Spring 3-6-2017

The Role of the Principal Walk-through

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Education
Seton Hall University
2017

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Karen Lee Holgersen, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to

the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ed.D.** during this **Spring Semester 2017.**

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ABSTRACT

Karen Lee Holgersen: The Role of the Principal Walk-through

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the principal's perspective of the efficacy of the principal walk-through as a tool to improve and gather formative feedback about teaching. Principals from selected schools in one district were interviewed to further clarify their feelings and provide insight into how they engaged in the process. The findings suggest that the principals in this study have adapted the classroom walk-through to meet the current requirements of an instructional leader.

Keywords: instructional leader, principal leadership, principal walk-through, qualitative study, reflective conversation

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and to all of my relations. It is also dedicated to all of those young minds who are the future. Finally, this work is dedicated to all who supported me on this journey of discovery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

"What would life be if we had no courage to attempt anything?" (Vincent Van Gogh)

Vincent Van Gogh had it right. It takes much courage to live life to the fullest. This document represents a ten-year journey of courage and commitment to a dream. It is my highest honor to have undertaken this experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter I

The Problem

Introduction

One of the present challenges for school administrators was how to guide a K–12 school

through the policy environment of high-stakes testing and school accountability. The emphasis

on student achievement as measured by results on standardized tests had become the centerpiece

of federal education policy for school leaders with the inception of the No Child Left Behind

Act, signed by President George W. Bush, on January 8, 2002. Due to the current climate of

school reform based on standardized testing, principals were held accountable through their

yearly performance evaluations for student success on standardized tests (Levine, 2005). As

teacher quality was widely believed to affect student learning and achievement on standardized

tests (Ruddy & Prusinski, 2012), the pressure of success had dictated many school reform ideas.

One such idea to increase the achievement on standardized tests of subgroups of students had

been the administrative classroom instructional *walk-through*. A classroom instructional walk-

through was a process in which principals or other education administrators spent minutes

(usually less than 10 minutes) observing classrooms to form an impression about the quality of

teaching occurring in them (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008). Although walk-throughs had been a

national phenomenon for at least two decades, the federal movement of accountability, through

annual standardized testing, had driven schools and districts to focus on improving test scores

(Cobb, 2005). The increased policy focused on standardized test results had created a climate of

increased pressure on school administrators, teachers, and students alike. School administrators

 across the nation had implemented a variety of classroom walk-through observations in a

renewed effort to improve teaching and learning and ultimately improve student achievement (Sorenson, 2010).

Although the classroom walk-through procedure had been around for 20 years, little qualitative research existed about the principals' perceptions of the value of classroom walk-throughs and their understanding of how walk-throughs informed the assessment of teaching, especially as a strategy for school improvement.

Background and Rationale

Scholars have long argued that principals should have been instructional leaders (Grissom, Loeb & Master, 2013). If the primary charge of any principal was to be that of an instructional leader, then the responsibility of classroom walk-throughs must primarily be given to the school principals. English (2010) attested that the walk-through concept is "a quick, truncated, postholed view of the classroom" (p. xv). In its simplest form, the principals usually focused on a variety of simple but specific questions to be answered after a snapshot observation of a lesson (Dyrli, 2008). As with most ideas introduced for mass consumption, the idea of the principal walk-through had morphed into many forms. Although purported to be a novel approach to assessing conformity to a reform agenda for a school district, it had also been used as a tool to evaluate teacher job performance. This dichotomy of purpose was problematic as it had not been adequately addressed in the literature. The intention or motivation behind the walk-through phenomenon warranted a closer look.

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Consistency of form and function appeared to be at the core of the confusion of walk-throughs. As every school district administrative team was out doing its own thing, there did not seem to be a consensus of what constituted an informative classroom walk-through. As there was not a lot of literature to substantiate the best modality, it would have been helpful to bring more understanding to this topic by looking at the walkthrough procedures in one district in one state and the principals' perceptions of its effectiveness. Thus, it would have been advantageous to examine the topic of a walk-through as a possible viable assessment tool. This analysis lead to the following research questions:

1. What did principals perceive as the value of the walk-through?

What value did walk-throughs have for developing the expertise and skills of the instructional leader? This research question was posited to develop deeper insight on this aspect.

2. How did principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching? Central to the research questions was the underlying problem statement: *What was the role of the principal walk-through?*

Significance of the Study

In the literature on principal walk-throughs, most information was in regard to the process of the walk-through. There was a scarcity of literature on how the principals actually felt about the walk-through. This study provided this insight from selected principals. The selected principals revealed how they viewed the process of the walk-through as instructional leaders. The significance of the study was that it was looking at the perspective of the user to get a deeper insight about the principal walk-through.

School improvement plans tended to be very broad and vague (Dyrli, 2008). Because principals needed to be instructional leaders in a school, the principals needed ways to develop into the role. Barring any how-to list, principals could have benefitted from additional leadership strategies that would enhance student learning. Those instructional leadership strategies that would have yielded maximum benefit would be those strategies that are practical, cost and time effective, and gave reliable and valid assessment results so that principals could make intelligent decisions.

It could be argued that any technique that could ultimately improve teaching and learning would ultimately improve student achievement. The principal walk-through could be a candidate for consideration by any school district that was desirous of increased student achievement results. Principal walk-throughs could be an important new tool in educational reform, and further investigation was warranted.

Conceptual Framework

According to Marshall (2003), a principal could not possibly answer the following questions without frequent visits to the classroom: (a) Were teachers on track with the curriculum? (b) Were the students learning? (c) Were teachers "happy campers" in terms of their jobs and their lives? (d) Did some teachers deserve special praise? (e) Did some teachers need redirection, emergency support, or a negative evaluation? A principal must have spent quality time in classrooms and had substantive follow-up conversations after each visit. This was the most efficient way for a principal to monitor classrooms and to have found the answers to those key questions.

Another reason, according to Marshall (2003), for keeping classroom visits to only 5

minutes: it was the only way to have visited frequently enough to have seen the big picture. If visits were lengthy, the principals could not fit as many into each day and would not see teachers often enough to have had a sense of each teacher's overall reality and the reality across all classrooms in the building (DeBoer & Hinojosa, 2012).

Another author who supported short classroom observations was Susan Black (2007) who believes the classroom observations should be done in 3 to 10 minutes. She cites the book, *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-through-Changing School Supervisory Practice One Teacher at a Time* (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston, 2004), as a resource. Downey and her research team had shown that with training and practice, principals and other instructional leaders could observe a teacher's critical teaching decisions—such as having students work independently or in groups—in as little as 3 minutes. But, according to Downey (2004), for 3-minute walk-throughs to work as promised, principals and other instructional leaders should had made sure these sessions were: (a) informal, avoid filling out checklists, and take notes only to help recall details later; (b) brief, observe classrooms frequently and kept the visits short; (c) unannounced, arrived without advance notice to avoid a staged lesson; (d) focused, concentrated on the decisions teachers made about curriculum and instruction and how their decisions affected students' learning. For teachers who needed help, suggested one or two things they could try; (e) non-evaluative, kept visit collegial and cooperative. Assured teachers that the purpose of your visit was continuous improvement throughout the school; and (f) reflective, asked teachers to reflect on their instructional decisions and strategies (DeBoer & Hinojosa, 2012).

Although the walk-through seemed to be an important administrative tool for instructional leaders, the importance of the principal walk-through is still evolving in the literature. The existing research on walk-throughs was tenuous as researchers had tended to

report on the breadth rather than the depth of the subject. The many variations in the literature that occurred seem to be the result of the collective school districts' struggled to guide school improvement. The common objective of the walk-through was that the outcome do *something*.

Although the idea behind the walk-through was not new, the term *classroom walkthrough* and administrative style was widely credited to Carolyn Downey, a retired professor and consultant in San Diego, California (Dyrli, 2008).

The walk-through literature seemed to divide into two categories. The categories appeared to be (a) what the walk-throughs focus on (i.e., the function) and (b) how walk-throughs are conducted (i.e., the form). The first category is best exemplified by the walk-through description of a quick snapshot to discover if teachers are complying with a school district reform strategy or practice. Granada and Vriesenga (2008) reported on the University of Kentucky implementation of a Web-based walk-through system in which 1,393 walk-throughs were conducted during the 2006-2007 academic year. The researchers reported that the positive, timely feedback to the teachers was open and frequent, and that it promoted a positive school culture. The teachers were "very susceptive to suggestions" (p. 26).

Derrington (2011) asserted that "educators must see teachers as adult learners who work best when actively engaged in the improvement process" (p. 51). A variation of working with the teachers was described in the book, *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through* by Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston (2004). The collegial walk-through model reported by Kohm and Nance (2007) and Bushman (2006) views the teachers as partners in the process. Teachers are actively engaged in the walk-throughs with the principal. It can be viewed as a sharing of leadership and power (Ziegler & Ramage, 2013).

In direct contrast to sharing leadership and power, the principal can focus on a less

interactive approach. This type of principal walk-through was a part of a formal assessment

process in which marginal teachers may be identified and eliminated (Maulding & Joachim,

2000). In some schools, walk-throughs were part of a formal evaluation process. They

supplemented formal, full-length classroom observations, validating or refuting the instruction

observed during the scheduled observation (Skretta, 2007).

Whether it was the teacher partnership model or the "drive-by" or "gotcha" model of the

principal walk-through, the second category, or the how of walk-throughs was a true

smorgasbord of possibilities. The sheer variety was breathtaking. In an overview of the topic,

David (2008) stated that "they can last from 2 to 45 minutes. The group observing may range

from 2 to 12 people, and may include teachers, administrators, community members, and

students. Walk-throughs could focus on one teacher, all teachers, or a subset of teachers and

schools" (p. 2).

Cudeiro and Nelsen (2009) suggested that administrators and instructional leaders spend

7 to 10 minutes in each classroom to look for, gather, and record observational data and evidence

such as student work in portfolios and on display, work students were engaged in, types of

teacher and student questions and responses, and instructional guiding charts. The authors went

on to explain that benefits gained from learning walks help change the culture of their schools

from one of distrust and isolation to one of collaboration and openness (DeBoer & Hinojosa,

2012).

Regardless of which type of walk-through was utilized by a school district, the reality

was that walk-throughs carry significant risks to the teacher's perception of its purpose. When

the purpose was murky, or when trust among teachers, principals, and the central-office staff was

low, walk-throughs were likely to be perceived as compliance checks, increasing distrust and

tension. Increased teacher anxiety was described by Valli and Buese (2007) in a 4-year study of 150 teachers in a district that instituted principal walk-throughs. Many districts and schools could tell tales about walk-throughs that backfired (David, 2008). The research suggested that walk-throughs could play a constructive role only when districts made their purpose clear and carry them out in a climate of trust.

A study reported by Willingham (2014) questioned the entire walk-through concept as a reform strategy. The new study by researchers Grissom et al. (2013) followed 100 Miami-Dade County Public School principals for a full instructional day. The principals' tasks were recorded and analyzed. The results showed that the principals spent, on average, 12.6% of their time on activities related to instruction. Of the instructionally related activities, the most common was the classroom walkthrough (5.4%) and the second was formal teacher evaluation (2.4%). Time spent on instructional leadership was not associated with student learning outcomes. Specifically, the informal classroom walkthrough—the most common activity—was *negatively* associated with student achievement. According to the study's data, this negative association was especially true in high schools. Thus, there appeared to be a clear discrepancy in the benefits of walkthroughs as a strategy to improve student learning outcomes.

Due to this discrepancy in the literature, it was important to investigate the principal's perceptions of the value of the walk-through and how the principal might have used this tool to help access teaching.

Purpose Statement

My purpose for this qualitative case study was to describe the principal's perception of the efficacy of the principal walk-through as a tool to improve and assess teaching. Principals from selected schools in one district were interviewed to further clarify their feelings and provide insight into how they engaged in the process.

Limitations

Limitations in the design of the study was the small sample size. The study was confined to five schools in one school district.

This study was also be limited to focusing on how principals perceived the value of the walk-through process and how they made decisions during the walk-through. It is assumed that the principals would accurately describe their feelings and perceptions about the walk-through.

Another limitation in the study was associated with participation in the interview process as a voluntary act.

Finally, as I was an employee in the district, it was assumed that I would not color the responses in the interview process.

Delimitations

The selection of one northern New Jersey district with a District Factor Group of GH delimited the study. In addition, this study was also delimited as only principals (and not other educational leaders) would be surveyed.

Definition of Terms

Principal is the person who is officially identified as the primary instructional leader of the school.

Walk-through is an organized observation of a teacher(s) using a schema that focuses on instruction and learning.

Organization of the Study

The classroom or principal walk-through concept has been recently introduced as a possible school district reform protocol. As the literature presents so many variations in the concept of the principal walk-through, there was a literary challenge to the efficacy of the walk-through. The best practices model was missing and had yet to be formulated in the literature. Currently, every school district must decide *how* and *when* to implement which form of the principal walk-through. A school district that had yet to utilize the principal walk-through must decide even *if*, or even *why* to implement this concept.

The purpose of the qualitative study was to investigate the topic of the principal walk-through. In order to better understand the rationale and current thinking of the concept of principal walk-throughs, a school district was chosen that is in the embryonic stage of walk-through implementation. The target date to begin principal or classroom walk-throughs was the academic year 2013-2014. The school district was located in the northeastern part of the United States and is commuting distance to a major metropolitan city. At the current time, there are nine elementary principals, three middle-school principals, and two high school principals in the school district.

Data were generated by means of face-to-face audiotaped interviews with the principals

in the school district of interest. All of the principals in the district have been given the directive to implement the walk-through concept. I questioned the principals, and all responses and the subjects' names will be kept confidential. All data were numbered and stored in an appropriate manner so that the principals can remain anonymous.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the sequential analysis methodology as described in the book *Qualitative Data Analysis* by Miles and Huberman. Clusters of key phrases were labeled and pattern coded (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After coding, generalizations and mini-theories were integrated and reported.

It is hoped that the qualitative results will provide insight into the principals' thinking and administrative decision-making as seen in the formative process of policy creation. Witnessing the birth of the principal walk-through implementation in the school district of interest should be very informative.

The study contributed to the literary conversation about the principal walk-through. It will have particularly added to the body of knowledge of the role and value of the principal walk-through by establishing the justification as reported by the principals in the study. As the principal was the primary person conducting the walk-through observations, it was logical to ask the principal what guiding template the principals were using to evaluate what they are observing concerning what was happening in the classroom. The principals' voices, opinions, ideas, procedures, and strategies would be heard. In the end, it was hoped that the outcomes would cast a vote as to whether principal walk-throughs were justified or not.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Historical Perspective

Historically, the principal was expected to set clear goals, allocate resources to instruction, manage the curriculum, monitor lesson plans, and evaluate teachers (DiPaola & Hoy as cited in Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou, 2010). Besides the evaluation of certified and noncertified staff, other management tasks by the principal encompassed a wide range including, but not limited to, developing schedules, maintaining budgets, meeting with parents and the community groups (Cobb, 2005).

Contemporary schools are obligated to provide a high quality education for students who walk through their doors (Friend & Pope, 2005). Cobb (2005) proclaims that, "accountability, through annual testing, drives schools and districts to focus on improving test scores" (p. 472). Education literature is replete with reform ideas that can boost student achievement (Bushman, 2006). Inherent in the process of improving schools is the focus on improving teaching. Teachers' performance is being scrutinized and monitored by school administrators. Accountability models of teacher evaluation are seen as quality control mechanisms (Larsen, 2005). As reported by Larsen (2005), the intention of the accountability models are "(a) to assuage public fears that incompetent teachers will be allowed to remain in the classroom and (b) to improve performance amongst classroom teachers to improve student achievement outcomes" (pp. 293-294). The ultimate accountability for student achievement is incumbent upon the instructional leader (Grigsby et al., 2010).

The primary school administrator responsible for the evaluation of teachers' performance has typically been the principal (Berube & Dexter, 2006). Evaluation is a formal process developed and implemented by districts to meet state statutes and district policies, to assign teachers a rating at the end of the year, and to determine whether a teacher will return to work the following school year (Berube & Dexter, 2006). The evaluation process is a high-stakes reality for teachers.

Today, the burden for school improvement in a time of accountability falls squarely on the shoulders of principals, as new requirements demand that they act as instructional leaders (Crum & Sherman, 2008). The principal must be more deeply involved in the mechanics of teaching and learning, the use of data to make decisions, and prescribe and participate in meaningful professional development. Principals should provide professional development activities designed to improve teacher quality, which, in turn, must be tied to student academic success (Berube & Dexter, 2006). What is not fully known is how the principal's role must also change to implement a new evaluation model (Derrington, 2011). Ready or not, principals are being asked to take on the role of change agent in their schools (Cobb, 2005).

Theoretical Frameworks

According to Fullan (2001), it is "essential for leaders to understand the change process" (p. 5). This would apply to educational leaders as well. Evans, Thornton, and Usinger (2012) purport that it would be important for educational leaders to know theoretical frameworks of organizational change to guide school improvement. In particular, Evans et al. (2012) imply that there are four models of organizational change that could apply to school systems. These four models of change are the continuous improvement model, the organizational learning model,

13

the learning organizations model, and the appreciative inquiry model. These four were chosen because "of their emergence within the field of education, possible adaptability to school systems, and potential to support organizational change" (p. 156).

The continuous improvement model by W. Edwards Deming (2000) proposes that there are 14 key principles to organizational change. Although not all 14 key principles of change for businesses can be transferred into the educational setting, there are several points that are applicable. Deming's model of continuous change focuses on all the stakeholders imagining all possibilities for improvement. Evans et al. (2012) note, "As leaders throughout a school system imagine what might be possible for students, the vision becomes the guiding force by which decisions are made" (p. 156).

This model also promotes quality performance upfront from the workers. Applying this principle to the school systems would have the teachers becoming the quality control agents due to the leader's style of distributed leadership (Evans et al., 2012). Continuous improvement equates to continuous education of employees through training and job skills enhancement. The idea here is that quality leaders promote the education of their employees.

Elmore, as quoted in Fullan (2001), agreed:

The job of administrative leaders was primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organization, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various piece of the organization together in a productive relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result (p. 65).

Contiguous to the idea of the education of employees, the continuous improvement model also had the principle of eliminating fear. Speaking about this principle, Evans et al.

(2012) contended that "effective leaders use data and provide continuous open feedback to drive out fear" (p.158). Relating this to the educational setting, an effective principal would have worked with a teacher to learn from mistakes and make improvements (Evans et al., 2012). In this manner, school improvement would have occurred as the principals were promoting effective change.

The final educational application of the Deming model of continuous improvement would be the application of the plan-do-study-act cycle of continuous improvement. According to Evans et al. (2012), this model has application to a school building's programs and policies. At each step, "The principal would provide the structures, resources, and encouragement to promote this continuous cycle of inquiry" (p. 158). Whatever the program for improvement, the principal could use this model to guide the change within the school building.

The second model of organizational change was the organizational learning model by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1996). The idea behind this model was to closely link the individual learning within an organization with the organization's learning itself. As opposed to individual learning, this model explained how collective learning of individuals could be transferred throughout an organization and could change the organization. The model was composed of three types of organizational learning: single-loop learning, double-loop learning, and deutero-learning.

Evans et al. (2012) contended that the single-loop learning application to education (for example, one teacher made changes in the classroom might not change the entire school); however, double-loop learning and deutero-learning might have overall application to the transformation of schools.

Core values of an organization can be changed with double-loop learning. For example,

principals can incorporate effective classroom techniques throughout a school system by the use of reflection and integration of the best techniques. A critical aspect of the model is the willingness of the leader to "emphasize common goals and mutual influence" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 165). In the case of an educational setting, it would be the task of the principal to emphasize the common goals and/or mutual influence when communicating with the teachers.

In the third way that organizations learn (Argyris & Schön, 1996), deutero-learning focuses on the manner in which organizations learn how to learn. Open communication and advocacy combined with inquiry are but a couple of examples of how organizations learn. Bolman and Deal (2003) argue that this model emphasizes "common elements of effectiveness that apply regardless of the individual" (p. 170).

This organizational learning model applies to education as per Evans et al. (2012) because it is to be used to support effective instructional techniques throughout the school system. As cited in Evans et al. (2012), Fullan also stated "that organizational success depends on a system-wide approach to growth and learning and suggested that gains in student achievement will continue to occur in isolation unless leaders throughout school systems can embrace and effectively promote organizational learning" (p. 161).

The learning organizations model by Peter Senge (2006) was published in the book, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. This model emphasizes systems thinking as the fifth component that surrounds a theoretical framework of personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. Personal mastery can be encouraged by principals through teacher evaluation tools, collaborative inquiry based on authentic data, and acting as role models (Evans et al., 2012).

Mental models, the second feature of the learning organizations model, were the "beliefs

and assumptions that individuals hold about concepts and events that impact behavior" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 163). This facet of the model could be directly used by principals. Evans et al. attestted that "by providing staff with opportunities to engage in professional dialogues about student learning, principals create an environment by which mental models are openly explored" (p. 164).

Although shared vision, the third part of Senge's learning organizations model, was also included in the Deming and Argyris and Schön models as discussed previously, the shared vision in this particular model was the collective caring behind the organization (Senge, 2006). Positive organizational change could happen when there was a collective vision.

The fourth component of the learning organizations model was team learning. Senge stated, "Team building is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (as cited in Evans et al., 2012, p. 164). If teams were able to function together well and learn from each other, then "the strengths of each member frequently produce positive systemic change within the organization" (Evans et al., p. 164). In the educational setting, team building could be utilized by grade-level teams, discipline teams, or even at faculty meetings.

The final part of the learning organizations model by Peter Senge was the systems thinking aspect. This aspect incorporates all of the other components and was the foundational core of the concept. All of the other components revolved around the systemic point-of-view. The point that Evans et al. (2012) made was that this model reflected an awareness that "every action made and action taken within an organization impacts other elements of that organization" (p. 165).

The last theoretical framework for organizational change is the appreciative inquiry

17

model by Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2005). The five principles that frame this approach

to the model, as cited in Evans et al. (2012) are: (a) the constructionist principle, (b) the principle

of simultaneity, (c) the poetic principle, (d) the anticipatory principle, and (e) the positive

principle. The governing idea was that every organization had something that worked well. It

was at this positive point that positive change can begin. The four stages embodied this positive

construct, and they included the stages of discovery, dream, design and destiny (Evans et al.,

2012). The model also used the ideas of a shared vision, collaboration, and deeply held values.

Evans et al. stressed that the appreciative inquiry model "asks principals and school staffs to start

with strengths then move to possibilities" (p. 168).

In summary, whatever model of change theory was adopted by an educational leader, the

importance of "grounding organizational change in theory cannot be overemphasized as it

provided leaders with comprehensive structure to view organizational evolution and suggest

appropriate options to positively impact the process" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 169).

What is a Walk-through?

Touted as a systematic and efficient way to gather helpful data on instructional practices,

school administrators instituted classroom walk-throughs with increasing frequency since the

inception of the No Child Left Behind Act (David, 2008). David further asserted that "the idea

behind walk-throughs is that firsthand classroom observations can paint a picture to inform

improvement efforts" (p.2). According to the Encyclopedia of Educational Leadership and

Administration (2006), "a walk-through or a walk-about of a classroom has come to be

considered as a brief structured visitation to a classroom while it is in use" (p. 1063). Although

walk-throughs could range in duration, Hanson (2011) stated that walk-throughs were a way of

getting into classrooms regularly for approximately 10 minutes to observe instruction. The

classroom walk-through (CWT) was a supervision model not to be used for evaluation. This

model had been receiving more attention as classroom principals looked for strategies to help

improve instruction with the ultimate goal to improve student achievement (Berube & Dexter,

2006).

Why Walk-throughs Matter

Walk-throughs matter because walk-throughs were integrative to school improvement

organizational change models. Skretta (2007) stated that walk-throughs were not for formal

evaluation purposes but as a lens through which to view school improvement in action. The

walk-through, according to Skretta, was an excellent vehicle for demonstrating support for

teachers' instructional efforts while simultaneously challenging the teacher to aspire to a higher

level of instructional efficacy, and support for teachers was vital to successful school reading

programs. Also, Skretta stated that saying that principals should have conducted walk-throughs

was one matter; actually conducting the walk-throughs and providing teachers with the kind of

feedback they needed and deserved was another. "The best walk-throughs give a teacher

relevant, real-time data on their instruction" (as cited in DeBoer & Hinojosa, 2012, p. 2).

In a 2012 study by Brooks-Long, the researcher investigated the reflective walk-through

protocol on teacher instructional practices and student proficiency trends. The study's design

included the examination of collected evidence found in the natural school environment by the

walk-through team. The research questions that guided the study were: To what extent did the

implementation of a walk-through protocol combined with reflective practice and curriculum

component influence teacher practices in the areas of learning objectives, student engagement,

wall-walk, student interviews, and effective communication? Further, the research examined

whether these changes produced substantive changes in the language arts and mathematics performance of students during the 2-year period of walk-through implementation (2009-2010 and 2010-2011) compared to the baseline year of 2008-2009.

The study was conducted was follows:

Year 1: Baseline data were collected by the use of the district providing feedback.

Year 2: The walk-through protocol was completed once per month for 10 months combined with a reflective practice model that included whole school feedback and monthly professional development.

Year 3: The walk-through protocol was completed once per month for 10 months combined with professional development, individual coaching, "look fors," informals, content analysis to analyze the data, and a sixth element added for review, namely curriculum implementation.

A review of the data indicated that reflective practice did influence changes in teacher practice in the study area descriptors of learning objectives, student engagement, wall-walk, student interviews, and effective communication. It also appeared that improvement in teacher instructional practices coincided yearly with improvement in student proficiency rates in language arts and mathematics as measured by the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge or NJASK. (The NJASK assesses student achievement in language arts, math, and science.) In summation, it was interesting to note that when reflective practice was implemented, both teacher practices and student proficiency showed growth.

What Walk-throughs Look Like

If walk-throughs could have been a way of improving teaching and student learning, it might have been informative to critically evaluate what the walk-throughs looked like. A review of the current literature revealed different ideas of who, what, when, where, how, and why the classroom walk-through was undertaken. There appeared to be a dearth of information on the *when* of the walk-through; however, inferences made from the reading of the literature indicated that it occurred at the discretion of the observer. The *when* would not be further investigated in the current investigation.

The two major topics that were addressed in the study were the *how* of the principal walkthrough and the *what* the principal focused on. The other questions of *who*, *where*, and *why* all supported these two major questions of *how* and *what*. Both the *how* and *what* had many variations.

David (2008) spoke to the *what* of the question by describing the vast variety of the walk-throughs. Walkthroughs could last from 2 to 45 minutes and could focus on one teacher, all teachers, or a subset of teachers and schools (David, 2008).

The *how* of the walkthrough was varied, also. The person doing the walk-through could use checklists, forms, rubrics, or questions. A wide range of electronic data-collection devices have appeared on the scene to support walk-throughs (David, 2008). Educational technology companies such as Teachscape, Austin Sky, and McREL have developed walk-through programs that utilize handheld devices, software, and the Internet for data collection and staff development (Dyril, 2008).

The most common scenario of the *who* of the walk-through was the principal. Usually, the principal worked under the directive of the superintendent to implement systems of

accountability (Useem, 2009). Spencer, Falchi, and Ghiso (2011) related a case in which the

principal was actually monitored by a superintendent conducting walk-throughs to check on the

principal's performance. In most cases, though, it was primarily the principal conducting the

walk-through, observing teachers in their classrooms. Although in larger school districts, this

responsibility may be delegated to others, research suggested that the principals are the primary

persons conducting walk-throughs. Due to this prevalence of the principal model, this study

exclusively examined principal walkthroughs more than any other positions. How or what the

principal focused on was of particular interest.

Although research, overall, on the topic of walk-throughs was limited due to its

modernity (David, 2008), the *where* of the classroom walk-throughs were cited in diverse school

situations. The ubiquitous principal walk-through was mentioned in educational rural,

urban/socioeconomically challenged, novice-teacher, and co-teacher literature. To answer the

where question, the answer seemed that walk-throughs seemed to be popping up everywhere.

Some examples follow.

In a rural environment, Ashton and Duncan (2012) claimed that the principal must have

dealt with professional isolation and loneliness, getting to know a rural community and basic

management skills for the lone administrator. They purported that the rural administrator needed

to add to his or her leadership toolkit the ability to have scheduled short blocks of time for daily

or frequent walk-throughs.

Further challenges included low fiscal capacity, fewer management support services,

greater per pupil costs, higher number of teachers teaching outside of their specialty area, less

competitive salaries and benefits, less specialized space and equipment, less availability of

planning support services, and fewer evaluative support services (Harmon, Gordanier, Henry, &

George, 2007). These challenges make it difficult for rural districts to maintain a school improvement process. Even in the disadvantaged rural setting, administrative walk-throughs were recommended for the success of new teaching practices in this study of Missouri schools.

Socioeconomically challenged urban schools also had economically disadvantaged settings plus the schools had persistent academic disparities in student performance (Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010). Even in a challenging setting, a principal's application of the creative use of walk-throughs could be effective. Ramalho et al. (2010) reported on a study in Texas where one principal stated that "poverty does not diminish intelligence" (p. 45) and insisted that quality teaching is possible. This principal had the teachers fill out their own walk-through observation form. The principal then jointly discussed approaches to improve teaching and learning. Again, the principal chose the *how* and the *what* to focus on. The *where* was simply the setting where the principal and the teachers came together in the formation of the principal walkthrough. The principal had at his or her discretion the *how* and the *what* he or she was focusing on. Again, the *where* supported the *how* and the *what* in the literature.

Another example of a varied *how* and *what* walkthrough that a principal could use was an informal walkthrough. In addition to formal walk-throughs, informal walk-throughs could be used by principals before formal observations. This concept was demonstrated by a co-teaching scenario in Maryland. Co-teaching had been increasingly implemented over the past 20 years as a shared responsibility alternative to more restrictive special education models for providing service to students with disabilities (Walsh, 2012). Administrative *look fors* in a co-taught classroom included cognitive development of students and planning and implementation of instruction during the administrative walk-through. The informal walk-through gives the principal a preview of the teaching and learning to be assessed. They supplemented formal, full-

length classroom observations validating or refutted the instruction observed during the scheduled observation (Skretta, 2007).

The *how* and *what* the principal was focused on depended on the motive of the principal. The goals for principal supervision and principal evaluation were different. Thus, the outcomes of supervision and evaluation were different (Berube & Dexter, 2006). The *how* and *what* questions were directly affected by the integration of the *why* walkthroughs were being conducted. As teachers became more involved in school-based decisions, the relationship between the principal and the teacher must have undergone metamorphosis (Singh, 2011). The role of a principal, formerly a manager, had morphed into *both* manager and instructional leader. The practice of using 3-, 5-, or 10-minute walk-throughs to monitor curriculum and instruction among teachers had become a task of the instructional leader (Karanxha, Agosto, & Elam, 2011).

One of the responsibilities of an instructional leader was to conduct multiple walk-throughs and provide constructive feedback (Grigsby, et al, 2010). Administrator walk-throughs should have focused on giving teachers information and feedback that would improve the quality of the learning strategy instruction they provided to their students (Lenz, 2006). As the focus was on student learning, not teacher performance, walk-throughs could have established a sense of shared responsibility for student learning between administrators and teachers. Feedback was an essential component of walk-throughs and could be in the form of a quick email, or a sticky note left in the teacher's mailbox. Feedback should have been specific and constructive (Cobb, 2005).

Since well-trained teachers were commonly believed to be one aspect necessary for improving student achievement and enhancing the quality of instruction, providing teachers with sufficient support and professional development had been considered to be the key element in

educational policies (Ruddy & Prusinski, 2012). Walk-throughs were a way of seeing what practices from previous professional development sessions teachers had implemented (Hanson, 2011).

However, research showed that even successful, high-quality professional development lead to about a 5% implementation rate (Nelsen & Cudeiro, 2009). Perhaps it was this statistic that had created the development of other forms of walk-throughs. According to Derrington (2011), principals and district leaders needed to reconsider the ineffectiveness of administrative control and the benefit of teacher professionalism achieved by involving other staff members and stakeholders in the evaluation process.

As a result, the expansion of the principal walkthrough concept could have been labeled the *principal and others, or simply, others*. The *how* question was that the principal would "distribute" his or her leadership role to others by the sharing, the spreading, and the distributing of leadership work across the individuals and roles throughout the school organization (Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, & Louis, 2007). The observation role had thus expanded to *more* people doing the walk-throughs. The group who observed may range from 2 to 12 people and may include teachers, administrators, community members, and students (David, 2008). In these models of the walk-throughs, all types of educational personnel were trained to look at learning and/or the implementation of a professional development strategy.

A notable study in Texas by Ramalho, Ärlestig, & Törnsén (2011) involved 41 visiting Swedish principals' perceptions of schools in Texas. What was impressive to the Swedish principals were the supervisory walks, or walk-throughs. The schools that were visited had principals, vice-principals and curriculum co-ordinators who were required to document approximately 25 walk-throughs in a week using rubrics measuring "three-minute learning

visits" (p. 104) to classrooms. The Swedish delegation liked the "walk-throughs and the closeness of the leadership" (p. 104).

An even more distributed leadership strategy was the collaborative model; again, this was a variation of the *how* question of walkthroughs. Collaborative professional development was also important for school improvement because for school improvement measures to be successful, *everyone* must have been empowered to recognize her or his role in achieving the goals of the school improvement process (Ruddy & Prusinski, 2012). The principal, instructional leadership team, and other school leaders conducted frequent visitations to all classrooms to have a clear understanding of its implementation level of new practices. This was *not* part of the teacher evaluation process (Nelsen & Cudeiro, 2009).

The critical question, it appeared, was what happened between the principal and the teachers after the walkthrough.

Pros: Possible Upside to the Principal Walk-through

Another model of teacher empowerment was the professional learning community (PLC) wherein staff members worked together to meet the challenges they faced on a daily basis. In this model, teachers could organize walk-throughs so colleagues observed one another's classroom to learn new ideas and provided feedback (Singh, 2011).

The walk-through observations gave valuable data to educational personnel on professional development implementation. Nelsen and Cudeiro (2009) reported on the powerful professional development implementation strategy used in 110 high schools in Chicago. The plan included cycles of high-quality learning, followed by periods of practicing. In the third week of the cycle, the principal, the instructional leadership team, and other school leaders

conducted frequent visits to all classrooms to have a clear understanding of the implementation level of new practices.

In a 2005–2006 Chula Vista, California, study reported by Fisher, Frey, and Nelson (2012), the researchers analyzed the impact of instructional leadership teams (ILT). The building-level instructional leadership teams consisted of six to eight teachers, coaches, and the principal and received professional development. The expectation was that the ILT would take the information back to their school sites. After several months of training, the walk-through data suggested that there was limited implementation of the instructional framework. In 38 of the 44 schools, the curricular program was observed in fewer than 25% of the classrooms. The implication for teachers is that teachers need time to talk with their peers and develop their expertise at decision-making.

Another opportunity for staff to learn from each other is the instructional walk-through collaborative model. Ziegler (2006) reported on this model enacted by the Edmonton Public Schools in Canada. In 2005, the coordination of walk-throughs was given back to the schools for implementation. To facilitate walk-throughs, 560 of the staff were trained, including teachers, assistant principals, curriculum coordinators, and principals. Schools initiated their own walk-throughs, plus visited other schools in addition to having district walk-throughs. The walk-through groups provided feedback related to the critical question (that replaced the observation guide) only in the form of evidence gathered and reflective questions. The researcher reported that the district evidence indicated improvements: High school completion rates rose from 64.1% to 68.9%.

Academic coaching walk-through models were also used to help teachers model instruction. Liz Hanson (2011) described the job of a literacy coach in Minnesota. Hanson

described the walk-through process as not evaluative but a way to notice trends in the school. These walk-throughs were a way to see what practices from previous professional development sessions teachers had implemented. Generally, the literacy coach was looking for a few specific things during a walk-through. These had to do with the focus of the lesson, opportunities for students to have talked or written about text, ways that the teacher modeled instruction, or how the teacher monitored students' progress. The St. Paul coaching model included walk-throughs as one of the five components. The other components were literacy team meetings, formal coaching opportunities, professional learning communities, and weekly meetings with the principal. The literacy coach visited every classroom once every 3 weeks. The walk-throughs were a way to help a literacy coach provide the needed assistance to teachers right away.

Summary of Pros: Do the Walk-throughs Serve Any Purpose?

The upside of the walk-throughs seem to be that they: (a) give valuable data to educational personnel on professional development implementation, (b) provide staff an opportunity to learn from each other, and (c) can be used to notice trends in a school.

All of the aforementioned examples of additional personnel conducting walkthroughs spoke to the wide application of the concept. The diversity of application had occurred because the principal was willing to share the responsibility of the walkthrough, which, again, indicated the differentiation in the *how* of the walkthrough. Although interesting in its scope of *who* could conduct a walkthrough, this study still focused the research on the principal walkthrough.

Cons: Possible Downside to the Principal Walk-throughs

No matter what form the walkthrough took, the bigger question was whether the walkthroughs should have been used at all. The *why* of the walk-throughs have perpetrated some negative outcomes. Barrett (2009) spoke to Valli and Buese's 4-year study of 150 teachers. The study findings indicated that there was the side-effect of heightened anxiety of teachers as teams came to visit their classrooms to make sure they were implementing school district expectations. These walk-throughs caused the teachers to feel under pressure and fear being singled out for doing something wrong. Often, the teachers reacted to the fact that the dictates they are expected to adhere to are externally imposed (often by those completely outside or loosely attached to the field of education) and wondered when any of the district "visitors" had last taught.

If teachers perceived the data collection as superficial or invalid, they lost confidence in its purpose and value, and dismissed the walk-throughs as "drive-bys" or "gotchas." If the trust was low, walk-throughs were perceived as compliance checks, increasing distrust and tension (David, 2008).

Stickney (2009) criticized the entire viability of the walk-through in which administrators made 2-minute visits to classes often with a checklist of things to look for and later discuss with the teacher. As previously discussed, a palm-held computer for tracking observations and generating reports was even being heavily marketed. Hand-held computers or not, Stickney (2009) compared administrators getting out of their offices to cops on a beat and concluded that although administrator awareness was increased, "the advice that they could offer as a result of these observations is of dubious value" (p.213).

Classroom observations and surprise walk-throughs opened up the teacher to the gaze of

the principal (Larsen, 2005). On the surface, that may have sounded like a good thing. While the walk-through was a component of the new teacher-evaluation policies that provide some of the accountability that the public demands, the policies have had a "detrimental effect" (p. 302) on teachers. Larsen concurred with the previous findings: Teacher stress and anxiety levels had increased and school relations had deteriorated with the development of new cultures of fear and mistrust.

Non-tenured, novice teachers to the teaching profession are particularly vulnerable to the whims of the walk-through. In a study of new teachers in New York, Costigan (2008) laments that the "Wal Mart-like schooling now present in the United States, using interchangeable, poorly paid workers (teachers) and a cheap, standardized, one-size-fits-all curriculum (product) operating on a standardized consumer (students, families, public) may simply be too powerful for new teachers to subvert" (p.9).

Stickney (2009) quotes Wittenstein as comparing a 2-minute "talkie" (film) to a 2-minute walk-through of a teaching scene as "decontextualized nonsense" (p. 213). Anticipating impromptu visits, teachers often simulate compliance with reform mandates by decorating their walls with the outward signs of items in the inspector's "look fors." As an alternative approach to the walk-through, Stickney has used a mentor model for a more holistic impression of the student teacher's overall performance. In this case, the walk-through model was actually rejected and was replaced with an alternative model.

Even in the case that teachers are included in the walk-through process, there appear to be pitfalls as demonstrated in a study by Margolis and Huggins (2012). This study involved the hybrid teacher leader or HTL. The HTLs are teachers whose official schedule includes both teaching K–12 students and leading teachers in some capacity. The study included six HTLs

across four school districts over 2 years. One of the hybrid teacher's tasks was to do walk-throughs and other initiatives. However, little thought had been given to *how* the HTLs would execute their duties. The researchers summarized the problems of the hybrid as lack of classroom-centered professional development, lack of accountability, uncoordinated reform efforts, and deteriorating local relationships. In simplistic language, the hybrid teachers were neither teacher nor administrator, and the lack of role definition led to the downfall of the program.

Some of the harshest criticisms of the current walkthrough strategy can be found in the book review of the book, *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning* by City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2010). The four authors wrote that one should expect better systems to be developed than the system of occasional walk-throughs. They proposed a solution to the walk-through problem, that is, a new and improved walk-through model based on the rounds in hospitals. David V. Loertscher (year) reviewed the book and challenged the authors' premise that student learning can increase with more teachers' knowledge and skill. Loertscher discussed the idea that the entire reform movement is on the teachers' shoulders. In fact, he stated, "Again and again, we see in the educational literature everything heaped upon the classroom teacher-the isolated person in the classroom who can, if properly trained and supervised, cause the entire educational system in this country to change." (p. 1)

Costigan (2008) echoes the thought with a narrative from one of the teachers involved in the study. "You know, we're really just canaries in the coal mine for the whole No Child Left Behind experiment" (Rob, second-year teacher, p. 1).

Although standards-based reforms may provide a framework to start thinking about

31

quality teaching, Larsen (2005) also argues that a standardized one-size-fits-all approach ignores the complexity of teaching. Rather than approach educational reform with the sole aim of providing public accountability, the focus needs to be on creating systems and environments that foster excellence.

Summary of Cons: Do the Walk-throughs Serve Any Purpose?

The downside of the walk-throughs seem to be that they (a) heighten the anxiety of teachers; (b) increase the distrust and tension of teachers (if trust is low), which can lead to a new culture of fear and mistrust; and (c) can falsely simulate teacher compliance with reform one-size-fits-all mandates.

The principal is the focal point of the school to which all people involved first look for direction. Roberson and Roberson (2008) argue that as the focal point, it is important that the principal ensure that progress is made toward the improvement of students academically and the teachers professionally. Second, the principal is the instructional leader of the school building, and as such, he or she is accountable for the success or failure of teachers to meet school and district goals and of students to reach performance goals. In sum, the school principal is now held more accountable for student success. It makes good sense to shine the spotlight on the principal as he or she is the leading character in the walk-through theatre of reform.

Synthesis of the Literature Review

The empirical studies are of particular interest as there was a paucity of this type in the literature. Although few in number, these studies were a driving force in conceptualizing the research design. The empirical studies are summarized in Table 1.

32

Table 1

Summary of Literature Review Empirical Studies

Researcher (s)	Sample size	School type	School size	Design	Methods	Findings
Brooks-Long	School district	School district	Unknown	Quantitative	Walk-Throughs + Reflective practice	Increase proficiency rates in Math and Lang. Arts
Fisher, Frey, & Nelson (2012)	44 Schools	Elem. K–6	27,400 Students Chula Vista School District	Qualitative	Interviews Adm. monthly, conduct teacher focus groups quarterly, participate in weekly school wide walk-throughs	41 of the 44 schools met the state expectations (up from 9 of the 44 in 2002)
Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou (2012)	35 Principals	15 Elem. 10 Middle 10 High schools	Unknown	Qualitative content analysis approach to identify emerging themes	30-minute Individual interviews	Elem. principals spent 60%-80% time in classroom; more attuned to curricular issues

Researcher (s)	Sample size	School type	School size	Design	Methods	Findings
Margolis & Huggins (2012)	6 Hybrid teacher leaders + administrators	Four school districts K–12	Unknown	Qualitative	Interviews, On-sight observations, artifacts	Lack of capacity for HTL efficacy
Ramalho, Ärlestig, & Törnsén (2011)	41 Principals, Sweden and 15 U.S. principals	Schools in Texas: elem. middle and high schools	Unknown	Qualitative phenomenological	Observation and analysis of principals' perceptions; nine-week assessment and documentation 25 walk-throughs a week	Principals can create sustained environments for learning.

Researcher(s)	Sample size	School type	School size	Design	Methods	Findings
Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant (2010)	Two inner city principals at two different schools	Mostly Hispanic students 6–10 yrs of age low-income but high-achieving	1) 35 staff, 400 students 2) 550+ students	Mixed methods	Questionnaires one-on-one interviews group interviews	Strong sense of trust among various groups of stakeholders
Spencer, Falchi, & Ghiso (2011)	Two NYC schools	Multi-lingual population dual lang. public school	1) K–8 school 2) K–8 school 2nd grade classroom # of students unknown	Qualitative	Participant/observation of children/teachers; interviewing teachers/admin.; analysis of documentation	Educators and children drew on collaboration and multi-lingualism

(continued)

35

| Walsh (2012) | 70 schools in Howard County Maryland | Grades 3–8 2003, 2009 | Total number of students unknown | Historical review | Statistical compari-son of reading and math. special ed. students | Significant increases in reading and math scores in co-taught classrooms |

The overall summary analysis of the literature review consisted of 41 references, which could be categorized into four main areas. The areas were: (a) theoretical or non-empirical research articles, (b) instructive or instructional how-to articles, (c) descriptive articles, and (d) empirical studies. The breakdown was as follows:

Theoretical	6
Instructive	15
Descriptive	12
Empirical	8

After an analysis of these four categories, the question that was still not answered in the literature was whether the principal walk-through was really the tool in the toolkit that was

meeting the demands of the reform hype. As school districts "invented" their own version of the walk-through to monitor teaching and learning, it was prudent to examine the lens that the districts were choosing to use. To focus on the decision-making of a school district at the first years of its implementation stage might prove helpful to further understand the struggle to define quality teaching and learning. In this manner, the decisions of the principals and what constituted quality teaching and learning could be investigated.

To better understand the rationale and current thinking of the concept, a school district was chosen that had just begun the walk-through implementation process in the 2013-2014 academic year. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the topic of the walk-through as it pertained to the creation of new educational policy in this school district.

What Happens After a Walk-through

Pursuant to the theoretical framework of the principal walk-through was the role of the principal in the school. How the administrator viewed the leadership role might have, indeed, impacted the role of the principal walk-through. The critical question, it appeared, was what happened between the principal and the teachers after the walkthrough? How the principal felt about the process of conducting the walk-through was showcased in this study.

Underlying the walkthrough process was the motivation of the principal in using the walk-through technique. It might have begun with the how the principals philosophically approach their supervision and coaching. Two foundational motivational theories of supervision were explained by Douglas McGregor (1960) in his book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, as cited in English (2010). Traditionally, the typical management style in most schools is the top-down business approach, or Theory X. English (2010) explained the following:

Theory X (Drucker, 1974) is based on the the belief that people have to be

coerced into doing a good job, do not want to work, and lack internal motivation

to grow; therefore, supervision is viewed as the means by which people are forced to

work. Theory Y (Drucker, 1974) is based on the belief that people want to do a good job,

want to work, and have an internal motivation to grow and learn. (p. 3)

English (2010) further explains, "We contend that the type of supervision approach that

will be most effective in improving teaching and learning is that which reflects a supervisory

purpose congruent with a Theory Y approach" (p. 3). English continues:

…to encourage you to see individuals as good people who are working to make a

difference and to contribute. Therefore, posing reflective questions to help the individual

think about his or her own practice is a viable strategy in helping influence a person's

growth and professional practice. (p. 5)

To assist with the accountability movement, "...many administrators have interpreted

accountability to mean that he must revert to 'inspecting' whether people are carrying out the

work" (English, 2010). As this approach mirrored the supervision philosophy of Theory X

(traditional), it would use feedback and a controlling environment, whereas Theory Y

(transformational) would use reflection and a growth environment (Downey & Frase, 2003).

A principal who had a supervision philosophy of a Theory X practitioner would use feedback

after a walk-through; it would be an evaluative approach. A principal who had a supervision

philosophy of a Theory Y practitioner would use reflection after a walk-through, and it would

had been a data collection and coaching approach.

It would be reasonable that a principal's approach, whether it were evaluative or

coaching, might be apparent in how the principal felt about the process of conducting the walk-

through. What the principals believed to be their instructional role might help to clarify the role of the principal walk-through.

Although it would be informative to know how the principals view their role as an instructional leader, it would also be informative to know how they choose to use the walk-through data. As Pitler and Goodwin (2008) postulated, "A number of misconceptions persist about how to use the data generated from classroom walk-throughs. Indeed, some teachers' resistance to walk-throughs was likely due to the fact that they (or their principals or both) were unclear about how to use their observation data" (p. 10). To answer these queries, it followed that the principals would be able to provide this information by asking them about the value and effectiveness of the walk-through.

Crucial to the current investigation were the following research questions:

1. What did principals perceive as the value of the walk-through?

2. How did principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching?

This qualitative study hoped to give insight into the value and effectiveness of the principal walk-through. Central to the research questions was the underlying problem statement: What was the role of the principal walkthrough?

Data were collected from the principals' conversations. More specifically, I conducted face-to-face audio interviews with principals to hear their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about the walk-throughs.

Whether the principal walk-through were simply management by walking around or a daily walk for the health of the school remained to be seen.

Chapter III

Research Design

In a study by Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004), the principal was considered the key education agent at the school level, initiating change by raising the level of expectations for both teachers and students. According to these researchers, so critical was the principal's leadership that a "school cannot achieve its fundamental academic mission without a principal's leadership efforts" (p. 1). What leadership decisions and subsequent actions taken by principals would, by implication, affect teachers in a domino theory effect; what affects teachers will affect students.

Administrators needed to be educational leaders and needed to be more than visible in classrooms. Principals needed to be engaged (DeWitt, 2012). One way to be visible was for the principal to conduct a walkthrough. One of the most common definitions of a walkthrough was "an informal, brief classroom observation(s) used for generic data gathering or focused on specific teaching and learning behaviors" (Oliver, 2009, p. 12).

Purpose of the Study

My purpose for this qualitative case study was to describe the principal's perspective of the efficacy of the principal walk-through as a tool to improve and assess teaching. Principals from selected schools in one district were interviewed to further clarify their feelings and provide insight into how they engage in the process.

As previously discussed, the purpose of walkthroughs was a controversial one. An analysis of the literature review presented both the promotion and condemnation of the current accountability concept.

For some, the practice of classroom walkthroughs, where principals or other instructional leaders spent only minutes observing classrooms to form an impression about the quality of teaching and learning occurring in them, is "preposterous" (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008, p.12). The problem with walkthroughs, according to Saphier (2008), is that they can be easily degraded into superficial acts. Saphier argued that the idea of academic walkthroughs first came to prominence in the 80s and 90s in District 2 in New York City by Anthony Alvarado, Superintendent, who wanted principals to be in classrooms often. Principals were expected to do walkthroughs regularly. The main reason for the practice was symbolic: By showing up in the classroom, the principals were to demonstrate that instruction was important. The walkthrough began as a symbolic gesture.

On the other hand, walkthroughs were becoming more popular with principals. DeWitt (2012) concurred that walkthroughs should be popular with principals because they *were* an effective way to observe what is going on in the classroom. Walkthroughs also provided administrators with the opportunity to establish important connections with students. Simply put, there was no downside to doing walkthroughs in a school (DeWitt, 2012). Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) also argued for the positive aspect of principal walkthroughs. The benefits, according to these researchers, were: (a) administrators become more familiar with the school's curriculum and teachers' instructional practices; (b) administrators can gauge the climate of a school; (c) a team atmosphere develops as teachers and administrators examine instruction and students motivation and achievement; (d) administrators establish themselves as campus leaders and instructional mentors, influencing teaching, learning, and ongoing school renewal; and (e) students see that both administration and teachers value instruction and learning. Both the pro and con sides of why a principal should or should not conduct walkthroughs were robustly

41

represented in the literature.

Besides disagreement over the efficacy, or *why* of the principal walkthrough, there were also different opinions by administrators over the timeframe, or the *how* of a walkthrough. Some administrators stated that classroom visitations should be short while others disagree and believe longer observations reflected a better sense of what went on in the classroom (DeBoer & Hinojosa, 2012).

Despite the recent popularity and appeal of walkthroughs, however, there had been little empirical work to understand their implementation and their use by ordinary school leaders. Thus, it was entirely possible that one's practice of walkthroughs falls short of one's intentions. The dearth in the literature about the actual measurable effect that ensued from principal walkthroughs lead to the natural suggestion about the use of the walkthrough throughout the educational reform movement. The purpose of this study was to investigate the topic of the principal walkthrough.

Research Questions

Although principals were, above all, supposed to be "instructional leaders" (Strauss, 2014, p. 1), time is of the essence as principals could not spend all of their time directly with teachers on the improvement of classroom teaching (Saphier, 2008). What principals do with their time matters. However, in a recent study by Grissom et al. (2013), the researchers reported that time spent on instructional leadership was NOT associated with student learning outcomes (as cited in Willingham, 2014, p. 2). If principals were indeed conducting walkthroughs, were they wasting their time? To capture the essence of the efficacy of the principal walkthrough was at the crux of this study. This analysis lead to the following research questions:

1. What do principals perceive as the value of the walk-through?

2. How do principal walkthroughs help gather formative feedback about

   teaching?

        Central to the research questions was the underlying problem statement:

        What was the role of the principal walkthrough?

As there were little qualitative research on the perspective of the principals conducting the walk-throughs, the study added that perspective.

Design

        The design was a qualitative case study. I used a grounded research approach. Historically, grounded theory emerged in the 1960s as a result of Glaser and Strauss's sociological research program (Walker & Myrick, 2007). As explained by Walker and Myrick, "Grounded theory, although clearly a qualitative method, endeavored to integrate the strengths inherent in quantitative methods with qualitative approaches" (p. 48). At its core, the method enabled the researcher to systematically generate a substantive theory from the data. Grounded theory could be distinguished "from other qualitative methods because of its goal of generating theory together with its completeness of method" (Walker & Myrick, 2007, p. 48). This approach was chosen because, by definition, it is an inductive analysis system that is more open-minded and more context sensitive (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Theory developed in this manner originates from the bottom up rather than from the top down (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Grounded research is appropriate for qualitative research, as qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. According to Bogdan and Biklen, 2007, "They do not search out

data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together" (p. 6). Codes emerged during data collection, and they were grounded empirically. I am open to what the site has to say rather than to force fit the data into pre-existing codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Theories were generated systematically while grounded in empirical data. The conclusions were based on the comments gathered while conducting personal interviews with the participating principals. Questions for the interviews were based on the research questions.

Methodology Rationale

Quantitative leadership behavior studies were still scarce, and perhaps it is because leadership was difficult to quantify in an empirical design. Most of the studies have used surveys to measure behavior. Surveys were limited by the questions that were being formulated, and researchers were constantly focusing on the scientific aspects of human interactions.

There was a paucity of qualitative studies that inquire about perceptions or understandings of principal behaviors. It was my desire to use a qualitative research design to gather investigative data. In qualitative research, interviews may be the dominant strategy for data collection (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Perhaps there was additional information to be learned in a more intimate setting, with more open-ended questions for the school leaders. Surveys also could ask questions; however, the respondent was not given license to elaborate on the responses. In an interview format, the principals were free to tell "their own story." It was my intent to use a case study format and conduct face-to-face interviews with principals for data collection. In-depth interviews within a case study format would possibly help to fill in the gap in the literature.

Site

　　The study occurred in a suburban township in a state located in the northeastern United States. It was a commuting district to a major city. The school district had nine elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools with a student population of over 8,500. This school district was in the embryonic stage implementation of the principal walkthrough. The principal walkthroughs began in the 2013-2014 academic year.

　　 This particular setting was chosen as I hope to utilize a case study rationale as argued by Yin (2003) to capture the representative or typical case. Using this justification, the school district in the study had been economically coded by the Department of Education as having the district factor group as "GH." ("A" being the lowest socioeconomic group while "J" being the highest socioeconomic group.) This designation was the same in 1990 as in 2000, so the economic conditions could be argued as relatively stable. The United States Census Bureau prepared a fact sheet based on the last census in the year 2010. Again, the average family size is 3.52 in the school district, while it is 3.20 for the United States. The White population is 88% compared to the 74% for the United States; however, the school district has a higher percentage of foreign born residents (18% compared to the 13% for the United States). Thus, the school district could be characterized as a typical upper middle class district.

Sample

　　As the principal was the primary person conducting the walk-through observations, it was logical to ask the principals what they had experienced as they implemented this new policy in the school district.

　　At the time of the study, there were a total of 14 principals in the school district. The

school district had nine elementary school principals, three middle school principals and two high school principals. All of the principals were contacted and invited to confidentially participate.

Researcher Bias

I am an employee in the district. I conducted face-to-face interviews with the principals who had consented to participate in the study. Even though I had limited personal experience with walk-throughs, and those experiences had been positive, the intent of this study was to accurately record what the principals thought about the walk-throughs. To reduce researcher bias, I was committed to strictly adhering to the interview questions and did not speak of those personal experiences in any of the interviews. None of the interviewees asked me about any personal experiences, as only the interview questions were discussed.

The qualitative data analysis method of sequential analysis was also chosen, as I did not summarize the words; instead, the actual words of the principals were presented in the data reporting from the transcripts directly recorded at the interviews. Data interpretation proceeded directly from what the principals actually said, as opposed to what I thought they said or hoped that they might say. These practices were employed to reduce my influence on data interpretation.

Data Collection

Interview questions were piloted by a focus group for reliability and validity. Five principals were invited to participate in a focus group to openly analyze the quality of the interview questions. The interactive feedback about the interview questions were used to make

any modifications and changes to enhance the questions' reliability and validity.

Once consent was granted, the participating principals were interviewed at their respective school settings. I asked research-question-based interview questions of the principals. Their responses to the interview questions were audio-recorded for accuracy. I, then, transcribed and typed up the interview responses into transcripts.

Care was taken to maintain transcription quality by addressing the four problems of transcription: (a) sentence structure, (b) failure to include quotation marks, (c) omissions, and (d) mistaking words and phrases for others (Poland, 2001).

The names of the participants were changed for privacy purposes. Thus, each of the participant principals was assigned a letter to protect each participant. Following proper qualitative research protocol, it was imperative that the confidentiality of the respondents' responses be protected and confidential. The data were not stored in an educational setting but in a private home.

Each principal was interviewed once. The interviews varied from 20 minutes to over an hour.

Data Analysis

In this study, the unit of analysis was the principal in a school district. Each principal was identified according to the labels, "A," "B," "C," "D," and "E;" each principal's answers to each of the 12 questions were examined independently. After underlining key terms in the text, these terms were restated with care so as to remain as descriptive and literal as possible. Forty-six typed pages of transcripts were reduced to eight pages by use of the analytical method.

The principals' responses were coded using schema driven by the research questions.

Their comments were confidentially coded after being typed from the interview recordings. Codes were assigned to each interview question. Strategy codes were employed, as "strategy codes refer to the tactics, methods, techniques, maneuvers, ploys and other conscious ways people accomplish various things" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994, p. 177). It was important not to impute motives to the principals' behaviors (Bogdan & Biklen, 1994). Codes were analyzed according to the steps of sequential analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Possible cluster codes were labeled during the analysis process. Most crucial to this decision was on what a specific theme was in the actual data that had been collected, analyzed, and coded. I found a focus from the coding categories and looked to see which had yielded the greatest amount of data. After the narrative responses were analyzed, their relationship to the research questions was discussed in summaries related to each research question. Further comparison to the principals' responses was developed in relationship to the four organizational frameworks to guide school improvement.

After this cross-case analysis of the research data, it was hoped that the qualitative results would provide insight into the principals' perceptions of the value of the walk-through and how the principal walk-throughs helped assess teaching. The principals' voices, opinions, ideas, procedures, and strategies in this study were heard and hopefully could now add to the literary conversation about the principal walk-through.

The results of this study could deepen the conversation about the principal walk-through and whether this new educational leadership element was perceived as a viable assessment tool to access teaching and learning.

Chapter IV

Research Findings

Introduction

My purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the principal's perception of the efficacy of the principal walk-through as a tool to improve and gather formative feedback about teaching. A school district was chosen in the northeastern part of the United States that was a commuting distance to a major city. This school district was chosen as it was in the early stages of walk-through implementation. In the official policy mandates of this school district, the principal walk-through is only mentioned once, and it is listed as an activity that the administrators perform. There was no official policy for the walk-through, per se. The walk-through was a part of an administrative tool kit but otherwise was up to the administrator's (principals') discretion.

At the time of the study, the walk-throughs were in the second year of policy implementation and were directed to be used by the nine elementary principals, three middle school principals, and two high school principals who comprised the principal population of the district.

Population

All of the 14 principals at the time of the study were invited to participate by email. Five principals consented to participate. All five of the consenting principals were at the elementary level. There are two female and three male principals in the sample. One principal was hired from within the district from a supervisor position, while the others were hired from other

districts. It is unknown whether these principals had any formal training on how to conduct walk-throughs.

In this study, individualized interviews took place between the elementary school principal and me. All interviews were conducted at the respective campus at a time that was convenient to each principal.

I asked six questions each related to the two research questions, for a total of 12 questions each.

The first research question was: What did principals perceive as the value of the walk-through? The six interview questions pertaining to that research question were:

1. What is your definition of your walk-throughs, and do you use it as an evaluative purpose?

2. What do you see as the purpose of walk-throughs?

3. What do teachers feel about walk-throughs?

4. Have there been any unexpected outcomes or surprises seen or observed?

5. Have you noticed any patterns or trends?

6. Next year, would you change anything about walk-throughs? If so, what would you change?

The second research question was: How do principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching? The six interview questions relating to that research question were:

1. What do you look for when conducting a walk-through?

2. How long does each walk-through take?

3. How much time, in a week, do you spend on walk-throughs?

4. Do you use a template or rubric?

5. What types of information have you gathered from the walk-throughs?

6. How do you use this information to guide your leadership?

All responses were recorded on an audiotape recorder after the informed consent form was signed and a copy was given to each participant. All of the principals were assigned a number to protect the identity of the participants.

Analysis

Each interview was recorded for accuracy and then transcribed. The raw data of the interviews are the words spoken by the interviewed participants. At this step, "Researchers need to take voluminous amounts of text-based data and reduce that data to a manageable form without losing the embedded meaning" (Daley, 2004, p. 1). The sequential analysis process was utilized (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as it is a method to "attach meaningful labels to data chunks" (p. 89).

The steps in sequential analysis are:

Step 1: Underline the key terms in the text.

Step 2: Restate key phrases. The idea is to remain as descriptive and literal as possible.

Step 3: Reduce the phrases and create clusters.

Step 4: Reduce clusters and attach labels. This is the process of pattern coding. As clusters are reduced in number and are combined to form "meta-clusters," comparisons are made "at the boundaries of each cluster" (p. 87).

Step 5: Generalize about the phrases in each cluster.

Step 6: Generate mini-theories.

Step 7: Integrate theories in an explanatory framework.

As described by the sequential analysis process, key terms in the transcripts were underlined (Step 1). The key phrases were restated as marginal notes on the original texts (Step 2). Using large chart paper, the phrases were reduced and clusters were created (Step 3). The reduced clusters were then typed up for further analysis. From the original over 40 pages of transcripts, the reduced clusters now represented eight papers of clusters (Step 4). Generalizations about the phrases were made about each cluster and from a list of possible codes, codes were chosen (pp. 59–60, Miles & Huberman, 1994) for each reduced cluster. Each reduced cluster code indicated a summation of the participants' responses to each question (Step 5).

The codes that were assigned were user orientation, user motives, effects on organizational climate, critical events, assessments by users, effects on organizational practices, initial user experience, organizational procedures, classroom implementation, readiness, characteristics, and explanations for transformational planning.

These codes were assigned to each individual interview question. The assigned codes, with their interview questions, are listed in Tables 2 and 3.

Research Question 1: What do principals perceive as the value of the walk-through?

Table 2

Assigned Codes for Research Question 1

Interview Question	Assigned Code
What is your definition of a walk-through and do you use it as an evaluative purpose?	User Orientation
What do you see as the purpose of walk-throughs?	User Motives
What do teachers feel about walk-throughs?	Effects on Organizational Climate
Have there been any unexpected outcomes or surprises seen of observed?	Critical Events
Have you noticed any patterns or trends?	Assessment by Users
Next year, would you change anything about walk-throughs? If so, what would you change?	Effects on Organizational Practices

Research Question 2: How do principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching?

Table 3

Assigned Codes for Research Question 2

Interview Question	Assigned Code
What do you look for when conducting a walk-through?	Initial User Experience
How long does each walk-through take?	Organizational Procedures
How much time, in a week, do you spend on walk-throughs?	Classroom Implementation
Do you use a template or rubric?	Readiness
What types of information have you gathered from the walk-throughs?	Characteristics
How do you use this information to guide your leadership?	Explanations for Transformational Planning

The Data

As previously discussed, the interview questions were divided into two groups based on the two research questions. Both sets of questions are attached as appendices. Generalizations about each cluster were made after analysis of the principals' responses. The complete synthesis can be found in the next chapter.

One group of questions was based on the research question: Do principal walk-throughs have any perceived value? The interview questions, with the assigned codes, and the principals' responses were as follows:

1. What is your definition of a walk-through and do you use it as an evaluative purpose? (user orientation)

Principal A: Informal observation.

Principal B: Informal way to be visible and gain a lot of information.

Principal C: They are evaluative.

Principal D: Purposeful visit to a classroom.

Principal E: Brief observation to gather immediate information.

2. What do you see as the purpose of walk-throughs? (User Motives)

Principal A: Get a sense of tone of instruction.

Principal B: Be visible...if teachers are pacing lessons, following curriculum, good classroom management.

Principal C: Get a snapshot...make sure everything is okay in a room.

Principal D: Address the trends that are going on in a building... make sure kids are getting good instruction...see if individual teachers doing great job or need support.

Principal E: To gather information; it is that informal information that the teacher gives.

3. What do teachers feel about walk-throughs? (effects on

organizational climate)

Principal A: At first, a little suspicious-now, welcome in every classroom.

Principal B: Former district more unwelcomed-past purpose to document the monitoring.

Principal C: I learn, you learn, everybody learns-as long as foster trust, they seem okay with it.

Principal D: If you do it right, they welcome it-generally positive if you do it the right way.

Principal E: They are terrified...they want their teaching to be private, but that is not in their best interest or the district's best interest-makes them very self-conscious about their practice.

4. Have there been any unexpected outcomes or surprises seen or observed? (critical events)

Principal A: Yes. Second grade. Saw kids self-managing. Passes ideas on to other teachers.

Principal B: Don't think there have been any surprises...seen some pretty fantastic things in the classroom. Science class...creating own animals; art class, raised tables.

Principal C: One unfortunate surprise. There are moments, 'That was interesting.' Some negative moments...some issues have to address.

Principal D: Can address some issues in a short walk-through. Particular situation, class always in rows...it was one particular instructional method...had I not gone back, I would have been out-of-line.

Principal E: Always surprises...those wonderful surprises. There are those negative surprises...if there is a safe environment, with mutual respect, administrator to teacher, it can be a positive interaction.

     5. Have you noticed any patterns or trends? (assessment by users)

Principal A: Workshop model...three years more comfort with the model. See greater comfort lower grades with new (math) program, less comfort upper grades.

Principal B: Strengths of grade level teams and pacing. Bigger trend in small group instruction.

Principal C: No. Most of my teachers do their job.

Principal D: Seeing trend that math is more standardized. Flip side, ELA is more uneven. Can find a lot of things in these walk-throughs that you can address. Key is really find out what you want will make a measurable impact without overwhelming people.

Principal E: Sure. Our limited understanding of second language learners. We have missed students communicating students' mathematical thinking. Co-teaching looking more like job sharing.

     6. Next year, would you change anything about walk-throughs? If so, what would you change? (effects of organizational practice)

Principal A: If same staff, probably wouldn't change a thing.

Principal B: I was in a building that a lot went on last year. Have to rebuild staff and the climate, culture foremost before huge shifts instructionally. So, focus of walk-throughs will definitely change. Having a focus is important, not enough. How are we going to improve results and involve other people, especially teachers.

Principal C: I don't think do. Don't feel the need to be shifting right now or at any point. We have a solid staff...probably won't see drastic or major changes.

Principal D: Way I do walk-throughs won't change because of the very nature of it. Next year, the sharing would probably change a bit - might want to put verbal comments in writing. So, walk-through took, itself, doesn't change, and I think the frequency shouldn't change, but the focus, and the relationship with the output, changes.

Principal E: District didn't give us a template or a guide in terms of how to do it. The one thing, is, I would like to do it more often. Good structure to help give administrators valuable information about what is happening in the building.

What Did Principals Perceive as the Value of the Walk-Through?: User Orientation

As stated in Chapter 2, one of the most common definitions of a walk-through is "an informal, brief classroom observation(s) used for generic data gathering or focused on generic teaching and learning behaviors" (Oliver, 2009, p. 12). All of the principals in the study were able to provide a workable definition of a walk-through. The principals' definitions established their orientation, or what they thought walk-throughs were supposed to be in their administrative practice. Four out of the five principals in the study used words from the classic definition to define a walk-through. Definitions ranged from "an informal observation," "an informal way to

be visible and gain a lot of information," a "brief observation to gather immediate information," a "purposeful visit to a classroom" to "they are evaluative." Principal C was the only principal to mention that the walk-through was evaluative as part of the initial definition and did not match the classic definition, although this principal did admit that "you see a lot just by going through a room." The dichotomy of responses corresponds to the controversy in the literature. The outcomes of supervision and evaluation are different (Berube & Dexter, 2006). Principal C represented the evaluative aspect of the literature, whereas the other principals represented the supervisory aspect of the literature.

User Motives

The responses to the questions are directly affected by the integration of the *why* walk-throughs are being conducted. The interviewed principals all were able to describe the purpose of the walk-through, albeit that they were all different. Different principals choose to use the principal walk-through in different ways and thus have different user motives. Principal A said that the purpose was to "get a sense of tone of instruction," whereas Principal B thought that the purpose of the walk-through was to "be visible, to see if teachers are pacing lessons, following curriculum and if they had good classroom management." Principal C wanted to "get a snapshot-to make sure everything is okay in a room." The motive of Principal D was to "address the trends that are going on in a building. To make sure kids are getting good instruction and to see if individual teachers are doing a great job or do they need support." Principal E saw the purpose of the walk-through was "to gather information. It is that informal information that the teacher gives." As discussed in the literature, "classroom observations and surprise 'walk-throughs' open up the teacher to the gaze of the principal" (Larsen, 2005, p. 300).

Each of the principals in the study chose what to look at, or gaze at, while conducting each walk-through.

Effects on Organizational Climate

How the teachers felt about the principal visits to their classrooms was of particular interest. In keeping with the literature, teacher responses can be positive or negative. Both of these responses were addressed by principals in the study. The principal responses represented both positive and negative extremes, from Principal D reporting that "if you do it right they welcome it- generally positive if you do it the right way," to the statement from Principal E, "They are terrified. They want their teaching to be private." This aligns with the research finding (Larsen, 2005) that "teacher stress and anxiety levels have increased" (p. 302). If trust is low, walk-throughs are perceived as compliance checks, increasing distrust and tension (David, 2008). Principal E acknowledged though, "that is not in their best interest or the district's best interest. (Walk-throughs) makes them very self-conscious about their practice." Principals A and B both reported having an experience that had some pushback. Principal A said, "At first, (they were) a little suspicious, now, welcome in every classroom," while Principal B recognized that in the "former district (the walk-throughs) were more unwelcomed. In the past, the purpose was to document the monitoring." (To document that a certain number of walk-throughs had been done.) Principal C took a more open and positive view "as long as you foster trust, they seem okay with it." The data suggest that teachers' possible reactions to walk-throughs run the entire spectrum from feeling positive to feeling negative about the walk-through experience and correspond with the findings in the literature.

Critical Events

When asked whether the principals had witnessed any unexpected outcomes or surprises, the data reflected the full extent of possible responses. Current research would agree with this finding as "walkthroughs should be popular with principals because they are an effective way to observe what is going on in the classroom" (DeWitt, 2012, p. 1). A reasonable assumption would be that the principals would see a variety of possible outcomes based on the very nature of the walk-through. Principal A said, "Yes" to a positive surprise, while Principal B stated, "I don't think there have been any surprises." Principal C admitted to seeing "one unfortunate surprise." Principal E combined both outcomes and claimed that there are "always surprises- those wonderful surprises...and there are those negative surprises." Principal D had both outcomes contained within one context. The principal related a story in which a teacher had been judged incorrectly (negative) and the walkthrough confirmed that the teacher was, indeed, following proper procedure (positive). Thus, initially, the principal had falsely judged a teacher from a walk-through, and when the principal did a second walk-through, Principal D realized that "had I not gone back, I would have been out of line." (This principal had observed a certain teacher who started the class in rows and, later on in the instruction, had the students work in small groups. The principal had initially made the wrong assumption that the teacher only had students seated in rows. Doing a second walk-through had clarified this teacher's approach.)

Assessment by Users

The walk-through model was developed to assess the teaching of the faculty. Ginsburg and Murphy (2002) argue that conducting principal walk-throughs allows the administrators to become more familiar with the school's curriculum and teachers' instructional practices. This is

in accordance with the query about if the principals had noticed any patterns or trends from their walk-through data, Principal C flatly replied, "No. Most of my teachers do their job." Principals A and C both had noticed trends in math and the workshop model in language arts, whereas Principal B had noticed strengths of grade level teams and pacing. Principal E lamented the "limited understanding of second language learners." The overarching idea is that the principals could speak to the inquiry and share what was going on in their buildings because of their walk-through experiences. As discussed in the literature, all of the principals in this sample appeared to indeed, be familiar with the school's curriculum and the teachers' instructional practices.

Effects on Organizational Practices

Although it is entirely possible that one's practice of walk-throughs falls short of one's intentions, the principals in this study seemed to feel that the walk-through practice was helpful and adaptive. The versatility of the walk-through model is that the assessment tool can be modified if, indeed, one's practice of walk-throughs falls short of one's intentions or maybe the intentions, themselves, can even change. This was revealed when the question of how the walk-through has affected the organizational practice of the principals was addressed. When questioned whether the principals would change their walk-through protocols the next year, Principal A confided that if there were the same staff, then, "probably wouldn't change a thing." Principal C also "didn't think so, and didn't feel the need to be shifting right now or at any point." Principal D declared that the "way I do walk-throughs won't change because of the very nature of it. Next year, the sharing would probably change a bit and might want to put the verbal comments in writing." These three principals appeared satisfied with their current practice.

Two principals wanted to change their walk-through practice. Principals B and E both

predict that they will be doing things differently next year. Principal B proclaimed that "I was in a building that a lot went on last year. Having to rebuild the staff and the climate, culture is foremost before huge shifts instructionally. So, focus of walk-throughs will definitely change." Principal E concluded that the "district didn't give us a template or a guide in terms of how to do it. The thing is, I would like to do it more often."

The second group of questions was based on the research question: How do principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching?" These interview questions, with assigned codes, and the principals' responses are as follows:

1. What do you look for when conducting a walk-through? (initial user experience)

Principal A: I don't look for anything specific. How is the instruction going? Students engaged? Compliant with district approach? Gives me quick look without the formality of evaluative observation.

Principal B: Different reasons to do walk-throughs. Build relationships. To know what is normal. Building trends. See if PD is effective. See what assistance I or the assistant principal can give to a teacher.

Principal C: Kids engaged? Richness of their discussions. Looking for teacher to be guiding not leading. Looking for organization. What the climate is: the level of engagement and rigor is in the classroom.

Principal D: The district has a lot to do with it. A good walkthrough is never one thing. It just depends on what you are actually for. Anybody who has one template isn't doing it correctly- should be looking for different elements. I have about five different walk-through forms. There is not one walk-through form.

Principal E: Most important thing is student engagement, but with a purpose. Other thing is if the teacher is prepared. (Resources, materials, thoughtful, creative activities. Some form of differentiation.)

1. How long does each walk-through take? (organizational procedures)

Principal A: 10 minutes

Principal B: 5–7 minutes. Somethings, if it is targeted, can catch that in a shorter amount of time.

Principal C: I can always see it as quickly as 5 minutes.

Principal D: I do daily walk-throughs, just 2–5 minutes, just checking in what is going on. More educational walk-throughs, per se, 10–20 minutes with a focus.

Principal E: Some walk-throughs are 1–2 minutes. Most valuable ones are not walk-throughs, but rather, short observations and experience what instruction looks like in the classroom.

2. How much time, in a week, do you spend on walk-throughs? (classroom implementation)

Principal A: Half an hour a day, times five.

Principal B: Two hours a day. Ten hours a week (at least).

Principal C: Couple of hours. A few hours a week.

Principal D: Morning walk-throughs: 40 minutes. Afternoon walk-throughs: probably 40

minutes.

Principal E: Varies during the year. On a daily basis, 1–2 hours. Can be negatively impacted by the responsibilities of the job.

 3.   Do you use a template or rubric? (readiness)

Principal A: No, just anecdotal, holistic. If I did, they would think it is evaluative.

Principal B: Right now, no. Former district had specific walk-throughs forms.

Principal C: Yeah. We use Strong method.

Principal D: It depends. Five-minute walk-throughs is not a template. May carry a notepad or jot it down on my phone. For an official walk-through, though, maybe 10, 15, or 20 minutes. Have five different templates.

Principal E: Yeah, I do. Trained under Danielson. Here we use Strong evaluation tool. Strong doesn't give you a rubric, so I created my own rubric to give a more accurate reading of how the teacher is doing.

 4.   What types of information have you gathered from the walk-throughs? (characteristics)

Principal A: Different techniques I can share with other teachers.

Principal B: See who stronger teachers are, a lot of really good teaching, a lot of higher order questioning and thinking, and student engagement.

Principal C: What teachers are doing instructionally. What their intentions are. Good match for

the kids. Climate, engagement, rigor.

Principal D: Student engagement styles, engagement time (time-on-task), behavioral management tactics, implementation of PD. Really varies. You have individual data and trend data. Individual teachers who need help.

Principal E: Looking for patterns, teacher patterns. Also looking for building-wide patterns. To empower teachers and help them become better.

5.   How do you use this information to guide your leadership? (explanations for transformational planning)

Principal A: With walk-throughs, looking at while building... getting a broader sense of how things are going in the building. Culture, climate, mood...a lot of things you don't get from a formal observation. A great way to be visible...getting a sense of how people are feeling and what they are doing.

Principal B: It is about how I can support teachers. It allows me to plan for the future and to guide who I want to be. Helps me plan faculty meetings. Walk-throughs have helped me see what the teachers are interested in. It has helped me to be an instructional leader.

Principal C: It starts a conversation. It is a basis for a discussion. I feel like I am still a teacher so there is that understanding as well.

Principal D: A real principal who is doing the right thing should be an instructional leader. I put it on the priority list. I look at the walk-through data and ask, 'Is there something I should have my focus on?' Is the building truly doing all they can for the kids, and conversely, am I doing everything for the teachers and work, and say that is something I value. All of those things can

come from a walk-through. You can see it. It can inform your practice pretty well.

Principal E: I use it during the post-conferences. I try to find creative ways to empower teachers. So, over the summertime, I sit down and think about what I saw that year, what were the trends, how do I begin to address those plans, and make plans for the following year.

How Did Principal Walk-Throughs Help Gather Formative Feedback About Teaching?

Initial User Experience

The participants varied in their responses to what they were actually looking for when conducting a walk-through. This is congruent with the literature as, generally, the principal chooses what to focus on during a walk-through. The data should thus reflect a variety of responses as each building has a separate principal responsible for the walk-throughs in that building. The findings were, indeed, varied. Although Principal A said, "I don't look for anything specific," and Principal E said, "The most important thing is student engagement, but with a purpose." Three of the five responded "student engagement." As the walk-through was designed to gather formative feedback about teaching, which, by nature is multifaceted, perhaps the fact that there was a gamut of responses is based on the very nature of walk-throughs. Principal B might have said it best, "There are different reasons to do walk-throughs." Principal D summed it as well, "A good walk-through is never one thing." These responses seemed to agree with the literature as each principal made their individual decision of what to look for while conducting a walk-through.

Organizational Procedures

The reported length of time taken for each walk-through varied among the participants. The range was "1–2 minutes" from Principal E to "10 minutes" from Principal A. Although David (2008) states that walk-throughs can last from "2 to 45 minutes," (p. 2) the data in this study comply more with the finding of Hanson (2011), which state that "walk-throughs are a way of getting into classroom regularly for approximately *ten minutes* to observe instruction" (p. 2). The preponderance of evidence from these data supports the idea that the walk-through is a *quick* snapshot to discover if the teachers are complying with a school district reform strategy/practice or not, but there does not seem to be agreement on how long is long enough for an effective walk-through.

Classroom Implementation

When asked how much time in a week was spent on walk-throughs, all principals purported spending hours every week on walk-throughs. Principal A said "half an hour a day," while Principal B said "2 hours a day." Principal C stated a "couple of hours," while Principal D said, "morning walk-throughs 40 minutes" and "afternoon walk-throughs 40 minutes." Principal E reported "1-2 hours a day," although that could be "negatively impacted by the responsibilities of the job." However often these principals reported visiting the classrooms, the walk-throughs all seemed to "supplement formal, full-length classroom observations, validating or refuting the instruction observed during the scheduled observation" (Skretta, 2007, p. 1).

Readiness

      As reported in the literature, the person doing the walk-through can use checklists, forms, rubrics, or questions. The decision to use a template or rubric appeared to be a point of variance based on perception of the walk-through purpose. Principal A would not use one because "they (the teachers) would think it was evaluative," whereas, Principal C "used the Strong method," which is a formal evaluation tool to assess teachers. Principal D and Principal E had both been formerly employed in districts that used a template for walk-throughs and had created their own templates. Principal D did not believe that the "5-minute walk-through" is a template, but is a "feel" thing. As a result, Principal D developed five different rubrics for a more "official" walk-through of 10, 15, or 20 minutes. Principal B had also been formerly employed in a district that used a template, however, had not chosen to create a personal template at the present time. Again, each individual principal in this study made an individual decision about whether or not to use an instrument or tool to assist in conducting the walk-throughs.

Characteristics

      The types of information gathered go to the heart of the idea of assessing the teacher's performance in the classroom. Each principal gathered different types of data. The characteristics of the recorded data ranged from different techniques the principal could share, to seeing who the stronger teachers were, to viewing what the teachers are doing instructionally, to student engagement styles, to looking for teacher patterns. Principals D and E also reported looking for those teachers who needed assistance. Principal D looked for "individual teachers who need help," while Principal E wanted to "empower teachers and help them become better." These two principals were looking at their teachers "as adult learners who work best when

actively engaged in the improvement process" (Derrington, 2011, p. 1). The two responses

suggest a data alignment with the research done by Cobb (2005) that if the focus is on student

learning, not teacher performance, walk-throughs can establish a sense of shared responsibility

for student learning between administrators and teachers.

Explanations for Transformational Planning

When asked how the principals used the walk-through data to guide their leadership, all

the principals reported that the walk-throughs did inform their leadership. Principal A stated that

"You are getting a broader sense of how things are going in the building-culture, climate, mood-

a lot of things you don't get from a formal observation." Principal B said that "it is about how I

can support teachers...walk-throughs have helped me see what the teachers are interested in."

Principal C related that "it starts a conversation...It is the basis for a discussion. I feel like I am

still a teacher so there is that understanding as well." Principal D reflected on the role of being a

leader and stated:

> A real principal who is doing the right thing should be an instructional leader. I put it on
>
> the priority list. I look at the walk-through data and ask, "Is there something I should
>
> have my focus on? Is the building truly doing all they can for the kids, and conversely,
>
> am I doing everything for the teachers and work, and say that is something I value?" All
>
> of those things can come from a walk-through. You can see it. It can inform your
>
> practice pretty well.

Principal E used the walk-throughs to encourage reflection as well and stated:

> I try to find creative ways to empower teachers. So, over the summertime, I sit down and
>
> think about what I saw that year, what were the trends, how do I begin to address those

plans, and make plans for the following year.

It is my opinion that all of the five principals used the walk-through data to improve their instructional leadership.

Chapter V

Conclusion and Recommendations for Practice, Policy and Further Study

Data Synthesis

The purpose of the qualitative study was to investigate the topic of the principal walk-through. As the principal is the person conducting the walk-through observations, it was logical to ask the principals about their opinions, ideas, procedures, and strategies in regard to the role and the concept of the principal walk-through. Principals were interviewed, and their responses were taped so that the principals' thinking could be recorded for accuracy.

The study revolved around the ideas of perceived value and effectiveness. Specifically, the two research questions were:

What do principals perceive as the value of the walk-through?

How do principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching?

Six questions each, for a total of 12 questions, were asked of each participant. The following is the completion of the sequential analysis in Steps 5, 6, and 7: generalizations about the phrases in each cluster, generating mini-theories, and finally, integrating theories in an explanatory framework typically referred to as the synthesis of the data. The explanations will follow each coded segment for clarity purposes. The data findings in this study will also be compared and contrasted with current research data findings in the literature review.

Summary of Data: Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What do principals perceive as the value of the walk-through?

In the coded category of user orientation, all of the principals were able to define what walk-throughs were, and the definitions aligned closely with what the literature stated. Four of the five principals used the walk-through in a non-evaluative manner. The principals in this study established motive to use the walk-throughs through the responses to: What do you see as the purpose of walk-throughs? (user motives). These responses garnered critical insight to whether the principals' practice of walk-through utilization had any perceived value. All five of the principals gave different responses. One principal said the purpose was to "get a sense of the tone of instruction," while another principal's purpose was to see "if teachers are pacing lessons, following curriculum, good classroom management." A third principal, who had the evaluative perspective, stated that the purpose was to "get a snapshot-make sure everything is okay in the classroom." Another principal said that the purpose was to "address the trends that are going on in a building-make sure kids are getting good instruction-see if individual teachers doing great job or need support." The last principal purported that the purpose of the principal walk-through was "to gather information; it is that informal information that the teacher gives." Although the principals' responses are different, they were all related to their role as an instructional leader. The principals were using the principal walk-throughs for their individual purposes.

Along with principal-specific application of the walk-throughs, all the principals could speak to how the teachers felt about the walk-throughs in their buildings. It was noted by all of the principals that there could be teacher pushback unless the principal fosters trust, as Principal

C stated, then "they seem okay with it." This response also corroborates the findings in the literature of heightened anxiety of teachers if trust is low. The principals were able to notice if anything was out of the ordinary. Every principal examined the walk-through data. Four out of the five principals noticed patterns or trends, which could give the principals a valuable assessment tool to know what was happening instructionally in the classrooms. Even though some of the principals were content with their personal protocols, other principals had decided to make changes to improve their walk-through administration.

Walk-throughs were used with conviction as each principal reported conducting walk-throughs on a weekly basis. The principals in this study implied that the walk-through strategy had perceived value to the principals as evidenced by their responses to the user orientation and user motives questions. In summary, Principal E may have said it best, "Walk-throughs are a good structure that help give administrators valuable information about what is happening in the building."

Summary of Data: Research Question 2

Research Question 2: How do principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching?

The principals in this study used the walk-throughs to gather formative feedback about teaching. In the coded category of initial user experience, the principals varied in what they looked for when conducting a walk-through. One principal "didn't look for anything specific," while another stated that "it just depends on what you are actually looking for." Two principals said that student engagement was what they were looking for, while another principal stated that

there were "different reasons to do walk-throughs." Even though they all looked for different things when conducting walk-throughs and collected different types of data as instructional leaders, the principals in this study used the walk-throughs to observe the teachers and how student learning was being cultivated. This finding corresponds to the literature that the practice of the principal walk-through gives helpful information to the educational personnel. Even though the principals spent various amounts of time per week going in the classrooms to assess the teachers, all of the principals in this study appeared to use the walk-through as a snapshot to what was happening in their respective buildings. So, even though there was variation in the data, the administrator (principal) walk-throughs should focus on giving teachers information and feedback that will improve the quality of the learning strategy instruction they provide to their students (Lenz, 2006). The lack of uniformity in the use of templates or rubrics might stem from the fact that the school district policy does not require the use of one at this writing. The principals' use of a template or rubric is left to the discretion of the individual principal. Based on the principal statements in this study to the questions in initial user experience, the argument could be made that the use of principal walk-throughs are an effective way of gathering formative feedback about teaching.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of the principal walk-through. Analysis of the data indicates that the principal walk-through has perceived value and is an effective way of gathering formative feedback about teaching by those principals who participated in the study. One of the limitations of the study was the sample size; however, the range of responses seemed to cover many scenarios of reported use of the walk-through model.

74

Although the implementation of the principal walk-through was in its formative stage in the school district under investigation, it appears that the individual principal is adapting this strategy to their leadership style. When viewed through the conceptual framework of the Theory X or Theory Y management style, what happens after a walk-through is critical to the instructional role of the principal. How the principal uses the data collected in a walk-through answers the question of whether the principal sees the role of the principal as a business supervisor or as an instructional coach. The motivation of the principal using the technique is the key to the role of the principal walk-through. English (2010) posits that the conversation after the walk-through in a reflective practice is a transformational situation. "The principal and the teacher are working within a true collegial relationship and both questions and replies are initiated by each" (p. xxi). Four out of the five principals in this study perceived the walk-through from a coaching perspective. One principal said that it was used "during post-conferences. I try to find a creative way to empower teachers." Another principal who used the data in a coaching model said, "It is about how I can support teachers." One principal just stated bluntly, " A real principal who is doing the right thing should be an instructional leader." Even the principal who said that walk-throughs were evaluative stated that walk-throughs "start a conversation." However the principals perceive their instructional role, the principal walk-through tool is morphing to meet their administrative needs.

Most impressive was how potentially powerful the walk-through model is to the principal's best practice. Even though it is part of the principal's job description that "one of the responsibilities of an instructional leader is to conduct multiple walk-throughs and provide constructive feedback" (Grigsby et al., 2010, p. 5), the role of the principal as well as the role of the principal walk-through seems to be evolving. The principals in this study have used the

walk-through technique, not only to meet the demands of policy, but also to reflect upon how to improve their own role in education. In the coded category, explanations for transformational planning (How do you use this information to guide your leadership?) one principal stated that you get (from a walk-through) "culture, climate, mood- a lot of things you don't get from a formal observation." The principal walk-through seems to give important information to the school leaders that they may not have gotten in a more formal assessment format. It appears to give principals the opportunity to be more honest, open, and helpful to the teachers about the instruction and learning taking place in the school. The principal walk-through, although originally conceived to be a tool to assess teachers' performance in the classroom, has developed into a motivational tool for the principals to change and grow as well as the teachers. In conclusion, Principal C said it best, "We are all in a learning process. I learn. You learn. Everybody learns."

Conceptual Framework Synthesis

In Chapter 2, four distinct theoretical frameworks to guide school improvement were discussed. When compared to the strategic codes, it is interesting to note that some of the codes and data could be applied to these models.

The first model, the continuous improvement model by W. Edwards Deming (2000), spoke to eliminating fear. This idea was addressed in the code effects on organizational climate that was related to the interview question, What do teachers feel about walk-throughs? All of the principals inferred that they understood that teachers are fearful of the "observation-evaluation-correction cycle of typical traditional supervision model" (English, 2010, p. xxi). According to Evans et al. (2012),

An effective principal would identify the source of fear and then specifically address its

source. For example, if it were related to making a mistake, the principal would work to

help the teacher develop methods to learn from mistakes, make improvements, and then

reinforce a culture of learning from mistakes. (p. 158)

Principal C acknowledged that as long as the principal was able to foster trust (with the

teachers), then they (the teachers) were okay; whereas Principal D said that the teachers were

generally positive if you do it (the walk-throughs) the right way. In this study, there was not a

clear explanation from the principals concerning how these principals "fostered trust" or were

"generally positive;" however, the inference here is that these principals were somehow

eliminating fear.

Critical to the idea of sharing power and leadership is what happens between the

principals and teachers after a walk-through. Organizational democracy might enable the

teachers and principals to share their insights and freely discuss their concerns. In addition, there

must exist in the workplace a culture of care (Von Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000). Principals

must establish a climate of trust.

The second model previously discussed was the organizational learning model by Chris

Argyris and Donald Schön (1996). In order for organizational learning to occur, an organization

must employ strategies to systematically integrate individual and collective learning into skills

and knowledge that will deeply affect the organization. In this study, only Principal A alluded to

sharing the information that was gathered from the walk-throughs with other teachers. If that

process actually occurs, then that would indicate a double-loop system was occurring; that is,

there might be a chance of core values or beliefs shifting.

The third model discussed in Chapter 2 was the learning organizations model by Peter

Senge (2006). Personal mastery was one of the tenets of the model. As stated by Evans et al. (2012),

> ...leaders can foster personal mastery in their staff by acting as role models. A principal's constant thirst for new knowledge and perspectives, effort to develop skills, and a keen interest in learning alongside teachers will not go unnoticed and will serve as an inspiration to others. (p. 163)

Principal C demonstrated this willingness to learn by saying, " I learn, you learn, everybody learns." This was the only principal who indicated the personal mastery philosophy in the responses to the interview questions. It is unclear whether the other principals communicated this philosophy of personal mastery to their teachers.

The final previously discussed organizational framework to guide school improvement efforts is the appreciative inquiry model by Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2005). The one principle of this model that can be applied to this study is the anticipatory principle. Evans et al. (2012) posit that "...having a strong, shared vision about the future is critical to creating that future" (p. 166). When the principals in this study were asked if they would change anything about their walk-through procedure next year, Principal B spoke to sharing goals with the teachers. This first-year principal said:

> I was in a building that a lot went on last year. Have to rebuild staff and the climate, culture, foremost before huge shifts instructionally. So, focus of walk-throughs will definitely change. Having a focus is important, but not enough. How are we going to improve results and involve other people, especially teachers?

In this response, this principal inferred sharing a vision with the teachers and that it was important to build up the climate and culture of the school, which lines up with the idea of

communicating a strong, shared vision of the future.

Recommendations for Practice

The first recommendation would be to choose a school reform theoretical framework to follow. "Many education leaders lack an understanding of the underlying theoretical structures associated with successful change. This is especially true for principals, who are at the heart of organizational change for our public schools" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 155). Any of the previously discussed four frameworks adapted to guide school improvement as suggested by Evans et al. (2012) would be highly recommended. As they explained, "Each approach has pros and cons. Each will require principals to possess skills, knowledge, and a deep understanding, each of which are approach specific" (p. 168).

This recommendation naturally leads to the second, which would be to obtain the necessary professional development to orchestrate effective change. Professional development for experienced leaders is often overlooked and is a critical element in school improvement efforts (Evans et al., 2012). None of the principals who participated in this study received any professional development from the district on how to conduct walk-throughs.

Congruent with that observation, the third recommendation would be to learn how to conduct a walk-through so that it would have the strongest influence on school change. The book, *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-through-Changing School Supervisory Practice One Teacher at a Time* (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase & Poston, 2004), cited by several authors in the literature (Black, 2007; English, 2010) should be a good place to begin. As stated in the book, the characteristics of the principal walk-through that work the best according to Downey, et al. (2004) are that they be: informal, brief, unannounced, focused, non-evaluative, and

79

reflective.

One of the principals in the study saw the walk-throughs as evaluative, which is contrary to what appears to work the best for school improvement. Perhaps that would have changed with professional development and/or how-to knowledge of how to conduct a reflective walk-through.

In this study, the principals reflected on their practice when they were asked the code, effect on organizational practices, which was the interview question, Next year, would you change anything about walk-throughs? If so, what would you change? Although only one principal purported that the walk-through format would change, a second principal had planned on changing the rubric, while a third principal's change was to do walk-throughs more often. In order for principals to be agents of change, they should change their walk-through protocol and allow the teachers to reflect on their practice as well.

The reflective walk-through protocol, in particular, would be the fourth best practices recommendation. Knowing how to conduct a walk-through is one thing; knowing what to do after a walk-through is quite another. According to English (2010), in the name of managerial efficiency, sometimes the reflective piece of the Downey model is omitted. English argues with "greater clarity the importance, difference, and criticality of the reflective conversation not only as a way to improve teaching practice in classrooms, but as a way to democratize relations within schools between teachers and administrators" (p. xvi).

The power of the reflective walk-through has been demonstrated by the Brooks-Long (2012) study that showed when reflective practice was implemented, both teacher practices and student proficiency showed growth.

Democratizing relations within schools would be the fifth recommendation. Distributed or shared leadership style should be a best practice. It would alleviate the fear factor of the

80

teachers that has been mentioned in the literature and was also mentioned by every principal in the study. As Principal D said, "If you do it right (walk-throughs), they welcome it- generally positive if you do it the right way."

One evidence-informed way would be in a school with instructional leaders that value teachers' input and thoughts.

Another recommendation for best practices would be to incorporate the ideas of Ginsberg and Murphy (2002). They believe that the key to walk-through success is consistency and commitment. Together, they say, teachers and administrators can determine their school's approach by asking several important questions. Ginsberg and Murphy suggest using the following questions:

1. How can the walk-through process contribute to our school's approach to renewal?

2. What are some of the reasons for conducting periodic walk-throughs? Who should visit the classroom? Which rooms? How often?

3. What questions should observers bring to walk-throughs? What questions should observers ask students?

4. What other data can we gather and analyze to complement insights from walk-throughs?

5. How can we create a positive experience for all participants?

By working with the teachers to develop a custom-made walk-through for the school, the teachers could "buy-in" to the walk-through protocol for school improvement. This collaboration would help to foster trust in the principal's role as an instructional leader as well as their role in guiding school change efforts.

An additional practice recommendation would be to encourage a shared vision within the school setting. Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) alluded to a shared vision in the creation of a school's walk-through protocol. Shared vision was one of the common components to *all* of the four theoretical frameworks for school change. As stated by Evans et al. (2012), "Having a strong, shared vision about the future is critical to creating that future. Discussion, dialogue, and inquiry are tools that help members of any organization develop and sustain an effective shared vision" (p. 166).

In order to have a shared vision, there must be a paradigm shift; the business model's traditional approach to supervision is "no longer a viable means for effecting lasting change in the classroom" (English, 2010, p. 6).

Just as in most historical and political movements, true change usually develops from the bottom up and not from the top down; change in public schools should begin from the bottom up as well. The newer adapted school models will require the principals to be the agents of change for instructional improvement. The practical aspect of this shift might include professional development for the instructional leaders so that they might ground the walk-through data in an organizational change framework. These knowledge-building recommendations were previously addressed in best practices.

The philosophy of "expecting rather than inspecting and respecting rather than directing" (English, 2010, p. 6) will move the culture and climate of a school from surviving to thriving. This can be a shift for some, especially in the recent era of accountability "where deficits and failures have been highlighted" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 168). However, with professional development and additional training in discourse protocols of communication to implement a more reflective type of walk-through, this shift is very doable.

This idea leads to another practice recommendation, and that is to create a positive experience for all of the people involved in the school improvement efforts. Creating a positive experience for all participants is at the core of the theoretical framework, appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2005). The stages of discovery, dream, design, and destiny in this model for organizational change require all the stakeholders to identify what they are doing well, to imagine all the possibilities based on their values and successes, to increase their awareness of the power of intention, and finally, to collaborate and discuss contributions that each can make to the vision.

The use of positivity is the final practice recommendation. Principals, teachers, staff, faculty, students, parents—all of the stakeholders in an educational setting—would benefit from a culture of team-building and respect and caring. From a practical, financial point of view, a change in outlook costs the organization nothing; however, the benefits would be recognizable.

As cited in Fullan (2001), Lewin and Regine affirmatively state,

Actually, most people want to be part of their organization; they want to know the organization's purpose; they want to make a difference. When the individual soul is connected to the organization, people become connected to something deeper-the desire to contribute to a larger purpose, to feel they are part of a greater whole, a web of connection. (p. 27)

Although this study revolved around the perceptions of the principal, it would seem that the perceptions of the teachers are valuable as well. Connecting each stakeholder to the organization in a positive way promotes a positive environment for organizational change. This idea of appreciating the value of each person in the educational community is at the core of the appreciative inquiry framework. "Positive inquiries lead to positive outcomes and positive

83

outcomes promote creativity, energy and joy within an organization" (Evans et al., 2012, p. 166).

Changing one's viewpoint could cost time, patience, and perseverance instead of dollars:

however, that investment could be well worth it.

The principal walk-through is a formative assessment tool to promote improvement.

Connecting each stakeholder to the wisdom of the positive effects of the principal walk-through

might just lead to those positive outcomes of improvements in student achievement. Tapping

into the "web of connection" —that we are all in this together—is a powerful motivator for

growth and positive change.

Recommendations for Policy

One of the definitions of policy, as described by Fowler (2004), is "the dynamic and

value laden process through which a political system handles a public problem. It includes a

government's expressed intentions and official enactments as well as its consistent patterns of

activity and inactivity" (p. 9). Often, policy implementation requires financial considerations. In

sensitivity to budgetary concerns, all of the following policy recommendations are at a minimum

financial expenditure.

In conversation with the Commissioner of Education, the first recommendation would be

to encourage a more open-ended model of principal walk-through policy throughout the school

districts across the state. Rather than a rigid number of required walk-throughs, for example, it

might prove prudent or wise of the commissioner to manage the affairs of the individual school

districts by distributing that authority to the auspices of the individual instructional leaders. This

is central to the idea posited by Evans, Thornton and Usinger (2010) that principals and district

leaders "rely more on individualistic approaches to change rather than system-wide strategies

based on a common, articulated framework" (p. 155).

In this study, the principals were allowed the freedom to adapt and modify the walk-through form and function according to the instructional needs within their educational communities. These principals were able to make their own meaning of the walk-through and were permitted the flexibility to build instructional coherence according to their situation-specific standards.

Removing the educational policy constraints of a mandatory number of walk-throughs frees the institutional leaders in other school districts to make their own meaning as well. This recommendation could apply to the federal educational policy-makers who continue to make policies for the states. In this case, less may be more as less regulation may lead to more school improvement in student achievement scores.

Less is also the theme of the second policy recommendation to the Commissioner of Education of this state and that would be to have less evaluative teacher observations. The number of evaluative observations were increased to two a year for tenured teachers in New Jersey. This recent change from one evaluative observation to two evaluative observations means that instructional leaders now must meet more time requirements for observations rather than have the time to conduct as many walk-throughs. As one of the principals in the study said, "I would like to do it (conduct walk-throughs) more often." If the principals have less time to conduct walk-throughs, then there might be less time to monitor the teaching and curriculum in the school building.

The third policy recommendation to the Commissioner of Education would be to inspire a positive shared vision with the school districts to promote optimum growth. This would be an analysis of what every school district was doing right. The use of positivity, as suggested by the

appreciative inquiry model previously discussed, would focus on the strengths of each school and each school district. Beginning with what was being done well by all the stakeholders in the district would help to establish a climate of trust in each educational community. The use of positivity would be to support a more positive approach to student achievement gain by building trust and eliminating fear. After the positive inquiries were completed, then an examination of areas of possible academic growth might be reviewed.

This approach is quite different from what is the current policy derived from high-stakes testing and school accountability. The current policy environment of the government's expressed intention is to punish school districts by state take-overs when student achievement scores are low. At this writing, student achievement scores constitute 30% of the principal and teacher summative evaluations in the state of New Jersey. Therefore, it is in the highest and best interest for student achievement scores to be the best that they can be, not only for the sake of the students who are learning, but also for the sake of the principals and teachers whose job security is inextricably tied to these assessments. Alleviating the high-stakes testing modality so that there is less "teaching to the test" but more teaching to the academic needs of each student might be the strongest policy recommendation that can be made. Indeed, reducing the anxiety, fear, and stress of all the stakeholders in a K–12 school might be the best educational reform idea of all.

In conclusion, being a modern instructional leader in a school setting requires best practices wisdom combined with visionary leadership to orchestrate meaningful organizational improvements. It is my hope that these policy recommendations would support their efforts during this era of school reform.

Further Study

As defined in this study, a walk-through is an organized observation of a teacher using a schema that focuses on instruction and learning. While this study focused on the perceptions of the principal conducting the principal walk-through, it might be helpful to look at the teacher's perspective of the walk-through was well. As it was only mentioned in one question in the interviews, it would be informative to get a more authentic view of the teacher's feelings, ideas, and thoughts about the walk-through. The first recommendation would be to do this qualitative study from the perspective of teachers.

A second recommendation for further investigators involving teachers would be to add a teacher survey to the investigation. The additional use of a survey for a mixed methods approach might capture the teachers' perceptions of the principal walk-through. As purported by David (2008), if teachers perceive the data collection as superficial or invalid, they lose confidence in its purpose and value and dismiss the walk-throughs as "drive-bys" or "gotchas." The teachers' viewpoints would add another dimension to the data as they would add a current teacher viewpoint to the body of literature.

These additional teacher studies would also bolster the qualitative and quantitative literature on the topic. As previously discussed, there is a paucity of quantitative studies on the walk-through subject. Hopefully, in the future, more studies will address this aspect.

Thirdly, other models, as previously mentioned in the literature, might warrant further investigation as well. Other variations of the walk-through model, such as the collaborative

walk-through model that includes other teachers, as well as the teacher-reflective model, might be instructive and add to the body of literature about the how and why of the walk-through.

Another recommendation for further study would be a longitudinal study in which training would be provided to the principals and teachers on the conceptual frameworks for organizational school reform as well as training on the reflective walk-through for both principals and teachers. Comparison to the baseline student proficiency information before the professional development to future student proficiency performance post professional development might be particularly informative.

Whatever the content of further investigations, I would recommend a larger sample size. A larger sample size would increase the reliability of the data.

In conclusion, as instructional leaders, the principal's role in the school is to make firsthand classroom observations that "can paint a picture to inform improvement efforts" (David, 2008, p. 2). Downey, Steffy, Poston, and English (2010) state that "the walk-through yields the type of information we need to be able to assist the teacher in reflecting on his or her own practice and in making decisions about how to best improve the delivery of the curriculum" (p. 7). The times are changing. Cobb (2005) spoke to that change when he declared that principals are being asked to take on the role of change agent in their schools. The walk-through might just prove to play that constructive role that will help the instructional leaders adapt to that change.

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Appendix A

Research Question: What do principals perceive as the value of the walk-through?

Interview Questions:

1. What feedback, if any, have you had from teachers about walk-throughs?

2. Have there been any unexpected outcomes or surprises?

3. Have you noticed any patterns or trends?

4. What do you see as the purpose of walk-throughs?

5. Would you recommend the adoption of walk-throughs to another school district?

6. Next year, would you change anything about the walk-throughs?

Appendix B

Research Question: How do principal walk-throughs help gather formative feedback about teaching?

Interview Questions:

1. What do you look for in a walk-through?

2.   How long does each walk-through take?

3.   How much time, in a week, do you spend on walk-throughs?

4.   Do you use a template or rubric?

5.   What types of information have you gathered from the walk-throughs?

6.   How do you use this information to guide your leadership?

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

November 16, 2015

Karen L. Holgersen
P. O. Box 3382
Wayne, NJ 07474

Dear Ms. Holgersen,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled "The Role of the Principal Walk-Through." Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. 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 document.

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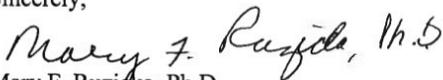
Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Daniel Gutmore