

7-24-2013

Walkthrough Observations and their Influence on the Development of Professional Learning Communities: A Multiple-Case Study

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WALKTHROUGH OBSERVATIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE
DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:
A MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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May 2013

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The *No Child Left Behind Act* has profoundly impacted public schools throughout our country. All school personnel must work together thoughtfully and diligently to address the mandates set forth by this federal law. As reforms are initiated and instructional programs are restructured, this qualitative multiple-case study examines supervisory practices utilized in four elementary schools in South Western Pennsylvania and how these practices influence organizational learning.

A qualitative method was chosen because it provides a more in-depth and interpersonal response to the research questions. Multiple cases were selected to increase the possibility that the findings may be further generalized. This study was grounded in theories of supervision and organizational learning. All four of the participating elementary schools were using the Walkthrough Observation Tool developed through the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania at the University of Pittsburgh. Information gathered from Walkthrough Observations was then analyzed and categorized into Blankstein's (2010) framework of six principles that synthesized research on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Of the four schools chosen for this study, two of them are participants of Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI). ELI is a systems approach to improve teaching and learning by bringing together superintendents, principals, and teacher leaders together to share a common vision,

focus and goals. Individual interviews with superintendents and principals as well as teacher focus groups were used to gather information for this study.

As presented in this study, superintendents and principals can effectively learn how to use walkthrough observations to positively promote professional learning communities within their schools. Both of these practices working separately are highly effective. However, when purposefully aligned, they are very powerful tools that may lead to or suggest an increase in student achievement within the schools.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dr. Cathy Kaufman, as my advisor you are the epitome of leadership and professionalism. You helped me get started on this journey and stayed with me through the thick and thin. You knew just when to provide encouragement and positive motivation to keep me on track. Through every chapter of this work, you accepted it graciously and always responded favorably in a timely manner.

Dr. Sue Rieg and Dr. Joseph Marcoline, I thank you for the great amount of time that you spent reviewing my work and providing proper suggestions to ensure accuracy. Dr. Otto Graf, I am greatly indebted to you for joining my IUP team and most importantly working closely with me on the use of walkthroughs in my current school district. Those experiences were the backbone of this dissertation and helped me to grow professionally.

I would like to thank classmate Dr. John Ackermann for sharing this educational journey as we traveled the many miles back and forth to our classes. Your words of wisdom invigorated me to persevere to the finish line.

Most of all, I would like to thank my wife, Toni, daughter, Rone'e, sons, Joseph and Ryan, granddaughters, Carigan and Amelia, and mother, Frances, for your inspiration throughout this process. To my late father and educator, Joseph, who is my hero and shining light. You instilled in me the value of education and I dedicate this document to you. I love all of you and thank you for your support, patience, and understanding.

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CHAPTER I

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

“A high-quality public school system is essential, not only for parents who send their children to these schools but also for the public good as a whole” (Fullan, 2003a, p. 4).

Introduction

In schools today, instructional leadership continues to play a major role concerning academic achievement. Effective leaders make a difference by establishing clear missions and goals, a positive culture and climate for learning, a strong curriculum, effective classroom practices, and opportunities for students to learn (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). The principal is responsible for all activities in a school. He or she sets the tone and climate for the building, including instructional expectations, the level of collaboration, and teacher morale. The principal is also responsible for ensuring all school activities are child-centered. According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) leadership makes a difference in improving learning and its impact on achievement is second only to teaching. The greatest impact seems to occur in schools that have the most need. Much success is accomplished through setting clear objectives, scrutinizing data, developing people, and supporting teachers so they are able to accomplish their job responsibilities. Along these same lines, Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) stated that supervision is necessary to increase the ability of schools to effectively contribute to students' educational success. This can be accomplished through the development of an organizational

system that supports teaching and learning, instructional quality that demands in-depth understanding, and students who are actively engaged in their learning.

In most schools, a principal is not able to deliver these initiatives without help from others. Therefore, it is imperative that school leaders develop learning organizations where all faculty and staff work closely together learning research-based strategies that will have a positive effect on student achievement. As demands on society increase in complexity, leadership must become more sophisticated within organizational structures. Schools must become learning organizations or they will fail to survive (Fullan, 2001).

Central to the concept of learning organizations is the manner and technique in which principals align the supervisory structure and culture of the school. Principals and other administrators are charged with the supervisory process of evaluating teachers. This is a mandated obligation. To promote learning organizations, principals will need to establish a culture built upon high learning for all students. For this to occur, they must create conditions within the school to help the teachers work together collaboratively to improve upon their collective capacity (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Since observations are required as part of the evaluation process, principals may greatly benefit if they are able to effectively use multiple tools to help build learning organizations. This can be accomplished by frequently observing and working cooperatively with teachers to ensure that effective practices are being implemented and that evidence of student learning exists.

Principals use a variety of supervisory tools to observe teachers. Two popular models that are used in schools are clinical and differentiated supervision. Developed

by Morris Cogan, Robert Anderson, and their graduate students from Harvard University, clinical observation blends scientific and objective components with collegial relationships. In 1969, Robert Goldhammer, a student of Cogan, proposed a five-stage process in clinical supervision which many practitioners later reduced to three steps: pre-observation conference, the observation, and the post-conference (Starratt, n.d.). Clinical observations are a valuable tool that is still being used in schools today. However, due to the extensive amount of time required to complete this process that limits the number of occasions where principals may be in classrooms, administrators continue to look for additional options to effectively supervise staff.

The second supervisory approach that has gained prominence is differentiated supervision. Glatthorn (1997) stated this is a process that provides educators with options about supervision and evaluation. He claimed that clinical observation is a top-down model where the supervisor has the solution for a teacher who has the problem. According to Glatthorn, teaching is a profession where teachers should have more control over their professional development. He stated that supervision should be seen from four different perspectives: the profession, the organization, the supervisor, and the teacher. Glatthorn also listed three developmental components in differentiated supervision: intensive, cooperative, and self-directed development. Graf and Werlinich (2004) proposed another model of differentiated supervision. It is based upon the need to move away from a “one size fits all mentality” and recognize both strengths and needs of the professional teaching staff. Graf and Werlinich suggested three phases or stages that include accountability, growth and development, and a culture of discipline. Their tool will aid principals in supervising faculty members by rotating between a

clinical observation focus and one that offers a menu of options to enhance professional development.

As part of a differentiated supervisory plan, many administrators have adopted the model of walkthrough observations. This practice enables principals to be more visible in classrooms where they can watch teachers interact with students. In 2007, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) defined walkthroughs as brief and frequent informal visits that are two to five minutes long and designed to collect data about teaching to improve teachers' practices (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010). According to Graf and Werlinich (2004), the walkthrough observation creates a fresh ritual for collecting data on teaching and learning that can then be shared with the faculty.

In addition to examining supervisory processes and more specifically walkthrough observations, the development of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) was another major focus of this study. Much work in this area originated from Peter Senge's (2006) philosophies of learning organizations that began in the corporate world. Senge stated:

Learning organizations are where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (p. 3)

Senge wrote about five disciplines that exist in learning organizations: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking.

Eventually, Senge (2000) took these five disciplines and described how they can be

used to build learning organizations within institutions of learning. He believes that this successful business model could also be used to produce positive results in schools.

In addition to Senge's work, other researchers in the field of education began to define positive attributes of learning organizations and their influence on teachers. In the 1980s, Rosenholtz discussed the importance of supporting teachers with their ongoing learning and classroom practice. In 1993, McLaughlin and Talbert discussed the importance of collaborative inquiry and learning, and how teachers were able to share information gathered from this experience (Hord, 1997). This beginning research greatly influenced the work of Shirley Hord at the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). Due to her extensive work in this area, she is credited by many to be the creator of the term Professional Learning Community (PLC) (Blankstein, 2010). In addition to Hord's research, continuous work by DuFour and Eaker (1998) was labeled PLC to describe a similar model for professional development and school improvement.

The development of PLCs is quickly becoming a leading reform movement in our schools today. When schools aim to increase their educational capacity, they build professional communities through shared purpose, collaborative work, and collective responsibility among staff (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). The ideals of a PLC compel principals to retool their thinking about educational leadership and school management. This process requires building a knowledge base and developing relationships with all stakeholders. As federal mandates continue to make schools more accountable for all learners, administrators are well aware that they need to promote school reforms to be successful. Unfortunately, the history of education has shown that many previous

national reform efforts have not been successful. Richard Elmore, Harvard University School of Education (1996) stated:

A significant body of circumstantial evidence points to a deep, systemic incapacity of U.S. schools, and the practitioners who work within them, to develop, incorporate, and extend new ideas about teaching and learning in anything but a small fraction of schools and classrooms. (p. 1)

However, rich research is now surfacing that may have profound effects. Specifically, Schmoker (2006) defended the practice of professional learning communities as one of the most promising agendas to improve instruction and student performance. He claimed that it would be successful where other types of staff development and in-service training have not been effective. As we strive to meet the requirements of federal and state mandates, there is limited research identifying effective practices of supervisory theory and how it relates to the establishment of professional learning communities.

Statement of the Problem

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). The four pillars of NCLB include stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Under NCLB, all students will obtain proficiency or become better in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014. This is the first time in our nation's history that

every child, regardless of race or economic background, will be assessed for academic proficiency. Therefore, all students will be required to learn to high standards, while attending high quality schools. Darling-Hammond (1996) addressed this situation by stating that schools must not only offer an education but they must ensure learning. Furthermore, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (2011) wrote about the need for principals to shift school cultures in *Breaking Ranks: The Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement*. This professional organization authored their belief that all schools must address the following three core areas: collaborative leadership; personalizing your school environment; and curriculum, instruction, and assessment to improve student performance.

In Pennsylvania, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) holds school district personnel accountable to the public to ensure that the district, schools, and subgroups of students are meeting the demands of NCLB on an annual basis. The results for testing year 2011 reported approximately 75% of all Pennsylvania schools met all of their AYP targets (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). In 2012, the proficiency targets rose to 81% in reading and 78% in math. Approximately 50% of all Pennsylvania schools achieved AYP (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). Therefore, unless officials put into place effective reforms, the number of schools that do not make AYP will continue to increase as the targets rise every year until all of our students must reach academic proficiency in 2014.

Table 1 outlines the yearly percentages necessary for making AYP in Pennsylvania. It also includes the percentages of schools that made AYP statewide.

Table 1

Pennsylvania Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): Goals for Core Subject Results

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
AYP Targets: Percent Proficient in Math	35%	45%	45%	45%	56%	56%	56%	67%	78%	89%	100%
AYP Targets: Percent Proficient in Reading	45%	54%	54%	54%	63%	63%	63%	72%	81%	91%	100%
Percent of Schools That Made AYP	NA	NA	83%	77%	72%	78%	83%	75%	49.7%	NA	NA
Percent of Schools That Did Not Make AYP	NA	NA	17%	23%	28%	22%	17%	25%	50.3%	NA	NA

As leaders work to increase academic achievement, the central problem that guides this study is the need to examine supervisory practices in order to discover how specific supervisory strategies, such as walkthroughs, may benefit the development of professional learning communities. Consequently, researchers and practitioners may then look deeper at the identified strategies

and draw implications regarding best practices. The use of these best practices may then assist schools on their journey to achieve AYP. This study contributes to the body of literature by examining supervisory processes that are being used by principals in schools to observe teacher and student learning and how these strategies influenced organizational learning.

Purpose of the Study

In Western Pennsylvania, Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI) is one approach that incorporates the concept of a PLC. This comprehensive process helps school districts build a culture that focuses on student learning through a shared leadership model. University professors from Southwestern Pennsylvania along with superintendents from local school districts developed ELI. Their purpose was to generate a greater impact on learning by working with district leadership teams. Participating members of the teams consisted of superintendents, principals, and teachers who worked vertically within their own groups and then horizontally with cohorts from other school districts. Their vision for ELI was to promote student achievement in participating schools by identifying, recognizing, and documenting benchmarks of instructional excellence (Swenson & Longo, 2010).

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to examine walkthrough observation strategies used by two school districts from ELI and two additional districts that were working with walkthrough observations, but were not members of ELI. This researcher explored the beliefs, actions, and evidence of supervisors as they used the Walkthrough Observation Tool from the Principals

Academy of Western Pennsylvania. This researcher analyzed the data (interview transcripts) through six principles of a PLC. The findings of this study will help others build PLCs using walkthrough observations in their quest to increase student achievement for all learners. Information gathered will also assist ELI leaders as they plan professional development to increase their capacity for effective cultural change and student growth.

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in theories of supervision and organizational learning. Regarding supervision, this researcher examined the organizational structure, philosophies, and implementation of walkthrough observations. All four of the schools in this study were using the Walkthrough Observation Tool developed through the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania at the University of Pittsburgh. According to Directors Graf and Werlinich (2011), the mission of the Principals Academy is to help principals lead positive change in schools while creating a culture that supports all students academically, emotionally, and socially. Focusing on student achievement, the academy assists principals with the integration of reform movements in their schools with an overarching goal of building stronger connections to the classroom. Participating members have an opportunity to work with other principals from urban, suburban, and rural school districts within professional learning communities. Monthly meetings are held over a two-year time span. As part of the academy training, principals are given intense instruction on the use of the Walkthrough Observation Tool. This procedure gives administrators and

teachers a protocol for examining teaching and learning in our school. It is used to validate effective teaching practices and observable learning behaviors.

According to Graf and Werlinich (2004), the walkthrough is an organized tour that uses “look-fors” to focus on the elements of effective instruction and learning.

Several purposes for using walkthroughs include the desire to learn more about instruction and learning, validate effective instructional practices, and create a school-wide community of learners. To successfully implement this process in schools, principals need to follow a progression of 15 steps with their teachers. Specific walkthrough objectives and protocols are addressed in Chapter II.

Concerning organizational theory, Blankstein (2010) has taken philosophical ideals and key components of educational reform and placed them into a coherent framework of six principles that practitioners are called upon to implement in schools. It is his belief that principals must use courageous actions to ensure that failure is not an option in our educational environments.

Specifically, Blankstein’s principles represent a synthesis of research on PLCs and other factors including effective schools, the U.S. Department of Education’s criteria for excellent schools, Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) (2000-2008), Standards, and Newmann and Wehlage’s (1995) “Circles of Support Research.” Because Blankstein’s model represents current thinking on PLCs, his work was used to structure the data of this research study. The six principles are as follows:

Principle 1 - Common mission, vision, values, and goals;

Principle 2 - Ensuring achievement for all students: creating systems for

prevention and intervention;

Principle 3 - Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning;

Principle 4 - Using data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement;

Principle 5 - Gaining active engagement from family and community; and,

Principle 6 - Building sustainable leadership capacity (Blankstein, 2010).

To summarize the purpose and theoretical framework of this study, this researcher focused on the use of the Walkthrough Observation Tool from the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania and how it correlates with the six principles of a PLC that Blankstein identified. These two frameworks assist administrators with the accomplishment of school initiatives while they also complete their mandated responsibilities to participate in classroom observations and evaluations of teachers. It was the intent of this researcher to examine how walkthrough observations may be used most effectively, not only to supervise teachers, but to also assist with the development of PLCs. This researcher obtained the data through interviews and observations of supervisory walkthroughs. Discussions were held between the researcher and principals on instructional techniques and artifacts of displayed student work. Collected information was coded and categorized into one of Blankstein's six principles on PLCs. Principals who are interested in developing PLCs in their schools may be able to examine and implement the findings of this study to further accentuate their reform movements.

Research Questions

To address issues relative to the problem of this study, this researcher presents the following research questions:

1. What consistent walkthrough observation procedures do principals and teachers currently use in their schools?
2. What principles of Professional Learning Communities are evident in the four schools?
3. How do identified walkthrough procedures align with the six principles of Professional Learning Communities?
4. How are individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in Educational Leadership Initiative?

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)--This is a measure that is used to determine the yearly progress toward achieving their state's academic standards. It is the minimum requirement that states, districts, and schools must achieve every year (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012).

Best Practice—A term used by educators to mean thoughtful, trustworthy, authentic, collaborative, challenging, state-of-the-art, effective teaching. In order for a technique to be considered a best practice, it has to be one that has been researched-based, proven over time, and based on solid learning theory. These effective strategies are ones recommended by professional organizations, instructional researchers, and subject area leaders. Best practice is student-

centered, cognitive, and social (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). (For this research study, educators use the term best practice as an instructional technique that positively affects student achievement.)

Collaboration--A process to improve individual and collective results of professional practice by having people plan and work together interdependently (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Collective Inquiry--A process involving a group of professionals who work together exploring and clarifying questions to build a base of shared understanding (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Continuous Improvement--This is the process of constantly improving one's practice for the improvement of results (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Differentiated Supervision--A type of supervisory practice that provides teachers with options as to how they will be supervised and evaluated (Glatthorn, 1997).

Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI)--The Western Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI) is a comprehensive, integrated program of professional development designed to enhance the leadership skills of district participants in order to improve student learning in the region (Wallace, Goodwin, Graf & Werlinich, 2005).

Learning Organization--"Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and

where people are continually learning to see the whole together” (Senge, 2006, p. 3).

Look-Fors--Precise descriptors of teaching and learning strategies that teachers use in their classrooms to improve students’ learning (Graf & Werlinich, 2002).

Mental Models--Deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or mental images that impact our understanding of the world and how we react to it (Senge, 2006).

Mission--This is the fundamental purpose of an organization and why it exists (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Personal Mastery--It is the cornerstone and spiritual foundation of a learning organization that continually clarifies and deepens the personal vision, focuses our energies, develops patience, and sees reality objectively (Senge, 2006).

Professional Learning Community (PLC)--A process that engages educators to work collaboratively in collective inquiry and research to achieve positive results for students (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

Shared Personal Practice--This is when community members give and receive feedback for the improvement of both individual and organizational goals (Hord & Sommers, 2008).

Systems Thinking--The framework that underlies all five disciplines of a learning organization. It integrates and fuses all of the disciplines into a coherent body of theory and practice (Senge, 2006).

Team Learning--The process of aligning and developing the capacities of teams beyond a shared vision and personal mastery to create results that the members strive to accomplish (Senge, 2006).

Values--The specific attitudes, behaviors, and commitments that members demonstrate to promote the vision of an organization (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Vision--The capacity to develop a picture of the future that the group desires to create through a genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance (Senge, 2006).

Walkthroughs--A walkthrough is an organized tour through the school using "Look-Fors" to focus on elements of effective instruction and learning (Graf & Werlinich, 2004).

Research Design

This study examined the use of walkthrough observations by school principals and teachers and their influence on PLCs. This researcher chose to utilize qualitative methodology to gain a more in-depth and interpersonal response to the research questions. Merriam (1998) stated that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning that people have formed as a result of their work in the field and how they make sense of their experiences. Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as an inquiry process of understanding that deeply explores and investigates a social or human problem in a natural setting. Along these same lines, in 1985, Patton posited that qualitative research attempts to understand unique situations and interactions of

participants in a particular context (Merriam, 1998). He further stipulates that this understanding is not an attempt to predict future happenings but should be considered an end in itself.

Based upon the intent of the project, this researcher chose a qualitative multiple-case study design. Through classification and comparison, this researcher studied principals' use of walkthrough observations in four schools and their emerging themes for developing PLCs. This process enabled the researcher to examine and compare several different cases or sub cases. According to Merriam (1998), researchers used a case study approach to investigate complex social issues consisting of multiple variables to understand a phenomenon. The more cases available to be studied and the greater variation across the cases, the more captivating the analysis will become. Aligned with this same ideology, Yin (2003) stated that multiple case designs may be preferred over single case designs due to the possibility of direct replication, or even the possibility of varied circumstances that may eventually lead to common conclusions. This in turn will expand the extent to which the findings of the study can be externally generalized. Merriam (1998) concurred that the analysis of data from several cases can lead to categories or themes from all cases and the building of in-depth theory offering an integrated framework from all cases.

This researcher used in-depth interviewing to gather information for this study. Patton (1990) cited, "the purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone's mind" (p. 278). After gaining consent from each district, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the

participants' perceptions of the walkthrough process. This study was composed of individual interviews with superintendents and principals. The teachers from each school were interviewed as part of a focus group. According to Pattan, the object of a focus group interview is to get information and high quality data in a social context where participants can share their views with others. In this study, each group and individual interview took approximately 60 minutes to complete. The researcher held the interview in a location of the interviewee's choosing. The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed. Throughout and after the interview process, the researcher took notes of any peculiarities and emotional responses that occurred during the questioning.

To continue, the researcher used observations as an additional tool for data collection. This included an opportunity to observe a principal and teachers during walkthrough observations. At one of the schools, the principal explained to the researcher how he closely watched for active student engagement. This information was documented and then discussed with each teacher. Another instructional strategy that was noted was the use of formative assessments. As stated on the observation form, the principal clearly expected his teachers to use formative assessments to observe what the students have learned. In addition to these examples, the principals and researcher focused their attention on the physical environment, teachers' behaviors, students' interactions, and classroom artifacts.

This researcher also collected written documents for analysis. This comprised of information that the principal shared with the faculty about the

walkthrough process, ELI events, and other information from professional development. Examples of artifacts included walkthrough procedures, purposes, correspondences from observations, schedules, faculty meeting agendas, samples of student work, mission statements, and other documents.

Significance of the Study

In order to meet current and future mandates of NCLB, educators need to seek out current, research-based best practices following Senge's disciplines of leadership. According to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) and Blasé and Blasé (2004), there is a lack of research that focuses on collective practices in school leadership procedures that encourages collegiality as a method to improve instructional supervision in our schools today. Narrowing the focus even more, there is little evidence and support for school reformers who need strategies or assistance with creating a PLC in their school (Hord & Sommers, 2008). According to McLaughlin and Talbert (2006), limited research exists on the process of how learning organizations get started, are developed and mature. Additionally, research studies on the use of walkthrough observations in schools have been very narrow (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010; Keruskin, 2005; Rossi, 2007). To further accentuate the need for this study, research identifying specific walkthrough protocols to build professional learning communities is extremely limited-- if it even exists. This study fills a void in the research and will assist practitioners with specific strategies to build PLCs in their schools.

Limitations of the Study

Case studies are limited in their ability to generalize beyond the intended research project. However, researchers can identify patterns and themes that escalate their ability to generalize through increased investigations and additional research development. In addition, the use of prearranged questions and specific coding procedures may enhance this procedure. One possible limitation of this study may be attributed to the use of a small sample of schools from the same geographic area. Researcher subjectivity pertaining to the categorization, coding of data, and the development of themes may be considered another limitation of this study. A third limitation of this study could be the use of only the classroom teachers who were interviewed in the focus groups.

Summary

Focusing on the mandates of NCLB and high learning expectations for all students, this chapter establishes the background and need for the study. This researcher outlines the conceptual framework including basic attributes of walkthrough observations and how they may relate to a PLC. Four research questions were presented along with a definition of terms, research design, and significance of the study. This chapter concludes with limitations of the research. Chapter II will continue with a review of the literature related to the concepts that are outlined in Chapter I.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

“Learning organizations are where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 2006, p. 3).

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple-case study was to examine walkthrough observation strategies and how their usage aligns with the six synthesized principles of PLCs. In Chapter II, the researcher provides an in-depth review of existing research and literature on theories in supervision and organizational learning. It is from these two theoretical foundations that this researcher submits ideals of interconnectedness, interdependence, and meaning for influencing the development and growth of professional learning communities. The literature review includes an examination of instructional leadership and supervision, identification and descriptions of walkthrough observations, guiding principles of professional learning communities, and information about Western Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Initiative.

Instructional Leadership and Supervision

Throughout the past decade, many school organizations have restructured themselves to become more decentralized and this has taken root in the area of instructional supervision. In many cases, school-based shared decision-making is now the norm. Central to this thinking, Blasé and Blasé (2004) stated in this

democratic age, we must examine the concept of collaboration as it relates to the practice of leadership. Teachers want alternatives, not directives as they work together to form a learning community. Sullivan and Glantz (2009) envisioned the supervisory process as collaborative, dialogic, descriptive, and supportive. Furthermore, Glickman (1991) stated that principals are not instructional leaders but are the coordinators of teachers who serve in that capacity. Therefore, principals are poised to make dramatic differences in the lives of their students through the implementation of effective and collaborative supervisory practices.

What is supervision? In today's literature, there is still much debate about the role and meaning of supervision. Is the philosophy of supervision one to strictly rate and hold teachers accountable for minimum competences, or should the model reflect a process that is designed to work cooperatively and continuously with the faculty to grow and improve their teaching? According to Sullivan and Glantz (2009) and Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007), supervision is a process that engages teachers and school organizations in dialogue and instruction for the improvement of student achievement. It really does not matter if supervision is a role of superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum coordinators, principals, or peers; the ultimate goal remains to be one of improving instruction. For this to occur properly, administrators need to adopt supervisory processes that operate under a consistent system but gives professionals the freedom to develop their strengths and weaknesses.

In his book *Good to Great*, Collins (2001) used a flywheel to visually describe how organizations including schools can move from performing good

work to a higher level of greatness. One of the key characteristics that Collins described is a “Culture of Discipline.” A “Culture of Discipline” is about self-discipline. This starts by having self-disciplined people in the organization that have a disciplined thought process. These individuals then follow through with disciplined actions. Great organizations have disciplined people without the demands of a bureaucracy. This philosophy correlates well with a supervisory plan that promotes discipline with educational entrepreneurship to create the results we truly want to observe. The two reform movements presented in this study exhibit the characteristics necessary to help schools move to greatness.

Focusing first on supervision, a major responsibility of administrators involves classroom observations. Unfortunately, principals in many school districts continue to hold steadfast by using outdated observational techniques that may not be effective in our changing society. According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), many evaluation systems were developed in the mid-1970s. Their designs are not helpful for administrators and teachers who are trying to improve their practice. These evaluation systems lack precision, are hierarchical, show no differentiation between beginner and experienced practitioners, and are used by administrators with limited expertise in certain content areas.

As briefly mentioned, researchers have discovered that effective supervisory practices are ones that solicit teachers as part of the plan. When teachers take an active part in the supervisory process, exceptional learning will occur. Elmore (2002) believed learning for teachers could be a private good or a public good. As teachers learn and share their expertise publicly, both the

individual teacher and the entire school benefit. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) affirmed that a school's greatest asset is its combined intelligence. School administrators need to promote this exponential learning for the good of the entire school system.

In 1998, Newmann developed a framework for understanding how schools contribute to academic success (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Newmann's plan focused on three pathways for learning. The first pathway was instructional capacity, which included staff resources, professional community, and technical resources. The second dealt with components of instructional quality. The third and final pathway was student engagement with much participation in learning. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) stated that effective supervisors must focus on these three pathways as well as the amount of social and structural support that is made available to teachers.

Rizzo (2004) completed a study that examined the perceptions of classroom teachers and supervisors to gain a better understanding of supervision and evaluation. In particular, he sought information to identify teachers' and supervisors' current and ideal supervisory system, the differences between their perceptions of ideal and current supervisory systems, and variations between public, private, and religious schools. Rizzo found that both teachers and supervisors indicated effective supervision consists of a collaborative approach that incorporates a variety of models, frequent visitations, and a trusting and open relationship between the teacher and the supervisor.

In another study, Gates (2005) surveyed 71% of the superintendents in Pennsylvania to determine the status of their teacher evaluation programs. Based on the data, differentiated supervision, clinical supervision, and the traditional checklist were the most frequently used evaluation models in the state at the time of the survey. According to Gates, the findings of the study suggested that superintendents prefer alternative models of teacher evaluation and perceive the traditional checklist model as one that does not promote professional development. After a review of the literature and results, Gates made the following recommendations for school districts: review evaluation plans if they were not completed within the last five years; consider changing from a checklist model to an alternative form; and consider reducing the supervisory load of principals by increasing other supervisors to assist with this important function. Gates also recommended that superintendents consider using Danielson and McGreal's (2000) teacher evaluation model with the use of portfolio assessment as part of the process.

In another study, Mandell (2006) interviewed 10 high school principals to acquire knowledge of the effect of supervision on teachers' professional growth. Results from this study indicate that principals feel that supervision could have an impact on teachers' professional growth. According to Mandell, the majority of principals interviewed stated that walkthroughs were the most effective method for improving teachers' skills.

History of Supervision

Being able to study and reflect on the events and ideologies from the past will help inform and guide individuals to make better decisions. This section examines the history of supervision and practice in American schools and cultural landmarks.

Beginning in colonial New England, the main task of supervision involved the inspections of teachers' instruction and what the students were learning. It was not until the late 1830s that formal positions of educational administrators or superintendents were formed to serve in the common schools (Starratt, n.d). In 1987, Tanner and Tanner characterized Horace Mann as the first professional supervisor (Sullivan & Glantz, 2009). Horace Mann, lawyer and legislator from Massachusetts, additionally was called the Father of the Common School. He spearheaded the idea that every child could receive a basic education funded by local taxes.

A major influence on the expansion of American education in the second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century was the Industrial Revolution. As cities began to grow in size and the number of schools increased, it became necessary for superintendents to delegate this responsibility to principals. There was a marked need for greater administrative skills. This was an era of social efficiency and schools were necessary to prepare youth for jobs in factories. According to Sullivan and Glantz (2009), two specific types of school supervisors existed. A special supervisor was often a lead female teacher who would help assist less experienced teachers in content areas. A second type was a general

supervisor, now known as an assistant principal who helped the principal with general subjects and other administrative duties. With the publication of Frederick Winslow Taylor's book in 1911, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, scientific management and efficiency carried over into the schools. Furthermore, in 1913, Franklin Bobbitt took the ideals of Taylorism and applied them to supervision and school management (Sullivan & Glantz, 2009). Through his ideologies, supervision became very bureaucratic, controlling, and inspectional as it sought to seek efficiency in the workplace from 1870-1920.

During this same time period, the child-centered and experienced-based curriculum theories of Friedrich Froebel, Johann Pestalozzi, Johann Herbert, and John Dewey began to influence our schools (Starratt, n.d.). Many educators began opposing the autocratic styles of supervision and management. Based upon Dewey's theories of democracy and Hosisic's (1920) ideas of democratic supervision, Pajak in 2000 stated that supervisors introduced scientific methods and cooperative problem solving techniques to address educational issues (Sullivan & Glantz, 2009). To improve instruction, cooperation existed between teachers and their supervisors.

The next three decades became known for scientific supervision and were influenced by some governmental landmarks. Supervisors had to possess skills in teaching adults and children. Autocratic supervisory practices were no longer feasible. The use of classroom observations gained momentum. During these observations, supervisors would take verbatim notes of what transpired in the classrooms.

Schooling in the 1960s was again greatly influenced by social turmoil. There were concerns for justice and equality and antiwar sentiments regarding America's involvement in Vietnam. Officials enacted *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act* to help educate the less fortunate. Supervisors were called upon to be more democratic. Robert Leeper and other authors (1969) wrote a set of anthologies on this topic for the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). This was accomplished by making supervision a leadership function. According to Sullivan and Glantz (2009), supervisors provided leadership by developing goals with others, soliciting cooperative and democratic methods of supervision, improving instruction, fostering the use of educational research to solve problems, and encouraging professional leadership.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the country was again looking for direction to respond to issues in both society and schools. At the beginning of the 1970s, America was still involved in the Vietnam War. Concerning government's involvement in education, the Reagan administration called for major reforms through a national report entitled *A Nation at Risk* (1983). This report criticized American schools for low-test scores, lack of standards, and diminished expectations of students. Motivated by these inefficiencies, and others, a new format of supervisory practice came to the forefront. This new technique was entitled clinical supervision. Initially developed by Harvard professors Morris Cogan, Robert Anderson, and their graduate students, it is based upon the use of objective and scientific classroom observations while utilizing a collaborative

process between the teachers and their supervisor to make significant improvements in classroom instruction (Starratt, n.d). In addition to clinical observations, educator Madeline Hunter introduced a very popular, quasi-scientific approach to effective teaching entitled *Instructional Theory into Practice* (ITIP) (Hunter, 1994). It is based upon three lesson-designed categories including content, learner behaviors, and teacher behaviors. There is a framework of seven elements that must be considered as a part of every lesson plan. During these decades, much of Hunter's work was superimposed within the framework of the clinical observation.

During the 1990s, there was increased government legislation and a greater push for establishing democratic governance in schools (Sullivan & Glantz, 2009). President Clinton signed President Bush's Goals 2000 reform legislation that compels all American students to be first in math and science as well as drug free. Moreover, the Clinton administration passed the *Educate America Act Goals 2000*, which added two additional goals of increased parental involvement and professional development for teachers. Pertaining to supervisory practices, Glickman's publication *Supervision in Action* (1992) set the stage for changing supervision to a democratic model (Sullivan & Glantz, 2009). Instead of using the words supervisor, Glickman proposed using the term instructional leadership. Another form of supervision that began in the 1990s and continues to grow in popularity is differentiated supervision. Under this plan, principals provide teachers with different supervisory options based upon their need and level of experience (Glatthorn, 1997). Other forms of supervision that

evolved during this time include developmental supervision, transformational leadership, teacher empowerment, and peer supervision (Sullivan & Glantz, 2009). Furthermore, during this decade there was movement to include groups of teachers to function as small communities of learners. Teachers were committed to helping supervise each other through grade level or department work (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007).

At the turn of the current century, Americans continued to deal with political turmoil and inadequacies in our educational systems. The disasters of September 11, 2001 were overwhelming and encompassing. Philosophical and financial concerns regarding our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were also the center of attention. Concerning education, congress passed one of the most encompassing and controversial pieces of legislation. More specifically, President George W. Bush signed into law the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*, entitled the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). Major provisions of the law included increased accountability for states, school district, and schools, greater school choice for parents and students, more flexibility for states and local educational agencies in the use of federal education dollars, and a stronger emphasis on reading (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). The standards based movement continues to impact supervision in our schools today.

Sullivan and Glantz, (2009) summarized lessons learned by stating, “Authoritarian supervision aimed at faultfinding and suspecting the competence of teachers should not be compatible with the modern practice of supervision” (p.

21). They extrapolated that supervisors face a major role conflict dealing with the need to evaluate or to assist teachers informally to improve their instruction.

Clinical Supervision

“When supervision is direct, centered in the classroom, focused on teachers’ issues, aimed primarily at helping teachers understand and improve their teaching, and collaborative, the term clinical supervision is often used” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007, p. 230).

As mentioned in the previous section, clinical supervision became popular in the later half of the 20th century. Motivated by the need for a more productive learning experience and fueled by a dissatisfaction of current educational practices, Harvard professors Morris Cogan and Robert Anderson, along with their graduate students, developed clinical supervision (Starratt, n.d.). According to Cogan, the two purposes of clinical supervision are to develop a system of classroom observations that will help to accomplish significant improvements in classroom instruction and to alleviate the neglect of in-class supervision while complementing the other duties of the supervisor (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007).

In 1969, Robert Goldhammer referred to clinical supervision as being an image of face-to-face relationships between supervisors and teachers. Goldhammer stated that it is meant to be supervision up close (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). The five stages in clinical supervision are as follows: a pre-observation conference between the teacher and supervisor; teacher observation; supervisor’s analysis of notes from the observation and strategy for the post-conference; post-conference; and, post-conference analysis.

In addition to the original form of clinical supervision, many alternate forms of this model have emerged. In 2000, Pajak enunciated that it was followed in the 1970s by Blumberg's and Eisner's humanistic-artistic model (Ornstein, Pajak, & Ornstein, 2007). The model surfaced again in the mid-1980s by Acheson, Gall, and Hunter's technical-didactic models and Glickman's developmental-reflective model. Lastly, in the mid-1990s, Costs and Garmston, and Zeichner and Liston proposed the latest form of clinical supervision. Each style of clinical supervision has differences and similarities based upon the purposes that they are set to accomplish. Pajak further stated that differences include their emphasis on objectivity versus subjectively, collection of data, steps in the process, the degree of control exercised by the supervisor, and the structure of the pre-post conferences.

Differentiated Supervision

Opposition to a top-down model such as clinical supervision led to the development of a more varied supervisory approach. "Differentiated supervision is an approach to supervision that provides teachers with options about the kinds of supervisory and evaluative services they receive" (Glatthorn, 1997, p. 3). This model offers intensive development to non-tenured and problematic teachers while the remainder of the faculty receives options for their staff development. Teachers may participate by working in cooperative teams or through independent work. In developing an environment of collaboration and professional inquiry, a differentiated approach to teacher evaluation is appropriate. In 1991, King and Kerchner, stated the idea of administrators

leading through fear and coercion is diminishing and the promotion of teacher professionalism does not indicate an end to the job of the principal (Blasé & Blasé, 2001). When a principal shares his or her expertise with a faculty and empowers teachers to make professional decisions during the supervisory process, continuous improvement will usually become the norm of the school culture.

Glatthorn (1997) wrote that educators need to view differentiated supervision from four perspectives: the profession; the organization; the supervisor; and, the teacher. The first perspective emphasizes the importance of professionalizing teaching. In clinical supervision, the supervisor has the solution to a teacher who has a problem. Unfortunately, this view makes teaching more of a craft instead of a profession. According to Glatthorn (1997), teachers should have more control over their professional development, which can be accomplished through a differentiated approach.

The second perspective points toward the organization. In effective schools, there is a high level of collegiality among the faculty. Glatthorn (1997) stated the use of a differentiated approach would build a collegial atmosphere through an emphasis on cooperation and mutual assistance. Teachers will have more of an opportunity to work together, thereby building a greater level of trust and cooperation.

The next perspective for building a rationale for the use of a differentiated model of supervision deals with the duties of a supervisor. In most school settings, the principal is both a building manager and an instructional leader.

Much time is needed to do both of these tasks effectively. In a study on Pennsylvania supervisors in 1984, Badiali and Levin reported that half of the respondents surveyed reported observing teachers only once or twice a year (Glatthorn, 1997). To deal with these situations, Glatthorn (1997) wrote that a model of differentiated supervision saves valuable time by enabling the supervisor to focus clinical efforts on those teachers who need the most help.

The final area Glatthorn (1997) examined is the teachers' perspective. In 1990, Burden wrote that teachers' preferences for the amount of professional assistance may vary depending upon their experience and knowledge (Glatthorn, 1997). Beginning teachers may appreciate the intensive assistance of clinical supervision while veteran teachers prefer options that respond to their individual needs. Furthermore, in 1988, Little stated that teachers welcome and profit from qualified observers whether they are peers or administrators as long as they do not waste their time or insult their intelligence, and they work hard to understand the classroom events as they are occurring (Glatthorn, 1997).

There are three developmental components to Glatthorn's (1997) model of differentiated supervision. The first model is entitled intensive development. During this stage, principals focus their work on improving student learning with teaching methods being seen as a means to an end, not an end unto them. Intensive development is Glatthorn's approach to "clinical supervision." The second component is cooperative development. In this setting, teachers typically work together in small groups to help each other grow professionally. Teachers may observe each other as they deliver instruction, work on curriculum, other

projects, or hold professional dialogue sessions. The third component is self-directed development. This plan enables teachers to work independently setting their own personal goals for professional growth.

When aligning evaluation options to a plan of differentiated supervision, Glatthorn (1997) recommended two different approaches. Teachers who are working in the area of intensive development will receive intensive evaluation. This evaluation would be used to make high stake decisions for tenure, promotion, or contractual renewals. All other teachers in the system will use a standard evaluation as established by the state for competent teachers.

Jailall (1998) revisited Glatthorn's model of differentiated supervision to identify suggestions for an effective model based upon actual practices across the United States of America. The major findings of his study proved that most supervisors initiated a plan of differentiated supervision within the past six years of the study. He also found that principals and supervisors believed that the self-directed component and the cooperative professional development of differentiated supervision were moderately to highly effective in improving instruction. Jailall found that teacher input in program development was the number one factor for success in differentiated supervision, followed by effective program design, use of pilots prior to implementation, and district support.

Graf and Werlinich (n.d.) have spent much time working with school personnel defining and implementing their model of differentiated supervision. Focusing on the work of Collins (2001) they believe that in order to make a school organization *great*, supervisors must use a system that will take teachers

from where they are to where they need to be. Educators must design supervision and professional development that specifically meet the strengths and needs of individual teachers. In order to accomplish this, they must build an environment of trust for the school to reach its fullest capacity. Stephen M. R. Covey (2006) uncovered the importance of trust in personal and professional relationships in his book *The Speed of Trust*. He professed that building trust with others helps create unmatched success and fortune in all facets of life. Along these same lines, Fullan (2001) stated that for leaders to be effective, they have to tap into people's intrinsic commitments and mobilize their sense of moral purpose.

Graf and Werlinich (n.d.) proposed a differentiated model of supervision that contains three stages of development for teachers. The first stage of development is "accountability." This stage is for non-tenured teachers and teachers who are in need of focused support or improvement plans. Key components of this stage include clinical conferences, walkthrough observations, video and self-evaluation tools, collegial conferences, and induction programs. The second stage is "growth and responsibility." According to Graf and Werlinich, this stage is for competent teachers who are reflective about their teaching. These teachers focus on improving teaching and learning and are collaborative with others. During this stage, supervisors and teachers will be involved in walkthrough observations, video and self-evaluation tools, collegial conferences, and learning communities. The third and final stage of this model is "culture of discipline." This stage is for master teachers and teachers who are

prepared to drive their own personal and professional growth. According to Graf and Werlinich, this model builds capacity and unleashes teachers' creativity. Teachers become active researchers taking on a leadership role concerning teaching and learning.

As educators continue to ensure high levels of learning for all students, one particular research study showed evidence of a direct correlation between student achievement and the level of teacher effectiveness. In the research report *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement*, Sanders and Rivers (1996), verified the importance of students being taught under the tutelage of effective teachers. It is their belief that the single most overriding factor affecting student academic gain is teacher effectiveness. Groups of students with the same abilities may have vastly different outcomes based upon the teachers to whom they are assigned. A summary of their findings shows the effects of achievement are both additive and cumulative with differences of 50 percentile points based upon teacher sequence after three years with little evidence of compensatory help in later years. Their research shows that as teacher effectiveness increases, the lowest achieving students are the first to benefit. Additionally, students of different ethnicities respond in a similar manner within the quintile of teacher effectiveness. Lastly, the top quintile of teachers is able to help their students achieve appropriate to excellent gains for all achievement levels. The results of this study can be used to guide administrators to improve learning for all students by closely scrutinizing procedures of student assignment, and appraising the current evaluation system

along with preservice and professional development. The use of walkthrough observations and PLCs are tools that principals may use to help teachers become more effective.

A Model of Teacher Evaluation

Researchers continue to develop methods for evaluating teachers that will improve teaching and learning. Recently, evaluation systems based on formative evaluation techniques produced higher levels of satisfaction among the teachers. These recent practices have developed out of new information on adult learning and an increase in reform efforts.

Danielson (1996) stated that administrators should utilize a framework for teaching based upon teacher responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies, and theoretical research such as promoting student learning. She indicated that the components of professional practice offer a comprehensive structure that reflects the qualities of teaching. This framework provides well-established definitions of expertise and procedures for both beginning and veteran teachers. Danielson's components of professional practice include the following domains: planning and preparation; the classroom environment; instruction; and, professional responsibilities.

In addition, principals need to use a teacher evaluation system that is a researched-based set of teaching standards built around a range of data and information (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). It should allow teachers at different stages to be involved in different processes and activities. Danielson and

McGreal base their teacher evaluation system on Danielson's standards for effective teaching.

The evaluation system that they propose uses a three-track system as the framework. *Track I – The Beginner Teacher Program* is for all new teachers who have not acquired tenure. According to Danielson and McGreal (2000), the primary purpose of this track is to produce reliable data that administrators will use to support decisions on contract renewal. The next component is *The Professional Development Track -Track II*. Since most teachers are neither probationary nor marginal, this is the dominant track in a school setting. Danielson and McGreal declared that the purpose of a professional development track will provide our most experienced and knowledgeable teachers with a structured, supportive, and collaborative platform to further the district's mission. It will also ensure that all tenured teachers continue to meet high expectations for teaching. The last track that is part of this evaluation system is *Track III – The Teacher Assistance Track*. This track is proposed for those teachers who need support and are not meeting the district's standards.

Piranno (2006) investigated the influence that a differentiated teacher supervision system has on improving classroom instruction. As part of a qualitative study, Piranno (2006) investigated high school principals' perceptions on differentiated supervision's ability to improve classroom instruction based upon Danielson's Four Domains of Instruction. Piranno found strong principal preference for differentiated teacher supervision. Reported key findings

indicated that differentiated supervision fostered teacher collaboration, professional inquiry, and a commitment to continuous excellence.

Walkthrough Observations

Administrators continue to look for strategies that will make the best use of time to obtain effective results. One form of supervision that is gaining prominence to improve instructional practices of teachers is the walkthrough observation. Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) wrote that learning walks, or walkthroughs, involve visiting classrooms to study teaching practices and the learning environment. According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2007), walkthroughs are brief, structured, non-evaluative observations that are followed by a conference between the principal and teacher to discuss what was observed in the classroom (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010). Observers look for artifacts and any other information that provides evidence of student learning. Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins (2005), Chief Education Officer for the Chicago Public Schools, stated that during walkthrough observations, the participants view the classroom instruction as if seen through the eyes of the learners. Superintendents, principals, and teachers are currently using this practice in many school districts. Additionally, teams of participants complete walkthroughs, reflect on the evidence collected, and then form action plans for professional development.

Walkthroughs vary by name, purpose, and protocols. In their study of this topic, Kachur, Stout, and Edwards (2010) identified 18 walkthrough models that educators in different schools are using to observe classroom instruction. After

reviewing the literature, they provided basic components of a classroom walkthrough as:

- informal and brief;
- involving both administrators and teachers;
- quick views of instructional and curricular practices;
- non-evaluative;
- focused on “look-fors” that are decided before beginning observations;
- feedback to teachers for reflection on what was observed;
- and,
- maintaining student achievement as its ultimate goal.

Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) defined walkthroughs as short, unscheduled visits that can generate reflective and collaborative adult learning. According to Ginsberg and Murphy, administrators receive the following benefits from participating in walkthroughs: more familiarity with curriculum and instructional practices; the ability to gauge the school climate; the establishment of a team atmosphere where teachers and administrators work together on school-wide issues; the ability to establish themselves as instructional leaders; and, the opportunity for students to see that the principal values instruction and learning.

Walkthroughs enable principals to acquire data in short amounts of time. According to Larson (2007), principals view the “what” (curriculum) and the “how” (instruction) to gain knowledge about instructional practices in the school and to see first hand if expectations are being met. Larson stated that she is able to get

into every classroom at least once a week and she and her staff love the process.

According to David (2007/2008), walkthroughs paint a picture of improvement efforts. Establishing look-fors, collecting evidence, and then holding post-conferences with the teachers accomplish this. Even though research is limited on the use of walkthroughs, it has been found that principals must make their purposes clear and work to develop a climate of trust. David posits that walkthroughs should not be used for purposes of evaluation.

Historical Perspective of Walkthroughs

The history of walkthroughs pinpoints its origins to the corporate world. In a best-selling book entitled *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*, Peters and Waterman (1982) wrote about the importance of maintaining close relationships with business employees. They wrote that business leaders were found walking the floors of their companies observing the daily routines, cultures, atmosphere, strengths, weaknesses, and problems of their employees (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010). This was especially popular at Hewlett-Packard where Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) became the norm. School walkthroughs have their roots beginning with MBWA (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010).

Likewise, much early work in schools with walkthroughs began in New York City's Community School District #2. It was there that Superintendent Tony Alvarado and Deputy Superintendent Fink introduced the principles of MBWA by using walkthroughs in their schools (Elmore & Burney, 2000). As part of the High

Performance Learning Communities Project, Fink and Resnick (1999) adapted the walkthrough away from being evaluative into one that focused on improving instruction and learning. The Learning Walk routine was developed and refined at The Institute for Learning at the University of Pittsburgh.

Another early model for the development of walkthroughs was occurring in the early 1990s. *School Management by Wandering Around* was published to explain how MBWA could be used as a procedure to bring administrators, teachers, and others together to pursue excellence. Frase and Hetzel (1990) wrote the MBWA principal is off his seat and on his feet looking for better ways to deliver instruction. The MBWA concept provided principals with a process to help accomplish both management and instructional needs. The administrator, who uses this philosophy, truly believes that the classroom and teachers are the source for diagnostic information about what is occurring in the school. Time is deliberately scheduled on the calendar to be out of the office. A MBWA principal has a clear purpose, knows what to look for, leads by example, and believes that people are the number one resource. As established several decades ago with the introduction of a “One-Minute Manager,” these practices may be done efficiently. In their book, Blanchard and Johnson (1982) wrote:

The One-Minute Manager’s symbol—a one minute readout from the face of a modern digital watch—is intended to remind each of us to take a minute out of our day to look into the faces of the people we manage. And to realize that *they* are our most important resources. (p. 5)

Due to the effectiveness of walkthroughs, administrators have developed variations of this method to increase student learning in our schools. To narrow the focus for this study, this literature review addressed the following models of walkthrough observations: The Learning Walk; The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-through; iObservation; Classroom Walkthrough (CWT); and, The Walkthrough Observation Tool.

The Learning Walk

The *Learning Walk* is the Institute for Learning's signature tool for becoming smarter about teaching and learning through professional development and the building of learning communities (Institute for Learning, 2011). The Institute for Learning was founded in 1995 as part of the Learning Research and Development Center of the University of Pittsburgh. The *Learning Walk*, as created by the Institute for Learning, is an organized visit through a school focusing on the *Principles of Learning*. The *Principles of Learning* are condensed theoretical statements to help educators analyze the quality of instruction and opportunities for learning. Specifically, they are as follows: organizing for effort; clear expectations; fair and credible evaluations; recognition of accomplishment; academic rigor in a thinking curriculum; accountable talk; socializing intelligence; self-management of learning; and, learning as apprenticeship (Institute for Learning, 2011). Incorporating district skills and practices, the *Learning Walks* are structured and organized based upon the needs of the participants.

According to the Institute for Learning (2011), there are three components to the *Learning Walk* – orientation, observation, and debriefing. Participants begin by meeting to establish a focus area. They then spend 5 to 10 minutes in different classrooms observing as well as talking with students and teachers. Administrators use a portion of the classroom visit time to examine student work and artifacts. One trademark of the *Learning Walk* is the academic process filtered through the eyes and voices of the students.

At the close of the classroom visit, participants meet in the hallway to talk about what they observed in the classroom. The observers make objective statements and mention points of interest regarding what was occurring in the classroom. In addition, participants may pose questions that stimulate deeper thoughts by the teacher on instructional practices. When educators finish the *Learning Walk*, the group meets again to discuss overall school patterns and additional needs for professional development.

The *Learning Walks* provide a platform for developing professional learning communities through a deeper understanding of teaching and learning. According to the Institute for Learning (2011), *Learning Walks* should not be implemented as isolated events but as a part of a large scheme of professional development, which may include study groups, in-service training, team meetings, etc. As members of a school participate in *Learning Walks*, they develop a shared vision of all students as they work toward achieving the standards.

The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through

Carolyn Downey created *The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through* (Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, Jr., 2004). This process rejects the superior-subordinate model that typifies many of schools' supervisory plans. The philosophy is centered on professional conversation between the principal and the teacher. According to Downey, et al. (2004), principals replace the infrequent and formal modes of supervision and evaluation with frequent, brief, and informal observations. The goal of the walkthrough is to gather information on curricular and instructional practices in a brief amount of time. There is no intent to use this tool to evaluate teachers.

This model of walkthroughs is based upon five key ideas. The first involves brief and focused observations that last approximately two to three minutes. The second idea strives to establish an avenue for additional teacher reflection. The intent of this is to possibly trigger a thought the teacher may use to better his or her instructional practice. The third idea enables the observer to focus on curriculum and instruction. While in the classroom, the supervisor will be able to gain a better perspective of the taught curriculum and the teacher's instructional decisions. The fourth idea is based on the frequency of follow-up conversations. Downey, et al. (2004) recommended that feedback should not be given after every observation but only when it will be received in a meaningful manner. The fifth and final idea is that this process is informal and collaborative. Checklists are not used and observers may take only a few notes to help the

observer recall any information that he or she may want to share with the teacher.

The *Three Minute Classroom Walkthrough* is a five-step process. The first step is to notice whether attending behavior is in place and that students appear oriented to their work. The second step deals with curricular decision points. It is during this time that the observer is checking alignment between the written and taught curriculum. In the third step, the observer focuses on the instructional strategies the teacher is using in the classroom to teach the lesson objectives. "Walk the Walls" is the name of the next step in this process. Supervisors can learn much information about what the teachers have taught in the classroom and what will be taught in the future by examining student work that is displayed on the walls of the classroom. The fifth and final step deals with safety and health issues. In many situations, this happens naturally upon entering the classroom. During the brief visit, the principal has an opportunity to note any maintenance issues to safety concerns of the classroom.

Downey, et al. (2004) believed that this walkthrough process would help make a school more reflective and collaborative. With the principal acting as a coach, the real power of this model is the number of brief but frequent visits that accumulate much information for the teacher to contemplate. Finally, the major purpose of the walkthrough is to promote the process of teachers' professional growth.

Teachscape Classroom Walkthrough

Teachscape's Classroom Walkthrough (CWT) is a valuable tool that instructional leaders can use to promote, support, monitor, and sustain effective teaching strategies for the overall improvement of student outcomes (Teachscape, 2006). This process is built from research on leadership, reflective adult learning, and effective professional development, instruction, and learning. Using a flexible approach, CWT's framework offers participants the ability to build a culture of data-informed decision-making and reflective teaching practices. Through the generation of customized reports, its overall goal is to promote student achievement in the school.

The users of this process will establish a focus on a variety of educational platforms. To begin, the observer examined curriculum by trying to identify the learning objective and if it is meeting the standards. The second area of focus was on instruction. Participants looked at instructional strategies and how the teacher groups the students. Other areas that the principal or visitor observed were the level of engagement and instructional materials that teachers use in the classroom. Concerning environment, the observer looked at resources, classroom arrangement, artifacts of student work, and the level of expectations. Lastly, the supervisor reported on differentiation of instruction and how the teacher met the learning needs of diverse students.

When completing a walkthrough using this technique, the principal collected data on paper or by using a hand-held wireless device. From there, the principal uploaded the information to a web-based database. The software then

aggregated and displayed the information in a variety of customized graphic formats.

Power Walkthrough

Based upon popular books, *Classroom Instruction that Works* and *Using Technology with Classroom Instruction that Works*, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning's (McRel's) *Power Walkthrough* provides principals with an instructional structure and software tools to report observation feedback to teachers. Through the use of McRel's software loaded on an iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, Blackberry, Android, or Tablet PC device, a regular observation is now a "Power Walkthrough" (McRel, 2011). Using this tool, principals document information from classroom walkthroughs on observed instructional strategies, student engagement, and the use of technology. The observations take between three to five minutes to accomplish.

In order to gain a better understanding of the concepts that are associated with *Classroom Instruction that Works*, McRel requires a two-day training seminar or a one-day online webinar. Principals learned how to observe and record information on learning goals, effective instructional strategies, grouping techniques, levels of student's work, and use of technology.

iObservation

The *iObservation* system is a data collection tool to assist educators with the process for conducting short, frequent, formative classroom walkthroughs (iObservation, 2010). In addition, this classroom walkthrough tool is a complete professional development tool for improving instructional practices in schools.

More specifically, *iObservation* incorporates effective practices from Charlotte Danielson's teacher evaluation framework, Marzano's research-based strategies for teacher effectiveness, and Reeves' standards-based dimensions for leadership performance. The purpose of this program is to connect effective classroom instruction and leadership practices to gains in student achievement.

As written on the *iObservation* website, this tool supports districts in their effort to:

- Establish a common understanding of effective instruction.
- Create a singular focus on enhancing teaching to increase student learning.
- Develop trust with teachers through a focused and fair walkthrough and observation process.
- Engage in reflection and collaboration within virtual professional learning communities.
- Save time and money by eliminating ineffective professional development programs.
- Connect teacher learning to student learning.
- Help principals and administrators monitor and support effective teaching.
- Build capacity and implement for sustainability.

(*iObservation*, 2010, p. 2)

As part of this process, teachers and administrators may access various forms to obtain information on content and video resources. In addition to

accessing information from Marzano, Danielson, and Reeves, users also have access to additional research-based practices, 21st century teaching and learning, early literacy, state evaluation forms, and customized district or school observation forms. Principals may use *iObservation* on desktop computers, laptops, tablet PCs, or a variety of other types of web-enabled or internet-connected devices.

The Walkthrough Observation Tool

In a study completed by Keruskin (2005), five high school principals, a central administrator, and the majority of the teachers in five high schools believed that the walkthrough process had a positive impact on instruction and student achievement in their schools. Keruskin cited that walkthroughs influence instruction, which is attributed to the occurrence of look-fors that administrators see in the classrooms. In addition, the look-fors improve classroom instruction and eventually student achievement. Keruskin claimed that walkthroughs help teachers to work together and collaborate about their best teaching practices. Keruskin based his study on *The Walkthrough Observation Tool*.

According to Graf and Werlinich (2002), a walkthrough is an organized tour through the school that uses “look-fors” to focus on the elements of effective instruction and learning. It is a tool for collecting data around teaching, learning, and sharing frequent snapshot views and ideas with teachers. Schools that incorporate walkthroughs are making a statement that instruction and learning are a priority in the school, and the teachers along with the principals play a major role in the learning process.

As outlined by Graf and Werlinich (2002), the specific objectives for walkthroughs are as follows: (1) to learn more about instruction and learning; (2) to validate effective practice and ensure continued use; (3) to create a community of learners for adults and children; (4) to open the school and classroom to all staff; (5) to focus teachers and the principal on student work and the learning process; (6) to improve decision making about instruction and learning; and, (7) to design more useful professional growth opportunities.

An important part of the walkthrough process is the development of an intense instructional focus. Principals can identify the instructional focus through the incorporation of look-fors. According to Graf and Werlinich (2002):

Look-fors are specific descriptors of conditions that when present in classrooms enable students to improve their achievement and learning levels. Look-fors emphasize the guiding principles that teachers believe produce student learning. Look-fors recognize specific descriptors of certain conditions that when present in the class enable all students to improve their achievement and learning levels. If we believe, for example, that all students can learn in an environment if clear expectations are present, then teachers and the principal must identify what strategies when applied in the classroom establish clear expectations for students. Once identified, teachers and the principal work together to implement those strategies in every classroom throughout the school. (p. 5)

Graf and Werlinich believe walkthrough observations can change the culture in schools. This observational technique creates a ritual that teams up

teachers with administrators to view, discuss, and revise lessons. Walkthroughs provide a strategy to move the school from a closed, isolated environment to a more collaborative environment. According to Schmoker (2006), insiders and outsiders of the school community know very little about what actually goes on inside the classrooms. Elmore (2000) described how schools protect themselves by what he refers to as a “buffer.” This protective mask discourages scrutiny of instruction by others in the classrooms. According to Elmore, teachers working in isolation manage the technical core. This buffer creates a “logic of confidence” between the schools and the general public about methodology and content of instruction. Walkthroughs will open up the school to the idea of sharing of best practices.

Implementation of *The Walkthrough Observation Tool* is a developmental process. It begins with the principal being visible in the classrooms. Once there, the principal can validate best practices and positive teacher efforts. After teachers are comfortable with the practice of walkthroughs, a major shift occurs in thinking about how to develop and then share the repertoire of effective strategies for improving pedagogy. Validation of effective practices motivates the faculty to continue using those practices. It builds a level of trust that is necessary for future growth.

Graf and Werlinich (2002) have identified 15 specific steps that principals are to use when implementing *The Walkthrough Observation Tool*. They are as follows: (1) conduct a preliminary walkthrough to collect base-line data about staff, students, curriculum and the school; (2) conduct a meeting with the staff to

establish clear expectations for the purpose and process of implementing walkthroughs; (3) work together with the faculty to identify elements of effective instruction, a focus, and look-fors for subsequent walkthroughs; (4) connect the look-fors to established standards; (5) establish and communicate a schedule for walkthroughs and stick to it throughout the school year; (6) identify types of data to be collected; (7) collect data noting specific examples of look-fors; (8) observe student behaviors and talk to students about their learning; (9) validate effective teaching practices; (10) debrief with teachers giving specific feedback about what occurred in the classroom; (11) utilize a variety of strategies for the debriefing with the teachers as a whole and individually; (12) coach each other about instruction and learning; (13) create a school culture where teaching, learning, and sharing are entrenched in everyday activities; (14) create a learning community that embraces students, teachers, and the principal as a way to connect teaching and learning; and, (15) establish clear expectations and guidelines for all participants in the walkthroughs by maintaining a high degree of confidentiality and avoiding negative or judgmental comments to others regarding the observed teacher. Since their original work on walkthroughs, Graf and Werlinich have revised the framework that reduces the process to five essential steps. They include communicating expectations to staff, establishing a focus for the walkthrough, collecting formative and summative data, observing students' learning, and providing feedback to teachers.

In another study, Rossi (2007) researched elementary schools using *The Walkthrough Observation Tool* to evaluate how this model improves student

achievement. He found that teachers are sharing best practices, and principals are better-informed instructional leaders. According to Rossi, the walkthroughs did influence student achievement through improved teacher practices and increased time on task.

The Learning Organization

Thus far in Chapter II, this researcher shared much information regarding the history of supervision and current techniques that principals use in schools. This next section relates to the origins and philosophies of learning organizations. Many ideals of professional learning communities were influenced and derived from original work in learning organizations from the corporate world. Argyris (1977) of Harvard University is one of the leading forerunners in the development of learning organizations. He defined organizational learning as a process of detecting and correcting error, with error being any form of knowledge that inhibits learning. Argyris stated that when individuals in an organization maintain their present practices and policies, he considers it “single loop learning.” He called a more comprehensive form of learning “double loop learning.” This occurs when an organization or individual questions the governing variables to find answers for why such incidents have occurred. Argyris further explained inhibitors of double loop learning through a model of assumptions entitled Model I and Model II. The first of these assumptions involves a strategy of controlling environment and associated task. It is one of deeply embedded defensive routines. The aim of Model II assumptions is to help individuals create valid information, make informed decisions, and develop a

commitment to those options. Argyris' goal was to move people from Model I to Model II assumptions. He believed this could be accomplished through open communication and public testing of beliefs or positions that would invite confrontation, which would eventually lead to double loop learning. Argyris deeply influenced the work of Senge. After inviting Argyris to do a workshop at MIT, Senge (2006) recounted, "the presentation quickly evolved into a powerful demonstration of what action science practitioners call 'reflection in action.' This in turn led to subtle patterns of reasoning and mental modes in action" (p. 172-173).

To continue, Senge (2006) stated:

Learning organizations are where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. (p. 3)

In order for organizations to be successful, they must encourage full participation of all members of the group and provide avenues for them to grow to their fullest potential. Senge believed that working for someone else's approval instead of working for oneself created a condition of mediocrity. He believed that this type of structure stymied creativity and trust within the organization. Therefore, Senge advocated an organizational structure that he based upon learning—a learning organization. Smith (2001) spoke of Senge as a visionary of learning organizations. According to Smith, Senge's vision of individuals who continually

enhance their capacities to create what they truly desire has been profoundly influential.

What distinguishes learning organizations from other traditional organizations is what Senge (2006) called the disciplines of the learning organization. According to Senge, the first discipline is “Personal Mastery.” Organizations will learn and improve when individuals take the initiative to learn on their own. This does not guarantee organizational learning but without it organizational learning certainly will not occur. This discipline involves a strengthening of our personal vision and a concentration of energies. “Mental Models” is the second discipline. Senge stated, “Mental models are deeply engrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action” (p. 8). The third discipline is building a “Shared Vision.” According to Senge, this is the ability to maintain a shared picture of the future that is to be created. “Team Learning” is the next discipline and is a very vital component of the organization. Senge stated that when teams are learning, they are producing outstanding results with the individual members achieving more than they would have on their own. The fifth discipline is “Systems Thinking.” This discipline integrates all the others, melding them into a coherent body of theory and practice.

Senge (2000) took his original work on learning organizations and applied its meaning into the field of education. Specifically, the principles of building shared vision and team learning provided a basis for much development of professional learning communities in schools (Blankstein, 2010). Senge wrote

that educational institutions could be re-created, made vital and sustainably renewed by incorporating a learning orientation through the involvement of everyone in the system as they develop their capabilities together.

Kofman and Senge (1995) further suggested that building learning organizations requires cultural shifts in thinking and interacting requires much personal commitment. Their idea of a learning organization is not as an outside phenomenon but a view that involves both the observer and the observed in the organization. It is not just a vision but what the vision actually accomplishes that really matters.

Evolution of Learning Communities

In education, the evolution of learning communities began in the 1980s. During this time period, attention was being paid to the influence of work settings on employees in both private and public sectors. Rosenholtz (1989) cited that teachers who felt supported with their own learning and who also had a strong sense of their own efficacy were more committed and effective than others (Hord, 1997). This support to teachers was provided through the implementation of teacher networks, expanded professional responsibilities and collaborative work. In 1993, McLaughlin and Talbert confirmed Rosenholtz's research pertaining to experienced teachers having opportunities for collaboration and its end result of a wider knowledge base that could be shared with many other educators (Hord, 1997). To continue, Darling-Hammond (1996) cited that shared decision-making among teachers promoted curriculum reform and this was aided by providing

team planning, observing each other's classrooms, and sharing feedback (Hord, 1997).

Throughout the last couple of decades, various researchers and organizations have been involved with the development of the learning community concept. However, it was at SEDL that leaders in the field credited Shirley Hord for coining the term *Professional Learning Community (PLC)* (Blankstein, 2010). Deriving from earlier research, DuFour and Eaker (1998) also used the term *Professional Learning Community (PLC)* to represent components of a similar process for school improvement.

Value of Professional Learning Communities

According to Schmoker (2004) the professional learning community is a structure and practice that when implemented correctly will appreciably improve both teaching quality and levels of learning. The PLC begins with a group of teachers who meet regularly to discuss instructional goals, lesson plans, teaching strategies, assessments, and data. The underlying belief is that through a concerted group effort, this process will positively affect student achievement. In every school, there are teachers who are willing to share their talents with others if only given a chance. These individuals understand that in addition to what the students receive in their classrooms, the entire educational system also has great influence on their future success. Danielson (2007) wrote that teachers have many opportunities to extend their expertise to their teaching teams, schools, and districts. Building a learning community is one of the most important responsibilities principals must accomplish in their school communities.

In 1999, Speck stated a school learning community promotes and values learning through an ongoing and collaborative process that encourages dialogue with all stakeholders in their quest to improve the quality of learning and life in the school (Roberts & Pruitt, 2003).

Many educational organizations have supported PLCs as a way to improve instructional practices. For instance, The National Commission on Teaching (2003), stated in their summary report that schools need to become learning communities with shared leadership. The members of this committee indicated that it was time to end the era of teacher isolation. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2011) established five core propositions that form the foundational beliefs of what is required to become a National Board Certified Teacher. Their fifth proposition states that teachers are members of a learning community. Additionally, The National Education Association (2009) promoted open communication and collaborative problem solving as important indicators of school quality. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2008) wrote extensively on job descriptions for principals including the need to lead learning communities. One important attribute they identified of learning communities is that of supportive and shared leadership. It is their belief that facilitative, distributed, or shared leadership is essential to promote both student and adult learning.

In addition to professional organizations that have promoted PLCs, there is also an abundance of support from leading professionals in education on the value of developing professional learning communities in our schools (Blankstein,

2010; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1996; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Elmore, 2002; Fullan, 2003; Hord, 2004; Lezotte, 1991; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003; Schmoker, 2006; Senge, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007).

As noted, the evidence and value for developing a PLC is very strong. However, what works in schools still seems to be problematic. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) articulated, “We remain convinced that closing the knowing-doing gap will require purposeful action to alter not only the existing structures of schools and districts, but more importantly, the cultures that have created and sustained those traditional structures” (p. 79).

Correlates of Effective Schools

As Blankstein (2010) worked to develop the six principles of PLCs, he factored in research on effective schools. The effective schools movement began over 30 years ago and has continued to evolve. In 1966, J. S. Coleman published *The Equal Educational Opportunity Survey*. This report found that family background and not the school determined how well students would do academically. Due to much opposition and disagreement with the statements made in the Coleman report, many other studies emerged that formed the basis for the effective schools research. In 1982, Ronald Edmonds developed and published five characteristics, or correlates, of effective schools (Lezotte, 1991). As a result of several hundred research studies, Edmonds stated, “we can, whenever and whatever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us” (Lezotte, n.d., p. 4). As time progressed, the

original correlates were refined and expanded to the following: clear school mission; high expectations for success; instructional leadership; frequent monitoring of student progress; opportunity to learn and student time on task; safe and orderly environment; and, home-school relations.

Lezotte (1991) continued the work of Edmonds by proposing a second generation of correlates that focus on the mission of *learning for all*. Much of this new thinking has a direct alignment with the development of PLCs. Highlights of the second generation include the development of collaborative environments and teamwork, teachers not working in isolation, high expectations for all, the principal as a leader of leaders, continuous learning and use of criterion-referenced assessments to closely monitor student achievement. The last correlate focused on home-school relations. Lezotte stated that there must be an authentic partnership between the school and home. To ensure an effective school and home situation for all children, educators and parents must work closely together to develop a trusting relationship.

Leading Learning Communities

As written in a prior section, many national organizations are supportive of initiatives to develop PLCs. Specifically, one professional organization that has directly influenced its membership in support of this endeavor is the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Its leadership wrote a second edition to *Leading Learning Communities* as a guide to provide content, tools, and resources that principals can use to improve their individual practice and lead learning communities. According to NAESP (2008), the role of the

principal is becoming more complex and challenging. Our current system which requires high-stakes accountability while maintaining elevated ideals of supporting the social, physical, and emotional needs of the students demands that principals demonstrate resolution, knowledge, and skill to establish and lead learning communities. It is only through this process that we will be able to promote the fullest potential of all students. NAESP defines learning communities as a place where educators and students are committed to work collaboratively for continuous improvement. According to NAESP, the following are core attributes of learning communities: shared mission; vision; values and goals; commitment to results; continuous improvement; culture of collaboration; collective inquiry; and, supportive and shared leadership (2008).

In their work with principals across the nation, NAESP (2008) updated their standards for what principals should know and be able to do. The following six standards define leadership for learning communities:

1. Lead schools in a way that places student and adult learning at the center.
2. Set high expectations and standards for the academic, social, emotional, and physical development of all students.
3. Demand content and instruction that ensure student achievement of agreed-upon standards.
4. Create a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning and other school goals.

5. Manage data and knowledge to inform decisions and measure progress of student, adult, and school performance.
6. Actively engage the community to create shared responsibility for student performance and development.

Professional Communities

To continue the literature review, this researcher focused on research by leaders on Professional Learning Communities. Louis and Kruse (1995), proposed an argument that school-based professional communities can intrinsically assist teachers against the barriers of isolation and uncertainty. It is their argument that administrators must present teachers with supporting and engaging work environments, otherwise they will not be able to reach out and teach students effectively. Much of their work focused on creating professional communities in urban schools. According to Louis and Kruse, professional school communities share the following five core characteristics: shared values; reflective dialogue; deprivatization of practice; focus on student learning; and, collaboration.

The first characteristic is *shared values*. This is the foundation for all other actions in a learning community. Educators base this action upon moral authority derived from the importance of education in our schools. Without a strong sense of *shared values*, a school may not move in a direction that advocates for teaching and learning.

Reflective dialogue or practice requires self-monitoring of instructional practices and actions by the individual teacher. Louis and Kruse (1995) stated

that teachers become students of their craft as they investigate and implement best strategies to address learning situations. As a result, reflective dialogue leads both individuals and groups of educators to deeper understanding of the instructional process.

The third characteristic is *deprivatization of practice*. This opens the doors of classrooms so teachers are able to practice their craft openly. When that occurs, teachers can observe and mentor each other and effective strategies may then be shared across the building.

Continuing, *collective focus on student learning* refers to the importance that teachers pay sustained attention to students and students' learning. All teachers in a learning community believe that schoolchildren are capable of learning and provide the necessary techniques to ensure that this occurs. It is the teacher's moral obligation to possess the beliefs and values that support this condition passionately.

Lastly, *collaboration* is the most advanced form of cooperation and collegiality between teachers. The goal for all teachers should be one that involves co-development of curriculum, lessons, and instructional practices. This involves high levels of conversational discourse. Participants across all grade levels or content areas see themselves as contributing members of the team. It is both individual skills and group thought processes that move a school forward with its initiatives.

Circles of Support

In another major study, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) synthesized five years of research conducted by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools (CORS). They suggested administrators and others in schools are not doing enough to directly address the quality of student learning. Newmann and Wehlage wrote:

Student learning can meet high standards if educators and the public give three kinds of support: teachers who practice authentic pedagogy; schools that build organizational capacity by strengthening professional community; and external agencies and parents that support schools to achieve the high quality student learning. (p. 51)

According to Newmann and Wehlage, research has identified four “Circles of Support” that outline processes for increasing student learning. They are as follows: Student Learning; Authentic Pedagogy; School Organizational Capacity; and External Support.

The first circle, *Student Learning*, involves the use of effective current practices. Principals and teachers must focus curriculum, instruction, and assessment toward a common vision of improving student learning. *Authentic Pedagogy* involves teachers using techniques geared toward accomplishment of the vision. Successful teaching strategies require students to develop a deeper understanding of the content and be able to apply the concepts to relevant situations. The goal of *School Organizational Capacity* is to build the collective capacity of schools to work together as a team. According to Newmann and

Wehlage (1995), the most successful school administrators restructure their schools into professional learning communities. This type of school offered better pedagogy and was able to increase student learning. *External Support* is the fourth circle for increasing student learning. Many regulatory agencies, reformers, and community groups have direct influence on school governance. The schools that are successful have external support in the setting of high standards for learning, the increase of staff development opportunities, and the use of deregulation to increase school independence (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995).

Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement

The philosophy of PLCs gained momentum through the work of Shirley Hord and her associates at SEDL. From 1992 through 1995, these researchers followed the progress of an exceptional school where there was abundant learning among all students, teachers, and parents. To promote this school's learning model, Hord launched an inquiry entitled *Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* (Hord, 2004). She later named this field of research as PLCs.

After scrutinizing characteristics of the recognized school, as well as other schools with the same qualities, Hord (2004) identified five major themes. They are as follows: Supportive and Shared Leadership; Shared Values and Vision; Collective Learning and Application of that Learning; Supportive Conditions; and Shared Practice.

The first theme, *Supportive and Shared Leadership*, involves a process where the school principal shares leadership, power, and authority with the faculty and staff. The principal accomplishes this by soliciting the faculty's input and action with school-based decisions. *Shared Values and Vision* is the second theme and it refers to a full commitment to the importance of student learning by all stakeholders. All educators create and verbalize the message of this premise. The third theme refers to *Collective Learning and Application of the Learning*. This suggests how the staff is engaged in processes for seeking out new knowledge and skills to address student needs. Educators work collaboratively through reflective dialogue or inquiry. The next important theme is *Supportive Conditions*. This message encompasses the idea of having both physical and structural factors and human capacities to encourage collegiality and collective learning. *Shared Practice* is the final identified theme. This requires a review of a teacher's work by colleagues and then a sharing of feedback and assistance for instructional improvement. Hord (2004) stated that these dimensions are interwoven, not isolated, and affect each other in a variety of ways.

Professional Learning Community

Several additional researchers are recognized for promoting the philosophies of PLCs. DuFour, Eaker, and associates have defined a professional learning community as an:

Ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to

improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 11). Derived from earlier works in the field, DuFour and Eaker's model also takes on the name of *Professional Learning Communities*.

According to DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) the key characteristics of a PLC are: Shared Mission; Vision; Values and Goals--all focused on student learning; Collaborative Culture with a Focus on Learning; Collective Inquiry into Best Practice and Current Reality; Action Orientation: Learning by Doing; Commitment to Continuous Improvement; and, Results Orientation.

The first element of *Shared Mission, Vision, Values and Goals* focuses on the heart of a learning community. Educators place this commitment on learning for each student. To accomplish this goal, members of the PLC must be willing to create a clear and undeniable mission (purpose), vision statement (clear direction), and goals (indicators, timelines, and targets) of what they want to achieve. *A Collaborative Culture with a Focus on Learning* refers to the team acting as the driving force of the PLC effort. It is important that much collaboration occurs between team members and that they center on the right issues. According to DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010), teachers in a PLC work together collaboratively and interdependently to impact instruction that will lead to improved results for their students, team, and school.

The third area refers to *Collective Inquiry into Best Practice and Current Reality*. Three ideas for consideration to address this area are best instructional strategies, an honest review of current instructional techniques, and a truthful

examination of student progress. *Action Orientation: Learning by Doing* is the fourth principle. This requires teams to take immediate actions to accomplish their visions. Principals and teachers may need to move out of a comfort zone and do things differently to achieve better results. The next element of a PLC is a commitment to continuous learning. Members of a PLC are not content with the status quo but are constantly looking for better methods to improve learning for all. This includes developing effective instructional strategies and gathering verification of student learning. The final characteristic is one of *Results Orientation*. Instructors must not judge students by instructional intentions but instead use real evidence through assessments of learning and progress.

Educational Leadership Initiative

The final section of this literature review centers on a project that was developed by experts in Western Pennsylvania using the best and latest research for influencing student achievement in schools. Located at the University of Pittsburgh, key developers, Wallace, Goodwin, Graf, and Werlinich formed Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI) to bring superintendents, principals, and teacher leaders together to share a common vision, focus, and goals. They identified a need in the lack of comprehensive, coordinated leadership that enables superintendents, principals, and teachers to focus on instructional priorities together. "The Western Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI) is a comprehensive, integrated program of professional development designed to enhance the leadership skills of district participants in order to improve student learning in the region" (Wallace,

Goodwin, Graf, & Werlinich, 2005, p. 1). The vision of the Western Pennsylvania ELI is to promote significant change in the cultural and operational systems of participating schools. This initiative is a systems approach to improving teaching and learning. According to the current co-directors, ELI is not a program, but a way of thinking and operating that supports our local school districts (Swenson & Longo, 2007).

In August 2006, ELI founders invited a cohort of nine schools to join in the pilot phase. They selected schools based upon geographic distribution in Western Pennsylvania, variation in district size, variation in district socio-economic status, and variation in district racial and ethnic student populations. The founders balanced the cohort group according to their geographic location of being rural, suburban, or urban districts with the inclusion of “at-risk” school districts. Additional selection criteria included the districts’ readiness to change, record of professional development that supports learning, evidence of risk taking, and willingness of the board of education and superintendent to commit time and resources. At the conclusion of the pilot year, seven of the nine initial school districts continued their participation in ELI with several more joining in thereafter. During the 2009 school year, 18 districts participated in this endeavor.

District teams including superintendents, central office personnel, principals, and teacher leaders meet for professional development with ELI leaders and other professionals from universities. They work on constructing a school culture that focuses on student learning and builds on a foundation of

shared leadership. Through open dialogue and planning vertical leadership, teams learn from others and then implement data-informed problem solving and decision making to improve learning.

To further accentuate this process within the home districts, the vertical ELI teams build sustainability and capacity by introducing newly acquired skills to other district personnel. ELI accentuates this process by continuing to provide support to the vertical teams through an assignment of a Colleague in Residence (CIR) to work on site at the schools. The CIRs are university professors, retired superintendents, administrators, and supervisors who are experts in this field of study. They act as consultants and liaisons with the schools to provide resources and information as necessary. The CIRs assess the progress of the ELI schools through the use of a CLIFSS rubric. The attributes of this rubric include Culture, Leadership, Instruction, Focus, Systems, and Students (CLIFSS). Each area is scored and discussed with other CIRs noting what area each school district can celebrate as well as what barriers need to be overcome.

ELI leaders strongly believe that educational leaders are actively engaged in the learning process by establishing three focus areas including authentic pedagogy, data-based instructional leadership, and vision-based organizational leadership. Regarding authentic pedagogy, leaders must create a sense of urgency about teaching and learning, acquire a deep knowledge of curricular approaches, and actively disseminate best practices to their teachers. Concerning data, educators must use it to inform decision-making. They must train faculty to analyze data and successfully implement strategies that will

improve teaching and learning. The third focus area deals with effective organizational leadership that establishes strong values and vision for student learning. Organizational leaders set clear standards of behavior. They successfully motivate the staff around effective researched-based initiatives.

ELI is funded through the Grable Foundation, The Heinz Endowments, and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. In addition, each school pays their fair share of \$10,000 annually to participate.

As outlined in this study, the philosophies of ELI align closely with the principles of professional learning communities. The professional development that the ELI schools receive falls under the umbrella of what is needed to become a professional learning community. For many of the ELI schools, principals use walkthroughs to promote student learning and academic growth.

Summary

The purpose for this literature review was to thoroughly examine past and current research on supervisory and organizational theory. At this time, there is a gap between specific strategies that are currently mandated in schools involving observations and evaluations of teachers and how this time can be structured to build professional learning communities. As outlined in this chapter, research shows that the effects of classroom teachers' performance greatly impacts students' learning. It is a major responsibility of all administrators to ensure that highly effective teachers are instructing all students.

To monitor instruction, many principals use walkthrough observations as part of their tool-bag for observing student learning. Walkthroughs may provide a

process for learning more about what is occurring in the classrooms. They can be used to help focus teachers on the academic rigor of student work and the learning process. The walkthrough may also help to tear down barriers of classroom and school isolation that have permeated schools for many decades. Principals may use walkthroughs to validate effective practices.

As principals use walkthroughs to observe instruction, they may also directly or indirectly use this tool to expand another major development that researchers have proven to be effective for increasing student achievement-- Professional Learning Communities. The idea of PLCs has grown in popularity as leading reform movements in our schools. A synthesis of research on PLCs shows that there is a common vision of ensuring achievement for all students, collaborative teaming, multiple uses of data, active participation of community, and sustainable leadership capacity. This researcher sought to identify specific walkthrough strategies and instructional practices that were currently being used in selected schools and how they align with PLCs. Information gleaned from schools' participating in ELI was sought to identify both successful and unsuccessful techniques gathered from their participation in this initiative

To understand the research behind this study, this chapter began with an historical perspective on supervisory practices. This researcher then presented information on clinical supervision, differentiated supervision, and evaluations. Much research was obtained on the various models of walkthrough observations that are currently being used in our schools today. The focus of the literature review then shifted to descriptions of learning organizations and learning

communities. Chapter II closed with an overview of Western Pennsylvania Educational Leadership Initiative. This researcher outlined specific research methodology for how walkthrough observations may influence the development of Professional Learning Communities in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

“The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability for school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. xi).

Introduction

School administrators continue to investigate and develop techniques to improve educational practices. As research has shown, the use of walkthrough observations has proven to be an effective tool for increasing student achievement (Keruskin, 2005; Rossi, 2007). Furthermore, leading researchers and practitioners have reported that optimal learning occurs within school buildings that work extensively to build professional learning communities (Blankstein, 2010; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1996; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Elmore, 2002; Fullan, 2003b; Hord, 2004; Lezotte, 1991; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Roberts & Pruitt 2003; Schmoker, 2006; Senge, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007;). This qualitative multiple-case study examined the principal's use of walkthrough observations and how they influenced the development of professional learning communities.

The information in Chapter III describes the methodology utilized in this study. Included is the Statement of the Problem, Research Questions, and Research Design. Additionally, this researcher provides a plan for data collection and a description of strategies for data analysis.

Statement of the Problem

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed the federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB). The four pillars of NCLB include stronger accountability for results, more freedom for states and communities, proven education methods, and more choices for parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Under NCLB, all students will obtain proficiency or better in reading and mathematics by 2013-2014. This is the first time in our nation's history that every child regardless of race or economic background will be assessed for academic proficiency. Therefore, all students will be required to learn to high standards, while attending high quality schools. Darling-Hammond (1996) addressed this situation by stating that schools must not only offer an education but they must ensure learning.

The problem that served as the foundation of this research study was the need to examine supervisory practice for improving organizational learning in our schools. There is a void in research showing how specific supervisory strategies may benefit the development of professional learning communities. Currently, research exists for the identification, usage, and value of a variety of supervisory models. More than ever, effective leadership continues to be a factor that is very important for increasing student learning. According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) leadership is second only to teaching for making a difference in student achievement and leadership effects are greatest in schools where they are needed the most. In addition to effective leadership and supervision, there is also a growing body of knowledge regarding important

correlates for PLCs. Practitioners need studies to identify specific supervisory strategies that align with or develop identified correlates of PLCs. Consequently, researchers and practitioners may then look deeper at the identified strategies and draw implications regarding best practices. These best practices will hopefully increase student achievement and help school districts meet the demands of NCLB.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the direction of this study are as follows:

1. What consistent walkthrough observation procedures do principals and teachers currently use in their schools?
2. What principles of Professional Learning Communities are evident in the four schools?
3. How do identified walkthrough procedures align with the six principles of Professional Learning Communities?
4. How are individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in Educational Leadership Initiative?

Research Design

This study examined the use of walkthrough observations by school principals and teachers, and their influence on PLCs. This researcher used qualitative methodology to gain a more in-depth and interpersonal response to the research questions. Merriam (1998) stated, “qualitative researchers are

interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p.

6). Creswell (1998) defined qualitative research as:

An inquiry process of understanding based on the distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Patton (1995) posited:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting. (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 6)

Based upon the intent of the project, this researcher used a qualitative multiple-case study design. Through classification and comparison, this researcher studied principals' use of walkthrough observations in four schools and their emerging themes for developing professional learning communities. This process enabled the researcher to examine and compare several different cases or sub-cases. According to Merriam (1998), the case study offered researchers methodology for studying complex social issues in order to understand a phenomenon. Furthermore, Yin (2003) stated that multiple-case designs may be preferred over single-case designs due to the possibility of direct

replication, or even the possibility of varied circumstances that may eventually lead to common conclusions. This in turn expanded the external generalizability of the findings. Merriam (1998) concurred that the analysis of data from several cases can lead to categories or themes from all cases or the building of in-depth theory offering an integrated framework from all cases.

In-depth interviewing was the main tool used to gather information for this study. According to Merriam (1998), interviewing is the most common means of collecting qualitative data and the most common form of interviewing is a person-to-person encounter. Patton (1990) stated, "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone's mind" (p. 278). The type of interview used depends upon the amount of structure warranted. A highly structured interview contains predetermined questions somewhat in the form of an oral survey. An unstructured interview is the opposite. This is based upon open-ended questions or more of a conversation. For this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of the participants' perceptions of the walkthrough process and professional learning communities. Merriam (1998) cited that semi-structured interviews contain a mix of more and less structured questions. This researcher prepared interview questions that promoted both structured inquiry and continuing conversations. At times this researcher took the liberty to ask follow-up questions for further clarification. This study was composed of individual interviews with superintendents and principals. Additionally, several teachers were interviewed together in focus groups. Focus group participants were selected based on principal recommendation. Each

principal provided five or six names of teachers. In schools that were not participating in ELI, principals selected their teacher leaders. Participation was voluntary. The interview process, including the collection of data, was the same for each of the four school districts. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes to complete. This researcher provided participants with general information about the types of questions, but did not give the exact questions in advance of the interview. The researcher held the interview in a location of the interviewee's choosing. With permission, the interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. Throughout the interview process, the researcher took notes of any peculiarities and emotional responses that occurred during the questioning. During the analysis of the data, this researcher noted consistencies and discrepancies between all interviewees, and the data were reviewed, categorized, and appropriately coded. According to Stake (1995), "perhaps the most important thing to insist on is ample time and space immediately following the interview to prepare the facsimile and interpretive commentary" (p. 66).

To continue, this researcher used observations as an additional tool for data collection. This included an opportunity to observe a principal and teachers during a walkthrough observation. Aligned with the procedures of the Walkthrough Observation Tool as outlined by Graf and Werlinich (2002), this researcher identified elements of effective instruction including the instructional focus and look-fors that were being used by the teachers during their lesson. Information was obtained on how the principal gathered the data and documented it for reporting back to the teachers. Several examples of

instructional strategies that were noted included the level of active engagement of students, use of formative assessments and level of academic rigor. At the conclusion of the walkthrough observations, this researcher met with the principals to compare notes of what was observed and further validate effective practices. Of particular importance were annotations of the physical environment, teachers' behaviors, students' interactions, and classroom artifacts. This researcher's approach is supported by Patton (1990) who stated, "naturalistic inquiry is studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; non-manipulative, unobtrusive, and non-controlling; openness to whatever emerges—lack or predetermined constraints on outcomes" (p. 40).

Additional sources of evidence included documents and other artifacts that the principal shared with the faculty about the walkthrough process or learning communities. Items included letters, memoranda, agendas, minutes of meetings, written reports, and mission statements. According to Yin (2003), these written documents corroborate and augment all other sources of evidence.

Sample Selection

This researcher used purposive sampling for this study. To select schools for this study, this researcher asked three experts for assistance. This researcher contacted Otto Graf and Joe Werlinich from the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania and John Lozosky from the Educational Leadership Institute to determine which schools were currently using the Principals Academy Walkthrough Tool and were also members of ELI. This researcher chose three public schools and one public charter school from the suburbs of Western

Pennsylvania to participate in this study. Two of the schools were participating in ELI and the other two schools were not members of ELI. The schools that were not part of ELI were chosen because of their intensive use of walkthrough observations utilizing the protocols from the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania. This researcher's school is a member of ELI. Due to the possibility of bias, this researcher's school was used only during the pilot study of this research and was not a part of the formal study. The names of the schools and participants remained confidential, thereby protecting the privacy of the participants. This was accomplished by providing pseudo names for each school and all of the participants.

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, this researcher sought verbal permission to begin research in the school districts with each superintendent. After receiving verbal permission, a follow-up letter of consent was sent to each superintendent and principal. Additional letters were provided for each principal to distribute to possible teacher participants. In addition to inviting administrators and teachers to participate in the study, the letter explained the project's purpose, provided information about participation, and IRB policies (See Appendix A). A self-addressed stamped envelope was included in each packet for the return of the Informed Consent Forms.

The interview sample included teachers and administrators from the four selected schools. This researcher interviewed the district superintendent/assistant superintendent, and building principal individually.

Furthermore, two to six teachers from each of the four schools were interviewed in a group setting as part of a focus group interview. Only core subject classroom teachers who have a homeroom and who provided instruction to a group of students were included in the study. Special area teachers such as music, art, library, or physical education teachers were not interviewed. In addition, this researcher did not include Title I, resource, counselors, psychologists, and school nurses as part of this research.

School Demographics

The four suburban school districts that participated in this study are located in Allegheny and Westmoreland counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania. The four elementary schools all made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for the 2010–2011 school year according to the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Table 2 outlines demographic information for the four schools that are included in this study.

Table 2

Demographic Data of Participating Schools

Enrollment Characteristics of Students	Green Valley	Blue Mountain	Red River	Oak Ridge
Total Number of Students	340	520	285	389
Grades	K – 5	K – 4	4 – 5	K – 8
Classroom Teachers (FTE)	24.75	33.53	12	26.50

Table 2 (continued)

Demographic Data of Participating Schools

Enrollment Characteristics of Students	Green Valley	Blue Mountain	Red River	Oak Ridge
Student/Teacher Ratio	13.74	15.51	23.75	14.68
American Indian	3	5	1	3
Asian/Pacific Islander	1	46	5	1
Black	19	5	4	133
Hispanic	1	8	3	2
White	316	448	265	214
Male	171	267	139	179
Female	169	245	147	174
Free Lunch	119	15	78	205
Reduced Priced Lunch	35	2		19
Economically Disadvantaged Percentage Rates	45.3%	3.3%	24.3%	57.6%
Charter	No	No	No	Yes
Magnet	No	No	No	No

Table 2 (continued)

Demographic Data of Participating Schools

Enrollment Characteristics of Students	Green Valley	Blue Mountain	Red River	Oak Ridge
Title I	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Title I Schoolwide	Yes	No	No	Yes

Framework for Coding the Data

In his book, *Failure is not an Option*, Blankstein (2010) synthesized the recent research on PLC and research on effective schools. Based upon his findings, he developed six principles, which encompass the essence of PLCs.

They are as follows:

- Principle 1 - Common mission, vision, values and goals;
- Principle 2 - Ensuring achievement for all students: creating systems for prevention and intervention;
- Principle 3 - Collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning;
- Principle 4 - Using data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement;
- Principle 5 - Gaining active engagement from family and community; and,
- Principle 6 - Building sustainable leadership capacity.

The first principle focuses on the establishment of a school culture that writes and verbalizes a *Common Mission, Vision, Values and Goals* statement.

The school vision is grown from members of the school community using their best thinking and beliefs.

The second principle, *Ensuring Achievement for all Students: Creating Systems for Prevention and Intervention*, deals with the concept of learning for all. According to Blankstein (2010) educators accomplish this by looking at three major aspects for ensuring success: school's belief system; overarching philosophy; and, comprehensive systems.

Principle three is *Collaborative Teaming Focused on Teaching for Learning*. In this type of school culture, the teachers meet to assess students' progress and to develop strategies for their improvement. Blankstein (2010) stated "Collaboration among colleagues is a means to an end: enhancing teaching for learning" (p. 147). Teachers may collaborate in a variety of ways including, professional practice forums, classroom observations, curriculum planning, vertical teams, professional study groups, grade-level or subject-area teams, interdisciplinary teams, task forces, and teaching strategy or professional learning teams.

The fourth principle is *Using Data to Guide Decision Making and Continuous Improvement*. Implementing valuable assessment procedures, then analyzing and effectively using the data are key to increasing student achievement. Data should be used to drive decisions, set goals, target interventions, support change, monitor progress, and guide professional development.

Gaining Active Engagement from Family and Community is the next principle. In a professional learning community, some schools address the gap between parents and teachers by being empathetic toward parents, recognizing shared interests, involving families in a variety of activities, offering valuable outreach programs, and opening strong channels of communications.

The sixth and final principle is *Building Sustainable Leadership Capacity*. It has been discovered that a majority of the principles focus on student learning and collaboration. However, the building of a sustainable organization is equally important. Blankstein (2010) wrote, “Leadership, Capacity and Sustainability are words that emphasize the importance of continually developing the human resources of the school community so that success lasts well beyond the initial implementation of school improvement efforts” (p. 208).

Information from each interview was organized, categorized, and coded using Blankstein’s (2010) six principles. This researcher analyzed interview responses based upon the use of the Walkthrough Observation Tool to decipher how walkthroughs influence the building of PLCs. Additional information from the observations, artifacts, and written documents were sorted and coded according to their emerging themes and patterns. This researcher then compared and classified the data with the information from the interviews.

Purpose of Interview Questions

This researcher designed the interview questions for this study to find out how walkthroughs influence the development of professional learning

communities. Blankstein's (2010) six principles, which encompass the essence of professional learning communities were used as a framework to code the data.

Interview Questions for Superintendents and Principals

1. How many years has your school participated in ELI?
2. What is the purpose of your district joining ELI? Who are the team members from your district and how were they selected?
3. What are your ELI goals or focus areas and how is progress measured in achieving those goals?
4. How has your team benefitted from working with teams from other school districts?
5. When did the walkthrough process begin in your district and how was it initiated? How were you trained in this process?
6. When completing walkthroughs, what are the objectives and look-fors?
7. What are the specific steps and procedures that administrators and teachers use to complete the walkthrough process?
8. How do you provide feedback to the teachers after completing a walkthrough?
9. What is your understanding of a professional learning community and how does your school meet this criterion?
10. How, and in what capacity, do walkthrough observations affect the development of professional learning communities?
11. How does the walkthrough promote or not promote the mission, vision, values, or goals of your school?

12. How, and in what way, does the walkthrough process affect collaborative teaming in your school?
13. Focusing on prevention and intervention strategies, how and in what ways does your school ensure learning for all and are walkthroughs an important part of this process?
14. How do walkthroughs influence the use of data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement?
15. Do walkthroughs help gain active engagement from family and community and, if so, how does this occur?
16. How, and in what way, do walkthroughs help to build sustainable leadership capacity?
17. What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of other teachers in your school and how is this scheduled or organized?
18. What are your overall perceptions of the value of the walkthrough process?
19. What have you observed or been made aware of concerning the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best classroom practices and student performance? Please elaborate on specific examples.
20. Has ELI helped to promote the use of walkthroughs in your district/school? If so, how?
21. Has ELI helped to promote the building of professional learning communities in your district/school? If so, how?

22. If a colleague was considering and asking you for advice on the development of professional learning communities and the use of walkthroughs in his or her school district, how would you respond?

In addition to the above interview questions, the researcher asked the superintendents/ principals the following questions:

- Describe your current position in the district.
- Describe the size, location, and population of your district/school.

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. When did you join ELI? How many years has your school participated in ELI?
2. What is the purpose of your district joining ELI? Who are the team members from your district and how were they selected?
3. What are your ELI goals or focus areas and how is progress measured in achieving those goals?
4. How has your team benefitted from working with teams from other school districts?
5. When did the walkthrough process begin in your school and how was it initiated? How were you trained in this process?
6. When walkthroughs are completed, what are the objectives and look-fors?
7. What are the specific steps and procedures that administrators and teachers use to complete the walkthrough process?

8. After being observed during a walkthrough, how are you provided feedback?
9. What is your understanding of a professional learning community and how does your school meet this criterion?
10. How, and in what capacity, do walkthrough observations affect the development of professional learning communities?
11. How does the walkthrough promote or not promote the mission, vision, values, or goals of your school?
12. How, and in what way, does the walkthrough process affect collaborative teaming in your school?
13. Focusing on prevention and intervention strategies, how and in what ways does your school ensure learning for all and are walkthroughs an important part of this process?
14. How do walkthroughs influence the use of data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement?
15. Do walkthroughs help gain active engagement from family and community, and if so, how does this occur?
16. How, and in what way, do walkthroughs help to build sustainable leadership capacity?
17. What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of other teachers in your school?
18. What are your overall perceptions of the value of the walkthrough process?

19. What have you observed or been made aware of concerning the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best classroom practices and student performance? Please elaborate on specific examples.
20. Has ELI helped to promote the use of walkthroughs in your district/school? If so, how?
21. Has ELI helped to promote the building of professional learning communities in your district/school? If so, how?
22. If a colleague was considering and asking you for advice on the development of professional learning communities and the use of walkthroughs in his or her school district, how would you respond?

In addition to the above interview questions, the researcher asked the teachers to describe general information of the district as follows:

- Describe your current position in the district
- Describe the size, location, and population of your district/school.

Table 3

Matrix of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions Superintendents Principals	Interview Questions Teachers
What consistent walkthrough observation procedures do principals and teachers currently use in their schools?	Interview Questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18	Interview Questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, 18

Table 3 (continued)

Matrix of Research Questions to Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions Superintendents Principals	Interview Questions Teachers
What principles of professional learning communities are evident in the four schools?	Interview Questions 9, 10, 19	Interview Questions 9, 10, 19
How do identified walkthrough strategies directly align with the six principles of professional learning communities?	Interview Questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22	Interview Questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 22
How are individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in the Educational Leadership Initiative	Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 20, 21	Interview Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 20, 21

Validity and Reliability

As with any research project, investigators want to contribute data that is believable and trustworthy. Qualitative researchers employ a variety of means to address issues of verification. According to Merriam (1998), researchers may use six different strategies to enhance internal validity: triangulation; member checks; long-term observation; peer examination; participatory or collaborative models of research; and, researcher’s bias. Reliability denotes the magnitude that the researcher can replicate the findings. It is challenging in the social sciences because human behavior is never static. The research data for this

study included case study notes, documents, tabular material, and narratives. This researcher maintained a chain of evidence, or audit trail, during the duration of the project. A major strength of case study data collection and analysis involves the use of multiple sources of evidence. Yin (2003) stated, "The most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry" (p. 98).

The first technique this researcher used to address concerns of validity was the development and implementation of a pilot study. This researcher's own school district was used to pilot the interview questions of this study. Participants of this school were selected because the district was an active member of ELI and the assistant principal was trained using the Walkthrough Observation Tool from the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania. To begin this process, this researcher developed a matrix of interview questions and determined their alignment to the research questions. Interviews were held with the superintendent (retired), assistant principal, and a focus group of teachers. Using a recording device, this researcher typed all transcripts from the interviews. After analyzing the results, this researcher expanded upon questions that resulted in yes or no answers or did not solicit information related to the research questions. Questions that were ambiguous were also eliminated. To further increase validity, this researcher was also trained thoroughly by Otto Graf and Joseph Werlinich on the Walkthrough Observation Tool and is currently using it on a regular basis within his own elementary school.

Furthermore, this researcher used member checks. After each interview, this researcher provided participants with written transcripts of their answers to the interview questions. Notable changes brought to the researcher's attention by participants were made in the transcripts to ensure accuracy and the true intentions of answers. This process continued throughout the study.

The next technique was to address the issue of researcher's bias. One way the researcher accomplished this was by excluding his school district from the study. Additionally, this researcher was open to contrary findings and preliminary results were reviewed with experts in this subject area.

In qualitative research, a common concern deals with the trustworthiness of the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) clarified this by asking, "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (p. 290)? They proposed that researchers in naturalistic inquiry use the terms credibility (in place of validity), transferability (in place of external validity), dependability (in place of reliability), and confirmability (in place of objectivity). This researcher used peer examination to establish credibility, research bias and thick descriptions to facilitate transferability, and a case study database while maintaining a strong chain of evidence to ensure dependability and confirmability.

Expert Panel

Along with the dissertation committee, this researcher shared information of this study with retired superintendents John Lozosky and Anthony Skender. Both of these professionals were active participants in ELI and were also

involved with the use of walkthrough observations. After these experts reviewed the material, this researcher absorbed their suggestions into this study and was better able to understand the walkthrough process, PLCs, and philosophy of ELI. In addition to the pilot study, their review of the research questions and study further helped to validate the process.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Merriam (1998) wrote, “Data analysis is a complex process that involves moving back and forth between concrete bits of data and abstract concepts, between inductive and deductive, between description and interpretation” (p. 178). This researcher conducted data analysis simultaneously with data collection in this qualitative study. In 1995, Stake conveyed that the importance of analysis is to understand the behaviors, concerns, and circumstances concerning one particular case (Merriam, 1998). This researcher identified the meaning of each exposed pattern or data.

This study utilized a qualitative approach to data analysis. It provides readers with an in-depth description of walkthrough observations and how the process influenced the development of professional learning communities.

Since this was a multiple-case study, this researcher used two frameworks for analysis. The first was completion of within-case analysis followed by a cross-case analysis. The within-in case analysis was considered an individual case. According to Yin (2003), multiple-case studies should follow logic of replication. This technique is analogous to how individuals replicate scientific experiments to duplicate significant findings.

For both types of analyses, this researcher developed a case record. Patton (1990) stated, "The case record pulls together and organizes the voluminous case into a comprehensive, primary resource package" (p. 387). The case record contains a compilation of all collected information from each case individually and then across all cases. The written report contains descriptions of the schools, walkthrough processes, information on PLCs and ELI. The case record is a tool to help code data, identify themes, and answer the research questions.

In completing this process, the first step was to transcribe the responses of each interviewee from the recorded interview sessions. This researcher gave the transcription to each interviewee to review and confirm the accuracy of their responses. Information was added or removed from the report to make it as accurate as possible. The researcher used the constant comparative method to analyze the data. This method, as developed in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss is still used for developing grounded theory (Merriam, 1998). Grounded theory is the categories, properties, and hypotheses that are the conceptual links between the identified groups or categories of data. This comparative analysis began with a breakdown of the information from the first transcribed interview. The researcher identified phrases that were reflective of the like behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, and events. The researcher compared these incidents with different incidents from the same interview or from other interviews. As this process continued, categories and themes eventually emerged. This procedure

continued until the researcher reviewed all transcripts, notes from the observations, documents, and artifacts.

The last information this researcher used to complete the research was an examination of written documents and artifacts from the schools, e.g., handouts, student writing, rubrics, projects, descriptors, meeting agendas. According to Merriam (1998), content analysis is the method for analyzing written correspondence and other written documents. The researcher reviewed all information, checking to see if it was relevant to the study. Yin wrote, “The most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (2003, p. 87).

The case study summary report and data therein were presented to explain all collected data and to answer each of the four research questions. The information in the summary report represented both the individual cases as well as a cross-case analysis of the multiple cases. For each individual case, this researcher explained the derivation of all data. Furthermore, across all four cases, the extent of replication logic with descriptions of the results was also portrayed. This researcher coded all responses to protect the privacy of the participants. Where applicable, a matrix was provided to visually show the data and the patterns that emerged from the different cases.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher outlined procedures for the research design, research site, and instrument as well as strategies for data analysis. As shown in the research design, the intent of this study was to examine

walkthrough observations and their impact on PLCs. The researcher acquired data from individual interviews, observations, and artifacts. In Chapter IV, the findings of this study are presented.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

“The basic role of the leader is to foster mutual respect and build a complementary team where each strength is made productive and each weakness made irrelevant” (Covey, 2003, p. 246).

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the walkthrough process used in four elementary schools and to identify if this observational tool directly or indirectly influenced the development of professional learning communities. Currently, research on the methodology and usage of walkthroughs in schools exists. In addition, there is an abundance of information on professional learning communities. However, there is little research, if any, on how or if walkthrough observations impact the development of professional learning communities. The following research questions were used to guide this researcher throughout the study:

1. What consistent walkthrough observation procedures do principals and teachers currently use in their schools?
2. What principles of Professional Learning Communities are evident in the four schools?
3. How do identified walkthrough procedures align with the six principles of Professional Learning Communities?

4. How are individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in Educational Leadership Initiative?

In this chapter, data on walkthrough observations and professional learning communities are presented by each of the four schools through participants' answers to interview questions and their alignment with one of the four research questions. This researcher also identified emerging themes from a cross-case analysis of the responses from the respondents of the four schools. To protect their confidentiality, pseudonyms or job titles were used to identify all participants and the names of school districts. The following schools and individuals participated in the interview process:

Green Valley Elementary School

Assistant Superintendent—Thomas

Principal—Brian

Teacher Focus Group

Blue Mountain Elementary School

Assistant Superintendent—Susan

Principal—Mike

Teacher Focus Group

Red River Elementary School

Superintendent—Megan

Principal—Amanda

Principal—Gary

Teacher Focus Group

Oak Ridge Elementary

Assistant Superintendent—Tammy

Principal—Jason

Teacher Focus Group

Interview Responses Relative to Research Question 1

The first research question focuses on the specific walkthrough procedures that each of the administrators and teachers use in their school. The purpose for this question was to identify the philosophy, development, nature, and magnitude of the process. To help answer this first research question, superintendents, principals, and teachers were asked interview questions numbered 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18. All interview questions may be found in Chapter III of this document.

Green Valley Elementary School

Interview Question 5

When did the walkthrough process begin in your school and how was it initiated? How were you trained in the process?

Thomas, the assistant superintendent, reported that the current walkthrough being used in their district began several years ago. His response was as follows:

It truly started three years ago when the superintendent and I arrived at Green Valley. They had a walkthrough form before, but they were looking for about 30 items. There was no focus. By working with the principals,

they went to the staff and asked what should we see in every class period. What does good instruction look like? From the list generated by these questions, we picked three items to focus on. That is how the process started. The teachers bought into the walkthrough process because they created the first form.

Brian, the elementary principal, reported that there was a walkthrough process in place when he started working in the district. However, that earlier model was not very effective. He felt that the walkthrough process began when Dr. Graf, co-creator of procedures used in the population of researched sites, and Thomas planned and began implementing the current model. Through professional development, they worked with the faculty on changing their mindset for what they were looking for in the classrooms. Brian reported:

I went head to head with Thomas on this many times. I used to believe that if I had a teacher who was having a problem with classroom management then I would look at classroom management during the walkthrough. If it was broken then I needed to fix it. However, Thomas stated that we would not learn anything. I had to change my mindset because that type of thinking never fixed anything. We talked and learned from them but we did not fix anything. Thomas and the superintendent came up three times a year and we all did walkthroughs together and then we talked about what we learned. At the end of the year we then had an idea of what we needed to work on the following year.

The six teachers from the focus group claimed the walkthrough process began when Brian came to the building. They said it was explained to them during a faculty meeting. One teacher elaborated more specifically as follows:

When I came to the building I had to ask others about them. We call them drive-byes. I get nervous when Brian first walks into the room. I get nervous but then I really don't mind it. If it were 20 years ago, I would have said the same thing but now as long as you are doing what you are supposed to be doing it is not a big deal. I am teaching kindergarten so after they all say hello it is fine after that. If it is a day where we are doing something difficult, it is more of an interruption than anything else.

Interview Question 6

When completing walkthroughs, what are the objectives and look-fors?

During my discussion with Thomas, he stated the look-fors should be something that we should see in the classrooms everyday. The average and below average teachers will try to avoid this and hide from the process. Thomas felt the look-fors should be something that you want more or less of in the classrooms. At the elementary school, it was decided that they needed more formative assessments. They needed to get the students more actively engaged. Thomas reported that there are students who can hide and become invisible in the classrooms. Thomas responded with the following information about establishing look-fors:

It is defined. We get the teachers involved so there is no doubt. We get the teacher leaders involved and they define their walkthrough or focus for

that year. The superintendent and I push our principals and we ask them how can we take this walkthrough to another level. We just do not want to do walkthroughs just to do walkthroughs. We really want to change the instruction in those classrooms and more student engagement. During our last in-service we had teachers talk about formative assessments. The teachers had to rank order their formative assessments that they know and don't know and to pick the bottom five. We then asked them to pick three of the bottom five that they have to use sometime within the next two weeks to try in the classrooms. It will be on a walkthrough form. It is a laser-like focus. It is all tied together from our professional development to the walkthrough. I can't stress this enough. From our walkthrough, the professional development conversations we are having with teachers are all intertwined.

Brian responded to this question in a similar fashion to what Thomas reported. Brian said they changed their form this year to focus more on formative assessments. He elaborated as follows:

The reason we have this form is because the use of formative assessments was our goal for the year. We want our teachers to use more formative assessments. I could have a form that I would document any formative assessment seen by me in the classrooms. By using that type of form, they are not going to learn anything else. Guess what type of formative assessment I will see? It is the same as last time. They are not going to change their formative assessment if it is one they are used to

and they like. By me forcing them to use different types of formative assessments they will learn different formative assessments throughout the year. By the end of the year they will learn twelve different assessments. Elementary teachers do this the best. They are wonderful at this. It is like taking the temperature of their room. High School teachers struggle with this the most. Back and forth exit slips, three sentence wrap-ups, red cards and yellow cards, thumbs up and thumbs down are what we are using in the elementary schools. I could have a form that does not have any specific type of formative assessments but then I will see the same ones over and over again. Formative assessments were our goal for the year. This form will permit me to see different ones throughout the year.

Brian reported that they now have a template of their observation form on an iPad. He placed the teachers' names into the document. Through the use of this walkthrough application, he will monitor active engagement of all students and the use of formative assessments. Brian stressed the importance of changing the look-fors every nine weeks so additional learning will occur among the teachers throughout the year. Brian referred to Otto Graf's belief that the look-fors must have a laser-like focus.

The teachers indicated that the focus this year is on formative assessments. A summary of their response is as follows:

This time he gave us three specific formative assessments that we can use and he hopes that he will see them when he comes in. He wants to

see those strategies when he comes into the room. Using the whiteboards in the classroom, air write it, mouth it or say it in the primary school are some of our look-fors. Another one is using red, yellow or green cards to show back their understanding. In the intermediate grades they use cards. They also use one that contains three sentences like an exit slip. Last year the big thing was looking for the learning targets which basically is the objective or anchor. We were supposed to have them on the board. Now if he was coming in for a formal observation he would see these things but it is hit or miss during the walkthroughs. You are going to maybe see me doing that depending on when they occur during the day. That is why they make me sweat. How many students are on target and how many students are off-task is included in the walkthrough. By looking at the students he is going to make that decision. We each have had a formal and a walkthrough observation.

Interview Question 7

What are the specific steps and procedures that administrators and teachers use to complete the walkthrough process?

In addition to his views and expectations for how the building principals need to complete walkthroughs, Thomas explained his thoughts on being a central office person who observes teachers. An overall summary of his response is as follows:

The principals decide when they want to go into the classrooms. They go in and look for the focus points of the walkthrough form and I expect them

to send that email (feedback) before they leave the classroom. We have to model this behavior with immediate feedback. Teachers look for that. It is not just the principal but it is the superintendent and the assistant superintendent who are also doing walkthroughs. I think it makes some people nervous, but it got the teachers to a culture that they understand where we are. The teachers have made the comments that the superintendent and I are here to improve instruction. We don't evaluate teachers because that is the principal's job. We are going to be directing the principal. We did 26 walkthroughs last Monday. We scared a few people. You have to watch how that is perceived by, not just the teachers, but to the board and community at large. It is different when you are a high school administrator. When you are a district office administrator and you go on walkthroughs, some people may perceive that in different ways. We are going in because we are instructional leaders and we want to see what is going on in the classrooms. We don't want the perception to be that the schools are weak and that the principals are not doing their job, that you're intimidating staff because board members hired a lot of the teachers. That is the dimension of this job that there are all of these other things. That is the nature of this job. That does not mean that you can't take the high road. We don't let that stuff keep bothering us.

For this question, Brian reiterated the point that he checks the boxes on the electronic template and then immediately sends the completed document to the teacher, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. He claims that the

only time that he talks with the teacher is when he sees something that he is not happy about. Brian shared the following information:

No news is good news. I saw one teacher at 9:45 and it was already play time. So I talked to her about it and I said what are you doing? I came back later and completed another lesson and it was fabulous. I did one hundred sixty observations last year. They consisted of two observations on every teacher and at least three to four walkthroughs every year. The system is very efficient. What is funny is that they will come to me and say I just want you know that this is what I was doing. Did I come to you? No, so it was not a problem. I will also use it for data that I will use later when I complete my formal observations. The formal observations are at least 40 minutes. It depends on the grade level and what the teachers are doing. Sometimes we do back to back observations. It is very enlightening. It is the same lesson and same subject. By doing this, it answers the question about where they were going with that concept. Go the next day and observe again. I want to see your math lesson today and then come back again tomorrow. This is good especially for your new people. What did you do for the five kids who did not get it? It is really powerful. I love it.

The teachers reported that the principal brings his laptop into the classrooms to complete the observations. He then places the completed forms into their mailboxes. When asked about teachers participating in walkthroughs, they stated that they did not do walkthroughs but participated in observations of

other teachers in their classrooms. When asked if they would be interested in doing walkthroughs, they responded by saying “yes” but only if they had more time. If they were provided subs, they would certainly like to participate in walkthroughs in their building.

Interview Question 8

How do you provide feedback to the teachers after completing a walkthrough? (Superintendents and Principals)

The assistant superintendent indicated that this is done right away. He stated that many times the teachers would email him soon after the observation asking him about what was reported on the walkthrough form.

Brian proclaimed that feedback was given immediately using the iPad application after finishing the observation. He again stated that if he does not speak to the teacher there was not a problem. However, if there were issues, he would ask to see the teacher later to discuss the situation.

After being observed during a walkthrough, how are you provided feedback? (Teachers)

The teachers replied that the form goes into the mailbox. If you have questions you just ask him about the walkthrough. (To clarify their response, this researcher asked Brian about why the teachers did not state that they received the walkthrough form electronically. Brian stated that the electronic process was something that was recently implemented.)

Interview Question 17

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school and how is this scheduled or organized? Do the teachers value this opportunity to observe their peers? Do they have an opportunity to provide feedback with others? (Superintendents and Principals)

A summary of Thomas's response is as follows:

We have sent some teachers to other schools to observe other teachers. There is a third grade math teacher. She differentiates every math lesson. It took her years to get to that point. We have sent high school and middle school teachers to observe her. I think that can occur in every classroom or math classroom. In many cases when we have teachers observing other teachers, it is because a teacher is on an employee improvement plan or an administrative concern list that we have to say that you have to observe three different teachers. It is more around that area at this point. One thing we started to work on is when we do a walkthrough with the teachers we are able to click on one of the 30 or 40 videos that have our own teachers teaching. We tell the teachers to watch a certain video and think about this strategy. They click on this URL site and it takes it to one of our teachers who is teaching. It is a private site and you can only access it within our district.

The principal reported the following information:

They would never do a walkthrough like I would. I welcomed them. Two reasons, contractually and union wise. I don't think others want teachers

judging them. If they walked in with nothing it is okay but when they bring paper and pencil they get upset. I wanted a teacher who was here with principal papers to observe a student. The teacher asked her what she was doing. You have no right being here. You are not an administrator. I don't want her evaluating me. I sent her into the room to evaluate a child and not the teacher. The teacher said it was not right. It speaks volumes about the culture.

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school? If you are able to observe other teachers, how and in what ways do you value this process? Do you provide feedback to your peers after completing walkthroughs? (Teachers)

The teachers replied that they never participate in walkthroughs in other teachers' classrooms. However, they claimed that teachers have done regular classroom observations.

Interview Question 18

What are your overall perceptions of the value of the walkthrough process?

Thomas elaborated on this question as follows:

It has a huge impact on student achievement. There is a lot of research behind that. Whatever you want more of, or less of, in your classroom that walkthrough form is a tool to make that happen. It is not that walkthroughs will change instruction but you can use this tool to change instruction, have that laser-like focus, and make sure you are seeing things you want

to see in the classrooms. No doubt, I wish I could just do walkthroughs. I don't need to see somebody's whole observation unless I see some things they are not doing. In 10 minutes, I can gauge what type of classroom it is. You are only staying there for 10 minutes. You don't have to do that whole formal observation spending 40 minutes in the classroom and how many hours to write it. I want my principals doing 10 to 20 a day. Each teacher at the elementary gets three to four walkthroughs a year. At the middle school, I would say 10 walkthroughs and at the high school four to five walkthroughs a year.

Brian positively responded to this question with the following reply:

Love it - absolutely love it. I think I learn more in five minutes about a teacher's skill than I learn in 40 minutes. It is faster for me. I can do much more with much less time. I can do eight walkthroughs in one hour than in one major lesson. I can do more of them. In some schools the teacher only gets one observation a year. I can do many more walkthroughs. The second part is the professional development piece. I can change the walkthrough document with the click of a button. I am married to the formal observation form. Once we start using it we have to use the formal observation all year long. This is not true for walkthroughs.

The teachers claimed that the walkthroughs were helpful because they helped them to improve on their skills everyday. They felt the observers were able to point out some things that they may not be able to notice about themselves.

Blue Mountain Elementary School

Interview Question 5

When did the walkthrough process begin in your school and how was it initiated? How were you trained in the process?

Susan, the assistant superintendent, indicated that one of their district goals was to revise and refine their evaluation process. Therefore, they developed a new model about six years ago. This new model included the walkthrough process. Susan spoke about the walkthrough process being a part of a differentiated supervisory plan.

It is powerful because it provides a formal traditional model or plan for teachers who need it but it also provides a lot of other meaningful opportunities for teachers who do not need to go through that every year. I think that walkthroughs are so sensible to everybody so I see that as a remaining part wherever we end up with the supervisory process. The whole idea that a principal can go into a classroom once a year to write any kind of meaningful evaluation - most of us gave up on that a couple of years ago. So having an evaluator not only write a formal part but also be in your classroom four more times makes sense with teachers and administrators.

Mike, the elementary principal at Blue Mountain Elementary replied that the walkthrough process began in their district around five years ago with the beginning of the new teachers' contract. He stated that the administrative team

met a couple of times to talk and learn more about the process. Mike pointed out the following information about their observation plan:

It is up to four walkthroughs a year, plus traditional observations for teachers in certain defined years. It could be two walkthroughs and two observations. It could be three walkthroughs and one observation. It could be four walkthroughs and one observation. This would be throughout the whole school year. The supervisory plan is based on the number of years of service. Every three years is a traditional year. The other years are option years where they have some projects. Every year you could do up to four walkthroughs. The walkthroughs are not announced.

The teachers replied that the walkthrough was a part of the teachers' contract. They mentioned the introduction of Charlotte Danielson's model as well as the walkthrough. The teachers discussed how the principal does walkthroughs through a whole grade level on the same day to compare instruction. They described this process as follows:

He will do a walkthrough during a math class. We have four or five math classes being taught at every level. Often times he tries to go to all math classes on the same day. He wants to get a sense that the high class is getting something differently at each level. We regroup for each math topic or chapter based on pretest scores including rate of acquisition, and rate of retention so they are all at the same skill level for math in each class.

Interview Question 6

When completing walkthroughs, what are the objectives and look-fors?

Susan, the assistant superintendent, shared a form that the principal uses to observe the teachers during a walkthrough observation. It is from their collective bargaining agreement. Susan indicated that the form contains three domains with indicators in each of the domains. The principals set their own building goals and focal areas and they may change from year to year.

Mike's response for this question was as follows:

There are times we have look-fors and there are times we do not. Nothing comes from central office and says we have to do this. As a building leader, my style is I recognize that we have to have learning targets for the teachers. This is the same as teachers setting targets for their kids. The teachers have to learn using targets. I do announce most of the time what I am looking for. This occurs if I feel our team has a need or our building has a certain focus and needs to be mindful of a certain area. It may be that we may have an initiative going on so I will say that. If not, I will typically go in and they have a number of things that I will be looking for. For example, I am going to look for differentiation, individualized instruction for kids, small grouping for kids with instruction that meets their needs for that group, and also flexible grouping in math to make sure the instruction is at different levels based on their learning.

Mike further claimed that the look-fors never change because that is the core philosophy of the building. In addition, Mike stated that there are times he

does walkthroughs when there is no one in the room. This gives him a time to “read the walls.” He looks to see if the work is meaningful and instructional.

The teachers identified the four domains in Danielson’s plan and how Mike may focus on one of the key areas. They stated that he would point out things that you are doing really well and maybe one or two things that could push your teaching a little further. Within each domain, there are a lot of delineated things that he looks for. The teachers continued their discussion as follows:

When he comes through during the math time, he wants to see if the novice group is different than the high group. He often does that so he can see if the lessons are differentiated. If we have extra adults in the classroom, he wants to see how you are using the adults in the classroom.

Are they taking a small group of students? He is really big on that.

Interview Question 7

What are the specific steps and procedures that administrators and teachers use to complete the walkthrough process?

Susan indicated that most of the principals are using technology to complete the forms in their buildings. However, she stated that this was not a mandate and was up to the principal. When asked to discuss the number of walkthroughs that are required, Susan referred back to their collective bargaining agreement. It is as follows:

If you are in your first three years of employment and every third year after that, you go through the formal supervision evaluation process. The

walkthroughs are up to four a year. The project years would be the other years. The language is worded up to four.

Mike described his part in the walkthrough process as going into the classrooms and then writing up the walkthrough observation form. He stated that there are times when he meets with the teachers to provide feedback and then there are times when he does not meet. However, Mike claimed that he would always provide written feedback on the formal observation form. The template that is used for the walkthroughs contains the four domains. Mike replied if the walkthrough clearly was dealing with the first domain it would be under the area of planning. He stated that there are not any checklists on the form but it is all completed through a narrative response.

The teachers responded to this question by stating that Mike usually comes into their classrooms with his laptop. He usually stays for about five to ten minutes. After he types up the report, he places a copy of it in their mailbox. Mike will also talk with them about the observation the next day.

Interview Question 8

How do you provide feedback to the teachers after completing a walkthrough? (Superintendents and Principals)

Susan elaborated on this question as follows:

One of the things happening in this building in terms of the PLC is that Mike is very good as a principal at tying together all of the information. He may go into a fourth grade math class and he will do a quick walkthrough on five fourth grade teachers and a resource teacher all of whom are

implementing some different level of math instruction. Everybody gets his or her own feedback. He is really good in sending emails or notes commenting on what he saw in general across the five classrooms. He incorporates that feedback into his building work. What is powerful about that for me is the whole idea here behind PLC. We want all teachers working with all second grade students. We believe that every second grade student is his or her responsibility and not that the 29 kids are hers and the 25 kids I have are mine but there is a very collective sense of responsibility. So it does make sense to give feedback to the group. It is really powerful. Frequently with the flexible grouping and the ways we are pulling kids, we have a lot of different staff members working with kids.

In responding to this question, Mike referred back to the information that he previously discussed about the observation form in question 7.

After being observed during a walkthrough, how are you provided feedback? (Teachers)

The teachers elaborated on question 8 as follows:

It is usually the next day that it is in our mailbox. He will give us a new idea to try something and then he will follow up on it. At the monthly faculty meeting he will say, I did my monthly walkthrough and this is the evidence of students' work. He would have lists of things that were positive, or how we were using the paraprofessionals in the classrooms. He would never use names. He would have a list of those things that were terrific. It is two tiered. He gives specific information to the teacher

with direct feedback to her. At the end of the month if he sees things that are really powerful he will share those things with the teachers. It is what things we need to work on collectively in the building. He will have it printed out or he will he mail it to you. That key validation from him helps you understand that you are doing good things and you are to keep doing those good things throughout the year. It also helps you to pick up things that you might not have thought of to try in the classroom. He may provide you a hard copy at the faculty meeting. He also personalizes the information by handwriting on the form. Each domain is formally typed and it also contains that little personalized information on the bottom.

Interview Question 17

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school and how is this scheduled or organized? Do the teachers value this opportunity to observe their peers? Do they have an opportunity to provide feedback with others? (Superintendents and Principals)

The assistant superintendent responded that the teachers do not participate in walkthroughs as part of the formal process. However, there is some informal peer-to peer observation occurring throughout the building. In addition, every new teacher is assigned a mentor teacher. Susan reported that there are some opportunities for observations and feedback but probably not as much as they could accomplish. She further stated that it does not fit nicely into the collective bargaining unit.

Mike replied in the same manner as Susan. He stated that the teachers do not participate in walkthroughs. However, they are encouraged to peer observe. Usually that would be for an entire lesson. Mike also reiterated the fact that this is not a part of the teachers' contractual agreement.

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school? If you are able to observe other teachers, how and in what ways do you value this process? Do you provide feedback to your peers after completing walkthroughs? (Teachers)

The following summarizes the teachers' response to this question:

Mike has always encouraged us to observe others and not only the new teachers. If there is someone who is doing something that I am interested in, all I have to do is go to him and say I would like to observe Mary.

Whether it is your grade level or another grade level teaching something, he will provide coverage and totally encourage you to observe that. There have been times where he has gone to teachers, and said I will get coverage for you to find a time to watch so and so do guided reading. So he encourages us all of the time. So that is always out there for us to take advantage of. Even if it were someone who is in another building he would make that happen. It cannot be part of the contract part of the walkthrough. We are not allowed to do that but we are allowed to observe as long as it is not in an evaluative sense.

Interview Question 18

What are your overall perceptions of the value of the walkthrough process?

Susan replied as follows:

I think walkthroughs are very important because they offer us something meaningful beyond the supervisor observing a single class lesson and then providing the feedback based on that. It also provides several more opportunities for the building leader to provide more formal feedback to teachers. There was some apprehension about this when we were first going to do this. This was not an easy sell. It has been in existence long enough and it is sensible to them so it is not a big deal. They now feel safe.

Mike stated the following:

The value is that it allows you to go into the room informally a number of times throughout the year. The biggest value is that it is not announced. On top of that, what can be of value is if the building leader identifies what exact practices are positive. That is helpful and then having open dialogue about that.

The teachers elaborated as follows:

I think in the beginning when he started we would worry that he was missing part of the lesson. We were worried that he missed the continuity of the beginning to the end. But given the feedback that we have been given over the years, we realize that 10 to 15 minutes can give you a huge

snapshot. It is not about the lesson; it is about the kids, the learning, and the dynamics that are happening in the class. So it doesn't matter if you are point a, b, or c in the lesson, you are going to see it or not. He often talks to the kids to hear what they have to say about the lesson. They should know what is going on. The other thing about the walkthroughs for everybody is it is so much more real. In the old days when we had formal observations, we used to have our beautiful lesson plans and you would practice that. That is not what you can do every day. The fact that Mike is in there and he is catching a glimpse of a lesson that you had no idea that he was coming makes it more authentic.

Red River Elementary School

Interview Question 5

When did the walkthrough process begin in your school and how was it initiated? How were you trained in the process?

Megan, who is currently the superintendent of schools for Red River, stated that the walkthrough started five years before her employment in this position. Therefore, it has been in place for about 16 years. This process began through the work and assistance of Joseph Werlinich and Otto Graf. The previous superintendent brought it into the district and she believed in it. Megan reports that it was mostly event walkthroughs where a group of consultants, administrators, and teachers would observe briefly in classrooms to gain a better understanding of the instructional direction of the school. Subsequently, the

walkthrough then became a tool used for supervision of instruction. Megan summarizes the initiation process of the walkthrough as follows:

It was done in such a way that people were asked to volunteer to participate. If they did not want to participate they were told that they could close their doors. They worked through it and did professional development and now it is to the point where we walk in and out of classes on a regular basis.

Amanda, the primary school principal replied that the walkthrough had been in the district at least 10 years. Amanda also reaffirmed what Megan had stated regarding the fact that it was brought into the district by Joe Werlinich and Otto Graf who are the directors of the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania at the University of Pittsburgh. Amanda indicated that a select group of administrators would come into the classrooms to observe and now it has evolved into our principal walkthroughs at any given time. Amanda stated that she now invites teachers to complete walkthroughs in the building. This procedure was developed through the Principals Academy and was accomplished through the hiring of substitutes. After completing the observations, the group would meet and discuss what was observed.

Gary, another principal in the district, also reported that the walkthroughs were instituted more than 10 years ago in the district. Gary replied that he received his mentoring in how to complete walkthroughs by working closely with Dr. Graf and the superintendent at that time. In addition, Gary indicated that he

had previous experience with the Learning Walk through the Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC) from the University of Pittsburgh.

The teacher focus group shared that the walkthrough had been in place for a while but it was not until recent times that it has been used more extensively and discussed with the teachers. They claimed that walkthroughs were discussed during their in-service programs. The teachers felt that the walkthroughs were used more extensively at the middle school. The middle school teachers observed teachers at the elementary schools and the high school teachers visited classrooms at the middle school. Overall they indicated that mostly administrators, not the teachers, were doing the walkthroughs.

Interview Question 6

When completing walkthroughs, what are the objectives and look-fors?

Megan replied that the objectives and look-fors are developed at the building levels. A summary of her response follows:

The principal and staff develop the look-fors and it is based on what is developed at the leadership academy. There we develop district goals and then the building develops goals within those district goals. The professional staff develops goals based upon the building goals so the goals trickle down and all align back to the district goals. The middle school principal has a goal that aligns with data and student success. One of his look-fors is how do teachers use data to design instruction. When he does a walkthrough, he looks for those ideas and then conferences with the teachers. The high school is getting to essential

questions as part of the look-fors and how the essential questions are being used in the classroom to bring about student awareness. It is not an objective. They are broad questions that can be interdisciplinary. Right now at the elementary they are still going through the restructuring. The upper elementary is going to be a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) building and has look-fors that will probably be along those lines.

Amanda shared that the objectives are set by a team in her building and they are very closely aligned to the district objectives. A major focus in her school this year has been centered on the work by nationally recognized educators, Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, and their model of Understanding by Design (UbD). Another focus is on knowing specifically what we want the students to know and be able to do as well as what we are doing to assist struggling learners. Amanda elaborated as follows:

We put two spins on that including, not only your lower end students, but also how are you are moving your higher end students. What evidence do we have to support that? That is our standard for what we are looking for when we are in the classrooms. It is the same for all of the other buildings. We call it our three-question reflection with our assessment portfolios, and our lesson plan reflections. The teachers use these questions as their model of personal reflection.

Gary took a more global view of look-fors as he answered this question. He stated that he has a couple of look-fors that he focuses on and they are

instructionally based. One of the areas that he is interested in involves questioning techniques. Gary pointed out that look-fors might only apply in certain occasions. Therefore, he is looking for evidence of learning period and at what level the students are learning. Gary stated that is his internal objective regarding look-fors. Gary elaborated on the use of look-fors as follows:

I don't think we can hamstring ourselves to those three look-fors. I don't have any problems discussing things we can enhance. But if you focus so much on a look-for you are going to turn the walkthrough into an event or a dog and pony show. And that is not what you want. You want the walkthrough to be several snapshots in time. My goal is to have over 180 snapshots and some are formal feedback to the teacher and some are information just for me. But when I sit at this desk in June, I am giving them very good feedback based on a lot of exposure. I don't like to hamstring myself with certain look-fors. To me, the walkthrough is looking for evidence of learning. I am doing that through instruction or artifacts. It is not the clinical model for me. You get a great deal of information from walkthroughs about instruction and I can provide you with that information.

The teachers stated that their look-fors were written objectives, and the use of rubrics. They claimed the administration also looked at student work that was displayed in the hallway for examples of critical thinking and higher levels of thinking. They looked for the use of rubrics. The teachers indicated that the objective, writing prompt and a descriptor of what was required was to be hung

on the walls. The last look-for that they mentioned was the arrangement of the student desks.

Interview Question 7

What are the specific steps and procedures that administrators and teachers use to complete the walkthrough process?

The superintendent pointed out that the principals use a blank form when they complete a walkthrough. It is geared to whatever part of the lesson that they see. She elaborated on the process as follows:

If they are 20 minutes into the lesson they are pretty much into instructional delivery, how the lesson was prepared, probably a little about the classroom environment and how they react with the kids. If it is the beginning of the lesson they will see more about the preparedness rather than instructional delivery. You write a few sentences to validate what has been going on in the classroom and communicate that back to the teacher. After you collect six of those, you then write up an observation from that. Six walkthroughs equal one observation. The feedback is the form that you have. You copy it and go back to the office, sign it as the building principal and the teacher signs off on it and gives it back to you. We use those to compile the observation and the principals try to purposefully go into classrooms at different times to see different parts of the lesson.

Amanda replied that she completes both formal and informal walkthrough observations. Her response was as follows:

When completing the formal walkthroughs, we notify the staff that we are going to be coming into the classroom on a particular day. It is not a specific time or that kind of thing. We do go in with a form on where we jot down notes, what we see, how are some of those three questions being addressed, and then we come back together as an administrative team to discuss what we saw. Our ELI Colleague in Residence (CIR) is always with us on these walkthroughs. On the following day or several days later, we then hold a faculty meeting to share the great things we saw but we also throw one challenge out there on something we saw and would like to upgrade. The informal walkthroughs may be held at any point in time. The teachers know as established at the beginning of the year what the look-fors are. That is just a matter for me to go around in and out of the classrooms for 5 to 10 minutes. Hanging out and talking with the kids and thinking about those three questions that we put out to the teachers and how they are being addressed in that little snapshot of time. What I will do to provide feedback? I am not big about stick the post-it on the desk. It is more if I see that teacher, then I will have a conversation or if I have done a grade level, I will send out an email to the entire grade level on what are some of the good things I saw. I will share out at their grade level meetings as well. Some of our administrators use a walkthrough form but I do not because I am more of a talker.

Gary stated that he calls them different levels of walkthroughs. His response was as follows:

We have our formal model where we can do a personal option where I select six teachers to do six walkthroughs in lieu of an observation. When I do that, I give them very formal feedback with a feedback form and I collect those forms at the end of the year. I use those six forms and then I use that information to create an observation report that will serve as the observation for the year. The next level down is we have the event walkthroughs. (Event walkthroughs are pre-planned walkthroughs usually involving outside consultants, central office and building administrators, and teacher leaders. The purpose for this type of walkthrough is to validate and discuss with school personnel what observed effective instructional practices are occurring in the school.) Right now it is once a marking period. In my practices as a building level administrator, I try to be in the classrooms as much as I can. I pride myself in being in the classrooms much more than many other people maybe. When I am in the classrooms, I am not evaluating the teacher per say. But when I can coach a teacher that is when I want to take the time to coach them. If I use an iPad, I can do a walkthrough without interrupting their lesson or not doing it 28 days later. I could give it to them right on the spot. Hey when you asked that question, here is a snapshot when you asked this question. There were five hands being raised, don't you think it would be better for think-pair-share when all kids were engaged? That is the sort of feedback that I give. Sometimes during a walkthrough it turns into me instructing with the teacher because we evolve into that and that is a good thing.

Sometimes during a walkthrough there is not a whole lot going in. Otto said that one of the benefits for doing a walkthrough is for good PR. The kids see you. They trust and like you. They tell the parents and the parents feel the same way about you. That is a benefit and a residue of walkthroughs. Sometimes when they are taking a test, I am not going to interrupt their test but they know I was in there that day. If there is instruction going on, I am going to sit in. Now as a principal, I see dozens of classrooms every single day. If I had to go teach again, I would be a much better teacher because I had all of those exposures. A lot of times I will sit in and just learn. It gives me a feel for a teacher. It also breaks down barriers. My teachers are comfortable when I am in the room. It does not have to be earth-shattering instruction every time I walk in. I know what a classroom looks like and I know what it entails. I would much rather have clearer pictures of what they do so when I sit at the evaluation table in June, there is not an argument. I see everything that you do. The art is to make them feel that it is not a formal evaluation. As the principal of this building, I have a right to be in every room at any time that I want to. I am polite about it. It is not an issue in this building. There have been times where I have walked into rooms and they did not even know that I was in the room.

The teachers said that they will receive an email stating that there will be event walkthroughs on a particular day. They are not given a specific time. Most of the walkthroughs are with administrators. Lately, it has been with the principal.

They indicated that it used to be more of a team of administrators maybe once a year. They stated that Gary now comes into their rooms four to five times per year outside of the formal observations.

Interview Question 8

How do you provide feedback to the teachers after completing a walkthrough? (Superintendents and Principals)

Megan stated that the principals provide feedback to the teachers through the use of the blank observation form.

Amanda responded by saying that feedback was done mostly verbally at the grade level meetings. There is also a note taking form that is used during the formal observations.

Gary replied that he uses a form, which he gives to the teachers immediately. They then discuss it informally. There are times when he writes on the form that he would like to see the teacher to discuss something that was observed during the walkthrough. Gary indicated that he would then review all six of the walkthrough forms with the teacher at the end of the year.

After being observed during a walkthrough, how are you provided feedback? (Teachers)

The teachers stated that Gary would give them a checklist. If he is doing it as an observation he will write it up. If you were on the team that did an event walkthrough, you would report back to the conference room and talk about what was observed.

Interview Question 17

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school and how is this scheduled or organized? Do the teachers value this opportunity to observe their peers? Do they have an opportunity to provide feedback with others? (Superintendents and Principals)

The superintendent pointed out that the opportunity exists for teachers to participate in walkthroughs, but it is driven by teacher choice. The only time it is not driven by choice is when the teachers participate as part of the induction program. Megan stated that there are four event walkthroughs a year. They host one every nine weeks and invite other districts to participate in the walks. There is usually a focus area that the observers try to identify on these event walkthroughs.

Amanda indicated that in past years she was able to schedule each teacher an opportunity to participate in a walkthrough. The teachers were also permitted to do additional walkthroughs during their planning periods. Amanda stated that they were able to hire substitute teachers to cover the classrooms of the teachers so they would be free to do the walkthroughs. She elaborated on the process as follows:

We got subs and we built the teams so that they were not all just the second or third grade team. It was two first grade teachers and two-second grade teachers. So that their discussion could relate to the different grade levels and not just isolate it to what second grade already thinks. The teachers value this. To be a little more formal, we would sit

before the walkthrough and review the look-fors. We would then debrief when they were finished. I would provide feedback to the teachers by email by providing positive information to the teachers. The people appreciate it. We have been doing them for a long time so there isn't necessarily that sense that somebody is coming in. The new teachers would say oh this is all that you are looking for.

In his building, Gary referred back to the induction process as a time that teachers would do the walkthroughs. These event walkthroughs were scheduled through the assistant superintendent's office.

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school? If you are able to observe other teachers, how and in what ways do you value this process? Do you provide feedback to your peers after completing walkthroughs? (Teachers)

The teachers shared information about participating in walkthroughs when they were a part of the induction team. Several of the teachers commented that they liked the process because they were new teachers and they had the administration walking with them pointing out different areas on which to focus.

Interview Question 18

What are your overall perceptions of the value of the walkthrough process?

The superintendent replied to this question as follows:

The value is huge. For example, one of my favorite walkthrough experiences is when I observed a math teacher at the middle school. In

most cases the math teachers on any given day would use a starter problem, homework, new content, and then a practice phase. Typically, this is what math looks like and it should not. This is not what we should be seeing. Purposely, we would go in on math classes to complete six 10-minute walkthroughs, which equal one observation. Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) prep, group work, presentations, tutoring, think-pair-share, I got to see all kinds of things that the teacher did instead of just seeing a one day snapshot.

Amanda stated the following:

I think it is a wonderful tool for the teachers in a sense that it helps to foster discussions and collaboration. There is a sense of accountability as well as validation. It is a wonderful way for me to stay connected to the classrooms. I can go out there and hit eleven rooms and nobody feels any different about it. I value it for the teachers and myself. I think it is really great.

Gary held very high regards for the use of the walkthrough. He stated that the process does not intimidate the teachers. He claimed that it is a valuable process for changing instruction and he has evidence that things have changed over the years. He also is interested in attaching videos, photos, and being able to mail it back to the teachers immediately through the use of an iPad. He announced that using the iPad would be very powerful.

The teachers replied that it is good for them to see the administration in the classroom as opposed to seeing them only in the office. The students are able to see that the principal really cares about them as students.

Oak Ridge Elementary School

Interview Question 5

When did the walkthrough process begin in your school and how was it initiated? How were you trained in the process?

Tammy, assistant superintendent, replied that their philosophy from the very beginning was to make sure that the principals were instructional leaders and they had to be in the classrooms every day. She claimed that when she was a principal, she would do 15 to 20 walkthroughs a week. Tammy summarizes this question as follows:

One of things we focused on was to make sure that the teachers understood that it was important for the principals to be in the classrooms. We set the stage that teachers would feel comfortable from the very beginning. There was always a principal and assistant or a principal and a co-principal. I start with a visibility walk two to three times a day. I was in the class anywhere from two to five minutes. Most often I would do a 15-minute observation and provide the teacher with some form of written feedback. That was done through locked folders so only that teacher and I would have access to the folders. The teacher would then respond to the feedback. If I posed a question, he or she would respond back. It was embedded support. I would also do two formal observations a year in

which I would spend at least 60 minutes in the classroom. Those formal observations would include the pre and post conference and speaking with the teacher. The 15 minute walkthrough feedback was done through email or I would touch base with that teacher in person to make sure to answer questions or if we were on the same page. It is typical in Oak Ridge for that to happen. The ongoing conversations were important. We got to the point with ELI that it was more of a team effort where these walks were planned and that we would go in as a team and debrief for the purpose for learning about the best practices.

Jason, the elementary principal, replied that the walkthrough process began back in 2003 with the opening of one of their elementary schools. He said that the walkthrough is just a tool that creates dialogue between the principal, teacher, and others. It is not the overall end all, save all. Jason stated the walkthrough was not created for evaluation. Jason commented further:

During the training with the teachers we role-play with it. How should we use this form? That is where the professional development part comes into play. If you just give it to the teachers, they do not buy into it. They don't take stock in it. It has to come from them. It is useful to me and to them. It has to be something that evolves over time. This walkthrough form here can be tweaked to different things. This is more of an umbrella approach of a walkthrough. I can go into a classroom and look at classroom routines and procedures.

The teachers replied that they felt that the walkthrough was in place for a while. However, over the past two years the process has really been formalized. They stated that the administration is really making sure they use a form to give teachers some type of feedback instead of just walking in and leaving. The teachers were trained with the form during their monthly after school meetings. It is a rubric. The principal usually sends them a Google document.

Interview Question 6

When completing walkthroughs, what are the objectives and look-fors?

Tammy responded to this question as follows:

It depends year to year on what those walkthroughs and objectives are. Typically at the beginning of the year we establish goals as a staff so the teachers really have some input on those look-fors. This past year accountability and sense of urgency were two look-fors. In past years as we were developing best practices we were looking at specific skills or strategies and concepts. We may have looked for guided reading or guided math or specific interactions with the teachers. Most of our look-fors are based on Charlotte Danielson's model and those four domains so anything that falls under those domains are important. This year we are looking at our Promising Principals and Agile Instruction. Agile Instruction is a pretty big focus. We are looking at how do teachers embed technology within their lessons, are teachers differentiating instruction and what does that look like in each classroom. It is important that to make sure that we are individualizing to students because we know that one

size does not fit all. Differentiation has been a main topic for our schools this year under the larger framework of Agile Instruction.

As a follow-up to this question, this researcher asked the assistant superintendent how the Promising Principles were developed. Tammy elaborated as follows:

They were developed over time. From the very beginning, there were expectations. A couple of years ago we had someone videotape for an entire year. She went into our classrooms. She would look for consistent practices across all Oak Ridge Schools. So there was a lot of video footage taken. We always expected teachers to teach with small group instruction to differentiate instruction but really did not have formal names for what we do. From that year of videotaping, our superintendent and others have looked at a lot of video footage and put names to the practices we have used. It is not anything that we have done differently but it now has a name and is a little more formalized and a larger framework has been created. We are trying to build a common language around those six Promising Principles.

Jason indicated that the overall objectives and look-fors are to build on the strengths in the classrooms and to support the teachers. The look-fors can come by on an umbrella approach or teachers can ask for specific feedback on something that is occurring in their classrooms.

As a follow-up to this question, I asked if he had any specific look-fors that should be evident in everyone's classrooms. Jason replied as follows:

What is on this form has to happen in every room. This is real basic stuff that we are looking for. If you did not do something, we will talk to the teachers about what was missing. It comes again from that dialogue. I don't want teachers to look at me as the guy coming in as much as I would like to say that I am the principal or the instructional leader in the school. I could not teach math as well as he can. My job is to help this teacher take his game to the next level. I just want to make that teacher a better teacher and push him beyond that potential.

Interview Question 7

What are the specific steps and procedures that administrators and teachers use to complete the walkthrough process?

The assistant superintendent responded to this question as follows:
It depends on if it is formal or informal. If it is informal, the expectation is that principals will be in the classrooms at any given time during the day and spend anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes. They will provide teachers most often with written feedback. There is time to debrief whether there is an exchange of email or a talk because principals are so often in the classroom many of the talks happen in an informal basis. Hey what did you think about that lesson? That is pretty typical. If it is a formal observation, teachers are given an opportunity to sign up for a time and a preconference is scheduled. A teacher identifies the goals and objectives of the lesson. Often times a teacher will ask for a principal to look for a specific thing in the class. This is a 60-minute observation. After the

observation there is a scheduled time to debrief and that is usually 30 to 60 minutes. It is fairly in-depth. That conversation is probably the most important piece to help the teacher grow and move to the next level.

As a follow-up to this question, this researcher asked Tammy if there are any procedures that administrators use in the different buildings and if they use any specific type of template. She indicated the following:

Each building has its own template and each principal has been given autonomy to create those templates. We talk and we discuss our different approaches. Building to building we each have different look-fors and depending on the look-fors the templates go along with that. This year we are working as a team to create a consistent template that will be used across all of our schools and the template that we are using will incorporate the Promising Principles and all of these look-fors will fall under one of those Promising Principles. Since I have taken on this new position, I have been working with the principals on walkthroughs and giving feedback. We have started from the beginning in establishing a definition of what walkthroughs are and what the goals and purposes are. Tomorrow we are going to look at specific feedback. Each principal has given me their template and their comments. My goal is to look at what a good comment looks like, sounds like and how that comment will help that teacher grow. It is important to validate what teachers are doing but sometimes comments are not effective because they do not help the teacher grow. We need to as principals figure out how to be more specific

with the types of comments so they are more individualized to that teacher. When I think about teacher learning it is very individualized. Like we do for students, we have to do the same thing for teachers. Each teacher is at a different place on his or her learning continuum. We have to meet that teacher where they are and help them grow from that level.

This researcher sought additional information from Tammy about their use of look-fors. The specific question asked and Tammy's answer is as follows: Some schools have very specific look-fors and it appears that yours are more broad and based on the Promising Principles. Why did you decide to go that direction as opposed to a more specific direction?

There are six Promising Principles and they are each interconnected. For example if there is Agile Instruction, and we are looking at Differentiated Instruction, we also have to look at the principle of Embedded Support. They are very connected so we have to look at all of the pieces and we look at it from a more broad perspective so we can put all of the pieces together. When I think about a walkthrough, it is several snapshots of a classroom to make a larger picture. I think that is how we approach it so each time we go into the classroom we are taking those snapshots and we are helping that teacher create a just right picture for that classroom.

There are times we look for specific look-fors. The more established we are and the more stable in which we have had more teachers there for a longer period of time, they are ready to create that larger picture. At one of our schools there are several new teachers so that looks slightly

different. They are basing their look-fors on teach like a champion. Their focus is mainly on culture and they are looking at the language using the 100% slant making sure that all kids are on target. That is one of their main focuses within that building. It looks different in every building. For me specifically being principal at my former school for the past six years very few teachers changed over the last couple of years. I was able to have some specific look-fors for a couple of years. Over time, I looked at a broader perspective because those teachers were ready for me to look at multiple practices or things in their classroom.

The principal responded to this question as follows:

The specific steps are in the form and the development of the form. Is it reasonable and are teachers learning something from it? The students are learning and that is what it comes down to. The look-fors that I have on here are a support system for the kids. It is not so much that the teachers are using proper pedagogy and if the centers are 15 minutes long. I have seen some walkthroughs that are real specific that are almost programmed because that is the model in those schools. Here it is the opposite. There should not be a model because every class is different and every student and teacher is different. We look at the organization in the room, if the daily schedule is posted, and if there is a focus on instructional practices. The instructional delivery, or using positive tone, what does this look like? Are you circulating around the room or are you using wait time? It may not be appropriate at that part of the lesson. If

you want to push the teachers to be great teachers you have to individualize it. Satisfactory is not acceptable, I don't want status quo. Every time we do a walkthrough with them, I ask them how can I make the lesson better. It is not a negative thing. They want to do better.

The teachers pointed out that this depends on if there is a group of observers or if there is only one person. They stated that if there is only one person, they usually blend into the background. However, if there is a large group, they will explain to the visitors what is occurring in the classroom. When it is a group walkthrough, they usually stay about 10 minutes and we do not get much feedback. When it is an individual completing the walkthrough they usually stay about 15 to 20 minutes and then they also provide us with feedback.

Interview Question 8

How do you provide feedback to the teachers after completing a walkthrough? (Superintendents and Principals)

Tammy described the process as follows:

I have a locked folder on a shared drive so each teacher has information where we share information. I have a template inside each folder so once I go in I write feedback to the teacher where I pose questions and sometimes give suggestions and the teacher is expected to respond within a timely manner. Typically they are very thoughtful with that because as a principal you cannot see everything within a 15-minute period so there are a lot of questions. Because of that back and forth response everyone has that opportunity to have that dialogue. If there are further questions it may

call for that scheduled meeting. Most often it happens through leaving that template through that locked folder. Often times it is just touching base in person. I like this lesson why don't you give this a try. I noted in your observation something specific. It is an ongoing conversation. It provides embedded support and that happens all day and everyday.

This researcher followed up with an additional question. It is as follows with the assistant superintendent's response:

What happens if you see something that is not to your liking?

I will schedule a meeting with the teacher and we (administrators) will have a conversation with that teacher. I will have an opportunity to really explain their purpose for what they were doing in the class. Often time the result is that we will come up with a plan of action. If there is something in literacy that is not working or following with the expectations, I may have the literacy coach come in and model a lesson. After the lesson they will go in again and provide feedback. We set goals together so the teacher knows what direction he or she needs to go. We are lucky that we have a literacy and math coach in the building every single day. We do have a science and technology coach that is district wide. Those coaches work very closely with the principals. They do not evaluate the teachers but we do talk a lot so we are giving the same feedback and message to the teachers. Our goal is to support the teacher. Through the leadership team you have four people going through your classroom consistently giving feedback and support so that makes a difference.

The principal responded to this question as follows:

In the morning, I try to touch base with every teacher. The feedback could be done orally, written, or through conversation. Sometimes the feedback could be to come into my office because we need to have a talk. The transitions in your room were not up to par. I am going to come back into your room and look at the transitions. The typical protocol is to talk about before hand what the look-fors are, come in and look for those things, check off these things and give you some feedback. It has to be continuous. I cannot just go in the classroom 15 minutes once a week. I need to know what is going on in that classroom daily in order to be respected by the teacher.

After being observed during a walkthrough, how are you provided feedback? (Teachers)

The teachers reported that they receive feedback through the use of sticky notes or writing on a half sheet of paper. The coaches or principals check off their name at the top of the page. There is also a space for comment on the form. It is a carbon copy, so they keep part of the form and we get the other page. In many cases, the teachers stated that the feedback is given in a more informal manner. However, when the principals come in, they are there to complete a formal walkthrough. One teacher replied that she keeps her sticky notes inside of her big black cabinet. She said that it is hidden from everybody, but she knows that it is there.

Interview Question 17

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school and how is this scheduled or organized? Do the teachers value this opportunity to observe their peers? Do they have an opportunity to provide feedback with others? (Superintendents and Principals)

The assistant superintendent replied to this question as follows:

That is an interesting question. There have been with ELI those opportunities. A few years ago, teacher leaders were able to go through on walkthroughs. However, over time we have built that trusting environment that the teachers now feel very comfortable in saying can I come into your classroom. They do peer observations on their own. They are very unscheduled. So since that environment has been established, they feel that they now have that opportunity. So often times they will say to the principal is there any way that I can have someone cover my classroom so I can see so and so because I am struggling with classroom management or I want to see a group on project-based learning that is going on. I think that teachers go into each other's classrooms because it is a culture that has been established. I also think that this was established within those professional learning communities. Teachers have to really get to know one another. They built those relationships. Through those communities they kind of establish their own look-fors. It was going out and gathering certain information to go back to the community to support the focus for the community.

As a follow-up, this researcher asked the following question, then includes Tammy's response:

Would you consider them as more formal observations or walkthroughs?
It sounds to me more of an observation where they are going into one classroom.

I guess it would be more of an observation but if they were looking for something specific for their learning community they may go into five or six classrooms to look for that. So it could be walkthroughs. If we were doing the walkthroughs as a group where there are principals, coaches, teacher leaders, and the teachers were a part of that, the debrief process would be focused on the look-fors. I don't think that happens quite as often as the principal or coach walkthroughs.

Jason replied as follows:

If they want to do it everyday, I will let them do it. They come to me and if I have a sub available or I will cover the class, we get it done. The ideal situation is a teacher who comes and says I am really struggling, can I go and watch another teacher with this skill. The teachers value it 100%. They have common planning time to go over feedback with the teachers. A lot of teachers stay after school. If you want to come teach and hide, it will not even work for one day here. Forget about it.

What extent do teachers participate in walkthroughs through direct observation of teachers in your school? If you are able to observe other teachers, how and in what ways do you value this process? Do you provide feedback to your peers after completing walkthroughs? (Teachers)

The teachers shared that they do not participate in walkthroughs but they would be interested to do so this year. They stated that it was a goal that they were trying to get to. However, they claimed that there are always so many issues as to how they can get out to observe other teachers.

Interview Question 18

What are your overall perceptions of the value of the walkthrough process?

Tammy's response is as follows:

It is imperative that it is critical. The walkthrough process is something that needs to happen on an ongoing basis. The walkthroughs are critical because it provides the teachers with support. The principal's job is to be the instructional leader. If the principal is doing his or her job and providing ongoing feedback the teachers will get better at what they are doing.

As a follow-up, this researcher asked the following question:

One of my biggest problems is finding the time to do the walkthroughs. To get into the classroom 15 to 20 times to provide the feedback, it seems like an enormous task. What suggestions would you provide to someone who wants to do this?

Tammy provided the following explanation:

From the very beginning culture was very important to establish. Once we focused on culture before instruction and we really defined what that culture was about, that was the starting point. For me as a principal, I

think it is important for me to build that common language. Once we established that culture and built a common language we taught teachers to make sure that time on task is a priority. So when there is time on task in those classrooms, there is going to be less discipline issues. So that is one of the reasons we really focused on the cultural piece. For me as a principal, I knew that I had to balance out my time everyday. So I would plot out my schedule every single day. From this time to this time, this is what is happening. We have an advantage because there are two principals in every building. I told my assistant I am doing my walkthroughs at these times in the day so you handle any discipline or issues going on in the building. When he was doing his walkthroughs I would handle those other things and he would do his walkthroughs because we knew it was a priority. Unless it was a dire emergency those walkthroughs are going to happen. The more visible the principals are in the classrooms the less issues the school has. You are constantly in there. The kids see you in there. You are able to talk with the teachers and have that dialogue. You have to have a sense of urgency. I run around like a mad woman during the day making sure that all of those things are happening. Walkthroughs are a priority to me so I put that at the top of the list. We know that professional development is built in so if you kind of connect those pieces and make that a priority it will happen every day.

Jason promoted the use of a walkthrough as a nice systematic process that provides you an umbrella approach for observing what needs to be accomplished in the classroom.

The teachers pointed out that it is extremely valuable to be on the same page as your peers and that you have the same expectations as somebody who is teaching next to you. One of the teachers summarized this idea as follows:

I think it would be extremely beneficial. Even the other first grade teacher and I are a lot alike and do a lot of things the same. I went over to observe her centers one day and just the little thing she did differently, I said I could do that. Even the teacher you are next to everyday, you can pick things up. We would provide feedback by just talking to the other teacher. We debriefed a few times that day and it was so helpful. It is more helpful to talk peer to peer than to fill out a form. I think it is valuable on both extremes for both teachers and administrators. As an administrator, it gives them a snapshot of the classroom without the stress on us of being a formal observation. As a teacher coming into other classrooms, it goes back to getting their perspective and getting new ideas. Keeping you current or even just saying that I am not in a bubble. These things are happening in their classroom too so I can go back and start fresh with this new idea. I know that I am not alone on this. Even the group walkthroughs are not always people from our school. It is beneficial for them and us because they are getting a perspective from a different district and how they are taught. I think it would be beneficial for a district

to definitely partner and have more of us go to different districts to see how things are done.

Interview Responses Relative to Research Question 2

This second research question is posed to identify what, if any characteristics of professional learning communities are engrained into any of the four elementary schools that were a part of this research. To help answer this second research question, superintendents, principals, and teachers were asked interview questions numbered 9, 10, and 19.

Green Valley Elementary School

Interview Question 9

What are your understandings of a professional learning community and how does your school meet this criterion?

Thomas, the assistant superintendent, stated that they have PLCs in the schools but they do not call them that. At the elementary grade levels, they have meetings where they may bring all of the teachers together to talk about instruction and curriculum. They may focus on a particular topic such as formative assessment and how that may be different between the primary schools and the upper elementary. Thomas spoke about how his district is in the process of compiling a library of instructional videos and articles. The teachers are watching the videos or reading the articles and then having discussions on the material. It is work in progress. Thomas pointed out that you must have a strong instructional model in place and implement it consistently every day. A summary of his response is as follows:

Having a bell ringer, having your objective, stating your objective, having closing activities and having those formative assessments along the way, making sure that all kids are getting it and if they are not, what are we doing if they are not getting it. That is my whole premise of changing a school. A school culture is making sure that we have a strong instructional model and then we can build off of that. I can have teachers now talk about PLCs around formative assessments, or learning targets or closing activities whatever they want to focus on or what they need more of. I don't think I can do that at the High School just yet. I don't want them to talk about bad instructional practices. I understand the DuFours and I have heard them present but we are not just there yet.

Brian, elementary principal, answered this question as follows:

To me a PLC is where all people are helping others to learn. When teachers are helping other teachers craft their skills or hone their skills that is a professional learning community. Common planning time is a help. For our mentor program, I wrote a program that I have all of my first year teachers do an observation of another teacher at least once a month. The mentor also has to ask the mentee a prescribed set of questions. Every month they have to do a different observation. I challenge every teacher to observe another teacher at least once a month. Once they close their door there is no new learning unless they are out observing other teachers. I started the practice of best practice faculty meetings. I will cancel the December meeting and we will do a best practices meeting.

Every teacher will do a five-minute presentation on a best practice. Teachers must ask themselves if it is truly a best practice and if it helps all of the teachers learn new skills. One example was with the use of bookmarks. The next day another teacher was using it. Don't hide your best practice. Give me your best practice. All elementary teachers in the district did best practices and we podcasted them. This is on our private drive. Parents cannot see this. In this category, we have seventeen different episodes of best practices. One example shows a teacher explaining her best practice, which was as follows: This is what I use as a transition between calendar math and our reading program. I write it and I read it at the beginning of the year. Then I write it and the kids read it. After Christmas I will write it and make mistakes and the kids fix it. The kids end up writing it all. These are downloaded onto the school drives. You can attach these as a link to the observations. In this one, there are four different best practices. We did this on Jan 17. She is going to talk about Boomerang Folders in K-2 and 3-5 grades. There is no person in the world that I can pick better than we can get from our own staff. We pulled our reading specialists and we hand picked about five to six teachers to plan and then do in-service trainings for us. Then our walkthrough was that and we looked for that the whole year.

The teachers described a professional learning community as a group of colleagues that share ideas with you. They stated that they share best practices in faculty meetings and with their website. Every teacher in the building got

taped last year. When asked how they felt about this procedure, this is what they replied:

It makes people very nervous. People were a nervous wreck when you have to do this in front of your colleagues. We share best practices during faculty meetings. Best practices are some ideas that we use in the classrooms. It is something that you may use that others may not use in their classrooms. It may also be something that can be adapted to another class or grade level. Spelling games, jeopardy games or on-line activities are possible ideas.

Interview Question 10

How and in what capacity do walkthrough observations affect the development of professional learning communities?

Thomas answered this question as follows:

We drive our PLCs at the elementary or middle school level when doing our walkthroughs. We see that things are not where they need to be, such as more or less of something. This impacts our professional development days, faculty meetings, and our online courses at our middle school. We may put up more videos. We created an online professional development library of our own teachers. We probably have 30 podcasts of our own teachers that we have video taped with them talking about lessons. It is voluntarily done. We may tell a teacher to log on and watch a teacher teach. In another district where I did my dissertation, they used the walkthrough form in 1999. They actually had teachers doing walkthrough

with other teachers. I started that at my previous school. However with the finances here, it is very difficult because we have no money. It is very powerful. At the school where I did my dissertation work, it was a laser-like approach. When teachers went into the room, there were certain things that they better see. If they didn't, there was conversation about it. It wasn't negative but this is what we better be seeing. We better see teachers using formative assessment. We do not want to see kids passively engaged but they need to be actively engaged.

Brian pointed out that the walkthroughs demonstrate what the teacher does well and what they do not do really well. He stated that, principals should use that information to guide the PLC. If he goes into classrooms and sees that the teachers are doing the formative assessments well, he knows it is time to introduce new ones to them. If they are not doing something well, he will ask one of the staff members to present to the others on how this may be best accomplished. It is then modeled for them.

The teachers indicated that when Brian saw good ideas in the classrooms, he thought we needed to share them with other teachers. This was how he was able to come up with ideas for professional development. One teacher responded as follows: "It is like a pitcher who has more pitches that he can use. It will make you more successful. You can always improve on a lesson. "

Interview Question 19

What have you observed or been made aware of concerning the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best classroom practices and student performance?

Please elaborate on specific examples.

Thomas's response is as follows:

It all ties together. I like the question. We have focused in our middle school around formative assessment. If the principal goes in and does not see any formative assessment, the teacher gets the feedback. During my walkthroughs, if I don't see formative assessment, I will tell the teacher to please discuss with a colleague. That teacher will discuss with another teacher during planning time. There will be discussion on a blog using the online program and there is talk about that. What formative assessments do I use when I lecture for 10 to 15 minutes? These are the types of questions that are being posted on the discussion board. Some of our better teachers will shoot them back a discussion and they will add some documents to that so the teachers can simply print them out. If it is a t-chart, the kids take notes on the left side and on the right side; they have to summarize their notes. We should see formative assessment occurring throughout your lesson. "Total Participation Techniques" (TPT) is a good book on formative assessment. Marzano has some good books on formative assessments. Otto has given us things on formative assessments. You can grab those strategies from this book and put in any classroom.

Brian replied that we talked about this throughout the whole interview. He said that he can see what they are doing well and what they are not doing well. Brian felt that you are better able to identify what the professional development needs are for the teachers by being in the classrooms on walkthroughs. He elaborated as follows:

For a best practices faculty meeting, I asked one teacher to do Whiteboard Holdups. He came in and showed everyone how to do whiteboard holdups at any grade level with any content. Another example was on learning targets and how often do you use the learning target. One teacher would ask her students to describe what we just did and how it relates to our learning targets. That is very different to just listing it on the board and not making reference to that. The podcasts came from these. We went on a walkthrough and I said I wish my other teachers did this. Every time we do a best practice it came from walkthroughs. I have one teacher who does differentiation better than any other teacher on the staff. I went to her and asked her to show the other teachers.

The teachers responded briefly by saying that they have all shared best practices and are using other's ideas in the classrooms.

Blue Mountain Elementary School

Interview Question 9

What are your understandings of a professional learning community and how does your school meet this criterion?

Susan stated they began PLCs in the elementary schools about eight or nine years ago. During those initial years there were a lot of growing pains. She said that they did not have any models to follow at that time. However, through the years many positive changes occurred in the elementary building. To begin, the principal gained much experience and grew as an instructional leader. In addition, a number of faculty members who may have been resistant to change have since retired or moved on to another school district. The teachers, who started the process and believed in it, had enough time under their belt and started to see success. Susan proclaimed that once you see the benefits and put all of those things together, it is very powerful. A summary of Susan's response is as follows:

It is not easy to implement and teachers will tell you it was easier and more convenient for teachers to not do it this way. But once you see the benefits in terms of kids, it is hard to imagine as a teacher that you did what you did for x number of years. The facilitators that you select and develop are very critical for the process. The eight to nine years, Mike has grown and has done an outstanding job as a principal. They are completely volunteers. You are talking about some top-notch teachers who are well respected by colleagues, work very hard, and do good things for families. The rhetoric is important. Mike and I talk about this a lot. The first couple of years that I knew him, I remember reflecting a couple of times that this guy says the same thing over and over again professionally. It took me a little while to get it. He's got his core values

and beliefs about what it is and what it is supposed to be for kids. It is all based on what is best for kids so people cannot even argue with it along the way. It is incredible so now I get it.

Mike responded to this question as follows:

My understanding is it is working collaboratively. The most important part of working collaboratively is with a focus. The focus is on student learning. There are many places that say we are learning community and we work together but in my mind, if you don't work on the focus of student learning what is the point. You may be a collaborative but our goal is to improve student learning. Everything we do, as a team has to answer the question on how are we going to influence learning. That is the focus of our learning community.

As a follow-up to this question, this researcher asked Mike several additional questions.

Do you have any specific teams?

He replied as follows:

We are grades K-4. At the elementary we have grade level teams. The facilitators and the teams meet once a month formally. I am not part of that team because they have to own that process. There are meeting minutes that they have to fill out and I get one. I have enough oversight without having to own the process. They have to own the process. I meet regularly with the facilitators as well. They are the core leaders of the grade level teams.

When do they meet?

He replied as follows:

It has developed since we started. They meet roughly 45 to 60 minutes and there is no housekeeping. It is just student discussion on best practices and support for individual students or small groups. They have a form that they complete for minutes and then send me a copy.

Is it built into their contract?

It is not but it is within the contractual day. It is at the end of the day.

They meet at 2:40. I get coverage for them to dismiss kids so they can get started right away and they go until 3:30. Typically they stay later. We have paraprofessionals or special area teachers who cover the classes during dismissal and not during any instructional time.

Interview Question 10

How and in what capacity do walkthrough observations affect the development of professional learning communities?

Susan replied that the walkthrough is a nice and quick way to reinforce best practices, which are directly linked to professional learning communities. She stated that when the teachers meet in their PLC weekly, they spend a chunk of time focusing on students and their special needs and talking about best practices. According to Susan, the tie-in is very clear.

Mike claimed that this is limited to the leader. If the leader does not make a point to connect the two, there will not be a connection. If the leader does

connect the two, the focus will be more important and effective. Mike elaborated on how he makes this occur:

Typically I send out to everyone positive instructional practices that I observed. Not naming which teacher did what but saying this group of instructional practices that I observed were positive. This is what we are about and that promotes this consistency. In addition to that, there are times when I would ask the facilitators to talk about that in their grade level meetings. The tie-in would be taking it from the observed practices and having discussions happen with a colleague. They would say that I have tried this and what about this one that is on the list. It is the Second Chance Learning opportunity, which is the support part of the program. This is really a critical piece to the philosophy. The goal was to know our kids better. We collaborate to know our kids better in turn provide more detailed and intense focused instruction based on who they are as individual learners. Once you know the kids better, you are going to know what instruction to give them and then if they learned it or not. If they haven't learned it, what are you going to do and that is the Second Chance Learning opportunity. So everything we do is based on knowing our kids as learners and how are we going to impact the learning. So that collaboration turns into focused collaboration based on that. It is not just who is doing the field trip or talks about who is doing the copy work.

The teachers reflected on the best practices that Mike saw in the classroom and worked well as a collective group. This is a summary of what they reported:

The teachers would discuss or talk in their PLCs what worked or did not work well. Having that little discussion within your team is very helpful. One of our discussions on the team is sharing best practices. Not only are we doing that but he is also a part of doing that. Since we only meet at our grade level, I may not know what is happening at second grade. It is really a nice way to see things that are happening at different grades and adapting things with kids we are working with. Every once in a while we have noticed inconsistencies. We would ask each other if he said anything about this when he was in your room the other day. Yes he did and we will say what was that about. It will spur on a conversation whether it was a positive thing or was something on bulletin boards, how much stuff we have in the room, and was that really beneficial for learning. My group spent a lot of time talking about it. We kind of know but maybe we did not know. I don't know if he did intend that or not but he probably did know because he is a master at that.

Interview Question 19

What have you observed or been made aware of concerning the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best classroom practices and student performance? Please elaborate on specific examples.

The assistant superintendent stressed that the walkthroughs are tied-in nicely with the professional learning communities. In addition, she stated that the PLCs have had a nice impact on the consistent implementation of best practices across classrooms.

Mike elaborated on this question as follows:

For me the biggest impact has been a number of things. The collaboration of teachers is one of them. No more are teachers feeling isolated. No one works in isolation anymore. They share kids, practices, and strategies. That is a huge piece. Additionally, teachers talk about and recognize which kids are learning and not learning and knowing what to do about it. They have a schedule that supports them doing something about it. Providing Second Chance Learning opportunities or providing different challenges for kids who may be doing well is also key. That collaboration is an extremely critical piece to owning our kids. It is not my 25 kids but it is my 100 kids across the grade level. We have to work together if we are going to be effective and impact learning. Know our kids, share our kids, share strategies, share resources, so it has everything to do with impacting learning.

The teachers replied to this question as follows:

Our meeting that is 45 to 50 minutes sometimes ends up being longer. The major chunk of it is talking about kids. We have a piece that is designed in that meeting to talk about the sharing of best practice. Mike might say that he wants you to share this and talk about this at your

meeting. If a teacher is having a problem they might say help me in the beginning. It was harder to get people to share so they may bring a little card with a few notes to talk about a lesson that they taught last week and throw it in a hat. So that best practice piece happens every week in our meetings. Some of that comes from our walkthroughs and some does not. Mark sometimes sees something in the minutes in their best practice session so he will talk about this. It also allows teachers to brag a little about the things that they are doing. It lets it be shared amongst the group.

Red River Elementary School

Interview Question 9

What are your understandings of a professional learning community and how does your school meet this criterion?

Megan, superintendent, replied that PLCs are groups of people who are aligned professionally in seeking a common goal. At Red River, they have a 30 minute morning time that was put into place with the last contract. It has been a part of the schedule for about the last six years. Megan stated that they have an agreement with the teachers that three days would be used for professional development and two days would be used for clerical time. Teachers get together and meet during the 30-minute planning time. It might be a group of cross-curricular teachers. It could be discussions on struggling students, When in Need (WIN) time or even the portfolio assessments.

Amanda, principal, stated that PLCs are a group of people who are missioned at whatever the task is at hand. She said that they have grade level teams, grade level leader teams, data teams, and Response to Instruction and Intervention (RtII) teams. All of these teams are working under the premise of a PLC. Amanda elaborated as follows:

Really what I found when we first started was it had to be agenda based - here is what you need to do. A lot of those groups are now providing me if I am not there what happened, what they have accomplished, and what problems they have solved. In terms of those groups taking hold of their own, it has really been awesome. Always the most difficult situations are where do the specialists fit in. In my previous building, I had them tell me what particular grade level they hoped to focus their collaboration on for that year. In the second semester they would chose another specialist to plan so our art teacher and computer specialist planned a project together. They struggle as to where they fit in with the PLC so sometimes it takes more of a push. We meet 30 minutes in a morning two to three times a week for various meetings. Grade levels meet at least twice a week. We tell them exactly what needs to be accomplished during these meetings. The teachers really love this time for meeting. It was tough the first year to get it started.

Gary responded to this question as follows:

A PLC is when everyone is invested in one topic of research or learners themselves. I had a lot of success in my formal schools but we are not

collaborative here just yet in this building. In my former building, grade level meetings were very strong. We have 30 minutes of morning minute time every day. Sometimes it is used for staff meeting time, sometimes for technology updates; sometimes it is a grade level meeting. But it is 30 minutes of collaboration time and that is what it was designated for. In my previous four to five years, the groups were very good about it and extremely strong with it. Things emerged. We started something called Power Grouping five years ago where a third grade team was looking at their situations where once a cycle they would put their kids in homogenous groups. The reading specialist and special education teacher would get on board to make those groups a little smaller and level their instruction. It was curricular in nature and that emerged from third grade four to five years ago from their grade level collaboration. Micro learning communities and the things that they do emerged from their own needs. Right now we are a STEM building and I am taking the lead on this. It has not gotten to the point where grade levels have taken the lead. They are not doing it as much in this building. Right now we do assessment portfolios and we maintain our assessments and do a portfolio process. There is some research involved with that and that is a professional learning community. There are several PLCs here in this building. I have STEM training and that is PLC. We have a curriculum review which is the assessment portfolios. I am leading all of these individually. My goal is to go back to where we were at my previous

school and have some little micro PLCs emerge and take over. That will hopefully happen next year.

The teachers' understanding of a PLC is any outside organization that comes together with the district to better enhance our learning. They stated that they are working with Penn State in New Kensington on a science program (STEM) that they are trying to incorporate into the district. There is a mapping team, an RtII team, and an Elementary Student Assistance Program (ESAP) team. Another teacher felt that a PLC involved parents, teachers, and students working together and learning from each other. There is also a time for sharing ideas between the teachers.

Interview Question 10

How and in what capacity do walkthrough observations affect the development of professional learning communities?

Megan pointed out that they had a closed-door environment before beginning the walkthroughs. She stated that through the work of Joe Werlinich and Otto Graf, they became a very collaborative environment. At first, Megan said the teachers felt the walkthroughs were a “gotcha” with a lot of doom and gloom.

Amanda emphasized the importance of taking the teachers along with the administrators on walkthroughs. One of the areas that they focused on last year was student writing. After completing the walkthroughs there was a discussion on how all of the grade levels were struggling with writing and how they were to come up with a plan for improvement. They were to consider the age group as

they developed their own vertical alignment. The teachers had discussions on why certain topics such as instruction on verbs were occurring in first grade and also again in fourth grade. Additionally, some of the teachers asked if they could go back into the classrooms again on their planning periods. Amanda stated that it was not everybody, but it was an awesome thing for those who did go back in.

Gary replied that they are all connected. Nothing is independent. He stated that the generalized feedback that is given on a walkthrough could be put back into their PLC. When Gary completes walkthroughs, he looks for student learning and gives the teachers feedback on instruction.

The teachers appreciated feedback from the principals. They stated that it enhances their practices tremendously. One specific example that the teachers shared was how they were able to do walkthroughs at another school district to focus on restructuring the building. Another example that they referred to was how the middle school and elementary teachers compared notes of their reading program after completing walkthroughs.

Interview Question 19

What have you observed or been made aware of concerning the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best classroom practices and student performance? Please elaborate on specific examples.

A summary of Megan's response to this question is as follows:

That is huge and this is an easy tie-in because through the walkthrough, administrators identify best practices and share with teachers information in conferences about best practices. They recommend teachers observe

others. When you have groups of teachers it strengthens that whole process. During walkthroughs, you may observe strategies involving think-pair-share, differentiated instruction, Socratic seminar, or different things like that. I believe the walkthrough makes administrators more aware of the practices and administrators can connect with teachers. The lesson plan is not always going to tell you that. The walkthrough facilitates best practices and the discussions that need to happen.

Amanda replied that she has observed the use of small group collaborations, use of rubrics, tiered lessons, and differentiation. In addition, the use of technology, especially Promethean Boards, is being better utilized. People are now sharing ideas and their websites.

Gary confirmed that is just what the research states. The best instructional practices produce the best results.

The teachers indicated that it just keeps them aware and on top of things. Through the use of walkthroughs, they are aware of what others are doing in their classrooms.

Oak Ridge Elementary School

Interview Question 9

What are your understandings of a professional learning community and how does your school meet this criterion?

Tammy responded to this question as follows:

I have approached PLC in different ways. About five years ago we developed learning communities. At another school in the district, we

gave teachers options as to what professional development they would like to engage in. So we developed that based upon the teacher's input. There were six different groups and teacher leaders facilitated them. Twice a month we would meet for 45 minutes in the meeting. Teacher leaders had the autonomy to develop exactly what those 45 minutes would look like. Many of the teachers would base the learning group on a book or snapshots of video. For example if they were working on best practices they would really look at the video to see what those best practices were in the classrooms. We had a group on brain-based learning and how that works. We had a group that looked at SMART goals. Each year those professional learning communities changed but it was based on a survey that was given at the end of the year to see what types of additional professional development they were interested in. PLCs have to be based upon teacher interest so they are excited about learning and taking it to a new level. At the end of the year they did a sharing forum so each group presented what they had learned throughout the year. One group focused on reading strategies and they created a binder for teachers to use and that was kept in the learning library. It really helped them to learn along the way but it helped everyone else on the staff for the information they were able to share.

A summary of Jason's remarks is as follows:

PLCs are set up to make what we do better. We have four of them currently in our building. We have a literacy leadership one where it

involves every literacy teacher in the building with one representative from K-2. We have the same thing in math. All of our PLCs meet once a month after school. Our third one is a career exploration PLC. It involves our social studies teacher, science teacher, one of our resource teachers and me. It is looking at how 7th and 8th graders are preparing for high school or jobs. We take surveys with them. We take field trips. We bring in speakers for them, and we do a big career day at the end of the year. It is a warm motivational piece for them. The last is the arts integration group where the artists, music teachers, and a variety of regular classroom teachers work together to figure every year the best way to push arts into the classrooms. Whether it is centers, projects, or if sixth grade is studying Greece or if they want to do something on coliseums, they can collaborate more with the regular education teacher and the artists. Typically what they are discussing are the best practices and their agile instruction. It is right here. Sharing best practices and what is working. There is a correlation between the observation feedbacks. Three literacy teachers have been in each other's classrooms all last year. They can tell you how they are doing the writing process together. They get feedback as they meet once a month after school and the in-service days they meet a half-day too. What their look-fors are my look-fors so all of us are on the same page too. Our PLCs are an extension of our school day. That plays into that leadership role where we are trying to make them experts in their content.

The teachers answered this question as follows:

It is a lot of us devoted to some kind of task that we decide. We actually have our PLC as part of our afterschool meetings that we do. The groups are the Math Crazies, the Arts Integration, Homework, Literacy Writing, Leadership, Career Exploration Action Research, Assessing Student Learning, and School Wide Positive Behavior.

Interview Question 10

How and in what capacity do walkthrough observations affect the development of professional learning communities?

Tammy responded to this question as follows:

They affect PLCs in a very big way. We look at what is going on daily and we see where there is a need and most teachers can see where those needs are. It is a collaborative effort between teachers and principals coming up with those ideas. What those PLCs will be for the year. At Oak Ridge specifically, we have 30 days of professional development along with those learning communities that happen twice a month. We look at how we can connect professional development to the learning communities. That is ongoing development that happens throughout the year that we connect one to the next. It is really helpful to the teachers in that it is not just a one shot deal. Here is differentiated instruction but differentiated instruction occurs 30 times throughout the year so we are really building on that one main topic or what the learning topics are for

the learning communities. You have a chance to build and connect and take that to a new level.

A summary of Jason's response to this question is as follows:

This is the tool to base that discussion dialogue on. When I was in your room and when you were making inferences you were acting out different scenes from shows. I really liked that. Can I come in and watch how your kids transition to that? Can you share this with your PLC? Can you model that for them? Last year we used to have sessions set up in which we had PLC meetings for half the time and the rest of the time we had teachers sharing their best practices. This year we just use the time for the PLC meetings. I take my PLCs pretty seriously with our staff. I want to see some growth. At the beginning of the year I sit down and review personal growth plans with the teachers and that is how the PLCs are formed. How can we support you in this? For example, our English teacher wanted to be a reading coach so we work to get them to that point. Some teachers may put their desire to improve in technology. We ask everybody at the beginning of the year what he or she is interested in working on. On our web page we have our PLCs. Last year we posted an action research group on homework. All of the PLC teams fill out an action plan form and a feedback form. So anytime I want to see what the teams have filled out I can go on-line and look at it. Here is our growth plan. What are your focus strategies to get there, timelines professional areas of strength? How are you growing to demonstrate progress? Every teacher has a mid-

term and an end of the year evaluation. Homework and smart stuff was our action groups last year. Our presentations last year had to be based around the Promising Principles. This year, I did a Google site. Vibrant teaching communities, and our theme this year is introducing the Common Core Standards. Every teacher can look at every teacher's lesson plans. Our superintendent and assistant superintendent also have access to all lesson plans. Our RtII process is tracked through OnHands data software. The teachers also do a reflection each week. How my week went and what are our goals for the next week. We have discussions of best practices and can model for others. If I go to Agile Instruction we are able to post what each teacher did.

The teachers indicated that the walkthroughs and PLCs are separate. The walkthroughs are more for us as individuals where the PLCs are more of a collaborative effort.

Interview Question 19

What have you observed or been made aware of concerning the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best classroom practices and student performance?

Please elaborate on specific examples.

Tammy replied to this question as follows:

We have 30 days of professional development. We have the professional learning communities so those all fall under the umbrella of the Promising Principles. When we are doing the walkthroughs, we are making the connections through what we learned through professional development

and those best practices. If we are looking at differentiated instruction, feedback is given about differentiated instruction. It is continual.

Everything is interconnected and it is how you make those connections that are important. The Promising Principles is how we have that common language. It is consistently and continually talking about those things that have had that impact.

Jason responded as follows:

Without walkthroughs and PLCs, we would be stagnate and we would not be able to grow. They are instrumental in our success. It gives teachers time to plan and share best practices. It gives you a set of standards that you are going by. It is kind of like playing sports. You can't play defense without talking about it. The continuous use of data is one of our best practices. We live and breathe data here (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Literacy Skills -DIBELS, Developmental Reading Assessment - DRA, 4 sight assessments, PSSA, and map assessments). I am pretty confident that I could tell you what each student's scores are in this building. If we go into any teacher's room they can point out where their kids are. We live and die by knowing that data. You can't go anywhere unless you know where your students are.

The teachers stated that people see different behaviors and ways to handle them. They are observing different best practices that people are using and are trying to share those throughout the building. The teachers pointed out

that it may only be the administrators who are coming into the classrooms, but they want to make sure that everyone is seeing some of those things.

Interview Responses Relative to Research Question 3

This third research question is designed to identify walkthrough strategies that directly align with the six principles Blankstein identified as important components of professional learning communities. To answer this research question, superintendents, principals, and teachers were asked interview questions numbered 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 22.

Green Valley Elementary School

Interview Question 11

How does the walkthrough promote or not promote the mission, vision, values, or goals of your school?

Thomas explained that their mission is to make sure that all kids can learn and that they need to make sure that we are using the best instructional practices. He stated that with the walkthrough form, they are consistent in the use of best practices. The best practices that Thomas refers to are active student engagement, learning targets, and formative assessments.

Brian replied that their mission statement is about kids and learning in a global society. He stated that if we have good teachers we will create that child. Walkthroughs are professional development for teachers. They should not be implemented to catch someone doing something wrong. According to Brian, they should be used to affirm or learn new ideas. Therefore, the idea of a walkthrough is to create great teachers.

The teachers indicated that they have a collaborative working relationship through the sharing of best practices. They also pointed out that Brian is able to gain more knowledge about the students and their learning through the use of walkthroughs. They felt that this better prepares him for dealing with the parents during conferences.

Interview Question 12

How and in what ways does the walkthrough process affect collaborative teaming in your school?

Thomas replied that during the grade level meetings, and team planning time, the teachers have conversations about the walkthroughs. The information that they discuss is what the superintendents and principals are seeing in the classrooms. They share best practices. If someone does not get good feedback, they talk with the other teachers about how to improve their practice.

Brian stated that when he sees something that a teacher is doing really well, he asks that person to show the rest of the faculty. He said that he really likes the idea of having teachers do walkthroughs on their own throughout the building.

The teachers indicated that they share ideas with each other. When Brian discussed formative assessments, one of the teachers researched the topic and then shared the information with the other teachers. They stated that they meet during their lunchtime and share ideas. They also share ideas during the faculty meetings.

Interview Question 13

Focusing on prevention and intervention strategies, how and in what ways does your school ensure learning for all and are walkthroughs an important part of this process?

Thomas was not sure if there was a direct correlation between the walkthrough and prevention or intervention strategies. However, he referred back to the use of formative assessments and the need to vary this technique. He spoke about the importance of identifying those three or four students in the classroom who may not have a good understanding of what is being taught by the teacher. Thomas elaborated more on this topic as follows:

What are you going to do to differentiate your instruction? Can you assign homework or give them another problem or work with those kids in a small group to help them. I don't want to talk about pulling kids; I want to know what you are doing within the classroom. We are having discussions with teachers now because the walkthrough form has given us a tool to talk about formative assessment and how we intervene with kids. The teachers are starting to think more about how we can help the kids.

Brian elaborated on the process extensively as follows:

For me the biggest and most important thing is what safety net do I have in place for kids who are struggling. Walkthroughs give teachers new skills in how to deal with kids – differentiation. The safety net is important to make sure that the kids do not fall through the cracks. I meet with each grade level of teachers to talk about every kid and who needs help and

what they need help in. Reading specialists and Title teachers are there. We look at who needs help and what they need help in. We have flexible reading groups that we do throughout everyday. I have three aides. We have 60 fifth graders and I divide them into skills-based groups. This is how I prevent kids from falling through the cracks. I do not have math help. Classroom teachers take three groups, three aides work with the highest kids in book studies in three groups, and my Title teacher takes the bottom group. I pair up one teacher with one aide. In this notebook, I have the names of our flexible groups. Here is the aide's name and teacher's name. My Title teacher just takes the Title kids. The first group we base the students on the PSSA scores. Terra Nova or DIBELS is what we use for the primary school students. If we have a kid who probably should not be in this group, we will then move them into another group. We move students around every 16 days. I tell my staff that after day 7, if you know that a kid needs to be moved, they should not wait until the 16th day. Move them before then. I have a binder that shows you every group of kids, the teacher, and what they are doing with the students. Title teachers use Read Naturally, Study Island, and reading skills fluency with Read Naturally. This is how I do my RtII. When we sit down to have our next grade level meeting, we will sit down with this binder and will talk about this student. Does he need to stay in this group or do we need to move on? The Title teacher documents what is going on with each group. Our struggle is that we do not have any intense programs. We have to

have something that we can monitor. You have to answer that question for me after 16 days. If you can't answer that question for me then you can't use that program and as soon as the student is flat-lined then you need a new group or a new program.

The teachers replied that the walkthrough helps to identify how many students are engaged in the instruction. They said that would tell them if they are meeting the students' needs. For the students in the upper grades, the teachers referred to formative assessments through the use of whiteboards as a strategy for prevention and intervention.

Interview Question 14

How do walkthroughs influence the use of data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement?

Thomas replied to the question as follows:

That is a good one with the walkthrough being sent to me. We are able to gather data. I will create an excel spreadsheet on how often we are seeing learning targets, and types of formative assessments. My secretary created an excel spreadsheet for the walkthrough forms. We have data throughout the year on what we are seeing and what we are not seeing. If 100% of our teachers are using learning targets we need to change it up. That should not be a focus now because everyone is doing it. Our goal with walkthroughs is to get more or less of whatever you want and once you get to the point that you are seeing what you want to see, you need to move forward. You got to have another focus. It does not

have to be another additional focus, but it has to be around that instructional model or taking that focus to another level.

Brian replied that his walkthrough does not influence the use of data. He clarified by stating discussions on test scores and other types of data happen during grade level meetings. Brian did mention the importance of observing and documenting the number of students who were actively engaged, which is data that he discusses with the teachers. However, walkthroughs do not give him specific information about test data scores.

The teachers also responded to this question with an answer about which students were actively engaged or not engaged.

Interview Question 15

Do walkthroughs help gain active engagement from family and community and, if so, how does this occur?

Thomas responded to this question as follows:

I think it depends on what your focus is on your walkthrough. It depends on what you looking for. If your focus is on learning targets it will not pull in the parents. Formative assessment and I am still on that because it is something that I really believe in [*sic.*]. If you have more kids engaged in your classroom they are going to have a better chance doing their homework at night. They are going to have a better understanding of what is going on. You are going to see more success in the school. Now you have a positive environment. Parents are happy. When are parents not happy? It is because the students are not doing very well. Is it the

kids or teachers fault for not using good strategies? Back 40 years ago, we instructed and then 3 weeks later we would give a test. We never gave different types of formative assessments along the way. There is research out there that says that there are better instructional practices. I don't care if that is how I was taught 20 or 30 years ago, there are better instructional practices that are occurring now. So I think it depends on what focus you are going to make. Do I think a lot of focus could be tied into parent and community, I do. I guess this is the tie in, if you have better instruction in the classroom and kids are seeing more success, you are going to have more parent involvement. They are going to be proud of their school and the kids are going to be proud of their school. I don't believe in a bell curve. If there is good instruction going on all kids can do well in your class. I've seen some great teachers using great instructional practices that could pull the lowest kid up and that kid is excited about school. That is your tie in. It is around instructional practices. If your teachers are using the best instructional practices and kids are having success, you have parents happy. It is a win for everybody. When parents are telling other community members, boy what is going on in that school and there are great things going on it really makes a difference.

Brian replied that when he does walkthroughs, he is able to see the organization and arrangement of the classroom. He asks himself if we are dealing with a dis-shuffled person? He then addresses any issues with the

classroom teacher. He replied that parents are also able to see the classrooms. Brian stated that this speaks volumes when you talk to the community.

The teachers reported that the walkthroughs help the principal gain a better understanding of what is happening in the classroom, which helps during parent conferences.

Interview Question 16

How and in what ways do walkthroughs help to build sustainable leadership capacity?

Thomas responded to the question as follows:

As central office people, we need to continue to work with the principals and give them strategies and best practices. I presented yesterday at the middle school on formative assessments. I think the principals learned some things on best strategies. One of the books I really like is "If You Don't Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students." It is a great book so you have to constantly feed them. Teachers have to realize that they are nomads. Teachers are never going to get to that point where you feel 100% satisfied with all of the initiatives. We are going to push to try to get better. We are going to continue to work with the principals and give them the strategies, help and bring in resources to help principals evaluate teachers.

Brian stated that this is dependent on your walkthrough. The walkthrough should be implemented to promote professional development and learning.

Interview Question 22

If a colleague was considering and asking you for advice on the development of professional learning communities and the use of walkthroughs in his or her school district, how would you respond?

Thomas stated that before someone considers implementing walkthroughs, they must understand its purpose. They also need to know whether there is a history of walkthroughs being used in the district. Teacher buy-in is also critical. He mentioned that in a previous district where he worked, the walkthroughs were used in a negative manner. They just crushed the teachers. When implementing walkthroughs for the first time, Thomas recommends starting with a small group of teachers first and then he asks them: What strategies should we be seeing in your classrooms during walkthroughs? He pointed out that would be the focus for the first semester. He elaborated as follows:

You have to get teacher buy-in. The only way to get teacher buy in is to ask them what should I see to continue to grow. As an administrator, I network once a month and we talk about these things. The other thing that is important is to work with the union. We don't want to catch them off guard and we need to make sure that they understand where we are going with this.

Brian replied as follows:

Definitely do it without a doubt. It is very valuable for what we do here. I love the idea about teachers visiting other classrooms. It is a critical

piece. First I would let teachers have input on what the walkthrough should be focused on. I would ask them about one thing that is extremely valuable in teaching. They may say class management. I should then see that in the classroom. Then you start to shift the focus areas. That is critical. They then realize that he is evaluating them on things they feel are important. If you shove something down their throats that they don't feel are important they will look at you as if you have seven eyes. I agree to whiteboards, however I am going to put something on the list that I want. Then you have to make sure that you do a follow-up. You have to give them the feedback.

The teachers responded as follows:

My opinion about walkthroughs is that they are needed and are a necessity. However, they should not happen once or twice a year. It has helped us improve what we do. Brian is very approachable. If we have a question he always has time for the teachers. Being through several administrators that makes a huge difference.

Blue Mountain Elementary School

Interview Question 11

How does the walkthrough promote or not promote the mission, vision, values, or goals of your school?

Susan replied to the following question as follows:

I think it definitely fits in. We're talking about a responsive and innovative staff so walkthroughs are reinforcing more often best practices,

recognizing teachers for doing best practices, and giving feedback to teachers about doing best practices. It talks about doing learning experiences that are unique for each child. There is definitely a strong connection.

Mike responded as follows:

Again I think it is the leadership who sets that base. If you create the walkthrough process and focus it around initiatives or common core beliefs, you would assume that both beliefs are beliefs core to the district. You can then call attention to it through the walkthrough process. All of the discussion, whether it be faculty meetings, individual meetings, informal discussions or walkthrough write-ups have to work in unison to reinforce what we are about. I would assume that what we are about is part of the mission statement. When I say assume I mean in any district, I would assume that you are about what your mission statement is about. Our current tagline this year is customizing learning, nourishing potential and delivering excellence.

The teachers referred to their tag line about being a responsive staff.

They stated that their culture is--you have a plan and you teach your lesson. You know who has learned it and who has not and you respond. We give them a second chance that day at learning. They indicated that their lesson plans might change throughout the week. They teach and then respond to the learners. That is the crux of their culture so that is how they claim to be a responsive staff.

As a follow-up question, I asked the teachers, “How do the walkthroughs promote that culture?” They reported that one of the areas that Mike looks for when he is in the classrooms deals with student understanding. They elaborated as follows:

Often he will say to us when we are at the end of the lesson, I want to know right now which students did not master this learning target. We often walk around with post it notes. When I am walking around, I write down the names of kids. It may be three; it may five or it may be none. That is something that he has drilled into us, as we need to know who has not met that target and how we are going to respond to those children who did learn or did not learn.

I asked the teachers, “How do they formally or informally assess those students?” This is how they replied:

We have had a lot of training on assessment for learning strategies. So using dry erase boards, using active votes, using small groups rotating through you, there is a whole plethora of things we have been trained in. In fourth grade it is a little different. We use little checkups. It may be like four questions. We often do that at the beginning of the next math class. After they have had the whole lesson and have completed their homework, we review the prior day’s lesson and then do a little checkup. A lot of it is informal. We collect a lot of data but it is not necessarily numerical data. It is data that helps to drive our instruction. It may not be in a chart or a graph or printed out. Every teacher in this building can

name five or six ways that they use data every day. In our math classes if you have one of the novice math groups, we often have paraprofessionals, interns, or student teachers. He does not want to see me teaching and the other person just walking around or checking to make sure the students are doing what they are supposed to be doing. He wants to see us broken into two groups. Our lowest math group has 16 kids so we break into two groups. You have a real sense of which kids are getting it and which ones do not. We do the same thing for reading but not across the grade levels. We do guided reading. So within our classrooms we have different reading groups.

Continuing with this discussion, this researcher asked the teachers, “How do they manage the extra time and the Second Chance Learning between reading and math?” This was their response:

After the teacher understands who is getting the lesson or is not getting the lesson, those kids will be pulled out that day or the following day. My teachers may do Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time with another teacher and I will work with kids from my class and other classrooms. We can really practice with those kids who really need it and what they really need to practice. That session lasts for about 15 to 20 minutes. We also use a resource teacher to help with that Second Chance Learning who is on our novice math group. She is there doing the lesson. She is aware of what is instructed so she provides second learning during our (DEAR) time. It is about 20 minutes of silent reading. They are not missing any

other instruction. We determine if it is a math or a reading skill that they need help with. In second grade we use student teachers. After we take a chapter test we analyze any of the kids' tests that did not reach mastery. For us that is 85%. We will track out the kids and the lessons that they need and we will use that Blue Mountain Power Time to give them specific re-teaching lessons and we will then retest them to see how they do when we finish that cycle. All of those decisions are made during the PLC meetings; how we use resource teachers, how we are going to set up Blue Mountain Power, who is going, and how we regroup for math. We started the Second Chance Learning about nine years. When I think about third grade and the number of children, it has dramatically dropped. Because we are doing so much of a better job differentiating and catching them everyday and re-teaching them as we go along and they are mastering the tests. It really has changed dramatically.

Furthermore, I asked if this whole process was difficult to implement when they first started. This was their reply:

Our biggest hurdle is people thinking that it was something new and that it would come and go. Probably the meetings when we were taking time away from planning time or their time were a concern. I could be grading papers instead of sitting here talking about kids or Blue Mountain Power Time. In our meetings, it is supposed to be about talking about kids and their successes or their needs. When we first met it was hard to keep people on track with their discussions. They wanted to talk about field

trips, who was doing the copy work, what are you teaching, and not kids. It was keeping that discussion corralled in that area. It was hard in the beginning. We were not used to sharing with others. In the past, you may have teamed with another teacher based on if you were their friend or if you were self-contained. The idea that you would sit down and say that you are struggling with so and so and to open yourself up to the fact that I needed help or other ideas was a challenge. These are the issues that my kids are having. It really now is all five teachers know all of these kids because we talk about them openly and everyone helps and gives advice to everyone. It was hard at first especially for some people. It makes them feel vulnerable.

My last follow-up question focused on how they were able to find time for the meetings and this is how they replied:

It has changed over the years. In the beginning just to make sure that we would all be committed to it, he scheduled it during our special time. So if I have music and gym back to back and if my colleagues all have their specials, he would have someone cover and walk my kids to gym class so we could be a part of that meeting. It was our common planning time. After a few years, once he knew we became committed to it, we could take the morning time because we are here before the kids arrive. Or we could stay after school. My PLC meeting is from 2:45 – 3:30. And once again he will find someone to dismiss my kids so I am there for the 10 minutes that are at the beginning part of my meeting. When we were

learning about PLC communities, they talked about certain things at the beginning that needed to be tight. So that meeting time was tight. As everyone is buying in you could be a little looser. That is what he did for us. Whatever is best for your grade level, you choose that time. We all know that you do not schedule a parent conference or you do not make a make a phone call. You do not arrange anything else and that is sacred time for your team no matter what.

Interview Question 12

How and in what ways does the walkthrough process affect collaborative teaming in your school?

According to Susan, there is an impact when each teacher gets his or her own individual feedback regarding whether common practices were observed. Another good example is when teachers work collaboratively on concepts that may not be evident across many classrooms.

The teachers stated that the principal is looking for a particular strategy across the grade level, so they discuss that at their common planning time meetings. They elaborated as follows:

One of things last year in third grade that he was looking for was evidence of students' work. His feeling was maybe there was not enough of student work around the classroom and that the students could look at each other's work. He did that with us. He has said that some of us were doing checking with understanding and he asked us to share that with the rest of the team and our teammates based on our observations. He had us do

that with descriptive feedback. He was seeing some who were giving really good feedback with the students and others who needed a little more encouragement and ideas.

Interview Question 13

Focusing on prevention and intervention strategies, how and in what ways does your school ensure learning for all and are walkthroughs an important part of this process?

Susan elaborated on this process as follows:

That is a huge part of the whole PLC culture in this building. It is focused on each child as an individual learner. The way we use the schedule. The way we assign resources in terms of what we ask the gifted teacher and what we ask the reading resource teacher to do. Everything is really focused on prevention and intervention trying to use resources as best as possible. There is a lot of swapping of teachers. It is really interesting. It is done informally and I think that makes it powerful. We have students who have special education Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Gifted Individualized Education Programs (GIEPs). We have service agreements. But we also have our gifted teacher working with other kids who do not have GIEPs based on their needs in a particular area in a particular time based on enrichment. That informal instruction using resources as best as we can is really powerful. The whole focus here is on Mike's banner. It is his PLC banner and his main point about what he repeats all of the time. It is all focused on did kids *learn* what we taught

them and not did we *teach* it. So there is huge responsibility here and accountability on if we taught a given concept to a student making sure that the student learned it or if the student did not learn it. Then it is the responsibility of the teachers to figure how we are going to provide different instruction on what is needed. That part became addictive to teachers once they started to really measure everything they taught and figuring out ways to provide more instruction, different instruction, and reassess kids learning. Once you see that more kids can get it when you offer an extra half hour with the students that became motivational for the teachers that they had that kind of power even beyond what they were doing in the classroom.

Mike replied as follows:

It is not so much the walkthrough process but the PLC process. At the weekly meetings they talk about individual kids and are they learning or are they not learning. Their plan supports that through Second Chance Learning. They also plan strategies within the classroom and when we do small group interventions. The discussions are based solely on whether that child learned or did not learn. If they did not learn, they talk about strategies and interventions strategies for that individual child.

As a follow-up, I asked if their process was based on the philosophies of the DuFours. Mike replied that they started with strategies based upon DuFour's work about eight years ago and have adapted some of his ideas.

The teachers again focused on the importance of establishing a strong culture. Therefore, when Mike does his walkthroughs, he validates that the culture exists in the classroom. He is always looking for evidence of small group work and differentiation. He also checks for understanding.

Interview Question 14

How do walkthroughs influence the use of data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement?

Susan responded as follows:

Frequent formative assessment is an expected part of the culture here. It is part of the PLC model. When Mike completes his observations and provides feedback he is looking at that area as one of the key areas. The focal points of the walkthrough are really critical in terms of understanding the role that frequent formative assessment plays in terms of kids learning. That kind of feedback is based on best practice. So being aware of that as a principal and an evaluator and looking for opportunities to give teachers more about that is really important.

Mike replied to the question as follows:

As I go through the walkthrough process I typically do it in chunks. I may go through the entire grade level at the same time and that gives me a clearer picture of what is happening. So for instance, if it is during math time and we typically have flexible groups, I should see instruction based on those children as learners. So I get a real clear picture from the top to the bottom of the grade where the kids are as learners and how our

instruction is meeting those needs. So the clear match is the walkthrough process. What I find doing, as a building leader is to analyze where we are and where our needs are and use faculty meeting time or other times to have teachers look through data that has been accumulated or observed. We discuss data and use time to effectively move students. The key part is how are we impacting kids in their learning. In many schools, people are not given time to change practices or time to collaborate with colleagues to change practices. They are not given time to look at data and practices and how they are going to implement in classrooms tomorrow. Instead this is what is thrown out at them and they never talk about it again.

The teachers stated that this goes back to Mike wanting to see or talking to them about how they are checking for student understanding. He wants to know if they have numerical data and the formative data or assessments. However, the teachers said that he wants to know what we are doing with that data. In addition, what did they do to gather information on who understood or did not understand the lesson content.

Interview Question 15

Do walkthroughs help gain active engagement from family and community and, if so, how does this occur?

Susan replied to this question as follows:

I don't know. I would say that the PLC model and the way we use resources and the way we schedule here gains a lot of satisfaction from

parents. I am not sure that we talk to parents about walkthroughs. It all ties together. Parents feel here like everybody who works here is paying attention to every detail about their kid's experience and really being as creative and efficient as they can in trying to provide support and provide instruction. There is a really strong sense of satisfaction. Not everybody is satisfied with what we do no matter what we do but there is a real strong sense that the building is really doing it the right way and what is best for kids.

Mike stated that the walkthroughs typically do not. However, they do indirectly because the walkthroughs are a positive part of what they are trying to do for kids in the end. He indicated that walkthroughs impact their instructional practices and their building philosophies, which ultimately does impact kids and their families. According to Mike, it certainly impacts what they do with their children.

A summary of the teachers' response is as follows:

It shows when the kids go home while talking with their parents they may say the principal was in our classroom today. I think it is showing a concern and personal connections with those kids. Not only is he taking notes, he is asking students how they did on their test or how their brother is doing. It is nice to see that informality also. It is building a personal connection and relationships with those kids. When parents call or community members ask about what is happening inside the building or during a school board meeting or such, he is in the classroom so he

knows. So a lot of times when you do not have walkthroughs you are not in the classrooms on a routine basis. I am always amazed that he knows most of the students' names. The kids love that because he knows their names. He can respond to just about any question from any parent or people in the community. He is in the classroom and not just his office. We give minutes to him from our weekly meetings. Someone takes notes and we send minutes to Mike, the special area teachers and team members who were there. Every week he has very detailed meetings about what we talk about in our PLC meetings. So that is another way that he really keeps tabs on what is going on. Sometimes he will bring something up about what we highlighted. He reads and highlights them so we know that he reads them. He wants an action step so what are we going to do about it. He always says to tell me about what is going on there.

Interview Question 16

How and in what ways do walkthroughs help to build sustainable leadership capacity?

Susan replied that walkthroughs offer a formal way for the building principal to be more visible, involved, and informed with classroom instruction. In terms of leadership, Susan stated that it is critical to have the building leaders observing as much instruction as possible, so they can provide formal and informal feedback to the teachers. She claimed that it is important for the leader and very important for the teachers.

Mike stressed that so much of that is dependent on the type of leader and leadership style. He believes that when done and communicated correctly, and when there is a good process for give and take discussions, walkthroughs build a lot of ability for leadership capacity.

As a follow up, this researcher stated to Mike that he used the words done correctly several times, and asked him to explain in more detail what does he mean by being “done correctly.” Mike responded as follows:

Everything is done in concert. When I say correctly, the faculty meeting process, the informal meeting process, the grade level meeting process, everything has to reaffirm the goals of the building and what we are trying to do as a building. It has to be very intentional. Every process has to be done with intentionality. This is who we are and this is why we work this way. Everything has to be done with the goal on how this impacts kids. Not how it makes adults happy with their schedules or when we have to make this parent happy or whatever, the bottom line is how does this impact kids. Being intentional in every way to make these processes connect is critical. It doesn't work if I have a walkthrough process here and that is one thing and a faculty meeting here and that is another thing and none of them connect. To me that is not correct. The correct thing is having them all mesh with a similar focus and goal and everyone working on the same to get there. It doesn't make sense to build a schedule to make adults happy or to have an instructional practice philosophy that is disjointed from classroom to classroom to classroom. There is no

collaboration from inexperienced to experienced teachers. All of these practices have to work together. I am the building leader. I have to oversee all of that and make it flow that way. Nothing works in isolation.

The teachers reported the following information:

They are helpful with helping new teachers. In a sense of what we shared earlier. If he sees during his walkthroughs that someone needs help with checking for understanding, showing evidence, or providing more detailed feedback, he asks for you to talk about this at your next meeting. Share your ideas. You have done a great job with this. Help your teammates out. It makes sense. They feel very supported and comfortable with this. He has also asked people to present at faculty meetings or if you could share this idea that you did. He is trying to foster a little bit of leadership in a teacher leader kind of role. When he sees something that is outstanding, he will find a way to encourage them to share and not just with their team. In thinking the opposite way, we have some young and new unbelievable technology driven teachers who come in and share with us. He tells them they are in charge of sharing websites and different things they found that are valuable and asks them to discuss how they were using that in the classroom. They made a list of these things and shared with us. It is also valuing their strengths. They are different types of teachers and learners than we are and just helping in this way has also been very effective. So it is not just the veteran teachers.

Interview Question 22

If a colleague was considering and asking you for advice on the development of professional learning communities and the use of walkthroughs in his or her school district, how would you respond?

Susan replied that she thinks that PLC's are great at all levels. She stated that it might look differently at an elementary level than at a high school. Susan believes that training with the leader and potential facilitators is very important. To implement, it is very important to have district level support. In addition, Susan suggested the following:

One of the things or kickoff things that Mike did that was very valuable was that he and a team attended one of the PLC institutes. It was the DuFours where they went on a two or three day session. They learned a lot of content while they were there. They had a lot of group planning time while they were there. It was a great way of kicking this off. Here is what we learned this morning and how can we get this kicked off. I would recommend that as some sort of a kick-off. It is really important to take teachers.

Mike answered this question as follows:

I think both of them are critical. They both provide you with the ability to move kids. This is the most important piece about why we are here. The PLC at Blue Mountain has completely changed the culture of the building. We went from a did we teach it mentality to did they learn it mentality. There is no doubt about that. We are very student centered. Before that,

we were a bell center. If I was giving advice, they are essential to moving kids as learners. Not just by themselves, because it is the leader that has to take a solid understanding of both of those things and make sure they are working to benefit learning.

The teachers responded to this question as follows:

I have been here 29 years in this building. In the course of that time I always thought that I was good teacher. But in the past nine years, progressively I can say without a doubt that I know my children so much better because we are a professional learning community. It is just so different. I know how to differentiate. I know by the end of the lesson who got it and who did not get it. It all comes out of the culture of Blue Mountain. I think that Mike has made it very clear to us as a staff of things he will be looking for when he comes into the classroom. I know what Mike is looking for and those are best practices that have been a part of our culture and the expectations. Everyone supports one another. I was at another building in our district and that culture was there. But it is more organized here where it is a lot tighter. Here you can go to somebody where you can ask for advice. That network of colleagues makes that possible. I don't think that walkthroughs can drive a PLC. Once again walkthroughs are more of a validation and maybe a means for him to feed ideas or things that might need shared or worked on. You have to have the whole PLC culture in place and then the walkthroughs can become a beneficial part of it. But I don't think the reverse can happen. Having

great walkthroughs is not going to create a great PLC or culture in the building that supports the dynamic student learning that we have here. It is a piece of the puzzle.

Red River Elementary School

Interview Question 11

How does the walkthrough promote or not promote the mission, vision, values, or goals of your school?

Megan described their vision statement as one that refers to lifelong learners. She said to tie the walkthrough into that would be to talk about the collaborative environment that has been created among the professionals. Megan explained that as a result of the walkthrough, the professionals have created the vision statement and that promotes lifelong learning. For them, it improves what students are experiencing in their classrooms. Megan stated that it improves their achievement and growth and hopefully inspires them to be lifelong learners and responsible citizens in this competitive world.

Amanda said that she definitely believes that the walkthroughs support the mission and vision statement. When we complete the walkthroughs we are identifying the positive things and best practices that are being implemented in the classrooms. We want to see kids working in groups and not in isolation. We want to see students discussing topics with each other and with us. Those types of things all support what we are trying to do in society.

Gary replied that the use of the walkthrough makes us a valuable learning organization that educates and inspires lifelong learners. He referred to the idea of creating that open door policy. He stated that everyone is open to feedback.

Interview Question 12

How and in what ways does the walkthrough process affect collaborative teaming in your school?

Megan explained the walkthrough, whether an event or idea, includes teachers observing their peers in action rather than looking at a produced activity. They use it for professional growth without the administration being present. The teachers came up with this idea themselves.

Amanda elaborated as follows:

Absolutely! That is probably the biggest one that we see. Even if it is our walkthrough and not the teachers walking with us, the ideas that we bring back and if something stands out within the grade level that is what their next grade level meeting will be about. Collaborative teaming definitely occurs when the teachers are with us. When the teachers are with us, some natural collaboration will take place. We do something here new this year called WIN time. It is 30 minutes everyday for every kid. We instruct for 9 days and progress monitor on the 10th. Then we regroup our kids and put them into different groups. Because it is a new thing that we are doing, this is when I do most of my walkthroughs. This is part of the RtII process. When we break down the grade levels, there will be 11 staff members, our special education teacher, and Title I teacher. We divide

the kids into the different groups. We have developed a reading continuum of skills so that at each grade level we do a screener at the beginning of the year. It is a pretty intense one timer. We also use DIBELS three times a year with every student and additional times for those who have qualified for Title I. During the WIN time, whatever that skills group, only one skill such as consonant blend is taught. The progress monitoring is being done with everybody. It is not DIBELS. It is a progress monitoring assessment based on that one skill. If a student needs more time, he or she gets pulled out in the afternoon to work with the academic intervention specialist in our Tier II or our reading specialist, which is our Tier III. So they are getting 90 minutes and some are getting an extra 30 minutes in the afternoon so there is lots of collaboration around that.

The teachers explained that when they do walkthroughs on their own, they are able to see what others do in their rooms. They can then ask permission to use these practices in their own rooms. They claimed they would share ideas that way. The teachers felt that they do better with the sharing of ideas when it is not prompted and it is informal. They used a protocol called the Guest Book for when they visited other classrooms and then provided the teachers with feedback. With this protocol, they would display samples of student work, and a blank sheet of paper for teachers to respond in writing about the project. According to the teachers, that task was done on an in-service day.

Interview Question 13

Focusing on prevention and intervention strategies, how and in what ways does your school ensure learning for all and are walkthroughs an important part of this process?

Megan stated through the use of walkthroughs, they are able to see if the teachers are using accountable talk, if the students are engaged, and if the teachers are talking with the students who may be having difficulties.

Amanda replied that the information she discovers in the classrooms from the walkthroughs is brought right back to the grade levels and that information is directly related to prevention and intervention strategies.

Gary and the teachers reported that they did not see a connection between the walkthroughs and prevention or intervention strategies.

Interview Question 14

How do walkthroughs influence the use of data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement?

Megan indicated that data could be more than just numerical information. She stated that if the goal of the school is to have clear expectations, we would be able to see this in every classroom. The administrator would be able to say to the teachers they were not meeting the look-for goal and that would be data back to the teacher that could then be used to change instruction, which would ultimately affect the kids.

Amanda indicated that she really did not use the walkthroughs to gather data. She stated that the walkthroughs were used to encourage collaboration with the WIN time, DIBELS, and the use of 4sight assessments.

Gary replied that they discuss the use of data gathered from walkthroughs during their district level meetings.

The teachers explained that they have data days where they examine results from the 4sight, PSSA, and Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS). They did not believe that there was a connection between the walkthroughs and the use of data to influence decision-making and continuous improvement.

Interview Question 15

Do walkthroughs help gain active engagement from family and community and, if so, how does this occur?

Megan and Amanda reported that the parents do not participate in walkthroughs and they were not able to make any connections in this area.

Gary stated that the walkthroughs do not gain active engagement from parents. However, he felt that it could with a stretch. To clarify, he promoted the idea of public relations. Gary claimed that the walkthrough allows the parents to know he is in the classrooms and he knows what is happening instructionally. He claimed that he knows that because the parents report to him that the kids tell them that he is in the classrooms all of the time.

The teachers did not see a connection in this area.

Interview Question 16

How and in what ways do walkthroughs help to build sustainable leadership capacity?

Megan replied to this question as follows:

That is huge when you have a group of teachers who want to walkthrough and observe each other as a personal option. You develop leadership in the group of teachers. It is not administrator driven at all. I think we do induction walkthroughs where we take the new teachers through the district to show what is happening district wide. We want them to take on roles and fill gaps to step up to the plate. I think the walkthrough contributes to that when they are participating in the walkthrough. As an administrator you can say you do this really well so I am going to have someone observe you. You would build leadership when you as an administrator go in and say you do this really well.

Amanda proclaimed that this is a big one and they have really developed in this area. It is not just the teacher leaders who are completing walkthroughs now, but it is people who have stepped up to the plate. For example, she described a group of teachers who were struggling with writing and wanted to do something about it. They are collaborating more and it is one of the biggest ways that fosters that leadership and collaboration.

Gary replied to the question as follows:

That has to be your rock—being in and out of the classrooms.

Walkthroughs facilitate being in and out of the classrooms. As a leader

you have to know what is happening in the classrooms. As a leader you have to know what initiatives are being carried out in the classrooms. As a leader you have to be able to coach people to do things more efficiently in the classroom and the best way to do this is through the walkthrough. It might build leadership capacity by doing walkthroughs with the teachers. It certainly educates teachers but does it make better leaders? I am not sure. Do some of them become leaders while they do walkthroughs, they do but are they applying what they learned from the walkthroughs? They are learning from what they do in the walkthroughs to become better teachers.

The teachers did not specifically refer to walkthroughs but responded that it was a big thing that anyone could be a leader and it did not have to be an administrator. They talked about finding your seat on the bus slogan. Some of the teachers would run the meetings whether it was content oriented or not. The topics of the meetings that they held were on the Promethean Board and the writing process.

Interview Question 22

If a colleague was considering and asking you for advice on the development of professional learning communities and the use of walkthroughs in his or her school district, how would you respond?

Megan answered this question as follows:

It would depend on where they were with the openness of their teams.

However, I am an old science teacher so I would recommend that you use

walkthroughs to give your professional learning committee content to discuss. So you have your science teachers observe each other with look-fors and then they sit down as professional learning communities. They discuss the look-fors to see what they can change with what they are doing and what is good about what they are doing. You move it into the sharing of best practices assessment and you grow a culture out of it. You have to start with someone who is willing. Yes I think it is a very good practice. We have teachers who crave it. People ask to observe others. Amanda replied as follows:

It has been one of the most beneficial things that our district has done. Especially coming from a district that did not have that. It really gives you that open door feeling. It is teacher focused but ultimately it comes back on the students. And the conversations you have with the students, it really connects you and lets you know what is going on in the classrooms. It helps you understand what they need to be doing and why they need to be doing it. For the PLC, any time the teachers can get together, have those discussions to make plans and set goals, that is what comes out of the learning communities.

Gary responded with the following answer:

I wouldn't do them at the same time. The walkthrough is more important because it is at the core of what we do as leaders. Be visible in rooms and stay a little bit longer. Make yourself visible and make yourself an open friendly resource in the classroom. When you make that comfort,

then you can start giving constructive feedback and it is all constructive or suggestive. Hey I really liked how you asked so and so this or how you nurtured them on this. Hey next time would you consider doing think-pair-share? You were asking kids really great questions. Further engage kids with think-pair-share. To develop the PLC the best way is to begin with a book study. Anything that is forced is not a PLC.

The teachers reported that they would recommend the use of walkthroughs. They appreciated having an opportunity to do walkthroughs themselves. You can observe the little things beyond academics that enrich your students.

Oak Ridge Elementary School

Interview Question 11

How does the walkthrough promote or not promote the mission, vision, values, or goals of your school?

Tammy responded to question as follows:

The walkthroughs promote our goals because they are built upon the framework of the Promising Principles and so all of the walkthroughs and the look-fors fall within that larger framework. So our goal is to have Agile Instruction happening all day everyday within the classrooms. So when principals do the walkthroughs, all of the pieces of Agile Instruction are look-fors. Agile Instruction, Embedded Support, a full Valued Arts Program, Culture of Dignity, and a Quest for Excellence are the Promising Principles. You can look at it in broader terms so everything that we do

we are looking to be the best and always ensuring that whatever we are doing is with the best interests of students in mind. That goes for teachers to looking back and thinking about how I can look in the mirror and reflect on the today's lesson and how can I make it better for tomorrow. Within that quest of excellence we are always self reflecting and looking to improve what we are doing so what we are doing may be good but we want it to be great. So even if you are an established teacher and you have been with Oak Ridge for the past nine years, you know that there is still room to grow. That is the philosophy that we have engrained with the teachers. There is always room to improve and improve your practices.

The teachers replied that the walkthroughs keep them on target with what they are here to do as educators. They stated that they are to provide the best learning environment for the kids. They feel the walkthroughs encourage them to keep going. The teachers stated that if they were slipping in an area, that group would notice that area of weakness. They would then work to improve that skill.

Interview Question 12

How and in what ways does the walkthrough process affect collaborative teaming in your school?

Tammy replied to this question as follows:

There is collaborative teaming that happens all of the time. The way the master schedule is designed so that teachers from two grade levels at a time have a chance to collaborate - first and second grade, and third and fourth grade. We purposely made the schedule so teachers have time to

collaborate. If we are doing walkthroughs, we may look at a team for specific look-fors. For example, we are full inclusion schools so our resource teachers co-teach with our regular ed. classroom teachers. If I am doing an observation, I may provide that same exact feedback to the teachers because they approached this as a team. It may be important for the three of us to have a dialogue about that particular lesson. It may extend to that entire first grade team. We have a wall that opens so at often times an entire team may do a lesson. You may see eight centers across a first grade classroom. That is an opportunity to provide that collaborative team effort with the walkthrough.

Jason explained that the walkthroughs are not just done by the administrators, but they can be teacher to teacher. He stated that every teacher has a common planning time. They also have an instructional cabinet that discusses the goals of the school.

The teachers indicated that this was the first year that they were able to do walkthroughs. They stated that it helps them to see things that they could strengthen with their own teaching. It is also helpful to do walkthroughs and see what others are doing in our school district.

Interview Question 13

Focusing on prevention and intervention strategies, how and in what ways does your school ensure learning for all and are walkthroughs an important part of this process?

Tammy elaborated on this question as follows:

This occurs a couple of different ways. Interventions are embedded into the daily routines. We don't pull students out for interventions. We work with teachers on how to provide students with the support they need within a differentiated classroom. Interventions happen on a regular basis but it may be individualized for that classroom. If a student needs to become a more fluent reader, a fluency test may happen when the students are in the 60 minutes time that the teachers are doing guided reading. If a student needs additional support in decoding there might be specific interventions that are designed with that literacy coach and that teacher to help support the student. That is really built into that small group time where that teacher is either working with a group of students within in the guided instruction to provide that intervention or working one on one. Every six weeks we have a data meeting. Those data meetings include not only student achievement but if students are struggling behaviorally or struggling with particular deficits in any content area. It is somewhat an RtII process, but is approached differently where we talk about every single student at these meetings. We talk about their needs. The entire team is a part of that process. For example, if I am working with a fifth grade team it includes a principal, the assistant principal, the reading coach, the math coach, the guidance counselor, the resource teacher, the paraprofessionals, and the classroom teachers. Working together during those times to look at every student, because we are discussing every student's needs. During those walkthroughs, we are helping the principals

and coaches with those specific look-fors. We may have discussed the students' needs at the time of the walkthrough. That gives us an idea of what those students' needs are so we can provide support or suggestions because of the information. That is also an ongoing process. It is RtII.

Jason explained that they have an RtII process in their school. In every classroom, there is small group instruction. Oak Ridge's strength is to provide instruction that is geared toward each child. Jason stated you know everything about every student because you are responsible for that student's success. Jason reported that they have a skills block in which there may be students from different grade levels who are given instruction on a particular skill that they may be lacking. Teachers may do walkthroughs into this classroom to observe the progress of these students.

The teachers indicated that this is a focus area for when they do walkthroughs. Checks are made to see if the students who are struggling are getting the extra help they need to be successful. It is reported on the walkthrough form.

Interview Question 14

How do walkthroughs influence the use of data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement?

Tammy replied to this question as follows:

It does. We really look at data. We look at several snapshots of data with DIBELS, 4sight, DRA, and math classroom based assessments. So at the status meetings, we look to see where there are deficits and where

supports are needed. We look at it again on a very individual basis and then we create a just right instructional plan for specific students. Again it's those walkthroughs because we know that information and everyone is familiar with where students are scoring and where there is an area of need. It is easy for walkthroughs to support teachers and students. Often time during the walkthroughs we talk with students and interact with students and asking students to explain what they are learning. It is really an important piece because I can sit within a walkthrough and talk with different students and then provide that information to the teacher. So sometimes it is not that I am sitting back and looking at a teacher but I am figuring out what is happening instructionally by talking with students. Students are the best indicator of what is happening with instruction in the classroom.

As a follow-up to this question, this researcher asked Tammy what she does if the student does not know the objective or the focus of the lesson. This was her response:

If that happens then that will be the focus of the conversation with that teacher. It is important to figure if students are not able to explain or to apply the information they have learned in class. Then there must be a disconnect between what the teacher thinks is happening in the classroom. It is important to make sure that there is a clear understanding of that and teachers want that.

Jason explained that the only data that is collected is the documentation of things that are going to be discussed with the teacher.

Interview Question 15

Do walkthroughs help gain active engagement from family and community and, if so, how does this occur?

Tammy explained that the walkthroughs do not specifically support the family but she feels that there maybe an indirect connection. The indirect connection is one that relates back to the review of data with the parents. She also discussed how parents tour the school building frequently and they are able to see the small group instruction, and one-on-one interaction between the teachers and students. Tammy stated that parents often want to see what is going on in the classrooms so they can connect that learning with what they are doing at home.

Jason replied that parents do walkthroughs when they tour the school. They use their “Promising Principles” as a tool for the parents as they do the walkthroughs. During this process they encourage the parents to check to see if the students are engaged and active in their learning. The overall philosophy of the school is that the parents and students are the customers in this business. Jason proclaimed that failing schools need to take a close look in the mirror to make things better. According to Jason, excellence begins when the excuses stop.

When answering this question, the teachers also discussed what occurs with the families as they walk through the school on tours. They indicated that as

parents do the walkthroughs, they are picking up on things such as transitions, groupings, centers, behavior systems, and use of technology. They are able to see our behavior charts that are posted in the rooms. They shared that their extensive use of technology is another area that is often observed by the parents.

Interview Question 16

How and in what ways do walkthroughs help to build sustainable leadership capacity?

The assistant superintendent at Oak Ridge stated that walkthroughs help to build leadership capacity because there is a strong connection between principals, coaches, and teachers. She clarified as follows:

One of our goals is to build teacher leaders and principals. You can do this through walkthroughs. You can identify teachers who have good leadership skills. We really promote teacher leadership and most often the teacher leaders do grow into other leadership positions such as coaches. I started as a teacher at Oak Ridge and was a coach, a principal, and now the assistant superintendent. I think that because we promote that and because we see growth from our teacher leaders every day. The second way is that principals and the assistant principals have dialogue with what is happening in the classrooms. I see that as some form of professional development for the leaders so the conversation that is going on is the building of common language and consistent practices in the school.

Jason stressed that he thinks of everyone as equal. He stated that if one of the teachers is not a leader then we are going to sink. He proclaimed that is the culture they have built over time.

The teachers focused on when they are being observed in their classrooms. They pointed out that if the administration brings others into their classrooms frequently, it must be that they are doing something well. In their PLCs, the teachers reported that everyone takes a leadership role. They said that someone in the groups will usually take charge but no one is really ever assigned the leadership role.

Interview Question 22

If a colleague was considering and asking you for advice on the development of professional learning communities and the use of walkthroughs in his or her school district, how would you respond?

Tammy replied as follows:

The use of walkthroughs and professional learning communities are both very important because of the dialogue that happens with the teachers and principals. Within those learning communities you have an opportunity to figure out if something is not going the way you expect in your classroom. There are other teachers to help and support and to give ideas. The same goes for the walkthroughs. It goes back to support and conversation. Those are the two pieces that really connect the professional learning communities and the walkthroughs. The dialogue that happens is more than any learning material. It is just teachers talking

with teachers or administrators or coaches talking with teachers. Because through that dialogue sometimes you have those “Aha” moments for exactly what you need to do next.

Jason emphasized the importance of strong leadership in the school. He stated that leaders have to have a culture and their own belief systems and people who believe in them.

The teachers were very forthright with their answer to this question. They said to do walkthroughs but make sure that you do not put too much weight on them. The teachers pointed out that through the use of walkthroughs, information is shared on whether they are meeting the needs of the students. They stated they could not imagine the administrators only coming into the room twice a year and trying to tell them how to do their job. Otherwise with multiple visits, they said they felt fine having the visitors sharing ideas with them.

Interview Responses Relative to Research Question 4

This fourth research question focuses on the identification of individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in the Educational Leadership Initiative. To answer this research question, superintendents, principals, and teachers were asked interview questions numbered 1,2,3,4,20, and 21. Only two of the four schools that were a part of this research study participated in ELI.

Green Valley Elementary School

Interview Question 1

How many years has your school participated in ELI?

Green Valley did not participate in ELI.

Blue Mountain Elementary School

Interview Question 1

How many years has your school participated in ELI?

Blue Mountain did not participate in ELI.

Red River Elementary School

Interview Question 1

How many years has your school participated in ELI?

The superintendent, principals, and teachers reported that they were one of the nine starting districts in ELI. The superintendent stated they have been participating for about five to six years.

Interview Question 2

What was the purpose for having your district join ELI? Who are the team members from your district and how were they selected?

The superintendent replied that their purpose for joining ELI was that it was an extension of what they were already doing. Otto Graf and Joe Werlinich worked with their district prior to ELI for years as they implemented a differentiated supervision model that included walkthroughs. Megan proclaimed that they joined ELI to strengthen that and to foster more teacher leadership. She pointed out that they take a team of administrators and teachers on a retreat to a leadership academy every year. Instead of calling it ELI, they now call it a Leadership Academy. Megan elaborated on the process as follows:

There we work on our vision for the district. We look at where we were last year and plan for future years. It is a check and balance to see how

we are doing each year on our plan. When I became superintendent, the people on ELI were the same people for the last three years. They are the District Leadership Team and the ELI team. There are representatives from each building. Some of the team members have titles and others may not have titles but are leaders within their buildings. They might be Department Heads. We developed four committees. The first was the Restructuring Committee, and it has taken place this year. There were eight members on that team. We have a Student Success Group that has a sixth through ninth grade focus. A Technology Team focuses on technology Kindergarten through twelfth grade. There is a Classrooms for the Future (CFF) coach/teacher who helps teachers integrate technology in the classrooms. A Curriculum Group does assessment portfolios and works with Curriculum Connector. It is our online curriculum. All of those people on these committees would know about ELI. One of our tasks this year was to put a school governance model in place where our Leadership Team communicates out to building level teams in order to improve communications. This helps teachers who are not connected in any way understand ELI. This has just started this year so it is fresh. Fifteen teachers are now participating in ELI from the elementary schools as a district team.

Amanda, one of the principals, reported that the main purpose was to be able to connect and collaborate with other school districts. She added a second

purpose stating that joining ELI was valuable for building teacher leadership.

Amanda described how members participate as follows:

We moved to the model that we invite people to come and join us. Now if they have an interest we will invite them to participate. I have six teachers, our academic intervention specialist, and myself from my building on the leadership team. It is a lot of the people who come to our retreat. We put out a mass email to all of our teachers inviting all to participate in the retreat to become a part of the planning and goal setting. It is an opportunity for anybody to participate.

Gary, another principal from the district, replied that he was not in the district when they first joined ELI. However, he imagined that it was to develop internal leadership or teacher leadership. The team members from his school include the department head, and other teacher leaders who were placed upon the team by their level of interest or recommendations from other teachers.

According to the teachers, the purpose for joining ELI was to establish a community of learners from around the district. They stated the team members included the superintendent, the assistant superintendent, principals, teachers, and the nurse.

Interview Question 3

What are your ELI goals or focus areas and how is progress measured in achieving those goals?

Megan outlined their goals as follows:

The four categories are our goals that lead to student growth. That is what it is all about. Concerning restructuring, we had two K-5 buildings. Our scores were less than perfect especially in 4th and 6th grade. We did not have RtII so we felt that we were missing kids when it came to drilling down to their weaknesses. We put together a task force, which we called the restructuring committee. It has been together for three years and this year we actually restructured the buildings. We now have a K-3 building and a 4-5 building. That team has accomplished their mission and we are now walking it out. As a result we made curricular changes, and scheduling changes to accommodate each building. This will give kids what they need. We will use DIBELS data. We began WIN time where kids get the 90 minutes of instructional time and an additional 30 minutes of time for enrichment or time to bring their scores to the benchmark. If in the middle you are being strengthened and hopefully moving forward. We have an academic intervention specialist who plans all of the data for it. There are seven classrooms, two reading specialist, two learning support teachers, a guidance counselor, and sometimes the principal to get their needs met. This may include eight or nine groups to get to their needs. This was one of our goals through ELI and our district leadership teams.

The 2nd category was the student success group. The k-12 team is looking at what motivates kids, what causes them to persevere, and what type of activities can give them a sense of belonging or a reason to be here to make those social behavioral connections.

Technology category is to integrate technology to bring our teachers into the 21st century. To make sure that they we understand technology and how kids use it. We have your own Bring your Own Technology (BYOT) and we have implemented it at the high school and will be bringing it slowly down to the elementary.

The fourth group is the curriculum connector/assessment portfolio group. The high school is in its third year in having assessment portfolios. We don't collect lesson plans anymore but we now collect assessment portfolios. Teachers collect every assessment they do formally or informally and then they select one every couple weeks or every month. They reflect on that based on the following three important questions: "What concepts or understandings do I want my students to know as a result of this activity? What will I do to help them understand? How will I know they understand the concepts" (Costa & Kallick, 2008, p. 47)? They are meeting in departments in their professional learning communities. They are meeting across departments during a 30-minute morning time a couple times a month to discuss their portfolios. They discuss what students are growing or not growing and what they are doing to change their approach to the child. The middle school is doing the same thing in the second year. The elementary is the pilot team who is doing the Curriculum Connector and assessment portfolios. They are new to the assessment portfolios. Our science and computer departments have their curriculum mapped. The elementary is doing diary mapping so they just

started last year. They are carrying it out to develop their core maps that are linked to the assessment portfolios. We just wanted people to put down what they were doing and we found they were already closely aligned.

Concerning how progress is measured, Megan reported that they have action plans for each group, which includes their goals for the year. She added that the technology team has steps in place to accomplish their goals. For example, they are implementing wireless connections in all buildings. When the groups meet every month, they reflect and report out on their progress.

Amanda proclaimed that their district goals for ELI focus on developing teacher leaders. The purpose is to build a culture with the staff on the idea of collaboration and decision-making and not the top-down model. In addition, she felt that it was important to make connections with other school districts to share resources and ideas.

Gary gave a response similar to what Megan explained. He talked about the four general areas including restructuring, curriculum mapping, technology, and student motivation. These focus areas were established at the retreat. Gary said that people at the retreat gravitated toward one of the four committees and they have been together for the last couple of years. Gary specifically stated he was on the curriculum mapping committee and they were working closely with another participating school from ELI. According to Gary, progress is measured through needs assessments and surveys. They are moving forward because much energy is being spent on these topics.

When answering this question, the teachers also pointed out that their goals focused on restructuring, assessment portfolio goals, technology, student engagement, and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics).

Interview Question 4

How has your team benefitted from working with teams from other school districts?

Megan indicated that she was not sure how ELI directly benefited their progress. However, indirectly, she stated the collaboration that exists between the schools from ELI is a contributing factor. The Colleague in Residences (CIRs) from ELI brought the districts together to share ideas and plans. Megan said they visit each other's schools and do walkthroughs to learn about different programs such as AP, Curriculum Connector, and assessment portfolios.

Amanda and Gary shared their excitement about being able to collaborate with other schools as well as share costs and resources with them to promote their programs. For example, she talked about the districts sharing the costs and being able to host Bena Kallick, a noted author, who is a recognized educational consultant throughout the United States and abroad. This cohort of schools was developed out of ELI. Gary shared that this five-member cohort is exceptionally powerful in terms of financial and intellectual resources.

The teachers did not have specific examples to share but they were appreciative of being able to visit other school districts. They liked being able to see what other districts are doing well and borrow some of their best practices.

Interview Question 20

How and in what ways has ELI helped to promote the use of walkthroughs in your district/school? If so how?

Megan reported that her connection with ELI is about teacher leadership. She stated that before ELI, Otto Graf, and Joe Werlinich worked with their teachers on the walkthrough process. This is an extension of that work. When they go to ELI meetings, a major part of their agenda includes doing walkthroughs at the various schools where the meetings are taking place.

Amanda reported that ELI has helped to promote walkthroughs through the Colleague in Residence (CIR) program.

Gary mentioned Otto Graph's work in their district on the implementation of walkthroughs. He said that Otto was a mentor for them throughout this process. Gary said that Otto would schedule an event walkthrough and talk about what was happening. He would model the procedures for them. Additionally, Gary spoke on ELI's use of walkthroughs during any events that they hosted.

The teachers felt that ELI's purpose for coming to the district was to promote the use of walkthroughs. They receive a lot of feedback from the walkthroughs.

Interview Question 21

Has ELI helped to promote the building of professional learning communities in your district/school? If so how?

To answer this question, Megan and Amanda both spoke on the importance of building teacher leadership. Amanda elaborated by stating that when they started with ELI, one of their first goals was developing teacher leadership and the collaboration within that. Originally the workings within their schools were very isolated. Amanda stated that their first attempt to build teacher leadership was the development of grade level department heads. These individuals now competently lead their grade level meetings.

Gary's feeling is that ELI helped to sustain professional learning communities within the district. He reported that there is an agreement within the district that teachers go to a certain amount of professional development or training so ELI is only enhancing that.

The teachers indicated that ELI helped to promote the building of professional learning communities through their attendance at the yearly retreats.

Oak Ridge Elementary School

Interview Question 1

How many years has your school participated in ELI?

Tammy elaborated on this question as follows:

I believe it has been for about the past four or five years. We participated with ELI in different capacities. In the beginning we had a group of people who participated in the ELI meetings. We also worked with Sue Goodman who came into the schools and worked with us. However after a year, ELI felt that we were very much ahead of many schools so they started to work with us in a consulting type of way. We still work with John Lozosky

and Sue Goodwin. They did some walkthroughs with us at the time and they worked with our district coaches. They developed times within each of the schools to do walkthroughs collaboratively with the principals and the teacher leaders. At that time she suggested a tool for us. This is not a walkthrough that was day to day for the principal. This was more of a walkthrough to gather information about best practices and strategies being used in the classrooms so it could be used consistently across Oak Ridge. On the learning walks we would go into a classroom and the teacher would know ahead of time. We would go into the classroom for about 15 minutes and after the walkthroughs we would take time to debrief and involve the teachers in the debriefing. The look-fors were established before the walkthroughs started. The teachers knew them ahead of time. We would look at reading in particular and the small group instruction, the skills and strategies and how the teachers were looking at them.

Jason stated that ELI has been working in his school for approximately three years.

The teachers were not familiar with ELI.

Interview Question 2

What was the purpose for having your district join ELI? Who are the team members from your district and how were they selected?

Tammy stated that their connection with ELI goes back to our superintendent and her relationship with the University of Pittsburgh. Tammy described their purpose as follows:

As much as we wanted to be part of ELI they wanted to be a part of Oak Ridge too. That connection was pretty strong. Our superintendent has worked with Otto and John. When we first started, we were not sure where it would lead us. I was a principal at the time. The members of the team were the superintendent, two principals, director of curriculum and instruction, our literacy coach, and a math coach. That was a small group of people who attended the meeting. All of the team members were from different Oak Ridge schools and they would take the information back to their individual school.

Jason replied that their purpose was to collaborate with other school districts, share what they are doing, but also learn from what other districts are doing well. Jason pointed out that a good example of this was when he sent a teacher to this researcher's school to observe the Spanish program. Jason now reports that they have started their own Spanish program within his school. Concerning team membership, Jason stated that he is a member of the team along with a teacher and instructional coach.

Interview Question 3

What are your ELI goals or focus areas and how is progress measured in achieving those goals?

The assistant superintendent responded to this question as follows:

Our ELI focus was learning walks. We wanted to identify what the best practices were in the classrooms. From the learning walks we began to look at look-fors from a different perspective and we were able to figure

out what the look-fors were in each building. I think it looked slightly different in each building. We would use the look-fors to connect the best practices and to work more collaboratively as a team and more consistently across Oak Ridge. Progress is measured through the debrief. We talked as a team and we would make adjustments accordingly after each walk. The dialogue was probably the most important piece. It provided a forum for the leadership groups to talk together. This is where we are and where we want to go as a team. What we learned from the learning walk was later used in professional development to help the best practices within the classrooms. Because the walks are with the coaches they are the folks who run the professional development. They are the persons that really create that professional development. It is valuable to have them as a part of these walks.

Jason answered this question as follows:

My experience with ELI is going to the meetings or visiting schools. We get two benefits out of it. For example, we added our skills block and this was where they pushed in for special education. This is where we got that information. ELI to me is to see what great things are happening in great places. Touring and looking at classrooms is like going to a conference. There are lots of things to see, but it is really nice if you take away great things like the Spanish program at your school. Then, I think it is very successful. The whole ELI thing is seeing how administrators work with teachers together and share ideas.

When questioned concerning goals, Jason spoke globally about keeping an open mind to observe what is going on and to observe the dynamics of groups and how they interact with the teachers. Jason stated that it is a learned experience. He claims that they learned a lot about how our coaches, teachers, and administrators from other schools work together. At ELI, they do not teach a single lesson that is going on in one person's classroom. Jason pointed out that what he likes about ELI is that every group that presents at the meetings utilizes a group approach. It shows how administrators, teachers, resource teachers, and others effectively work together. Jason stated that his goal is to go to the meetings and look at how they can take school-wide ideas and implement them at his school.

Interview Question 4

How has your team benefited from working with teams from other school districts?

When asked about working with teams from different schools, Tammy stated that they approached it differently. She stated that they did not work with other districts in ELI. They would attend some of the meetings, but they worked with ELI in a different capacity. According to Tammy, at Oak Ridge they have a strong vision of where the district is headed. There are some very solid people on ELI and they acted more like consultants to map where the district is headed as opposed to helping the district make changes. Tammy stated that they were not making changes, but growing and adding to what they were doing. One of the ideas that ELI helped their district with Project -Based Learning.

Jason replied that they have learned through collaborating with others and seeing what works best. It is the networking that is most valuable. For example, he discussed how another district's math coach might interact with a math coach from his school district. It is a sharing of resources and conference information. He stated that sometimes districts are too isolated, which is not good.

The teachers commented on when they held a technology night at their school and how teachers from others schools visited to learn new techniques and skills. When we have the chance to go to different school, it gives us the perspective of what other teachers are doing in their classrooms. They stated that they are always curious about what others are doing and what practices can be shared.

Interview Question 20

How and in what ways has ELI helped to promote the use of walkthroughs in your district/school? If so how?

Tammy stated that they have done walkthroughs for quite a while. When they first started with ELI, they had some superintendents and principals who were able to provide them valuable feedback and validation about what is going on in the classrooms. According to Tammy, one of the most valuable pieces is providing a forum for conversation and dialogue. When they first started with ELI, they did not have their Promising Principles developed. It was through continuous conversation with ELI that helped them to figure out what their best practices were and what they could do to grow with those best practices.

Jason stated it is the dialogue that you get from doing walkthroughs with others that is important. They walk and talk about what was observed. It is all about dialogue.

Interview Question 21

Has ELI helped to promote the building of professional learning communities in your district/school? If so how?

Tammy answered this question as follows:

Not specifically. Even before we were with ELI we started with professional learning communities. We probably worked with ELI for the past four years. I started learning communities at least five or six years ago because I felt that they are very important. But we had conversations with folks from ELI about our professional learning communities to hear what is going on in other school districts and an opportunity for us to grow and learn when we first established the learning communities. It was trial and error and over time we changed the learning communities. It looks different in each of the Oak Ridge schools but we each have the learning communities within our schools.

Jason also stated that he did not think that ELI helped build them. However, through ELI, they were able to compare their PLC teams and what others were getting accomplished in different school districts. Jason talked about the importance of having strong leadership in the PLC groups. They have to be individuals who present themselves in a positive manner, who others respect and

will follow. Jason pointed out that if these “Big Bubbles” are negative, you have to burst them and find someone else to take the leadership role.

Emergent Topics or Themes

This chapter continues with a presentation of tables representing key points derived from all interviews in each of the four schools. The purpose for developing these tables was to assist this researcher with the identification of emergent topics or themes.

Table 4

Interview Questions Relative to Research Question 1

Inter view Ques tions	Green Valley	Blue Mountain	Red River	Oak Ridge	Emerging Topics
5	<p>S – Started about three ago</p> <p>Graf/Principals Academy</p> <p>Need a focus</p> <p>Teacher involvement</p> <p>Development of Walkthrough template</p> <p>P-Professional development</p>	<p>S – Developed about six years ago</p> <p>Part of differentiated supervisory plan</p> <p>P – Established five years ago with new teacher contract</p> <p>Part of supervisory plan</p> <p>T – Part of teacher’s contact</p> <p>Introduction of Danielson’s Model and</p>	<p>S – Started sixteen years ago</p> <p>Worked with Graf and Werlinich/ Principals Academy</p> <p>Event walkthroughs at first</p> <p>Part of Supervisory Plan</p> <p>Professional development</p> <p>P –</p>	<p>S – Principals are instructional leaders who need to be in classrooms everyday</p> <p>15 minute observations</p> <p>Feedback through locked folders</p> <p>Ongoing conversations and embedded support</p> <p>Team effort</p>	<p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p> <p><i>Professional Development</i></p> <p><i>Instructional Improvement</i></p>

	<p>Graf/Principals Academy</p> <p>Instructional Focus</p> <p>T - Presented to them at a faculty meeting</p>	<p>walkthroughs</p> <p>Walkthroughs through a whole grade level</p> <p>Differentiated instruction</p>	<p>Established 10 years ago</p> <p>Werlinich and Graf/ Principals Academy Event walkthroughs</p> <p>Supervisory walkthroughs</p> <p>Teachers do walkthroughs</p> <p>T – Walks in place for a awhile but only used extensively in recent times</p> <p>Walks discussed during in-service programs</p> <p>Mostly done by administrators</p>	<p>with ELI with planned walks to learn about best practices</p> <p>P – Began back in 2003</p> <p>Graf/ Principals Academy</p> <p>Tool to create dialogue with the teachers</p> <p>Not created to evaluate teachers</p> <p>Professional development</p> <p>Need teacher buy-in</p> <p>LRDC center</p> <p>T – walks in place for awhile but really formalized only last couple of years</p> <p>Trained on use of form at a faculty meeting</p> <p>Administration provides feedback through</p>	
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				Google Docs	
6	<p>S – Defined look-fors – More or less of in classroom</p> <p>Improvement of instruction – students can't hide</p> <p>Strong instructional plan</p> <p>Professional development</p> <p>Best practices</p> <p>Teacher involvement</p> <p>Formative assessments</p> <p>Student engagement</p> <p>Laser-like focus</p> <p>P – Formative assessments</p> <p>Instructional Focus</p> <p>Important to change every 9 weeks</p>	<p>S – Form from collective bargaining unit</p> <p>Principals set own annual building goals and focal areas</p> <p>P – Specific look-fors or not</p> <p>Building focuses</p> <p>Need learning targets. (Differentiation, Individualized Instruction, Small Groups, Flexible Grouping)</p> <p>Look- fors usually do not change</p> <p>“Reads the Walls”</p> <p>T – Danielson’s Model</p> <p>Differentiating the instruction. (low groups vs. high groups)</p> <p>Validation</p> <p>Use of adults (Para-professionals) in classroom</p>	<p>S – Develop district and school goals at the leadership academy</p> <p>Objectives focus on restructuring and STEM at the elementary</p> <p>P – Objectives set as a team in the building</p> <p>Focus is on UbD</p> <p>Knowing the levels of your students and how to move them forward.</p> <p>Questioning techniques</p> <p>More global view of look-fors based on evidence of learning</p> <p>Best Practices</p> <p>Lots of exposure</p> <p>T – look-fors were to see written objectives, the</p>	<p>S – Develop goals as a staff.</p> <p>Look-fors change from year to year. (Promising Principles and Agile Instruction.</p> <p>Danielson’s four domains are important area to derive look-fors</p> <p>Differentiation</p> <p>Accountability</p> <p>Sense of urgency</p> <p>Guided reading</p> <p>Guided math Teacher interactions</p> <p>Individualized instruction</p> <p>Technology</p> <p>P- Build on the strengths in classrooms and support for the teachers</p> <p>Dialogue</p>	<p><i>Instructional Improvement</i></p> <p><i>Professional Development</i></p> <p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p>

	<p>Laser-like focus</p> <p>Best practices</p> <p>T – Formative assessments</p> <p>Learning Targets</p> <p>Instructional improvement</p> <p>Look-fors</p> <p>Formal observations and walkthroughs</p>	<p>Differentiated instruction</p>	<p>use of rubrics, and arrangement of students' desks.</p> <p>Student work in the hallways</p>	<p>Look-fors include everything that is on the walkthrough form</p>	
7	<p>S – Principals decide when they want to go into classrooms</p> <p>Identify focus points on the form and provide immediate feedback</p> <p>Developed culture</p> <p>Instructional Improvement</p> <p>P – Provides immediate feedback</p>	<p>S - Using technology</p> <p>Number of walks based upon the collective bargaining agreement</p> <p>P – Completes walks and writes up the form</p> <p>Occasionally meets with teachers to provide feedback</p> <p>Feedback is always written</p> <p>Template on the walkthrough form provides</p>	<p>S – Use a blank form to complete walkthroughs</p> <p>Walkthrough procedures</p> <p>Validate lesson and then provide feedback</p> <p>Six walkthroughs equal formal evaluation</p> <p>P – Formal event walkthroughs are announced</p>	<p>S – Informal walks are 15-30 minutes</p> <p>Written feedback</p> <p>Formal observations require pre and post conference</p> <p>Consistent template across all schools</p> <p>Individualized learning for teachers</p> <p>P – Specific steps are in</p>	<p><i>Culture/Core Beliefs of District</i></p> <p><i>Instructional Improvement</i></p>

	<p>Usually does not meet with teachers unless there is an issue</p> <p>Use of technology</p> <p>T– Use of technology and immediate feedback</p> <p>Teachers do not do walks but sometimes observe other classrooms</p>	<p>four domains</p> <p>All narrative responses</p> <p>T – Principal usually comes into the classroom with laptop and stays for 5-10 minutes</p> <p>Feedback is placed in their mailbox</p> <p>Principal will talk to the teachers about walks next day</p>	<p>Shares information with staff individually or during a faculty meeting</p> <p>Informal walks are held at any point in time</p> <p>In class for 5 – 10 minutes</p> <p>Uses six walkthroughs to create the formal evaluation</p> <p>Event walks occur once a marking period Creates good PR by being visible in classrooms as much as possible</p> <p>T – Administration sends an email stating there will be an event walk on a particular day</p>	<p>the form and the development of the form</p> <p>Should not be a specific look-for model because every class and teacher are different</p> <p>Focus on instructional practices</p> <p>T – Depends on if there is a group of people or if there is only one observer.</p> <p>Usually get feedback from individual but not the large group</p> <p>Individuals stay about 15 – 20 minutes</p>	
8	S - Immediate feedback through the use of an	S – Principal provides individual feedback to all teachers	S – Feedback is provided through a blank observation	S – Uses a locked folder on a shared drive to share information	

	<p>iPad</p> <p>P – Immediate feedback through the use of an iPad</p> <p>T – In previous years, report would be placed in mailboxes but now it is sent electronically</p>	<p>Principal sends emails or notes to teachers across a grade level</p> <p>Powerful for forming a PLC and a collective sense of responsibility</p> <p>P – Provides feedback through the walkthrough observation form</p> <p>May or may not meet with teachers to discuss walks</p> <p>T – Principal uses a laptop to complete walks and then types a report that is placed in their mailboxes.</p> <p>Principal will talk to teachers about observation the next day</p> <p>Principal will give us a new idea to try and will follow up to see if it is embedded in class</p> <p>Principal will</p>	<p>form</p> <p>P – Feedback is completed through the use of a written form and then discussed verbally</p> <p>Discussed verbally during grade level meetings Occasionally meets with teachers</p> <p>T – Written feedback or discussion</p>	<p>and create a conversation with teachers.</p> <p>May schedule a meeting with the teacher to discuss in more detail and possibly come up with a plan of action</p> <p>P – Feedback may be done orally or written</p> <p>Ongoing visibility</p> <p>T- They receive sticky notes or a form that has a carbon copy.</p>	
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		report at faculty meeting			
17	<p>S – Teachers may participate in observations but not walkthroughs</p> <p>Observations are sometimes included in the employee improvement plan</p> <p>Professional Development</p> <p>P – For contractual reasons teachers will not do walkthroughs</p> <p>Culture</p> <p>T – Teachers will do classroom observations but not walkthroughs</p>	<p>S – Teachers do not participate in walkthroughs but may do some peer-to-peer observations.</p> <p>Against the collective bargaining agreement</p> <p>P – No teacher walkthroughs but they may peer observe</p> <p>Against the contractual agreement.</p> <p>T – Allowed to observe others as long as it is not evaluative.</p>	<p>S – Opportunity exists for teachers to participate in walkthroughs by teacher's choice.</p> <p>Mandatory teacher walkthroughs as part of the induction program. 4 event walks a year</p> <p>P - Hired substitutes to enable teachers to do walkthroughs.</p> <p>Part of the induction program.</p> <p>Feedback through email</p> <p>T – Referred to it being a part of the induction team.</p>	<p>S – Opportunities through ELI for teachers to participate in walkthroughs.</p> <p>Trusting environment</p> <p>Culture allows teachers to do peer observations on their own</p> <p>P – Teachers may do walkthroughs at any time. They ask and I provide coverage for them.</p> <p>Can't hide here</p> <p>T- Would like to do more walkthroughs</p>	<p><i>Culture/Core Beliefs of District</i></p> <p><i>Professional Development</i></p>

18	<p>S – Impacts student achievement</p> <p>Laser-like focus</p> <p>More efficient than formal observations</p> <p>What you want more of or less of in the classroom</p> <p>P- Love it – absolutely love it.</p> <p>More efficient</p> <p>Increase in professional development through flexibility of template.</p> <p>T – Helpful to improve skills</p>	<p>S – Walkthroughs are very important because they allow additional opportunities to observe classrooms.</p> <p>Teachers apprehensive at first but now it makes sense and they feel safe.</p> <p>P – Walkthroughs are unannounced</p> <p>Validates and then encourages open dialogue on best practices</p> <p>Allows you to go into the room informally a number of times.</p> <p>T – Realized over the years that 10 – 15 minutes could give you a huge snapshot of the classroom.</p> <p>It is not about the lesson – it is about the kids, the learning, and the dynamics of what is</p>	<p>S – The value is huge.</p> <p>Allows much visibility in classrooms</p> <p>P –Fosters discussions and collaboration.</p> <p>Accountability and validation.</p> <p>Stay connected to the classrooms.</p> <p>Does not intimidate teachers.</p> <p>iPad provides immediate feedback to the teachers.</p> <p>Professional Development</p> <p>T – It is good to see the principals in the classrooms.</p> <p>Students like to see the principal really cares about the students.</p>	<p>S– It is imperative that it is critical.</p> <p>Needs to occur everyday - visibility</p> <p>Provides teachers with dialogue and support.</p> <p>Need to focus on culture and a common language as a starting point.</p> <p>Establish a sense of urgency and make it a priority</p> <p>Great for visibility</p> <p>P – A systematic approach for what you should be covering.</p> <p>T – Important to have the same expectations as your peers.</p> <p>Important to learn and to get new ideas</p>	<p><i>Instructional Improvement</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue and Support</i></p> <p><i>Culture/ Core Beliefs of District</i></p>
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		<p>happening in the classroom.</p> <p>Principal talks to kids because they should know what is going on. It is so much more real because we do not know he is coming into the classroom, which makes it more authentic.</p>		<p>from peers.</p>	
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Note. S – Superintendent Responses; P – Principal Responses; T – Teacher Responses.

Table 5

Interview Questions Relative to Research Question 2

Inter view Ques tions	Green Valley	Blue Mountain	Red River	Oak Ridge	Emerging Themes
9	<p>S – They have PLCs but do not use that title.</p> <p>Meetings are held to discuss instruction and curriculum</p> <p>Compiling a library of videos and articles.</p> <p>Making sure all kids are getting it and if they are not, what is being done to correct the problem.</p> <p>Must have a strong instructional model in place before beginning to establish PLCs.</p>	<p>S – We began PLC’s about 8 or 9 years ago.</p> <p>Gained success because principal grew as an instructional leader, faculty members resistant to change retired, and teachers started to see success.</p> <p>Not easy to implement but once it happens wonder why it wasn’t started sooner.</p> <p>Facilitators are very critical for success.</p>	<p>S – PLCs are groups of people that are aligned professionally in seeking a common goal.</p> <p>30-minute morning time that is used three days a week for professional development.</p> <p>Discussions occur on struggling students, When In Need time (WIN), or portfolio assessments.</p> <p>P – PLCs are a group of people missioned at whatever the task is at hand. They have grade level teams, grade</p>	<p>S – We developed learning communities about five years ago in which teachers focused on professional development.</p> <p>Meet for 45 minutes twice a month.</p> <p>Based on teacher interest.</p> <p>P – Groups work to make things better</p> <p>Meet once a month after school.</p> <p>Sharing best practices and what is working.</p> <p>Their look-fors are my look-fors.</p>	<p><i>Professional Development</i></p> <p><i>Instructional improvement</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p>

	<p>P- A PLC is when teachers help other teachers hone or craft their skills.</p> <p>Challenges every teacher to observe other teachers at least once a month.</p> <p>Professional development through best practice faculty meetings.</p> <p>T – Group of colleagues that share ideas with you.</p> <p>We share best practices during the faculty meetings.</p>	<p>The rhetoric is important because it is based upon what is good for kids.</p> <p>P – It is working collaboratively with a focus.</p> <p>The focus is on student learning.</p> <p>How we are going to influence learning?</p> <p>This is accomplished through grade level teams.</p> <p>The teams meet once a month for about 45 minutes.</p> <p>They have to own the process.</p>	<p>level leader teams, data teams and RtII teams.</p> <p>At first meetings had to be agenda based.</p> <p>Teams provide me information on what they have accomplished.</p> <p>The groups have now taken hold on own.</p> <p>Specialist teachers still have problems fitting into the grade level PLCs.</p> <p>It was tough getting started the first year but now the teachers really love the time to meet.</p> <p>Goal is to have PLCs emerge</p> <p>T – Any outside organization</p>	<p>PLCs are an extension of the school day.</p> <p>T – A lot of us devoted to some task that we decide.</p>	
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			that comes together with the district to enhance learning. Parents, teachers, and students working together and sharing ideas.		
10	<p>S – PLCs are driven by the walkthrough</p> <p>We are able to see where things are or need to be and this impacts our professional development.</p> <p>Using a laser-like approach.</p> <p>Using formative assessment and having students actively engaged are important.</p> <p>P – Walkthrough demonstrates what you do or not do really well.</p>	<p>S – Use walkthrough to reinforce best practices that are directly linked to professional learning communities.</p> <p>P – The leader must make the connection between walkthrough and professional learning communities.</p> <p>Send out to all teachers best practices that I observed.</p> <p>Taking these best practices and being able to talk with colleagues in</p>	<p>S - Walkthroughs help to break the mold of a closed-door environment.</p> <p>Establishes collaboration</p> <p>P – Important to take teachers along during walkthroughs.</p> <p>Led to additional observations by the teachers. Everything is connected and nothing is independent.</p> <p>Feedback from the walkthrough is discussed in PLC,</p> <p>Look at student</p>	<p>S – They affect PLCs in a very big way. Look to identify needs on a daily basis.</p> <p>Collaborative effort between teachers and principal to come up with ideas.</p> <p>Look at how we can connect professional development to the learning communities.</p> <p>P – A tool to base that discussion and dialogue on.</p> <p>T – Indicated that walkthroughs and PLCs are separate. Walks are for individuals and PLCs are for a</p>	<p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue and Support</i></p> <p><i>Professional Development</i></p> <p><i>Instructional Improvement</i></p>

	<p>Use that information to base your PLCs.</p> <p>T - The principal would see ideas in the classrooms and then we would share them with other teachers.</p>	<p>their groups is the tie-in.</p> <p>Everything we do is based on knowing our kids as learners and how are we going to impact the learning.</p> <p>Collaboration turns into focused collaboration</p> <p>T - The teachers would discuss what worked or did not work well in their PLCs.</p> <p>It is important to share best practices.</p>	<p>learning but provide information on instruction</p> <p>Helps to check on vertical alignment of curriculum.</p> <p>T - Appreciated feedback from principals and being able to also participate in walkthroughs.</p>	<p>collaborative effort.</p>	
19	<p>S - Formative assessment is one best practice that we look for on our walkthrough.</p> <p>Dialogue occurs through the use of a blog.</p>	<p>S - Walkthroughs are tied in nicely with PLCs and have impacted the implementation of best practices.</p> <p>P - A big impact is collaboration</p>	<p>S - That is huge because administrators will identify best practices during the walkthroughs and share with others.</p> <p>Some best practices</p>	<p>S - Important to make connections between professional development and best practices</p> <p>P - It gives our teachers time to plan and share best practices.</p>	<p><i>Professional Development</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration</i></p> <p><i>Instructional Improvement</i></p>

	<p>P - Whiteboard holdups, differentiation and learning targets are best practices we focus on.</p> <p>Discussions from best practices come from walkthrough.</p> <p>Identify areas for professional development</p> <p>T - Teachers have all shared best practices and are using other's ideas in their rooms.</p>	<p>of teachers where they share kids, practices and strategies. Knowing which students are or are not learning and knowing what to do about it is important.</p> <p>T - We share best practices when we meet in our groups and then possibly during faculty meetings.</p> <p>Teachers take minutes from their meeting and that may be shared with others.</p>	<p>include think-pair-share, differentiated instruction, and Socratic seminar.</p> <p>P - Best practices observed during walkthroughs include small groups, rubrics, tiered lessons, technology and differentiation</p> <p>T - It helps them become better aware of what others are doing in their classrooms.</p>	<p>Continuous use of data is a best practice.</p> <p>T - Observing best practices and sharing those throughout the building.</p>	
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Table 6

Interview Questions Relative to Research Question 3

Interview Questions	Green Valley	Blue Mountain	Red River	Oak Ridge	Emerging Themes
11	<p>S – Mission is to make sure that all students learn and the walkthrough ensures the consistent use of best practices (student engagement, learning targets, formative assessments).</p> <p>P – Walkthroughs are professional development for teachers.</p> <p>T – Collaborative working relationship through the sharing of best practices.</p>	<p>S – Walkthroughs certainly fit in because it reinforces best practices, recognizes teachers who are using best practices, and provides a tool for providing feedback.</p> <p>P – The leader sets that base. It should be set around core beliefs of the district. Everything has to work in unison. Our tagline is customizing learning, nourishing potential, and delivering excellence.</p> <p>T – Culture is you have a plan and you teach your</p>	<p>S – It has created a collaborative environment amongst the staff, improves achievement and growth, and inspires them to be responsible learners.</p> <p>P – Identifying the positive things and best practices that are being implemented in the classrooms.</p> <p>We want to see kids working in groups and not in isolation and that supports what we are trying to do in society.</p> <p>It creates an</p>	<p>S – The walkthroughs are built upon the framework of the Promising Principles.</p> <p>We have built a culture that there is always room to grow professionally</p> <p>T – Walkthroughs keep them on target for what they are here to do as educators.</p> <p>It helps them to stay on target and improve their skills.</p>	<p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p> <p><i>Culture/Core Beliefs of District</i></p> <p><i>Professional Development</i></p> <p><i>Instructional Improvement</i></p>

		<p>lesson.</p> <p>They teach and then respond to the learners. Students who do not get it the first time and retaught the same day.</p> <p>All decisions regarding what students will be taught and content is decided during PLC meetings.</p>	<p>open door policy where everyone is open to feedback.</p>		
12	<p>S – Teachers discuss during their group planning times what was observed in the classrooms.</p> <p>There is a sharing of best practices.</p> <p>P – Teachers share best practices during faculty meetings.</p> <p>Really likes the idea of teachers doing walkthroughs.</p> <p>T – Teachers researched</p>	<p>S – If something is missing across classrooms, then teachers are able to share ideas with each other.</p> <p>T - We discuss a particular strategy that the principal is looking for across grade levels</p>	<p>S – Teachers came up with the idea themselves that they will observe others for professional growth.</p> <p>P – Teachers will discuss at their next grade level what was seen during the walkthrough observations.</p>	<p>S – The schedule is designed to enable collaborative teaming with two grades at a time.</p> <p>Feedback may be given to two teachers at the same time if they are co-teaching.</p> <p>P – Every teacher has a common planning time and also participates as part of an instructional cabinet.</p> <p>T – This was</p>	<p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p> <p><i>Professional Development</i></p>

	topics and shared information with others.			our first year to do walkthroughs. It helps to strengthen skills in their own classrooms.	
13	<p>S – Spoke about the importance of formative assessments and differentiation of instruction.</p> <p>P – Spoke about what safety net is in place so kids will not fall through the cracks.</p> <p>Walkthroughs give teachers ideas on how to differentiate instruction.</p> <p>T – Walkthroughs help to identify how many students are engaged in the instruction.</p> <p>Formative assessment and the use of whiteboards</p>	<p>S – That is a huge part of the PLC culture in this building.</p> <p>It involves scheduling and the use of resources.</p> <p>Did the students learn the material and not did we teach it?</p> <p>It became addictive for the teachers once they found out that extra instruction on what is needed created success.</p> <p>P – It is not so much the walkthrough process but the PLC process.</p> <p>Everything is based upon whether the</p>	<p>S – Use walkthroughs to check that teachers are using accountable talk, are actively engaged, and talking with students who are having difficulties.</p> <p>P – Information acquired from walkthroughs is brought back to the teachers and this is directly related to prevention and intervention.</p> <p>T – Did not see a connection between walkthroughs and prevention or intervention strategies.</p>	<p>S – Interventions are embedded into the daily routines.</p> <p>Regular meetings are established to discuss the progress of each individual student.</p> <p>Walkthroughs are used to help the principals and teachers focus on the specific look-fors.</p> <p>P – Use an RtII approach and gear instruction towards every child.</p> <p>Have a skills block where students across grade levels are taught on specific skills that may be</p>	<i>Culture/Core Beliefs of District</i>

	were also used as tools.	<p>child learned or did not learn and intervention strategies for the child.</p> <p>T – Focused on the importance of building a strong culture.</p> <p>Walkthroughs are done to enforce the importance of establishing a strong culture and the use of small group work, differentiation, and checking for understanding.</p>		<p>lacking. Teachers complete walkthroughs during this time frame.</p> <p>T – This is an area that is focused on when walkthroughs are completed.</p>	
14	<p>S – We are able to gather data because the principal sends all of the walkthroughs to us.</p> <p>Create an excel spreadsheet on how often we are seeing learning targets or formative assessments.</p> <p>Once we have</p>	<p>S – Frequent formative assessment is part of the building culture and PLC model.</p> <p>P – The walkthrough process enables me to observe a block of classrooms across an entire grade level and then gather and analyze the</p>	<p>S – Data can be more than just numerical data and if an area is lacking, that information can be sent back to the teacher for improvement.</p> <p>P – Really did not use the data to gather information but used it to encourage collaboration for WIN time,</p>	<p>S – Data is an important part of our instructional plan. Since we know where every student is at academically, we use the walkthroughs to support teachers and to talk with students about their learning needs.</p> <p>P – Data is collected and</p>	<i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i>

	<p>achieved our goals then we need to change our focus or raise the expectations.</p> <p>P – Walkthroughs do not give specific information about test scores but provide data on numbers of actively engaged students.</p> <p>T – Receive data on the number of actively engaged students.</p>	<p>data to make informed decisions.</p> <p>Teachers study the data during meeting times.</p> <p>T – Our principal wants to know if we have data on how we are checking for understanding and what we are doing with that data.</p>	<p>DIBELS and 4sight assessments.</p> <p>Data information from walkthroughs is discussed during the district meetings.</p> <p>T – Did not recognize any connection with walkthroughs and data.</p>	<p>used to discuss later with the teacher.</p>	
15	<p>S – It depends on the focus of the walkthrough.</p> <p>If it is on formative assessments, you are going to see more success in schools.</p> <p>The tie-in is if you have better instruction in the classroom</p>	<p>S – It all ties together. Parents get a lot of satisfaction on how we use our resources and how we develop our schedule</p> <p>P - Walkthroughs are a positive part of what we are trying to do for kids. They impact</p>	<p>S – Not able to make any connections.</p> <p>P – Walkthroughs could gain active engagement from parents through the idea of public relations. It allows parents to know that I am in the classrooms</p>	<p>S – Indirectly, through the review of data with the parents.</p> <p>Parents also participate in many walkthroughs in the schools.</p> <p>P – We use the Promising Principles as a guide for parents when we complete</p>	<p><i>Culture/Core Beliefs of District</i></p>

	<p>and kids are seeing more success, you are going to have more parent involvement.</p> <p>P – Walkthroughs will help identify issues with the organization of the classroom and this is something that parents see.</p> <p>T – Walkthroughs help principals gain a better understanding of what is occurring in the classroom, which helps during parent conferences.</p>	<p>our instructional practices and philosophies and that impacts kids and their families.</p> <p>T – It shows when the students go home and state the principal was in my classroom today. It is a personal connection and relationship with kids.</p> <p>The principal also talks with students about what is going on in their lives.</p>	<p>and I know what is happening instructionally. Parents report back to him about his presence in the classroom.</p> <p>T – Did not see a connection</p>	<p>walkthroughs with them in the school. We encourage them to look for active student engagement.</p> <p>Parents are our customers.</p> <p>T – When parents complete walkthroughs, they are looking at transitions, groupings, centers, behavior systems, and use of technology.</p>	
16	<p>S – We need to continually work with principals and give them best practices and strategies for improvement. You have to constantly feed your</p>	<p>S – Walkthroughs provide a formal way for the building principal to be more visible, involved, and paying attention to classroom</p>	<p>S – It is huge when you have a group of teachers who want to do walkthroughs and observe each other. It develops leadership.</p>	<p>S – It builds leadership because there is a strong connection between the principals, coaches and the teachers.</p> <p>There is</p>	<p><i>Professional Development</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p> <p><i>Culture/Core Beliefs of District</i></p>

	<p>principals and teachers.</p> <p>P – The walkthrough should be implemented to promote professional development and learning.</p>	<p>instruction.</p> <p>P – If done and communicated correctly, walkthroughs build a lot of ability for leadership capacity.</p> <p>Correctly means that everything is done in concert. Everything that happens has to be intentional and reaffirm the goals of the building.</p> <p>We must think about how it impacts kids and not if how it makes the adults happy.</p> <p>Important for the building leader to make it connect and flow properly.</p> <p>T – Assists new teachers by having someone talk about it during the next grade level meeting. Share your</p>	<p>You can ask someone who is doing really well to share with others.</p> <p>P – They have really developed in this area. Both teacher leaders and others who may be struggling with a technique are now asking to do walkthroughs.</p> <p>It fosters collaboration and leadership.</p> <p>It has to be your rock – being in and out of classrooms and this can be accomplished through the use of walkthroughs.</p> <p>Teachers may become leaders from what they learn from doing the</p>	<p>dialogue from what is happening in the classrooms. It is professional development for leaders on the building of a common language and consistent practices in the school.</p> <p>P - Our culture is one that we treat everyone as equals.</p> <p>T – During the PLC meetings, everyone takes a leadership role.</p>	<p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p>
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		ideas and help out your teammates, this builds teacher leaders. Young teachers also bring new ideas to the table especially with the use of technology.	walkthroughs. T – The teachers did not specifically mention walkthroughs with building leadership but felt the concept of teacher leadership as an important one.		
22	<p>S – You need to understand the culture of the district and check to see if they were used in the past.</p> <p>You need to establish teacher buy-in. This can be accomplished by asking the teachers to help identify the look-fors.</p> <p>You need to establish union support.</p> <p>P – Definitely do it without a doubt. Important to</p>	<p>S – PLCs are great at all levels.</p> <p>Training with the leader and facilitators is very important.</p> <p>As a kick-off for building PLCs, it is very valuable to take teachers to a PLC institute.</p> <p>P – Both walkthroughs and PLCs are important because they help to move kids.</p> <p>You must move from a did we teach it</p>	<p>S – Use the walkthroughs to give the PLCs content to discuss.</p> <p>P – The walkthroughs are one of the most important things that our district has done.</p> <p>It gives everyone that open door feeling. The student conversations are very important.</p> <p>Do not do at the same time. The walkthrough is more</p>	<p>S – Both the walkthroughs and the PLCs are important because of the dialogue that happens with the teachers and principals.</p> <p>Support and conversation is what connects the walkthroughs and the PLCs.</p> <p>P – Important to have strong culture, belief system, and leadership.</p> <p>T – Important to do them but do not put too much weight upon them.</p>	<p><i>Culture/Core Beliefs of District</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and support</i></p> <p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p>

	<p>let teachers visit other classrooms.</p> <p>Ask them for one thing that is extremely valuable in teaching.</p> <p>When look-for is accomplished, then shift the focus area.</p> <p>You have to give teachers immediate feedback.</p> <p>T – They are needed and are a necessity.</p> <p>Should not just happen once or twice a year.</p>	<p>mentality to a did the students learn it.</p> <p>The leader has to take a solid understanding of walkthroughs and PLCs,</p> <p>T – Absolutely know my students so much better because we are a PLC.</p> <p>I know how to differentiate and what students got it and what students did not understand.</p> <p>We know what best practices the principal is looking for when he comes into the room.</p> <p>Walkthroughs do not drive a PLC. They are a means to share ideas or to identify what needs worked on.</p> <p>You have to</p>	<p>important because it is at the core of what we do as leaders.</p> <p>Be visible in the classrooms to set the parameters to provide constructive feedback.</p> <p>Possibly begin PLCs with a book study.</p> <p>T – Recommend the use of walkthroughs and really appreciate being able to do the walkthroughs themselves.</p> <p>Able to see the little things in the classrooms and not just the academics.</p>	<p>Multiple walkthrough visits are important throughout the school year.</p>	
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		have the whole PLC culture in place and then the walkthroughs can become a beneficial part of it. The opposite may not occur.			
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Table 7

Interview Questions Relative to Research Question 4

Interview Questions	Green Valley	Blue Mountain	Red River	Oak Ridge	Emerging Themes
1			<p>S – They were one of nine districts that started in ELI. They have been participating for about 5-6 years.</p>	<p>S – We participated for the past four to five years. In the early years, we had a group of people who participated. It then moved to more of consultation work with ELI.</p> <p>P – ELI worked in this principal’s school for about three years.</p> <p>T – The teachers were not familiar with ELI.</p>	<p><i>ELI participation</i></p>
2			<p>S – It was an extension of what they were already doing with the walkthroughs and a model of differentiated supervision.</p> <p>Increase teacher leadership in the district.</p> <p>It is now called Leadership Academy.</p>	<p>S – Their connection goes back to the relationship that was formed with the University of Pittsburgh.</p> <p>The members were superintendent, principals, director of curriculum, and a literacy and math coach.</p> <p>P – The purpose was</p>	<p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p>

			<p>Membership includes representatives from each building including the department heads. There 15 teachers from the elementary schools</p> <p>P – One of the purposes was to be able to connect and collaborate with other districts.</p> <p>Another purpose was to build teacher leadership.</p> <p>Opportunity exists for anyone to join the ELI team.</p> <p>T – Purpose was to establish a community of leaders from around the district</p>	to collaborate with other districts.	
3			<p>S – The four categories include restructuring, student success group, technology, and curriculum connector/assessment portfolio group.</p> <p>Action plans are developed for each group that includes the goals for the year.</p> <p>P – The goals for ELI</p>	<p>S – Our ELI focus was learning walks.</p> <p>P – Experience was visiting other schools or attending meetings.</p> <p>ELI enables us to see great things happening in great places and then be able to implement some of these ideas at his school.</p>	<p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue and Support</i></p>

			<p>was to develop teacher leaders.</p> <p>Important to build a culture on collaboration and decision-making and to make connections with other districts to share resources and ideas.</p> <p>T – In addition to what was already mentioned, the teachers added student engagement and STEM (Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics).</p>		
4			<p>S – The collaboration from working with other schools is a contributing factor.</p> <p>The Colleagues in Residence (CIRs) from ELI brought the districts together to share ideas and plans.</p> <p>P – The cohort developed out of ELI is very powerful in terms of financial and intellectual resources.</p> <p>T – Appreciative of being able to visit other district and borrowing ideas of things they are doing</p>	<p>S – Their emphasis was not working with schools from other districts. We worked with ELI in a consulting position as to where we are going with our vision.</p> <p>ELI helped us with Project Based Learning.</p> <p>P – Networking and learning from others is very valuable.</p> <p>T – Referred to the value of visiting other schools to gain a perspective of what other teachers are doing in the</p>	<p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p>

			really well.	classrooms.	
20			<p>S – The connection with ELI was about teacher leadership. It was the work with Otto Graf and Joe Werlinich that we learned about walkthroughs. However, when we attend ELI meetings we always participate in walkthroughs at the site of the meeting.</p> <p>P – Walkthroughs have been promoted through the Colleague in Residence (CIR) program.</p> <p>Otto was the mentor for our district on the implementation of the walkthrough process.</p> <p>T – ELI’s purpose was on the implementation of walkthroughs.</p>	<p>S – ELI helped to provide information to the school about what was being observed in classrooms during walkthroughs.</p> <p>The most valuable piece is being able to provide a forum for conversation and dialogue.</p> <p>ELI assisted them with the development of Promising Principles.</p> <p>P – It is all about the dialogue that you receive from completing the walkthroughs.</p>	<p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p>
21			<p>S – Our first goal in working with ELI was to develop teacher leadership and the collaboration within that.</p> <p>P – Developed teacher grade level department head positions.</p>	<p>S – The professional learning communities were started in our school before our participation in ELI.</p> <p>Over the years we have had continuous conversations with ELI about our PLCs</p>	<p><i>Supervision of Instruction</i></p> <p><i>Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support</i></p>

			<p>T – ELI helped promote the building of PLCs through their attendance at the yearly retreats.</p>	<p>and how they could help us grow.</p> <p>P – ELI did not help us begin the PLCs but through them we were able to see what others were getting accomplished in their districts.</p> <p>Need strong leaders who are positive to be in the ELI groups.</p>	
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As derived from the transcripts and further organized in the previous matrix, the responses of superintendents, principals, and teachers were classified, categorized, and examined for emergent themes from across the four school districts. To assist with analysis, this researcher assigned codes for each theme by participant and then inserted the codes throughout the document identifying occurrences of each theme. This information now facilitates the cross-case study of how walkthrough observations influence the development of professional learning communities. Fives themes emerged to further guide this researcher to answer the initial research questions outlined in this study. These are as follows: (1) Supervision of Instruction; (2) Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support; (3) Professional Development; (4) Instructional Improvement; and, (6) Culture. An in-depth analysis reveals contrasts and similarities of responses with the possibility that occurrences of information may cross boundaries and be categorized under several different themes.

Supervision of Instruction

Key to any school-wide improvement plan is examining the many facets that underlie supervision of instruction. The evidence from this study clearly shows that superintendents, principals, and teachers all value the inclusion of walkthrough observations as a part of this process. At Green Valley, Assistant Superintendent Thomas stated:

It has a huge impact on student achievement. No doubt, I wish I could just do walkthroughs. I don't need to see somebody's whole observation unless I see some things that they are not doing. In our district, the principal goes in for a 5 to 10 minute observation and then sends feedback to the teacher electronically.

Thomas reports that he also gets a copy of the report. The feedback is important for validation and instructional improvement. As is the case in Green Valley, feedback is usually positive and provided immediately to the teachers. Each teacher gets four to five walkthroughs a year. Principal Brian replied that he absolutely loves the walkthrough process. He felt that they were faster thus enabling him to get into many more classrooms.

At Blue Mountain, Assistant Superintendent Susan added that they are very sensible, much more meaningful than a single observation, and will remain a part of their differentiated supervisory plan. Principal Mike claimed that the biggest value of walkthroughs is that it allows him to go into classrooms unannounced making them much more authentic. Mike claims that the walkthrough began about five years ago and the teachers may get up to four

observations a year. There are learning targets that he expects to see in the classrooms. Those are based on best practices and core philosophies of the building. Mike also “Reads the Walls” to examine the quality of displayed work. Feedback is given back to the teachers soon after the walkthrough. Mike provides the teachers group feedback on best practices that he observed during the walkthroughs. Several teachers replied that the walkthrough allows the principal to go into a classroom for 10 to 15 minutes where he is given a huge snapshot of instruction. The teachers summed it up as follows: “It is not about the lesson, it is about the kids, the learning and the dynamics that are happening in the class.” Their walkthrough template is based on Charlotte Danielson’s model of supervision.

Megan, superintendent at Red River, proclaimed that the walkthrough began in her district about 16 years ago through the work of Graf and Werlinich. It began first as an event Walkthrough and then was transformed into a tool for the supervision of instruction. In this district they use a blank form to write the observation with six walkthroughs equaling one formal observation. Principal Amanda replied that they do announced informal event walkthroughs and unannounced formal walkthroughs. Feedback is provided to teachers individually or in a group at faculty meetings. The teachers and students appreciated seeing the principals in the classrooms.

At Oak Ridge, Assistant Superintendent Tammy begins the walkthrough process with short two to three minute visibility walks. That time increases as the teachers become more accustomed to having her in their classrooms. Event

walkthroughs are also held to identify best practices within the schools. Each building within the district has their own walkthrough form but plans are being made to adopt one template that will be used by all administrators. Principal Jason stated that the look-fors are included on the form and are globally based on their best practices. He meets with the teachers on a daily basis to provide either verbal or written feedback. The teachers indicated that they appreciated having the walkthroughs due to the fact that they are less stressful than the formal observations.

Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support

Throughout this study, much evidence emerged on the value of working together collaboratively and hosting focused conversations between professionals. In this section, this researcher will highlight information and comments from the participants on this theme for the walkthrough process, professional learning communities, and ELI.

After a walkthrough observation, there are several occasions that an observer will collaborate, discuss, and further support the teachers. This may be accomplished informally through brief verbal exchanges or more formally through written documents or conferences. At Green Valley, Thomas reported that after walkthrough observations, teachers would share their ideas or even concerns about the observations during their grade level meetings. Brian commented on the collaboration that comes out of the Best Practice Faculty meetings. If he sees something during his walkthroughs that he feels will help others, he asks the teacher to explain it to others during the faculty meeting. This has proven to

be very successful for his school. The teachers from Green Valley commented that they have all shared best practices especially those involving the use of formative assessments and are using each other's ideas in their own classrooms. They also commented about learning ideas during the Best Practice Faculty meetings.

At Blue Mountain, Susan pointed out the discussions concerning the walkthroughs are very important. She claims that when teachers get feedback that something may be missing from their instruction, they will discuss it at their grade level meetings. Mike stated when the building leader announces what exact practices are positive, there will be discussions between the teachers on that topic. Additionally, he asks his facilitators to discuss best practices with colleagues that were taken from the observations. This is done during their grade level meetings.

Megan claimed that before walkthroughs at Red River, they had an isolated environment and now it is very collaborative. She also felt that the walkthrough process enables teachers to discuss best practices and the look-fors. Amanda and Gary appreciated the conversations and collaboration that permeated around the use of data, WIN time, DIBELS, and the 4sight assessments. This was all encouraged through the use of walkthrough observations. Furthermore, Amanda stated the information that she sees on prevention and intervention strategies is brought back to the teachers for additional discussions. All of teachers appreciated receiving feedback after the observations as it enhanced their teaching practices.

According to Tammy, the conversation after an observation is probably the most important piece to help the teacher grow professionally and to move to the next level. In her district, they have instructional coaches who work very closely with teachers and principals. Their main job is to support the teachers with planning and delivery of effective instruction. Tammy stated that the walkthroughs are very critical because they provide the teachers with the support they need to be successful. One very powerful tool that exemplifies the importance of feedback and support is how Tammy uses technology to organize a locked folder that establishes an avenue for dialogue with the teachers. She implements this after she completes a walkthrough observation and it is a continuous process of support for the teachers.

Regarding PLCs, the superintendents stated that the dialogue is very important. Susan elaborated on the importance of speaking your core values and beliefs that are focused on learning and what is good for students. Tammy and Megan explained how walkthroughs affect PLCs in a big way and how they are connected. Through the walkthroughs they are able to identify what the needs are. These areas of weaknesses are then discussed within the PLCs. The principals acknowledged that PLCs involve teachers working together collaboratively with a focus on student learning. Mike stated, "We collaborate to know our kids better, in turn provide more detailed and intense focused instruction based on who they are as individual learners." He continued by stating the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best practices has created much collaboration by the teachers. According to Mike, none of his teachers are

feeling isolated. They share kids, practices and strategies, and collaboration by the teachers is an extremely critical piece to owning the kids. During the interviews, the teachers from Blue Mountain indicated that they were in agreement with Mike's synopsis of the importance of collaboration and they reiterated that the focus of their PLCs meetings were on what worked or did not work well in their classrooms. As written throughout this document, it is clear that teachers from the identified schools valued the importance of collaboration, dialogue, and support as they carried out their daily instructional duties.

The final area to comment on under this section focuses on ELI. Megan and Tammy discussed the importance of collaboration and how the CIRs from ELI assisted in bringing different schools together for the sharing of best practices and the establishment of a forum for conversation and dialogue. Amanda and Gary added that this connection with other districts enabled a sharing of resources and costs on several in-service programs. Jason summed it all up by saying it is all about the dialogue.

Professional Development

In addition to collaboration, dialogue, and support the importance of having a strong instructional foundation built upon professional development emerged as a theme in this study. For walkthrough observations to be successful, the principals and teachers must all be trained properly in this process. At Green Valley, Thomas stated it is all tied together from our professional development to the walkthroughs. They have developed 30 to 40 videos of their own teachers using best practices that other teachers may view.

If weaknesses are observed during the walkthrough observations, the principal may recommend to the teachers that they watch the video. This is very targeted professional development to improve teaching skills. Furthermore, Thomas spoke on the importance of building sustainable leadership capacity by continuing to educate the principals on best strategies to evaluate instruction. Brian mentioned it was through the professional development work of Dr. Graf and Thomas that changed the mindset of their teachers for what would be seen in the classrooms. Brian also commented on the value of the walkthrough form for promoting professional development. He proclaimed that he is able to change the walkthrough template and then provide additional training to the staff on areas that may need improved. He is not able to make these changes with the formal observation document.

Susan spoke of the professional development that comes out of their PLCs. This is something that is great at all levels. However, to be most successful, training must be provided to all leaders or facilitators of the PLCs.

Megan spoke on the value of building teacher leaders and the importance in providing proper professional development. This is accomplished in their district through the help of ELI. The teachers are also provided common planning three times a week in which they receive professional development and also work within their PLCs.

As Tammy explained, "We talk with principals about different approaches, look-fors, and Promising Principles. We establish a definition for walkthroughs with goals, purposes, and feedback." Furthermore, Tammy elaborated that they

talk with the principals about proper comments and techniques of validating teacher practices. She spoke on how her district has 30 days of professional development. They use this time to make connections between the walkthroughs and the learning communities. It is ongoing professional development and not a one shot deal. As building principal Jason stated, they role-play with the observation form and that generates teacher involvement and buy-in.

Instructional Improvement

The improvement of instruction emerged as a major theme when considering walkthroughs and professional learning communities. At Green Valley, Thomas stated that walkthroughs have a huge impact on instruction. He explained that you could use the walkthrough tool to change instruction in the classrooms. Thomas stated, “Whatever you want more or less of in your classroom that walkthrough form is a tool to make that happen.” It is important to have a laser-like focus. This year our focus is on formative assessments and active student engagement. Walkthroughs help ensure the consistent use of best practices. Thomas also gathers data on the walkthroughs on quality of formative assessments and levels of active student engagement. PLCs at Green Valley are driven by the information that is gathered on the walkthroughs and they all tie together for the improvement of instruction. Principal Brian explained that the superintendent and Thomas visit his school three times a year to complete walkthroughs. It is on these visits they are able to determine what the look-fors will be for the following year. The teachers also validated the

importance of formative assessments in their classrooms. They commented on their extra attention to making sure that the students are actively engaged.

At Blue Mountain, Susan reported that walkthroughs ensure delivery of the mission statement. There is a strong connection with reinforcing best practices, recognizing teachers who use best practices, and feedback to teachers about best practices. In terms of PLCs, we use all of our resources to help with prevention and interventions. Principal Mike stated that after he completes walkthroughs he sends out positive instructional practices, which promotes consistency across all grade levels. Mike believes it is not the walkthroughs that assist with prevention and interventions, but it is the PLCs. During the PLC meeting, discussions are held to determine what students need assistance and what strategies will be used to promote success. The students are then instructed during an additional time period called Second Chance Learning. Another area that promotes achievement is gaining a strong understanding of data. Mike stated that within the walkthroughs he is able to analyze where they are academically and then use the faculty meetings to have the teachers search through the data information. The teachers focused on the importance of knowing how well their students understand the material and how they learned it. This is something that they feel their principal is really interested in when he completes the walkthroughs.

At Red River, Megan reported that they host a leadership retreat on an annual basis. During this retreat, the administrators and teachers identify the district goals for the year. The building goals are then developed which may

include look-fors for the upcoming school year. Megan stated through the walkthroughs the principals are able to see if the teachers are using their identified best practices such as accountable talk and active student engagement. Other look-fors, as identified by the teachers, include writing the objectives, displaying student work with rubrics, higher level of thinking, and writing prompts with descriptors. Principal Amanda reported they also focus on their three-question reflection, which asks what do we want the students to know, be able to do, and what are we going to do to help struggling students. This all impacts their instructional plan for the year.

Tammy indicated that walkthroughs at Oak Ridge promoted instructional improvement because they are built on the Promising Principles framework. During the walkthroughs, she is helping the principals and coaches with specific look-fors that address the concerns of every student. Concerning the use of data, Tammy stated that they are very well informed on each student's progress. During the walkthroughs they identify what is occurring in the classroom to impact the achievement levels of each and every student. The teachers appreciated participating in walkthroughs so they would be able to see if they were instructing at the same levels as their peers.

Culture

The last major theme identified for this study reflects upon the district and building culture. All participants in this study agreed that without the proper culture and environment, it would be difficult to implement walkthroughs and PLCs effectively.

Thomas stated that before anyone attempts to implement walkthroughs, they must understand their purpose and if there is any history in the district. He replied that you need to have teacher buy-in with union support. Thomas elaborated by saying that walkthroughs have gained bad standings in some districts because they were used in a very negative manner to catch people not doing what was required. It was considered a “gotcha.” Thomas stated that he and the superintendent would continue to do walkthroughs because that is the culture that he wants portrayed in the district. It is one that they care about - the improvement of instruction. He wants the culture to be one where they have a strong instructional model and then they can build off that model. Brian appreciated the use of walkthroughs and even encouraged teachers to complete them. However, in his district, this did not occur due to ramifications of the union contract and fear of teachers evaluating others. The teachers stated that they do not do walkthroughs but do observe other teachers in their classrooms.

At Blue Mountain, Susan reported that the teachers do not do walkthroughs. However they may participate in peer-to-peer observations. The walkthrough process does not fit in nicely with the collective bargaining agreement. Susan elaborated on the powerful culture that has been built in this elementary school. It is the whole idea behind a PLC and that all teachers work with all students. In addition, the way they do their PLC gets a lot of satisfaction from the parents. The walkthroughs and the PLCs all tie together. Mike spoke about the importance of building leadership capacity in his building. He stated that everything is done in concert. All meeting goals are done with intentionality

for what positively impacts kids. He announced that he is the leader of the building and it is his responsibility to make sure that this occurs. Mike said, "PLCs at Blue Mountain have completely changed our culture of the building. We went from a did we teach it mentality to one of did they learn it." According to the teachers, the culture is that all teachers have a plan and they teach their lesson. The teachers said they must answer the question: "Do all students understand the content?"

At Red River, Megan stated that teachers might participate in walkthroughs if they are interested. Additionally, teachers are also invited to participate in the event walkthroughs. Megan said that there has to be a culture of openness in the school for walkthroughs and PLCs to thrive. The walkthroughs give the PLCs content to discuss. Amanda explained that the teachers in her building get substitutes for the teachers so they may participate in the walkthroughs. She is able to schedule each teacher on a walkthrough with another teacher from a different grade level. By doing this they are able to discuss vertical articulation of the curriculum. Gary mentioned that the teachers who are going through induction also participate in walkthroughs throughout the district. Amanda proclaimed that the walkthroughs have been one of the most beneficial things that her district has done to create an open door feeling.

At Oak Ridge, Tammy stated that the established culture is one where the principal has to be in the classrooms every day. The teachers understand the importance of having the principal in their classrooms. Tammy shared that they have built a trusting environment where teachers now feel comfortable asking

others to observe in their classrooms. This culture has been built for others to go into each other's classrooms. The culture was important to establish. Tammy stated that they did this even before focusing on instruction. Time on task was a priority. When focusing on culture, Jason replied that the ideal situation is a teacher who comes and says that they are struggling and can I go and watch another teacher with this skill. This shows much trust and openness. Jason emphasized the importance of strong leadership. He said you have to have a strong culture and your own belief systems and others have to believe in them. The teachers at Oak Ridge all would like to do more walkthroughs. They just wished that they had more time.

Summary

In this chapter, informational data were presented in the form of transcripts from individual and group interviews. Superintendents, principals, and teachers were interviewed to obtain information regarding walkthrough observations and Professional Learning Communities. After coding the data, emerging themes were identified and discussed. In Chapter V, this researcher uses the information gathered to answer the study's four research questions. Implications for professional practice, recommendations for further study, and a final summary will close out the chapter.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“Failure is not an option” (Krantz, 2009, p. 473).

Introduction

In Chapter IV, this researcher gathered information from participants on their use of walkthrough observations. Additionally, the extent to which professional learning communities were evident in each school was investigated. Evidence was obtained through the use of interviews and the collection of artifacts from the contributing schools.

The purpose of Chapter V is to reflect critically upon the research process by closely examining, evaluating, and further discussing the relevance and significance of the findings and their alignment to each of the research questions while encompassing information previously presented in the literature review. Emerging research has indicated that the use of walkthrough observations has proven to be an effective tool to increase student achievement (Keruskin, 2005; Rossi, 2007). Furthermore, leading researchers and practitioners have reported that optimal learning occurs within school buildings that work extensively to build professional learning communities (Blankstein, 2010; Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1996; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Elmore, 2002; Fullan, 2003b; Hord, 2004; Lezotte, 1991; Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995; Roberts & Pruitt 2003; Schmoker, 2006; Senge, 2006; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). This researcher then analyzed information within and across all four case studies to determine whether the use

of walkthrough observations influence the development of professional learning communities.

In this final chapter, a synopsis of the findings from all of the participating schools is uncovered in relation to the following four research questions:

1. What consistent walkthrough observation procedures do principals and teachers currently use in their schools?
2. What principles of Professional Learning Communities are evident in the four schools?
3. How do identified walkthrough procedures align with the six principles of Professional Learning Communities?
4. How are individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in Educational Leadership Initiative?

It is within Chapter V that this researcher personally evaluated and discussed all research and documented evidence. Yin (2003) stated that the case study report brings the results and findings to a closure. Likewise, the following passage eloquently describes a case study:

Because it is an exercise in such depth, the study is an opportunity to see what others have not yet seen, to reflect the uniqueness of our own lives, to engage the best of our interpretive powers, and to make, even by its integrity alone, an advocacy for those things we cherish. (Stake, 1995, p . 136)

Summary of the Study

Discussion on Research Question 1

What consistent walkthrough observation procedures do principals and teachers currently use in their schools?

This first research question focuses on the specific walkthrough procedures that each of the administrators and teachers use in their schools. The purpose for this question was to identify the philosophy, development, nature, and magnitude of the process. The four schools selected to participate in this study used procedures from The Walkthrough Observation Tool from the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania. The identification of emerging themes and the extent to which this walkthrough model was actually being implemented as recommended by developers Graf and Werlinich (2002) were what this researcher identified. The purpose of this cross-case analysis is aligned with the description Merriam (1998) provided that the more cases involved and the greater variability between them will make the interpretation of the results much more compelling. To formulate a response for this first research question, interview questions numbered 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18 were asked of all participants from all four schools. As reflected in Table 4, the obtained information emerged into the following four themes: Supervision of Instruction; Instructional Improvement; Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support; and Professional Development.

Supervision of Instruction

The use of walkthrough observations as a tool for the supervision of instruction was closely examined. Sullivan and Glantz (2009) and Sergiovanni and Starratt (2007) commented that supervision is a process that engages teachers and school organizations in dialogue and instruction for the improvement of student achievement. Looking closely at specific types of supervision, Robert Goldhammer identified clinical supervision as a technique that implies supervision up close (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007). Glatthorn (1997) focused his thoughts on a differentiated supervisory plan where teachers are given options about the kinds of supervision and evaluation techniques they receive.

The perceptions of individuals in this study indicated that the walkthrough process is an effective supervisory technique that embraces the definition of supervision. In all four of the schools, the walkthrough observation tool was used as a part of a differentiated supervisory plan. Concerning evaluations, it was used both formally and informally. Depending on the teachers' contract, the number of required walkthroughs completed for each individual varied by the district. However, it was apparent that the principals visited the classrooms numerous times for informal visits.

The participants proclaimed that they have been using the walkthrough process in their buildings ranging from two to sixteen years. In all four schools, the principals determined when they would visit the classrooms. With the exception of one school during their use of formal walkthroughs, the visits were

unannounced. The principals spent approximately five to ten minutes in each classroom observing instruction and student learning. In two schools, technology was used to capture data while principals in the other two schools continued to write on a template or blank sheets of paper. Feedback was given to the teachers using technology, written notes, or in personal conference. In three of the schools, teachers did not do peer walkthrough observations. At Red River, substitutes were hired to provide teachers an opportunity to observe other classrooms. In all of the schools, teachers did participate in longer classroom observations of other teachers. These were informal observations.

Instructional Improvement

In the research report *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement*, Sanders and Rivers (1996), verified the importance of students being taught by effective teachers. It is their belief that the single most overriding factor affecting student academic gain is teacher effect. To help increase teacher effectiveness and instructional improvement of the students, the schools in this study considered the importance of having an instructional focus. This thinking is aligned with what Graf and Werlinich (2002) define as look-fors, which are specific descriptors of conditions that when present in classrooms enable students to improve academically. Each of the four schools implemented a plan concerning an instructional focus, but philosophically deviated on the level of specificity for the look-fors. In all schools, the look-fors were established through discussions with the faculty on what the focus needs to be for the current school year. At Green Valley, the assistant superintendent felt

very strongly that the teachers needed to identify very specific look-fors that should be seen in every lesson. It is his belief that students' achievement would increase through the consistent use of the look-fors. For additional teacher and student learning to occur, these look-fors would change once the faculty was comfortable using them as a regular part of instruction. At Red River, the look-fors were connected to the district goals that were established at summer leadership meetings. These goals and look-fors change annually. At Oak Ridge, the teachers established goals and look-fors at the beginning of the year. Most of the look-fors are based on Charlotte Danielson's (1996) Framework for Teaching Model including the following four domains: Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. Similarly, the look-fors at Blue Mountain are based on the Danielson model and are embedded into part of the evaluation system. There, teachers are expected to have learning targets. Additionally, if there is a new initiative being introduced in the building, this will become one of the look-fors. However, the instructional focus areas at Blue Mountain are fairly stable because they reflect the core philosophy of the building.

Collaboration, Dialogue, and Support

This theme emerged based upon the importance of having collaboration and dialogue with the faculty, and being able to support their teaching through the use of walkthrough observation protocols. In effective schools, there is a high level of collegiality among the faculty. Glatthorn (1997) stated the use of a differentiated approach would build a collegial atmosphere through an emphasis

on cooperation and mutual assistance. When a principal shares his or her expertise with faculty and empowers teachers to make professional decisions during the supervisory process, continuous improvement will usually become the norm of the school culture. As stated by Graf and Werlinich (2002) the use of the walkthrough will create a community of learners for adults and children.

All four of the schools mentioned that there was much discussion with faculty members before implementing the walkthrough observations. For example, the assistant superintendent from Green Valley specifically stated that they get the teachers involved with defining the look-fors. Their focus this year was on formative assessments so they asked the teachers to come up with their three best formative assessments and that would be part of the walkthrough template. At Red River, the superintendent elaborated on the collaboration that occurs during the summer leadership retreat. Teachers are invited to participate in this retreat and they work together to develop district goals, which in turn shape the vision of the district and the individual schools. The look-fors are then established to help meet the district goals. At Oak Ridge, the administrators spent much time collaborating with the faculty on developing and understanding their Promising Principles and Agile instruction, which they then use to identify specific areas to emphasize during the school year. All of these strategies are commensurate with what Graf and Werlinich (2002) outlined as important steps for developing walkthrough observations.

Concerning dialogue, the importance of providing effective feedback is considered. Through discussions with all of the participants, feedback is an

integral component of the walkthrough observations. However, it varies by technique and duration. At Green Valley, great importance is placed on providing teachers immediate feedback through the use of technology. Before leaving the classroom, the principal sends a report to the teacher regarding the observation. If there were any issues or problems, the principal would then schedule a time to personally meet with the teacher. The assistant superintendent at Blue Mountain praised her principal for really excelling in this area. She stated that Mike is very good at tying together all of the information. One technique that he uses when doing walkthroughs is to go through an entire grade level at one time. By doing this, he is able to compare the instructional levels of the content that is being delivered in the different classrooms. He then follows up with individual feedback to every teacher. The teachers further elaborated on Mike's feedback by saying that in addition to getting feedback the next day in their mailboxes, at the monthly faculty meeting he will also discuss positive ideas that he observed while being in the classrooms. They claimed that information is what they need to work on collectively in the building and they discuss the points across the grade levels or entire school.

The final component of this theme is support. The principal at Red River proclaimed that he likes to be in classrooms as much as he can. He prides himself on being in the classrooms more than other people in the profession. He feels this gives him an opportunity to coach the teachers on their instructional strategies. He claims that it is not evaluating the teacher per se but helping them to improve their practice. According to Gary, sometimes a walkthrough turns into

him instructing with the teacher because they evolve into that, which is a good thing. At Oak Ridge, the assistant superintendent has developed a unique system for supporting the teachers after walkthrough observations. She provides the teachers feedback through the use of closed or locked electronic folders. In the folders she has a template where she provides information to the teacher about the observation. Tammy will question or even give the teachers suggestions and the teacher is expected to respond back in a timely fashion. The discussions become very thoughtful and engaging. Tammy articulates that this provides teachers embedded support and that happens all day and everyday. This process is well aligned with what Graf and Werlinich (2002) declare on utilizing a variety of strategies for debriefing, the importance of coaching each other on instruction and learning, and creating a school culture where teaching, learning, and sharing are entrenched in everyday activities.

Professional Development

To effectively utilize walkthrough observations in any school, there must be an extensive program of professional development to help support the teachers with the implementation of this process. This begins by working collaboratively with the teachers on developing a culture conducive for the implementation of walkthroughs and the establishment of clear expectations of purpose and procedures. Unfortunately, many teachers have experienced situations where walkthroughs have been implemented incorrectly and with a “gotcha” attitude as opposed to ones that are used for instructional growth. To

avoid this dilemma, administrators must know the history of the district and proceed carefully through the use of professional development.

At Green Valley, the principal reported that the first walkthrough system being used in the school district was not very effective. It lacked an educational focus. Therefore through professional development, they were able to change the teachers' mindset as to what they were looking for in the classrooms. For example, before making specific formative assessments as one of the look-fors, professional development time was scheduled to learn about new techniques. The assistant superintendent claimed that they did not want to do walkthroughs just for the sake of getting into classes. They wanted to change the instruction in those classrooms. Thomas stated that it is all tied together from their professional development to the walkthrough. Another component that came out of the walkthroughs in this district was the establishment of professional videos on the use of best practices. If teachers are struggling on particular techniques, we ask them to watch a video of another teacher who has mastered the skill. Furthermore, the principal stated that the look-fors can be changed quickly on the walkthrough template and additional professional development may occur to support this need.

At Oak Ridge, the principal stated the walkthrough was not created for evaluation. He proudly replied that during professional development sessions, they role-play the items on the form and how they should use it. According to Jason, it has to come from the teachers and has to evolve over time. He commented that if you just give it to the teachers, they would not buy into it. The

assistant superintendent further commented on their development of the Promising Principles. She claimed that they were all connected so they have to look at it from a broad perspective and then tie all of the pieces together. The walkthroughs must be several snapshots of a classroom to make that larger picture. Much professional development went into understanding each component of the Promising Principles.

Discussion on Research Question 2

What principles of Professional Learning Communities are evident in the four schools?

This second research question is posed to identify what, if any, characteristics of professional learning communities are engrained into any of the four elementary schools that were a part of this research. To help answer this second research question, superintendents, principals, and teachers were asked interview questions numbered 9, 10, and 19. The answers from these interview questions will now be examined in relation to current research on professional learning communities.

There is stark evidence that there are components of professional learning communities in all of the four schools. However, due to individual interpretations of a PLC, each of the four schools had different levels of involvement. Superintendents, principals, and teachers all believed in the importance of giving teachers an opportunity to meet to discuss the academic needs of the students. This included faculty meetings, common planning time meetings, and even PLC meetings after school. Teams that were developed included grade level teams,

grade level leader teams, and special interest teams. Collaboration within the faculty was pronounced as one of the most important outcomes of the PLCs. Another aspect that was mentioned as being very valuable was the importance placed upon knowing if the students learned the content and what steps would be implemented to further their understanding if students were having academic difficulties. Lastly, individuals from all four schools stated that walkthroughs were an integral component of their instructional program and they positively influenced what occurred in professional learning communities. The following summarizes information from each of the schools for the second research question:

Green Valley Elementary School

At Green Valley, the assistant superintendent stated that they have professional learning communities but do not call them that. They have faculty meetings where they meet to discuss instruction and curriculum. Within those meetings they have specific topics where they focus on instructional practices. Thomas stated he understands professional learning communities as described by Dufour (2008), but they are not there yet. He wants to make sure that the educational program is strengthened before permitting teachers to meet in small groups and possibly reinforce bad practices.

Brian proclaimed that when teachers are helping other teachers craft or hone their skills that is a professional learning community. Louis and Kruse (1995) identified this collaboration as one of the five core characteristics of professional learning communities. Within this elementary school, teachers

collaborate during common planning time, classroom observations, best practice faculty meetings, and taped podcasts of teachers using best practices.

Concerning walkthroughs and how they affect the development of PLCs, Thomas believes that the walkthroughs drive the PLCs. Through the use of walkthroughs, they are able to see what is working or what needs to be further developed. Thomas calls it more or less of something to be done in the classrooms. This in turn then influences what direction they will take with their professional development. According to Brian, the walkthroughs demonstrate what you do really well and what you do not do really well. You then use that information to help guide your PLC. The teachers agreed it was through the walkthrough observations that their principal saw good ideas and later asked them to share with the faculty.

Concerning the impact of walkthroughs and PLCs on best practices, Thomas believes that it all ties together. If an effective practice is not seen in the classroom, discussion and collaboration must occur to initiate this strategy.

Blue Mountain Elementary School

The assistant superintendent stated that PLCs began in the elementary schools about eight years ago. It was through the expertise of the elementary principal and the facilitators that they were able to flourish. This supportive and shared leadership is congruent to what the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2008) designated as one of the core attributes of learning communities. The assistant superintendent believes that the principal's strong belief system and core values on what is best for kids go a long way.

Hord (2004) identified shared values and vision as one of the five major themes necessary to develop PLCs.

Mike elaborated on the meaning of PLCs as a group of professionals who work together collaboratively with a focus. This focus must be on student learning. According to Mike, if you are not working on a focus to improve student learning, what is the point. This thinking is aligned with what DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) included as a key characteristic of PLCs-Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals that are all focused on student learning. In Mike's school, this is accomplished through grade level teams that meet once a month formally. These teams meet for 45 to 60 minutes and focus exclusively on student learning. Minutes are taken of the meeting and a copy is given to the principal. Mike says the biggest impact that he has seen is with the amount of collaboration that exists within the school. He states that no one works in isolation any longer due to the fact that they share kids, practices, and strategies. According to Mike, it is no longer my 25 students but it is my 100 students across the grade level.

Concerning walkthroughs and PLCs, Susan replied that the walkthrough is a nice and quick way to reinforce best practices. When the teachers meet in their PLCs, they use this time to discuss student learning and best practices. Mike elaborated that it is up to the principal to make a strong connection between walkthroughs and PLCs. In this school, Mike sends out notes to everyone on positive instructional practices that he observed while completing the walkthroughs. Other times, Mike asks the teachers to talk about the effective

instructional practices in the PLCs. The teachers responded very favorably about receiving information from Mike on what is working throughout the school.

Another important piece of the PLC at Blue Mountain is the Second Chance Learning time where students who are struggling receive additional instruction. Everything that they do is based on knowing the kids as learners and how they are going to impact their learning. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) discussed the importance of systematic interventions that provide extra time and instruction for students who are struggling and this is an important practice of a PLC.

Red River Elementary School

The superintendent at Red River stated that PLCs are groups of people that are aligned in seeking a common goal. In this district, the teachers have a 30 minute morning time that they use to host discussions on struggling students, intervention time or professional development. Amanda, the elementary principal, replied that PLCs are groups of people that are missioned at whatever the task is at hand. In her building they have grade level teams, grade level leader teams, data teams, and RtII teams.

The walkthrough observation helped to create a collaborative environment within the schools. Amanda emphasized the importance of taking teachers along with the administrators on walkthroughs. One example where this proved successful was when they focused on samples of student writing that was posted in the hallways. This led to continuous discussions of expectations throughout the school.

According to Megan, the impact of walkthroughs on best practices and student performance is huge. Through the use of the walkthroughs, administrators identify best practices and share information about best practices with the teachers in conferences. The walkthrough facilitates best practices and the discussions that need to happen.

Oak Ridge Elementary School

At Oak Ridge, Tammy reported that PLCs in their district have to be based on teacher interest so teachers are excited about learning and taking it to a new level. Each year the PLCs change based upon the results of a teacher survey for what professional development is needed. The groups meet for 45 minutes once a month and teachers lead them. The facilitators plan the meetings and develop the agendas. At the end of the year, the groups share with the faculty what they had learned throughout the year.

At the elementary level, Jason reported that the PLCs in their school make what they do better. Currently there are four teams in place. The teams are literacy leadership, math leadership, career exploration, and arts integration.

Concerning the impact of walkthroughs, Tammy reported that they affect PLCs in a very big way. They look daily at what is going on and identify the needs. Coming up with ideas for the PLCs, it is a collaborative effort between teachers and the principals. There are 30 days of professional development built into the yearly calendar, much of which is tied to the learning communities. During the meeting times, the PLCs fill out an action plan on a web page. The

administration examines these focus strategies on how the PLCs plan to get the goals accomplished, timelines for completion, and evaluation of progress.

Tammy elaborated on their development of the Promising Principles. When they complete walkthroughs they are making the connection between what was learned through professional development and those best practices. Everything is interconnected and the techniques used for making those connections are very important. The Promising Principles is the organization's tool for having a common language. Walkthroughs and PLCs have impacted best classroom practices and student performance in a positive way.

Jason responded that without the walkthroughs and PLCs they would become stagnate. They are instrumental in their success. The PLCs give the teachers time to plan and share best practices.

Discussion on Research Question 3

How do identified walkthrough procedures align with the six principles of Professional Learning Communities?

This third research question focuses on the use of walkthrough observations by administrators and how they corroborate the essence of each of the six principles of a PLC. Blankstein (2010) categorized and listed these six principles that form the heart of a PLC from much research on effective schools, the U.S. Department of Education's criteria on excellent schools, and personal practice in the field. This question was answered through each of the six principles. A majority of the information was gathered from interview questions numbered 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, and 22.

Principle 1: Common Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

One key to success for any school is to create a productive culture where the staff takes responsibility for their actions and moves away from blame and hopelessness. Accountability must begin with the professional staff and not be shifted away to others. Productive cultures have an idea of where their organization is headed. They understand their mission, vision, values, and goals. As educators write mission statements, they must answer the question: Why do schools exist? A school's vision centers on what the school can become. Values are often described in attitudes or behavioral terms of a group's action or shared commitments. Lastly, measurable goals are specific short-term targets that the organization hopes to accomplish along the way to achieve their vision. Professional Learning Communities are built in schools that have dynamic cultures and a strong sense of direction for what they need to accomplish. Peter Senge (2006) reminded us that without a clear-shared vision, it is impossible to have a learning organization.

The assistant superintendent at Green Valley feels very strongly that there must be a strong instructional model in place and it must be implemented everyday. According to Thomas, their mission is to make sure that all kids can learn and that the teachers are using best instructional practices. He vocalizes this vision quite frequently and establishes attainable goals. He visits the schools in his district routinely and observes teachers in the classrooms through the use of walkthrough observations. Thomas also works with administrators and teachers outside of the district discussing walkthrough observations and best

practices. Thomas feels that the elementary schools at Green Valley are ready to begin talking in PLCs around best practices. Concerning walkthroughs, he feels that they drive the PLCs. They enable the staff to see where things are and where they need to be. This in turn impacts their professional development program.

Along these same lines, Brian is very vocal about his vision and what he expects to be accomplished in the school. Within faculty meetings, he collaborates with others to establish goals. Many of these goals turn into look-fors that are used when completing walkthrough observations. He believes that walkthroughs are professional development for the teachers. Once teachers have learned and started to implement specific instructional techniques, he likes to collaborate again with the teachers to set new ones so additional learning may occur. Brian leads with passion and it is evident with the practices that he has put into place.

At Blue Mountain, one can gain a strong sense of the mission, vision, values, and goals of the elementary school just by walking in the front door. In the lobby of the school, there is a PLC banner that emphasizes the question about whether or not the kids learned what was taught or did the teachers just teach it.

Susan the assistant superintendent stated the walkthrough observation definitely fits into the mission of the school. She stated that the rhetoric surrounding PLCs is important because it is based upon what is good for kids. Their focus remains to be one that is on student learning. Susan asserts that the

leader must make the connection between walkthrough observations and PLCs. At most times, with the responsive staff at their elementary school, the walkthrough observation gives the principal a chance to reinforce and validate the best practices that are occurring in the classrooms.

Mike reiterated the point that it is the leadership that sets the connection between the walkthroughs and the mission of the school. If your core beliefs are important to the district and you put emphasis on those beliefs during the walkthroughs, it is all tied together. Mike replied that the observations, group discussions, and individual write-ups all have to be in unison and that is how we carry out our duties.

The teachers at Blue Mountain were proud to remark about their tag line being one that claims they are a responsive staff. This invigorating culture that exists at Blue Mountain is deeply entrenched from the central office down to the classroom teachers.

At Red River, Megan describes her mission statement as being one that refers to lifelong learners. The tie-in with the walkthrough is to examine the collaborative environment that has been created by using this observation tool.

Amanda believes that the walkthrough definitely supports the mission and vision statement by identifying the positive things and best practices that are occurring in the classrooms. Gary concluded that the walkthrough has created an open door policy within his school.

At Oak Ridge, Tammy was proud to announce that walkthroughs promote the mission, vision, values, or goals of their school because they are built upon

the framework of the Promising Principles. So when principals complete walkthroughs, those elements of the Promising Principles Framework are the look-fors. For example, if they are focusing on Agile Instruction, all the components under Agile Instruction become the look-fors. The culture they have built at Oak Ridge is one where they want to be the best in everything they do and they want to do what is best for the students. This includes teachers reflecting on their lessons and then making them better for the next day. Their belief system is one where there is always room for improvement. Furthermore, the teachers reiterated these thoughts by saying that the walkthroughs keep them on target with what they are to do as educators. They are to provide the best learning environment for the kids.

Principle 2: Enduring Achievement for all Students

Creating Systems for Prevention and Intervention

Blankstein (2010) identified three major aspects of ensuring success for all learners through a comprehensive system for prevention and intervention. He recognized the importance of a powerful belief system for assisting struggling students, an overarching philosophy that coalesces the actions and behaviors of the staff, and widespread structures that will support students so that all will be successful. Teachers need to combat in a proactive manner the many obstacles they confront when teaching students. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) likewise argued that educators must work collectively to create a culture of high expectations for all students. They stated that students who are struggling must

involuntarily be given extra time and support for learning. This help must be given immediately at the onset of trouble and must be available to all students regardless of the individual teacher who is in charge of the classroom. These procedures are inherent components of PLCs.

The schools in this study have established strategies for working with students who may be struggling. To begin, there is much collaboration between the staff members as they discuss student assessment data and classroom performance. In three of the four schools, students are pulled into groups for extra instruction based upon their needs. At Green Valley, the principal called this grouping his safety net for catching those students who are experiencing difficulties. He uses his classroom teachers, reading specialists, and instructional aides to work with the students. At Blue Mountain, the intervention piece is a huge part of the whole PLC culture. It is focused on each child as an individual learner. During “Second Chance Learning,” faculty uses all resources available including how the schedule is developed to focus on prevention and intervention. At Red River, students are grouped in what is called “When In Need” (WIN) time. Again, students are placed into groups and receive extra instruction when deemed necessary. Oak Ridge is the only school that does not specifically pull students out of the classroom into separate groups for additional instruction. Administrators and coaches assist the teachers with the identification of any deficits the students may have and then they assist the students within the classroom setting. This is built into the daily schedule during small group time.

When specifically asked about walkthroughs and how they ensure achievement for all students, the participants referred back to the need to identify the use of best practices within the classrooms. The practices that were mentioned included active student engagement, accountable talk, formative assessments, and differentiation. The walkthroughs were being used to validate effective practices or to make sure that they exist through the use of look-fors within every classroom. It is interesting to note that the principal at Blue Mountain stated it was not so much the walkthrough process but the PLC process that really made a difference in their prevention and intervention techniques.

Principle 3: Collaborative Teaming

Focused on Teaching and Learning

Lezotte (1991) continued the work of Edmond's research on effective schools and he added a second generation of correlates that centered on the mission of learning for all. A major highlight of this second generation focused on the importance of developing a collaborative environment. This type of working relationship has become a cornerstone for PLCs.

In all four schools, collaboration is occurring throughout the school day. Centering on walkthroughs, the participants agreed that the observers shared information with the teachers on important strategies that were observed or even those that were missing. This feedback would then be discussed by teachers in small groups, within grade levels or at whole school faculty meetings.

At Green Valley, Thomas proclaimed that the teachers are discussing what the superintendent and principals are seeing in the classrooms. There is a sharing of best practices. Even if someone does not get feedback, they still talk with other teachers on how to improve their instruction. Brian announced that if he sees something that a teacher is doing really well, he will ask that person to show the rest of the faculty. The teachers in this school replied that when the principal talked about formative assessments, they researched the topic and then shared information with the other teachers. At Green Valley, teachers are now videotaped as they use best practices with their students. These videos are archived and shared with others who may be interested in learning these effective strategies. The walkthrough was the instrument that provided an avenue to encourage collaboration.

The teachers at Blue Mountain stated that after a walkthrough observation their principal was looking for additional student work to be posted in their classrooms. He was also interested in seeing the teachers increase the amount of time that they check for student understanding. Since this was to be accomplished across the grade level, the teachers met and discussed both of these areas during their common planning time.

Amanda, the principal at Red River, stated that increased collaboration through the walkthroughs is very important. When the principals complete walkthroughs, the teachers discuss the feedback during their grade level meetings. Collaborative teaming occurs naturally when teachers complete

walkthroughs with the principals. This is an excellent time for the principals to point out what is really working well in the school.

As discussed, the walkthrough sets the stage to entertain discussion within schools. It is through the walkthroughs that particular instructional strategies are validated or deemed nonexistent. As opposed to being isolated, teachers then move out of their classrooms and open their doors to conversations with others. As delineated by Graf and Werlinich (2002), walkthroughs can change the culture in the school by opening up the classroom environment thus moving from one that is isolated to one that is more collaborative. This helps to create the cornerstone for building PLCs. Blankstein (2010) corroborated this thinking by asserting that schools must have collaboration among their administrators and teachers or their efforts to create a learning community will fail.

Principle 4: Using Data to Guide Decision

Making and Continuous Improvement

Knowing what assessments should be given to students, understanding data results, and then implementing a formal plan of action for working with students are all an inherent part of a learning community and necessary for school improvement. Through the use of data, educators paint a realistic picture of what students have learned. Teachers then take this information to formulate educational plans. Even though the picture drawn may not be one that is pleasant, it is important to understand exactly what is the level of progress.

Aligned with this thinking, Jim Collins (2001) discussed how great companies did not fear to face the brutal facts of reality.

When asked if walkthroughs influenced the use of data, the interviewees provided a variety of responses. At Green Valley, the assistant superintendent discussed how he was able to organize his own data by collecting all of the walkthrough forms from his principals. After a principal completed a walkthrough, he or she would use technology to immediately send the walkthrough form back to him. The assistant superintendent would then create an excel spreadsheet to closely scrutinize how often they were seeing learning targets, formative assessments, and other important instructional strategies. He would be able to evaluate the situation to determine what direction to proceed. Thomas stated that his goal with the walkthroughs was to get more or less of whatever you want to see in the classrooms and once you get to that point, it is then time to move it to another level. Within the same school district, Brian and the teachers believed the walkthroughs were valuable to document the number of times students were actively engaged. This information would create dialogue between the principal and the teaching staff.

At Blue Mountain, Susan elaborated on the importance of using frequent formative assessments. She stated that was an engrained part of the culture in their school district and part of the PLC model. The data or information received from walkthrough observations on the use of formative assessments is very valuable to share with the staff. Furthermore, Mike discussed how he completes walkthroughs in chunks of time across an entire grade level. He is able to get a

clear picture from top to bottom of how well the students are performing as learners. He then provides the teachers with time to look at the data and make decisions on how they are going to implement new practices in their classrooms. The teachers in the school were more specific on Mike's walkthrough process and its influence on data gathering. They said that Mike wants to know what formal or informal data they have on the students. DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) professed that members of a PLC are not content with the status quo. They constantly search for better ways to achieve their goals and this includes a constant gathering of evidence on current levels of student learning.

Megan, the assistant superintendent at Red River, reminded this researcher that data could be more than just numerical information. Aligned with the thought process of Thomas, she discussed the importance of using the look-fors to gauge the use of effective strategies such as establishing clear expectations for all students.

At Oak Ridge, Tammy was very clear about the connection between the walkthroughs and the use of data. She began by discussing all of the different forms of data they currently use in their district (DIBELS, 4sight, DRA, and math classroom based assessments). Then during status meetings, they look to see where the deficits are and where the support is needed. An instructional plan is written for specific students. Tammy claims that it is the walkthroughs that help determine this plan because they are able to see exactly where the students are academically. A very important step during the walkthrough is when the assistant superintendent or principal actually talks with the students and then

follows up with a discussion with the teacher. Tammy believes that students are the best indicators of what is happening with instruction in the classroom.

According to Graf and Werlinich (2002) observing student behavior and talking with students about their learning is an integral component of the Walkthrough Observation Tool.

Principle 5: Gaining Active Engagement from Family and Community

As anticipated, the interviewees from all four schools had difficulty making a correlation between walkthroughs and gaining active engagement from family and community. A majority of the responses were of an indirect nature.

At Green Valley, Thomas directed his attention to the use of formative assessments. He stated the teachers will keep the students more actively engaged through their use of formative assessments and this will help them become more successful in school. This in turn will keep parents happy because their students are doing well in school. It is centered around instructional practices. Thomas believes that if teachers are using best instructional practices and kids are having success, parents will be happy. The use of the walkthrough ensures that the effective practices continue in the classrooms.

Susan claims that it all ties together. At Blue Mountain, her parents are very satisfied with the procedures they have in place at the elementary school. Parents feel that everyone who works at the school is paying close attention to their children. Mike replied that the walkthroughs indirectly do because they are positive part of their program that impacts students and their families. The

teachers appreciate the personal connection and relationships the principal is making with the students while in the classroom. Through the use of walkthroughs, Mike is able to talk with parents specifically about what is happening in the classroom. According to the teachers, he knows what is transpiring in the classrooms because he has been there.

At Red River, Gary talked about how walkthroughs promote the idea of public relations. By being in the classroom regularly, the parents are aware that he knows what is occurring in the classrooms instructionally. He stated that his parents report to him that their children come home and tell them that he is in the classrooms all of the time.

Tammy explained that walkthroughs indirectly support the family through their process of data review. She mentioned that parents frequently tour their school. While completing these walkthroughs, they are able to see small group instruction and one to one interactions with the teachers. The relationship with parents that exists at Oak Ridge is what Blankstein (2010) reported is necessary for a school to become a true professional learning community. Blankstein stated that there needs to be a mutual understanding based upon empathy and recognition of shared interests. He also promoted the idea that schools that are true professional learning communities have meaningful parent involvement, regular outreach, and communication to family and community.

Jason directed his attention to the Promising Principles that were developed at Oak Ridge and how parents will focus on that document while

touring the school. They are able to personally witness the components of the Promising Principles within the classrooms.

Principle 6: Building Sustainable Leadership Capacity

This last principle emphasizes the importance of building a strong leadership base for long-term success in schools. Within this principle, Blankstein (2010) reported that there are three key words to define what is necessary to be successful; they are leadership, capacity, and sustainability.

At Green Valley, Thomas stated he builds leadership and capacity with his principals by working with them on best practices. Susan pointed out that walkthroughs offer a formal way for the building principal to be more visible in the classroom paying more attention to classroom instruction. That is important for the principals and also the teachers. The teachers at Blue Mountain replied that if the principal sees something of value with someone's instruction, he asks that person to talk about it at the next grade level or faculty meeting. By doing this, he is trying to foster leadership with his teachers. At Red River, Megan proclaimed that using walkthroughs to build leadership capacity is huge when you have a group of teachers who want to observe other teachers. The teachers who are doing something really well are asked to have other teachers observe their instruction and that builds leadership. This thinking is aligned with what Hord (2004) identified as supportive and shared leadership. It is one of the key characteristics of Communities of Continuous Improvement or PLCs.

Discussion on Research Question 4

How are individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in Educational Leadership Initiative?

Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI) was developed to bring superintendents, principals, and teachers together to share a common vision, focus, and goal. According to key developers, this program of professional development is to enhance the leadership skills of district participants to improve student learning in the region (Wallace, Goodwin, Graf, & Werlinich 2005). This initiative is a systems approach to improve teaching and learning. Many of the schools that participate in ELI also utilize the walkthrough observation tool from the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania. Therefore, this researcher is interested to discover if participation in ELI supports the use of walkthroughs and their influence on the development of professional learning communities. Red River and Oak Ridge are two of the four schools that participate in ELI and also are in this study. Information gathered from interview questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 20, and 21 were used to answer this research question.

Red River Elementary School

The superintendent of Red River stated that they were one of the nine original districts that participated in ELI. They were involved for the last five to six years. Their major reason for joining ELI was that it was an extension of the work on differentiated supervision that was being accomplished through Otto

Graf and Joseph Werlinich. This model of differentiated supervision includes the use of walkthrough observations.

According to Megan, a second reason they joined ELI was to strengthen teacher leadership within the district. One major activity that was instituted was the development of a Leadership Academy. A team of administrators and teachers participated in a retreat to develop their vision for the district and to discuss past and future goals. The individuals who participated are leaders in their buildings. During their time spent together, team members worked together to develop committees for specific goals or projects to be implemented during the school year. Team leaders then communicated back to the individual school buildings information on work that was accomplished. Specific teams that were developed included a Restructuring Committee, Student Success Group, Technology Team, and Curriculum Connector/Assessment Portfolio Group. Progress is monitored through the use of action plans for each group.

Similar to what Megan explained, Amanda and Gary both believe that ELI helped to build teacher leadership. Teachers were invited to participate in the Leadership Academy. Through the help of ELI, they were able to build a culture with the staff on the idea of collaboration and decision-making and not the top-down model. Before ELI, the workings in the different school buildings were very isolated. ELI helped to build and sustain professional learning communities within the district.

Megan, Amanda, and Gary all shared their excitement about being able to connect and collaborate with other school districts. The Colleague in Residence

(CIR) brought districts together to share ideas and plans for improvement. They were able to visit schools of other ELI members to learn about different programs such as AP, Curriculum Connector, and assessment portfolios. Through ELI sponsored events, much information was learned during walkthrough observations at different schools. Megan reported that Otto Graf and Joe Werlinich worked with their teachers on the walkthrough process before their involvement with ELI. Once joining ELI, this was an extension of their work. When ELI meetings were held at the different schools, walkthroughs were usually an integral part of the agenda and heavily promoted by the CIRs.

Oak Ridge Elementary School

Tammy stated that her school district has been a member of ELI for the past four to five years. Even before developing a partnership with ELI, there was a working relationship in place with the University of Pittsburgh. The superintendent worked previously with Otto Graf and Joe Werlinich. Team members included the superintendent, principals, director of curriculum, and instructional coaches.

According to Tammy, their purpose for joining ELI was the learning walks. They wanted to identify what the best practices were in the classrooms and then work to establish effective look-fors. Best practices would then be incorporated across all of the district's schools. One of the most important parts of the process was the time spent conversing with team members. It was through continuous conversation with ELI that helped them to figure out what were the best practices and what they could do to grow with those best practices.

Additionally, what they learned from the walks turned into topics for professional development. The individuals from ELI served as consultants to help guide this process and to help with growth by adding to what they are already doing.

Jason really appreciated being able to collaborate with other school districts and to share instructional practices. He mentioned the importance of the schools utilizing a team approach involving administrators and teachers. He said it is the networking that is very valuable.

Concerning PLCs, Tammy replied that they were already in place before developing a partnership with ELI. However, conversations continued with the CIRs about their practices and how to improve what was being accomplished. Jason proclaimed that through ELI they were able to compare their PLC teams to what others were doing in other districts. Jason focused on the importance of having strong teacher leaders in place who are strong positive role models.

Implications and Recommendations for Professional Practice

This study centered on two important areas involving supervisory and organizational theory. Specifically, this researcher focused on the use of walkthrough observations and their influence on the development of professional learning communities. In this section, implications and recommendations of important information gathered from an analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of interview transcripts and other information from the four schools in this study will be presented for consideration by other researchers and practitioners to inform professional educational practice. These highlights will be offered through each of the research questions.

Implications and Recommendations - Research Question 1

What consistent walkthrough observation procedures do principals and teachers currently use in their schools?

It is quite apparent that walkthrough observations are a necessary tool administrators may use to help supervise or evaluate teachers and instructional practices within the classrooms. Respected professionals in the field have made comments that refer to how critical they are in the school or how they have made a huge impact on students' achievement. Additionally, information from this study paints a clear picture that practitioners have given up on the idea that they can provide meaningful evaluations by only going into classrooms once or twice a year. As stated through the work of Glatthorn (1997) and Graf and Werlinich (2004), evidence shows that it is even more powerful when the walkthrough is part of a differentiated supervisory plan that may include a clinical approach for new teachers and a project-based approach for master teachers.

Administrators in the district may decide which type of walkthrough protocol would work best for their teachers. As outlined in Chapter II of this study, there are several different effective models available for consideration with additional ideas being developed at the final writing of this document. As previously stated, this researcher worked with the model developed by Otto Graf and Joseph Werlinich (2002) of the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania. The Walkthrough Observation Tool was developed through much thought, research, and use over a long duration of time. It has been tested and

used by many practitioners within classrooms in school districts. Users of this tool must closely follow the steps as outlined by the developers to ensure fidelity.

Before beginning to complete walkthroughs in the classrooms, administrators need to make sure that the school culture is conducive for its implementation. The culture needs to be one that is based on openness and trust. Clear communication with the teachers' union for how it is going to be implemented is crucial. One way to introduce walkthroughs in a school is through the use of event walkthroughs where a team of administrators and teachers walk together pointing out very positive attributes observed in the school. The information observed is then shared with the entire faculty. This may be followed by short two to three minute visibility walks. Through this process, teachers and students begin to feel more comfortable with the observer's presence in the classroom. This may lead to a time where it was a normal part of the day to have visitors in the classrooms. The goal is to make the walkthrough seem like an informal visit rather than a formal evaluation. More importantly, administrators must not make the walkthroughs into a "gotcha" where the teachers feel they are being spied on for future negative ramifications. The stage has to be set where the prime purpose for using the walkthroughs will be for the improvement of instruction and a validation of effective instructional practices. These effective practices will then be shared with others to improve the overall instructional program. If and when administrators see issues in the classrooms, they will need to schedule additional observations and conferences to discuss the problematic areas.

An important component gleaned from this study is the importance of developing “look-fors” or areas to focus on while in the classrooms. It is extremely important for the teachers to be directly involved in the identification of the “look-fors.” Whether developed by a leadership team or the entire faculty, teacher buy-in with identification of the focus areas will certainly promote progress. One superintendent emphasized that “look-fors” must be very narrow and specific. He stated they should be what you want to see more or less of in the classrooms. Graf and Werlinich (2002) talked about the importance of making sure that the “look-fors” have a laser-like focus. The teachers need to have a clear and specific understanding of techniques that must be utilized in the classrooms on a daily basis. This in turn can be tied into the school’s plan for professional development.

The next area for consideration centers on how administrators provide feedback after completing walkthrough observations. Teachers are interested in hearing immediate comments once the walkthrough observations are finished. The use of technology is now being used in many schools to help accomplish this task. Walkthrough templates may be used to provide feedback quickly at the end of the observation. One great practice is to get into a routine where the observer writes the observation while in the room and emails the completed template back to the teacher before leaving the classroom. This will ensure that the observer gets the information back to the teacher in a timely manner. If necessary, the administrator may later schedule a conference to discuss details of the lesson.

Furthermore, another successful practice for sharing feedback is when the principal visits classrooms across a grade level on the same day. By doing this, the observer is better able to see what curriculum all teachers are covering at a certain time period. He or she would then provide individual feedback to teachers and also to an entire grade level of teachers to validate effective classroom practices. This same information may be discussed with the entire faculty during their monthly meeting.

The idea of teachers completing walkthroughs is another practice that teachers may be interested in undertaking. This researcher has found this strategy to be very beneficial but it must be approached carefully. To be successful, there has to be a high level of comfort among the teachers with having others walk into their classrooms. Teachers should never be perceived as being an evaluator or a reporter to the administration. Bargaining units will prohibit teachers from evaluating others and it is just not good practice. One method that this researcher has found to be successful is to solicit volunteers who would like to go on walkthroughs. Substitute teachers are hired for the day. Two sessions are established with one being in the morning and the other in the afternoon. Two different groups of teachers are scheduled for the day. The principal meets with the teachers to establish some ground rules before going on the walkthrough. Teachers should be instructed that they are looking for positive, best practices that their peers are using within the classrooms. The teachers are given a time period for when they will be on their walks. The entire building is given advance notice for when teachers will be completing walks. If a teacher

does not want others to visit his or her classroom, he or she will keep his or her doors closed or verbally state to the observers that it is not a good time to observe. At the end of the walks, the principal meets with the teachers again to discuss ideas learned from their visits. The teachers are not asked to turn in any written notes or documents to the administration. The only requirement is that the observers must briefly discuss in a positive manner what they observed or learned while on the walkthroughs during a faculty meeting.

Principals may use walkthroughs as a learning tool for new teachers or those who are in need of assistance. After observing in a classroom, everyone takes some time in the hallways to discuss what was observed within the classroom. This is also a time to “read the walls” noting the content of assignments, objectives, academic rigor, and assessment techniques. The use of descriptors explaining the purpose of the assignments and the possible display of rubrics is very beneficial. This is a valuable time to see progress across various grade levels. Principals can point out to the new teachers exactly what is the expectation for displaying student work.

As recommended by Graf and Werlinich (2002), taking time to talk with students is another technique that should be part of every walkthrough observation. While in the classrooms, quietly ask students questions about what they are learning. In a few minutes, one can see if students understand what objectives the teachers are trying to accomplish. Students usually are excited to explain what is happening in the room as well as the work they have posted on the classroom walls.

Lastly, one thought that is very important centers on the idea of scheduling the walkthroughs on your daily, weekly, and monthly calendar. As a practicing school principal in a large elementary school, this researcher is quite familiar with the number of interruptions that occur continuously throughout the day. When problems arise, the first duty that usually needs to be rescheduled is the walkthroughs. Even though there may be occurrences that cannot be avoided, it is important to be consistent with the completion of walkthroughs and this can only be done through a concerted effort to schedule them on a calendar. This may require the coordination of efforts with an assistant principal or lead teacher to take over the management of the school while one maintains the established walkthrough agenda.

Implications and Recommendations - Research Question 2

What principles of Professional Learning Communities are evident in the four schools?

Principals and teachers in this study have implemented various levels of Professional Learning Communities within their schools. However, this has now led to some concern by researchers in the field. For example, DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) clearly stated that the term Professional Learning Community has become commonplace in education. According to these authors, the problem that exists is where educators proclaim that they are a professional learning community but do not implement all of the necessary components essential to develop this practice. In this study, one of the four schools closely followed the parameters of a PLC as developed by leading researchers.

However, the other three schools implemented various PLC processes that were congruent to their needs. Changing the culture of a school and implementing an effective PLC is not an easy task, but it is one of the most important plans that administrators may do for overall school improvement. The staff may resist such a dramatic change at first, but it is important to maintain the course. It should be non-negotiable. Once success is achieved in terms of positive student learning outcomes, it is this researcher's belief that individuals will progressively buy into the PLC ideals. Furthermore, it is also essential that building administrators have the support of central office staff. Since developing a PLC may be a movement away from status quo, building principals will need the support from the superintendents.

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, one school in this study implemented the most effective and comprehensive plan for building a PLC. It was Blue Mountain. This was immediately evident as this researcher walked in their front door and was able to read the large PLC banner. The administration and teacher leaders in this school showed a real sense of pride with the processes that were established. They had a clear vision of where their students needed to be and how they were going to achieve their goals. Their overall compelling belief that leads everything they do is based upon student learning. It was not about what was taught but what the students learned. There was a real sense of ownership in the entire process. When asked how they began the PLC movement, they stated that they took a team of teachers to a conference held by

the DuFours and other leaders in the field. The inspiration and learning that the team received was what promoted this process.

After participating in this study, this researcher highly recommends that all schools begin the process of establishing PLCs within their schools. This can only be accomplished through a high level of shared and supportive leadership. In order to implement properly, a team of administrators and teachers from the school should attend a conference or seminar held by experts in the field. Working closely with teacher leaders, begin the process slowly in the school. Teams may include an entire grade level or small groups of teachers across a grade level. The teacher leaders will chair the team meetings. One member of team should document what was discussed and this information should be shared with the building principal. If available and appropriate, it may be helpful to visit other schools that are creating PLCs according to the recommendations of the experts. Time must be scheduled within the school day for teachers to collaborate by planning and working together. They need time to analyze student work and put into place necessary plans of action including rich curricular programs, proper formative and summative assessments, and processes for academic prevention, intervention, and enrichment. All energies must be geared towards the improvement of student learning.

Once the grade level academic teacher teams are established, this researcher also recommends creating other teams for the purpose of working collaboratively on different projects. It is a two-pronged approach where all teachers are placed on teams to analyze students' results for prevention and

intervention and additional teams for work on special assignments. Examples of this could include a reading curriculum, technology, or portfolio assessment committee. When teachers are given an opportunity to select the topic or project of their choice, they are motivated to complete the work. Again, successful schools through the adoption of collaborative teacher work groups have established a culture that emphasizes the importance of supportive and shared leadership.

Implications and Recommendations - Research Question 3

How do identified walkthrough procedures align with the six principles of Professional Learning Communities?

Throughout this study, this researcher was able to show an alignment regarding how walkthrough observations align directly or indirectly with the six principles of professional learning communities. Based upon the acquired data, there is ample evidence that describes how walkthroughs drive PLCs in schools. However, it is important for the leader to make the connection between the walkthroughs and the PLCs. Through walkthrough observations, the leader can glean evidence of where things are academically and where they need to be. This information can then be shared in PLCs to promote achievement. The leader must build a trusting relationship where the teams work in a business like manner to achieve their goals. PLC and faculty meetings must be focused on academic needs of the students and not on “housekeeping” or managerial situations of the building that can be dealt with using other tools of

communication. Additionally, the leader must have an audit system in place to check the progress of all teams.

Concerning the first of Blankstein's principles, it is important for all school personnel to know and understand the mission, vision, values, and goals of the district. Administrators can then use walkthrough observations to make sure that all teachers align their instruction to these core beliefs. By being in the classrooms regularly, administrators are able to validate effective practices or areas that may need to be improved. This information is then taken back to the PLCs to research and discuss effective practices that may be shared across the grade levels.

The second principle focuses on the importance of creating systems for prevention and intervention. Again through the walkthrough process, administrators should be trained to identify best practices that teachers are using within their classrooms. As defined in Chapter I, best practices are researched-based practices that have been proven to help increase student achievement. Several of these best practices include how the teachers are actively engaging students, the use of accountable talk, common, formative or summative assessments, and differentiation. Blocks of time must then be established in the schedule for teachers to work with students on specific needs. Teacher leaders will meet to discuss what the academic needs are and how instruction should be delivered. Principals must conduct walkthroughs to ensure that there is fidelity with how this process unfolds.

Walkthroughs can be used to help to promote collaborative teaming that is focused on teaching and learning. Administrators can aid this process by providing immediate feedback to the teachers individually, by grade level, or school-wide. A focus should be placed on the validation of best practices. Scheduling teachers to complete walkthroughs with the administrators or on their own has been found to be very beneficial. Participants can discuss information during the walkthrough or within the PLCs. These walkthroughs lead to increased conversations on best practices and collaboration within the school.

The next principle centers on the use of data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement. This researcher believes that administrators should gather data on effective practices or areas that need to be improved during the walkthrough observations. This information can then be discussed during faculty meetings or professional development sessions. For example, through walkthrough observations, a principal may witness whether teachers are actively engaging their students during instruction. Another example may be how well do the teachers utilize formative assessments. Furthermore, much data can be acquired from observers being able to read student assignments that are posted on the classroom walls. The observer may investigate the level of academic rigor with each assignment, the purpose of the assignment, and how the project was evaluated. This information may then be taken back to the PLCs to further discuss.

Blankstein (2010) centered his fifth principle on the importance of gaining active involvement from families and the community. This researcher was able

to make an indirect alignment between walkthroughs and parental involvement. Through the use of walkthroughs, principals can positively promote public relations with the school community. Walkthrough observations enable the principal to be in many classrooms for short periods of time. Students appreciate seeing the principal in the classrooms and they report that back to their parents. Parents are pleased to know that the principal is in the classrooms paying close attention to the students and what instruction the teachers are delivering. Furthermore, principals may build their own public relations within their school communities by openly discussing what he or she observed in the classrooms during the walkthrough observations and how teachers work collaboratively on learned skills in the PLCs. This could even be taken a step further by inviting parents or even non-parental taxpayers into the building to complete walkthroughs. This will give them a greater understanding of where their tax dollars are being spent. One word of caution would be to make sure that the faculty is well informed and prepared for this type of event.

The last principle spotlights the value of building sustainable leadership capacity. This researcher recommends that principals visit classrooms as much as feasibly possible. Scheduling walkthroughs on a personal calendar helps to ensure time is available to get into the classrooms. This extra visibility helps to promote principal's role as an instructional leader. When teachers participate in walkthroughs they are given an opportunity to identify teachers who are using effective practices. Collaboration may occur and that builds leadership capacity between the teachers as one individual assists another.

Implications and Recommendations - Research Question 4

How are individual or organizational practices concerning supervisory and organizational theory affected by participation in Educational Leadership Initiative?

Through ELI, administrators and teachers gain a deeper understanding of the philosophy of teacher leadership. During the scheduled meetings, school representatives meet to discuss reasons and methods for how to increase teacher leadership within each school district. Practical examples are shared by personnel from each district for others to contemplate and use on their own. Additionally, this process is extended through the work of the CIRs by meeting regularly with administrators and teachers in assigned school districts. The CIRs also meet as a group to discuss the progress their school districts are making with school based initiatives. ELI helps to build a culture with the staff on the idea of collaboration, decision-making and not a top-down model of leadership.

A second major benefit the districts received from participating in ELI is being able to understand certain components of an effective differentiated supervisory plan. Central to this process is the use of walkthrough observations. The CIRs spend ample time within each district to help train professionals on how to complete walkthroughs and to identify effective practices within the classrooms. Furthermore, having the ability to complete walkthroughs in other schools also promotes the sharing of ideas across many school districts. Administrators and teachers continue to share and network with other participants regularly.

This researcher fully supports the principles of ELI and the reason for its existence. Developing a cooperative undertaking between university professionals, retired superintendents, practicing administrators, and teachers helps put research into action by promoting the use of successful educational practices. In order to be most successful, ample funding needs to be acquired to maintain a strong base of consultants, research material on best practices, and time to be spent in the field. At the individual school level, resources and a time commitment for meetings need to be made by the administration to allow the process to develop. Communication must not only be shared with ELI team members but must be dispersed systematically through the entire school building. All teachers need to have an understanding of the process and an opportunity for input.

Due to the limited scope of this research project that actually focused on ELI, the differences between the ELI schools and the two schools that were not participating members were very limited. As previously mentioned, the ELI school members gained much knowledge from working with the ELI leaders as well as representatives from different schools. Much dialogue continued with all of the participating members on a regular basis. This was very helpful and supportive. However, the two non-participating ELI schools did not have this organized process in place and had to establish working relationships and professional development on their own. They did this well and were successful with the walkthroughs. Much of their success may be attributed to the fact that they already had a strong working relationship with Otto Graf and Joseph

Werlinich as part of the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania.

Furthermore, the staff from Blue Mountain participated in a PLC conference and that established a firm foundation for beginning the PLC movement within their school. Since then, it has grown and flourished.

Suggestions for Further Study

Case studies are limited in their ability to generalize beyond the intended research project. In this research study, only four schools were investigated. However, even with this small number of participants, identified patterns and themes discovered could be further investigated through additional research that may lead to increased levels of generalizability. Additional recommendations for future study include the following:

- Conduct a direct replication of this study with other elementary schools.
- Conduct a direct replication of this study using middle schools or high schools.
- Conduct a cross-case study on schools that are using different protocols of walkthrough observations and how they influence the development of professional learning communities.
- Conduct an in-depth case study on the leadership style of a principal who has established a strong professional learning community in his or her school.
- Conduct a study on schools that have built professional learning communities based upon the book "Failure is Not an Option."

- Conduct a quantitative study on schools that are using walkthrough observations to identify best instructional practices.
- Conduct a quantitative study focusing on state assessment scores for schools that are using walkthrough observations and have developed professional learning communities.
- Conduct a study on exemplary schools that have built professional learning communities as defined by Dufour, DuFour, and Eaker.
- Conduct a case study on successful charter schools that have built professional learning communities.
- Conduct a study on teachers' perspectives regarding the importance of building professional learning communities.
- Conduct a study utilizing the *Stages of Concern* Model developed by Hall and Hord (2006). This study would focus on the feelings and perceptions on the process of change that administrators and teachers go through during the implementation of walkthroughs and the development of professional learning communities.
- Conduct a study that examines the influence of walkthroughs and PLCs on the new Pennsylvania Educator Effectiveness Project.

Conclusion

This multiple-case study closely examined the use of walkthrough observations and how they influence the development of professional learning communities. As delineated throughout this study, superintendents and principals can effectively learn how to use walkthrough observations to positively

promote professional learning communities within their schools. Both of these practices working separately are highly effective. However, when purposefully aligned, they are very powerful tools that may foster student achievement.

After taking a global look at all interview discussions, there was much alignment between the responses given by the superintendents and principals within and across school districts. However, with the exception of Blue Mountain, this researcher struggled at times to solicit information from the teacher focus groups. This in turn may lead one to believe that additional lines of communication should be adopted between the administration and teachers regarding the purposes and procedures for walkthroughs, PLCs, and ELI. As evident with their responses, the teachers from Blue Mountain spoke proficiently and eloquently on their practices.

At the time of this writing, Pennsylvania Department of Education has begun to initiate a new evaluation process for all teachers, educational specialists, and administrators. It is entitled the Educator Effectiveness Project (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2012). According to the website, the goal of this project is to develop an effective model that will reform how principals, teachers, and educational specialists will be evaluated. Emphasis will be placed on the identification of critical components of teacher training and professional development. Based upon the work of Charlotte Danielson (1996), the evaluation will include four domains including Planning and Preparation, Classroom Environment, Instruction, and Professional Responsibilities. Initial planning includes the use of one formal observation and one walkthrough with

each participating teacher. This project will be required for all school districts in Pennsylvania in the near future. It is this researcher's belief that the procedures outlined in this research study will aide professionals to achieve the goals delineated in the new evaluation system. For example, as administrators complete walkthroughs, they will be able to identify teachers whose level of performance are proficient or even distinguished. Through discussions with the teachers, this information can be shared within PLCs to further promote effective practices within the school.

As currently being developed in Pennsylvania and other states, the use of a differentiated supervisory plan with the use of walkthrough observations are being investigated and possibly instituted for the purposes of evaluation. Teacher evaluation will continue to be a major area for instructional improvement and it will only be improved by what is learned through effective research in the field. Based upon this research study and others, school administrators will be well served to use walkthrough observations to influence the development of PLCs within their schools.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form

IUP LETTERHEAD

October 4, 2011

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to invite you to participate in a study group for the completion of my dissertation. My formal study will be held in four school districts in Western Pennsylvania. Two of the selected school districts are participating members of Educational Leadership Initiative (ELI). The purpose of this research will be to explore the beliefs, actions, and evidence of supervisors and teachers as they use the Walkthrough Observation Tool from the Principals Academy of Western Pennsylvania. This information will be analyzed to identify its influence on building Professional Learning Communities.

Since you are an administrator or a teacher from a school that uses the Walkthrough Tool, it is my hope that you will consider to join in this research study. The information included in this letter is provided in order to help you make an informed decision whether or not to participate. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without adversely affecting your relationship with the investigator, your school district, or IUP. If you decide to withdraw, all of your information pertaining to this study will be destroyed.

You may find that participating in this study will be both an enjoyable and educational experience. The information gained from this study may help other schools improve student achievement by building Professional Learning Communities through the use of walkthrough observations.

Indiana University of Pennsylvania respects the protection of participants in research studies. There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. All information obtained in this study may be published or presented at meetings. If you wish to participate, your identity and the identity of the school will be kept strictly confidential. This will be accomplished with an arbitrary coding system keeping all names anonymous.

As part of this study, I will interview you at a location of your choosing for approximately 1 hour using open-ended questions. Your school district may be the most convenient location. I will be asking you questions about the purposes and procedures of walkthrough observations. If your school is involved with ELI, I will ask you some general questions about what your school district has gained from this endeavor. To assist with data collection, the interviews will be tape-recorded.

Additionally, I may also briefly observe the walkthrough process as it is used in the classrooms. Information from the interviews and observations will be analyzed and aligned with principles of Professional Learning Communities.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign the statement below and return it to me in the stamped return envelope. You may keep the extra-unsigned copy for your records.

As a current elementary school principal, I fully understand how busy you are with the handling of daily tasks. I thank you in advance for your consideration in participating in this study. If you have any questions or seek any additional information, please contact Dr. Kaufman or me. Once the study is finished, feel free to contact me at ryasher@comcast.net and I will be happy to share the results with you.

Sincerely,

Ronald J. Yasher
Doctoral Candidate
650 Allison Hollow Road
Washington, PA 15301
724-255-4122

Dr. Cathy Kaufman, Dissertation Advisor
Professional Studies in Education
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
Indiana, PA 15705
724-357-3928

The Indiana University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has approved this study (Phone: 724-357-7730).

Informed Consent Form (continued)

VOLUNTARY CONSENT FORM:

I have read and understand the information on the form and I consent to volunteer to be a subject in this study. I understand that my responses are completely confidential and that I have the right to withdraw at any time. I have received an unsigned copy of this Informed Consent Form to keep in my possession.

Name (PLEASE PRINT)

Signature

Date

Phone number

email

Best days and times to reach you

Current Position

I certify that I have explained to the above individual the nature and purpose, the potential benefits, and possible risks associated with participating in this research study, have answered any questions that have been raised, and have witnessed the above signature.

Date

Investigator's Signature