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PRINCIPALS' USE OF CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGH OBSERVATIONS TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION: A GROUNDED THEORY

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PRINCIPALS' USE OF CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGH OBSERVATIONS TO

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By

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PRINCIPALS' USE OF CLASSROOM WALKTHROUGH OBSERVATIONS TO

IMPROVE INSTRUCTION: A GROUNDED THEORY

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The purpose of this grounded theory study was to generate a theory that explains the process of improving instruction in Nebraska public schools through the use of classroom walkthroughs. Classroom walkthroughs are brief, frequent, and unannounced observations conducted by building principals and other instructional leaders. Five Nebraska public school principals were invited to participate in taped interviews. Snowball and chain sampling was used to select additional teacher participants for interviews. Through these interviews conceptual labels were assigned, a core category (phenomenon) identified, and a theoretical model developed describing: (a) causal conditions that influence the phenomenon, (b) strategies that result from the phenomenon, (c) the contexts that influence the process, (d) the intervening conditions that influence the process, and (e) the consequences of the strategies when employed. Each category, along with its subcategories, is described using participant quotes, and a descriptive narrative is provided to illustrate the theory.

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Completing a doctoral degree takes the support and effort of many. The journey to complete this degree was no exception.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

There exists a growing body of knowledge on the use of classroom walkthrough observations to promote the development and improvement of educational practices within teachers' classrooms. A frequent and consistent method for supervision and evaluation is necessary to support teachers and students to help reach the increased requirements and accountability of federal mandates No Child Left Behind and state assessment practices. While the research is replete with examples of walkthrough forms and processes, there is a need to study how these forms and processes are used to collect information and how they promote the development of effective school practices. This study provides descriptive data to demonstrate the principal's use of classroom walkthrough observation processes to provide feedback, pose questions, and to develop a collaborative relationship with teachers to improve instructional practices.

Instructional leadership rests at the foundation of school improvement and increased student achievement. "Numerous research studies confirm that the most important factor contributing to student success is the effectiveness of instruction" (Bright, 2011, p. 33). Principals need to fully understand the instructional processes within schools through direct observation. Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston (2004) stated, "administrators must come to view their primary role as one of an instructional leader promoting improved student achievement" (p. 7). The literature supports the idea that principals who know about effective education practices make schools more successful. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) wrote of the strong correlation between effective principal leadership and improved student achievement

scores. A primary role of a principal should be a focus on teaching and learning. Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) discussed the importance of the principal's purpose when observing classrooms: "Improving a teacher's strategies and behaviors in the classroom should be the primary focus of supervision and evaluation" (p. 51).

While it is well known that leaders should focus on teaching and learning practices, it is also known that leaders must engage in frequent conversations with their instructional staff about these practices. Walkthroughs provide a structure for these conversations to occur. Simply stated, a walkthrough is a brief, focused classroom visit (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2009; Larson, 2007). They are often unannounced visits in which leaders collect data about what they observe (Kachur et al., 2009). "These visits and data gathering allow principals to engage in dialogue with teachers regarding instruction in ways that go beyond the required formal observations" (Schomburg, 2006, p. 547). These frequent conversations can have an influence on the relationship among professionals, and also have the potential to lead teachers to thinking about their own practices. "Walkthroughs are all about teacher and principals working together to reflect on teaching practices. Reflection is the key component" (Hopkins, 2005, p. 3). Through reflection on their instruction, teachers begin to develop a focus for their own practices and develop ideas for possible changes or additions to current practices.

Blasé and Blasé (1999) advocate that effective instructional leadership is "talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth" (p. 3). They encourage the concept that effective leaders promote dialogue to guide teachers' improvement efforts. "Effective principals 'hold up a mirror,' serve as 'another set of eyes,' and are 'critical friends' who engage in thoughtful discourse with teachers" (p. 4).

While the practice of talking with teachers is an important aspect of leadership, the hierarchy of leadership can often times extinguish the opportunities to develop the appropriate relationship for true improvement. Leaders who demonstrate a commitment to working *with* teachers improve their chances at developing stronger relationships. Knight (2011) wrote: "When we give up our top-down power and adopt a partnership approach to interaction, we replace the empty power we get by virtue of our position with the authentic power gained through choice" (p. 1). The collaborative relationships forged among administrators and teachers are an essential aspect of the process of change. Downey et al. (2004), authors of *The Three-Minute Classroom Walkthrough* write, "Leadership must initiate change . . . collaborative affiliations are critical for successful change" (p. 111).

The change process in schools is dependent upon the view principals hold of themselves. Principals should view themselves as an instructional coach to create improvements to the teaching and learning process. The concept of the principal as a coach helps provide a focus on instruction. Nidus and Sadder (2011) wrote, "formative coaching is built on deep analysis of teaching and learning" (p. 4). The coaching interaction is described by Downey et al. (2004): "Teacher learning and growth do not magically and spontaneously unfold. Rather, teachers depend on appropriate interaction between themselves and the principal and between themselves and other professionals" (p. 132). Downey et al. estimated that most educators overlook the importance of this relationship. "We would underscore that teacher learning and growth are dependent upon the interaction between teacher and principal" (p. 132). Making a commitment for improvement rather than accountability can change the culture of a school. When

reviewing the literature related to effective schools, Fullan and Knight (2011) concluded that schools that demonstrated substantial improvement "focused 78% of their interventions on professional learning and only 22% on accountability" (p. 22).

The use of a classroom walkthrough observation can help keep the focus on professional learning rather than on the role of accountability. Feedback from a principal can be an important aspect of an individual teacher's growth. "When administrators equip themselves with a walkthrough instrument and give teachers specific, detailed instructional feedback based on a 3 to 10 minute informal snapshot of a lesson, the effect can be tremendous" (Skretta & Fisher, 2002, p. 39). Conducting walkthroughs also creates a framework for principals to develop self-reflection among teachers. Downey et al. (2004) encouraged a walkthrough process that leads to collaboration among teachers and administrators, rather than a principal's evaluation of the classroom teacher. Walkthroughs should promote self-reflection on the part of the teacher that fosters personal accountability for improvement. Walkthrough observations also provide consistent, frequent, and brief pieces of information for teachers to reflect upon. This observational process can "produce information in bite-sized pieces that are easier for teachers to digest" (Downey et al., 2004, p. 2).

Danielson and McGreal (2000), professional educators who have studied teacher evaluation processes suggested that when approached in a certain way, an evaluation system can have a positive influence on teacher growth. "Evaluation systems designed to support teacher growth and development through an emphasis on formative evaluation techniques produces higher levels of satisfaction and more thoughtful and reflective practice while still being able to satisfy accountability demands" (p. 15). The

walkthrough process is one designed to provide frequent feedback about classrooms to support teacher growth. "Observing and being observed and giving and getting feedback about one's work in the classroom are the most powerful tools for instructional improvement and professional recognition" (Frase & Hetzel, 1990, p. 64). Hattie (1992) emphasized the importance of providing feedback for improvement: "The most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback" (Hattie, 1992, p. 9). Downey et al. (2004) shared this view of feedback for improvement; "Brief, one-on-one, focused feedback is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact and change behavior" (p. 8). The feedback component is a critical part of the classroom walkthrough process and should not be overlooked. "If walkthroughs are going to improve teaching and learning, follow-up to teachers is essential. Follow-up can be given in written or oral form and can be formal or informal" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 113). "In the absence of feedback, efficient learning is impossible and improvement only minimal even for highly motivated subjects. Hence, mere repetition of an activity will not automatically lead to improvement" (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993, p. 37). Kachur et al. (2009) wrote that while new teachers are in need of instructional support, all teachers are looking for feedback about their classrooms. "All teachers, including superstars, are hungry for feedback" (p. 71). Marzano et al. (2005) added that "creating a system that provides feedback is at the core of the responsibility of monitoring/evaluating" (p. 55). Linda Lambert (1998) described characteristics of effective feedback as:

> An information and feedback system needs to be consciously planned and implemented to ensure that frequency and quality of communication are more nearly the same for everyone. "Quality" here refers to respectful listening, asking essential questions, giving and receiving specific feedback. (p. 95)

Effective walkthrough processes combine observation and feedback to promote improved skills among teachers. "The first step for any teacher who seeks to increase his or her pedagogical skills . . . is to identify and focus on specific areas of pedagogical strength and weakness" (Marzano, et al., 2011, p. 55). Over time walkthroughs can provide information about the instructional abilities of individual staff. Once skills are identified, supervisors can begin to coach specific teachers. Marzano et al. (2011) wrote, "coaching is facilitating the efforts of another as they move toward a goal" (p. 74).

The coaching strategy elicits conversation between supervisor and instructor. "To facilitate learning, coaches must take off the expert hat, asking rather than telling, in order to assist teachers to adapt recommendations and find their own best way forward" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 2). Blasé and Blasé (1999) discussed the importance of coaching teachers to help improve their skills: "Formative coaching enables principals to provide meaningful feedback to teachers from their classroom observations. These one-on-one conversations provide a foundation for improving teaching and learning throughout the entire school" (p. 2). Berliner (1982) suggested that leaders should focus less on external supports. "Principals and central office supervisors should concentrate their staff development efforts on in-class coaching . . . they should bring in fewer speakers and instead have somebody in classrooms helping teachers make changes" (p. 14). This approach can help develop a better learning environment for teachers. "Through empathetic listening, coaches reduce defensiveness and increase teacher engagement in their own professional development" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 41).

Once a principal has made the commitment to being an instructional coach, the critical step is to be sure the coaching is done appropriately. Two vital components to the coaching process include listening and asking good questions. "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" (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008, p. 9).

> Coaches ask questions of their partners because they're more concerned with getting things right than with being right. Therefore, they ask good questions to which they don't know the answers -- and they listen for the answers . . . they stop persuading, and they start learning. (Knight, 2011, p. 3)

While there are numerous articles describing the overall classroom walkthrough observation process and the various formats of classroom walkthroughs observation forms, there lacks a description of how the process of classroom walkthrough observations leads to increased dialogue, coaching practices, and reflective dialogue about classroom instruction. Through observations of and conversations with teachers, principals have a greater ability to design and implement professional development opportunities to improve instructional practices. While we know that frequent communication about instructional practices is an important aspect of professional development for teachers, and that coaching practices help teachers to become more effective, we don't know *how* principals use the classroom walkthrough observation process to achieve these goals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a theoretical model that describes the process of improving instructional practices through the use of classroom walkthrough observations in Nebraska public schools. This study contributes to the

existing body of research that focuses on the role of school principals as instructional leaders. For the purposes of this study, classroom walkthroughs were defined as frequent, brief, unannounced observations of classrooms.

Research Questions

    Central question. The central question for the study was: What theory explains the process of improving instructional practices through the use of classroom walkthrough observations in Nebraska public schools?

    Sub-questions. The following sub-questions provided specificity:

1. What is central to the process of using classroom walkthrough observations to improve instruction?

2. Who influences the process of improving instruction through the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

3. What influences the process of improving instruction through the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

4. What strategies emerge from the process of using classroom walkthrough observations?

5. In what context are these strategies employed?

6. What are the outcomes of the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

Definition of Terms

    The following terms were defined for the purpose of the reader's understanding:

    Classroom Walkthrough Observation—A brief, unannounced observation of a classroom. These observations are typically completed with a greater frequency than formal observations and often have a set of criteria to be observed. Data is typically

collected on a walkthrough form and may be shared with teachers. This process is contrasted with the formal observation process in that it typically includes criteria for instructional practices that can be readily observed during classroom instruction, such as questioning strategies. Teaching practices such as planning and preparation are not easily observed during classroom instruction and are typically not included as one of the criteria to be observed.

Instructional Leadership—The skills, knowledge, and disposition of individuals who promote effective teaching. The skills might include communication of expectations, supporting instruction, modeling expected behaviors, being visible, and observing instruction. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices are common.

Student Achievement—The measure of students' knowledge and skills. This commonly refers to how students perform on local, state or national assessments and generally measure specific content areas.

Instructional Practices—The activities teachers use to promote student learning. Activities or strategies are used to introduce and reinforce academic content, promote an effective learning environment, and to build teacher-student rapport.

Instructional Coaching—The process of communicating with teachers about instructional research and strategies with the goal of increasing student engagement, improving student achievement, and building teacher capacity. This process includes posing open-ended questions, teacher goal setting, and providing support to meet identified goals.

Professional Development/Learning—Activities or information provided for teachers to implement new instructional practices or to improve current instructional practices.

Instructional Framework—The criteria and language used to describe instructional practices within the classroom. Having an instructional framework that is known and common to both teachers and principals allows for greater communication and dialogue regarding instructional practices and possible improvements.

Feedback—Information provided to the teacher after an observation. This information can be in oral or written form, and can be formal or informal.

Observation Criteria—The aspects of the classroom that are evaluated or examined during an observation. Criteria can be determined prior to the observation to provide a greater focus for the observer.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study provided guidance in the preparation, development, and monitoring of principal behaviors. Principals serve a critical role in the evaluation and observation process, guiding teachers as they work to improve instruction in their classrooms. Identifying critical components of the walkthrough observation process sheds light on methods to develop more effective and enhanced observation and feedback skills on the part of principals. Professional development service providers and university staff may find the results of this study useful as they plan for training and development opportunities for aspiring and acting principals.

Classroom teachers may also benefit as a result of this study. Feedback regarding instructional classroom practices can lead to improved teaching. Teachers who engage in

reflective dialogue with their principals may stand a greater chance of altering their teaching methods, and in turn, creating classrooms that are more effective. Having an observation process that encourages discussion and conversation may increase the quality of relationship between classroom teachers and principals, which may affect the job satisfaction of teachers.

Limitations of the Study

There were a number of limitations related to this study. Much of the data was based on semi-structured interviews; one limitation in this context is the honesty and involvement of the participants. Related to this limitation is the knowledge and ability of the researcher when conducting the interviews; specifically the structure, follow-up, and questioning during the interview process.

Another limitation of the study was the process to identify participants. The selection of principals to be part of the study was dependent upon the panel of experts who have experience and possess knowledge in school supervisory and observation practices to accurately identify schools and principals who conduct classroom walkthrough observations that truly have a positive affect on the learning environment. Building principals were asked to identify teacher interview participants. The study was dependent upon the ability and willingness of principals to identify teachers who could provide relevant and accurate information related to the walkthrough observation process.

This study only examined 3-4 teachers within each building. This is only a small percentage of teachers, and they may or not reflect the perceptions of all teachers within the building. These teacher participants were not randomly selected. The teachers were

chosen by their principal, as an individual who had experiences with the classroom walkthrough observations who would add information to the study.

This study was limited to five schools. These schools were identified as having an effective system in place and were selected through a theoretical sampling process. While each of these schools demonstrated how the classroom walkthrough observation process is effectively used, the lacks specific data to indicate how each school arrived at that state. Rather, this study indicated how the existing process leads to improved instruction.

In each school there existed a high level of trust. This was an essential component of the process, as it encouraged greater collaboration between teacher and principal, which resulted in more dialogue about effective instruction. This study does not provide data to indicate how trust is developed and cultivated among teachers and their observers.

The generalizability of the data from this research study was limited due to the nature of the study. Qualitative research is not designed to predict or account for large populations, but rather to understand individuals or small groups. To generalize the information from this study, further quantitative, hypothesis-testing studies could be designed and conducted.

Delimitations of the Study

The participants in this study were principals in Nebraska public schools, and teachers who were observed by those principals. This study was limited to the classroom walkthrough observation process and the interactions that occurred though its use; this study will not include the school or district formal evaluation process. Participants for

this study were limited to principals and teachers who were employed during the 2014-2015 school years.

Summary

The studies surrounding the topic of classroom walkthrough observations and their use are increasing. There is a realization that the frequent and consistent supervision, and feedback the walkthrough observation process provides can be beneficial to school leaders and their staff. There is limited research demonstrating how this process was developed and what aspects of the process were the most critical in the development of a collaborative relationship between principals and teachers that leads to instructional improvement.

The role of an effective principal includes a devotion to the teaching and learning process, and a commitment to making continuous improvements over time. Principals must engage in frequent dialogue with instructional staff to promote the reflection of current practice. By assuming an instructional coaching role, principals can help drive the improvement of classroom practices through reflective inquiry and focused professional learning.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There exists a growing body of knowledge on the use of walkthroughs to promote the development and improvement of educational practices within teachers' classrooms. A frequent and consistent method for supervision, observation, and feedback is necessary to support teachers and students to help reach the increased requirements and accountability of federal mandates and state assessment practices. While the research is replete with examples of walkthrough forms and processes, there was a need to study how these forms and processes are used to collect data and how they promote the development of effective instructional leadership and classroom teaching practices. This study provides descriptive data to demonstrate principal's use of walkthrough processes to collect and organize data, provide feedback and pose questions, and to design and deliver targeted professional development.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership rests at the foundation of school improvement and increased student achievement. "Numerous research studies confirm that the most important factor contributing to student success is the effectiveness of instruction" (Bright, 2011, p. 33). Principals need to fully understand the instructional processes within the schools through direct observation. Downey et al. (2004) stated, "administrators must come to view their primary role as one of an instructional leader promoting improved student achievement" (p. 7). The literature supports the idea that principals who know about effective education practices make schools more successful. Marzano et al. (2005) emphasized the strong correlation between effective principal

leadership and improved student achievement scores. A primary role of a principal should be a focus on teaching and learning. Marzano et al. (2011) discussed the importance of principal focus when observing classrooms: "Improving a teacher's strategies and behaviors in the classroom should be the primary focus of supervision and evaluation" (p. 51).

Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Effective leaders use their knowledge to help provide guidance and support to classroom teachers. Elmore (2000) emphasized how critical it is for an instructional leader to understand effective practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment and the ability to work with teachers on the day-to-day problems related to these topics.   The building leader plays an important role in regards to expectations. "The Principal must still set the expectations for student learning" (Nidus & Sadder, 2011, p. 3). The principal must have an academic focus to help assist and guide teachers to the implementation of new instructional practices. Danielson and McGreal (2000) wrote in their book entitled *Teacher Evaluation to Enhance Professional Practice*, "School staff lack the time . . . to become knowledgeable about the best evidence emerging from the research on teaching." If teachers lack the time to learn independently, schools must provide a structure for teachers to engage in dialogue with school leaders and colleagues to develop knowledge regarding instructional practices.

To effectively set expectations for learning, a building principal must allocate adequate time to observe the learning process in classrooms. Walkthroughs can provide leaders with a structure to consistently review and collect information regarding the learning process (Kachur et al., 2009). Additionally, there ought to be a substantial

amount of time spent in classrooms to develop a true sense of the reality of classrooms.

Promoting instructional improvements in a school "requires those making judgments to

be knowledgeable about instruction and spend more than a few minutes observing"

(David, 2007, p. 82).

> The research has demonstrated the great need for strong instructional leadership
> in schools and has identified several common characteristics of effective
> leaders. One of those characteristics, extremely important in the life of a school
> and often neglected, is that of being a visible principal. (Whitaker, 2007, p. 155)

Marzano et al. (2005) cited several responsibilities of a principal that correlate

with positive student achievement. Situational awareness, or the need to be aware of

current and potential problems, and monitoring and evaluating, the need to observe

effective school practices and the impact they have on student learning, are two of those

responsibilities. Walkthrough observations allowed principals to be recognized as

instructional leaders by increasing their visibility in classrooms (Freedman & LaFleur,

2002).

Conversations. Supervision of instruction must transcend the basic requirements

required by state statute. A leader must engage in frequent conversations with their

instructional staff to be effective. Classroom walkthrough observations provide a

structure for these conversations to occur. "These visits and data gathering allow

principals to engage in dialogue with teachers regarding instruction in ways that go

beyond the required formal observations" (Schomburg, 2006, p. 547). Frequent

conversations can lead to teachers thinking about their own practices. "Walkthroughs are

all about teachers and principals working together to reflect on teaching

practices. Reflection is the key component" (Hopkins, 2005, p. 3). Blasé and Blasé

(1999) advocated that effective instructional leadership is "talking with teachers to

promote reflection and promoting professional growth" (p. 3). They encouraged the concept that effective leaders promote dialogue to guide teachers' improvement efforts. "Effective principals 'hold up a mirror,' serve as 'another set of eyes,' and are 'critical friends' who engage in thoughtful discourse with teachers" (Blasé & Blasé, 1999, p. 133). The hierarchy of leadership can often times extinguish the opportunities to develop the appropriate relationship for true improvement. Knight (2011) shared: "When we give up our top-down power and adopt a partnership approach to interaction, we replace the empty power we get by virtue of our position with the authentic power gained through choice" (p. 20). The collaborative relationships forged among administrators and teachers are an essential aspect of the process of change. "Leadership must initiate change . . . collaborative affiliations are critical for successful change" (Downey et al., 2004, p. 111).

Principals should view themselves as an instructional coach to create improvements to the teaching and learning process. The concept of the principal as a coach helps provide a focus on instruction. Nidus and Sadder (2011) wrote, "formative coaching is built on deep analysis of teaching and learning" (p. 4). The coaching interaction was described by Downey et al. (2004): "Teacher learning and growth do not magically and spontaneously unfold. Rather, teachers depend on appropriate interaction between themselves and the principal and between themselves and other professionals" (p. 132). Downey estimated that most educators overlook the importance of this relationship. "We would underscore that teacher learning and growth are dependent upon the interaction between teacher and principal" (p. 132). Making a commitment for improvement rather than accountability can change the culture of a school. When

reviewing the literature related to effective schools, Fullan and Knight (2011) concluded that schools that demonstrated substantial improvement "focused 78% of their interventions on professional learning and only 22% on accountability" (p. 22).

Purpose of Walkthroughs

As stated by Kachur et al. (2009), "The hoped-for outcome of walkthroughs is that teachers closely examine their practices and become increasingly reflective, self-directed, critical thinkers focused on continually improving their teaching" (p. 113). Classroom walkthrough observations possess the potential to engage teachers in reflective thinking, provide teachers with information about their classrooms, and cultivate a collaborative environment between teacher and observer (Sullivan & Glanz, 2009). Marzano et al. (2011) provided several rationales for a walkthrough process:

> The reasons cited for conducting walkthroughs are many: frequent observations of teachers lower their apprehension, making formal observations more effective; the more supervisors and instructional coaches are in the classroom, the more they know about the school's operations; and frequent walkthroughs allow for the identification of patterns of instructional practices in a school. (p. 57)

The increased number of documented observations provides the instructional leader with increased information by which to judge the effectiveness of the instructional program. Benefits of the walkthrough include the principal's ability to become familiar with the curriculum and instructional practices, influence teaching and learning within classrooms, and to assess the learning climate of the school (Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002). Frequent observation may also lead to conversations that help promote a common instructional language. "Informal classroom observations translate to improved student achievement by using the observations as opportunities to develop a common language for instruction and to promote meaningful dialogue about instruction" (Skretta & Fisher, 2002, p. 39).

Observing instruction. Teddlie, Creemers, Kyriakides, Muijs, and Yu (2006) provided guidance suggesting that to evaluate teacher effectiveness one must be routinely in the classroom: "There are broad areas of effective teaching that have been identified by researchers . . . when we use the term effective teaching or teacher effectiveness, we are interested in what goes on in the classroom between the teacher and the students" (p. 573). The walkthrough approach to supervision and evaluation creates a system that allows for consistent review of classroom practices, and "it is not until we are impacting what is happening in the classroom that we will see higher student achievement" (Downey et al., 2004, p. 7). Downey suggested leaders not only be in classrooms, but also observe and influence the actions of the instructor. "The only way you are going to effect higher student achievement is through the teacher and his or her actions in the classroom" (p. 7). Downey et al. (2004) encouraged an informal approach that consists of observing teachers over time and creating a reflective question to promote teacher growth. This process, they contend, requires several visits to the classroom.

In the most effective form, walkthroughs become so common that they are seen as the daily routine. Through the observations of Fink and Resnick (2001) of a particular school, principals were in classrooms often; the high frequency of principal supervision and observation created an environment where principals "are in teachers' classrooms every day, and it is difficult to draw the line between observations that have an evaluative intent and those that are part of the professional support system" (p. 606). Marzano et al. (2005) shared the philosophy that frequency to the classroom is a key to supporting instruction: "As a visible presence the principal engages in frequent classroom observations and is highly accessible to faculty and staff" (p. 18). Marzano et al. (2005)

also emphasized, "Highly effective principals are in classrooms on a routine basis"

(p. 61). Developing this routine practice suggests to teachers and other educators that

"the principal is interested and engaged in the daily operations of the school; second, it

provides opportunities for the principal to interact with teachers and students regarding

substantive issues" (p. 61).

       Providing instructional support for identified needs. Supervisory systems and

practices should create a structure to support the improvement of teachers and their

instructional practices. "The walkthrough is a model or approach used to promote a

culture of collaborative learning. Used as professional development or supervision, the

walkthrough engages teachers in meaningful activities to enhance the instructional

process" (Sullivan & Glanz, 2009, p. 138). "Research has demonstrated that school

leaders must support professional development if it is to succeed by initiating and guiding

teacher development" (Frase & Hetzel, 1990, p. 50).

> Walkthroughs are not intended to evaluate individual teachers or principals or
> even to identify them by name in post-observation reports. Rather, the goal of
> walkthroughs are to help administrators and teachers learn more about instruction
> and to identify what training and support teachers need. (David, 2007, p. 81)

Classroom walkthrough observations "provide a way for the principal to determine what

additional support teachers need in order to achieve the school's goals" (Richardson,

2001, p. 1). Information gathered from walkthroughs "informs the leaders of the

strengths of the instructional system and the areas that require more reflection and

information from teachers" (Larson, 2007, p. 2). "Walkthroughs - announced or not -

provide data for conversations about how to improve teaching and increase student

learning" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 71). Identifying and providing an opportunity for staff

to share practices and innovations develops "shared understandings of high-quality

practice" (David, 2007, p. 82). "The evidence collected from a classroom walkthrough can drive a cycle of improvement by focusing on the effects of instruction" (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007, p. 1).

Cervone and Martinez-Miller (2007) developed the following cycle by which walkthroughs can lead to systematic school improvement process:

- Gather data through walkthroughs
- Interpret the data and generate ideas
- Take an action to test your ideas
- Talk about how your actions are fostering improvement
- Refine and sustain implementation. (p. 2)

Downey et al. (2004) proposed that the primary goal of developing a walkthrough process is to assist in the development of teacher's professional skills. "The major purpose of our walkthroughs is to provide opportunities for the teacher's professional growth. Professional growth is considered a process and not some abstract point of finality on a continuum of development" (p. 41). Taking an approach that emphasizes an opportunity to improve rather than manage and require accountability may be more productive. "Principals should not only ensure that staff development programs contain key characteristics; they must adopt a management style conducive to successful implementation" (Frase & Hetzel, 1990, p. 55). "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 to the classroom" (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008, p. 11). "Observation is a source of data for use in collecting evidence and for professional discussion and reflection on teaching and learning" (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 84).

While observations have been predominantly associated with reflection on individual teachers, walkthroughs provide principals the opportunity to look at data across their entire staff. Marzano et al. (2011) suggested a "valid use of walkthroughs is to provide aggregate data for the entire faculty in a school" (p. 61). By doing so a leader can "identify instructional patterns across a group of teachers" (p. 61). Pitler and Goodwin (2008) also discussed the importance of staff-wide data review. They wrote: "one of the most powerful aspects of walkthroughs is aggregating data across teachers and over time" (p. 11). Kachur et al. (2009) also encouraged observers to look beyond individual teachers: "For maximum improvement potential, look at data gathered from walkthroughs with a school-wide focus rather than just an individual classroom focus" (p. 82). Supovitz and Weathers (2004) reported that principals found walkthrough data to be beneficial for both student and staff. The data collected from walkthroughs can be used to evaluate student programs and adjust student participation in such programs; similar data can be used to determine and align professional development opportunities for instructional staff.

The ability to systemically organize and provide targeted professional development supported by real-time data provides educational leaders the opportunity to best support teachers. Additionally, "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" (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008, p. 11).

Skretta and Fisher (2002) recommended the following steps to follow to fully implement a walkthrough observation process:

- Develop and use a common language for quality instruction.
- Establish clear and consistent expectations for the administrators' presence in classrooms and communicate these to your staff members and the school community.
- Schedule informal walkthrough observations as you would any other important item on your calendar.
- Use walkthroughs to promote dialogue with teachers.
- Share anecdotal feedback from walkthroughs with your faculty (p. 41).

Risks associated with walkthroughs. Prior to implementing a walkthrough observation system, leaders should review possible misconceptions to the process. "Walkthroughs can also carry significant risks. When the purpose is murky or when trust among teachers, principals, and central-office staff is low, walkthroughs are likely to be perceived as compliance checks, increasing distrust and tension" (David, 2007, p. 82). Leaders should reflect upon their use and intent of frequent, unannounced observations. "As one of several strategies designed to support strong instructional leaders and teachers, walkthroughs can be helpful. Used . . . to enforce compliance, however, and they are likely to backfire" (David, 2007, p. 82). Marzano et al. (2011) urged those who use a walkthrough process to be considerate of how they record and evaluate observations: "It is important to keep in mind that the absence of strategies and behaviors being observed does not necessarily imply anything negative about the teacher being observed" (p. 60). Being in a classroom for a limited amount of time assumes that the observer may not see specific behaviors that may be expected during a full class period. **"**It might simply be the case that a given strategy of behavior was not appropriate during the interval of time during which the walkthrough occurred. This is particularly true with walkthroughs" (p. 60). Marzano, et al. (2011) provided guidance to help alleviate the short duration of typical walkthrough observations: "One useful convention to follow when conducting walkthroughs is for observers to make a brief scan of the observation form immediately

after the walkthrough is conducted" (p. 60). "This might remind the observer of a strategy or behavior that occurred but was not recorded." However, when specific strategies or techniques may not be witnessed, observers need to understand that this does not create the implication that the teacher being observed is deficient. City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) also wrote that making judgments based on limited and brief visits to classrooms can be risky and counterproductive:

> The purpose of some walkthroughs has been to identify deficiencies in classroom practice and to "fix" teachers who manifest these deficiencies. In many instances, judgments about what needs fixing are made on the basis of simplistic checklists that have little or nothing to do with direct experience of teachers in their classrooms. Groups of administrators descend on classrooms with clipboards and checklists, caucus briefly in the hallway, and then deliver a set of simplistic messages about what needs fixing. This kind of practice is antithetical to the purposes of instructional rounds and profoundly anti-professional. (p. 4)

Frase and Hetzel (1990) provided a list of negative implications that may occur when principals begin to provide feedback. Principals may "act as a know it all," "procrastinates on problems," or have "no or impractical suggestions regarding instruction and classroom management" (p. 67). Classroom walkthrough observations should be developed to provide a structure that intends to help each educator become more self-reflective, to review his or her own teaching abilities, and to determine how one might improve those abilities (Downey et al., 2004). They should encourage educators to learn collaboratively with colleagues and supervisors. Downey et al. (2004) suggested that classroom walkthrough observations are not intended to be used during a principal's evaluation of a classroom teacher. The data that instructional leaders glean from these informal visits are best used to guide the professional learning of the observed teacher.

Structure of Walkthroughs

A review of the literature related to walkthroughs revealed that there are numerous approaches and structures to the walkthrough process. Simply stated, a walkthrough is a brief and focused visit to a classroom (Kachur et al., 2009; Larson, 2007). However, the structures of classroom walkthrough observations vary greatly, and not only in the suggested amount of time spent in each classroom, but also in the process of completing the walkthrough, and the type and amount of data collected for each classroom visit. "In theory, before visiting classrooms, observers decide what they will focus on, what evidence they will collect, and how they will make sense of it. Afterward, they report their findings formally or informally to one or more audiences" (David, 2007, p. 81). Kachur et al. (2009) discovered that the majority of walkthrough programs advocate for providing feedback to teachers. "Most walkthrough models suggest that there be some kind of follow-up to teachers after walkthroughs" (p. 71).

Time and frequency. The time spent in classrooms has not been standardized for walkthrough observations. "The sheer variety of walkthroughs is breathtaking. They can last from 2 to 45 minutes" (David, 2007, p. 81). Kachur et al. (2009) have completed an in-depth review of walkthroughs and concluded, "Visits range from . . . 'rounds' that last 30-45 seconds to . . . models that call for up to 20 minutes" (p. 67). Frase and Hetzel (1990), authors of *School Management by Wandering Around*, suggested observers should get into each classroom twice a week. They emphasized that teachers do not develop a sense of trust with an observer, or the feeling that the observer has a strong understanding of their teaching abilities and routines in less than three visits of adequate length.

Recording evidence. How observers record information during and after classroom walkthroughs varies from observers recording narratives to completing predetermined checklists, or a combination of checklists and anecdotal notes (Kachur et al., 2009). Hopkins (2005) wrote: "Principals record their walkthrough observations in a wide variety of ways. Some have set forms. Others use informal forms or observations notes" (p. 4). While checklists can be completed quickly and can provide quantitative data that is easily recorded, they may not provide the feedback needed to promote improvement in teachers' practices. "Checklists focused on surface features are not likely to provide useful information to teachers as they implement new approaches or refine their teaching practices" (David, 2007, p. 81). "To be most effective, feedback on summative judgments should also include a narrative component" (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 97). David (2007) argued that checklists alone fail to provide effective feedback for teaching and learning practices to improve: "Checklists focused on surface features are not likely to provide useful information to teachers as they implement new approaches or refine their teaching practices" (82). Checklist data is easy to collect and review but may not capture the most essential information from the classroom. "Although the efficiency of electronic checklists is appealing, the kinds of data that provide the most valuable feedback are not necessarily those that are easiest to count and record" (David, 2007, p. 82).

What to Look For

Schomburg (2006) stressed: "Be clear about your motives and the ends you seek" (p. 549). Creating a focus for a walkthrough observation is necessary to create the alignment needed to promote change in instruction. The literature suggested that

walkthroughs would be most effective if they are "based on a foundation of research on instructional practices that positively impact student learning" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 77).

Observation criteria. There was substantial research suggesting what strategies were most effective to promote learning. The research available can help instructional supervisors to determine what might be observed within classrooms. Effective supervision relies upon developing and clarifying evaluative criteria or the "what" to be evaluated (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). "A major tenet of successful observation is that the accuracy and usefulness of classroom observation is directly related to the supervisor's use of a narrow focus of observation" (p. 86). This focus becomes especially important with the nature of a walkthrough.

Conducting numerous, brief observations in a school requires the observer to have a clear focus. The key to making accurate decisions based on short observations is knowing what to look for. "If principals don't know what to look for or misunderstand the purpose of walkthroughs, their observations can be useless, or worse, harmful to teachers and students" (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008, p. 9). While there are several classroom walkthrough observation models being developed and implemented in schools, each one has a defined set of principles or strategies to observe. Kachur et al. (2009) described this set of principles or "Look-Fors" as:

> Explicit teacher or student behaviors that participants will observe and record throughout their walks. Look-fors are clear statements or descriptors or observable evidence of teaching and learning such as specific instructional strategies, learning activities, behavioral outcomes, artifacts, routines, or practices. They are quantitative data that may assess both the degree of program implementation and needs of individual teachers, groups of teachers, the entire school, or school district. (p. 76)

Teddlie et al. (2006) identified the following observable components of effective

instruction: assessment and evaluation, differentiation and inclusion, clarity of instruction,

instructional skills, promoting active learning, classroom climate, and classroom

management (p. 576). These instructional skills are broad areas that are observable in the

classroom between teachers and students.

The Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning Corporation (McREL)

has developed a walkthrough process called the *Power Walkthrough*. This tool includes a

focus on Marzano's nine instructional strategies described in *Classroom Instruction that*

Works (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Other walkthroughs may focus on

questioning strategies, student engagement, and the degree of differentiation within

classrooms (Kachur et al., 2009).

Downey et al. (2004) created a walkthrough model that has five areas of focus:

(a) student orientation to the work, (b) curricular decisions (objectives), (c) instructional

strategies, (d) walk the walls (evidence of past objectives), and (e) safety conditions (p.

41). Kachur et al. (2009) wrote of an instructional walkthrough process developed by

Deborah Tyler that has a similar focus as the Downey model. Her focus included teacher

talk and questioning, curricular indicators and objectives, use of materials, instructional

decisions, the ability of students to explain what they are doing, display of student work,

and the use of assessment to monitor student progress. Kachur et al. (2009) also

described the *Look 2 Learning* model, which focused on curriculum objectives, levels of

thinking, quality of student work, learner engagement, and instruction.

While some models are broad and try to capture all aspects of teaching and

learning, others have a more limited, but targeted focus. The *Equity Learning Walk,*

developed by the Educational Equity Center (Kachur et al., 2009) focused on the equity in participation, support, and expectations for all students, including those verified for special education and English language learner programs.

The *Learning Keys' Data Walks* and the *Instructional Practices Inventory Process* models have an even narrower focus. Both models provide a structure for principals to observe teacher actions and classroom organization as they relate to student engagement (Kachur et al., 2009).

While defining the focus of observation is an essential element to the development of effective observation practices, leaders might also develop questions as a method to create a focus for observations. Sergiovanni (1987) listed several questions as examples to be used to create a focus for observation:

- What activities?
- Do they correspond to the objectives?
- Teacher and student activities?
- Aligned with school mission?
- Aligned with knowledge of how students learn?
- Aligned with understanding of the structure of the subject matter?
- Appropriate instructional strategies?
- Are students learning (assessment)? (p. 57)

Aligned with feedback. The focus for the walkthrough is important to consider, as it directly relates to the focus of the feedback provided to the instructor. "For feedback to be instrumental in developing teacher expertise, it must focus on specific classroom strategies and behaviors . . . during a set interval of time" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 6). In *School Management by Wandering Around*, Frase and Hetzel (1990) wrote of the importance of defining the focus of observations to guide the feedback process: "When the focus . . . has been determined, it becomes easy to give feedback. The focus is

important because it gives the administrator specific information to feedback to the staff member" (p. 57).

Student perceptions. Kachur et al. (2009) described a walkthrough model developed by the University of Pittsburgh and was designed to evaluate the University's Principles of Learning. This model's structure does not only rely on the interaction between the teacher and the observer, but also with direct interaction with students: "When no direct whole-class instruction is occurring, walkers talk with students about their learning. This protocol is designed to help educators analyze the elements of instruction and opportunities for learning they offer to students" (p. 78).

Providing Feedback

Effective feedback provides teachers and principals the opportunity to review and discuss classroom practices. "When administrators equip themselves with a walkthrough instrument and give teachers specific, detailed instructional feedback based on a 3 to 10 minute informal snapshot of a lesson, the effect can be tremendous" (Skretta & Fisher, 2002, p. 39).

Conducting classroom walkthrough observations also creates a framework for principals to develop self-reflection among teachers. Downey et al. (2004) encouraged a walkthrough process that leads to collaboration among teachers and administrators, rather than a principal's evaluation of the classroom teacher. Walkthroughs should promote self-reflection on the part of the teacher that fosters personal accountability for improvement. Walkthrough observations also provide consistent, frequent, and brief pieces of information for teachers to reflect upon. This observational process can

"produce information in bite-sized pieces that are easier for teachers to digest" (Richardson, 2001, p. 2).

When designed effectively, classroom walkthrough observations focus on the improvement of teaching, rather than being used as an evaluation tool. "Evaluation systems designed to support teacher growth and development through an emphasis on formative evaluation techniques produces higher levels of satisfaction and more thoughtful and reflective practice while still being able to satisfy accountability demands" (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 15). The inclusion of instructional feedback can influence a teacher's practice. "Observing and being observed and giving and getting feedback about one's work in the classroom are the most powerful tools for instructional improvement and professional recognition" (Frase & Hetzel, 1990, p. 64). "The most powerful single modification that enhances achievement is feedback" (Hattie, 1992, p. 9). "Brief, one-on-one, focused feedback is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact and change behavior" (Downey et al., 2004, p. 8). "If walkthroughs are going to improve teaching and learning, follow-up to teachers is essential. Follow-up can be given in written or oral form and can be formal or informal" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 113).

Principals and other instructional leaders should consider the importance of sharing information collected during observations and create a plan providing feedback. "In the absence of feedback, efficient learning is impossible and improvement only minimal even for highly motivated subjects. Hence, mere repetition of an activity will not automatically lead to improvement" (Ericsson et al., 1993, p. 37). "All teachers, including superstars, are hungry for feedback" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 71). "Creating a

system that provides feedback is at the core of the responsibility of monitoring/evaluating"

(Marzano et al., 2005, p. 55).

> An information and feedback system needs to be consciously planned and implemented to ensure that frequency and quality of communication are nearly the same for everyone. "Quality" here refers to respectful listening, asking essential questions, giving and receiving specific feedback. (Lambert, 1998, p. 95)

Coaching. Effective classroom walkthrough observation processes combine observation and feedback to promote improved skills among teachers. "The first step for any teacher who seeks to increase his or her pedagogical skills . . . is to identify and focus on specific areas of pedagogical strength and weakness" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 55). Over time walkthroughs can provide information about the instructional abilities of individual staff. Once skills are identified, supervisors can begin to coach specific teachers. "Coaching is facilitating the efforts of another as they more toward a goal" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 74).

The coaching strategy elicits conversation between supervisor and instructor. Blasé and Blasé (1999) discussed the importance of coaching teachers to help improve their skills: "Formative coaching enables principals to provide meaningful feedback to teachers from their classroom observations. These one-on-one conversations provide a foundation for improving teaching and learning throughout the entire school" (p. 2). "Principals and central office supervisors should concentrate their staff development efforts on in-class coaching . . . they should bring in fewer speakers and instead have somebody in classrooms helping teachers make changes . . ." (Berliner, 1982, p. 14). "To facilitate learning, coaches must take off the expert hat, asking rather than telling, in order to assist teachers to adapt recommendations and find their own best way forward" (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 39).

Using a coaching approach can create a more collaborative relationship with

teachers. "Through empathetic listening, coaches reduce defensiveness and increase

teacher engagement in their own professional development" (Tschannen-Moran &

Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 41). "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" (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008,

p. 9). According to Knight (2011) principals should pose open-ended questions and

feedback should be provided frequently; coaching for application should be included in

this process.

> Coaches ask questions of their partners because they're more concerned with
> getting things right than with being right. Therefore, they ask good questions to
> which they don't know the answers -- and they listen for the answers . . . they stop
> persuading, and they start learning. (Knight, 2011, p. 28)

Top-down feedback. Feedback that is defined by a set of directives to be

accomplished tends to be less effective in classroom instruction improvement efforts.

"Directive 'tell and sell' coaching models often do more harm than good" (Tschannen-

Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011, p. 7).

> The term *feedback* often brings to mind traditional top-down feedback. We
> envision a coach who gives an athlete feedback on how to hit the ball or jump a
> hurdle. This kind of feedback usually involves giving some positive comments,
> explaining how to improve, and ensuring that the listener knows what he or she
> needs to do to improve. When coaches take the top-down approach in school,
> they use data to explain what they think the teacher has done well and what she or
> he needs to do to improve. Top-down coaches do most of the talking because they
> want to make sure that teachers learn how to do something correctly. However,
> the problem with top-down feedback is that it's based on the assumption that
> there's only one right way to see things—and that right way is always the coach's
> way. An alternative to top-down feedback is the partnership approach—the
> collaborative exploration of data. Here, coach and teacher sit side by side as
> partners and discuss their interpretations of the data that the coach has gathered.
> Coaches don't withhold their opinions, but they offer them provisionally,

communicating their openness to the teacher's point of view. (Knight, 2011, pp. 30-32).

Knight further explained: "Equality is a necessary condition of any partnership. In true partnerships, one partner does not tell the other what to do; both partners share ideas and make decisions together as equals" (2011, p. 2). Sarason (1996) noted that when a young teacher is provided an "evaluation-free relationship" (p. 211) with a more masterful colleague, there is an increased chance that the inexperienced teacher will grow in skillfulness and effectiveness. "To be most beneficial, follow-up will be a collegial discussion reflecting on teaching and learning observed and will be non-evaluative" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 122).

Reflection on teaching. The classroom walkthrough observation process provides principals the opportunity to provoke the reflective process. "These frequent, short, unscheduled visits can foster focused, reflective, and collaborative adult learning" (Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002, p. 1). "Professional growth comes from reflecting on what you're learning. When professionals are told what to do - and when and how to do it, with no room for their own individual thought - there's a good chance they're not learning at all" (Knight, 2011, p. 12). Rather than provide comments that evaluate instructional practices, principals should use strategies that encourage teachers to think about their classroom and how they might make adjustments. "Walkthroughs are used to facilitate conversations about teaching and learning, so it is helpful to encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching practices relative to student achievement" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 113). "Few activities are more powerful for professional learning than reflection on practice" (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 24). Downey et al. (2004) described the

reflective process, and how the focus of the teachers should be on their decision-making

process, rather than on what they do in the classroom:

> The more recent stages in the evolution of the Downey Walkthrough are the focus on teacher decisions rather than on teacher actions. There is more focus on reflection about how teachers will make instructional decisions in the future. Observing teacher decisions enables the teacher and principal to open up a dialogue about the criteria being used in the making of those decisions. (p. 12)

Cogan (1973) also supported the idea that supervision should seek to understand

what the teacher is thinking when he or she makes decisions. Additionally,

Hopkins (2005) wrote about posing questions to teachers to focus the efforts of

teachers.

> Focus questions set a purpose for a classroom walkthrough. The questions can cover any area of student instruction or learning. They challenge teachers to target specific best practices and to reflect continuously about their progress toward individual or school-wide goals. (p. 3)

Linda Lambert (1998) wrote about the reflection process as a way to foster increased

motivation within schools. "When we pose questions of relevance, we re-energize

ourselves and focus our work" (p. 82). Hopkins (2005) stated the importance of posing

probing questions to teachers because "the question offers the teacher a chance to reflect

on the *why* of something they are doing" (p. 3). Sullivan and Glanz (2009) wrote of the

importance of providing a framework for reflection: "With regard to learning how to

provide feedback, it is only through practicing the skills and reflecting on their

development that students of supervision will internalize and personalize what they have

learned" (p. 51). "Walkthroughs are all about teachers and principals working together to

reflect on teaching practices. Reflection is the key component" (Hopkins, 2005, p. 3).

Hopkins provided some examples of questions that may be posed to a teacher:

- How do you plan your lesson to encourage the students to be active participants?
- How do you ensure that all students understand concepts of the lesson?
- "How did you conclude how many of the students worked the problems together? (p. 3)

Asking questions to promote instructional improvement has the potential to influence student achievement. "Any question that causes teachers to reflect and has the potential to result in improved student learning and achievement is a worthy one" (Hopkins, 2005, p. 3). The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement described the role of feedback to teachers about their instructional decisions:

> Focused feedback is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact teacher behavior. Feedback often takes the form of reflective questions, such as "Why did you group your students for that activity?" or "How did you develop the criteria for posting student work?" The goal of the dialogue is twofold: to encourage teachers to reflect on their classroom practice and to inform the principal about how that practice can be supported. (*Using the Classroom Walkthrough as an Instructional Leadership Strategy, 2007*)

Professional dialogue. The amount of communication between the principal and the teacher is essential to the development or improvement process. "With respect to working with teachers, no matter what the developmental level of the staff members of the interpersonal orientation of the supervisor, the person receiving feedback should be involved in generating ideas and solutions for the situation under discussion" (Sullivan & Glanz, 2009, p. 51). "To assure the value of the walkthrough process, it is important to assure two-way communication" (Kachur et al., 2009, p. 65). "Conversations invariably engage teachers in self-assessment and reflection" (Danielson & McGreal, 2000, p. 27).

Lambert (1998) wrote of effective leadership and provided examples of leaders who "use authority to convene and support the dialogue rather than to give answers and commands" (p. 75). Effective feedback is "focused on observed classroom behavior, was

specific, expressed caring and interest, provided praise, established a problem-solving

orientation, responded to concerns about students, and stressed the principal's availability

for follow-up talk" (Blasé & Blasé, 1999, p. 4).

> The brief, one-on-one conversation about what was observed or heard is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact student behavior. The goal of such dialogue is to use questions that encourage teachers to reflect on their classroom practice. When the educators in the school openly discuss what matters in the classroom, the possibilities for continuous improvement increase rather significantly. (Kachur et al., 2009, p.114)

> **Feedback method.** Kachur et al. (2009) wrote of the various methods by which

administrators provide feedback: "Some administrators use hand-written notes, email,

post-it notes, and checklists for their follow-up . . . Others believe that follow-up should

only be given in face to face communication that can occur virtually anywhere" (p. 72).

Danielson and McGreal (2000) recommended some guidelines when providing written

feedback to instructors:

> All written summative feedback operate from a simple model of valuing. The model states that no value statement or term should be used unless it is accompanied by example, anecdote, illustration, or description. These become the facts to support the value. This concept allows administrators to use the descriptive data collected during the required activities within the system as the facts to support the judgments. (p. 97)

Written feedback is commonly provided in conjunction with a checklist (Kachur et al.,

2009). While checklists are common, they may not have a positive influence on the

observation process. Downey et al. (2004) shared that checklists narrow the scope and

vision within classrooms. Robert Marzano et al. (2011) wrote, "In our experience many

teachers prefer anecdotal feedback to numeric ratings particularly when walkthroughs are

being conducted" (p. 60). Carolyn Downey et al. (2004) urged supervisors to consider

providing recommendations for improvement directly with teachers in face-to-face

meetings:

> Unfortunately we have experienced many situations where principals choose to leave notes on areas that need improvement. Many staff members misread the words, and such approaches often push teachers away and keep supervisors from being a good influence in their careers. We strongly suggest that if you're going to make recommendations for improvements, you need to do it in a conversation. (p. 46)

While checklists are often used, principals should consider the use of written, specific

feedback. Justifying teacher ratings in narrative form ensures teachers get specific

feedback rather than assigning similar ratings to all teachers (Frase & Hetzel, 1990)

"Hastily assigned numeric ratings can be quite unfair and counterproductive" (Marzano

et al., 2011, p. 60). "To avoid problems associated with hasty numeric ratings assigned

during walkthroughs, we suggest that observers rely primarily on anecdotal feedback

during walkthroughs" (Marzano et al., 2011, p. 61). Rather than reporting numbers on a

scale, report notes in written or email form; ask teachers to assign their own rating and

provide validation for the rating (Marzano et al., 2011).

Summary

The classroom walkthrough observation process, when employed correctly can

yield positive results in schools. Principals, through frequent observations and

conversations with their instructional staff, can help define expectations for student

learning. Professional dialogue about the results of a principal's observation can develop

a culture of self-reflective teachers. Visibility within classrooms demonstrates to teachers

and students that learning is important, and principals can consistently gather real-time

information about the instructional programs within the school. Professional

development efforts can be designed and delivered to support identified pedagogical deficiencies.

If classroom walkthrough observations are used purposefully and structured appropriately, principals can collect and organize data to provide feedback to individuals and school-wide staff. Detailed feedback promotes improvement of instruction by encouraging teachers to consider *why* they use certain teaching strategies. Frequent, open-ended feedback in response to principals' observations in classrooms can cultivate professional dialogue regarding the improvement of professional teaching practices.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

Grounded theory design was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a methodology, which uses systematic procedures of analysis to develop a theory. A grounded theory of characteristics and strategies for principals to improve instructional practices through the use of classroom walkthrough observations was inductively generated from this research. The literature associated with classroom walkthrough observations was predominantly theoretical and descriptive in nature. There was little research on the use of classroom walkthrough observations, and what research has been conducted was largely quantitative in nature. The results of the quantitative research provided information about the structure of classroom walkthroughs (frequency of use, length of observations, etc.), but did not provide insight into *how* principals viewed the purpose of walkthroughs, how they promoted dialogue with teachers, or how they led to improved instructional practices. This qualitative study added value by providing a description from principals and teachers about the process of developing consistent dialogue and feedback to teachers to improve the educational settings for teachers and students. Many principals employ classroom walkthrough observations, but not all of them achieve the rich collaborative relationships with teachers regarding the effective instructional practices within their buildings. Through these relationships, principals and teachers gain a better understanding of the needs to support the improvement of instruction.

Creswell (2013) stated, "Grounded theory is a good design to use when a theory is

not available to explain or understand a process" (p. 88). The literature was replete with

examples of classroom walkthrough models, but lacked a detailed description of how

they are best used to create a culture where collaboration between teacher and principal to

improve instruction is the norm. This study provided data from principals who used

classroom walkthrough observations to effectively improve the instructional practices of

teachers they supervised. Specifically, this study developed an understanding of the

process by which principals began to influence instructional practices through frequent

and collaborative conversations using information from their classroom walkthrough

observations. Trust and collaboration between principals and teachers led to the

development of reflective practitioners, in turn leading to improved instructional

practices. Furthermore, this study developed a theory based on these perspectives.

A grounded theory design was used in this study. This methodology, developed

by Glaser and Strauss (1967), builds theory directly from the data.

> The end result of this type of qualitative study is a theory that emerges from, or is
> "grounded" in, the data – hence, grounded theory. Rich description is also
> important but is not the primary focus of this type of study. (Merriam, 2009,
> p. 29)

This type of study contrasts with other qualitative approaches in that it focuses on

building theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). While other approaches focus primarily on

description, grounded theory attempts to generate or discover a theory to describe a

particular process (Creswell, 2013). A "grounded theory is a qualitative research design

in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, an action or

an interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants" (p. 83). Since I

sought to better understand the process by which principals use classroom walkthrough observations to improve instruction, grounded theory was the selected approach.

Researcher Positioning

As a researcher, I would describe my approach to research as social constructivism, or interpretivism (Creswell, 2013). This approach is described as individuals who seek an "understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences . . ." (p. 24). I believe schools are complex and are difficult to describe with simple cause-and-effect relationships. The number of possible variables that can influence outcomes are too many to count, and are too difficult to measure with a few set of ideas and principles. Creswell (2013) described how this interpretive framework is used in practice:

> the questions become broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation, a meaning typically forged in discussions or interactions with other persons. The more open-ended questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say and do in the life setting. (p. 25)

To best understand how principals develop collaborative relationships with teachers through classroom walkthrough observations, and improve instructional practices, one must consider the vast number of factors that influence this process.

I have served as a school administrator for over ten years, and have always felt as though the activities that take place within classrooms are the most important area of focus for a building principal. Throughout my career as an administrator I routinely conducted classroom walkthroughs as a part of the supervision and observation of teachers and their instructional practices. Through these interactions I fostered trust and relationships with my staff through frequent conversations regarding their instructional practices, and discovered ways I could best support them in their improvement efforts.

Being in classrooms each day helped me to gain a better understanding of the challenges

teachers and students were confronted with, both academic and non-academic. Through

these observations I developed professional development plans for individual teachers, as

well as training opportunities for the entire staff. I also was able to talk with parents

more deeply about their child's learning and educational experiences.

In the fall of 2010 I developed an electronic form and process to record

walkthrough observation data. Using this form, data is aggregated over time and can be

reviewed at any point by both the teacher and the principal. I was asked to present this

electronic form at several workshops where I had the opportunity to talk directly with

principals regarding their use of the form, as well as their intent of the classroom

walkthrough observation process. While many principals use this approach merely to

supervise and evaluate teachers, there were some principals who sought to use the

walkthrough process to develop a greater sense of trust and community with their staff, to

develop reflective teachers, and to use the data collected from observations to inform

professional development planning and improvement efforts of teachers. It is these

principals whom I desired to learn more from. How have they been able to use classroom

walkthroughs observations to create this culture?

I have several years of experience associated with conducting and providing

training for the use of classroom walkthroughs, but committed to drawing conclusions

only from the data collected in this study, and made a conscious effort to exclude my own

prior judgments. My prior experiences played a role in the development of the theory,

but did not inhibit my ability to remain open to new concepts as they emerged from the

data. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) described theoretical comparisons and how they are to be approached during the formation of a theory:

> Making theoretical comparisons not only means knowing something about the theory, and at least intuitively understanding how to go about theorizing, but also means being able to play with theoretical ideas before becoming committed to a single theoretical interpretation. (p. 17)

There appears to be a delicate balance here. Being able to identify themes to pursue through further data collection without becoming too focused was the most difficult role of the researcher during the data collection and analysis process.

Sampling Method

With a grounded theory, emerging concepts and ideas drive the data collection process.

> The primary form of data collection is often interviewing in which the researcher is constantly comparing data gleaned from participants with ideas about the emerging theory. The process consists of going back and forth between the participants, gathering new interviews, and then returning to the evolving theory to fill in the gaps and to elaborate on how it works. (Creswell, 2013, p. 85)

In this qualitative research study, purposeful sampling was used in order to select participants who informed the phenomenon. "The participants are theoretically chosen (called theoretical sampling) to help the researcher best form the theory" (Creswell, 2013, p. 88).

Six initial participants were selected and invited to take part in an interview as the primary source of data. The researcher used a panel of experts who have experience and knowledge in school supervisory and observation practices to select prospective participants. The experts on the panel had first-hand experience with public schools in eastern Nebraska and were able to identify those schools that engaged in classroom walkthrough observations in a manner that reflected collegial discussions between

principals and teachers. The panel was asked to identify principals who were skilled

observers, had developed a high degree of relational trust among the staff, and used their

knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices to effectively coach the

teachers they supervise. Once identified, the researcher contacted potential participants

to request their participation in the study. They were also asked to identify up to four

teachers within their buildings who had experienced observations and feedback through

the use of a classroom walkthrough observation process, and who might provide insight

as to how classroom walkthrough observations aided in the development or improvement

of instructional practices. The researcher met with the identified teachers as potential

research participants to obtain consent and conduct face-to-face interviews.

Creswell (2013) referred to this type of sampling as snowball or chain sampling.

Dukes (1984) recommended a sample size of 20 to 30 individuals for a grounded theory

study. After initial interviews with participants, the researcher emailed electronic

transcripts of the interview to each participant, and asked them to review the information

for accuracy, and also asked participants for any additional information regarding the

study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted until enough information was

gathered to fully develop a theoretical model. The point at which no additional

information was being collected through additional data collection was referred to as

theoretical saturation. Participants continued to be pursued until the model became fully

developed, or saturated. While Dukes (1984) suggested that 20 to 30 interviews are

needed, Creswell (2013) stated the number of interviews required may be as many as 60

to reach saturation. Once the point of theoretical saturation was reached, an individual

outside the initial interviews was contacted and consulted to see if the theory was justified (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative data can come in various forms. All possible forms, however, are organized in four basic types: observations, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials (Creswell, 2013). While semi-structured interviews were the primary mode of data collection for this study, walkthrough observation documents were also used to collect data to help develop themes related to the theory. Many principals who conduct walkthroughs use a form to collect information during observations. Some of these forms are electronic, while others are hard copy. A review of the forms used by research participants were used to determine possible categories for data collection, and provided information to help guide additional interview questions posed to participants. Any written communication originating from their interactions with teachers during observations, observation conferences, at staff meetings, and other formal and informal interactions served as additional data, as they related to principal behaviors and characteristics to promote dialogue and collaboration with teachers to improve instruction.

Data Collection Procedures

The primary method of data collection was through participant interviews. Once participants for interviews were selected, face-to-face interviews on site at the research participant's school building were arranged. Creswell (2013) recommended when using individual interviews the researcher should be sure that participants were not hesitant to speak and to be sure the participants were in a comfortable setting. The intent for face-to-face interviews was to interview principals and teachers at their own building in a

location they choose. Doing so ensured that the location was a setting that was comfortable. Since the participants in this study were school principals and teachers, it was expected they would be comfortable sharing information about their supervision and observation process, as that is a common function in schools.

Six districts were initially contacted and were invited to be a part of the study. Superintendents from all 6 districts consented to have a school within their district be a part of the study. Of the 6 principals contacted to be as part of the study, 5 provided consent. Each of these 5 principals provided at least 3 teachers to be included in the study, while some provided 4 teachers to be included in the study. Overall, the study included interviews with 17 teachers and 5 principals. Of the teachers involved, 10 teachers taught at an elementary school, while the other 7 taught at a secondary school (grades 7-12). Of the 5 principals included in the study, 3 were elementary principals, and the other 2 were secondary (grades 7-12) principals. All of the schools involved in this study were located in the eastern part of Nebraska.

A digital recording device was used to record all interviews, and the researcher or a transcriptionist transcribed the recording to text. The texts were entered into a computer program that aided in the identification of common words and phrases to assist with the coding of information. MAXQDA was used to collect, organize, and analyze the qualitative data, and also was used to code and classify the data into themes. The collected and recorded data was password protected and only accessible to the researcher.

To help guide the principal interview process an interview protocol was developed and used for each interview (Appendix A). This protocol included the interview questions, introductory comments about the study, and a thank you statement at

the end (Creswell, 2013). A pilot study was conducted with two individuals who had experience with the classroom walkthrough process. The interview protocol was used and a digital recording device was tested to be sure it functioned as intended. The information gained from the pilot study was used to change question wording, length of the interview, and other aspects, as needed. An interview protocol was developed to guide the interview process with teachers (Appendix B).

When initially contacting participants regarding the interview process the researcher shared the motives and intentions of the study, described the anonymity of the respondents comments, and the time and place of the interview, as Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggested. Each teacher interview lasted approximately 25 minutes, while the principal interviews lasted considerably longer, averaging approximately 45 minutes each.

Documents used in the classroom walkthrough observation process were also reviewed. Most principals shared the form they used to record their observations. Additionally, some principals used documents to describe the criteria to be observed during the process. These documents were collected during the interview process while on site with each principal. Most principals also provided sample emails they had sent to teachers as feedback as part of the walkthrough process. Teacher interview participants also provided sample emails they received from their principals. The sample emails were included as part of the data analysis. All of these types of documents were reviewed as data for the study.

Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis took place at the same time. "The process consists of going back and forth between the participants, gathering new information, and then returning to the evolving theory to fill in the gaps and to elaborate on how it works" (Creswell, 2013, p. 85). As data was collected the researcher created categories of information based upon common properties and information. Once several codes were developed and refined, axial coding took place. During axial coding, the researcher identified one category to focus on, which was referred to as the "core" phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Once the "core" phenomenon was identified, the researcher identified the causal conditions, strategies, contexts, and consequences associated with the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For this study, the "core" or central phenomenon was the collection of, clarification of, and reflection on observation data obtained through classroom walkthrough observations. This included the feedback principals posed to teachers, and also the response teachers provided back to the principal. There existed conversations between teachers and principals that helped clarify the current state of classrooms in the building and the instructional strategies used by teachers. This information could not be collected solely through the observation process. Conversations prompted by the process allowed principals to better identify strengths and growth opportunities.

The causal conditions described what factors influenced the "core" phenomenon. For this study, the causal condition was the identification and development of effective instructional criteria, or an instructional framework. Through the identification of an instructional framework, principals established a focus for observations, developed

background knowledge and information to pose effective feedback to teachers, and used the framework as a guide to make judgments regarding instructional strengths and potential growth areas.

Strategies are actions that take place in response to the "core" phenomenon. In response to dialogue regarding instructional practices observed within classrooms, principals provided resources to support professional learning for teachers. Resources included external sources, such as educational service unit personnel, or internal sources by enacting strategies for teachers to share effective instructional practices among all staff within the building. Principals also provided frequent encouragement and affirmation once new strategies had been implemented.

Intervening conditions are the situational factors that influence the process. The intervening conditions included the knowledge and the qualities of the principal, the knowledge and the qualities of the teachers being observed, the frequency of observations, the spontaneity of the observations, and the quality of communication between teachers and principals.

The consequences were the outcomes that were experienced as a result of using the strategies. For this study, this included the inclusion of new teaching strategies or activities within classrooms, and more frequent reflection of teachers regarding their instructional practices.   The final step of data analysis is selective coding (Creswell, 2013). For this step the researcher developed a diagram that connected the categories together and created a description of how they interrelated.

Through the collection of data a theory began to develop. Throughout the data collection process the researcher collected ideas about the developing theory. "The

theory emerges with help from the process of memoing, in which the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory throughout the process of open, axial, and selective coding" (Creswell, 2013, p. 89). Over the course of the study, the researcher wrote down possible theories and hypotheses as data were reviewed from interviews and documents collected from research participants. Once initial hypotheses were developed, discriminant sampling was used (Creswell, 2013) to see if the theories were relevant and accurate. Creswell described discriminant sampling as gathering "additional information from individuals different from those people initially interviewed to determine if the theory holds true for these additional participants" (p. 90).

Data was collected and coding began immediately following the first set of interviews that were conducted. Coding and memoing occurred at this point and continued throughout study. During the data collection in the study, there was ample time to fully analyze the data and code the data into categories. There was "zig-zagging" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) of data collection and analysis throughout the interviewing process. Initial codes and themes began to emerge after interviews were conducted in the first two schools. Memos about the initial codes and themes were written to provide information about how they interrelated. The questions and initial ideas developed through the memoing process helped guide the interview process, providing guidance for follow-up questions and probes.

The data collection offered preliminary information for an emerging theoretical model for improving instruction through the use of a classroom walkthrough observation process. This qualitative approach explained *how* principals used the walkthrough process to improve instruction.

A theory emerged to explain how the classroom walkthrough observation process leads to the implementation of effective instructional practices. Creswell (2013) explained that the data collection process in grounded theory could eventually lead to an emerging theory. "The result of this process of data collection and analysis is a theory, a substantive-level theory, written by the researcher close to a specific problem or population of people" (p. 89). A theory emerged, and categories of data were identified and organized to demonstrate the process.

Ethical Considerations

"In qualitative studies, ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of the data and in the dissemination of findings" (Merriam, 2009, p. 230). The researcher kept in mind the ethical considerations for this study, such as the experiences of the participants during interviews and observations. The researcher refrained from making judgments or comments that may have affected the confidence or perceptions of the participants. The anonymity of the participants was protected and information was shared through the use of fictitious names or codes when quotes or themes were described. The researcher considered the potential impact of his or her research on those affected. Research participants were aware of the potential risk the study had on them, whether it be personal, professional, psychological, etc.

The researcher made it known to the research participants that participation was voluntarily and they were not coerced to take part in the study. Research participants were also informed about the procedures and known risks involved in the study through the use of a consent form. A consent form explained the study and explained that participants could withdraw from the study at any time. All materials were kept

confidential, securing documents with password protection and were kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. Information was only accessible to the primary researcher.

Summary

While classroom walkthrough observation practices are increasing there lacks a consistent approach to the process, as well as an approach that is supported by the literature. This study developed a model that demonstrated how a walkthrough observation process provided an opportunity for teachers and principals to collect and reflect upon observation data, align resources, share strategies, and promote deliberate practice to develop new and refine existing instructional strategies to improve classroom learning.

Collecting information from Nebraska principals and teachers provided the knowledge and information to develop a framework to illustrate an effective observation process. Interviews and review of walkthrough observation artifacts were used to determine what strategies, contexts, and other factors influenced the process.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Pilot Study

A pilot study consisting of interviews with two currently employed principals in Nebraska public schools was conducted. Interviews were used to collect responses from the participants and the questions were outlined in an interview protocol. Both principals were well known by the researcher, which may have aided the interview process in that a rapport had been developed previously. Although there was a plan to record and transcribe the interviews using an online program, the program was not available at the time of the interview so the researcher used a digital recording device and took notes to collect quotes from interviewees. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes, and provided initial information regarding the development of a theoretical framework to illustrate the classroom walkthrough observation process. The data collected in the pilot study was from only two interviews, no documents were collected, and no observations were made, there were several limitations. The pilot study offered information that led to rewording of interview protocols for both teachers and principals.

Results and Analysis

"Grounded theory provides a procedure for developing categories of information, interconnecting strategies, building a 'story' that connects the categories, and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 195). Merriam (2009) wrote, "grounded theory is particularly useful for addressing questions about process" (p. 30). This grounded theory study provided detail regarding the classroom

walkthrough process, specifically how it was used to promote effective instructional practices within classrooms.

This chapter outlines the collection and organization of data, a description and results of the Central Question, followed by the sub-questions and findings. A theoretical model was introduced, which describes the contexts and processes that emerged from the data. This theoretical model describes the results of the central question, causal conditions, and resulting strategies. Descriptions, followed with data in narrative format include the actual voices of the interview participants. The theoretical model is introduced and relates the results and responses to the sub-questions.

Procedures

To develop a grounded theory, a series of steps were taken to ensure that the emerging theory was grounded in the data. "The investigator as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis assumes an inductive stance and strives to derive meaning from the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 29). Through theoretical sampling the researcher collected data related to the process and labeled the data with codes. Once codes were developed they were organized into themes and segments of data were compared to determine how they fit together and related to one another. Figures for the coding paradigm and the theoretical model are provided to illustrate how the data was connected.

Open coding. Labels were assigned during open coding of the participant interviews. A sample of these open coding categories is represented in Table 1. Charmaz (2006) wrote,

> While engaged in initial coding, you mine early data for analytic ideas to pursue in further data collection and analysis. . . . During initial coding the goal is to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by your readings of the data. (p. 46)

Table 1

Initial Codes

(Initial Codes emerging from the data collected from interview participants)		
accountable	alignment	"always on your game"
affirmation	approachable	benefit
"boost"	brief	coaching
collaboration	confidence	consistency
communication	common language	community
data	feedback	focus
framework	frequency	"gotcha"
Invitation	immediate	sharing
specific	students	structure
training	unplanned	visible

Merriam (2009) discussed the use of categories during data collection.

"Categories, and the properties that define or illuminate the categories, are conceptual

elements of the theory, all of which are inductively derived from or are 'grounded' in the

data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 31). During the coding process, the researcher constantly

reviewed existing codes to determine how they might be grouped into themes. After each

set of interviews more data was added, and new codes were created. Each time new

codes were added, the themes were reviewed to see if the new codes fit into an existing

theme, or if a new theme needed to be created. Once the study began to reach a point of

theoretical saturation (Creswell, 2013) the researcher reviewed all codes and themes that

had been identified. Through the initial review of the data gathered early during the

interview process, the following categories were developed: (a) framework for

instruction; (b) gathering, clarifying, and reflecting on evidence; (c) resources and support; (d) deliberate practice; (e) relational trust; and (f) frequent, spontaneous observations.

The phenomenon of interest.

> Once an initial set of categories has been developed, the researcher identifies . . . the central phenomenon. . . . The open coding category selected for this purpose is typically one that is extensively discussed by the participants . . . because it seems central to the process. (Creswell, 2013, p. 196)

The phenomenon of interest eventually emerged through the constant comparative method of data analysis where collected data was compared to the emerging categories within the data (Creswell, 2013). The process of collecting, sharing and clarifying evidence through the classroom walkthrough observation process emerged as the "central" piece of the process.

Through participant interviews teachers often commented on the usefulness of the feedback provided by their principal, and provided ample evidence to indicate that the feedback from the classroom walkthrough observations promoted professional exchange of ideas through collaborative dialogue among teachers and principals. Teachers shared samples of feedback provided by their principals, which contained references to the instructional framework established by the school, and specific feedback related to that framework. Principals provided evidence through interviews and through documents shared with the researcher that feedback happened frequently and provided both affirmative and suggestive feedback, as well as questions for the teacher to reflect on. The feedback provided to teachers, and the conversations and reflection that occurred because of it, appeared to drive the process of instructional improvement. All of the other themes emerging from the data related in some way to this "core" category.

Axial coding. Data collection and data analysis took place at the same time. "The process consists of going back and forth between the participants, gathering new information, and then returning to the evolving theory to fill in the gaps and to elaborate on how it works" (Creswell, 2013, p. 85). As data was collected the researcher created categories of information based upon common properties and information. Once several codes were developed and refined, axial coding took place. During axial coding, the researcher identified one category to focus on, which was referred to as the central or "core" phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Once the "core" phenomenon was identified, the researcher identified the causal conditions, strategies, contexts, and consequences associated with the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For this study, the "core" or central phenomenon was the collection of, clarification of, and reflection on observation data obtained through classroom walkthrough observations. This included the feedback principals posed to teachers, and also the response teachers provided back to the principal. There existed conversations between teachers and principals that helped clarify the current state of classrooms in the building and the instructional strategies used by teachers. This information could not be collected solely through the observation process. Conversations prompted by the process allowed principals to better identify strengths and growth opportunities.

The causal conditions describe what factors influence the "core" phenomenon. For this study, the causal condition was the identification and development of effective instructional criteria, or an instructional framework. Through the identification of an instructional framework, principals established a focus for observations, developed background knowledge and information to pose effective feedback to teachers, and used

the framework as a guide to make judgments regarding instructional strengths and potential growth areas.

Several intervening conditions emerged as a result of the study. The conditions included the principal's knowledge of effective instruction, the principal's ability to craft and deliver effective feedback, the teacher's openness and desire to receive observation feedback, teacher's willingness to be reflective of their instructional practices, the frequency of observations, the spontaneity of the observations, and the frequency of communication between teachers and principals.

Strategies are actions that take place in response to the "core" phenomenon. In response to dialogue regarding instructional practices observed within classrooms, principals provided resources to support professional learning for teachers. Resources included external sources, such as educational service unit personnel, or internal sources by enacting strategies for teachers to share effective instructional practices among all staff within the building. Principals also provided frequent encouragement and affirmation once new strategies had been implemented.

The consequences are the outcomes that are experienced as a result of using the strategies. For this study, this included the inclusion of new teaching strategies or activities within classrooms, and more frequent teacher self-reflection regarding their instructional practices.

Figure 1 provides a visual model, or coding paradigm (Creswell, 2013) to illustrate how the central phenomenon, conditions, context, and consequences interrelate.
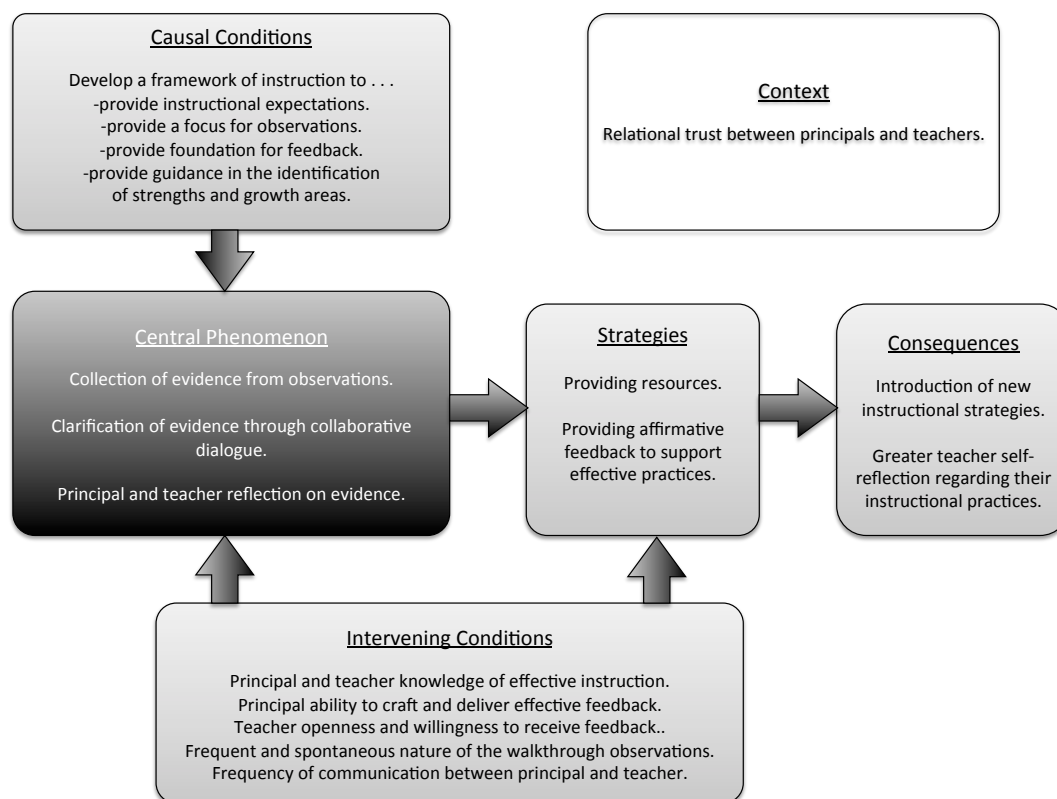
Figure 1. Classroom walkthrough observation process coding paradigm.

Selective coding. The final step of data analysis was selective coding (Creswell, 2013). For this step the researcher develops hypotheses that connected the categories together and created a description of how they interrelate. During the selective coding process, the researcher "assembles a story that describes the interrelationship of categories in the model" (Creswell, 2013, p. 87). The results of the study revealed a theoretical model describing how the categories influence one another in the process. The questions posed in the research study helped explain how principals use the classroom walkthrough observation process to improve instruction.

Central Question

The central question for the study was: What theory explains the process of improving instructional practices through the use of classroom walkthrough observations in Nebraska public schools? A central question provides a focus for "the generation of a theory in grounded theory" (Creswell, 2013, p. 143). A central question guides the identification of a core category that connects the information throughout the study. This core category "must be central . . . related to as many other categories and their properties as is possible . . . must appear frequently in the data . . . and must develop the theory" (Strauss, 1987, p. 36).

"A grounded theory study seeks not just to understand, but also to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest" (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). This phenomenon of interest is identified through the identification of a central category. Interviews with research participants revealed that the identification of an instructional framework was central to the process of improving instruction through the use of classroom walkthrough observations. During interviews with classroom teachers and building principals, the importance of providing effective feedback became apparent. Engaging in dialogue regarding the evidence gathered from observations clarifies the evidence, promotes reflection of current instructional practices, and aligns professional development through the identification of instructional "gaps" or needs. This was consistent with Marzano et al. (2005) who suggested that classroom walkthrough observations are most effective when they provide focused feedback for staff. "Creating a system that provides feedback is at the core of the responsibility of monitoring and evaluating" (p. 55).

Sub-questions. Below are the sub-questions and results included in the research study. The sub-questions provided specificity.

1. What is central to the process of using classroom walkthrough observations to improve instruction?

Providing feedback. This was an initial code that emerged early in the data collection and analysis process. During the coding process, there emerged several codes related to feedback. As the coding process unfolded, themes developed in regard to the feedback provided from principals as a result of classroom walkthrough observations. Principals provided suggestive or critical feedback to promote new instructional strategies or practices. Another theme related to feedback was coded as "posing questions" or "coaching" where principals asked clarifying questions, or posed questions to promote teacher self-reflection.

Principals used the classroom walkthrough observation process to provide feedback to teachers suggesting changes or additions to current instructional practices. Principal V shared, "That's kind of our starting point for our conversations. So we'll talk about things to develop . . . that just opens up conversations that I don't feel like we had in the past. I don't feel like we had that in the past." Principal Y felt that teachers have found the suggestions valuable. By stating, "I think most of them are very open to it now and really see it as helpful and beneficial . . . the feedback that I gave to a teacher today . . . when I gave that feedback she was like, 'Oh, yeah, I never thought about doing that.'" Principal X stated that the classroom walkthrough observations are aligned with each teacher's professional growth plan, and the observations provided an opportunity to guide the growth process.

I'm looking for focus areas that they've chosen. Likely they have focused on an area they're not really good at the year before . . . I did walkthroughs looking for this, provide my comments and I make suggestions to do this a little bit differently.

Teachers validated that the feedback from classroom walkthrough observations provided suggestions for instruction. Teacher E said during the interview process, "It's good to focus on the positive, but . . . it's okay to get some negative feedback . . . we go on from there, learn from it, and then we can grow and improve." A teacher from another school added, "I have never been in a better position where I get great feedback. And, not only positive feedback as far as what I am doing well, but constructive criticism as well" (Teacher P). Teacher I emphasized that the principal provides positive feedback, but also provides suggestions for improvement. "Other times, he just said, 'maybe you could try this or maybe you could try that.'"

Another type of feedback that emerged during the interviews with teachers and principals was the "coaching" role where principals posed questions to teachers regarding their classroom practices. One principal shared how the classroom walkthrough process has helped provide opportunities to promote changes to instruction by asking questions.

> It's good for us to be in the classroom . . . I think that is a great thing. Our kids see this; our teachers see this, and part of it that whole coaching purpose. It kind of gives specific . . . feedback so that staff either knows that what they are doing is working real well or maybe giving some information . . . asking some questions to improve instruction. (Principal W)

Teacher D described the expectations for questions posed by the principal:

> A lot of times, they will ask questions, like 'Have you considered . . . ?' So our administrators are really trying to move away from the evaluator role to, maybe coaching is a better word for it, looking at ways to help you grow and that sort of thing and not just there to report the facts as they are kind of thing, and offer their critique, but rather giving different ways of thinking about things . . . there is an expectation that you are going to read those [questions] and that you are going to . . . reflect on some of the questions that they raise.

Teacher G shared examples of questions posed by the principal. "It's just the general 'So, I noticed this, why was that happening?'" Another example, "They just say, 'so why was this, what were you talking about, what did you mean by this?' I've had that a couple of times. 'What did you mean when you said . . .' so then I just explain it." Teacher M shared the benefit of having questions posed regarding the classroom walkthrough observations. "It's been good insight as far as working with specific students. She'll say 'did you know this student was doing this while you were instructing?' It's been very helpful that way."

Promoting dialogue. Another common theme surrounding the classroom walkthrough observation process that emerged from the data was the promotion of academic dialogue. The frequent classroom observations provided evidence and fostered conversations between principals and teachers. Principal Z shared how the classroom walkthrough observation process changed the conversations, "I think they just benefit by how the conversations have changed. The conversations have changed from what so-and-so did on the weekend . . . When we are in school, we're talking school." Principal V said the communication through the process has promoted a collaborative approach. "We've had a change of mindset . . . that it's more collaborative, so that we're working together . . . we're in this together." Principal X said of the classroom walkthrough process, "it's the conversation that really is the meat of it."

Teachers also provided evidence regarding the conversations that resulted from the classroom walkthrough observation process.

> It is a check system . . . for things that they witnessed in the classroom, and then there is a place for some comments. . . . You have these informal checks along the way, but there are also conversations with your administration in passing . . . she made an effort to get into the classroom yesterday . . . and then we were able to

have a conversation after school yesterday to kind of talk about how that went. (Teacher D)

Teacher D provided further comments regarding the process.

I think it is a method for opening up dialogue, conversation. The administrators are in the classroom more, so they have more experience of being in there . . . so when you're talking about something it's not just some vague concept.

Teacher F explained how the use of software encourages more dialogue. "With the i-Observation we do have more exchange . . . making the dialogue happen a little bit more." Teacher F stated that the dialogue is expected as part of the classroom walkthrough observation process, "I know the expectation for me was to be sure I do some sort of response or some confirmation that I've read their feedback."

Who influences the process of improving instruction through the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

Principals. It is obvious that principals directly influence the improvement of instruction through the classroom walkthrough observation process, but *how* do they influence the process? As indicated in the prior section, it became evident that having principals trained in the instructional framework is essential to the process. Principals who are trained in the instructional process have a more specific focus when conducting classroom walkthrough observations, which provides an opportunity for more detailed and specific feedback related to instructional strategies observed within the classroom.

Teachers reported that principals serve as another set of eyes within the classroom, and someone with whom they could discuss ideas, "There was some feedback from, you know, another person to run ideas by" (Teacher D). Teacher Q stated

last year there was [a classroom walkthrough observation] where she walked through and I hadn't noticed . . . but [the student] wasn't saying the response during reading, they weren't doing the word attack list with me . . . she happened

to observe that, 'he wasn't saying them when he was supposed to be,' so then just another set of eyes.

Several teachers offered evidence of situations where principals provided suggestions related to classroom instruction. Teacher F discussed the benefits of having suggestions provided.

> Last year, in my second year, I was trying out the process of getting the kids attention by counting down 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 . . . when my administrator was in they said, 'hey, why don't you do this . . . why don't you try counting a little slower, and talk to the students so they know what the expectation is,' and suggestions of ways to improve.

Another teacher shared the following example of how the principal provided suggestions through feedback.

> If I am struggling with a group or she just sees a different side of it that I do, she sees all of it instead of me just being with the students, so I guess she can give some pointers of, you know, "you handled this well, but maybe you could . . . " (Teacher K)

Teacher M said that the feedback from the principal has "been good insight as far as working with specific students. . . . It's been very helpful that way. And then even after the walkthrough they are very good about 'try this while you're teaching.'"

Through the interviews with teachers, it became apparent that teachers found their principal was approachable, and felt as though they received valuable feedback through the conversation. "When I have asked him for advice on how to handle certain students or how to handle a situation, he has always had really good ideas on what to try next" (Teacher I). Teacher N said of the principal "she is very approachable . . . we have a very good relationship, so I just think that she has made it very aware to all of us that she is very approachable." Teacher B added, "The principal is a really approachable person,

and very willing to offer positive feedback, and he'll give you some suggestions. I feel like that, in general, has made it a little bit easier."

Teachers being observed. It is also obvious that the teachers being observed as part of the classroom walkthrough observation process influence the improvement of instruction. *How* do they influence the process? Nearly every teacher indicated that a purpose of the classroom walkthrough process was to grow professionally. Interviews with teachers indicated that they had a desire to improve, and that classroom walkthroughs provided feedback for them to help accomplish that task.

Teacher O shared "It makes you realize . . . you can grow from the comments that you have heard from the administrator. Anytime you have any feedback, it makes you excited to try new things." Another teacher shared, "[the feedback] just kept you wanting to do better and wanting to learn more . . . like you are constantly wanting to better yourself" (Teacher N). Teacher M stated, "The administrator conducting the walkthrough is there to help, that is a tremendous value, because we can all improve, and I want that." Teacher E added that the classroom walkthrough observation process "makes me question myself . . . making me a better teacher, to be successful, so all of that."

It was also discovered that teachers in this study found that the classroom walkthrough process provided an opportunity to be reflective about their practice. Teachers valued and embraced this opportunity. Teacher F: "Reflection is a huge part of teaching. It helps us grow and I think that helps me to reflect when they give me those little suggestions." "I think it challenges you to think about your practice through the feedback and that sort of thing, gives you an opportunity to reflect on things that you

might not normally reflect on" (Teacher D). Teacher E simply stated, "I enjoy it because it is a very reflective piece." Teacher O summarized how the classroom walkthrough observations influence the reflection process. "I think walkthroughs are a good way for teachers to reflect. I think by reflecting, we can improve ourselves, and that is a great thing for education."

Other teachers within the building. Not only did the teachers being observed through the classroom walkthrough observation process influence the improvement of instruction, but also other teachers within the building influenced the process as well by sharing ideas related to the instructional framework. One principal indicated that they are consistently looking across classrooms for effective practices to share with other teachers to ensure staff are consistent with instructional approaches. "I will follow-up with the teacher and question why we are doing it that way and then . . . I will have her go observe a teacher that does [the strategy] very well and watch it . . . so that she can get it implemented properly" (Principal Y). Other principals noted that they look for strategies that might be shared with the entire staff. For example Principal Z shared the following:

> I will ask that teacher, "Hey, at the next professional development, or when you feel comfortable, can you show the rest of the teachers your call and response method that helps keep students engaged? . . . Can you show us how you developed those strategies and just have some conversations at the next professional development on the strategies that you use?" Sometimes, I will ask them if we can videotape it, so then we can actually see it during that professional development.

Teachers also listed examples of how other teachers in the building might help influence their instructional practices. "He has always really done a really good job of giving me pretty good feedback on what I could try or even, 'You could go watch this teacher and see what they do'" (Teacher I). Teacher J provided another example. "They

are looking for suggestions for how to improve something. Like sending me to another teacher and saying 'I think this is what you're really looking for, this person does a great job of this.'"

External professional development personnel. Individuals outside of the school were also enlisted to help promote the effectiveness of the process. In most schools, external professional development personnel provided training to promote the understanding of the framework for instruction. "A Marzano trainer is coming . . . to kind of give us an overview of all the 41 elements . . . to kind of tie our professional development time to the Marzano framework" (Principal V). One teacher shared, "I was part of the Marzano team. We went to the Marzano Academy. There were eight or nine of us that went, so I was part of that first team. And so I went to several workshops in a year" (Teacher I).

What influences the process of improving instruction through the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

Framework for instruction. This code emerged early in the data collection and analysis process. Twenty-one of the 22 research participants identified an instructional framework within the school, and nearly all participants indicated in some way that the framework provided a focus for the classroom walkthrough observation process. The research provides substantial instructional frameworks that instructional supervisors might review to determine what might be observed within classrooms. Effective supervision relies upon developing and clarifying evaluative criteria or the "what" to be evaluated (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). Making accurate decisions based on observations is largely dependent upon knowing what to look for. "If principals don't

know what to look for . . . their observations can be useless, or worse, harmful to teachers

and students" (Pitler & Goodwin, 2008, p. 9).

An instructional framework provides a focus for observations. Teacher G

discussed cards that were developed by the school district. The cards included the

criteria that had been identified as effective instructional practices they felt should be

present in classrooms: "[Administrators] took those cards, laminated them, and gave

them to everyone in the district. Mine sits on my desk. So I know what they are looking

for. Instead of, before, it was like 'well, come on in and see what happens.'" Teacher E

stated that the classroom walkthrough observations are "tied to the Marzano

framework . . . I really like it because of the consistency of the 41 strategies, they are

specific strategies and you can use them by looking for consistency throughout the

school." A principal also noted that the identification of an instructional framework

provides consistency, stating

> we are using the Marzano observation instrument . . . We have had two
> superintendents since I've been here, and so, when I first got here the observation
> practice was kind of whatever you've done or whatever you want to do, you do it.
> We have been much more consistent as a district.

Nearly all of the building principal research participants provided a copy of the

instructional framework used within their building. While each district took a different

approach to the use of a framework, all of them used a framework to varying degrees.

Some districts adopted an instructional framework, such as Marzano's comprehensive

framework for effective instruction (Marzano, 2007), while others used a framework or a

combination of frameworks to create their own set of criteria at their district. Another

district implemented the Marzano framework a few elements at a time. Principal Z

shared the process used to implement the framework at their school:

> I just took the six elements that the teachers decided that they wanted to focus on for that first semester, and I put all of those . . . on a walkthrough, and when I go into the teachers' classrooms, they know what element we are working on . . . they know what I am looking for, I know what I am looking for.

> *An instructional framework provides a focus for feedback.* Through the

development and implementation of a framework for instruction, principals and teachers

not only have a guideline for the focus of the observation, but also a guideline for

feedback regarding the classroom walkthrough observations. Teacher J discussed how

the district uses an online program, i-Observation, which is aligned with the Marzano

framework. "The tool we have been using . . . we started it last year. i-Observation is the

means for getting feedback. With that [software] he just sends me e-mail with what he

observed, what we are doing, and gives feedback right away." Teacher G noted how the

use of an instructional framework has changed the feedback that is provided.

> I've noticed that since we've gone to [the Marzano Framework] the feedback is much more specific to teaching and teaching techniques . . . what's happening with kids, instead of things like "oh, I like your bulletin boards, oh, you look like you're having a good time."

> Principals also noted changes to the feedback they provide to teachers.

Principal V stated,

> When I go through walkthroughs and I make comments . . . if it ties to the Marzano framework, I make reference to what design question that it ties to. For example, if I see you teacher using rules and procedures, I make a comment about that. Following my comment I will list design question number 6, so they can relate that back to the Marzano framework.

Principal W stated that the framework provides a consistent focus among all

administrators in the district:

Consistency with three different administrators and three different skill sets and trying to do different things . . . it's been a good thing for our staff because consistency . . . we probably are looking and seeing some of the same stuff—rather than, "I really like it when the classroom looks like this, and another administrator likes his classroom to look like that." I know teachers start to get kind of mixed messages . . . there is much less of that because of our work with i-Observation and then our conversation as administrators in the buildings and also as a district.

An instructional framework promotes dialogue about instruction. Teacher G

provides an example of how conversations have changed since the inclusion of an

instructional framework as part of the classroom walkthrough observation process.

It's made the principals get away from the general "doing a nice job." They take it to the next level. They are very specific. Like "you are engaging the students,' or 'you stop and get the students engaged if they're not."

Teacher P also provided an example of how the process promoted conversations. "[The

principal] just says, 'Hey, I have an idea for you—maybe try this,' . . . or just things

where she gives me feedback on things that I could improve on." A principal noted the

importance that an instructional framework has in the development of a common

language of instruction among the staff. "We've attempted to try to use those

walkthroughs for the feedback, to be real specific to Marzano language, and to help our

staff develop the language as well" (Principal X).

The instructional framework is known and shared among teachers and principals.

It was revealed through interviews that both teachers and principals within the school

understand the school's instructional framework. Whether a framework was adopted or

developed locally over time through various professional development opportunities, it

was evident that the teachers and principals could list the criteria that defined their

framework for effective instruction. Principal V noted, "We took about half of our

teachers to the Marzano training . . . we've taken three teams of five teachers in the

elementary building. So a total of 15 teachers have gone through the training." This

principal also described how training was conducted for all staff within the building.

> Last year we had the service unit come in and they did some in-service with us either before or after school . . . [an Educational Service Unit staff member] would come in and provide a highlight of lesson segment one, just with the teachers, trying to do an overview of them.

Teacher I indicated that the training regarding the instructional framework was

adequate. "[The administration] has done a nice job of making sure that we've had

enough meetings and that they have gone over the rubrics and skills that they are using,

and we have our own copies for that, and we know what we're supposed to do." Teacher

D added "it was a work probably over the course of two or three years that we went

through, lots of training and in-service."

Another principal (Principal Y) described how they provided frequent training for

their locally developed framework.

> Every Wednesday we have some kind of a staff meeting . . . so I will visit with the instructional coach and tell her these are some things that I am seeing in the reading classroom, so I need you to model this with our reading teachers, or this is something that I see with math, so let's have a conversation about this.

Principals also took part in the training to ensure they understood the components

of the instructional framework. "For three years we've taken staff to Marzano, and I've

gone each of the three years . . . I've attended a number of workshops . . . we've had great

conversations as building principals at the ESU about the whole walk through process"

(Principal V). Another principal noted that they attended "a four-day training . . . I went

to that two years in a row. I've been very fortunate . . . to go to the national DI

conference. So, just to continue to learn from even just the other participants." It was

evident among all schools in the study that there is a commitment to training and

professional development for both teachers and principals regarding criteria for effective instruction.

What strategies emerge from the process of using classroom walkthrough observations?

Organizing external and internal resources. One factor that emerged through the interviews that influences the process to improve instruction is the availability and use of resources, and how principals allocated those resources through the classroom walkthrough observation process. Principals use observation data and evidence from the process to consider instructional improvement needs, and also coordinate professional support to develop practices within classrooms. Principal V shared how their school arranged for training through their local educational service unit.

> The ESU staff member . . . went through a lesson segment involving routines and events. So he would come in and do an in-service for us. And that's when I told you earlier, over the next 4 to 6 weeks, the teachers would pull a goal from that lesson segment to work on. Then he would come in after that.

The educational service unit was used to provide initial support and follow-up after teachers implemented new strategies within their classrooms. Principal X discussed how the classroom walkthrough guided conversations regarding professional growth. Once professional growth goals are established "the next step is an improvement plan, and that's to work on mostly by [the teacher] with me giving [the teacher] feedback and resources."

Schools also used their instructional framework as a guide to facilitate conversations within their buildings and to share instructional practices among school staff. Principal Z stated, "We'll talk about the elements during professional development—this is what it currently looks like in classrooms, or implementing a new

element, we'll talk about it on [professional development days]." Principal Z further

explained how teachers were involved in the professional development process.

> And then that Monday, [teachers] will start to find strategies . . . and some of the teachers are getting on Pinterest and just finding different strategies to chunk content, you know, "How can I chunk content—what are some things I can do differently that I have not tried before?"

One teacher stated that their principal routinely uses professional development

time to ensure teachers understand elements within the instructional framework.

"They're . . . with their staff addressing one element a month in a staff meeting,

explaining it, describing it, 'what does it mean to me?'" (Teacher G). Teacher N

described how the school district has used technology to allow teachers to better share

instructional practices and strategies.

> We have just done a lot either through training, the different videos . . . on our Google community, and the different resources . . . I think from seeing all that, it just kind of been ways to incorporate that into the classroom.

Teacher P, a teacher in the same building, also shared how the principal promotes sharing

of instructional practices through the use of technology.

> We have a Google community, all the elementary teachers, all of our Marzano elements go in that. And we study it for three weeks, so [the principal] is constantly putting ideas out there for us for things that she says we need to get better at.

> *Providing affirmative feedback.* Principals provided affirmative feedback to

teachers regarding current effective practices observed in classrooms. All principals in

the study noted that they provided positive, or affirmative feedback to teachers. "We are

looking for things that we can praise them on, you know, and then affirm what they are

doing is good" (Principal W). Principal X added, "I would try to make an affirmative

statement, too. We never wanted to walk out and say something like 'That was a train

wreck.' It is always recommendations 'that's really good' and keep it really simple."

Principal Z also noted the existence of affirmative feedback. "So . . . if I see something

good . . . I just scratch a little note or whatever and just say, 'I really liked how you were

. . . ,' so I'll leave feedback in that way."

Teachers also shared that the feedback from the classroom walkthrough

observations was positive in nature. Teacher B stated, "for the most part, it's generally

very positive. And crazily enough I look forward to reading those. Just because I think

it's really nice to get someone else's perspective on my teaching, and what I'm doing in

the classroom." Another teacher felt it was helpful when the principal is

> letting me know that I am doing these things on Marzano that I do. As teachers, we don't always think about that we're doing them . . . he's pointing it out to us . . . that's good feedback for me. I think most teachers need that positive affirmation. I appreciate that. (Teacher C)

Teacher I said that the feedback on instructional strategies from the classroom

walkthrough observations "kind of gives me the reassurance that . . . I'm [teaching] well.

It's always nice to be reassured that you're doing something right."

Promoting deliberate practice. Once teachers attempted new strategies, there was

a sense that the classroom walkthrough observations provided a structure that encouraged

teachers to continue those practices, or engage in deliberate practice until the new

strategies had become routine. Principal V shared this idea. "I noticed some things that

they could do a little bit different. Being in classrooms giving that structured feedback . . .

I think that holds them accountable making sure that they're doing those things."

Principal X shared that through the classroom walkthrough process a professional

development plan can be created and tracked, which promotes changes to instructional

practice. "We've created a really good plan for them . . . if it goes well and it is well

planned . . . then they're more apt to probably repeat it, the strategy again, or to at least be

a little bit reflective."

Teachers included in the study also explained that the classroom walkthrough

observations process held them accountable to continue new instructional strategies.

> The accountability on me, I know that I can't just not . . . do the different
> practices that we've learned . . . it's just something that's kind of part of the
> culture . . . the fact that they are more visible in the classroom, and the fact that
> that holds us accountable as teachers, it's helped us. (Teacher H)

Teacher Q shared a similar perspective. "Being that we are a Marzano school, she's really

looking at maybe what we were working on, but also looking at things that we already

have been working on, and making sure that we are sticking with that stuff." The fact

that the classroom observation walkthrough process held teachers accountable to continue

new practices aligned with the instructional framework was consistently noted in teacher

interviews.

In what context are these strategies employed?

Spontaneous in nature. Both teachers and principals noted the spontaneous nature

of the classroom walkthrough observations. In every district, the classroom walkthrough

observations were described as being unannounced.

> The principal will come in periodically . . . he will just randomly pick a time . . .
> he'll just come in with his iPad and have a seat then somewhere in my classroom,
> and he'll just observe for somewhere between 10 and 15 minutes. (Teacher B)

Teacher F noted "every so often one of the administrators will just pop in while we're

teaching at any point in the day." Another teacher described the classroom walkthrough

observations as

more spontaneous than a planned lesson for a more formal observation . . . as the teacher you really have to make sure that it is very clear on what the kids are supposed to know and you have to make sure that you're completing what you're supposed to do.

Interviews with the teacher participants revealed that the teachers felt as though the classroom walkthrough observations needed to be spontaneous. Teacher K shared,

I think some teachers, if they know someone is coming they may change their practice or do what they know they are supposed to be doing, even if they are not doing it, but I think probably popping in is just better for her to see what is really happening.

Teacher B added that the spontaneous nature of the classroom walkthrough observations created an opportunity for reflection.

I like that it is unplanned. I would much rather have him come in unannounced just to see what I'm doing on a regular basis . . . I also think it's good for me as an instructor to just be able to reflect on what I'm doing.

Another teacher added "knowing that an administrator can walk through the door at anytime during the day . . . becomes something that helps my students" (Teacher H).

Codes and themes describing what interview participants called "real" or "day-to-day" teaching emerged when teachers and principals discussed the spontaneous nature of the classroom walkthrough observations. Teacher F described the benefit of observing "real" teaching:

So when I'm in my classroom and I'm comfortable, I think my teaching is more real. I'm not trying to put on a show, or it's not fake in any way . . . when they are in there, they are seeing the real me and seeing what I'm doing in the classroom . . .. Then I think the feedback becomes more valuable because these are things that I'm actually doing in the day-to-day . . . because [the principal] would be commenting on what I actually do on a day-to-day and not something that I just put in.

Teacher H added that classroom walkthrough observations "hold us accountable, but it's also to improve our day-to-day education practice—how are we reacting with the

kids, how are we communicating with the kids." Teacher J also commented on "real" teaching. "I think if you want a real picture of what's happening, you would want to be here all the time, not announce the visit ahead of time."

Teachers also consistently noted that classroom walkthrough observations held them accountable to consistently employ effective instructional practices in their classrooms. Teacher C stated that because of the classroom walkthrough observations "every day teachers are doing what they are supposed to be doing." Teacher M reported "they are a good way for administrators to hold their staff accountable." Another teacher added that the unannounced observations encouraged a high level of accountability. "The purpose . . . would be to not necessarily catch us off guard, but so we are in our element of everyday teaching . . . and watch us so we are on top of our game that day" (Teacher P). Teacher J also shared how the walkthrough observations encouraged accountability, "I think that just knowing that supervisor could walk in at any time is something that ensures that what you're doing is worthwhile. . . . It holds me accountable."

Relational trust. As a result of interviews and teacher participants, it became evident that there existed a trusting relationship in the schools participating in this study. The high frequency of classroom walkthrough observations created an environment where principals and teachers gained a better understanding of one another, which in turn fostered a deeper relationship. This relationship of trust among principals and teachers promoted a culture that classroom walkthrough observations were nonthreatening, and led to conversations about instruction.

Each principal in the study mentioned the idea that classroom walkthroughs are not meant to be a "gotcha," or to catch teachers off guard. They were intentional in developing a culture where classroom walkthrough observations were seen as a tool to promote professional growth, rather than to reveal and focus on ineffective practices. Principal X shared that their administrative team will "try to not make the walkthrough threatening, so [the administrators] don't ever reference, 'on this walkthrough date. . . .'" in order to promote the idea that the classroom walkthrough observation process is not directly tied to the formal evaluation process.

Principal Y shared that teachers don't feel threatened by the classroom walkthrough observations, and that

> probably just over time, [the teachers] realizing that I was here to help them and assist them, and do what's best for kids, and it wasn't that I'm . . . trying to find faults in them, but I was . . . wanting to help them to make their instruction improve.

Principal W stated "it's never that 'gotcha,' it's more of a 'Hey, this is what I noticed. What do you think about this? Have you thought about that?'" When Principal Z was asked about the perceptions teachers have regarding the classroom walkthrough process, it was stated that "they know that I am here to help and not here to judge." It appeared among all schools that there was an intentional approach to ensuring that teachers felt comfortable in the process.

Teachers also indicated through interviews that the classroom walkthrough process was a non-threatening process. "When the principal walks through any door it's just . . . it feels comfortable" (Teacher A). Teacher H used the term "fearless" when describing the process. "My experience with the . . . walkthroughs are very positive and they are fearless. I think that's important . . . our administrators have made it that way."

Another teacher stated, "its really comfortable . . . with the administration that I work with here . . . they have given me no reason to be anxious" (Teacher E).

A trusting relationship appeared to be closely aligned with the frequency of conversations teachers had with principals. Teachers shared that through the classroom walkthrough process, they developed a better understanding of one another through conversations.

> To get to know the administrators helps tremendously . . . the more that they made an effort to get to know me, that has helped tremendously because when they came into my classroom it wasn't just this intimidating stranger just sitting there watching my every move. (Teacher F)

Teacher G described how the classroom walkthrough process helps principals understand why decisions are made within the classroom. "Well, it leads to a lot better communication. When I come [to the administration] with problems, they actually understand where I'm coming from." Teacher H stated, "I think it is important for the administrators . . . they're not strangers. I think that is good for our whole school that they come in and are part of the education process."

Because of the relationship that is built over time, teachers reported that they feel more comfortable approaching their principal.

> I think that [the classroom walkthroughs] just made me feel like that . . . if I need something from the principal I can go ask him for it. That may even prompt him to come in and see what is going on so that he can kind of give me some ideas of what to do (Teacher I).

Teacher B shared about his principal: "The principal is a really approachable person, and very willing to offer positive feedback, and he'll give you some suggestions."

Principal V shared how the classroom walkthrough observations have led to additional conversations.

> I feel like [the teachers] come to me frequently with instructional questions . . . if they are struggling with something, they will ask me, "How can I do this?" or "What can I do?" and we'll brainstorm ideas together . . . I think the walkthrough process kind of initiates those things.

Teachers also provided evidence through interviews that they have frequent conversations with principals. "She is a very personable individual, so outside of the classroom we have everyday conversations" (Teacher M). Another teacher shared that feedback from the walkthroughs provide opportunity for conversations.

> [The principal] always says, 'Come and talk to me if you want to' or 'we can come and talk about this. . . .' I think keeping that door of communication very open. So, I know that if I have a problem at all, I can come in and talk to her, and I don't feel like I am a bad teacher because I am asking for help. (Teacher Q)

Teacher G suggested that the classroom walkthrough observation process has led to deeper conversations.

> I've always had a good relationship with my principals, but [the classroom walkthrough process] has taken it the next level. I mean, now when I talk to them it's not that superficial 'how you doing?' type of stuff. Now he can actually talk to me about things. And I can talk to him about things, in a little more depth. I can say 'this is why I do it that way' and they understand it.

What are the outcomes of the use of classroom walkthrough observations? The two outcomes found in the study were the fostering of reflective teachers and the encouragement of professional growth. Each of these three themes contributed to the process of improving instructional practices through the use of a classroom walkthrough observation process.

Reflective teachers. The classroom walkthrough observation process provides opportunities for principals to promote self-reflection among their teaching staff. Principals noted that the feedback from the frequent observations was part of the overall process to promote teacher reflection. "I think . . . it's also just a coaching model as a

way to help. It's a reflective process that they can take information, reflect on it, and then use that in a way that is going to affect their classroom in a positive way" (Principal W).

Principal X also stated, "We have really tried to create a situation where they can get as much focused feedback on what [the teachers] are working on. As opposed to just having the random visits where somebody just writes something . . . [they] can reflect a little bit."

Teacher B described how the feedback from the classroom walkthrough observation process drives the reflective process:

> I like that it is unplanned . . . just to see what I'm doing on a regular basis, and then I also think it's good for me as an instructor to just be able to reflect on what I'm doing. . . . Going back and reading the notes and seeing which of the strategies I'm using in the classroom, and which ones I haven't. I can go back and figure out 'okay let's try something new in my classroom.' I think that we just continue to make adjustments with what our administration wants us to do, as far as how to improve our instruction . . . At times [the principal] may mention a specific student that was in the classroom that he observed just doing something. So I can look at that and say, "Okay, well can I do anything to make sure I'm engaging him?"

Teacher E noted the reflective process, as well. "What I really like about it is that it is timely and it is . . . research-based. It shows your strengths, and also it has some reflective features . . . it's a great process to reflect on your progress every single day." Another teacher demonstrated how the classroom walkthrough observation feedback promotes reflection. "What do I need to be doing right now; so, the reflective part to me happens right away and continuously, of knowing that, 'okay, this is what is being expected—am I doing it?' Make sure I am doing it right now" (Teacher L).

Professional growth. Teachers noted that knowing their principal frequently visited classrooms provided accountability to grow professionally. "I think the overall purpose is for us as educators to continue to grow and find ways to strive to make us

better . . . him mentioning that my engagement was really nicely done . . . I want to make

it even better" (Teacher A). Teacher I shared that the process has created awareness

regarding the use of specific instructional strategies.

> I think it's definitely made me more aware of the classroom; definitely helping
> me with classroom procedures and making sure that kids know what is expected
> of them, but I also think that it has helped me form my lessons a little bit better
> and just being more aware of all of the elements.

> Teacher N said "I think the purpose is for any teacher to improve . . . there is

something that everybody can get better at, and although I don't always enjoy hearing

what I could do better . . . and that is what she is trying to help us do." Teacher N

continued,

> from the different walkthroughs . . . [the principal] has brought to our attention
> the things [the principal] has looked for on the walkthroughs . . . you think kind of
> outside the box, and that there are other ways to do things . . . I think it is just
> broadened my perspective.

> Principal interviews also provided evidence that professional growth is the

purpose of classroom walkthrough observations.

> I think that they've bought into that mindset of the importance of professional
> growth. . . . And I think that they are starting to see that the walkthrough . . .
> process is part of that . . . we're not out to get you, it's not a personal attack, but
> it's our goal and mindset . . . to continue to get better at our profession.
> (Principal V)

> Principal W also shared thoughts on professional growth:

> I think our purpose as an administrative group is to provide feedback, whether it's
> positive or negative . . . but then also, when there are issues of things that they
> could improve on . . . then try to give some consistency and give some examples
> of different ways to do things.

The Theoretical Model

Through the process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, a

grounded theory study produces a theoretical model that illustrates how the categories of

data interrelate. "The result of this process of data collection and analysis is a theory . . . in which the researcher writes down ideas about the evolving theory through the process" (Creswell, 2013, p. 89). The researcher collected information from interviews and documents and analyzed the information to reveal categories and themes related to the data.

The rich and illustrative descriptions provided by the principals and teachers in this study provided ample evidence to create the framework explaining how instruction improves through the use of classroom walkthrough observations. The Classroom Walkthrough Observation Process Model (Figure 2) outlined the activities, conditions, contexts, and strategies experienced through the process. There were four sections to the model: (a) Establish a Framework for Instruction; (b) Gather, Clarify, and Reflect on Evidence; (c) Provide Resources and Support; and (d) Promote Deliberate Practice. The process began with the identification of effective instruction. The arrows indicated movement from one section to the next, as well as movement within sections through loops. There also existed specific contexts and conditions central to the process. Figure 2 below outlines the Classroom Walkthrough Observation Process Model.

Establish a framework for instruction. Research participants suggested that having a set of criteria to define effective instruction was an essential component of the classroom walkthrough observation process. Ensuring that principals understood the established criteria created a more specific focus for observations, guided the development of feedback delivered to teachers, and directed the allocation of internal and external resources for professional development. By having an established instructional
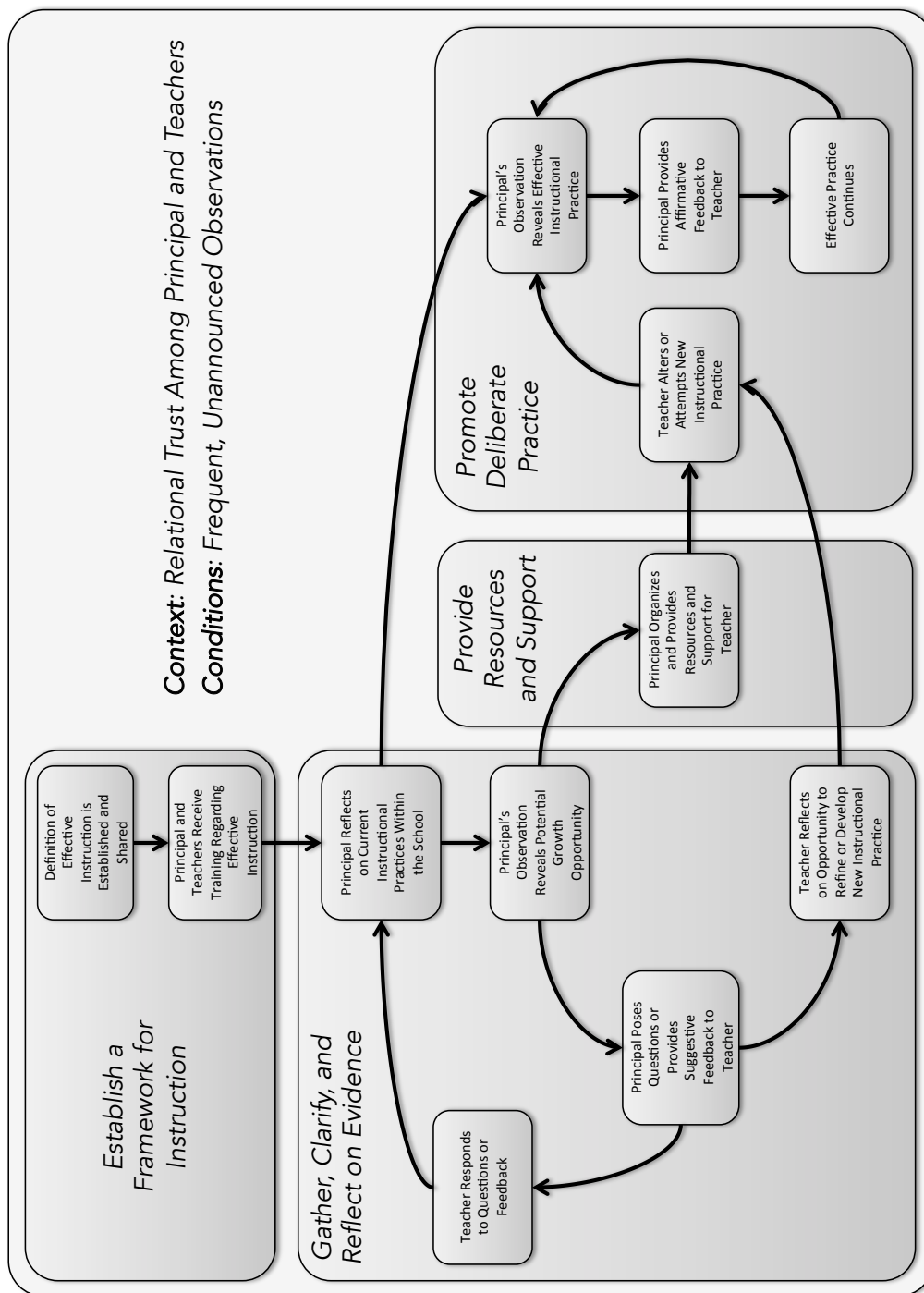
Figure 2. Classroom walkthrough observation process model.

framework, teachers better understood the expectations for instruction, and could engage in self-reflection regarding their instructional strengths and areas for growth.

Gather, clarify, and reflect on evidence. Through the frequent visits to the classrooms as a result of the use of the walkthrough observation process, principals were able to collect evidence of current instructional strategies and then provide feedback to teachers by way of suggestive feedback or by posing questions. Once this feedback was received, teachers had the opportunity to reflect upon the feedback offered by their principal, and either (a) determine that a new instructional strategy should be implemented, (b) determine that an existing instructional strategy could be modified or altered, or (c) provide clarifying information back to the principal regarding the observed practice. Given the fact the classroom walkthrough observations are brief, the opportunity for teachers to clarify observation data was encouraged.

Provide resources and support. Principals used the evidence collected through classroom walkthrough observations and feedback from teachers to align resources for professional development related to the implementation of new instructional strategies. This often occurred through a sharing of practices among teaching staff within the building. The classroom walkthrough observations not only provided data to determine potential areas for growth, but also identified effective practices within the building to be shared with staff.

Promote deliberate practice. Principals in this study used the classroom walkthrough observation process to provide affirmative feedback to encourage the continuation of effective instructional practices. Affirmation from principals fostered greater confidence of classroom teachers, and provided encouragement to continue

effective instructional practices that were already in place. The frequency of the classroom walkthrough observations also held teachers accountable to consistently use those practices identified as effective.

Through self-reflection, or through sharing of ideas and resources regarding effective instructional practices, teachers in the study attempted new instructional strategies that fit within the instructional framework. Once teachers attempted a new instructional practice, principals were able to provide supporting feedback to teachers to encourage deliberate practice of the newly implemented strategies.

Context and conditions. The effectiveness of the classroom walkthrough observation process was influenced by the degree of relational trust between the principal and the teacher, and the frequency and spontaneous structure of the process. The presence of a trusting relationship with the principal promoted more frequent and honest conversations regarding the implementation and use of new instructional strategies by teachers. Teachers reported that since they had a positive working relationship with their principal, they were more apt to approach them with questions or with needs. They also felt as though they could discuss classroom observations and instances more freely. The frequency of the classroom walkthrough observations facilitated a greater relationship between principals and teachers. Also, frequent and unannounced visits to the classroom ensured that teachers felt accountable to enact effective instructional strategies more consistently. The spontaneity of the process also allowed principals to observe and provide feedback regarding "real" or "day to day" instruction.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a theoretical model that described the process of improving instructional practices through the use of classroom walkthrough observations in Nebraska public schools. This study contributes to the existing body of research that focuses on the role of school principals as instructional leaders. For the purposes of this study, classroom walkthroughs were defined as frequent, brief, unannounced observations of classrooms.

While the literature is rife with articles describing the overall classroom walkthrough observation process and descriptions of various formats of classroom walkthroughs observation forms, there lacks a description of how the process of classroom walkthrough observations are used to promote reflective dialogue about classroom practices, to align resources with instructional needs, and to encourage deliberate practice of newly implemented strategies. While current literature offered extensive samples of walkthrough forms and processes, this study added information from principals and teachers regarding how these forms and processes were used to collect information and to promote the development of effective instruction. This study provided descriptive data to demonstrate the principal's use of classroom walkthrough observation processes to provide feedback, pose questions, and to develop a collaborative relationship with teachers to improve instructional practices. Through frequent observations and professional conversations with teachers, principals had a greater ability to design and implement professional development opportunities to improve instruction.

Summary

For the purpose of this study, the central question was "What theory explains the process of improving instructional practices through the use of classroom walkthrough observations in Nebraska public schools?" The following sub-questions provided specificity:

1. What is central to the process of using classroom walkthrough observations to improve instruction?

2. Who influences the process of improving instruction through the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

3. What influences the process of improving instruction through the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

4. What strategies emerge from the process of using classroom walkthrough observations?

5. In what context are these strategies employed?

6. What are the outcomes of the use of classroom walkthrough observations?

So, how do principals effectively use the classroom walkthrough process to improve instruction? There are several conditions and factors that contribute to this process. In many ways the interactions of the participants align with those present in the literature.

Findings form the study revealed that the principal's ability to engage in reflective collaborative processes with teachers was central to the overall process to improve instruction. Principals in this study effectively and frequently collected evidence from classroom observations, guiding the feedback offered to teachers. The feedback came in

the form of affirmative statements regarding current effective strategies, suggestive

statements regarding proposed instructional strategies, or questions posed to the teachers

to foster their own reflection of their current practices.

The research indicated that effective observatory practices include processes that

engage teachers and principals in conversations about instruction. Effective leaders

promote dialogue to better understand current practices and to guide teachers'

improvement efforts (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Hopkins, 2005; Schomburg, 2006). "Effective

principals 'hold up a mirror,' serve as 'another set of eyes,' and are 'critical friends' who

engage in thoughtful discourse with teachers" (Blasé & Blasé, 1999, p. 133).

Principal Z indicated that the classroom walkthrough observation process changed

the conversations. "I think they just benefit by how the conversations have changed. The

conversations have changed from what so-and-so did on the weekend. . . . When we are

in school, we're talking school." Another principal said of the classroom walkthrough

process, "it's the conversation that really is the meat of it" (Principal X). A teacher

shared,

> It is a check system . . . for things that they witnessed in the classroom, and then
> there is a place for some comments. . . . You have these informal checks along the
> way, but there is also conversations with your administration in passing . . . she
> made an effort to get into the classroom yesterday . . . and then we were able to
> have a conversation after school yesterday to kind of talk about how that went.
> (Teacher D)

> I think it is a method for opening up dialogue, conversation. The administrators
> are in the classroom more, so they have more experience of being in there . . . so
> when you're talking about something, that's not just some vague concept.

This process of dialogue was found within a context of relational trust between

the principal and the teacher. A greater degree of trust encouraged teachers to approach

principals with a response to feedback from the teacher or when they had a question

about the use of an instructional strategy within their classroom. The frequency of classroom walkthroughs influenced the level of trust in a positive way. Frase and Hetzel (1990), authors of *School Management by Wandering Around*, suggested observers should get into each classroom twice a week. They suggested that teachers do not develop a sense of trust with an observer, or the feeling that the observer has a strong understanding of their teaching abilities and routines in less than three visits of adequate length.

Teachers indicated through interviews that the classroom walkthrough process was a non-threatening process. "When the principal walks through any door it's just . . . it feels comfortable" (Teacher A). Teacher F added that the process was helpful in getting "to know the administrators . . . the more that they made an effort to get to know me, that has helped tremendously because when they came into my classroom it wasn't just this intimidating stranger just sitting there watching my every move."

Dialogue was also dependent upon the reflective willingness of teachers. The teachers in this study provided evidence to suggest that they actively reflected on their teaching practices. This may have been influenced by the feedback provided as a result of classroom walkthrough observations, or they may have been reflective prior to the implementation of the classroom walkthrough process. The literature suggested the involvement of teachers in professional dialogue promoted more thoughtful and reflective practices regarding teaching (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Downey et al., 2004; Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002; Kachur et al., 2009; Knight, 2011; Richardson, 2001). "Walkthroughs are all about teachers and principals working together to reflect on teaching practices. Reflection is the key component" (Hopkins, 2005, p. 3).

Principal W shared thoughts regarding the reflective aspect of the classroom walkthrough observations. "I think . . . it's also just a coaching model as a way to help. It's a reflective process that they can take information, reflect on it, and then use that in a way that is going to affect their classroom in a positive way." Teacher B described how the process drives reflection from a teachers' standpoint:

> Going back and reading the notes and seeing which of the strategies I'm using in the classroom, and which ones I haven't. I can go back and figure out 'okay let's try something new in my classroom.' I think that we just continue to make adjustments with what our administration wants us to do, as far as how to improve our instruction. . . . At times [the principal] may mention a specific student that was in the classroom that he observed just doing something. So I can look at that and say "okay, well can I do anything to make sure I'm engaging him?"

The quality of the feedback was dependent upon the principal's knowledge of effective instructional practices. In each school in this study, the school had a definition of effective instruction, and this definition was shared and understood by principals and teachers within the building. This set of criteria, or instructional framework became an integral part of the overall process.

The instructional framework was developed and implemented differently at each school. Some districts adopted a current instructional framework, such as Marzano's comprehensive framework for effective instruction (Marzano, 2007), while others reviewed existing frameworks and past professional development opportunities to establish their own set of criteria. In either case, the principal and teacher participants in the study explained how effective instruction was defined in their building. Most schools in the study concentrated on a few aspects of the instructional framework at a time, to ensure there was adequate training and time to implement individual parts of the framework. The development of an instructional framework, or set of observational

criteria, is a critical component of the classroom walkthrough observation process (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Downey et al., 2004; Kachur et al., 2009). Danielson and McGreal (2000) suggested that clarifying evaluative criteria, or the "what" to be observed promotes more effective supervision practices.

Teacher G provided an example of how conversations have changed since the inclusion of an instructional framework as part of the classroom walkthrough observation process. "It's made the principals get away from the general 'doing a nice job.' They take it to the next level. They are very specific. Like 'you are engaging the students,' or 'you stop and get the students engaged if they're not.'" Principal X stated, "We've attempted to try to use those walkthroughs for the feedback, to be real specific to Marzano language, and to help our staff develop the language as well." Using the language from the instructional framework promoted staff understanding of the framework. The framework guided the establishment of classroom expectations for instruction, provided a focus for principals during classroom walkthrough observations, and provided a foundation as principals crafted feedback to teachers. The framework also engaged principals in the identification of current effective practices observed in classrooms, and potential growth areas.

Two strategies emerged from the data as a result of the compilation and clarification of evidence collected through classroom walkthrough observations: (a) affirmation of current effective instructional practices, and (b) allocation of resources to promote new instructional practices. Principals used the classroom walkthrough observations as an opportunity to provide positive and reinforcing feedback to teachers when they observed effective practices. Teachers found the feedback to be helpful,

knowing that they were employing instructional practices that were supported by their instructional framework. Teachers experienced greater confidence in their practices once principals affirmed observed instructional practices.

While the literature included ample information regarding instructional feedback related to the classroom walkthrough observation process (Blasé & Blasé, 1999; Downey et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2011), this information described feedback related to changes or growth in current instructional practices, or prescribed the use of reflective questions to promote reflective thinking. There was little evidence in the literature related to the classroom walkthrough observation process regarding the use of affirmative feedback to encourage the continued use of current effective practices.

All principals in the study noted that they provided positive, or affirmative feedback to teachers. Principal W said, "We are looking for things that we can praise them on, you know, and then affirm what they are doing is good." Principal X added, "So . . . if I see something good . . . I just scratch a little note or whatever and just say, 'I really liked how you were . . . ,' so I'll leave feedback in that way." Teacher I shared thoughts regarding the affirmative feedback from the classroom walkthrough observations. The feedback "kind of gives me the reassurance that . . . I'm [teaching] well. It's always nice to be reassured that you're doing something right."

Principals also used the observation data collected to organize professional learning opportunities for teachers. This task was accomplished through the use of resources and expertise outside of the building, such as educational service unit personnel, or by using processes to promote sharing of instructional strategies and ideas among teachers within the building.

Through the use of classroom observations, leaders have the opportunity to engage in the review of observational data and dialogue with staff regarding their professional needs. The classroom walkthrough process provides leaders with real-time data to make adjustments to instruction (David, 2007; Downey et al., 2004; Pitler & Goodwin, 2008; Richardson, 2001; Sullivan & Glanz, 2009). "The walkthrough is a model or approach used to promote a culture of collaborative learning. Used as professional development or supervision, the walkthrough engages teachers in meaningful activities to enhance the instructional process" (Sullivan & Glanz, 2009, p. 138). Fullan and Knight (2011) concluded that schools that demonstrated substantial improvement "focused 78% of their interventions on professional learning" (p. 22).

Teacher N described how the school district used technology to allow teachers to better share instructional practices and strategies. "We have just done a lot either through training, the different videos . . . on our Google community, and the different resources. I think from seeing all that, it just kind have been ways to incorporate that into the classroom." Teacher G also shared that the school promoted teacher growth through professional development regarding the classroom walkthrough observations and the instructional framework. "[Principals] are . . . with their staff addressing one element a month in a staff meeting, explaining it, describing it, 'what does it mean to me?'" (Teacher G). Principal Z stated "we'll talk about the elements during professional development—this is what it currently looks like in classrooms, or implementing a new element, we'll talk about it on [professional development days]."

Once professional learning opportunities were provided, principals used the classroom walkthrough observations to ensure teachers engaged in deliberate practice

regarding new instructional practices or strategies. The frequent visits to the classroom

provided accountability on the part of teachers to be sure the practices they had learned

were consistently in place. Principals also used the classroom walkthrough observation

process to provide affirmative feedback to promote continued implementation of newly

acquired practices.

The spontaneous and frequent nature of the classroom walkthrough observations

provided the necessary conditions for the collection of evidence and collaborative

dialogue that followed. Teachers reported several times during interviews that

unannounced observations allowed principals to experience "real" teaching or "day-to-

day" teaching. Being able to observe "real" teaching allowed feedback to focus on "real"

issues and also helped accurately define potential professional growth areas for staff.

Teacher K:

> I think some teachers, if they know someone is coming they may change
> their practice or do what they know they are supposed to be doing, even if
> they are not doing it, but I think probably popping in is just better for her
> to see what is really happening.

Teacher F added, "I think the feedback becomes more valuable because these are

things that I'm actually doing in the day-to-day . . . because [the principal] would

be commenting on what I actually do on a day-to-day and not something that I

just put in."

The outcomes of an effective classroom walkthrough observation process are

two-fold: (a) teachers begin to engage in reflective practices regarding instructional

strengths and areas for growth on a more consistent manner, and (b) teachers identify and

implement new instructional strategies. These two outcomes are dependent upon the

knowledge teachers and principals possess regarding effective instruction, the ability of

principals to engage teachers in collaborative dialogue regarding instruction, and the mechanisms principals employ to promote and share knowledge of effective instruction among their staff.

There is sufficient evidence in the research to suggest that teacher reflection is an important precursor to the improvement of instruction (Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Downey et al., 2004; Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002; Kachur et al., 2009; Knight, 2011; Lambert, 1998). Sullivan and Glanz (2009) illustrated the importance of the self-reflection process: "With regard to learning how to provide feedback, it is only through practicing the skills and reflecting on their development that students of supervision will internalize and personalize what they have learned" (p. 51). Kachur added, "Walkthroughs are used to facilitate conversations about teaching and learning, so it is helpful to encourage teachers to reflect on their teaching practices relative to student achievement" (2009, p. 113). Teacher E explained, "What I really like about it is that it is timely and it is . . . research-based. It shows your strengths, and also it has some reflective features . . . it's a great process to reflect on your progress every single day."

Teacher growth was another outcome revealed in this study. Blasé and Blasé (1999) advocated that effective instructional leadership is "talking with teachers to promote reflection and promoting professional growth" (p. 3). Teacher N shared,

> [the principal] has either brought to our attention or the things [the principal] has looked for on the walkthroughs . . . you think kind of outside the box, and that there are other ways to do things . . . I think it is just broadened my perspective.

Principal V stated that teachers "are starting to see that the walkthrough . . . process is part of that . . . we're not out to get you, it's not a personal attack, but it's our goal and mindset . . . to continue to get better at our profession."

Practical Implications

Districts that wish to implement a classroom walkthrough observation process or to adjust existing observatory practices to better promote the use of effective instructional practices can use the results of this research as a guide. One important theme to note was the purpose described by the participants of the study. Each school in this study used the process as a means to improve instruction rather than as a method to evaluate teachers. The principals often stated that they intentionally avoided using the classroom walkthrough observation process as a "gotcha." Rather, principals used the frequent and spontaneous observations to observe day-to-day teaching practices to gather evidence to promote conversations and offer support to teachers.

This study also demonstrated the effective use of feedback. Principals used evidence gathered during observations to ask questions, promote dialogue with teachers, and used this information to provide professional learning opportunities to build the instructional capacity and efficacy of teachers within the building. The feedback was related to the criteria that had been established to define effective instruction.

The benefits realized through the establishment of an instructional framework offer a number of motives for school districts to ensure they have a defined set of instructional criteria that is shared and known by all principals and teachers. School personnel should be able to answer the question, "What is good instruction?" Having a clear and documented answer to this question guides the process to discuss and implement new strategies within classrooms. Developing an instructional framework that is evidence-based ensures that observations, feedback, and the development and implementation of new instructional practices are grounded in research.

The results of this study provide information useful to administrators, educational service unit personnel, and instructors in colleges of education as programs to develop principal skills as instructional leaders are developed and implemented.

Limitations of the study. There were a number of limitations related to this study. Much of the data was based on semi-structured interviews; one limitation in this context is the honesty and involvement of the participants. Related to this limitation is the knowledge and ability of the researcher when conducting the interviews; specifically the structure, follow-up, and questioning during the interview process.

Another limitation of the study was the process to identify participants. The selection of principals to be part of the study was dependent upon the panel of experts who had experience and possessed knowledge in school supervisory and observation practices to accurately identify schools and principals who conducted classroom walkthrough observations that truly had a positive affect on the learning environment. Additionally, building principals were asked to identify teacher interview participants. The study was dependent upon the ability and willingness of principals to identify teachers who could provide relevant and accurate information related to the walkthrough observation process.

This study only examined 3-4 teachers within each building. This represents only a portion of teachers, and they may or may not reflect the perceptions of the entire teaching staff within the building. These teacher participants were not randomly selected. The teachers were selected because their principal had identified them as an individual who had experiences with the classroom walkthrough observations and their principal felt they would add information to the study.

This study was limited to five schools. These schools were identified as having an effective system in place and were selected through a theoretical sampling process. While each these schools demonstrated how the classroom walkthrough observation process is effectively used, the study lacks data to indicate each school achieved that state. Rather, this study indicated how the existing process leads to improved instruction.

In each school there existed a high level of trust, and this appeared to be an essential component of the process, as it encouraged greater collaboration between teacher and principal, and resulted in more dialogue about effective instruction. This study does not provide data to indicate how trust is developed and cultivated among teachers and their observers.

The generalizability of the data from this research study was limited due to the nature of the study. Qualitative research is not designed to predict or account for large populations, but rather to understand individuals or small groups. To generalize the information from this study, further quantitative, hypothesis-testing studies could be designed and conducted.

Delimitations of the study. The participants in this study were principals in Nebraska public schools, and teachers who were observed by those principals. This study is limited to the classroom walkthrough observation process and the interactions that occurred though its use; this study did not include the school or district formal evaluation process. Participants for this study were limited to principals and teachers who were employed during the 2014-2015 school year.

Future Research

While this study provided evidence and a model for school districts that wish to develop an effective classroom walkthrough observation process, additional research should be conducted to support the data. Future research should include the following:

- Examining how trust is developed and maintained through the classroom observation process. The existence of trust among principals and teachers was critical in promoting collaborative dialogue regarding effective instruction. An examination of the development of trust would provide key information to encourage more open conversations about classroom strengths and growth areas.

- Conducting a quantitative research study to investigate the theoretical model presented in this research study. The sampling methods employed in this study limit the generalizability of the data. A quantitative research study could be designed to investigate the perceptions of teachers and principals across a more diverse audience.

- Reviewing methods to establish an instructional framework. Having an instructional framework that teachers and principals understood was influential in principal's ability to effectively observe classrooms, provide focused feedback, and align resources with instructional needs. Collecting and analyzing teacher and principal perceptions related to the establishment of an instructional framework would be valuable information to consider. How was an instructional framework developed? Was the framework created by the school district, or was an existing framework adopted? What research was

conducted prior to adopting the framework? How are the elements of the

framework shared with all staff?

- What are professional development methods to build efficacy of teaching

  practices? This study indicated that principals used the evidence collected

  from classroom walkthrough observations to provided resources and support

  to classroom teachers. However, additional research could more deeply

  examine the strategies and processes to deliver professional learning

  opportunities for staff.

- Determining how aggregate data collected from classroom walkthrough

  observations is collected and analyzed for individual teachers and building-

  wide staff. How do principals use this data to develop and guide improvement

  systems to promote effective instruction? Future research could examine data

  collection method, types of data reviewed, and the process used to respond to

  the data.

- Collecting student perceptions of the classroom walkthrough observation

  process. This study provides the perceptions of teachers and principals

  regarding the use of the classroom walkthrough observation process, but did

  not examine student perceptions. Interviews or survey instruments could be

  used to reveal student's perceptions of the process. Students could provide

  insight to the development and implementation of new instructional strategies

  in the classroom.

- Examining the coaching role of principals. Principals in this study referred to

  their "coaching" role; providing questions for teachers to ponder regarding

their instructional practices. Determining how principals develop and use instructional coaching methods would be significant in understanding the process of improving instruction. How do principals use coaching methods to promote teachers' self-reflection about their instruction?

Additional research in these areas would provide supplemental data to support the principal's use of observation practices to foster the improvement of instruction within schools.

Conclusion

This study examined the principal's use of the classroom walkthrough observation process to improve instruction. The results provided evidence that the establishment of observation criteria and promotion of dialogue regarding those criteria guided the alignment of professional learning opportunities and implementation of new instructional practices. The schools involved in the study demonstrated how principals promote deliberate practice through frequent observations, and encourage the continued use of practices through supportive and affirmative feedback. Teachers felt the process provided them with valuable information to consider and reflect upon as they determined their own set of strengths and areas for growth. The classroom walkthrough observation process ultimately led to the introduction of new strategies to support student learning.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol for Principals

<center>**Interview Protocol for Principals**</center>

Use of Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Instruction

Time of interview:
Date:
Interviewee:
Position of the Interviewee:

Project description: This purpose of this study is to examine Nebraska public school principals' use of the classroom walkthrough observation process to improve instruction.

1. Tell me how the classroom walkthrough observation process was developed and implemented.

2. What are you looking for when you are conducting classroom walkthrough observations?

    a. (Follow-Up) What happens if you are looking for a particular strategy or practice during a classroom walkthrough observation, and you do not observe that practice or strategy?

3. Describe how you use the classroom walkthrough observation process to provide feedback to teachers about their instructional practices?

4. How would you describe the purposes of your classroom walkthrough observations?

5. How has using classroom walkthrough observations influenced the formal evaluation process?

6. Describe how the walkthrough observation process has influenced your planning for professional development.

7. Please describe any trainings, workshops, or experiences that have influenced the walkthrough observation process?

8. How do teachers perceive the classroom walkthrough observation process?

9. How would teachers describe the purpose of the classroom walkthrough observation process?

10. Tell me about any resistance you've felt from teachers in response to your classroom walkthrough observation process?

    a. (Follow-Up) What have you done to overcome this resistance?

11. Tell me about the benefits you have experienced from conducting classroom walkthrough observations.

12. Is there other information you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation in this interview. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Use of Classroom Walkthroughs to Improve Instruction

Time of interview:
Date:
Interviewee:
Position of the Interviewee:

Project description: This purpose of this study is to examine Nebraska public school principal's use of the classroom walkthrough observation process to improve instruction.

1. Tell me about the classroom walkthrough observation process used by your principal.

2. What is the principal looking for when they are conducting classroom walkthrough observations?

    a. (Follow-Up) What happens if your principal is expecting to see a particular practice or strategy in your classroom during a walkthrough observation, and does *not* observe that practice or strategy?

3. Describe the feedback you receive from the classroom walkthrough observations.

    a. (Follow-Up) What feedback has been most helpful?

4. How would you describe the purposes of classroom walkthrough observations?

5. Describe how the expectations for the classroom walkthrough observation process have been communicated.

6. How have classroom walkthrough observations influenced your practice?

7. What concerns do you or did you have about the classroom walkthrough observation process?

    a. (Follow-Up) What was done or might be done to eliminate these concerns?

8. Tell me about the benefits you have experienced from classroom walkthrough observations.

9. What would you change about the classroom walkthrough observation process?

10. Is there other information you would like to add?

Thank you for your participation in this interview. All of your responses will be kept strictly confidential.