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## In the Real World: The Many Benefits of Classroom Walkthroughs

One principal shares how she uses classroom walkthroughs to keep current on what is being taught.

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by Sharon Weber

With spring in full bloom, we as administrators may find ourselves tied more to our offices with discipline, field trip planning, and the management of our buildings, but being constantly visible in the halls and classroom is still vitally important. How often do you get into the classrooms? Once a week? Less than that? This column addresses the importance of walkthroughs (several times a week; daily is ideal) for us as principals.

Walkthroughs are an excellent way to keep current on what is being taught in the classrooms, head off any parent concerns, quell discipline issues, and show the faculty and students that you care about them. In the January/February 2005 issue of *Principal* magazine, I reviewed a book on this subject titled *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through: Changing School Supervisory Practice One Teacher at a Time*, by Carolyn Downey, *et al.* To date, I feel that this is a top-notch resource for any principal who wants to complete quick (two to three minutes per classroom) walkthroughs in their buildings. The walkthroughs in Downey's book focus on curricular and instructional decision points of the teacher, rather than on a specific checklist. I appreciated this approach because when I introduced differentiation techniques to my faculty, I was able to document teacher usage and then revisit the topic and give "kudos" at the next meeting. This kept teachers motivated and also led to teachers sharing strategies that they've implemented.

Administrators in the Punxsutawney Area School District in Pennsylvania went through two days of training on Downey's walkthrough process and on how to coordinate this activity using our Palm devices. We then held faculty meetings with our teachers to explain what we'd be doing and to explain the process. The administrators spent the second semester of that year practicing walkthroughs, as well. It has been almost three years now that we've been consistently walking through our classrooms. Benefits to walkthroughs that I've noticed are:

- They are short (two to three minutes each);
- Walkthroughs are unannounced, so I get a true feel of the classrooms;
- Follow up with teachers occurs after 10 to 12 visits, not after each one;
- The computerized software program makes printing reports easy;
- I can visit novice teachers or a marginal teacher more often than veteran teachers, if I choose;
- Teachers reflect on their teaching rather than them feeling like I judge them personally;
- Teachers also ask me to come in on specific lessons, so that I don't miss them;
- I give praise to individual teachers one-to-one or in groups based on what I see and hear in their rooms on a regular basis;
- I discuss student behaviors with teachers and am proactive with parents on behavior issues;
- When parents call regarding class-related issues, I am knowledgeable about the students and can relate what I've noticed—thereby lowering the number of calls and conferences my teachers get;
- Teachers are willing to share ideas because we have a "school focus" rather than just a "teacher focus";
- I feel that teachers appreciate seeing me in the classrooms rather than in my office;
- I am current on the curriculum being taught in my building;
- I plan staff development topics based on walkthrough data; and
- I have extensive data on teachers that are struggling, which I can incorporate into growth plans, conversations, and meetings.

After three years, I find that teachers don't even pause during instruction when I walk into the room, and students remain on task as well. I am aware of the changes in bulletin boards, student work, and in seating arrangements. I also regularly check teacher lesson plans and grade books.

As you probably figured out, I am a huge fan of walkthroughs. Do all of the minutes add up that you are out of your office for this process? You bet. Do you end up either coming in early, working late, or taking work home to compensate for it? Absolutely. But is it worth it? Without a doubt.

If you are using a form of a walkthrough that you really like, please let me know! Also, if you've found a walkthrough resource that you use on a regular basis, I'd love to hear about it.

I hope that the end of the school year is calm, quick, and uneventful for you all. Best wishes for a relaxing summer!

Signing off from the educational "real world,"

Sharon Weber

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