at the district, school, or personal level.
Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses in one’s study that are out of the control of the researcher (Simon, 2011). Limitations of this study included:

1. The sample size of the study was relatively small due to a limited amount of volunteers and unforeseen cancellations.
2. The scope in the participating superintendents’ years and types of experience varied.
3. The researcher had to make the assumption that participating superintendents responded honestly to the semi-structured questions.
4. The researcher’s subjectivity in completing semi-structured interviews, especially pertaining to content analysis, must be accounted for.

Delimitations

Delimitations are those characteristics that are controlled, and limit the scope and define the boundaries of one’s study (Simon, 2011). Delimitations of this study included:

1. Eight superintendents participated in this study.
2. Only superintendents were chosen to participate in this study. Other educators were purposely not included.
3. The participating superintendents were all currently or formerly employed by suburban, public school districts in the state of New Jersey.
4. The size of the school districts that the superintendents served ranged from small to medium in size.
**Definition of Terms**

*Danielson Framework for Teaching:* A research-based set of components of instruction, aligned to the InTASC standards, and grounded in a constructivist view of learning and teaching. The complex activity of teaching is divided into 22 components (and 76 smaller elements) clustered into four domains of teaching responsibility.

*Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA):* The principal federal law affecting K-12 education, first passed by the U.S. Congress in 1965 as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society Program. The law, which Congress is supposed to reauthorize every five years, was intended to improve the education of the country’s poorest children, and that remains its overarching purpose.

*Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA):* A U.S. law passed in December 2015 that governs the United States K-12 public education policy. The law replaced its predecessor, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and modified but did not eliminate provisions relating to the periodic standardized tests given to students. ESSA is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which established the federal government’s expanded role in public education.

*Instructional Practice:* Applications that fuel effective and efficient classroom interaction to drive students on their journey of discovery in a learning experience.

*InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards:* Teaching standards that outline what teachers should know and be able to do to ensure that every K-12 student reaches the goal of being ready to enter college or the workforce in today’s world. This common core outlines the principles and foundations of teaching practice that cut across all subject areas and grade levels and that all teachers share.
**National Board for Professional Teaching Standards:** A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization in the United States, dedicated to promoting excellence in education. It develops and maintains advanced standards for educators and offers a national, voluntary assessment, National Board Certification, based on the NBPTS standards.

**School Accountability:** The concept that schools should be held responsible for improving student achievement and should be either rewarded for their success or sanctioned for their lack of success in doing so.

**Superintendent:** The top administrator in a school district who implements the school board’s vision by making day-to-day decisions about educational programs, spending, staff, and facilities.

**Teacher Evaluation:** The formal process a school uses to review and rate teachers’ performance and effectiveness in the classroom. Ideally, the findings from these evaluations are used to provide feedback to teachers and guide their professional development.

**Walkthrough:** A short, organized visit to a classroom to observe teachers and students. Ideally, the visits should occur frequently and are intended to support teachers in the delivery of instruction and curriculum. The aim of the walkthrough is to provide direct and specific feedback to teachers based on the snapshot observed. The feedback can then be given to an individual, or the observer may provide a report of patterns noted during the walkthroughs.
Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I (Introduction) contains the background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, design and methodology, significance of the study, limitations, delimitations, definition of terms, and organization of the study. Chapter II (Literature Review) includes an introduction, literature search procedures, and a literature review examining teacher effectiveness models and walkthroughs. Chapter III (Methodology) identifies the research design, sample, profiles of participants, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and validity and reliability. Chapter IV (Findings) includes an introduction, categorizes the results of the three research questions into corresponding themes, and finishes with a summary. Chapter V (Discussion and Recommendations) includes an introduction, presents a discussion of findings, suggests recommendations for practice, policy, and future research, and finishes with a summary. The researcher concludes the dissertation with references and various appendices.
Chapter II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

With this study focusing on walkthrough implementation as a means towards improving academic instruction, it is important to identify what constitutes effective academic instruction and to examine the walkthrough process itself. Specifically, the researcher sought to examine: a) the key components of classroom walkthroughs as identified by superintendents, b) obstacles that may exist that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis, and c) in what way, if any, do classroom walkthroughs impact administrators as instructional leaders. In order to conduct this study, it was necessary to complete a review of the current literature. The review was ongoing throughout the entirety of the study.

When conducting a walkthrough, the main goal of the school leader is to gather information about the instructional strengths and weaknesses of the educator being observed (Teachscape, 2006). Many teacher effectiveness models exist that identify best instructional strategies, but this study focused on three commonly used models. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards, and the Danielson Framework for Teaching are all widely accepted by teachers, administrators, policymakers, and academics alike as models of what constitute good teaching. The intricacies of each of these three models have been extensively reviewed.

In addition to focusing on the three previously mentioned teacher effectiveness models, the review of the literature also consists of an examination of the classroom
walkthrough process. First, the researcher provides an in-depth review of the purpose of conducting classroom walkthroughs. An analysis of the essential components of an effective walkthrough follows, and lastly, potential benefits that may arise through proper walkthrough implementation have been identified.

**Literature Search Procedures**

Merriam (2009) indicates that “a commanding knowledge of previous studies and writing on a topic offers a point of reference for discussing the contribution the current study will make to advancing the knowledge base in this area” (p. 72). It was therefore imperative that the researcher became familiar with previous research and theory in the areas of teacher effectiveness and classroom walkthrough implementation. The literature review allowed the researcher to integrate and synthesize these areas of study in order to identify the overall theoretical framework for study. It is from this frame of reference that the researcher contributed to the knowledge base of the field and helped advance, refine, and revise what is already known (Merriam, 2009).

The review of relevant research and literature related to this study was primarily conducted using the Seton Hall University online library search engine. Resources utilized to help conduct the literature review include ProQuest, EBSCOhost, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, and the Seton Hall University Electronic Dissertation and Theses (ETDs) database. Numerous books and journals pertaining to teacher effectiveness and walkthrough implementation were additionally purchased and/or borrowed.
Key search terms that were used throughout the literature search process include: classroom walkthroughs, Danielson Framework for Teaching, educational leadership, effective academic instruction, Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), informal teacher evaluation, instructional leadership, InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards, Management by Wandering Around (MBWA), National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, school accountability, school superintendents, teacher effectiveness models, and teacher evaluation.

The majority of the works reviewed and included were peer-reviewed journal articles, articles from respected education and education research journals, and books and book chapters pertaining to teacher effectiveness models and classroom walkthroughs. Most of the works were published within the past fifteen years, though some works were older in order to contribute to the historical perspectives of teacher effectiveness and teacher evaluation. The style guidelines used in formatting this dissertation were obtained from the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition (2009).

**Teacher Effectiveness Models**

**National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) is the “largest and most highly publicized initiative to improve teaching in American schools” (Boyd & Reese, 2006, p. 51). The idea for the NBPTS was first articulated in a speech given in 1985 by world-renowned educator and researcher Albert Shanker. Shanker’s speech,
stressing the need for national professional teaching standards, ultimately became the centerpiece of the 1986 report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy’s Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, titled “A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century” (Boyd & Reese, 2006). As a result of this landmark report, the NBPTS was established in 1987 through a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York (Lustick & Sykes, 2006) with a mission of establishing high and rigorous standards for the teaching profession, creating professional development opportunities, and increasing the status of the teaching profession in America (Serafini, 2002).

After its creation, the NBPTS issued the policy statement, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*, which provided a vision for accomplished teaching (Exstrom, 2011). This subsequent vision identified five core propositions that laid the groundwork for the National Board’s teaching standards and its voluntary, national teacher certification known as National Board Certification (NBPTS, 2002). Guided by the belief that although certification would be conferred on individual teachers, the certification as a whole would “have a profound cumulative impact on American education” (Berry, 2007, p. 6). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has certified more than 100,000 teachers across all fifty states in 25 areas of certification and is widely considered to be the most respected professional certification available in K-12 education (NBPTS, 2016). The certification process is demanding and rigorous, and teachers are assessed in terms of their knowledge of content and pedagogy, use of high-quality instructional practices, assessment skills, reflection on their practice, and involvement in professional activities (McColskey & Stronge, 2006).
The five core propositions outlined in *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do* are “the cornerstone of the system of National Board Certification and continue to serve as the foundation for all National Board Standards” (Auchter & Parkerson, 2011, p. 16). The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2016) articulates its five core propositions as follows:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
   - Teachers recognize individual differences in their students and adjust their practice accordingly.
   - Teachers understand how students develop and learn.
   - Teachers treat students equitably.
   - Teachers know their mission transcends the cognitive development of their students (pp. 11-16).

2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
   - Teachers appreciate how knowledge in their subjects is created, organized, and linked to other disciplines.
   - Teachers command specialized knowledge of how to convey a subject to students.
   - Teachers generate multiple paths to knowledge (pp. 17-22).

3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
   - Teachers call on multiple methods to meet their instructional goals.
   - Teachers support student learning in varied settings and groups.
   - Teachers value student engagement.
Teachers regularly assess student progress.

Teachers engage students in the learning process (pp. 23-29).

4. Teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience.

- Teachers make difficult choices that test their professional judgment.
- Teachers use feedback and research to improve their practice and positively impact student learning (pp. 30-33).

5. Teachers are members of learning communities.

- Teachers collaborate with other professionals to improve school effectiveness.
- Teachers work collaboratively with families.
- Teachers work collaboratively with the community (pp. 34-39).

**InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards**

The Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) was originally developed in 1992 by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and offers a “set of model core teaching standards that outline what teachers should know and be able to do to ensure every K-12 student reaches the goal of being ready to enter college or the workforce in today’s world” (CCSSO, 2011, p. 3). Although originally written with the intent of guiding beginning teachers through professional practice standards, the consortium evolved to its current role of offering standards for teachers of all developmental stages in 2011.

The core teaching standards stress that teachers need to build literacy and thinking skills across the curriculum, in addition to helping learners address multiple perspectives in exploring ideas and solving problems (CCSSO, 2011). The InTASC standards include
ten standards, with each standard including performances, essential knowledge, and critical dispositions for all teachers (Resse, Tannenbaum, & Kuku, 2015). The ten standards are grouped into four general categories to help users organize their thinking about the standards: The Learner and Learning, Content, Instructional Practice, and Professional Responsibility (CCSSO, 2013).

The first category (The Learner and Learning) has three standards associated with it. Standard #1 (Learner Development) states, “The teacher understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and designs and implements developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 8). Standard #2 (Learning Differences) states, “The teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 8). Standard #3 (Learning Environments) states, “The teacher works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self motivation” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 8).

The second category (Content) has two standards associated with it. Standard #4 (Content Knowledge) states, “The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and creates learning experiences that make the discipline accessible and meaningful for learners to assure mastery of the content” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 8). Standard #5 (Application of Content) states, “The teacher understands how to connect concepts and use differing perspectives
to engage learners in critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative problem solving related to authentic local and global issues” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 8).

The third category (Instructional Practice) has three standards associated with it. Standard #6 (Assessment) states, “The teacher understands and uses multiple methods of assessment to engage learners in their own growth, to monitor learner progress, and to guide the teacher’s and learner’s decision making” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 9). Standard #7 (Planning for Instruction) states, “The teacher plans instruction that supports every student in meeting rigorous learning goals by drawing upon knowledge of content areas, curriculum, cross-disciplinary skills, and pedagogy, as well as knowledge of learners and the community context” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 9). Standard #8 (Instructional Strategies) states, “The teacher understands and uses a variety of instructional strategies to encourage learners to develop deep understanding of content areas and their connections, and to build skills to apply knowledge in meaningful ways” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 9).

The fourth category (Professional Responsibility) has two standards associated with it. Standard #9 (Professional Learning and Ethical Practice) states, “The teacher engages in ongoing professional learning and uses evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice, particularly the effects of his/her choices and action on others (learners, families, other professionals, and the community), and adapts practice to meet the needs of each learner” (CCSSO, 2013, p. 9). Standard #10 (Leadership and Collaboration) states, “The teacher seeks appropriate leadership roles and opportunities to take responsibility for student learning, to collaborate with learners, families, colleagues, other school professionals, and community members to ensure learner growth, and to advance the profession” (CCSSO, 2013, p.9).
The Danielson Framework for Teaching

Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching is considered to be one of the most popular teacher evaluation frameworks implemented worldwide. Danielson, a career educator and educational consultant, is internationally recognized as a “guru” in teacher evaluation, and has published numerous books for the Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (Yaple, 2012). After its original publishing in 1996, Danielson’s Framework for Teaching has been revised in 2007, 2011, and 2013 to adapt to current teacher practices and key legislative demands (Danielson, 2013).

According to Danielson (2007), the Framework for Teaching identifies the specific aspects of a teacher’s responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research that promote improved student learning and academic success.

Danielson’s Framework for Teaching “offers teachers, teacher preparation programs, and schools with the tools to engage in professional conversations about good teaching, and to analyze practice to determine how it can be improved” (Danielson, 2002, p. 37). It can be used to meet all teachers’ needs, from beginner teachers who are concerned with day-to-day survival to a school’s most accomplished, high achieving educators who may want to move toward advanced certification or may simply want to better serve as a resource to less-experienced colleagues (Danielson, 2007). Many school districts throughout the United States use this framework as a formative instrument to help improve teacher practice. With that said, the Danielson Framework for Teaching involves more than just observing teacher practice; it additionally incorporates dialogue between supervisor and educators as a key artifact assessing overall teacher effectiveness.
The most recent revision of Danielson’s Framework for Teaching is divided into 22 specific components clustered into four domains of teaching responsibility. Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation) “includes comprehensive understanding of the content to be taught, knowledge of the students’ backgrounds, and designing instruction and assessment” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 23). Domain 2 (The Classroom Environment) “addresses the teacher’s skill in establishing an environment conducive to learning, including both the physical and interpersonal aspects of the environment” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 23). Domain 3 (Instruction) “is concerned with the teacher’s skill in engaging students in learning the content, and includes the wide range of instructional strategies that enable students to learn” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 23). Domain 4 (Professional Responsibilities) “addresses a teacher’s additional professional responsibilities, including self-assessment and reflection, communication with parents, participating in ongoing professional development, and contributing to the school and district environment” (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 23).

Skills in Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation) “are demonstrated primarily through the plans that teachers prepare to guide their teaching, by how they describe the decisions they make, and ultimately through the success of their plans as implemented” (Danielson, 2007, p. 27). These skills are reflected in the following six components: 1a) Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy, 1b) Demonstrating Knowledge of Students, 1c) Setting Instructional Outcomes, 1d) Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources, 1e) Designing Coherent Instruction, and 1f) Designing Student Assessments (Danielson, 2013). Domain 1 covers all aspects of instructional planning, beginning with
a deep understanding of content and pedagogy and an understanding and appreciation of one’s diverse group of students. Content must be transformed through instructional design into sequences of activities and exercises that make it accessible to all students (Danielson, 2007).

The skills of Domain 2 (The Classroom Environment) “are demonstrated through classroom interaction and captured on paper through interviews with or surveys of students. These skills are observed in action, either in person or on videotape” (Danielson, 2007, p.29). These skills are identified in the following five components: 2a) Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport, 2b) Establishing a Culture for Learning, 2c) Managing Classroom Procedures, 2d) Managing Student Behavior, and 2e) Organizing Physical Space (Danielson, 2013). The components of Domain 2 establish a comfortable and respectful classroom environment that cultivates a culture for learning and risk taking (Danielson, 2007).

In Domain 3 (Instruction), skills “are demonstrated through classroom interaction, observed either in person or videotape. In addition, samples of student work can reveal the degree of cognitive challenge expected from students and the extent of their engagement in learning” (Danielson, 2007, p. 30). The skills of Domain 3 include the following five components: 3a) Communicating with Students, 3b) Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques, 3c) Engaging Students in Learning, 3d) Using Assessment in Instruction, and 3e) Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness (Danielson, 2013). The components of Domain 3 are the heart of teaching, the actual engagement of students in content (Danielson, 2007).
Last of all, the skills of Domain 4 (Professional Responsibilities) “are demonstrated through teacher interactions with colleagues, families, other professionals, and the larger community” (Danielson, 2007, p. 31). These skills are found in the following six components: 4a) Reflecting on Teaching, 4b) Maintaining Accurate Records, 4c) Communicating with Families, 4d) Participating in the Professional Community, 4e) Growing and Developing Professionally, and 4f) Showing Professionalism (Danielson, 2013). The components of Domain 4 are associated with the professionalism of the educator and encompass teacher roles exerted inside and outside of the classroom (Danielson, 2007).

**Walkthroughs**

**Purpose**

According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2007), a walkthrough is a “brief, structured, non-evaluative classroom observation by the principal that is followed by a conversation between the principal and the teacher about what was observed” (p. 1). Being non-evaluative in nature, the walkthrough is separate from the formal teacher evaluation process and is intended to serve as a catalyst for creating a collaborative school environment with a focus on instructional practices and student learning. The purpose of a walkthrough is not to pass judgment on teachers, but rather to guide them to higher levels of teacher performance (Pitler & Goodwin, 2009). By establishing high levels of trust among all parties through the positive nature and frequency of walkthroughs, teachers ideally will have lower levels of apprehension when formal observations do occur (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). Decreased
apprehension levels ought to make formal observations a more reliable representation of one’s teaching ability, thus making formal evaluations a more reflective assessment of a teacher’s overall level of effectiveness.

The classroom walkthrough is a relatively new system of formative teacher assessment that has gradually gained popularity since Frase and Hetzel (2002) first argued for its place in the American school system in their landmark publication, *School Management by Wandering Around*. Before the advent and widespread use of the walkthrough, administrators usually only visited classrooms when they needed to conduct formal teacher evaluations (Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002). Principals on average spent from 40 to 80 percent of their time in or around the office area. An additional 23 to 40 percent of their time was spent in hallways and on the playgrounds. About 11 percent was spent off campus, and only about 2.5 to 10 percent of a principal’s time was generally spent in classrooms (Downey, 2004). As a byproduct of a practice developed in the private sector known as Management by Wandering Around (MBWA), the walkthrough process was created to address this lack of invaluable classroom visitation time (Schomburg, 2006).

MBWA was first introduced in the business world by Hewlett-Packard in the 1970s (Tanner-Smith, Jordan, Kosanovich, & Weinstein, 2009). Company executives were tasked with the charge of training managers in developmental management skills and making them more visible to employees (Rissman, Miller, & Torgesen, 2009). The simple premise behind MBWA is that successful companies tend to have executives that stay close to the work, rather than remaining isolated in their offices (Schomburg, 2006). Peters and Waterman (1982) justify the effectiveness of MBWA by conducting research
that substantiated the premise that a majority of the most successful companies had managers that were close to the customers and workers, and were involved in the daily routines of the business.

Using the MBWA model as its foundation, educators created their own version of Management by Wandering Around to fit the needs of today’s schools. Educators enhanced this practice by “adding data gathering to the wandering around, including taking note of specific instructional practices during short visits to classrooms” (Schomburg, 2006, p. 546). Schomburg (2006) asserts that these visits and subsequent data gathering allow administrators to engage in dialogue with teachers regarding instruction in ways that go well beyond those that take place during formal observations. When done right, walkthroughs possess the potential to engage teachers in reflective thinking, provide teachers with information about their classrooms, and cultivate a collaborative environment between teacher and observer (Sullivan & Glanz, 2009). The hoped-for outcome of classroom walkthroughs is that teachers closely examine their practices and become increasingly reflective, self-directed, critical thinkers focused on continually improving their teaching (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010).

Although they are far easier to talk about than to actually implement (Lemons & Helsing, 2009), classroom walkthroughs serve a variety of purposes and can have quite a dramatic effect on school culture when implemented correctly. Bloom (2007) stresses that when done well, “classroom visitations tied to professional learning communities and continuous improvement processes have transformative power” (p. 41). When done poorly, “they can produce hostility and distrust, and will become one more passing fad in the long and disappointing history of school reform” (p. 41). In order to ensure
walkthroughs are implemented properly, Bloom (2007) provides the following list of common characteristics all walkthrough models should share:

- They are intended to develop and support professional learning communities focused upon improving teaching and learning.
- They are tied to the strengthening of a teaching profession in which practice is public and informed by standards.
- They are grounded in a commitment to support the success of every student and every teacher.
- They are organized around clear and public processes and protocols, are evidence based, and are linked to continuous cycles of inquiry (p. 42).

Components

A review of the literature reveals four basic components of an effective walkthrough protocol. The first fundamental component of a walkthrough is defined in the length of time and frequency of individual walkthroughs. Although experts differ in regards to specifics of length, most agree that they should be relatively short in nature (Black, 2007). The second and possibly most important aspect of effective walkthrough implementation involves around the “look-fors” that evaluators should focus on when visiting classrooms. These are often posed as questions that when answered, can identify effective teaching and student learning (Protheroe, 2009). A third necessary component of a walkthrough is the utilization of data gathering. An efficient form of recording should take place during or immediately after the walkthrough that will ensure thoroughness and reliability (Gilliland, 2007). The final basic component derived from
the research is the utilization of teacher feedback stemming from walkthrough observations to help foster healthy dialogue between the observer and observee. This step is often overlooked, but when neglected can be counterproductive to the process. A state of mistrust between teachers and administrators may set in, thus sabotaging the overarching goal of improving teacher instruction (Archer, 2005).

The recommended allotment of time that should be dedicated to individual classroom walkthroughs ranges from a minimum of three minutes to a maximum of ten minutes. As per *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through: Changing School Supervisory Practice One Teacher at a Time*, Carolyn Downey (2004), asserts that a properly done walkthrough should be approximately three minutes in length. In collaboration with the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, Teachscape (2006) proposes that walkthroughs should last approximately 4-7 minutes, as long as classrooms are visited on a weekly basis. Marshall (2003) holds the belief that a regular cycle of five-minute classroom visits is the most efficient way of getting a general sense of how a teacher is doing. On the longer end of the spectrum, Cudeiro and Nelson (2009) suggest that administrators and instructional leaders spend seven to ten minutes in each classroom to look for, gather, and record observational evidence.

No matter the amount of time spent on an individual walkthrough, the key to making walkthroughs an integral part of a school’s culture is in their frequency (DeBoer & Hirojosa, 2012). Kachur, Stout, & Edwards (2010) stress the importance of making sure that walkthroughs occur on a regular, consistent basis. As a matter of fact, they argue that in order for this to occur, classroom visits cannot be lengthy. Spending too much time during individual classroom walkthroughs will lessen the amount of
classrooms an administrator can visit, thus diminishing the administrator’s ability to see the “big picture” of what is going on in the entire school.

The key to making accurate decisions based on walkthroughs is knowing what to look for. If administrators don’t know what to look for or misunderstand the purposes of walkthroughs, their observations can be useless, or even worse, harmful to teachers and students (Pitler & Goodwin, 2009). Specifying the look-fors that observers should focus on is an extremely important part of the process. “Look-fors describe observable evidence of teaching and learning such as instructional strategies, learning activities, behavioral outcomes, artifacts, routines, or practices” (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010, pp. 88-89). When equipped with the right set of look-fors (usually phrased in question form), brief classroom observations can, in fact, be powerful tools for promoting great teaching (Pitler & Goodwin, 2009).

According to Ginsburg and Murphy (2010), in order to effectively assess instructional practice and student learning during a walkthrough, observers should attempt to answer as many of these following questions as possible:

- Is there a clear academic focus? Can I ascertain the purpose and expectations of the lesson when I enter the classroom – through what I see on the wall or hear from the teacher and students?
- What is the level of student engagement? In general, is the movement, sound, or silence productive? Is student engagement high (80-100 percent), medium (40-79 percent), or low (0-39 percent)? What specific student behaviors indicate the level of engagement?
• What do the walls of the classroom show? Is the environment pleasant and innovative?

• How well do students understand the assignment?

• Do students communicate effectively and demonstrate critical thinking skills? Do I see evidence of productive communication styles and higher-order questioning? Can students respond in ways that include personal perspectives and imaginative and thoughtful analyses of new information? (p. 36).

Flynn (2010) also compiled a list of questions observers should consider when visiting a classroom. These look-fors include:

• Is the learning objective evident (posted and understood) to the students?

• Is the learning objective aligned to state standards?

• What level of thinking is expected of the students?

• Are measurements being used to assess learning?

• What is the engagement level of the students in the classroom?

• What research-proven instructional strategies are evident?

• Does the classroom environment contribute to student learning? (pp. 1-2).

Without the collection of data, administrators cannot provide teachers with the kind of feedback that is necessary to make meaningful, reflective change in instructional practice. Based on preference and one’s ability to reflect accurately post observation, administrators can document data during or after the walkthrough. No matter when the recording takes place, individuals conducting walkthroughs can record their observations in a variety of ways. The most popular formats used to record data include narrative
forms, forms with checklists only, and forms with checklists and narrative space combined. In addition, when administrators collect and aggregate data across multiple teacher observations to create a school-wide or district-wide profile of practices, the value of walkthrough implementation grows exponentially (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010). The key with recording data though is that it must be objective and nonjudgmental. Evidence is either apparent, or not (Larson, 2007).

The final component of the walkthrough process is the follow-up stage. During this stage, teachers receive feedback from administration using gathered data as evidence. As stated by Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010), “If walkthroughs are going to improve teaching and learning, follow-up to teachers is essential” (p.113). Teacher reflection based on given feedback is a key element of classroom walkthroughs. It is the spark that leads teachers to critically think about essential content and to strategically determine the best ways to teach content using research-based methodology (Larson, 2007).

The follow-up stage should optimally take place within 24-48 hours of the walkthrough, for if it takes longer, teachers may get frustrated and perceive your feedback as irrelevant (Skretta, 2007). Follow-up can be given in written or oral form and can be formal or informal. “Brief notes placed in teachers’ mailboxes or sent by e-mail are common ways of follow-up and usually include a summary of key observations, comments, points for clarification, and possible ideas for the teacher” (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010, p. 113). Although face-to-face walk-through related conversation could take place at random times before or after school, “it is more common to schedule a specific time to discuss or reflect on the observation” (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, p. 113).
Benefits

Although there is still a need for more research, available studies reveal a number of benefits associated with classroom walkthroughs (David, 2007). Evidence suggests that walkthrough implementation increases the capacity of schools to be professional learning communities where shared learning about effective instruction is the norm (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007). Teachers are enabled to get to the heart of student learning (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007) and develop a greater trust of administration, knowing that classroom visitations do not have to be a “gotcha” process (Steiny, 2009). An improvement in the quality of student work has been linked to walkthrough implementation with students getting to see that both administrators and teachers value instruction and learning (Protheroe, 2009). Additionally, research also shows that walkthroughs help support observers as campus leaders and instructional mentors, influencing teaching, learning, and ongoing school renewal (Ginsburg & Murphy, 2002).

Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) categorize specific significant benefits pertaining to each of the previously mentioned subgroups (schools, teachers, students, and observers) when the walkthrough process becomes a systemic part of a school’s operation. Gains can be seen by:

Schools:

- collecting additional data on teaching practices and student learning to supplement knowledge about how the school and students are performing;
• increasing school-wide reflection on best practices to increase student achievement;
• acquiring evidence of the impact of curricular initiatives and instructional practices;
• appraising how professional development initiatives are being incorporated into classroom practices;
• identifying professional development needs of the faculty and staff;
• promoting collegial and collaborative conversations that become part of the school culture.

Teachers:

• reflecting on their own instructional and curricular practices related to the school improvement plan;
• engaging in collegial dialogue and reflection about better teaching practices, curricular decisions, and school-wide improvement;
• identifying personal areas of high-need, high-impact professional development;
• receiving individual attention and assistance from instructional leaders.

Students:

• having opportunities to share observations about their learning and suggestions for instructional improvement with educators;
• seeing evidence of and having the opportunity to participate in the entire school improvement effort;
• benefitting from teaching that more effectively meets their needs and results in improved behavioral and academic performance.

Observers:

• maintaining visibility and accessibility that helps build relationships with teachers and students;
• establishing themselves as educational leaders, instructional coaches, or mentors by influencing teaching and learning;
• experiencing a greater awareness of what is taking place in teaching and learning in the school setting;
• determining specific needs in faculty support, mentor, and/or professional development;
• identifying faculty strengths in specific areas of instruction, curriculum, and/or classroom management;
• partnering strong faculty members with those in need of support;
• developing better rapport with students (pp. 7-8).

In summary, classroom walkthroughs alone are not a cure-all for the many challenges that schools face in the 21st century. Issues such as a lack of school funding, increasing class sizes, poverty, less than ideal family environments, a widening student achievement gap, and crime can not be conquered simply by walkthrough implementation. Yet, research supports that conducting effective classroom
walkthroughs produce a myriad of benefits that have a positive effect on instructional practice and student achievement. By making classroom walkthroughs a priority, educational leaders can make the transformative leap from simply reacting to educational problems to that of collaboratively identifying strengths and weaknesses in instructional practice with a focus on making great advances in student growth.
Chapter III
METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This descriptive, qualitative study sought to examine the perceptions and reflections that select suburban public school superintendents throughout the state of New Jersey have toward their districts’ use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve instructional practice. The qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to report the personal accounts and varied perspectives of the participants. These personal accounts and varied perspectives gave the researcher a plethora of rich, detailed information pertaining to walkthroughs that were ultimately used for analysis (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Gay (1996) defines qualitative research as “the collection and analysis of extensive narrative data in order to gain insights into a situation” (p. 208). The insights that this study attempted to ascertain are those on the utilization of classroom walkthroughs as a means of informal teacher assessment and their ability to improve instructional practice.

According to Merriam (1998), a commonly used form of qualitative research consists of the researcher eliciting direct quotations from interviewees about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge regarding a certain topic. Rubin and Rubin (1995) support the utilization of qualitative research when the researcher wants to analyze a specific issue in great detail and depth. Just as Lofland and Lofland (1995) similarly believed, Rubin and Rubin also believe that the data extracted from qualitative research are a source of rich descriptions and explanations.

In order to uncover the necessary rich descriptions and explanations from an interviewee, Rubin and Rubin (1995) state that the ability to do so is highly dependent on
the abilities of the interviewer. The interviewer must possess discipline and thorough inquiry based skills and techniques. A qualitative researcher must listen deeply and attentively to the interviewee looking for these very descriptions and explanations. The most important responsibility of a qualitative researcher is to capture real worlds and quotations of those being interviewed (Patton, 2002). The researcher must truly immerse oneself into another person’s world.

**Sample**

The research population consisted of eight out of twenty contacted former and current suburban public school superintendents in the state of New Jersey. The superintendents were selected based on their qualifications, their willingness to participate in the study, and their experience using the walkthrough protocol.

**Profiles of Participants**

Superintendent A is a retired superintendent with 39 years of public school experience, of which he served five years as superintendent. Before becoming superintendent, Superintendent A served as a teacher, supervisor of curriculum, high school assistant principal, middle school principal, high school principal, and assistant superintendent. The one district that he served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is considered to be a middle class community with a PreK-12 school district consisting of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Superintendent B is a retired superintendent with 42 years of public school experience, of which she served two years as superintendent. Before becoming
superintendent, Superintendent B served as a teacher, supervisor of math, supervisor of math/science, elementary school principal, director of curriculum, and assistant superintendent. The one district that she served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is considered to be a middle class community with a PreK-12 school district consisting of four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Superintendent C is an acting superintendent with 20 years of public school experience, of which he has served three years as superintendent. Before becoming superintendent, Superintendent C served as a teacher, K-12 content area supervisor of mathematics, world languages, science, business, and technology, director of curriculum and instruction, and assistant superintendent. The one district that he has served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is considered to be a middle class community with a PreK-12 school district consisting of a preschool, two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Superintendent D is an acting superintendent with 21 years of public school experience, of which she has served two years as superintendent. Before becoming superintendent, Superintendent D served as a teacher, director of special services, director of curriculum, director of secondary curriculum/testing, and assistant superintendent. The one district that she has served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is considered to be a middle class community with a PreK-12 school district consisting of five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Superintendent E is a retired superintendent with 41 years of public school experience, of which he served four years as superintendent. Before becoming
superintendent, Superintendent E served as a teacher, school social worker, elementary school principal, and director of special education. The one district that he served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is considered to be a middle class community with a PreK-12 school district consisting of a preschool, three elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Superintendent F is an acting superintendent with 21 years of public school experience, of which he has served four years as superintendent. Before becoming superintendent, Superintendent F served as a teacher, teaching supervisor, and high school principal. The first district that he served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is considered to be a middle class community with a PreK-8 school district consisting of two elementary schools and one middle school. His current district is considered to be an upper class community with a PreK-12 school district consisting of six elementary schools, two middle schools, one high school, and one alternative school.

Superintendent G is an acting superintendent with 14 years of public school experience, of which he has served two years as superintendent. Before becoming superintendent, Superintendent G served as a teacher, supervisor of social studies, and assistant superintendent. The one district that he has served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is considered to be an upper class community with a PreK-8 school district consisting of four elementary schools and one middle school.

Superintendent H is an acting superintendent with 21 years of public school experience, of which he has served five years as superintendent. Before becoming superintendent, Superintendent H served as a teacher, high school assistant principal,
elementary school principal, high school principal, and assistant superintendent. The one
district that he has served as superintendent in is located in northern New Jersey and is
considered to be a middle class community with a PreK-12 school district consisting of
eight elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation that was used for this study is semi-structured interviews. Rubin and Rubin (1995) assert that qualitative research seeks realistic description that
finds hidden meaning and shades of gray, not merely black and white. An effective way
of delving deeper in meaning is through the use of in depth interviews utilizing semi-
structured interview questions.

Semi-structured interview questions are designed to be open-ended, allowing for
the expansion of thoughts yet keeping the interview focused (Rabionet, 2011). According to Creswell (2013), semi-structured interviews provide in-depth information
concerning the interviewee’s experiences and viewpoints on a particular topic. Semi-
structured interviews yield more useful data than that obtained from yes or no questions
and provide greater detail and depth than standard surveys (Lapan, 2012). They allowed
the researcher to gain greater insight into the impact that walkthroughs have on
improving instructional practice. Using this interview style gave the participants and
researcher the opportunity to expand and clarify information given as it pertained to this
study.

Comprehensive, in-person, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the
eight selected participants. The interview questions were steered by the study’s research
questions in order to obtain specific information needed to successfully address each of them. These semi-structured interview questions provided the researcher the opportunity to delve deeply into the perceptions and reflections of the eight superintendents pertaining to walkthrough implementation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The semi-structured interview questions used are as follows:

1. What are the key components of classroom walkthroughs as identified by superintendents?
   
   1a) What do you and your administrative team look for during classroom walkthroughs?

   1b) Describe the feedback process you and your administrative team utilize after a classroom walkthrough is conducted.

   1c) In your professional opinion, what are the most meaningful components of the classroom walkthrough process?

2. What obstacles may exist that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis?

   2a) What obstacles, if any, have you and your administrative team ever experienced in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?

   2b) What resistance have you ever felt, if any, from teachers or your administrative team in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?

   2c) Describe any negative experiences, if any, you have had in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation.

3. How do classroom walkthroughs impact administrators as instructional leaders?

   3a) How do classroom walkthroughs impact instructional practice in your school district?

   3b) How does data obtained from classroom walkthroughs impact you and your administrative team as instructional leaders?

   3c) As the leader of your school district, what benefits do you believe classroom walkthroughs bring to the field of educational leadership?
Data Collection

The selected participants received a request to participate in this study via mail and/or e-mail. After receiving written permission to participate in this study, participants were contacted to schedule an interview at their convenience. Interviews were scheduled in 30-minute intervals with the total number of interviews being determined as needed. Interview locations and times took place at the convenience of the participants. Letters and/or e-mails were sent to each participant confirming the specifics of the interviews. Superintendents who volunteered to participate but were not chosen to be participants were contacted in written form. They were informed that they were not chosen to participate in the study, but their volunteering to do so was greatly appreciated.

Through the use of semi-structured interviews, the interviews were not rigid and allowed the participants to offer open responses (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The establishment of rapport between the interviewer and interviewees was imperative. A short period of time was dedicated at the beginning of the interviews to allow for personal introductions, a review of procedure, an assurance of confidentiality, and the answering of any questions. This was done in the hope that the interviewee would provide complete and accurate information (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Participants were interviewed with the assistance of a digital recording device in order to allow the researcher to remain attentive at all times and aid with accuracy. The interviews were transcribed as quickly as possible and were shared with the participating superintendents to check for accuracy. The superintendents were given the opportunity to clarify anything that may have been misconstrued through the interview process.
Data Analysis

According to Merriam (2009), data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data through the use of consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said. The method of data analysis that was used to complete the previously mentioned process is the inductive qualitative data analysis model developed by David R. Thomas (2006). Thomas attests that “the primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data” (p. 2). In addition, he posits that the following are some of the purposes underlying the development of the inductive approach:

1. To condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format.

2. To establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research).

3. To develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the text (raw data) (p.2).

Using Thomas’s model for inductive analysis, the initial step for the data analysis component of this study consisted of close reading the transcribed interviews from each of the participants. Through this close reading, the researcher became familiar with the content and gained an understanding of the themes in the text. These themes served as the foundation of the categories derived from the research questions.

In descriptive, qualitative research, categories capture some recurring pattern or patterns that cut across the preponderance of data (Merriam, 1998). The findings of this
qualitative study are presented in the form of a descriptive account and the creation of specific categories helped sift through what should be reported upon from the hundreds of pages collected from the research (Merriam, 2009). The categories and themes developed through the close reading of transcriptions are what ultimately allowed the researcher to take an exorbitant amount of data and convert it into a narrative that ultimately addressed the research questions of this study.

As specified by Merriam (1998), the key to the creation of categories is to make sure that they are organized in a way to help the researcher adequately answer the study’s research questions. He provides several important guidelines that can be used to determine the efficacy of categories derived from data analysis. The guidelines were strictly followed by the researcher and are as follows:

- Categories should reflect the purpose of the research.
- Categories should be exhaustive, that is you should be able to place all data that you decided were important or relevant to the study in a category or subcategory.
- Categories should be mutually exclusive. A particular unit of data should fit into only one category. If the exact same unit of data can be placed into more than one category, more conceptual work needs to be done to refine your categories.
- Categories should be sensitizing. The naming of the category should be as sensitive as possible to what is in the data. An outsider should be able to read the categories and gain some sense of their nature. The more exacting in capturing the meaning of the phenomenon, the better.
• Categories should be conceptually congruent. This means that the same level of abstraction should categorize all categories at the same level (pp. 183-184).

**Validity and Reliability**

Yin (2003) states that it is essential that qualitative research address the issues of validity and reliability. The researcher sought to ensure trustworthiness and find truth in this study, and in order to do so, findings must have been credible and replicable. For the purpose of controlling for credibility and replicability, this study utilized strategies proposed by Merriam (1998). These strategies assisted the researcher in the pursuit of trustworthiness and truth, and helped account for both validity (internal and external) and reliability.

According to Merriam (1998), “internal validity deals with the questions of how research findings match reality” (p. 199). These questions pertaining to the reality of one’s research findings include:

• How congruent are the findings with reality?
• Do the findings capture what is really there?
• Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring? (p. 201).

To answer Merriam’s aforementioned questions and enhance the internal validity of one’s study, Merriam (1998) additionally compiled a list of six basic strategies a researcher can utilize to help ensure internal validity:
1. Triangulation – using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings.

2. Member checks – taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible. A number of writers suggest doing this continuously throughout the study.

3. Long-term observation at the research site or repeated observations of the same phenomenon – gather data over a period of time in order to increase the validity of the findings.

4. Peer examination – asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge.

5. Participatory or collaborative modes of research – involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the study to writing up the findings.

6. Researcher’s biases – clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study (pp. 204-205).

The researcher made use of four of Merriam’s basic strategies to ensure the internal validity of this study. First, triangulation was utilized by compiling multiple sources of data through the interviewing of eight different participants. Second, member checks were employed by taking transcripts of the interviews back to the interviewees and asking if they were accurate and plausible. Third, peer examination was utilized by having colleagues in the field of educational leadership comment on the findings as soon as they emerged. Lastly, the researcher’s biases pertaining to one’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation were clarified at the outset of this study. The researcher has served in the capacity as both a teacher and an assistant principal and has
functioned in both roles of the walkthrough process: the observer and the one being observed.

Merriam (1998) maintains that “external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (p. 207). To enhance the possibility of the results of a specific qualitative study being replicated by other researchers, Merriam recommends that the following strategies be used:

• Rich, thick description – providing enough description so that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred.

• Typicality – describing how typical the program, event, or individual is compared with others in the same class, so that users can make comparisons with their own institutions.

• Multisite designs – using several sites, cases, situations, especially those that maximize diversity in the phenomenon of interest; this will allow the results to be applied by readers to a greater range of other situations. This variation can be achieved through purposeful or random sampling (pp. 211-212).

The researcher helped ensure the external validity of this study by implementing Merriam’s (1998) previously mentioned strategies. The research provides rich, thick description of the research situation, describes the typicality of the programs and individuals of the study, and uses several different sites and participants. Using these strategies allows the results of this study to be applied by readers to a greater range of other situations.
In addition to ensuring the validity of this study, it is equally important to ensure for reliability. As explained by Merriam (1998), “reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 205). In other words, if this study should happen to be repeated in the future, would it yield the same results? Although it is quite problematic to ensure for reliability in the field of education due to the lack of consistency in human behavior, Merriam offers a number of techniques to help ensure that results are reliable. The first of Merriam’s techniques that the researcher practiced to help ensure reliability was giving the basis for the selection of informants and by describing them and the social context from which the data was collected. Another technique that Merriam offers to help ensure reliability is the use of an audit trail. Through the use of an audit trail, Merriam (1998) states that the investigator “must describe in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (pp. 206-207). An audit trail following these guidelines was also presented by the researcher in order to help maintain the reliability of the study.
Chapter IV
FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions and reflections of superintendents of suburban public school districts throughout the state of New Jersey regarding their districts’ use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve academic instruction. The method of research was semi-structured interviews in which eight current and former superintendents were interviewed over a period of approximately six weeks. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour and was steered by nine interview questions that were derived from the three overarching research questions pertaining to this study. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the key components of classroom walkthroughs as identified by superintendents?

2. What obstacles may exist that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis?

3. In what way, if any, do classroom walkthroughs ultimately impact administrators as instructional leaders?

Through the process of qualitative data analysis, congruent categories and themes were constructed from the personal accounts and perspectives of each of the eight superintendents. The themes were presented in the form of descriptive narrative predominantly using direct quotes from as many superintendents as possible. It is the researcher’s hope that the themes derived from the raw data will establish clear links to the research and sufficiently answer each of the three aforementioned research questions.
Research Question #1

The researcher asked the following three questions of the eight participating superintendents through semi-structured interviews to acquire their perceptions and reflections surrounding Research Question #1:

1. *What are the key components of classroom walkthroughs as identified by superintendents?*
   1a) What do you and your administrative team look for during classroom walkthroughs?
   1b) Describe the feedback process you and your administrative team utilize after a classroom walkthrough is conducted.
   1c) In your professional opinion, what are the most meaningful components of the classroom walkthrough process?

After transcribing the interviews, the transcripts were close read and one category and five corresponding themes were identified in order to qualitatively answer Research Question #1. Through these themes, pertinent quotes that were gathered from the in-depth examination of the interviews are used as qualitative data to best express the superintendents’ answers to this specific research question.

Category #1: Key Components

Length & Frequency

Kim Marshall (2003) succinctly states that, “Principals who make short, frequent visits can see a lot” (p. 703). With that said, one must ponder how short and how frequent classroom visits should be in order to “see a lot.” The first key component of classroom walkthroughs that is identified through this study answers the key questions of how long and how frequent classroom walkthroughs should be. It is imperative for
individual school districts to identify the expected length and frequency of classroom walkthroughs that works best for their respective district. The following excerpts revealed each superintendent’s feelings on how long and how frequent classroom walkthroughs should be:

Superintendent A stated:
I think there should be at least ten unannounced walkthroughs conducted per teacher each year. These walkthroughs do not have to be more than ten minutes.

Superintendent B stated:
I think they could be too short and they can be too long. You don’t want to teeter on for 20 minutes because that’s something that the contract says turns into an observation and you don’t want that. I think anywhere between five to ten minutes is optimum with teachers being seen on a weekly basis.

Superintendent C stated:
A typical walkthrough takes five minutes and each teacher should be seen around ten times.

Superintendent D stated:
If you’re in a smaller building and you’re a principal, my expectation is that you’re in that classroom at least three times during the month for a quick walkthrough to see what’s going on. At the secondary level, at some point between principals and our supervisors, somebody should be in your classroom at least three times a month for a walkthrough. Our walkthroughs usually stay between five and ten minutes.

Superintendent E stated:
We expect at least three or four walkthroughs each marking period ranging from two minutes to five minutes.
Superintendent F stated:

So just like we differentiate for students, I think that the administrative team also differentiates for their instructors. New teachers are going to need to be seen more frequently because they’ve got to get more feedback. They may not be seeing the other teachers quite as often but they’re still dropping by and touching base with them regularly. Our walkthroughs last for a couple of minutes and we get a feel for what’s going on there.

Superintendent G stated:

Our principals try to be at every classroom every week in some kind of way. But the goals specifically are written to be in at least once every two weeks for approximately eight minutes.

Superintendent H stated:

I expect my principals to be in classrooms every day as often as they can. But formally, when it is actually documented on the electronic form that we utilize, every one of our teachers must have five walkthroughs that last approximately five to seven minutes.

Data Collection

In John Skretta’s (2007) article, “Using Walk-Throughs to Gather Data for School Improvement,” Skretta states that “Data gathering and analysis can be a dynamic and exciting process when walk-throughs are incorporated into your school’s improvement plan as an instructional snapshot” (p. 16). But what does this “dynamic and exciting process” look like and how should a school district go about collecting data from classroom walkthroughs? With responses ranging from no written documentation to the utilization of checklists and narrative recordings, every superintendent interviewed offered the data collection methods that their school district utilizes. The following excerpts revealed the data collection methods utilized by each superintendent’s school district:
Superintendent A stated:

Evidence, evidence, evidence. It is all evidence based. Write-ups should be at least a paragraph and I wanted to see their diaries of their walkthroughs. Just like the old adage, “You respect what you inspect.” If you are not checking up on your administrative team, they tend to get lost.

Superintendent B stated:

One of the key components of a walkthrough is actually gathering data on instructional practices. But we didn’t record. We didn’t use a checklist. Basically, once we finished our walkthroughs, the team would then immediately meet and discuss what we saw and heard.

Superintendent C stated:

After we negotiated with the teachers association, it was determined that nothing will be written during the actual walkthrough so it couldn’t be considered a formal evaluation. So they take their mental notes and they walk out of the classroom and on their iPad they write their notes.

Superintendent D stated:

We fill out walkthrough forms and give them to the teachers. They all have the opportunity to come and speak with whoever did the walkthrough and discuss it.

Superintendent E stated:

I waited until I left the classroom before I filled out a checklist of what I saw.

Superintendent F stated:

And I will tell you when I do walk around with the principals and we both walk in the rooms, there is time for both of us to reach out to students and just ask how they feel about the lesson.

Superintendent G stated:

We go in as a team of three people into a classroom. One person is assigned to the teacher, one person is assigned to the students, and one person is assigned to the classroom environment. And for the entire eight-minute visit you’re just taking notes based on whatever your assignment is.
Superintendent H stated:

Typically, we complete an online form while we are in the classroom and then later on you’re probably adding extra notes. But you will be in there with your iPad or your laptop and you will be doing it while you’re in there.

Non-Evaluative Intent

According to Downey, Steffy, Poston, & English (2009), “The intent of the informal walk-through is to provide a non-evaluative observation vehicle, which results in reflective dialogue among teachers, administrators, and other key staff” (p. 24). Multiple superintendents who were interviewed agreed with this very sentiment. Staying away from judging teachers and preventing teachers from believing that classroom walkthroughs will be used as “gotchas” is essential to the overall success of the implementation of classroom walkthroughs at the building or district level. The following excerpts revealed select superintendents’ feelings on how classroom walkthroughs should be non-evaluative in nature:

Superintendent A stated:

I think credibility gets built up when the teacher sees that you are not looking to get them, even when you witness a not so great lesson.

Superintendent B stated:

The one thing you have to be careful with is that you don’t want it to be evaluative. You want it to be constructive. The teachers need to know this is not a gotcha. I’m here to help. If you are an administrator with the I gotcha attitude than walkthroughs are not going to help you.

Superintendent F stated:

They’re not going to evaluate. It’s really just about giving good feedback to help teachers.
Superintendent G stated:

It is also really important that the teachers know that it’s not evaluative. We’re not in there to tell that teacher how they’re doing. We are there to get feedback about the district.

Superintendent H stated:

We do not use our walkthroughs in an evaluative fashion. Their purpose is to see what we’re doing well, see where we need improvement, and get that feedback back to the teacher.

Look-Fors

In the opinion of Pitler & Goodwin (2009), “If principals don’t know what to look for or misunderstand the purposes of walkthroughs, their observations can be useless, or worse, harmful to teachers and students. But if they are equipped with the right set of ‘look-fors’ and a clear understanding of purposes, brief classroom observations can, in fact, be powerful tools for promoting great teaching” (p. 9). Although look-fors differ from district to district, the “right set” of look-fors almost always revolves around best instructional practices and student learning. The following excerpts revealed many of the look-fors that each of the participant superintendents believes are fundamental to classroom walkthroughs being “powerful tools for promoting great teaching”:

Superintendent A stated:

The first thing that I’m looking for or I encourage my team to look for is student engagement, the active participation of the students. In addition, I am looking for differentiation of instruction, appropriate feedback, assessment, and overall best teaching practices. At the end of the day we want to determine if students are learning and then we can move forward and see what they are learning.
Superintendent B stated:

One of the things you are going to look for as you conduct a classroom walkthrough is whether or not students are engaged in the lesson. We also look at what instructional practices are being implemented and if they are effective and appropriate.

Superintendent C stated:

I’d say the thing we are most looking for is if the students are engaged. That they are not passive but interactive. Active learning is most important to me.

Superintendent D stated:

We look to see if the students are engaged. We look to see if the teacher is prepared. We look to see if the class is student-driven or if it is teacher-led. We also are looking for classroom management and the way that the students interact with each other.

Superintendent E stated:

The first thing we looked for was organization. If the class was in order in terms of there being teaching materials. Where was the teacher? Was the teacher in the front of the room? Was the teacher walking around? Are students in straight rows? In addition, we would look at teaching practices and overall just the general demeanor of the teacher in terms of interactions with children.

Superintendent F stated:

You are looking for rigor. You’re taking a look at whether it’s teacher centered versus student centered. You’re taking a look at questioning techniques. You’re taking a look at the type of assessments that are being called into play. You are looking for student engagement in terms of not wanting to mistake participation for engagement. You are also getting a sense of the culture and climate of what’s happening in the classroom. What do the interactions between students and other students, and between students and teachers look like?
Superintendent G stated:

At the beginning of the year our administrative team got together and established for the year that we would go to each school as a full team and specifically look for student engagement versus compliance. We targeted a very specific kind of overarching question of whether or not our students are truly engaged in learning or if they are just compliant with teachers’ wishes.

Superintendent H stated:

Generally we look at classroom environment and classroom instruction. We’re looking to see what’s going on in the classroom. We look for things like classroom procedures, student behavior, the physical space of the room, communicating with students, and using questions and discussion techniques. I want my principals to be able to see objectives posted, that students are engaged in the lesson, that the teacher is thinking before asking questions, and that the questions are higher level thinking questions.

Feedback

As stated by Kachur, Stout, & Edwards (2010), “Classroom walkthroughs alone are not a solution for challenges of school improvement and closing the student achievement gap. However, when instructional leaders choose to equip themselves with a structured focused walkthrough process and provide individual teachers or the entire school with specific, detailed follow-up, the impact of such instructional leadership will be considerable.” As previously stated, conducting classroom walkthroughs alone without providing appropriate and relevant feedback is basically useless when the goal is school improvement and closing the student achievement gap. Feedback can generally be given to individual teachers and/or to the school/district at large. The following excerpts revealed the different types of feedback that each of the interviewed superintendents provide as soon as possible after a classroom walkthrough is conducted:
Superintendent A stated:

When we first started this process, I allowed people to follow up with an email to the person. But that is way too sterile and that’s a step above being useless. You really need to sculpt time to have an informal conversation with the teacher. Whether it is from the classroom to the cafeteria or on the way out the door, just have a short discussion with the teacher regarding what was seen during the lesson. Remember, it’s not about the walk, it’s about the talk. You can do walkthroughs till you are blue in the face, but if you don’t have that conversation with the instructor, the walkthrough is useless.

Superintendent B stated:

We gave the teachers some type of feedback, whether it was via email or through a conversation. I didn’t like email as much because I think people read into it too much. People misinterpret email all the time. I would rather see the teacher in person and have a short conversation with him/her. You also have to be cognizant enough to make sure you provide feedback in a timely manner. You certainly don’t want to visit a teacher’s classroom and get back to the teacher two weeks later. It should be within a day.

Superintendent C stated:

When I give feedback I usually have the teacher stop by my office for a brief conversation. Usually something to the effect of maybe two strengths and something to improve upon. But we always try to make the dialogue very positive. When we have principals meetings, the last item is more like an open discussion and people more or less say what they’re seeing while conducting their walkthroughs.

Superintendent D stated:

Our procedure here is when we do a walkthrough, the teacher gets a walkthrough form and we provide them the opportunity to speak with us afterward. Now if the class was so poorly managed and the kids were out of control, you then have to have a conversation. Otherwise the feedback is really just a quick snapshot of what we’re seeing in the classroom and what we would like to see more of or something we really enjoyed seeing.
Superintendent E stated:

I would once in awhile leave a checklist of what I saw, but normally I would give feedback by writing something and leaving it in the teacher’s mailbox. I’m still a proponent of that. Email and checklists are great, but I think a handwritten note goes a long way.

Superintendent F stated:

We all know that the most important piece comes after the walkthrough. Those conversations are huge. Feedback is huge. So that is always going to be positive to reach out to teachers, to engage them in conversations, to engage principals in conversation, to a specific purpose and being able to have these ongoing purposeful interactions. The idea that principals are getting into classrooms and providing timely, meaningful, purposeful, relevant feedback is always going to be to the betterment of those teachers and then obviously ultimately be to the betterment of our students.

Superintendent G stated:

At the administrative level, the most meaningful aspect of the walkthrough process is the discussion afterwards with our whole leadership team as we talk about teaching and learning. We sit around for maybe an hour talking about what’s actually happening in the classrooms. The principals get all kinds of ideas about what they can bring back to their own building, and about where they are strong and where they have work to do.

Superintendent H stated:

Feedback is the most important component of the walkthrough process. One hundred percent. It has to be good, high quality feedback that is accurate and timely. I think that most reasonable people would agree the best feedback is going to be face-to-face. With electronic feedback you don’t know if it’s been read, and you don’t know if the teacher fully understands the feedback. So, we encourage a face-to-face conversation and it has to be done almost immediately. Because if the feedback doesn’t come in fast, it doesn’t make as much of an impact as it potentially could.

Based on the data gathered from the participants, notable findings regarding Question 1 were revealed. Five key components of classroom walkthroughs were identified including: a) length & frequency, b) data collection, c) non-evaluative intent, d) look-fors, and e) feedback.
Research Question #2

The researcher asked the following three questions of the eight participating superintendents through semi-structured interviews to acquire their perceptions and reflections surrounding Research Question #2:

2. What obstacles may exist that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis?

2a) What obstacles, if any, have you and your administrative team ever experienced in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?

2b) What resistance have you ever felt, if any, from teachers or your administrative team in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?

2c) Describe any negative experiences, if any, you have had in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation.

Once again, the transcripts were close read and one category and three corresponding themes were identified in order to qualitatively answer Research Question #2. Through these themes, pertinent quotes that were gathered from the in-depth examination of the interviews are used as qualitative data to best express the superintendents’ answers to this specific research question.

Category #2: Obstacles

Time

As maintained by Rissman, Miller, & Torgesen (2009), time constraints are one of “a number of practical challenges that can make it difficult to implement classroom walk-throughs effectively” (p. 9). Additionally, the authors claim “that the amount of time principals spent in classrooms and the quality of their feedback to teachers were important predictors of school achievement” (p. 43). Almost all of the superintendents
that were interviewed agreed with this assertion by claiming that time is without a doubt the number one obstacle in their quest of completing effectively done classroom walkthroughs. The following excerpts from their interviews revealed as such:

**Superintendent A stated:**

You are caught up with administrative minutia that’s rolling down a hill real quick. I was getting bombarded with board members, parents, the union, student incidents all at the same time. It was not easy finding the time to conduct these walkthroughs. But when I did, it would change the whole outlook of my day for the better.

**Superintendent B stated:**

I think the biggest obstacle is time. Time is your worst enemy. You have to pull yourself away from the office, and that’s the toughest part.

**Superintendent C stated:**

But I think the biggest challenge is to just find the time. It sounds good on paper to do five walkthroughs a week, but that can even be a challenge.

**Superintendent D stated:**

The biggest obstacle really is just logistics. It’s all about time. You have so many other things that you also have to deal with. Things just happen. Today I’m planning on doing eight walkthroughs without a doubt but I end up doing just two walkthroughs. How did this happen? I really just think it’s time. Time management.

**Superintendent E stated:**

I’ve found that as superintendent, it was almost impossible to really do them because first of all, you’re physically not in the building with the staff, so it requires traveling to another building and that takes time. And once you get into your office, the day-to-day goings on really do confine you to the office. Time is really something you just have to manage.
Superintendent F stated:

Time is the biggest obstacle. It has to be. You know schools are inherently busy places. No one has ever complained due to a shortage of work. That’s just not the world in which we live. And so you wake up every morning with the best intentions and you schedule your walkthroughs. Then certain things happen that when they happen, you need to deal with those things.

Superintendent H stated:

Time is always an obstacle. Time is an obstacle especially due to their regularly scheduled observations which have increased since the passing of the TEACHNJ Act.

Prioritization

One of the many reasons why time is the number one obstacle to conducting classroom walkthroughs is the fact that many administrators have a hard time prioritizing walkthroughs when compared to the many other tasks that they are responsible for on a daily basis. John Skretta (2007) alludes to this lack of prioritization when he states, “Saying that principals should conduct walk-throughs is one matter; actually conducting the walk-throughs and providing teachers with the kind of feedback they need and deserve is another” (p. 18). Skretta (2007) gives professional advice as to how to make classroom walkthroughs a priority by recommending that administrators “approach walk-throughs just as you would any other part of your day” (p. 21). Most of the superintendents that were interviewed either lamented on the lack of prioritization that they have witnessed over the years or gave sound advice for making classroom walkthroughs a priority. The following excerpts from their interviews revealed these lamentations and bits of advice:
Superintendent A stated:

It doesn’t always become a priority for principals and supervisors. And if walkthroughs are not important to superintendents, then it’s probably not going to be important to them especially.

Superintendent B stated:

If you don’t make it a priority, you’ll sit in your office forever. So it’s getting your self out and about making sure you get to see the teachers and the students.

Superintendent D stated:

Initially from the administrators, I did hear that I was asking a lot of them. They would ask if they could only do one. My thought to them and my conversation with them was once is not enough. Whether you have a walkthrough team or you’re going in on your own, you need to be in there more than once.

Superintendent E stated:

You have to make certain that walkthroughs are a priority. You really have to make your schedule and try to stick to it as best you can. There are always things that could come up, but you have to stick to it as best as you can.

Superintendent F stated:

So I think for district administrators, for superintendents, there’s so much else going on that pulls us out of classrooms. By making it a formal process that’s on the calendar, it forces you to stay connected to what’s actually happening in the classrooms. It becomes a priority.

Superintendent H stated:

Carve the time out of your schedule and schedule it. You schedule appointments and everything else. Barring some emergency, which is unpredictable, schedule time to just go around your school. You can’t be an instructional leader from your office. You can only do it in the classroom.
Trust

The last major obstacle to conducting effective classroom walkthroughs that the bulk of the interviewed superintendents mentioned involved a potential lack of trust from teachers. Gary Bloom (2007) surmises that if classroom walkthroughs “produce hostility and distrust, they will become one more passing fad in the long and disappointing history of school reform” (p. 41). The following excerpts revealed key advice from many of the participating superintendents in ways to gain and maintain trust with one’s teaching staff and some possible pitfalls if trust is not established:

Superintendent A stated:

Administrators could screw everything up by using walkthroughs as a gotcha technique. That would surely cause a lack of trust among your teachers.

Superintendent B stated:

I think that’s what scares teachers the most, is that they don’t understand the purpose of the walkthroughs. They may think that it’s a gotcha. If you haven’t spoken to your staff ahead of time regarding the walkthrough protocol, they’re not going to perceive this in a good way.

Superintendent C stated:

There were some teachers who were very hesitant of our intentions until that trust was built.

Superintendent D stated:

I think it took maybe two or three months for them to trust us and understand that the data’s not specifically kept on you. It can’t be used as a form of evaluation. We can’t put those things in your evaluation. So now they’re comfortable.
Superintendent E stated:

I think you have to orient the teachers to what you as a person are going to look for in a walkthrough. I don’t think it does any good to surprise people. If they know what you’re looking for then I think they can prepare and being prepared is all part of what you want from a teacher. It’s best practices. No gotchas. Gotchas don’t help.

Superintendent H stated:

If the only goal of evaluation is to improve instruction, if that is truly the goal, then there has to be trust. If teachers feel that it’s a gotcha, if teachers feel that administrators are coming into their room to catch them doing something wrong, it will backfire and it will cause a lot of issues.

Based on the data gathered from the participants, notable findings regarding Question 2 were revealed. Three potential obstacles that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis were identified including: a) time, b) prioritization, and c) trust.

Research Question #3

The researcher asked the following three questions of the eight participating superintendents through semi-structured interviews to acquire their perceptions and reflections surrounding Research Question #3:

3. **How do classroom walkthroughs impact administrators as instructional leaders?**

   3a) How do classroom walkthroughs impact instructional practice in your school district?

   3b) How does data obtained from classroom walkthroughs impact you and your administrative team as instructional leaders?

   3c) As the leader of your school district, what benefits do you believe classroom walkthroughs bring to the field of educational leadership?
The transcripts were close read one last time and one category and five corresponding themes were identified in order to qualitatively answer Research Question #3. Through these themes, pertinent quotes that were gathered from the in-depth examination of the interviews are used as qualitative data to best express the superintendents’ answers to this specific research question.

Category #3: Instructional Leadership Practices

Coaching

One of the most powerful ways that classroom walkthroughs impact administrators as instructional leaders is in the way that it allows principals to take on the role of coach. Pitler and Goodwin (2009) emphasize that “The purpose of a walkthrough is not to pass judgment on teachers but to coach them to higher levels of performance. Walkthroughs are not teacher evaluations; they are a method for identifying opportunities for improvement and supporting the sharing of best practices across the school” (p. 11).

The following excerpts revealed select superintendents’ feelings on how classroom walkthrough implementation allows them to become better instructional coaches:

Superintendent A stated:

I have to hope that my administrative team is going to work to accomplish the goals that we set out together as a team to do. It’s my job as superintendent to get them on the same page, moving in the same direction, and coaching them to the end.

Superintendent B stated:

When I conduct a walkthrough I am not evaluating the teacher. I am trying to help this person become a better teacher. Teachers know that I’m going to give them help when needed and that I’m going to be more of a coach, not a boss.
Superintendent C stated:

That’s really the crux of my job, to coach the administrators. I might walk through a class with an administrator and then afterwards have a conversation with him/her. The conversation lets me get some idea of how well that person is equipped and how I could help.

Superintendent F stated:

Teachers understand that I’m not there checking up on them, but rather I am there to support them. I am their coach.

Superintendent H stated:

When I personally conduct walkthroughs as superintendent, I don’t do them formally. I’m a coach and a cheerleader. When one of my principals conducts a walkthrough they should be the ultimate coach, the ultimate instructional coach.

Professional Development

In regards to the vital teacher reflection that takes place following classroom walkthroughs, Julia Steiny (2009) states, “So talking about their practice tied to professional development they have experienced in productive, nonjudgmental ways really develops an appetite for more professional development” (p. 34). This quote exemplifies that when feedback is given in a constructive, non-threatening fashion, and is geared towards assessing previous professional development opportunities, teachers tend to actually yearn for more professional development to help make them even greater teachers. This cycle of continual reflection and professional development offers invaluable opportunities for teachers to perpetually improve their craft. The following excerpts revealed each superintendents’ views on how effectively done classroom walkthroughs lead to endless opportunities for professional development in various shapes and forms:
**Superintendent A stated:**

You could certainly identify needs from walkthroughs and allow them to inform you as to what your staff needs. In addition, if I would see outstanding instruction from an individual teacher, I would ask that teacher if they would allow other teachers to come visit them.

**Superintendent B stated:**

We try to focus on kinds of professional development that we can offer to our staff to improve their instructional strategies based on what we saw during our walkthroughs. And if I saw something from a teacher that I felt other teachers could learn from, I’d ask the teacher to do a workshop on it. These were the people I would recruit as far as helping me out with offering professional development opportunities.

**Superintendent C stated:**

We had a third grade teacher who her PARCC scores were really off the roof in language arts. So the administrators at the elementary level looked at what she was doing, picked up some unique things, and asked her to turnkey it at a monthly meeting.

**Superintendent D stated:**

After seeing a great lesson, sometimes we go back and we’ll ask them if it is possible that they might want to present this somewhere. Something else I like to do when I see something fantastic from a specific teacher is have other teachers cycle into his/her room and watch him/her teach that lesson.

**Superintendent E stated:**

I was very proud of when computers were first starting to really be used as an educational tool in the classroom. I saw a teacher doing a great job using the computers and I put that teacher on special assignment. I pulled the teacher out of their regular assignments and put them on special assignment to work directly with teachers in classrooms on computers. I found that to be very helpful.

**Superintendent F stated:**

We have excellent teachers here. So when we see them do excellent things, we ask them to turnkey and present at professional development days.
Superintendent G stated:

The data we obtain from our walkthroughs are driving next year’s professional development plans. And our model of professional development is mostly turnkey. We’ll see great teachers during our walkthroughs and we’ll bring them into the process.

Superintendent H stated:

In general, if a principal identifies through walkthroughs an area where he or she finds lacking or in need of improvement, then that area will be targeted at our next professional development day.

Data-Driven Decision-Making

Supovitz and Weathers (2004) conducted a study involving a sample of schools in one large urban district. According to their research, “The data from walk-throughs gave them a better understanding of how well teachers were able to identify and move students in and out of support programs. This finding led them to make adjustments in the professional development they provided” (p. 81). This is a great demonstration of a school district taking data obtained from classroom walkthroughs and going beyond the ensuing feedback that occurs afterward. This shows that it’s not only about the walk and the talk, but it’s also about the action that occurs afterward. Data-driven decision-making in education refers to the process by which educators examine data to identify strengths and deficiencies and apply those findings to their practice (Mertler, 2014). The use of data-driven decision-making is expected of teachers and administrators alike in this age of accountability and is very important when making decisions on student and teacher needs. The following excerpts revealed how select superintendents utilize classroom walkthroughs as a means to implement data-driven decision-making:
Superintendent A stated:

Everybody’s driven by data, data, data. I say it almost tongue-in-cheek. But you could provide some real useful data as to what’s happening in the classroom.

Superintendent B stated:

If we’re not collecting data and doing something with it, that’s a waste. It’s just doing the walk for the sake of walking. We’re here to gather data and through that data we make some very important school or district-wide decisions.

Superintendent D stated:

We really do use the data from our walkthroughs. We go over it in our administration meetings and then go over it with the rest of our district and plan accordingly.

Superintendent F stated:

Walkthroughs definitely help us be a data-driven school district.

Superintendent G stated:

The data we compile regarding compliance versus engagement will help people determine what kind of individualized plans they should make related to this big question.

Superintendent H stated:

Data compiled from walkthroughs are used in our instructional leadership groups. It starts conversation about instruction and the data is used to identify what teachers are doing effectively. On the other end, last year we found a lot of questioning at the lower level of knowledge and comprehension as opposed to synthesis and analysis. That’s how we ended up with one of our district goals this year to focus on higher level questioning.
Visibility

One of the most important benefits of conducting classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis is the maintaining of visibility by principals and other administrators. Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston (2004) submit that, “The greater visibility of principals around their schools will have a salutary and beneficial impact on learning and achievement” (p. 123). Besides these significant benefits in regards to learning and achievement, staying visible has many other substantial advantages. In addition to keeping current on what is being taught in the classrooms and preventing potential discipline problems, just through their visibility, administrators show faculty and students that they truly care about them and that they are their main priority (Weber, 2007). A number of the participating superintendents also identified visibility as an important benefit of conducting classroom walkthroughs regularly. The following excerpts from their interviews revealed these beliefs:

Superintendent A stated:

You just getting your butt out of your office is important because you can never be visible enough for your staff. No matter how visible you are, the staff’s going to want you to be more visible. So I think doing these walkthroughs makes you more visible and adds to your credibility as an instructional leader. The more you’re there, the more the kids know you, the more the teachers know you, and they both know your place is to be in the classroom.

Superintendent B stated:

How are you going to know what’s going on in your building or in the district if you’re not in the classrooms seeing the kids and seeing the teachers? You know you can’t. You can’t rule from an office. You want to be visible. And you do this by being in the classrooms.
Superintendent C stated:

Not only do I think walkthroughs help improve instruction, but I think at the end of the day, it’s just that visibility. I think it’s important for us all to get out. I’m walking, being visible, because it’s so easy to get dragged behind your desk. You get a pulse of the school.

Superintendent H stated:

At the very least, if they’re not able to improve instruction dramatically from the walkthroughs, their visibility increases and that just helps with so many other things. By being visible in your building, you’re solving a lot of problems before they ever become problems. Visibility is very, very important and a definite benefit of conducting walkthroughs.

Culture Building

In Ginsburg and Murphy’s (2002) article “How Walkthroughs Open Doors,” they make the case that one of the benefits of implementing a daily schedule of short, unscheduled walkthroughs is that “a team atmosphere develops as teachers and administrators examine instruction and student motivation and achievement together” (p. 35). They additionally assert that “administrators establish themselves as campus leaders and instructional mentors, influencing teaching, learning, and ongoing school renewal” (p. 35). Through this culture building at the district, school, and personal levels, schools become a much more nurturing and welcome place for all stakeholders. This relationship building is imperative in order for students, teachers, and administrators to work together as a team. The following excerpts revealed how multiple superintendents identified culture building through classroom walkthrough implementation as an instrumental piece in transforming administrators into instructional leaders:
Superintendent A stated:

Let’s back up and understand this business that we’re in is all about relationships. Forget everything else. Administrators have to build a relationship with the staff. Walkthroughs help with relationship building.

Superintendent B stated:

Nothing is as exciting as being in those classrooms watching teachers in action, watching the kids learn from that teacher. That’s what makes your day. That’s what makes it all worthwhile.

Superintendent C stated:

Our teachers have come to expect walkthroughs. So they almost feel neglected if we aren’t there. That’s a great, great culture.

Superintendent F stated:

Another big piece is empathy. Empathy with the students and with the teachers. They know that I really am concerned with the things they have to contend with. They know that I want to remove obstacles. I want to provide them with the best opportunities. And so I think that when you start following through on those things during walkthroughs, you start to develop that trust and rapport. That becomes very powerful.

Superintendent H stated:

I would like to think teachers would say the district is looking out for their best interests because we are looking for things that we know are effective instructional techniques. That we’re looking for things that effective instructors do. When done with fidelity, walkthroughs can have a major impact on a school’s culture.

Based on the data gathered from the participants, notable findings regarding Question 3 were revealed. Five instructional leadership practices that demonstrate the possible impact that classroom walkthroughs have on administrators as instructional leaders were identified including: a) coaching, b) professional development, c) data-driven decision-making, d) visibility, and e) culture building.
Summary

Chapter IV reported the overall findings of each of the study’s three research questions in an attempt to examine the perceptions and reflections of select superintendents regarding the use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve instructional practice. The perceptions and reflections of each of the eight superintendents interviewed were documented through the use of direct quotes derived from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with each of the eight superintendents. These direct quotes served as a source of qualitative data specifically used to answer the study’s three research questions.

The perceptions and reflections of all eight superintendents were profoundly descriptive and quite relevant to the purpose of this study. Through these communicated perceptions and reflections, qualitative data were aggregately compiled into specific themes effectively supporting the significant impact that walkthrough implementation has on improving instructional practice. Furthermore, the findings of this study were quite consistent with the findings from the review of literature found in Chapter II. In addition to the presentation of recommendations for practice, policy, and future research, a discussion of the findings of this study will be further examined in Chapter V with a focus on how they connect with the findings of this study’s respective literature review.
Chapter V
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The final chapter of this study summarizes the main findings of the research as reported in the previous chapter. Through a discussion of findings, the previously identified themes are presented in narrative form in order to qualitatively answer the three research questions of this study. Moreover, the researcher analyzes the relationship of the main findings of this study with that of previous research found in the study’s review of literature. In conclusion, recommendations for practice, policy, and future research are suggested by the researcher.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question #1

*What are the key components of classroom walkthroughs as identified by superintendents?*

Through the administration of semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to compile a list of five key components of classroom walkthroughs that were identified by a majority of the participating superintendents. These key components include:

1. Length & Frequency
2. Data Collection
3. Non-Evaluative Intent
4. Look-Fors
5. Feedback
The first key component identified was the length and frequency of appropriately administered classroom walkthroughs. Although answers varied slightly among superintendents, they all agreed that walkthroughs should remain short and be frequently administered. In terms of length, answers ranged from 2-10 minutes per classroom walkthrough, which all fall in the scope of being short in nature. In terms of frequency of individual classroom walkthroughs, answers ranged from ten times per year to forty times per year. Although this range is relatively wide, it was noted by superintendents on the lower end of the spectrum that ten yearly classroom walkthroughs was a minimum and that they hope that their administrators would complete substantially more.

When comparing the findings of this research study with that of the literature review, the recommended length and frequency of classroom walkthroughs was nearly identical. Experts such as Black (2007), Downey (2004), and Marshall (2003) all agreed that classroom walkthroughs should be short in duration with times ranging from a minimum of three minutes to a maximum of ten minutes. Although the experts refrained from giving an exact amount of recommended classroom walkthroughs, experts such as DeBoer & Hirojosa (2012) and Kachur, Stout, & Edwards (2010) all agreed that they should be done frequently.

The second key component identified was the use of data collection methods by the observers. Although some of the superintendents mentioned that collecting data while actually in the classroom was prohibited due to union regulations, all agreed that data collection needs to take place as soon as possible if not instantly. A couple of the superintendents recommended using iPads or laptops as data collectors, some
recommended the filling out of checklists, and others recommended writing out in narrative what was observed.

In regards to data collection methods identified from the literature review, the research varies on whether or not the documentation of data should take place before or after each classroom walkthrough. What is clear though is that data does need to be documented and the means of doing so are very similar to the ways described in this study. Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) stress the importance of collecting data from classroom walkthroughs and various other experts also identify electronic devices, checklists, and narratives as examples of acceptable tools for collecting data.

The third key component identified was the non-evaluative intent of properly conducted classroom walkthroughs. All eight superintendents agreed that in order for classroom walkthroughs to be beneficial, teachers must trust the observer and trust that the walkthrough is not evaluative in nature. Most of the superintendents mentioned the term “gotcha” and how if teachers believe that walkthroughs are an attempt at a “gotcha” the process loses any chance for success.

Steiny (2009) concurs with the interviewed superintendents in regards to “gotchas” being extremely detrimental to the carrying out of effective classroom walkthroughs. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2007) and Pitler and Goodwin (2009) assert that classroom walkthroughs need to be separate from the formal teacher evaluation process and must always be non-evaluative in nature in order to maintain their integrity. Most experts agree that formal evaluations serve a purpose in education, but they must never be conducted under the guise of classroom walkthroughs.
The fourth key component identified was the inclusion of look-fors when conducting classroom walkthroughs. Superintendent C mentioned that his district’s walkthroughs tend to be more holistic and aren’t necessarily targeted in nature, but the other seven superintendents maintained that their walkthroughs tend to be more targeted and that they believed in the efficacy of look-fors. The following list contains some of the most common examples of look-fors that the seven superintendents kept an eye out for while conducting walkthroughs:

- Best teaching practices
- Student engagement
- Assessment
- Student interaction
- Classroom management
- Organization
- Rigor
- Questioning techniques

Pitler and Goodwin (2009) attest to the importance of look-fors by claiming that the right set of look-fors can be powerful tools for promoting great teaching. But they additionally articulate that walkthroughs could be harmful to teachers and students if administrators don’t know what to look for. Ginsburg and Murphy (2010) and Flynn (2010) believe that look-fors should be compiled as a list of questions that observers should attempt to answer to the best of their ability whenever feasible. No matter whether look-fors are listed or written in question form, the key is that they be used as a
tool for observers to search for evidence of teaching and learning (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010).

The fifth and final key component identified was the subsequent feedback given by administrators to teachers after walkthroughs are completed. All eight superintendents stressed the importance of delivering quick and meaningful feedback, with Superintendents F, G, & H all agreeing that feedback is by far the most important component of the entire walkthrough process. Superintendent A passionately stated that “it’s not about the walk, it’s about the talk” and that walkthroughs are simply useless without follow-up conversation with the instructor. In most cases, superintendents agreed that the most effective form of feedback is done in person and that emails and written notes tend to be less beneficial.

Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) consider feedback to be essential to the walkthrough process and can be given in either written or verbal forms. In regards to how quick feedback should be given, Skretta (2007) sustains that it needs to be given within 24-48 hours in order to be considered relevant. In concert with the interviewed superintendents’ beliefs that feedback and ensuing conversation are of utmost importance to the walkthrough process, Larson (2007) expresses that feedback and teacher reflection are the spark that lead teachers to strategically determine the best ways to teach content and assess for learning.
Research Question #2

What obstacles may exist that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis?

Through the administration of semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to compile a list of three common obstacles that were identified by a majority of the participating superintendents that could inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis. These obstacles include:

1. Time
2. Prioritization
3. Trust

The first and by far most prevalent obstacle identified that inhibits an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis is time. As a matter of fact, each of the superintendents claimed that time is by far the greatest obstacle to completing effective walkthroughs regularly. Superintendent B elaborated on this belief by stressing that time is unequivocally an administrator’s worst enemy. Superintendent F mentioned how time is the biggest obstacle to walkthroughs due to the fact that schools are inherently busy places. Lastly, Superintendent E even went as far to say that the element of time makes it nearly impossible for him to conduct walkthroughs in his role as superintendent.

The majority of research also concurs with the fact that time is the greatest obstacle to the proper implementation of classroom walkthroughs. Rissman, Miller, & Torgesen (2009) support this assertion by attributing the lack of effectively done walkthroughs to time constraints. Kachur, Stout, & Edwards (2010) attempt to combat
this obstacle by attesting that the key to conducting effective, regularly occurring classroom walkthroughs is to keep them as short as possible in order to make up for the inevitable loss of time. The key though is being as efficient as possible when spending precious amounts of time conducting classroom walkthroughs.

The second obstacle identified that inhibits an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis is a lack of prioritization skills. Certain superintendents mentioned that prioritizing is a skill that a few of their administrators lack, and in a couple of cases, superintendents came right out and questioned whether or not certain administrators even wanted to make classroom walkthroughs a priority. To proactively combat a possible lack of prioritization, Superintendent H mandates that each of his administrators conduct five formally documented walkthroughs for each of their teachers every year. Due to the fact that this is a key component of the administrators’ end-of-the-year summative evaluations, his mandate forces them to make classroom walkthroughs a priority. To his credit though, he proudly stated that all of his administrators additionally complete a substantial amount of non-mandatory informal walkthroughs on their own.

Skretta (2007) alludes to this lack of prioritization when he conveys, “Saying that principals should conduct walk-throughs is one matter; actually conducting the walk-throughs and providing teachers with the kind of feedback they need and deserve is another” (p. 18). He suggests that administrators could effectively conduct walkthroughs the way they should be by advising them to simply make classroom walkthroughs a priority. He suggests that the easiest way of doing this is by scheduling them into their daily schedule like they do with so many other administrative responsibilities.
The third and final obstacle identified that inhibits an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis is trust. Superintendent A stated that it is very easy to cause a lack of trust among your teachers and Superintendent C reflected on how hesitant teachers were of walkthroughs until that initial trust was built. Superintendent D went as far to say that it took her staff two to three months to trust the walkthrough process, and that wasn’t established until they knew for sure that the data wasn’t being specifically kept on them individually. Superintendent E reiterated that if the only goal of evaluation is to improve instruction, then trust is a necessity in order to do so.

The review of the literature highlights the need for trust throughout the entire process, from beginning to end. The overall research constantly refers to the fear of the process as the main cause of mistrust. This accentuates the importance of complete transparency and the involvement of teachers and teacher unions in the development of walkthrough protocols. Bloom (2007) stresses that when classroom walkthroughs are done poorly or with bad intentions, they tend to produce hostility and distrust among teachers. As stated earlier, if an administrator is using classroom walkthroughs as a gotcha or if it is perceived as being used as a gotcha, trust will not be established. In this case not only will walkthroughs be unproductive, they may even end up being counterproductive.
Research Question #3

How do classroom walkthroughs impact administrators as instructional leaders?

Through the administration of semi-structured interviews, the researcher was able to compile a list of five instructional leadership practices that were identified by a majority of the participating superintendents that demonstrate the impact that classroom walkthroughs have on administrators as instructional leaders. These instructional leadership practices include:

1. Coaching
2. Professional Development
3. Data-Driven Decision-Making
4. Visibility
5. Culture Building

The first identified instructional leadership practice that demonstrates evidence of classroom walkthroughs impacting administrators as instructional leaders is the coaching of teachers. Multiple superintendents shared through their experiences how classroom walkthroughs truly allow administrators to become coaches and true instructional leaders. Superintendents A, B, C, F, & H all identified themselves as coaches when they conduct classroom walkthroughs. It is through this coaching and the ability to be coached that allows teachers to become reflective practitioners and ultimately evolve into highly effective educators.

Marzano (2007) additionally notes how classroom walkthroughs can help transform administrators into instructional coaches. He asserts that conducting classroom
walkthroughs allows administrators to take on the role of instructional coach, which could potentially lead to higher levels of teacher performance. Pitler and Goodwin (2009) similarly claim that when administrators become instructional coaches, higher levels of performance are inevitable.

The second identified instructional leadership practice that demonstrates evidence of classroom walkthroughs impacting administrators as instructional leaders is the implementation of professional development based on needs identified through the classroom walkthrough process. Through this identification process, participating superintendents described two outcomes that often come as a result. First, professional development opportunities are made available to teachers to help address individual and school-wide weaknesses identified during classroom walkthroughs. Second, standout teachers who were observed during classroom walkthroughs are utilized to turnkey mastered instructional strategies to help aid their colleagues during teacher workshops. Most of the interviewed superintendents were very proud of the professional development opportunities that their districts offer and the fact that they utilize their own homegrown teachers to predominantly help implement them.

Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) confirm how properly conducted classroom walkthroughs lead to greater professional development possibilities. They additionally identify the many ways schools, teachers, and students benefit from focused and pertinent professional development. Bloom (2007) alleges that when done well and tied to professional learning communities and professional development, walkthroughs have transformative power. Likewise, Cervone & Martinez-Miller (2007) claim that evidence indicates that walkthrough implementation increases the capacity of schools to be
professional learning communities where shared learning regarding effective instruction is the norm.

The third identified instructional leadership practice that demonstrates evidence of classroom walkthroughs impacting administrators as instructional leaders is the use of data-driven decision-making at the classroom, building, and district levels. Multiple interviewed superintendents identified their districts as data-driven school districts and emphasized how useful data can be when making critical individual and school/district-wide decisions. Superintendent G even mentioned that data compiled from district-wide walkthroughs have not only led to individual and school improvements, but have also led to important policy changes at the school district level.

Kachur, Stout, & Edwards (2010) validate the importance of district-wide walkthroughs by claiming that when administrators collect and aggregate data from classroom walkthroughs to create district-wide profiles of practice, the value of walkthroughs grows exponentially. But it is at the classroom level where the collection, analysis, and utilization of relevant data is most important. Application of data-driven decision-making based upon individualized classroom walkthrough feedback is a powerful technique that can lead to reflective change in instructional practice (Teachscape, 2006).

The fourth identified instructional leadership practice that demonstrates evidence of classroom walkthroughs impacting administrators as instructional leaders is found in increasing levels of administrator visibility. Superintendent H described the bonus benefit of conducting classroom walkthroughs regularly when mentioning that by just simply being visible, administrators solve a lot of problems before they ever become
problems. Superintendent B expressed how becoming a true instructional leader can only occur when one becomes more aware of what’s happening in classrooms, and this only happens when one is present and visible. Superintendent A mentioned that by being visible in classrooms, administrators become second nature to the educational process and very rewarding relationships with students and teachers will develop naturally.

The management system that classroom walkthroughs are modeled after is known as Management by Wandering Around (MBWA). Unlike the classroom walkthrough model, MBWA usually does not include written data gathering or other key walkthrough elements. The main focus of MBWA is to simply be more visible as a means to hold employees more accountable and to simply show that you care (Schomburg, 2006). Peters and Waterman (1982) conducted research that found that a majority of the most successful companies had managers that were close to the customers and workers. This strategy of making one more visible not only holds great promise in the business world, but is the source of a great deal of benefits in education.

The fifth and final identified instructional leadership practice that demonstrates evidence of classroom walkthroughs impacting administrators as instructional leaders is engaging in culture building. Superintendent H wholeheartedly proclaimed that walkthroughs could have a major impact on a school’s culture when done properly. Superintendent A similarly believed that walkthrough implementation could have a significant impact on a school’s culture, especially in terms of relationship building. Moreover, Superintendent D simply claimed that administrators who are devoted to the classroom walkthrough process not only positively influence the school’s culture, but they essentially become a part of the classroom itself.
Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) identify significant benefits that occur when walkthroughs become a systemic part of a school’s operation. In addition to the many gains achieved by teachers, students, and observers, schools themselves make gains in their overall culture through the promotion of collegial and collaborative conversations among educators. Helsing (2009) is another author that supports the importance of culture building through classroom walkthrough implementation. The author states that classroom walkthroughs can have a dramatic effect on school culture when implemented correctly. It is through this culture building that trust is established in order for classroom walkthroughs to work at an optimum level. When completed at such a level, opportunities for continual school-wide improvement are plentiful, ultimately leading to better instruction and greater levels of student learning.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Based on the results of this study and numerous others, the researcher strongly believes that the implementation of appropriately administered classroom walkthroughs may lead to improved instructional performance. As a result, the following suggestions are recommended for practice:

1. Superintendents should clearly communicate with their administrative teams the purpose and importance of classroom walkthroughs. Implementation expectations should be well-defined and pertinent professional development for all observers should be provided.
2. School-level leaders should clearly communicate with their staff regarding the purpose and importance of classroom walkthroughs. It should be emphasized that classroom walkthroughs are not to be conducted for evaluative purposes, but rather be used to exclusively help improve instructional practice and academic achievement. Trust and staff buy-in must be established and are essential to the overall realization of making classroom walkthroughs a systemic part of a school district’s culture.

3. Principals and supervisors should be held accountable for properly implementing classroom walkthroughs and providing appropriate feedback and data at the district and school-wide levels. Substantial levels of support should be afforded in order to give administrators the best opportunity to succeed in this endeavor.

4. Superintendents and other district-wide leaders should join principals and supervisors, when possible, as they conduct their classroom walkthroughs. Subsequent and consequential discussion pertaining to best teaching strategies and instructional weaknesses observed should ensue.

5. Professional development needs should be identified based on the data collected from classroom walkthroughs. Professional development opportunities should be developed and administered according to these identified needs and be continuous and sustainable.
Recommendations for Policy

With the newly passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) still demanding high levels of accountability of all public schools, school districts must continue to seek ways of providing cost efficient means of improving teacher practice and student achievement. With research clearly supporting the use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improving instructional practice, school districts should make it a priority to implement this cost efficient administrative practice. The following recommendations for policy may help school districts accomplish this objective:

1. Boards of education and superintendents should resolutely commit to the practice of classroom walkthroughs as a means toward improving instructional practice and academic achievement. All principals and supervisors should be required by board policy and superintendent directives to perform classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis.

2. The New Jersey Department of Education should consider decreasing the mandatory number of formal evaluations required of school administrators. In exchange, the New Jersey Department of Education should strongly advocate for school districts to resolutely commit to the classroom walkthrough protocol as a part of their respective school improvement plans.
Recommendations for Future Research

The following are additional recommendations for future research that could potentially add to the fields of education and educational leadership. Specifically, the research base on improving instructional practice via walkthrough implementation may be enhanced through further research utilizing these recommendations:

1. This study was conducted through the interviewing of eight suburban public school superintendents in the state of New Jersey. A future recommendation for continued research would include substantially expanding the number of superintendents interviewed and possibly including different regions of the country in such an expanded research study.

2. This study utilized semi-structured interviews to provide qualitative insight regarding superintendents’ perceptions and reflections on the effectiveness of walkthrough implementation as a means to improve instructional practice. A future recommendation for continued research would consist of additionally using quantitative research methods to obtain further evidence regarding the effectiveness of this practice.

3. Although this study explored the impact that classroom walkthrough implementation had on instructional practice, its impact on student achievement was not examined. A future recommendation for continued research would consist of additionally analyzing district standardized test scores and benchmark assessments in order to explore the impact that classroom walkthrough implementation has on student achievement.
Summary

Chapter V summarized the main revelations of this study through a discussion of findings. Themes were presented in narrative form in order to qualitatively answer the three research questions of this study and effectively examine the perceptions and reflections of superintendents of suburban public school districts throughout the state of New Jersey regarding the use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve academic instruction. In addition, the researcher analyzed the relationship of the main findings of this study with that of previous research found in the study’s literature review. In conclusion, recommendations for practice, policy, and future research were suggested by the researcher.
References


Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). (2013). InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards and learning progressions for teachers 1.0. Washington, DC: CCSSO.


Appendix A

Interview Questions

4. What are the key components of classroom walkthroughs as identified by superintendents?

   1a) What do you and your administrative team look for during classroom walkthroughs?

   1b) Describe the feedback process you and your administrative team utilize after a classroom walkthrough is conducted.

   1c) In your professional opinion, what are the most meaningful components of the classroom walkthrough process?

5. What obstacles may exist that possibly inhibit an administrator’s ability to effectively conduct classroom walkthroughs on a regular basis?

   2a) What obstacles, if any, have you and your administrative team ever experienced in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?

   2b) What resistance have you ever felt, if any, from teachers or your administrative team in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?

   2c) Describe any negative experiences, if any, you have had in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation.

6. How do classroom walkthroughs impact administrators as instructional leaders?

   3a) How do classroom walkthroughs impact instructional practice in your school district?

   3b) How does data obtained from classroom walkthroughs impact you and your administrative team as instructional leaders?

   3c) As the leader of your school district, what benefits do you believe classroom walkthroughs bring to the field of educational leadership?
Appendix B

Letter of Solicitation

Dear [Superintendent’s Name]:

My name is Michael Celoski and I am a doctoral student at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services. Additionally, I have served as a teacher and vice principal for the Rahway Public Schools for the past 17 years. I am writing to respectfully ask if you would be willing to take part in my research study.

I am presently working on my dissertation seeking to examine the perceptions and reflections of superintendents of suburban public school districts throughout the state of New Jersey regarding the use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve academic instruction.

If you choose to participate in this study you will be interviewed by me for approximately 30-45 minutes. The interview will take place at a time and place that is convenient for you.

As this is a qualitative study, I would gather data from your interview using questions reviewed and approved by a panel of experts. You will receive an informed consent letter explaining the research and the parameters of the study.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview process, you will have the right to decline to answer any question or end the interview at any time.

All of the data compiled from your interview will be confidential. A digital recorder will be utilized in order to allow myself to remain attentive at all times and aid with accuracy. Interviews will be promptly transcribed and pseudonyms will be used to ensure the confidentiality of you and your school district.

Once the interview is complete, I will store the audio recordings and transcripts in a locked safe and/or locked filing cabinet in my place of residence where only I will have access to the data.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this research study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me anytime at (732) 713-4482 or e-mail me at mceloski@verizon.net.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Celoski
Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Improving Instructional Practice Via Walkthrough Implementation:
A Superintendent Centered Perspective

Researcher’s Affiliation
The researcher for this study is Michael J. Celoski, a doctoral student at Seton Hall University, College of Education and Human Services.

Purpose of the Research
The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions and reflections of superintendents of suburban public school districts throughout the state of New Jersey regarding the use of classroom walkthroughs as a means to improve academic instruction.

Duration of Subjects’ Participation
Upon voluntary agreement to participate in this research study, the subject can expect to participate in an interview that will last approximately 30-45 minutes.

Description of the Procedures
Participants who choose to take part in the study will be asked to be part of a 30-45 minute face-to-face interview with the researcher in a location that is convenient for each participant. Ten superintendents will be interviewed. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. Specific questions will be asked with appropriate follow-up questions based on the participants’ responses. The following questions will be asked during the interview:

- What do you and your administrative team look for during classroom walkthroughs?
- Describe the feedback process you and your administrative team utilize after a classroom walkthrough is conducted.
- In your professional opinion, what are the most meaningful components of the classroom walkthrough process?
- What obstacles, if any, have you and your administrative team ever experienced in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?
- What resistance have you ever felt, if any, from teachers or your administrative team in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation?
- Describe any negative experiences, if any, you have had in regards to classroom walkthrough implementation.
- How do classroom walkthroughs impact instructional practice in your school district?
- How does data obtained from classroom walkthroughs impact you and your administrative team as instructional leaders?
- As the leader of your school district, what benefits do you believe classroom walkthroughs bring to the field of educational leadership?
Instruments
Interview questions will be the sole source of research in this study.

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary; a superintendent may decline to participate without penalty and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If the participant feels uncomfortable during the interview process, he/she has the right to decline to answer any question or end the interview without penalty.

Anonymity
Participants' identities will remain confidential. Each participant and corresponding school district will be assigned a pseudonym to preserve confidentiality. The researcher will not disclose who participated in the study or disclose the identity of individual responses.

Confidentiality
All data associated with the study will remain strictly confidential. All documents obtained from the research including transcripts, digital recordings, and other printed materials will be kept in a locked safe and/or locked filing cabinet to protect the confidentiality of the participants. All data will be kept for a minimum of three years.

Records
Only the researcher and members of the dissertation committee will have access to the coded data. The dissertation committee is obligated to protect the data from disclosure.

Risks or Discomforts
There are no anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this research.

Direct Benefits
There are no direct benefits for participating in this study, though a potential benefit of participation in this study is the expansion of the knowledge base regarding classroom walkthroughs.

Remuneration
There is no remuneration of any kind for participating in this study.

Compensation
There are no anticipated risks associated with this research. Therefore, no compensation is required.

Alternative Procedures
The researcher is not aware of any alternative procedures that might be advantageous to the subject.
Contact Information
Michael J. Celecki is the principal researcher. Michael can be reached via phone at (732) 713-1482 or via e-mail at mcelecki@verizon.net.

Dr. Anthony Coletta is the researcher’s faculty advisor. Dr. Coletta can be reached via his e-mail at ajcoletta@icloud.com.

Seton Hall University’s IRB office contact information is as follows. This office may be contacted for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subject’s rights:

Dr. Mary Razicka
Director of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research (IRB)
(973) 313-6347
(973) 275-2361 (fax)
irb@shu.edu

Audio Record Consent
The researcher will request to use a digital recorder to record the interviews. Nonetheless, all participants will be identified by a coded pseudonym, and only the researcher will have access to the audio files with the ability to listen to the recorded information. The researcher will be the sole transcriber of the audio files. All audio files and transcripts will be kept in a locked safe and/or locked filing cabinet. Audio files and transcripts will remain protected for a minimum of three years but no longer than five years, after which they will be destroyed.

To indicate consent to participate in this research study and to be audio recorded during the interview, please sign below.

Participant Name (Please Print)

Participant Signature Date

Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board

JAN 3 1 2018

Approval Date

Department of Education Leadership, Management & Policy

400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey • 07079 • www.shu.edu

A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT
Appendix D

Institutional Review Board Approval

January 31, 2018

Michael Celaschi
4 Marian Lane
Warren, NJ 07059

Dear Mr. Celaschi,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved as submitted under expedited review your research proposal entitled “Improving Instructional Practice Via Walkthrough Implementation: A Superintendent Centered Perspective”. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of this stamped Consent Form.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Anthony Colella