Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve School Operations
Administrator Academy Course #1018

LaGrange Area Department of Special Education
Holiday Inn – Countryside, IL
September 15, 2011

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Don has been a workshop trainer for the Illinois Administrators Academy (a middle management training series of professional development opportunities offered statewide in Illinois for public school administrators) since 1985, as well as a workshop presenter for the Illinois Principals Association (IPA) and the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA). From 1996 through 2003, Don served as an executive consultant at State Farm Corporate. He worked particularly with Corporate HR in the planning and delivery of the Advanced Management Seminars (AMS). Don also served as a certified trainer with Motorola, Inc. for their formerly offered Leadership Development Institutes (LDI) for school superintendents and Executive Leadership Institutes (ELI) for school principals. These were management programs that focused on Visionary Leadership, Collaborative Team Building, Strategic Thinking, and Championing Change.

Don presently serves as a facilitator of planning having done facilitation work over the past fifteen years with such groups as the McLean County Health Department, Joliet Junior College Board of Directors, Illinois State University Alumni Association and College of Education, Economic Development Council of McLean County, Willco Area Career Center (Will County) and Capital Area Career Center (Springfield), Department of Human Services at State Farm Corporate, the Community Hospital of Ottawa, as well as a vast number of school district boards and school community planning groups.

He is an active member of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), in which he served a three-year appointment on the ASCD 21-member board of directors (2007-2010), Learning Forward (formerly National Staff Development Council, and Phi Delta Kappa (PDK). He holds his bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees in Education from Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

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Many different labels for walkthroughs

Looking Back: Abraham Lincoln  
Looking Back: Business Book

Management by Wandering Around (MBWA)
Table Group Discussion

Directions: Take a few minutes and share with others at your table your walks through schools.

How often and long do you visit classrooms?

To what are you giving attention?

Do you use a checklist or take written notes during your walks?

Do you give feedback about the walkthrough observations?
Why the increasing interest...
Instructional Leadership
Coaching/Mentoring
Learner Focused
Professional Learning Communities
Implementation of initiatives

Walkthroughs are...

Informal and ________________
Conducted by __________________________
Quick ___________________
NOT intended for __________________________
An opportunity for __________________________
Aimed at improving __________________________

Walkthrough Components

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In a California school district central office, staff members conduct “learning walks,” briefly visiting school classrooms and entering data into PDAs. A principal in Tennessee schedules what she calls, “learning walks,” as well, this time conducted by grade-level teams visiting their own classrooms and examining the success of a particular teaching strategy that they have all agreed to try. In a Pennsylvania school district, “walk-throughs” consist of structured interviews of students in the school’s hallways.

A large urban district in Illinois requires all sites to conduct what it calls “learning visits,” allowing each site to design its own process. Implementation of this mandate ranges from a high school where a few administrators walk through classrooms with a 52-item checklist to an elementary school where all teachers visit each others’ classrooms to observe for a teaching strategy and engage in an open conversation guided by three reflective questions.

Learning walks, walk-throughs and the like are being conducted around the country, and the results range from thoughtful discussions among practitioners about teaching practice, to the compilation of mountains of unused data gathered by self-appointed inspectors.

Teachers have traditionally worked in relative isolation, as “independent artisans’ exercising their craft behind closed doors. The ’80s and ’90s saw rising interest in mentoring and peer coaching, interactions that were primarily one-to-one.

Popularizers of Visitations

Informed by Peter Senge’s work on learning organizations and Etienne Wenger’s work on communities of practice, group classroom visitations have grown in popularity in recent years. Among the key popularizers of the concept are Tony Alvarado and Elaine Fink, formerly of New York City’s District 2, who organized principals and teachers as professional learning communities that frequently conducted group classroom visitations.

Lauren Resnick has built upon this approach and is now helping districts across the country implement what she calls “Learning Walks” through her Institute for Learning. Other organizations and consultants promote similar practices. Doug Reeves and the Center for Performance Assessment support districts to implement walk-throughs for the purpose of data gathering.

Carolyn Downey trains principals to conduct “Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Throughs.” The Lesson Study model has engaged teachers in crafting, testing and analyzing teaching in a public process.

Through multiple pathways, teaching is becoming a public professional practice; classroom doors are opening to principals and colleagues.

Clear Expectations Needed

As school sites and districts hop onto this bandwagon, there is a lot of unnecessary fumbling going on because of a lack of clarity around purpose, participants and process.

Done well, classroom visitations tied to professional learning communities and continuous improvement processes have transformative power. Done poorly, they can produce hostility and distrust, and will become on more passing fad in the long and disappointing history of school reform.

There are lots of valid reasons for visiting classrooms, many possible participants, and many processes that can be tied to those visits. No one model is sufficient to support a systemic school improvement process. It is essential that before a school or district begins a classroom visitation program, everybody is clear about what to expect and what their role is to be in the process.

The purpose of this article is to establish a typology of classroom visitations that might help schools and districts to achieve that clarity. The suggested categories and processes I share here are not meant to be exhaustive. It is easy to imagine dozens of variations on these models. Instead, think of this typology as a place to start, subject to the interests and inventiveness of your own professional community.

Characteristics of Visitations

Brief systematic classroom visitations can take a variety of forms and can serve a variety of purposes. At their core, they share some common characteristics:

1. They are intended to develop and support professional learning communities focused upon improving teaching and learning.
2. They are tied to the strengthening of a teaching profession in which practice is public and informed by standards.
3. They are grounded in a commitment to support the success of every student and every teacher.
4. They are organized around clear and public processes and protocols, are evidence-based, and are linked to continuous cycles of inquiry.
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Frequency &amp; Other Considerations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Data Walks</td>
<td>Teachers, teacher leaders, site administrators, central office, community, cross-site teams</td>
<td>Observers gather quantitative data to assess needs and program implementation at site and district levels. Data are aggregated to focus upon grade levels, departments, sites and programs, not individual teachers.</td>
<td>One to four times per year, announced.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Walks</td>
<td>Teachers, teacher leaders, site administrators</td>
<td>Observers gather quantitative and qualitative data to inform conversations and action planning in site-level professional learning communities.</td>
<td>Quarterly to monthly, typically announced.</td>
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<td>Peer Coaching</td>
<td>Teacher colleagues, teacher leaders</td>
<td>Teachers observe one another with the goal of providing mutual feedback and opportunities for reflection upon individual practice.</td>
<td>Quarterly to monthly, with sanctioned time for debriefing, announced.</td>
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<td>Principal Professional Learning Walks</td>
<td>Site administrators, central office, cross-site administrator teams</td>
<td>Administrators engage in shared observations in order to improve and calibrate their observation and teacher coaching skills and better understand best practices and needs across sites and among schools.</td>
<td>One to four times per year, announced or unannounced.</td>
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<td>Quick Visits</td>
<td>Site administrators and other support providers, often solo</td>
<td>Data informs coaching support directed to individual teachers by supervisors and other support providers, and informs the formal supervision/evaluation process.</td>
<td>Unannounced.</td>
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Questions to Ask

As schools and school districts initiate classroom visitations, they need to ask themselves a number of questions including the following:

- Why are we doing this? Do we hope to gather program data at the teacher, school or district level? Is the gathering of data our primary purpose, or is it our primary goal to help teachers improve their practices? How will these visitations relate to the teacher evaluation process, the school-planning process, grade-level or subject-matter teams, professional development planning, and so on?
- Who should participate in this process? Given our goals, who should be observing whom? How do we ensure that the process builds professionalism and trust? Should participation be mandatory?
- What protocols will guide our process? What are we going to be looking for, and how will we record what we see? How will we share and discuss our observations, and how will we commit to next steps and monitor our implementation of those next steps? How will we train participants, and how will we evaluate this process?

The table on this page has been useful to school districts as they engage in discussions to plan and name their visitation models. Again, there are many potential variations on these themes, and in healthy systems a variety of models are likely to be in play simultaneously.

Suggestions for Improved Practice

Here are some additional suggestions derived from the experiences of several school districts:

1. **Have high expectations.** Initial fears about resistance quickly evaporate when teachers and principals experience the benefits of safe and well-designed processes. Teacher leaders and administrators have to be very clear in communicating the fact that private practice is no longer an option in today’s schools.
2. **Keep the process simple.** Provide participants with basic training in data gathering and giving feedback, and build simple, inquiry-based protocols. Avoid detailed checklists, which are usually blunt instruments that produce superficial data and convey a compliance-oriented rather than collaborative message.
3. **Align the process with the analysis of student achievement data and student work**, with professional learning communities and professional development, and with school planning processes. These visitations are not just another activity, but that they are a key element of continuous improvement processes.

4. **Ensure that the process is ongoing, and that it is supported by adequate resources.** Visitations are not something you do once or twice; they are meant to be an integral element of a school and district culture. Participants get better at the process and results become more profound over time. It takes resources—training, facilitation, release time and the like—to do this well.

Where should a school and district start if it wants to engage in a process of collaborative professional classroom visitations? If the goal is to build public practice, trust and team, we believe that the starting place should be what we call “learning walks.” A generic protocol for learning walks is included on the previous page. In implementing learning walks, groups might want to review Shirley Hord and the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory’s research on successful professional learning communities. Among other things, they state that effective professional learning communities are characterized by shared leadership and shared personal practice characterized by visitation and review of each teacher’s classroom. Feedback is directed at individual and community improvement.

**Impact on School Culture and Achievement**

Implemented well, each of the visitation models outlined above can play a significant role in school improvement. Where they are embraced and modified to meet local needs as methods for gathering data, stimulating discussion and driving continuous improvement in district, school and individual practice, they have a huge impact on professional culture and student achievement.

**References**

Classroom Walkthroughs:  
Learning to see the Trees and the Forest  
By Howard Pitler with Bryan Goodwin  
Summer 2008: Changing Schools, pages 9-12.

For some, the practice of classroom “walkthroughs,” where principals or other instructional leaders spend only minutes observing classrooms to form an impression about the quality of teaching and learning occurring in them seems preposterous. But consider the study Malcolm Gladwell describes in the introduction to this book, *Blink*. After watching just two seconds of soundless video clips of Harvard professors they’d never seen teaching a class, students rated how effective they thought the professors would be as instructors. The researchers were surprised to find that not only did the students find the task easy, but their instantaneous impressions were highly correlated with end-of-the-semester ratings by those who actually took the classes (Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. New York: Little, Brown and Company). So, if college students can accurately assess the quality of professors from just two silent seconds of video, can principals assess the quality of a teacher’s instruction after only a few minutes? Maybe, but short observations also can be badly flawed.

The key to making accurate decisions based on short observations is knowing what to look for. For example, Gladwell notes that when emergency room doctors and nurses in the Cook County Hospital reduced their lengthy interview protocol for chest-pain patients down to a quick EKG reading and three simple (but incisive) questions, they dramatically increased their ability to accurately assess whether people with chest pain were about to have a heart attack. Likewise, if principals don’t know what to look for or misunderstand the purposes of walkthroughs, their observations can be useless, or worse, harmful to teachers and students. But if they are equipped with the right set of “look fors” and a clear understanding of purposes, brief classroom observations can, in fact, be powerful tools for promoting great teaching.

What to Look For

Principals should ask these six questions when observing classrooms:

1. **Are teachers using research-based teaching strategies?**
   One of the most important things to look for is teacher’s use of instructional strategies. The nine strategies from McREL’s ASCD publication, *Classroom Instruction That Works*, for example, can serve as a framework for determining the extent to which teachers use research-based strategies. Although there’s no single “right way” to teach, great teachers employ a variety of teaching strategies, understand the instructional purposes of each, and use each strategy intentionally. So, when observing classrooms, principals should look at strategies teachers are using, and during a follow-up coaching conversation, teachers should be able to articulate why they used a particular strategy.

2. **Do student grouping patterns support learning?**
   One of the nine categories of effective instruction in *Classroom Instruction That Works* is “cooperative learning,” which includes supporting student learning through large groups, small groups, pairs, cooperative groups (small groups with assigned roles for each member), or working individually. None of these grouping strategies are “wrong”; they may all be appropriate at different times and for different learning purposes. Again, the key is to determine whether teachers are intentional in their use of grouping patterns. During follow-up coaching sessions, can teachers state why they selected a particular grouping strategy?

3. **Are teachers and students using technology to support student learning?**
   While educational technology is more prevalent in today’s classrooms, many teachers still do not put these tools to best use. During walkthroughs, principals should note the technology teachers are using and how they’re using it. As before, principals should specifically ask about the pedagogical or learning purpose the teacher intended by using the selected technology. It is also important to monitor if and how students are using technology. Principals should ask about students’ opportunities for “fingers on keyboard” time to use technology to deepen their learning.

4. **Do students understand their goals for learning?**
   While conducting walkthroughs, principals should do more than go through a checklist of teacher practices; they also should observe what students are doing and learning. When asked, students should be able to articulate what they are doing as it relates to their learning goals. Are students making a connection to true learning objectives, or are they completely focused on activities? Over time, student responses will provide an indication of how well teachers are communicating learning goals and whether students are engaged and intentional about their own learning.
Research-based responsibilities of effective school leaders that can be fulfilled through classroom walkthroughs:

- Connecting with teachers and staff on a personal and professional level (the responsibility of relationships)
- Encouraging teachers to use research on instruction (the responsibility of intellectual stimulation)
- Reviewing formative achievement data and using it to inform instructional practices (the responsibility of involvement in curriculum, instruction, and assessment)
- Assessing the quality, fidelity, and consistency of instructional practices to determine staff development needs (the responsibility of monitoring/evaluating)
- Praising teachers with exemplary practices (the responsibility of contingent rewards)
- Communicating the belief that individual teachers can accomplish school goals (the responsibility of ideals and beliefs)
- Interpreting disappointing results or implementation challenges in ways that inspire hope and resiliency (the responsibility of optimizing)
- Soliciting feedback, both good and bad, and advice on improvement initiatives (the responsibility of input)
- Uncovering staff concerns and modifying leadership behaviors accordingly (the responsibility of flexibility)


5. Are students learning both basic and higher order levels of knowledge?

Classroom observations also should reveal whether students are engaged in learning at the lower rungs of Bloom’s taxonomy (e.g., remembering understanding, and applying) or at the higher levels, such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. All of these forms of learning are necessary and appropriate in different contexts. However, if the vast majority of student learning is concentrated on lower level learning, principals should initiate conversations with teachers regarding the levels of student learning they observed.

6. Do student achievement data correlate with walkthrough data?

Principals should also observe classrooms through the lens of student achievement data. In *It’s Being Done*, Chenoweth (Chenoweth, K. (2007). *It’s Being Done: Academic Success in Unexpected Schools*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Education Press: page 14) provides the following anecdote of how Sheri Shirley, principal of Oakland Heights Elementary School in Russellville, Arkansas, uses classroom observations to help her high-poverty school raise student achievement:

Shirley spends a great deal of time in classrooms herself, watching for effective teaching methods that can be shared. In one instance, she knew that the children in one classroom were mastering many more “sight” works (words read automatically without having to laboriously spell them out) than in others...she noticed that in the less-successful classrooms, if the children misses a flashcard word, the teachers would simply read the words to the children. In the more-successful classroom, any time the children missed a word, the teacher would teach them a “trick” to read the word more quickly. She might point out, for example, that there was a “word within the word” that the children already knew (stAND). That simple practice on the part of the teacher was helping kids read better, and by noticing, Shirley was then able to initiate conversations among teachers about effective teaching practices.

As this example illustrates, when principals place their classroom observations within the context of student achievement data, they can dramatically increase the acuity of their observations and identify ways to improve teaching and learning.

**How to Use Walkthrough Data**

A number of misconceptions persist about how to use the data generated from classroom walkthroughs. Indeed, some teachers’ resistance to walkthroughs is likely due to the fact they or their principals—or both—are unclear about how to use their observation data.

**Coaching, not evaluating**

For starters, the purpose of a walkthrough is not to pass judgment on teachers, but to coach them to higher levels of performance. Walkthroughs are not teacher evaluations; they are a method for identifying opportunities for improvement and supporting the sharing of best practices across the school.

**Measuring the impact of staff development efforts**

In its best use, the walkthrough process will provide strong data to schools and districts regarding the extent to which their professional development initiatives are actually making it into the classroom. If a district’s focus is in differentiated learning, for example, and the data indicate that an overwhelming percentage of observations show students are working only in whole group settings with each student doing exactly the same type of work, there would be an apparent disconnect between the intent of the professional development and actual classroom practice. By systematically collecting and analyzing data from classroom observations, school leaders can determine whether staff
development efforts are making a difference and guide real-time adjustments to the professional development they are offering teachers.

**Supporting professional learning communities with walkthrough data**

Savvy principals also understand the power of sharing their aggregated observation data with school staff to support professional learning communities. For example, one elementary school we worked with in Montana discovered through walkthrough data collected over a three-month period that teachers taught students in a whole-group setting in 67 percent of all observations. Through conversation with the staff and professional development on learning context, that number decreased from 67 percent to 56 percent during the following three months.

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**Power Walkthrough® Classroom Observation Seminar & Software**

The Mid-Continental Regional Education Laboratory’s (McREL) Power Walkthrough Seminar & Software allows school leaders to get the most of their regular classroom observations by using hand-held devices loaded with McREL software that uses their popular manual, Classroom Instruction That Works, as the basis for observing teachers. Visit [http://www.mcrel.org/powerwalkthrough](http://www.mcrel.org/powerwalkthrough)

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**Final Thoughts: Viewing the “Mosaic”**

As the success of this school illustrates, one of the most powerful aspects of walkthroughs is aggregating data across teachers and over time. One or two, or even 10 observations of an individual teacher, do not provide a clear picture of the quality of instruction within a school. But 10 visits each to 40 teachers’ classrooms will provide a more accurate picture. Think of it as a mosaic. Looking at one tile in isolation tells you almost nothing. But when you see 400 of those tiles laid out in an orderly manner, a picture begins to emerge.

So too, with classroom walkthroughs: when principals understand what to look for and the purposes of their observations, they are able to pull together their brief Blink-like observations into a more complete picture of the quality-and variations in the quality-of instruction occurring in their buildings. In short, the power of walkthroughs lies not only in seeing the trees, but also the forest.
I have become even more convinced that walk-throughs are a powerful school improvement tool that should be embraced by all school leaders. It is important, however, to conduct walk-throughs in an organized and careful manner. Simply stopping by classrooms, engaging in friendly and light banter with students and teachers, and moving on to the next classroom does not unleash the potential power of walk-throughs.

**Start with a Definition**

Walk-throughs are defined as informal, brief classroom observations used for generic data gathering or focused on specific teaching and learning behaviors. Writers and researchers differ on the amount of time observers should spend in a classroom during walk-throughs. The recommended time ranges from three to ten minutes per visit. The amount of time spent is not as critical as how the time is used by the observers.

**Change the Focus**

Walk-throughs are not a new educational practice. Administrators have been using the walk-through process for a number of years. In many instances, when central office or building level administrators carry out their walk-through visits, their focus has been almost exclusively on teacher behavior. Many ‘walkers’ have used checklists for ‘loos-fors’ for data gathering purposes during their visits. These observers code teacher behaviors they see in practice. In many walk-through practices, students are rarely consulted or asked about their learning.

More and more administrators are changing the way they complete their walk-through visits to classrooms. Instead of focusing on teacher behavior, the administrators are interacting with students. In short, they are going to the source to determine what students know and can do as a result of the instruction that has occurred in the class. In traditional observations, the observer often concluded that effective instruction was occurring as long as the teacher was implementing certain practices during the observed lesson. Knowledge of content, clear learning objectives, occasional teacher checks for understanding, time for student to practice new learning, perceived student engagement, and an orderly classroom were the primary indicators that a teacher was doing a good job and that the students were learning. The missing piece of the puzzle that was often neglected was to find out what was going on inside the students’ heads. Friendly, non-threatening discourses between administrators and students are resulting in newly-found sources of achievement data.

**Make the Practice Uncomplicated**

Interaction with students should be sensible, uncluttered, and to the point. Possible questions one might ask a student include the following:

- What are you currently learning?
- How is what you are working on helping you to learn that?
- Can you show me what you have learned so far?
- What previous learning did you do that is helping you with what you are currently learning?
- How will you know that you are successful?
- Are there any supports for learning around the classroom to help you if you get stuck?
- Are there any models you can look at to see what excellent work looks like?

The longer and more comfortable administrators become interacting with students, the more natural and free-flowing the conversations become. Administrators have discovered that they can often casually move around the classroom and talk with multiple students in a relatively short period of time. Another insight gained by many observers is how eager and excited students are to talk with adults who inquire about their learning.
Take in the Surroundings

In addition to talking with students, another important component of the walk-through experience is taking the time to look around the classrooms to see what kind of scaffolding or supports for learning are in evidence. Some administrators find themselves singling out charts, bulletin boards, displays, or items on blackboards/white boards/Smart boards and asking students how this information supports their learning. In some situations, students can make instant connections and tell with great specificity how the displayed item helps them learn. Conversely, students may be unaware of the purpose of displayed items in the classroom or how they are supposed to support learning.

Another beneficial practice during walk-throughs is to determine if learning outcomes are posted somewhere in the room in kid-friendly language. Asking students to explain their understanding of a standard or benchmark may add additional information gained during a walk-through visit. The observer may discover that students can clearly discuss what they are supposed to know or be able to do as a result of their work, or that they have little or no idea what some of the lofty phrases or complicated standards language really means.

Collect Achievement Data

The overall purpose of a walk-through is to determine if student learning is truly occurring from room to room throughout a school. As administrators interact with students, it is important not to rush to judgment based on these conversations. If students seem to be inconclusive about what they are learning, the administrator should make a mental note to return to the class in the near future to determine if the lack of responsiveness by the students formulates a pattern or if it was a temporary aberration. Likewise, the administrator should not conclude that excellent instruction is happening in a given class if the student responses indicate that they are clear on what they should be learning and know precisely how their learning will be assessed. These are good initial indicators; when subsequent follow-up visits confirm these first impressions, the administrator may begin to reach preliminary positive conclusions about the status of learning in that particular classroom.

Howard Pitler, an educational researcher with McREL, suggests that ten walk-throughs a year in a given classroom can provide an accurate picture of instruction and learning. He compares walk-throughs to a mosaic with one tile telling very little while many tiles forming a more complete picture.

Some educational writers feel that data gathered during walk-throughs should be used exclusively to coach teachers rather than as part of the evaluation process. Others feel that when data is gathered over time, it can provide a clear picture of instruction in a teacher’s classroom and can become valuable data which can be used as part of the supervision and evaluation process.

Provide Feedback to Teachers

Feedback to teachers on the student learning data that is gathered during walk-through visits acknowledges the efforts that teachers are making, and lets them know that their work with students is effective and worthwhile. The feedback may be through a note left on the teacher’s desk or podium or through timely, face-to-face conversations. This practice should be followed especially when the feedback being shared with the teacher is positive. If data on student learning in inconclusive or nonexistent, the administrator should reserve judgment and return to the class for further data gathering opportunities to see if the situation has improved or if learning is still not occurring. When the administrator finds that student responses to their inquiries indicate that learning may not be occurring, it may require a more private conference between the administrator and teacher to discuss the pattern which has emerged from the administrator’s walk-through observations.

Make the Process Public

Administrators who have made walk-throughs a regular part of their role as instructional leaders for their school or school district have gained a number of insights about the process. Since observers do not want the teaching staff to view walk-throughs as a mysterious or secretive process, they tell teachers exactly what they are doing when they interact with students as well as the specific questions they ask students during their visits. Several administrators have learned that as a result of making the walk-through questions public, their
teachers are using the walk-through questions as a tool to improve their own teaching. Student responses are helping teachers make the learning outcomes more explicit and clarify the connections between the classroom activities and the eventual learning that should occur. In sort, the walk-through questions are serving a dual purpose.
REGULAR SCHOOL/DISTRICT WALKTHROUGHS vs TARGETED LEARNING WALKS

Many school and classroom walkthroughs are perfunctory or solely used as a means for conducting formal principal or teacher evaluations. Too many central office supervisors and principals continue to walk through classrooms and school hallways checking to make sure students are on task, regardless of the quality of the assignments they have been given or the rigor of the work they are producing. In many districts and schools, administrators are often the only leaders who engage in the practice of visiting schools and classrooms. The mandated evaluation tool is often the only tool used during these visits and is rarely seen as a means for professional growth aimed at helping individuals or schools improve.

Targeted Learning Walks are purposeful and data driven. They are specific about “what to look for” and help school or district teams identify “next steps” once the process is over. Targeted Learning Walks are focused on the teaching and learning agenda as a means for ongoing improvement, not solely evaluation, and serve as tools for gathering evidence of how well instruction improvement efforts are being implemented in classrooms across a school or district.

Compared to many other walkthroughs, targeted learning walks are transparent to all involved in the process, become embedded in the school and district culture, and are considered an important factor in helping leaders and staff improve their practice and increase student achievement results. They are often conducted by a combination of external and on-site administrators and teaching staff and in many cases include parents, students, and paraprofessionals. This same process is a powerful tool when used by school instructional leadership teams, as well.

DEFINING THE TARGETING LEARNING WALK

Target Learning Walks are an organized visit through a school’s classrooms and halls to collect evidence about how well school improvement efforts such as: school and/or district selected instructional practices and processes are being implemented school-wide and how the implementation of these practices and processes is impacting student achievement results.

HOW DOES A SCHOOL ORGANIZE FOR A SUCCESSFUL TARGETED LEARNING WALK?

The success of any learning walk depends on how well the instructional leadership team of the school organizes and prepares the school community for the process. In order for a staff to fully benefit from the feedback after the learning walk, trust must be built by making the process transparent. Effective administrators and leadership teams engage the entire staff in identifying the purpose for the learning walk and clearly articulate what evidence the learning walk team will be charged with gathering. The objective is not to catch people doing the “wrong things” but to highlight promising practices, challenges in implementation of those practices, and make suggestions for improvement. Each step of the process must be carefully planned and communicated to the staff so that everyone knows what to expect and there are no surprises.

PRIOR TO THE TARGETED LEARNING WALK

Communication is the key during the targeted learning walk planning stage. During this stage, the leadership team of the school must inform the staff about all logistical details of the targeted learning walk such as: how many classrooms will be visited, who the members of the visiting team will be, how long they will remain in the classrooms, and how and when the evidence and feedback from the learning walk will be shared with all members of the school community. Additionally, it is imperative that the leadership team guide the staff in identifying the purpose of the learning walk—the specific instructional strategies, behaviors and processes that they want the visiting team to look for evidence of (implementation) in every classroom.

Following are some guiding questions that school and district leadership teams must be prepared to address prior to the targeted learning walk.
• What is the purpose of our targeted learning walk? What specific strategies do we need the visiting team to look for?
• What should we have available for the team to access when they are in the classrooms (samples of student work, student data results, other instructional artifacts)?
• Who from our staff will participate in the targeted learning walk along with the visiting team?
• Where will it take place? Which classrooms will be visited? Will all the classrooms be involved?
• How long will the process last?
• What evidence gathering tool (learning walk protocol) will the visiting team use?

DURING THE TARGETED LEARNING WALK

As important as the pre-targeted learning walk planning stage is to the success of this process, it is also critical that the visiting team identify a common and consistent protocol to use during the targeted learning walk. A common protocol ensures that all members of the team follow the same process when gathering evidence and remain focused on the purpose identified by the school. The visiting team may need to divide into several small groups of 4 or 5 so as not to overwhelm the classroom. They should:

• Identify a common data gathering tool or graphic organizer for every member of the visiting team to help them record their observations and wonderings related to the purpose identified by the school.
• Assign roles and responsibilities to each member of the visiting team (facilitator, recorder, reviewer of student work, student interviewers, reader of the walls and room environment, etc.).
• Spend 7-10 minutes in each classroom to look for, gather, and record observational data and evidence (student work in portfolios and on display, work students are engaged in, types of teacher and student questions and responses, instructional guiding charts, etc.).
• Have the student interviewer talk to 3-4 students. Sample questions: What are you learning or solving? Why is it important that you learn or solve this? How do you know what good work looks like? Is this work challenging for you? Would you please read a short section of this assignment for me?)
• Take 5 minutes in the hallway after visiting each classroom to discuss, as a team, the evidence and wonderings gathered—ensure that the designated recorder keeps clear notes from the discussion prior to visiting the next classroom.

AFTER THE TARGETED LEARNING WALK

Once the learning walk is over, the visiting team will need 30-60 minutes to convene in a quiet location in order to review all of their notes and discuss the evidence statements and wonderings. This discussion will help the team craft the feedback report that will be presented to the staff and/or leadership team of the school that received the visit. This process, which takes place after the targeted learning walk, needs to engage all members of the visiting team (including staff from the school who were members of the visiting team during the learning walk).

The feedback report does not contain a laundry list of detailed statements about every piece of evidence or wonderings that the team collected. Rather, it contains thoughtful, targeted statements (no more than 4-8 evidence statements, 4-5 wonderings, and 4-5 suggestions) based on specific evidence observed during the learning walk. In crafting this report, the team will look for common themes and trends as well as provide specific examples to support each theme or trend identified in the report.

Once the Recorder has had an opportunity to review and share the notes from the targeted learning walk with the team, the facilitator guides the group in the crafting of the report by asking the following questions:

• What are the 4-8 specific statements that we can make based on evidence we saw in classrooms that support what the school asked us to look for (purpose statement identified by the school prior to the targeted learning walk?? Did we see this evidence in some, a few, many, or most classrooms? (give exact percentages when possible).
• What are the 4-5 specific wondering statements (areas of weakness or challenge) that we can make based on evidence related to what the school asked us to look for?
• What 4-5 suggestions can we offer this staff in order to help them improve their work and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the strategies they are trying to implement school-wide?
SHARING THE FEEDBACK REPORT WITH THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY.

Once the feedback report is crafted, the visiting team works with the principal and the staff members from the school that participated in the targeted learning walk to identify a process for communicating the feedback report to the rest of the school community. Following is a set of sample questions that can help guide the team in this process:

• Who will need to hear and see the feedback report? Will there be opportunity for the school community to ask clarifying questions and discuss the report?
• Who, from our team, will share the report and facilitate the discussion with the school community?
• How soon can the feedback report be shared?
• What are the next steps for implementing the suggestions listed in the feedback report?
• How will the leadership team be involved in this process? The staff?
• What support will the leadership team need (from the principal, central office, staff developers, consultants, coaches…) to implement the suggestions and next steps?
In this video, you will be shown an effective tool to help improve student achievement. See how the walkthrough technique uses non-evaluative classroom visits to: (1) Quickly monitor teaching and learning in a school; (2) Determine professional development needs; and (3) Build unity of purpose in the school. Follow an elementary school principal through all the necessary steps of an effective walkthrough, including planning and executive walkthroughs, discussing observations with teachers, and engaging in post-walkthrough reviews.

1. What appears to be the purpose of the walkthrough as illustrated in this program?

2. How were teachers involved in the design and implementation of the walkthroughs?

3. What was it the observers were looking for in the walkthrough?

4. How long did the observers spend in each classroom as part of the walkthrough?

5. How did the observers record what was observed?

6. How did the observers share with the teachers a record of the walkthrough observations?

7. What “ah-ha,” new idea, thought, or question was raised in your mind as you watched this walkthrough?

¹How to Conduct Effective Classroom Walkthroughs (2006) ASCD.org
Focus Questions

Examples of focus questions are:

• What evidence demonstrates that students are actively engaged in their learning?
• How are diverse learning styles and multiple intelligences being accommodated?
• How is the use of higher-order thinking being demonstrated in lessons taught?
• How are the amount and type of student writing across the curriculum demonstrated?
• How are lessons being aligned to the state and district curriculum standards?
• How are teachers integrating technology into their lessons?
• What evidence illustrates that teachers are using formative assessments throughout lessons to monitor and adjust instruction?
• What developmentally appropriate activities are taking place to meet student needs?

Examples of Focus Questions and Associated Look-fors

**Focus Question:** How widely and effectively is guided reading being used by the teachers in working with small groups of students to help them learn effective strategies for processing text with understanding?

**Look-fors:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The teacher…</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• selects appropriately leveled reading materials for the group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• assesses students’ prior knowledge about the selection’s topic and vocabulary;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• clarifies the purpose for reading a particular selection through prediction, vocabulary introduction, or discussion of ideas that provides readers background knowledge required for understanding the text;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• observes students as they read the text softly or silently to themselves;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• provides guidance and coaching to students by providing prompts, asking questions, and encouraging attempts at the reading strategy application;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• asks questions to ensure text has been comprehended by readers;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• praises students’ efforts in reading text; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• addresses second language learners’ needs.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Focus Question:** What evidence demonstrates that the amount of student writing across the curriculum is increasing?

**Look-fors:**

• students are able to explain the writing process;
• students are maintaining writing journals;
• examples of student writing are posted on classroom walls;
• exemplary writing samples are posted on bulletin boards;
• prompts for journal writing are posted on white boards;
• lesson plans include writing assignments; and
• students share drafts of writing with each other.
**Levels of Outcome of Learning Activity**

**Awareness:** You learn about the existence of the idea, concept, or innovation.

**Conceptual Control:** You have an understanding of the idea, concept, or innovation.

**Skills and Principles:** You know how to implement the idea, concept, or innovation and have the skills to do the implementation.

**Transfer:** You can use the idea, concept, or innovation in the workplace and create a new situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Learned Behavior</th>
<th>Elements of Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theory only = Less than 1. <strong>THEORY-BASED EXPERIENCES:</strong> Lecture, discuss, consider, 10% will reach TRANSFER examine at the theory involved. Learn the literature.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 + 2 Less than 10% TRANSFER. 2. <strong>DEMONSTRATION:</strong> We are shown the idea, concept, or innovation. Modeling might reach skill level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 + 2 + 3 Over 76% will reach SKILL. TRANSFER will be 10-15%. 3. <strong>PRACTICE:</strong> Give the learner a chance to work idea, concept, or innovation out either in a simulation or in the actual workplace.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 + 2 + 3 + 4 Over 90% will reach SKILL. TRANSFER will be 40%. 4. <strong>FEEDBACK:</strong> How are we doing? Corrective feedback.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Five Elements - Over 90% transfer 5. <strong>COACHING TO APPLICATION:</strong> Now the training is integrated into what one does on the job. On-site process. Training assisted by other fellow workers, etc., social, and technical support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NEED ALL FIVE ELEMENTS TO ASSURE TRANSFER**
Concerns with Walkthroughs…

The Three T’s

T_______________________  T_______________________  T_________________________

Everyone is in the Know!

According to Gary Bloom, Associate Director of the New Teacher Center, University of California, Santa Cruz, “It is essential that before a school or district begins a classroom visitation program, everybody is clear about what to expect and what his or her role is to be in the process.” All stakeholders in the school setting need to know the following fifteen items:  


1. Why are classroom walkthroughs being considered?
2. What is the specific purpose of classroom walkthroughs?
3. Who will participate in the walkthroughs?
4. When and how often will walks occur?
5. How long will observers stay?
6. Will walkthroughs be announced prior to the visit?
7. What focus or look-fors will visitors observe during the walkthrough?
8. Will there be any training connected to the walkthroughs?
9. What and how will information from the observations be recorded?
10. What will happen to the observation notes or checklists?
11. How will teachers receive feedback?
12. Will everyone be required to be visited?
13. How will walkthroughs complement other school improvement initiatives?
14. How will walkthroughs relate to the teacher evaluation process?
15. How will the walkthrough process be evaluated and by whom?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHERS AS THEY SEE IT…</th>
<th>ADMINISTRATORS AS THEY SEE IT…</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are we being judged? Spying on us?</td>
<td>Teachers need to understand that the walkthrough is designed not as a “gotcha” but to get a glimpse of what is going on in the classroom (as specified by the target) so that together we can focus on improving our instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will this go in my evaluation?</td>
<td>Purpose and objectives need to be made clearly defined &amp; understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What if I am not doing what you are looking for?</td>
<td>Sharing of “data”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a short period of time, what’s going on in the room can be misconstrued or misunderstood</td>
<td>Time/coverage for this to happen over a consistent, meaningful time period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair “evaluation” of what has been observed based on personal bias.</td>
<td>Time to use the data to improve classroom instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They will be used “against” the teacher</td>
<td>Consistent implementation &amp; measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity about being misjudged</td>
<td>Ample time to do “walk-throughs.” Need an extra plan period—not to have to plan for a sub to cover the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That the walkthrough is a tool used to “gather data” that could harm observed teachers</td>
<td>This needs to be done in a professional manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That people will gossip or judge</td>
<td>Lots of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That people who didn’t know what our job was commenting on our needs</td>
<td>Knowledge of tool being used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distraction to classes</td>
<td>Knowing what is important to be assessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom entered during “crisis” moment when student disruption has disabled the lesson.</td>
<td>Must be completely objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often, how long?</td>
<td>Should evaluate the situation, not the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s the purpose of walkthroughs – what are “they” (whoever “they” are) looking for?</td>
<td>Look for the positive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which classrooms are involved?</td>
<td>Trying not to be disruptive, too frequent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will I receive feedback?</td>
<td>Teachers may feel pressure about performance—hopefully will look at this as an opportunity for growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will a record be kept of all walkthroughs?</td>
<td>Benefits worth the time put into it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust issues</td>
<td>Must evaluate it periodically to make sure its purposes are being met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being burned</td>
<td>Need training on what to observe and how to hold professional conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Helpful to determine professional development needs and implementation of new initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When will/under what circumstances will we engage in dialogue about walkthroughs?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Classroom Teacher Survey Regarding Classroom Walkthroughs

The purpose of this survey is to acquire a profile of views from your teaching staff about classroom walkthroughs that would be helpful in the design and implementation of your school’s walkthrough model.

Classroom walkthroughs are brief visits throughout the school, two to five minutes on the average, conducted on a frequent basis. They are informal and non-evaluative, in which the instructional and curricular programs are observed, feedback is provided to teachers, and students talk about what they are learning.

Directions: Please respond to each of the questions below. For each question, you are given the opportunity to add any further comments.

1. What should be the PURPOSE(S) of classroom walkthroughs? CIRCLE THE LETTER FOR ALL ITEMS THAT APPLY.
   a) Collecting additional data on teaching practices and students’ learning to supplement knowledge about how the school and students are performing;
   b) Collecting data to assist in decisions regarding continuous school improvement needs.
   c) Sharing collected data with teachers as a means to foster collaboration;
   d) Promoting collegial conversations that become part of the school’s professional learning culture;
   e) Increasing school-wide reflection on best practices to increase student achievement;
   f) Appraising how professional development initiatives are being incorporated into classroom practices;
   g) Identifying professional development needs of the faculty and staff;
   h) Other? (Please specify)___________________________________________

Comments:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What should be the FOCUS of classroom walkthroughs in our school? CIRCLE THE LETTER FOR ALL ITEMS THAT APPLY.
   a) Teacher instructional practices
   b) Curricular initiatives
   c) Assessment techniques
   d) Student behavior and learning activities
   e) Classroom environment (e.g., instructional resources, wall displays, etc.)
   f) Classroom management
   g) Other? (Please specify)___________________________________________

Comments:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

23
3. Who might be the **Observers** doing walkthroughs? CIRCLE THE LETTER FOR ALL ITEMS THAT APPLY.
   a) Principal
   b) Assistant/Associate principal
   c) Teachers
   d) Department chairs
   e) Certified support staff (e.g., social worker, school psychologist, dean, etc.)
   f) Central office personnel
   g) Students
   h) Parents
   i) Other? (Please specify)__________________________

   Comments:
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________

4. Should classroom walkthroughs be **ANNOUNCED** in advance?      _____ Yes   _____ No

   Comments:
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________

5. Should observers display an **INDICATOR** that they are conducting a walkthrough (e.g., pouch, badge, color, clipboard, etc.)?  _____ Yes   _____ No

   Comments:
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________

6. How **FREQUENTLY** should observers conduct classroom walkthroughs?
   a) Once a semester
   b) Once a quarter
   c) Once a month
   d) Twice a month
   e) Once a week
   f) Daily
   g) Other? (Please specify)______________________________________________________

   Comments:
   ____________________________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________________________
7. How much **TIME** should observers spend in each classroom during the walkthroughs?

   a) 1-4 minutes
   b) 5-7 minutes
   c) 8-10 minutes
   d) Other? (Please specify) ____________________________________________

Comments:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

8. Should observers **ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS** about what they are learning during walkthroughs?

   _______ Yes _______ No

Comments:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

9. Should observers **ENGAGE IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE TEACHER** during the walkthrough?

   _______ Yes _______ No

Comments:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

10. How might observation data be **RECORDED** during walkthroughs?

    a) Observers use a checklist of what they observe
    b) Observers take notes of what they observe
    c) Observers use a combination of a checklist and note-taking
    d) No note-taking or checklists should be used
    e) Other? (Please specify) ____________________________________________

Comments:
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
11. How would you prefer that **FEEDBACK** be shared? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
   a) Face-to-face
   b) Feedback left on desk as observer(s) depart
   c) Handwritten note or e-mail
   d) Department/grade level feedback
   e) Whole faculty feedback
   f) Other? (Please specify)___________________________________________

Comments:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

12. Should observers **RECORD** their walkthrough observations while in the classroom or after their departure?
    ______ Inside classroom ______ Outside of classroom ______ No preference

Comments:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

13. Should it be **REQUIRED** that all of the school’s teachers be observed during walkthroughs?
    ______ YES ______ NO

Comments:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

14. Should classroom walkthroughs be considered as part of the **TEACHER EVALUATION** process?
    ______ YES ______ NO

Comments:
__________________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________________

**Questions for Consideration:**

Would you use such an instrument as a survey? If yes, what school conditions are necessary for you to be able to successfully administer such a survey?

If no, why not? If no, in what other ways might you acquire teachers’ input to the design of your school walkthrough model?

Would you add, change, or delete any of the questions?
Evaluation of School/District Classroom Walkthrough Process

The purpose of the survey is to evaluate the school/district classroom walkthroughs.

DIRECTION: Please circle your response as to how you feel regarding each of the following statements.

1. Very clear understanding of the PURPOSE for classroom walkthroughs

   __________________________________________________________________________
   Totally agree    Somewhat agree    No opinion    Somewhat disagree    Totally disagree

2. Very clear understanding of the SPECIFIC FOCUS for each of the classroom walkthroughs

   __________________________________________________________________________
   Totally agree    Somewhat agree    No opinion    Somewhat disagree    Totally disagree

3. Very clear understanding of the LOOK-FORS for each of the classroom walkthroughs

   __________________________________________________________________________
   Totally agree    Somewhat agree    No opinion    Somewhat disagree    Totally disagree

4. The FREQUENCY that classroom walkthroughs are conducted

   __________________________________________________________________________
   Totally agree    Somewhat agree    No opinion    Somewhat disagree    Totally disagree

5. The AMOUNT OF TIME the observer spends in my classroom during walkthroughs

   __________________________________________________________________________
   Totally agree    Somewhat agree    No opinion    Somewhat disagree    Totally disagree

6. The TIMING of various walkthroughs so that the observer is seeing at different times the beginning, middle, and closing of my lessons

   __________________________________________________________________________
   Totally agree    Somewhat agree    No opinion    Somewhat disagree    Totally disagree

7. Observers should ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS WITH STUDENTS about what they are learning

   __________________________________________________________________________
   Totally agree    Somewhat agree    No opinion    Somewhat disagree    Totally disagree
8. Observers should **RECORD DATA** about what is observed in my classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

9. **HOW** observations are now **RECORDED** (e.g., checklist, note-taking, or use of a PDA observation software program)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

10. The way **FEEDBACK** is provided from classroom walkthroughs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

11. Walkthroughs are unobtrusive and conducted in ways that **MINIMIZE** the impact on classroom instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
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</table>

12. My teaching and students’ learning have **BENEFITED** from walkthroughs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

13. Classroom walkthroughs do not need to be **ANNOUNCED** in advance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

14. There is a **TRUSTING RELATIONSHIP** between those who observe and those observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

15. **ALL TEACHERS** should be observed through classroom walkthroughs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
16. **TEACHERS** should have the opportunity to be **OBSERVERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

17. The classroom walkthroughs are working well **IN CONCERT** with other school improvement initiatives taking place in our school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totally agree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Totally disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Questions for Consideration:**

Would you use such an instrument as a survey? If yes, what school conditions are necessary for you to be able to successfully administer such a survey? If no, why not?

If no, in what other ways might you acquire teachers’ input to the design of your school walkthrough model?

Would you add, change, or delete any of the questions?
Making the Most of Instructional Rounds

Instructional rounds are one of the most valuable tools that a school or district can use to enhance teachers’ pedagogical skills and develop a culture of collaboration. The goal of instructional rounds isn’t to provide feedback to the teacher being observed, although this is an option if the observed teacher so desires. Rather the primary purpose is for observing teachers to compare their own instructional practices with those of the teachers they observe. The chief benefit of this approach resides in the discussion that takes place among observing teachers at the end of the observation as well as in subsequent self-reflection.

Getting Started

Every teacher should participate in instructional rounds at least once a semester. Rounds should be facilitated by a lead teacher—someone colleagues respect as an exceptional teacher and recognize as a professional. Instructional coaches commonly have these characteristics. Administrators may also lead rounds, but it’s important to clarify from the outset that the purpose is not to evaluate the teachers being observed. The observed teachers typically have either volunteered or been asked to be the subject of rounds. Ideally, selected teachers are drawn from the pool of master teachers in the building or district—those veterans with proven ability to enhance the achievement of all students in their classes. This noted, any teacher might offer his or her classroom as a venue for rounds.

Conducting Rounds

Groups conducting rounds are best kept small—from three to five teachers, not counting the lead teacher. On the scheduled observation day, teachers being observed should alert their students that several teachers will visit their classroom. They might explain that the teachers are trying to learn from one another, just as students do.

When the observing teachers arrive, they should knock at the door and then quietly move to the back of the classroom, to some spot that doesn’t disrupt the flow of instruction. There they observe and take notes regarding the teacher’s use of specific instructional strategies. On an individual level, teachers can watch for strategies of particular interest to them, such as how the teacher uses questioning strategies or graphic organizers. Or the observation may have a common focus. For example, for one set of rounds, a school or district might decide that everyone will examine how a teacher communicates instructional objectives to students and keeps these objectives in the forefront of students’ minds throughout the lesson.

With focus areas identified, observing teachers record what they see during the 10-15 minutes that a round typically lasts. Observing teachers do not score teachers on a rubric. Rather, they take notes on teacher behaviors that relate to the observation focus areas. At the end of the observation, the observing team exits the classroom, making sure to thank the teacher and students.

Debriefing Rounds

After each instructional round, members of the observing team convene to reflect on their experiences. They can do this in round-robin format, with each teacher commenting on what he or she noted. The leader starts by reminding everyone that the purpose of the discussion is not to evaluate the observed teacher. Useful rules, which should be established before the debriefing, include the following:

- Observers should not share what they have observed in a lesson with anyone outside the group of observers.
- Observers should not share comments made during the debriefing with people out of the debriefing.
- Observers should not offer suggestions to the observed teacher unless the observed teacher explicitly asks for feedback.
As observing teachers take turns commenting, it is helpful to use a “pluses” and “deltas” format. An observing teacher begins by noting the positive things (pluses) that he or she saw and then speculates as to what produced the positive outcome. For example, the observing teacher might postulate that the classroom appeared well-managed because the students were aware of specific routines they were to use, such as raising their hands when asking a question and quietly transitioning from one activity to another. The observing teacher might suggest that students seemed highly engaged because the teacher maintained a lively pace and used quite a bit of humor.

Next, the observer mentions some questions or concerns (deltas) that he or she has about the observed teacher’s use of strategies. For example, he or she may wonder why the observed teacher stayed in front of the class the entire period instead of moving around the classroom. At this point, other observing teachers might add their thoughts, sharing their pluses and deltas. For any given observation, an observing teacher can opt not to share his or her analysis with the group.

What Teachers Can Learn

Instructional rounds end with observing teachers identifying instructional practices they’ll continue to use because they saw other teachers employing them effectively, practices they currently use that they will not reexamine in light of what they observed, and practices they don’t currently use but will try because they saw other teachers use them well.

For example, an observer teacher might offer the following thoughts: “As a result of what I saw today, I’m going to continue calling on students randomly when I ask questions. Other teachers seem to have success with this strategy as well. However, I’m going to reconsider the types of questions I ask. I think I focus too much on recall questions and don’t challenge students enough. Finally, I’ve got some new ideas about routines I need to implement with my students.”

Revitalized

I’ve found that instructional rounds stimulate excitement and energy among faculty members almost immediately. When teachers have an opportunity to observe and interact with their colleagues in a non-evaluative way regarding instruction, everyone wins.

Walkthrough Without Students (Ghost Walks)

While most walkthroughs occur in the classroom during instruction, Walkthrough Without Students includes an organized tour of buildings by teams of teachers without the presence of students or supervisors. Colleagues look for evidences of alignment with standards through teacher and student artifacts. Teams of teachers visit classrooms of peers to review student work which can be portfolios, on the walls or hallways, instructional materials, layout of classrooms, content of displays, and teacher lesson plans for scope and sequencing of instruction. Teachers being observed choose the materials to be shared. The process does not include observation of instructional practices during active student instruction. Grade level or content area meetings discuss findings and share ideas to replicate. The strength of the Walkthrough Without Students is the promotion of a culture of collaborative learning.

At Los Angeles’ 24th Street Elementary School, Los Angeles, California, teacher walk-throughs are part of an overall school improvement plan. When the school initiated walkthroughs, 25 teachers, kindergarten through fifth grade, volunteered to open their doors to other teachers. Teachers who walked through other classrooms were inspired to try new techniques, and several teachers took digital photographs of ideas that they later implemented.
Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through
Middletown Public Schools, Middleton, CT

Donna Marino Parent Resource Coordinator (860) 638-1462 marinod@mps1.org

Research shows that students are more successful in school when parents and the community are involved. It also shows that parents are more likely to visit and volunteer in schools they find attractive and welcoming.

To ensure that it measures up, the Middletown Public Schools District adopted the “Welcoming Atmosphere Walk Through,” developed by the Fairfax (Va.) County Public Schools’ Parenting Education Center. It was introduced to the Middletown district by the state’s School Family Community Partners (SFCP) team. What makes the walk-through helpful is that it provides the school with an objective tool for assessing school climate, collecting perceptions, and making recommendations to bring positive change.

By the end of this school year, five schools were scheduled to complete the process, involving more than 2,000 students, 3,000 parents and caregivers and 300 teachers. The superintendent has asked all 11 schools in the district to conduct a walk-through.

A team of parents, staff and community members evaluates the physical environment, school-wide practices and policies, written materials and how welcoming it finds the school staff. The team then makes recommendations to the school’s Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), which develops an action plan for implementing the six types of family and community involvement.

Each school invites parents, staff, students (in high schools only) and community members to participate. The District Facilitator for Partnerships, the ATP and the principal put together a representative team to complete the walk-through and make recommendations.

A typical walk-through takes about two hours. It includes a welcome from the principal, a statement of purposes and objectives and description and directions from the district facilitator. The participants are then divided into four smaller teams, which spend about one half hour to:

- Walk through the school with the checklist to evaluate the physical environment.
- Walk through the school with the checklist to evaluate the welcoming staff.
- Review the written materials (gathered by principal in advance) and web site.
- Interview the principal on practices and procedures.

Examples of checklist statements and questions include:

- A school map is displayed near the entrance that highlights frequently requested locations.
- When an irate parent calls, the staff member answering the phone remains calm, listens attentively and attempts to solve the problem or find someone who can.
- Is information about school and classroom policies, school rules, parent-teacher conferences and bus and lunch schedules available to parents in their languages?

Following the walk-through, the four small teams summarize their findings, reconvene and suggest next steps. The district facilitator then takes all reports and prepares a list of recommendations, which also includes a commendation section for what is presently working well. Students benefit directly from the implementation of the recommendations. For example, one Middletown middle additional displays of student work and established awards. The staff also rewrote discipline letters that are sent to families so that they were clearer and more appropriate. One school bought the software for an auto-dialer so it could better inform students and parents about major events. Another school used its auto-dialer more frequently and added messages in Spanish.

Gathering a representative team proved a challenge for some schools. In addition, some teachers and staff members though the evaluation could be punishing or detrimental to the school. Inviting teachers and all staff to participate was one way to overcome this perception.

In the end, the walk-through was considered a positive activity. It not only offers a concrete strategy for improving the school, but also empowers everyone involved to participate and take pride in those improvements.
Timing/Frequency/Length of Time Recorded

Announcing in Advance

Observation Data

Observation Feedback

Teacher Contract Issue

Managing Time
Classroom Walkthrough Software

**eCOVE Classroom Observation software** supports classroom walk throughs, sit-downs, and in-depth classroom observations. eCOVE Classroom software saves time and makes the observation process more efficient and accurate. It captures and combines empirical data to give a far more accurate view of classroom behavior than any other method available. eCOVE’s data collection is formulated around research-based indicators. Go to [http://www.ecove.net/](http://www.ecove.net/).

**Teacher Evaluation and Student Data (TESA) Classroom Walk-Through Software:** Classroom walkthroughs can be tailor-made to fit your existing methodology. We customize the format to meet your school's classroom walkthrough requirements. Using TESA to record quick classroom walkthroughs improves your walkthrough specificity and reduces time spent creating reports and analyzing data. The software can be customized to emulate a school's rubric on the handheld device. TESA allows school Principals to accurately and effortlessly record classroom walkthroughs in their own methodologies with only a Windows Mobile/Pocket PC handheld computer, laptop, desktop or Tablet PC. Go to AustinSky Technology at [http://www.austinsky.com/classroomwalkthrough.html](http://www.austinsky.com/classroomwalkthrough.html).

**Teachscape Classroom Walkthrough Technology:** Classroom Walkthrough technology is a simple data collection application that can be added to most wireless handheld devices (e.g., Palms, Blackberrys, Windows Mobile devices). Through brief classroom visits, the research-based tools and data collection software on a handheld device enables instructional leaders to quickly collect data about critical instructional practices. Once uploaded, that data are shaped into reports and graphs. Visit Teachscape at [http://www.teachscape.com/html/ts/nps/classroom_walkthrough.html](http://www.teachscape.com/html/ts/nps/classroom_walkthrough.html).

**McREL Power Walkthrough™ Classroom Observation Software:** The Power Walkthrough™ enables the observer to conduct and record informal observations in individual classrooms. The Power Walkthrough™ software is web based, which allows the observer to easily aggregate and analyze classroom observation data and to aggregate the data up to the building and district level. Only Power Walkthrough™ uses the McREL research as its foundation. This research led to the publication of Classroom Instruction that Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement (Marzano, R.J., Pickering, D.J., & Pollock, J.E., 2001). Visit Mid-Central Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) at [http://www.esc4.net/default.aspx?name=ldrCWT](http://www.esc4.net/default.aspx?name=ldrCWT).


**Administrative Observer** [http://www.pes-sports.com/pe06000.htm](http://www.pes-sports.com/pe06000.htm)

**SpringWare™ WT – principals’ classroom walkthrough tool** [http://www.springboardschools.org/tools_resources/springware.html](http://www.springboardschools.org/tools_resources/springware.html)

**iObservation™ System** [http://www.iobservation.com/iobservation/solutions.cfm](http://www.iobservation.com/iobservation/solutions.cfm)
21 Classroom Walkthrough Tips

Denise Burson
Feb 09, 2009

1. Conduct a Walkthrough meeting with the staff. This meeting sets the stage for the Walkthrough and establishes clear expectations for the staff.
2. Identify the type of data to be collected and gather data during the Walkthrough.
3. Connect the "look-fors" to established standards. This is an important step for developing a common language for staff and for establishing a matching set of indicators around instruction and learning.
4. Make a commitment to visit at least five classrooms for five minutes every day (5 x 5’s).
5. Make time for Walkthroughs. Have your mail and email sorted before you read it.
6. Place non-essential operational items second.
7. Restructure support staff procedures dealing with appropriate issues.
8. Develop options for dealing with students sent to the office for discipline.
9. Move from morning supervision to classrooms...save the office for later.
11. Look for evidence that supports the Lesson Essential Question (student work on display, work students are engage in, teacher questions, student responses).
12. Schedule classroom visits -no calls, no interruptions.
13. Train the school secretary to know where you are, and to answer your calls saying you are in classrooms observing teaching and learning when you are not in the office.
14. Create a Walkthrough calendar, and share it with the staff and secretary.
15. Have the secretary remind you/interrupt when it is time to leave the office for classroom visits.
16. Meet parents' request by having the secretary set appointments/phone calls.
17. Establish with the secretary a protocol for handling parent request for appointments and parent phone calls.
18. Publish the principal's schedule to parents in the newsletter (available meeting time)
19. Observe student behaviors that impact learning.
20. Take a camera. At faculty meetings share snapshots of effective teaching and learning.
21. 50% of the time use "Ask abouts" and follow-up questions. If teachers can discuss their lessons and activities with you for a few minutes when you see them at bus duty, lunch duty, in the hallway, when they come to your office, etc... you will gain a lot of knowledge of their understanding of the school's instructional goals and expected practices.
No One-Size-Fits-All Model

Think of Walks as a Mosaic

School Improvement Toolbox

Steps to Getting Started with Walkthroughs
Reflecting on What We Are About to Embark Upon!

As you reflect on your role as leader for your school district, consider the following:

1. How can you use walkthroughs to monitor the implementation of school district operations?
2. What value do you see in walkthroughs for those who do the observing, those observed, and the students?
3. What will be your role in conducting, modeling, and/or orchestrating the effective use of walkthroughs in your school district?
4. What are some of the obstacles that will need to be addressed to implement or expand your use of walkthroughs in your school district?
5. What is your vision of walkthroughs as a tool for your school district’s instructional leadership?
6. What features of your schools’ cultures need to be in place for walkthroughs to be accepted and valued?
7. How will you incorporate the research on adult learning in how you will conduct walkthroughs?
8. How will the purposes of walkthroughs be coordinated with other initiatives designed to improve student achievement in your school district?
9. How do we assure that everyone is clear as to the purposes of the walkthrough?
10. How can walkthroughs be sustained as a vital tool for creating continuous improvement in teaching and learning as well as other operations within the school district?
11. How might you approach your administrators, teachers, and other staff to assist with planning for walkthroughs?
12. How do you and staff members address anxiety that teachers and other staff might experience because of walkthroughs?
13. How frequently do you plan to conduct walkthroughs in your school district?
14. Will you announce walkthroughs ahead of time?
15. What are some guidelines or norms you would expect of yourself and others in the conduct of walkthroughs?
16. How will you keep track of your walkthroughs?
17. How will you determine the focus and look-fors for your walkthroughs?
18. What other data might you gather and analyze to complement evidence from walkthroughs?
19. Will you write notes of what you observe as you conduct walkthroughs?
20. How will you organize your notations from walkthroughs to give feedback?
21. Will technology be helpful for your walkthrough data collection?
22. How will you provide follow-up to those you accompany on walkthroughs or observe?
23. How can you use follow-up from walkthroughs to create a positive experience for all participants?
24. How are you building trust in your school to assure that walkthroughs will be successful?
25. When and how will you evaluate your walkthroughs?
# Planning Walkthroughs in Your School/District

## Informal Observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose (Why are we doing this?)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who will visit?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What will be the <strong>focus</strong> of observations/conversations of the walkthroughs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What specifically will we be <strong>looking for</strong> during walkthroughs?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How much <strong>time</strong> will be spent during a walkthrough? How <strong>often</strong> will walkthroughs be conducted?</td>
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## Data Collection Techniques and Approaches

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Will a record of walkthrough observations/conversations be held?</th>
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<tr>
<td>How will a record of walkthrough observations/conversations be kept?</td>
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## Follow-up to Observations

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<th>What will be shared with others about what was observed during walkthroughs?</th>
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<td>How will walkthrough observation date be shared?</td>
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</table>
Getting Started – 10 Steps

1. Thoroughly research the topic of walkthroughs.

2. Determine staff experiences with any previous walkthrough efforts.

3. Work with the faculty on purpose and format of walkthrough feedback.

4. Align walkthroughs with other school improvement efforts.

5. Visit schools using walkthroughs.

6. Establish clear and consistent guidelines for walkthroughs.

7. Provide walkthrough training for all participants.

8. Implement walkthroughs in the beginning on a piloting, voluntary basis.

9. Consider expanding opportunities for others to accompany on the walks.

10. Conduct a formative evaluation of the walkthrough process.
REFERENCES


Kachur, Donald, S., Stouts, Judith A., & Edwards, Claudia L. (2010) *Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Teaching and Learning.* Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education. (Examines eighteen walkthrough models from across the country for the purpose of designing a model that fits one’s own school setting)


# Session Reflective Journal

Take a moment and jot down your reflective thoughts to the items below…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) New ideas I am taking away!</th>
<th>(2) Actions I am going to take!</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>(3) Questions raised in my mind!</th>
<th>(4) Feelings I am experiencing!</th>
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