Understanding the Rationale Underlying the Walk-Through and Reflective Practice Approach

There are all types of classroom walk-through approaches that give feedback to teachers. Our approach is quite different from most. First, we will look at the walk-through itself. Then we will describe why a person would conduct walk-throughs of the type we propose. Finally, we will look at the development of the rationale for our approach to the five-step observation informal walk-throughs and the type of conversation we recommend to provide for optimal collaboration and reflection by teachers regarding their practice.

Before we begin this chapter, we ask you to reflect on your own experience with walk-throughs and follow-up dialogue, either as a teacher or as a supervisor/coach of teachers. You may do this alone, or if you are working with a learning partner, you might enjoy doing this together. The following questions might start you on your reflective thoughts:

- How often do you or did your supervisor walk into the classroom?
- How long do you or did your supervisor stay in the classroom on these walk-throughs?
- How frequently do you or did your supervisor provide follow-up?
- What was the nature of the follow-up?

REFLECTION

Initial Reflections on Walk-Throughs and Follow-Up

(Write your comments here.)

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WHAT IS THE DOWNEY WALK-THROUGH?

Downey Walk-Throughs involve five key ideas:

1. Short, focused, yet informal observation. The Downey Walk-Through classroom visit is short in length—about 2 to 3 minutes in a classroom. It is like taking a short video clip of the moment. There is no intent to evaluate the teacher; rather it is a time to gather information about curricular and instructional teaching practices and decisions teachers are making. It has been said that a teacher makes over 1,000 decisions a day. Our experience is that in the 2 to 3 minutes we are in the classroom, we typically observe anywhere from 5 to 10 decisions being made.

To focus our time in the classroom, the walk-through includes a five-step observational structure for gathering information on both the curriculum being taught and the instructional teaching decisions being made. This is described in detail in Chapter 2.

If you have about 30 minutes to walk through some classrooms, you could visit 10 to 12 classrooms using our approach. With other walk-through approaches, the observer usually stays in the room from 10 to 15 minutes. This would allow for only 2 or 3 classroom visits in 30 minutes. Through frequent, short observations, you become familiar with the teaching patterns and decisions teachers are making on a daily basis. Over time, you will obtain far more information about teachers and the school when you stay in each classroom for just a few minutes per visit.

Occasionally, you might spend more time in a classroom, but this is not the norm for our walk-through approach. If our goal is one of professional growth rather than evaluation of the individual, a short visit is all that is required to provide ample data to promote teacher growth. With a longer stay, too much data are collected. In fact, it is our opinion that we tend to make more judgments when staying in classrooms for longer periods of time. The short observation allows you to frequent all the classrooms on a regular basis rather than see just a few a month. The principal will have a more accurate picture of what is going on in the school when he or she is able to visit all of the classrooms regularly.

2. Possible area for reflection. The major goal of this brief informal observation is to trigger a thought that might be useful for the teacher to consider, one that might help the teacher in his or her decision making about effective practice. Notice the language here—"might be useful." When we provide follow-up, it is to give opportunities for reflective thought. The *teachers* will decide whether our conversation is of value to them. There are times for direct feedback, and this will be discussed later; but the ultimate purpose of our walk-through with reflective dialogue is to enable every educator to become a reflective thinker. Reflective thinkers are people who are personally responsible for their own growth and who are continuously analyzing their practice. An entire chapter (Chapter 3) is devoted to the reflective conversation.

3. Curriculum as well as instructional focus. While you are in the classroom observing, you will want to gather data about the curriculum and instructional decisions being made and notice their impact on student behavior. You will want to focus on curriculum and pedagogy. Typically, you will not be in the classroom long enough to ascertain content accuracy and completeness. We will share the strategy for moving out of the classroom after you have had a chance to zero in on the teaching objective and think of an effective teaching practice that you might want to discuss with the teacher (see Chapter 2).

4. Follow-up occurs only on occasion and not after every visit. While you are in the classroom, think about whether you wish to have a conversation with the teacher about any decisions the teacher is making. This needs to be done before you move to the next classroom. Decide whether you will be providing a follow-up conversation on some teaching practice for reflection (see Chapter 3). We would suggest that follow-up conversations not take place every time you visit a classroom. You may want to visit a classroom as many as 8 to 10 times before you decide to engage the teacher in reflective dialogue. In fact, we would suggest that feedback be given only when you know it will be received in a meaningful and timely

manner. We will talk about various follow-up approaches and ways to keep them brief in Chapter 3.

5. Informal and collaborative. There is no checklist of things to look for or judgments to be made. Checklists signal a formal observation and one that often looks like an inspection to the teacher. Our approach is informal, informal, and informal! With this process you do not go into a classroom with a checklist of teacher skills you wish to see, nor do you make a duplicate copy of your notes that is given to the teacher and/or placed in a file.

Our approach is very different. It is about colleagues working together to help each other think about practice. It is not about judging a teacher's effective use of a given teaching practice. While you are in the classroom, you will need to do an analysis and may need to take a few notes, but these notes are only to remind you of something you might want to remember. You will be going into so many classrooms; the notes will be necessary to jog your memory. We will make suggestions on how to take these notes and also on how to let teachers know what you are recording and why.

Table 1.1 lists some key ideas about our approach to walk-throughs compared to approaches used by other educators.

Table 1.1   Comparison of Walk-Through Approaches

Our Approach	*Other Approaches*
Informal	Formal
Brief—2 to 3 minutes	Longer—5 to 15 minutes
Brief gathering of data to look for teacher decisions	Gather data about teacher effectiveness
Walk-through time is throughout the day and unannounced	Walk-through time is typically known and scheduled—to watch a teacher use "shared reading strategies," for example
No checklist of teaching practices to look for; focus on curricular and instructional decision points of the teacher	Specific checklist (rubric) type of form to gather data about specific practices
Nothing put into personnel file	May be put into personnel file
Focus on professional growth	Focus on evaluation, assessment
Ultimately leads to reflective conversation	Usually leads to direct feedback from the supervisor to the teacher
Coaching focus	Judging focus—often inspectional

It should be mentioned that there are times when you are going to make more formal walk-through observations. You might want to spend more time with novice teachers and look for certain skills, such as classroom management proficiencies. If you think you have a marginal teacher, you will want to stay longer and make judgments that are documented. You might want to conduct classroom data-gathering observations on particular practices to help determine group staff-development needs. But remember, these formal walk-throughs should be fairly infrequent and out of the norm. Also, teachers must be made aware of exactly why you are going to do a formal walk-through.

This book is written for the majority of teachers, who are in good standing and trying to impact student achievement in the classroom.

Please take a moment to think about what you have read so far regarding our approach and about your previous experience with walk-throughs and follow-up dialogue. Think about similarities and differences between our approach and your previous experiences. Write your ideas below, on your own or together with your learning partner.

REFLECTION

What Are Your Reflections About Our Approach in Relation to Your Experiences Regarding Walk-Throughs and Follow-Up Dialogue?

(Write your comments here.)

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WHY WALK-THROUGHS?

Think for a moment about why you would conduct brief walk-throughs in classrooms. Why do you think walk-throughs are of value? Why should walk-throughs be a high priority in your work?

REFLECTION

Why Should Walk-Throughs Be a High Priority in Your Work?

(Write your comments here.)

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Here are some of our reasons for brief walk-throughs (Downey & Frase, 2001). Notice how many of your reasons are the same as ours.

- The frequent sampling of a teacher's actions gives greater validity to what you observe.
- Frequent observations often lower teacher apprehension over time, making formal observations more effective.
- The more you know about how people are functioning and making decisions, the more you know about the school's operations.
- The more you observe, the more you learn—the greater the repertoire of strategies you can share with other staff.
- You can identify common areas of decisions that might prove valuable for group staff development—entire faculty, department level, and grade level groups.
- You can observe how effective your staff development endeavors have been in impacting teaching behavior in the classroom.
- If parents call about a concern, you have your own observational data, in most cases, of the teacher's intentions and practice. You are better informed.
- It helps you identify possible individuals who might become marginal if you do not provide assistance quickly.
- It helps you keep perspective about your work.

What else did you think about that has not been mentioned? What has been mentioned here that you would add to your list? Add to your list below:

REFLECTION

Add to Your List of Reasons for Walk-Throughs

(Write your comments here.)

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It is essential that you take the time to interact with staff about their practices. Our walk-through approach is a valuable vehicle to start this journey toward collaborative, reflective dialogue. The teacher must be the primary client of the school-based administrator, whereas the district's primary client and the teacher's primary client is the student. The only way you are going to effect higher student achievement is through the teacher and his or her actions in the classroom.

Richard Elmore (2000) points out that administrators spend a great deal of time making changes in the structure of the organization. However, most of these changes do not result in higher student achievement. He indicates that it is not until we are impacting what is happening in the classroom that we will see higher student achievement.

Obviously, the principal has clients other than teachers, such as the parents and students. But often the principal views him- or herself as being most responsible to students and being less so to teachers. Other principals view their primary role as one of only maintaining a smooth-running organization. It is time for this minimalist image to change, but in order for that to happen, principals and other administrators must come to view their primary role as one of an instructional leader promoting improved student achievement. This requires that principals spend

a lot of time visiting classrooms and engaging teachers in collaborative, reflective dialogue.

Gene Hall and Shirley Hord (2000), who have studied the principal's role for years, have found that brief, one-on-one, focused feedback (one-legged conversation) is the most powerful staff development approach available to impact and change behavior. It is certainly more powerful than the typical one-day workshop many teachers attend. Our approach is to have 3- to 5-minute conversations with teachers that lead them into future thought.

We have three ultimate goals for the walk-through approach with collaborative, reflective dialogue. They are listed in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2 Ultimate Goals of the Walk-Through Approach With Reflective Dialogue*

- Reflective, self-directed, self-analytical, interdependent teachers who examine their own practices (even those who initially are at the dependent level)
- Teachers who are continually willing to improve their teaching practices
- Teachers who are committed to teaching the district curriculum student learnings and to working for ever higher student achievement

* The term *teacher* could be replaced with any type of educational position.

As we describe our approach in more detail in the following chapters, you will come to see how we use these strategies to achieve these goals.

People who hear about our approach to collaborative, reflective dialogue are intrigued, as it is very different from the approach most people use or have experienced. We consider it a 21st-century technique that honors teachers and their work and that focuses on those things that influence higher student achievement.

As mentioned earlier in this book, the approach being described was developed by Dr. Carolyn Downey, and it has evolved over time. Dr. Downey has served as an administrator in various roles for over 30 years. Among its most important attributes and key ideas, Downey's approach

- Focuses on those factors that influence higher student achievement
- Assumes there is alignment among the written, taught, and assessed curriculum
- Encourages teachers to provide instruction at the right level of difficulty for each student
- Promotes teacher use of assessments for diagnostic purposes to determine prerequisites, and acquisition and mastery of the learning

The collaborative, reflective dialogue following classroom visits

- Builds on the fact that change is intrapersonal—it comes from within
- Focuses on the use of intrinsic motivational strategies that honor the teacher and his or her decisions versus telling the teacher what to do
- Recognizes the teacher's level of experience and readiness for self-direction
- Engages in dialogue that moves the teacher to self-analysis
- Encourages collegial interactions and enables educators to learn together in an interdependent way

Our approach is very powerful with respect to change and the working relationship between coach/supervisor and teacher. We are not into a "gotcha" approach. Our goal is not to embarrass or put any teacher into a defensive posture. Rather, our goal is to have collaborative, thoughtful interactions with our colleagues. However, should our approach not be used in the way it was designed, it could be turned into a "gotcha" approach.

For those in supervisory roles with teachers, the shift should be away from a conventional or congenial supervisory approach toward a collegial one. Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1998) describe this shift as follows, that the relationship needs to be

- Collegial rather than a hierarchical relationship between teachers and supervisors
- Focused on teacher development rather than teacher conformity
- Facilitative of teachers collaborating with each other in instructional improvement efforts
- Supportive of teacher involvement in ongoing reflective inquiry

THE EVOLUTION OF THE DOWNEY WALK-THROUGH PROCESS

This particular walk-though approach began in the 1960s. Downey tells the story of becoming an administrator in the mid-60s and how someone indicated she ought to get into classrooms. Thinking it was a good idea, she proceeded to do so merely from a symbolic perspective—to let staff know she cared about them and their work. Staff responded well to these short visits. Downey quickly began to realize, however, that there was much more to the walk-throughs than just the symbolism of her presence. She

began to get a big picture of the learning environment and saw how much one could learn from the walk-throughs. She realized that there were many strategies and techniques that she had never used as a teacher that could become part of her staff's repertoire—strategies that she could share with others and use for staff development (Downey & Frase, 2001).

Over the years, Downey came to realize that the walk-through, coupled with meaningful dialogue, was a most effective approach to focus on staff members' professional growth. In the late 1960s, Downey had the opportunity to learn the Madeline Hunter (1968) approach to teacher evaluation. In this process, the administrator was supposed to intervene in the teacher's practice by suggesting strategies for improvement and behaviors to be maintained. She began to use these same strategies for walk-through conversation.

In the early 1970s, Downey went to a training with Sue Wells Welsh (1971), who added a self-analysis portion to the Hunter model. Downey indicates that this is when the journey toward reflective thought began for her. It was not only in her formal evaluations of staff that she focused on self-analysis; in the follow-up after walk-throughs, she began to move away from complimentary closing comments and began to use conversation with self-reflection. Downey indicates that this was philosophically more in line with her thinking about how to motivate staff toward change. Rather than telling or selling an idea, individuals exposed to new ideas seemed to embrace them better through reflective dialogue than when the "boss" told them how to change or reinforce certain practices.

In the early 1970s, through Costa's (1994; Costa & Garmston, 1985) training on Cognitive Coaching, Downey's approach to the reflective model was enhanced. Although the training was about the formal evaluation process, Downey began to move more and more toward the informal, brief walk-through with a focus on reflective conversations with teachers.

As Downey states, "The idea of moving from an inspectional approach to supervision to a reflectional supervision approach began to take shape. Why would anyone want to be in an inspectional situation unless the person was seen as marginal?" Where the Hunter model involved direct intervention, the Costa model was teacher-led and involved self-reflection on a topic selected by the teacher. Downey found herself caught between these two models and began to create one of her own. Her model was moving toward a more collaborative and interdependent practice in which reflection was the focus. She found that the Hunter approach was working quite well with relatively inexperienced teachers and marginal teachers and that the Costa model, as it was described in the

early 1970s, was working for the teachers who were experienced and especially for those who were quite independent.

During this time, Downey was influenced further by two different ideas about supervision that added to her perspective concerning identification of a continuum of reflective interaction. This evolved into the identification of three types of reflective dialogue that are incorporated into the model today: direct, indirect, and collaborative, reflective dialogue. One influence was Stephen Covey (1989), who advocated moving employees from a dependent relationship with a supervisor to an interdependent relationship, going through the independent stage along the way. This provided Downey with the logic for differentiation because it moved from the indirect or independent relationship with a supervisor to one that could be collaborative.

A second influence for Downey was Eric Berne's transactional analysis (1963), which described the supervisor's relationship with employees as adult-child, adult-adolescent, and adult-adult. Downey combined Covey and Berne in her thinking. She did not embrace the ideas of Berne or Covey in total but felt the information was of value when assessing the supervisory process.

As depicted in Figure 1.1, the dependent relationship is one of adult-child. This often benefits the novice teacher who needs a supportive, nurturing relationship that is direct in nature and in which the supervisor is in a teaching role. However, it is important that we move from that dependency stage to one of interdependence. Many supervisors use the same dependency style with experienced teachers, which has a very different effect on the teacher. Many experienced staff members actually enjoy this relationship—a paternalistic, benevolent one. The independent level was described as the
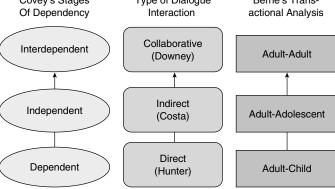
Figure 1.1   Flow of Supervisor of/Employee Relationships

adult-adolescent relationship between supervisor and employee. The ideal was noted as the interdependent, collaborative, adult-adult relationship. We want to have professional conversations with our teachers that are collaborative—adults to adults, learning together.
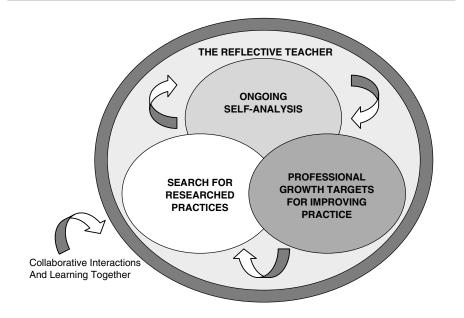
By the 1980s, Downey's model had continued to evolve in several ways:

- The supervisor acted as coach and mentor rather than judge.
- The supervisor viewed the teacher as the primary client for impacting student achievement.
- Interaction between principal and teacher moved from extrinsic motivators such as notes and positive praise to intrinsic motivations focused on teacher efficacy.
- Occasion for providing follow-up moved from giving feedback after every visit toward an occasional, collaborative, reflective dialogue, typically in the form of a reflective question.
- Conversations with novice/apprentice teachers who needed direct, nurturing feedback took on a reflective component.
- Supervisors began to recognize that it is the teacher's choice to answer any substantial reflective question posed by the supervisor, and that the teacher should be given time to ponder such questions.
- The focus moved toward encouraging reflective inquiry by teachers on their practices and decisions and moved away from direct feedback from a supervisor.
- It was recognized that it is the reflective question that has the power to change what teachers believe.
- There was a strengthening of the belief that the ultimate goal of supervision is to facilitate each teacher's ability to be self-analyzing about practice.

A few more ideas should be mentioned about how Downey views supervision. When she first began to focus on what was happening in the classroom, her observations were centered on instructional teaching practices, since most of her training had been in this area. In the 1980s, Downey was influenced by Fenwick English (1988) and his work on the alignment of the written, taught, and assessed curriculum (1993). Downey began to focus not only on how teachers were teaching but also on what they were teaching. This curriculum and instructional focus became entrenched in her model and has now been in place for over a decade and a half.

The more recent stage in the evolution of the Downey Walk-Through is *the focus on teacher decisions rather than on teacher actions.* There is more

Figure 1.2   Professional Growth Cycle

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.
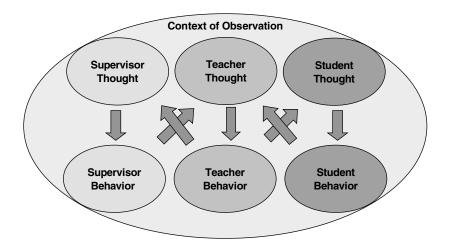
As Downey began teaching others her approach, she refined the components of the reflective question and conversation. This approach will be described in detail in Chapter 3.

The brief yet focused walk-through followed by collaborative, reflective dialogue is very powerful in bringing about change. Its ultimate purpose is to support teachers in becoming responsible and self-analytical individuals who are continuously improving their practice. After this goal is reached, teachers are encouraged to set growth targets and to search out researched practices and try them. Thus the cycle of self-analysis and improvement continues. This cycle of renewal is illustrated in Figure 1.2.

The heading of this figure could have been "The Reflective Principal," "The Reflective Superintendent," or "The Reflective Secretary"—the idea is for *every* employee to be continually growing.

Downey states that when she began supervising staff, she believed that she could go directly from her thoughts to her actions to change teacher behavior. Then she realized that this is not the way to implement truly long-lasting change. What she should be doing with her thoughts is influencing the thoughts of the teacher. This approach continues as it is

Figure 1.3 Initial Purpose of Follow-Up Interaction (influenced by Costa)

then used by the teacher as he or she works with students. It is also fully reciprocal in that the goal of the teacher would then be to influence the thoughts of the coach and/or supervisor. This is illustrated in Figure 1.3.

As noted:

- Our goal as supervisors is not to change teacher behavior but rather to influence a teacher's thinking so that the teacher has a desire to change his or her own behavior.
- Then the teacher's thinking will influence the teacher's behavior, which in turn influences student thought to obtain the desired student behaviors.
- And finally, the teacher's thinking influences the teacher's behavior to consequently influence supervisory thinking.
- This is a reciprocal process of influencing one another's reflective inquiries into one's own practice and work.

Table 1.3 provides a summary of the key ideas embodied in our approach to walk-through follow-up conversations versus some of the other walk-through models being used today.

Table 1.3 Comparison of Follow-Up Approaches

Our Approach	*Other Approaches*
Focus on moving all staff to self-reflection, self-diagnosis, and continual professional growth.	Focus on ensuring a particular instructional practice is in place in a classroom

Our Approach	*Other Approaches*
Two-way and conversational, with reflection (different levels); little, if any, use of notes	Direct feedback—often use of one-way notes or a checklist
Recognizes different levels of follow-up—direct, indirect, interactive	Follow-up is mainly direct feedback
Focus is on reflective questions about one's practice—not about the lesson observed	Focus is usually on the lesson observed and a particular practice and on how to improve that practice
Reflectional supervision philosophy with focus on teacher reflection at the analysis, synthesis, or evaluation cognitive type	More of an inspectional philosophy of accountability for particular practices—expected compliance
Focus on cycle of professional renewal	Focus on today's practice
Focus on intrinsic motivation	Focus on extrinsic motivation

It's Your Reflection Time!

Think back to the start of this chapter and your thoughts about walk-throughs and follow-up. How has this chapter influenced your thoughts?

Current Reflections About the Downey
Walk-Through and Follow-Up Approach

(Write your comments here.)

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