

Chapter 38

Tools to Change School Culture: Learning About Learning Together

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ABSTRACT

A school leader's time is limited. Demands on time are increasing every day, and expectations on performance are at an all-time high. How can processes like collegial learning walks change a school into a dynamic learning organization? How can the leader help teachers engage students so that so that they are willing to persevere in spite of obstacles and gain confidence to be able to learn the content well enough that they can actually transfer what they learn to a different context on their own? This chapter will provide potential solutions for next generation leaders and will examine how the stages of learning can serve as the point of departure for processes that change school culture in meaningful ways as teachers and school leaders reflect on their pedagogical practice and on learning for everyone in the learning organization.

INTRODUCTION

Principals today are tasked to be transformational leaders who are able to change the culture of a school and cause learning to improve for all members of the learning organization. However, the management tasks that consume so much time, and will become huge problems if left unattended, still loom every day. So, how can one person change the culture of a school so that everyone is committed to improvement? How can the principal take care of all managerial tasks and still attend to what is really important, if learning for all is to become the central mission of the school? The truth is that one person cannot do

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it alone. In fact, for lasting change to take effect, the principal must have everyone on board. So, what processes can principals implement to obtain buy-in from stakeholders? Traditional walk-throughs—frequent, short classroom visits that focus on the effects of instruction—are often guided by checklists of strategies that principals look for as they observe teachers and instruction. These prescriptive lists tie principals to a protocol that gathers one-sided evidence, invites misconceptions about effective teaching and meaningful learning, and derails opportunities for collaborative learning. Furthermore, some students are allowed to continue with low level instructional situations (Moss & Brookhart, 2013, p. 43).

The objectives of this chapter are to

1. Review existing models of walkthroughs and compare them to Collegial Learning Walks (CLWS),
2. Focus on mission as foundational to any meaningful change and on the stages of learning as key to instructional design considering their influence on tried and tested classroom practice, and
3. Examine Collegial Learning Walks and their impact on learning as documented in schools and districts on a national and international level.

BACKGROUND

Historical Context for the Development of Walkthroughs

In providing a historical perspective on Walkthroughs, Keruskin (2005) contextualizes that the concept of Walkthroughs or “Management by Wandering Around (MBWA)” is a management technique that has long been used by effective leaders (p. 18). In fact, Keruskin notes that the first MBWA model can be traced back to President Abraham Lincoln who believed in spending the majority of his time on the front lines with the troops fighting in the Civil War. More contemporaneously, business leaders have successfully employed the MBWA method. Johnston (2003) points out that Hewlet Packard was the first company to initiate the MBWA model in the 1970s. Johnston credits the publication of Peters and Waterman’s (1984) *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-run Companies* with popularizing the MBWA model in the 1980s. In fact, Peters and Waterman’s research indicates that the most effective leaders “were involved with the daily routines of the business, frequently on the work floor where the real work was taking place, listening and talking with workers...” (Keruskin, 2005, p. 18). Within the education context, Frase and Hetzel’s (1990) *School Management by Walking Around* served to introduce the walkthrough supervisory method to education administrators.

Three Minute Classroom Walk-Through/Downey Walk-Through Model

Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston (2004) seek to explain the classroom walkthrough approach created by Carolyn Downey in the book, *The Three Minute Classroom Walk-Through: Changing School Supervisory Practice One Teacher at a Time*. Downey et al. assert that the Downey approach to classroom walkthroughs differs from other supervisory walkthrough methods in its focus on fostering relationships between teachers and principals and its focus on changing the overall school culture. In contrast to a superior-subordinate type of principal-teacher relationship, this model employs a “collegial, egalitarian model of professional practice...that involves professional conversation about practice” (Downey et al., 2004, p. xi).

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