

The Effect of Demographics on the Implementation of the Principal Walkthrough

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Abstract

The purpose of this quantitative study was to research how school and principal demographics
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An integral part of being an instructional leader is the ability to prioritize the time in classrooms focusing on instruction (Finkel, 2012).

This idea of being visible and among world with William Hewlett and David Packard in the 1970s when they started a practice called management by wandering around (MBWA) in their company, Hewlett-Packard.

The goal of MBWA was to have company leaders go out into the workplace and talk to employees, work with them, ask questions and help support them if needed (Fraser & Hertzler, 1990).

They advanced the idea that leaders should be spending at least 50% of their time in the field working with others (Fraser & Hertzler, 1990). Through MBWA, leaders are supposed to walk among the employees with a purpose, to communicate, build morale, empower others and support the organization in its goal of achieving excellence (Fraser & Hertzler, 1990). Fraser and Hertzler later took the concept of MBWA and applied it to school leadership. The idea of school walkthroughs thus began as a possible educational practice.

Walkthroughs are brief, frequent, unannounced classroom visits that are focused on gathering data regarding the educational practices in the classroom (Kachur, Stout & Edwards, 2010).

While the purpose of conducting a walkthrough may differ from visit to visit, the school leader has the opportunity to gather information from the walkthrough on various areas that may include instructional strategies, implementation of curriculum and standards, lesson objectives, student learning, level of

student engagement, classroom resources, and level of cognitive demand (Kachur et al., 2010).

These short classroom visits are a means of collecting evidence from the classroom to assess and guide school improvement efforts (David, 2008). Although there are numerous variations in how walkthroughs are utilized, the basic idea of a walkthrough is that it is a short, focused, informal, non-evaluative classroom observation by the principal with the end goal of improving student achievement (Kachur et al., 2010).

Principals may utilize walkthroughs as a means of entering classrooms and gathering data, but many instructional leaders take different paths in their effort to improve student achievement. It is in these different paths that principals may choose different focuses or purposes for visiting classrooms.

Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) cite the following reasons for a school leader to conduct a walkthrough: assessing the school climate, becoming familiar with teacher instructional practices, becoming familiar with the curriculum, assessing the level of student engagement, gathering data on student achievement and student motivation, and establishing themselves as instructional leaders of the school.

Downey et al. (2004) identify additional reasons for conducting a walkthrough. They conclude that a school leader should conduct walkthroughs to identify areas of need for professional development, assess how staff development is impacting teaching, support teacher instruction, assess school operations,

Kachur, Stout and Edwards (2010) identified the following as areas that

instructional practices, implementation of curricular initiatives, assessment techniques, student behavior, student learning activities, classroom environment and classroom variation in the purposes of walkthroughs is not the only area of ambiguity.

compare schools with similar school and principal demographics.

Research Questions and Design

The form a walkthrough takes in regards to frequency and length also varies from principal to principal. Due to such a wide variability between the form and purpose of walkthroughs, it is important to investigate how principals utilize walkthroughs in their respective school settings.

One purpose of this study is to determine if different schools implement the walkthrough process is that there is no consistent approach on how best to utilize a walkthrough to improve instructional practice.

Schools differ in regards to the form and purpose of a walkthrough or class visit. In addition, when comparing different schools, what might be impactful for one school may not work for another (Lemons & Helsing, 2009).

While most instructional leaders utilize walkthroughs to improve student achievement, there is no agreed upon focus to achieve this end. This problem may be addressed by researching the different forms a walkthrough can take and looking at the different purposes principals have for conducting walkthroughs.

While there is a lack of consistency in the form and purpose of walkthroughs, this analysis will look at whether the perceived variability becomes more consistent when we



initiative, walkthroughs are an opportunity to determine if teachers need further support in implementing the program successfully.

Spending more time in classrooms also has two other valuable functions: it decreases the level of teacher anxiety when teachers see their principal enter their classrooms and provides a more accurate account of teacher practice (Downey & Frase, 2001). Teachers and students will come to expect classroom visits and they will become part of the norm.

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think, and how they motivate themselves (Bandura, 1994). The notion of self-efficacy has been shown to have an impact on student achievement directly as well as how teachers feel about their work in the classroom (Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

Teachers who have high self-efficacy believe in their ability to teach students at a high level, and this helps to promote student learning (Downey, 2004). Self-efficacy has EHHQ VKRZQ WR LPSDFW WHDFKHUV¶ EHOLHIV LQ KRZ they perform in the classroom, but research has also shown that it positively impacts student achievement in both reading and writing (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000). Frequent classroom walkthroughs have been shown to have an impact on teacher self-efficacy (Chester & Baudin, 1996). While they do not influence student learning directly, classroom YLVLWV KDYH WKH DELOLW\ WR LQFUHDVH D WHDFKHUV¶V belief that they can perform their role effectively.

The mere practice of visiting classrooms has an impact on teacher self-efficacy (LDF\ DQG EXLOGLQJ D WHDFKHUV¶V DELOLW\ WR IDFH challenges (Bandura, 1994). Teachers with a



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