Classroom Walk-Throughs

Why Is This Strategy Useful?

Walk-throughs are intended to be a means of engaging teachers in dialogue and reflection about teaching practices and schoolwide goals. Walk-throughs can benefit teachers in many ways: helping them learn to use reflection to increase their knowledge, skills, and performance; strategically aligning classroom instruction to learning targets; and increasing student learning across grade levels.

Description of Strategy

Whether known as instructional walks, learning walks, or data walks, walk-throughs follow roughly the same pattern: One or two observers visit numerous classrooms, spending about 5 minutes in each, looking for very specific things. At the conclusion, the observers assemble their information and share what they have learned with the teachers whose rooms have been observed. Unlike a classroom observation, which provides a view of a single classroom, a walk-through creates a schoolwide picture, made up of many small snapshots.

Walk-throughs generally have a specific focus and a straightforward template on which the observer captures key information. For example, increasing student time on task might be a schoolwide 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.

Although there are different types of walk-throughs, five steps characterize the key features:

- Step 1: snapshot of teaching and learning;
- Step 2: identification of instructional strategies;
- Step 3: assessment of learner engagement;
- Step 4: survey of the learning environment;
- Step 5: analysis of data collected; and
- Step 6: reflection with the teacher.

Research Evidence

At present, the research on walk-throughs consists largely of case studies. One book, *The Three-Minute Classroom Walkthrough*, profiles the technique and case studies of successful implementation in eight school districts across the United States and Canada. In addition, a case study of walk-throughs in the Palisades, Pennsylvania, school district associates this strategy to improved student achievement in fourth grade reading and mathematics.
Sample Studies Supporting This Strategy


Description: For years, the classic supervision model has frustrated both principals and teachers by fostering superior-subordinate relationships, focusing on teacher conformity rather than growth, or producing checklist data that is irrelevant to the curriculum. The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through offers a practical alternative that impacts student achievement by cultivating self-reliant teachers who are continuously improving their practice. This method addresses central questions to the school improvement process:

- Is the work of teachers aligned with the district curriculum?
- Are teachers using research-based "best practices"?
- Are teachers using instructional strategies that will promote student achievement?

Also known as the Downey Walk-Through, the method presented in The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through has been developed over a 40-year period, tested and refined in actual teaching environments.


A few years ago, the Palisades, Pennsylvania set out to raise standards, instructional practices, and achievement of all students. The district began WalkThroughs after learning about them through the Institute for Learning and being trained in the WalkThrough process. In fall 1998, the superintendent, assistant superintendent and curriculum coordinator began conducting WalkThroughs in three elementary buildings, the middle school, and the high school. WalkThroughs led to improved teacher learning and increased standardized test scores. Teachers benefited from discussions of what works and what does not and an ongoing dialogue about changes in curriculum and instruction.

Additional Resources


Online Workshop: Conducting classroom walk-throughs. http://mdk12.org/process/course/m3w2