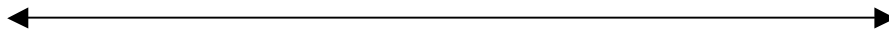




## Walk-Throughs Are On the Move!

Adapted from [http://www.education-world.com/a\\_admin/admin/admin405.shtml](http://www.education-world.com/a_admin/admin/admin405.shtml)

Have you ever read about "cutting edge" techniques or methods and thought, "Hey! I do that!" There are some things we do that come naturally - just due to being good teaching strategies. The strategy of "Walk-Throughs" is just such a situation. While reading about this administrative technique, I thought - "I had a principal who did that!" My first year teaching at Browning Elementary School, Jeff Foote was the principal. The more I read the following article, the more I could say - yes - that works! I knew from personal experience that teachers value principals who take the time and interest to be visible in the classrooms, hallways, playground, etc. Jeff was often in and out of our classrooms - He *knew* what was happening in there. He could knowledgeably address parents' concerns and questions because he was part of the scene. As you read the following article, I'm sure many of you will be able to say, "Yes - I do that." So - whether this administrative style is being re-enforced or introduced, consider the strategies. The rationale makes sense - and, from personal experience, I will add that it works!



Classroom walk-throughs are a trend that is on the move! The non-threatening, non-evaluative walk-throughs give principals a quick snapshot of student learning. That snapshot is used to engage teachers in conversations about how to improve teaching.

School leaders are under a lot of stress -- but if exercise is a stress antidote, then principals might be among the healthiest managers around. That's because a lot of principals are doing an awful lot of walking. They're using a technique known as the walk-through to take the pulse of student learning in their schools.

Walk-throughs are intended to be separate from any formal teacher evaluation process. The technique is used strictly as a means of engaging teachers in dialogue and reflection about teaching practices and school-wide goals. The walk-through is a significant step in influencing real change in schools by getting administrators close to the classroom and building their capacity to become instructional leaders.

The walk-through process can benefit teachers in many ways, according to Kathy Larson of the Cooperative Education Service Agency #2 in Milton, Wisconsin. Larson, who presents a session called Classroom Walk-Through Training, says teachers benefit by learning to use reflection to increase their knowledge, skills, and performance;





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strategically aligning classroom instruction to district curriculum; and increasing student learning across grade levels.

Different administrators share these comments about their experiences:

"When I do classroom walk-throughs I am looking for best practices determined by a reflective question that focuses on a practice or strategy our staff has determined to be a priority. The process is an informal and non-evaluative one; its purpose is to foster reflective practice." ~Deepi Kang-Weisz, Mississauga, Ontario (Canada)

"I get into every classroom at least six times a year. When I do a walk-through I use a checklist of observable best practices. I use my walk-through observations to give informal praise for good teaching. I also refer at faculty meetings to lessons I observed." ~ Marguerite McNeely, Deville, Louisiana

"How can I properly supervise teachers if I am not in classrooms on a regular basis? I know how tight a principal's time can be, but walk-throughs are a priority for me and my assistant principal. Our goal is to get into every classroom three times a week." ~ Michael Miller, Cocoa, Florida

"On walk-throughs, I observe if assignments are differentiated -- modified for children with special needs and enriched for those who finish early. I am looking to see if lessons seem organized and children are on task. I get into every classroom two or three times a week." ~ Ron Tibbetts, Providence, Rhode Island

"I walk through each teacher's classroom an average of once every two weeks. Walk-throughs are part of our school's teamwork approach to improve teaching. My assistant principal and I do them, and soon our guidance counselors will be involved too." ~ Todd Wiedemann, Berrien Springs, Michigan

Principals who have been trained to use the walk-through observation technique speak clearly about its benefits.

***"The more principals are able to spend time in classrooms, the more they understand what the teacher is doing and how the art of teaching is approached... "***

"The biggest benefit is that the process gets principals into classrooms much more often and with a specific reason in mind," said principal Todd Wiedemann. Since the walk-





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through has a specific focus "it puts teachers and principals on the same page in terms of expectations."

Another huge benefit is that it's an effective use of a principal's time, Wiedemann told Education World. "To make it into every classroom once every two weeks and only use 10 to 15 percent of my time is an awesome advantage."

Principal Ron Tibbetts agreed that getting principals into classrooms more often is one of the biggest benefits of the walk-through approach. He said. "Walk-throughs create a mutual ground for discussing students, curriculum, achievement, and behavior. They keep the administrator 'in touch' with day-to-day classroom activities."

Walk-throughs enable principal Marguerite McNeely to really know her teachers' strengths and weaknesses. "By knowing that, we can plan for improved instruction," said McNeely. "Doing walk-throughs -- being visible and giving feedback -- helps everybody know that I am active within the school and pressing for improvements always. Walk-throughs reinforce that I have a vested interest in what goes on daily in our school."

Walk-throughs also improve rapport with the students and decrease discipline issues, said McNeely. "And when I do walk through, I also check lighting, space and maintenance issues, the availability and condition of textbooks and other materials, teacher routines such as gradebooks, attendance, and lesson plans . . . ."

"A lot can get done in a walk-through," added McNeely. "The staff welcomes me because they know I am there to aid them and support their efforts."

The dialogue that results from walk-through observations is the biggest benefit for principal Deepi Kang-Weisz. "The reflective focus questions become a springboard for professional dialogue that is all about improving instruction and learning," she told Education World.

"Walk-throughs are a great way to maintain contact, and they provide a basis for reflection and sharing effective practices for staff as individuals and a faculty as a whole," added Kang-Weisz. "At staff meetings, I share some of the great things I see during walk-throughs. I encourage staff to share their practices, and we all ask questions and learn together. We are a professional learning community at work."





### *The Key To Making Walk-Throughs Work*

Making teachers comfortable with the walk-through process is the key to making it work. At the first mention of frequent, quick classroom walk-throughs, teachers might resist. They may fear that there is an ulterior motive or that the purpose behind walk-throughs is to "catch" them doing something wrong. Combating those fears and establishing trust - and helping teachers see walk-throughs as the non-threatening tool they are is key, said Kang-Weisz.

"Talking about the process and determining collectively the focus questions around which walk-through observations are done is essential," she added. "The shortness of the time spent walking through classrooms is balanced by the number of times a principal gets into each room during the year. There is a cumulative effect from those visits that provides an overview."

For Todd Wiedemann, training is the key. "You have to train the teachers on the importance of the walk-throughs and the relevance of the data collected," he told Education World. "Teachers have to buy in to the fact that walk-throughs are a tool that will be used to help them improve and not to punish them.

"Once you get the teachers to buy in to that thought, then you have to make sure you are consistent with the follow-through. Use the data collected to drive staff meetings, and incorporate the data into the school improvement plan."

Each year, Marguerite McNeely spends part of her first faculty meeting prepping teachers for her regular classroom visits. "I provide teachers with all the informal and formal forms I will be using when observing them. I explain what each item on those forms is measuring and how it can help us in development of a successful school," she explained. "I am very up front with my expectations."



Ron Tibbetts also sets the tone for regular classroom visits from the start of the school year. "At the first teachers' meeting, I mention that one of the things I like to do is visit classrooms, even if it is only for five minutes or less," said Tibbetts. "That sets the stage for regular walk-throughs.



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"The more I can get into a classroom, the less of a distraction my visits become to students and the more comfortable a teacher will become with having me in the room. In a way, the goal of walk-throughs is that I will be such a common presence that teachers will wonder what is going on when I cannot get into their classrooms."

### *An Extension Of MBWA*

Many principals see classroom walk-throughs as an extension of the Management-By-Walking-Around (MBWA) strategy developed by Hewlett-Packard executives in the 1970s and popularized in the book *In Search of Excellence* by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman.

"Whether walking through a classroom, the cafeteria, or a hallway, the walk-through technique keeps an administrator visible and accessible," said Tibbetts. "Walking through classrooms offers possibilities for interactions that otherwise might not occur."

"This morning I fielded a question about an Internet connection and was able to bring a printer back online. A couple of classrooms later I had the pleasure of listening to a kindergarten child read me her story about her family and her new brother. . . .

"I might not get into every class every day, but walking around the school at least once every day is a necessity. It is important for visibility, but it is also necessary to check safety, security, and other building concerns."

### *Walk-Through Focus Questions*

Principal Michael Miller aims to get himself or his assistant principal into every classroom a total of three times a week. "My school is 800 students so that is a tall task, but most weeks we meet our goal," Miller told Education World.

### Unexpected Benefits

One day, a couple of parents stopped by unexpectedly to talk with principal Ron Tibbetts. They had some questions about the teaching style of their child's teacher. They also had a question about something Tibbetts had not observed.





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Walk-throughs had given Tibbetts a good glimpse into the true abilities of his teacher. "In my opinion, her curriculum objectives and interactions with the students were developmentally appropriate and very much on target," said Tibbetts. "I was able to give very specific examples to relieve the parents' anxiety."

Walk-throughs also involve regular follow-up conversations with teachers, so when Tibbetts met with the teacher he was able to share what he had said about the curriculum and his support of her approach. "We were also able to move the conversation to the other item raised by the parents -- the one I hadn't observed," said Tibbetts. "We were able to freely discuss it and make a few changes."

On the quick walk-throughs that Miller and his assistant principal do, there is always a purpose. "Each week, we have specific things that we are looking for," he said. They communicate the weekly look-for in advance. One week they might be looking to learn Is the objective of the lesson clear to the students? Another week the purpose might be to learn, Is the lesson aligned with state standards for the grade level? or, Is the teacher asking higher-order thinking skills? The following week they might be looking at instructional strategies. They will want to know, What instructional strategy is the teacher using? Do we see the same strategy every time we walk through the room? Is this an appropriate strategy to use with the lesson? At other times they might be looking to learn, How are the students engaged? Is engagement authentic, ritual, or passive? Or, Is the students' work displayed? Or, Are classroom rules displayed?

In addition, this year Miller is observing how teachers are using the new LCD projectors that were installed in all classrooms.

Walk-throughs are all about teachers and principals working together to reflect on teaching practices. Reflection is the key component. After his walk-throughs, Miller often leaves teachers with an observation and a question that might encourage thoughtful dialogue and deeper thinking about lessons, curriculum, and teaching strategies. The prompts are always non-judgmental. For example, Miller might say:

\* When I was doing my walk-through today, the students were in their seats responding to questions. How do you plan your lesson to encourage the students to be active participants?







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\* While I was doing my walk-through today, the students were taking notes and reviewing a social studies lesson. How do you ensure that all students understand concepts of the lesson?

\* As I was watching the students work the problems today, I was wondering how many arrived at correct answers. How did you conclude how many of the students worked the problems correctly?

Sometimes teachers have a ready answer to Miller's questions -- an answer that details something they do that was not observed. Other times, the question offers the teachers a chance to reflect on the why of something they are doing. Subsequent observations enable teachers to continue to analyze their classroom practices and take charge of their professional growth.

### Sample Focus Questions

Focus questions set a purpose for a classroom walk-through. 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. The questions below present a few examples of questions that might be spurred by observations made over the course of several walk-throughs. The questions are presented in the first-person [teacher] voice.



- How am I infusing my discussions with God's love?
- How can I consistently integrate faith and learning in my lessons?
- How can I vary instruction methods to include a wider range of cooperative learning (partner work, small-group, . . . .) tasks?
- How can I be sure my curriculum is covering all state standards for the grade level?
  
- How can I develop lessons that challenge students to do more high-level thinking?
- When students are working on research reports, how can I help them do less copying of material and do more to make the material their own by summarizing, paraphrasing, and including personal examples and reflection?
- How can I integrate technology into my lessons in real ways?





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- How can I do more to challenge the most gifted students in my class?
- How can I use less direct instruction and incorporate more inquiry-based learning in my lessons?
- What can I do to develop a classroom "tone" that is less teacher-centered, more student-centered?
- How can I use fewer reward-punishment enticements and do more to make student learning an intrinsic thing?

Miller and the other principals in his county have been thoroughly trained in the walk-through procedure by Joe Whelan. Whelan's approach is based on the research of Robert Marzano, Robert Pickering, and Jane Pollock. He suggests keeping a map of the school and marking when you have been in each room. "This is a good visual that helps ensure you are hitting all classrooms and not just the ones close to the office," added Miller.

### More Examples Of Questions

Any question that causes teachers to reflect and has the potential to result in improved student learning and achievement is a worthy one. Sometimes a focus question is tied to a school-wide goal; the question will be the basis for all teachers' walk-through observations. Other times, individual teachers might be asked to reflect on questions tied directly to their personal classroom practices or goals.

For example, increasing student time on task might be a school-wide or individual teacher's goal. When a principal enters the classroom, he or she might collect data on the number (or percent) of students who are focused on schoolwork. Over a period of several walk-through observations, the principal or another observer will have significant data that might spur a reflective question such as - How can I increase the number of students who are actively engaged in learning? Subsequent observations and conversations continue to focus on that question, and teachers share their successful methods for increasing student engagement.

In another example, a 2001 article from the National Council for Staff Development, "Seeing Through New Eyes," detailed how a team of observers set out to walk-through one Texas middle school. Their goal was to learn if the school was making progress on its goal of increasing the amount of writing students did across the curriculum. Before the walk-through, observers created a list of things they might expect to see:







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- Students actively involved in writing.
- Evidence of past student writing, such as piles of written work and examples of student writing posted on classroom walls.
- Students writing in their journals.
- Students who could explain the writing process to observers.
- Displays of exemplary student writing, so students could study models of what good writing looks like.
- Prompts for journal writing on chalkboards or whiteboards.

Many of those things might be easily observed, even in a several-minute walk-through. The observers' findings plus other signs of student writing they had not even considered provided the basis for a report and follow-up dialogue about what teachers were doing to achieve the school-wide goal. "Best practices" that were observed in classrooms were shared school-wide. Most important, additional discussion ensued about what else could be done to enhance writing opportunities and results.

The goals of all this observing and questioning are clear: As a year of walk-throughs progresses, principals should see more student engagement, students working at higher cognitive levels, and teachers questioning their own practices and making appropriate adjustments.

### **Technology Tools Aid Walk-Through Forms**

Principals record their walk-through observations in a wide variety of ways. Some have set forms. Others use informal forms or observation notes.

George Manthey of the Association of California School Administrators is the developer of the Walk'bout, a computer/handheld program that many principals use during walk-throughs to record "best practices" and other observable behaviors. The program can be used to generate reports for teachers. An updated version of the Walk'bout, called Walk'bout II, examines more closely the cognitive depth of teachers' lessons through the lens of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Both Walk'bout products are tied to content standards.

"The Walk'bout can be used to analyze student learning activities," Manthey explained. "The program's standards database allows the observer to easily see where the observed student activity fits within the state standards and whether or not the standard being taught is tested at that grade level."





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The Walk'bout tools require training, said Manthey, adding, "One reason principals really like them is because we can customize them based on the district's priorities."

Bill Craig, principal at Byron (Illinois) High School uses another program, The Administrative Observer Software, on his handheld computer for recording observations and generating reports that provide teachers with feedback.

"Feedback is most powerful when the expectations are spelled out ahead of time and when feedback is expressed in terms of those expectations," Craig wrote in *My Recipe for School Improvement: Walk-Through Observations on a Handheld Computer*. "My teachers know . . . the seven or eight most important things I hope to see, and I ask them to focus on those things each class period. The Administrative Observer lets me put those expectations into the software as preferences and record my thoughts easily while I am in the classroom."

### **Walk-Throughs Nurture Performance**

Walk-through observations continue to grow in popularity. Paul Young thinks he knows why. "In most school districts, formal evaluations have been negotiated to the point that they result in minimal observations at best," said Young, principal (retired) of West Elementary School in Lancaster, Ohio and past president of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. "It is best that you develop a close professional relationship with teachers so that you can comment on performance throughout the year in personal, informal, and informative ways. Develop trust, and then you can really mentor and help a teacher grow."

"Walk-throughs help gather data that is needed to nurture performance," added Young.

"Classroom walk-throughs work," said Todd Wiedemann. "As long as the training is in place and there is consistency in their use, walk-throughs are a great tool for everyone in education."

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Observation Checklist

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_ Observer \_\_\_\_\_

1. Is there evidence of a learning environment reflective of the school's mission?  
Observed Not Observed
2. Is there evidence that grade-level-appropriate content standards are being taught by this teacher?  
Observed Not Observed
3. Is there evidence the teacher uses technology:
  - a. to enhance instruction? Observed Not Observed
  - b. for communicating w/parents and colleagues? Observed Not Observed
  - c. and that students are using technology? Observed Not Observed
4. Is there evidence this teacher provides:
  - a. equitable access to the core curriculum based on the experience, language, skills and abilities of the students?  
Observed Not Observed
  - b. a gender-fair, bias-free learning environment? Observed Not Observed
5. Is there evidence this teacher has considered health and safety factors for students in his/her decisions regarding:
  - a. classroom management and room arrangement? Observed Not Observed
  - b. individual students with health concerns? Observed Not Observed
  - c. readiness to implement emergency procedures? Observed Not Observed
6. Is there evidence the teacher integrates spiritual perspectives into the lesson?  
Observed Not Observed





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### **Specific observations related to observation 1 may include:**

Classroom rules are posted, classroom routines are implemented, a fair and respectful climate is evident, grade level standards are posted in classroom, teacher dialogue with students uses content-standard language, student explanation of standard being taught, student work posted reflecting grade-level-appropriate standards, students work- on grade level appropriate tasks reflects the standards, "big ideas" and "essential questions" are posted in classroom, written lesson plans reflect content standards, instructional materials are those adopted by the district,  
Other observations:

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### **Specific observations related to observation 3 may include:**

Students using technology at the time of the observation, teacher using technology as a teaching tool at the time of the observation, student work displayed reflecting the use of technology, student grade reports generated on line, parent communication via e-mail, colleague/professional communication via e-mail, teaching resources accessed on line, computer applications to analyze student data, classroom website as a tool for parent/colleague/community communication.  
Other observations:

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### **Specific observations related to observation 4 may include:**

Students of different abilities working in different groups on standards-based curriculum, teacher attending equally to students of diverse backgrounds, students of diverse backgrounds working cooperatively with one another, teacher or student bulletin boards that reflect respect for diversity, teacher attending equally to girls as well as boys, lessons on character development and respect for diversity  
Other observations:

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### **Specific observations related to observation 5 may include:**

Emergency procedures are clearly posted, emergency supplies are in classroom, bulletin boards address attention to good health and safety practices, classroom and student supplies are safely stored, cables and plugs are secure and out of student reach (primary), students with specific health concerns are strategically seated, conflict resolution strategies are posted for students, evidence shows that health curriculum is taught  
Other observations:

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Other observations:

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