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Send out your light and your truth! Let them guide me. Psalm 43:3

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# The Effect of Walkthrough Observations on Teacher Perspectives in Christian Schools

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## The Effect of Walk-through Observations on Teacher Perspectives in Christian Schools

From the practical experience of multiple Christian school administrators over many years, a perpetual phenomenon has surfaced – teachers do not enjoy supervisory observations of their teaching in classrooms. Their dislike, and even fear, of such classroom visits may emanate from several apprehensions including (a) lack of trust in administrators' motives, (b) uncertainty regarding administrators' real evaluations of their teaching performances, or (c) fear that personal performance weaknesses will manifest themselves during the observations.

Because of these teacher perceptions, the observation of classroom teaching by supervisors too often degenerates into unpleasant or unproductive activities for both teachers and administrators. Teachers sigh with relief when the observations are completed and eagerly return to their comfort zones, unable to profit substantially from data collected by observers and shared later in supportive conferences. Administrators, on the other hand, sigh with discouragement because observations, so difficult to schedule, result in unproductive supervisory activity that fails to provoke improvements in classroom instruction which are known to contribute to student learning.

In an effort to explore remedies for these conditions, we focused this Christian school study around two questions: (a) would frequent, informal classroom observations by supervisors strengthen the effectiveness of administrators' instructional leadership in schools and (b) would those same observations stimulate teachers' reflective practice and increase dialogue among teachers and administrators? Because teacher perceptions were pivotal elements in both questions, they formed the basis of data collection in participating schools.

## **Review of Literature and Research**

The foundation for student learning is a school culture (composite of administrator, teacher, parent, and student beliefs and values) committed to perspectives that relate positively to student achievement identified by decades of research. Examples of these perspectives are (a) visions and goals focused on high levels of student learning, (b) high expectations for student learning, (c) the expectation of continuous improvement, (d) regular discussion of instructional issues, (e) frequent classroom observation and feedback to teachers, (f) support of risk taking – trying new ideas, and (g) collaborative planning of instruction (Cotton, 2003; Zmuda, Kuklis, & Kline, 2004).

A focal responsibility of school administrators is to lead in establishing such a culture, or collection of values, among teachers. Over time, practitioners, theorists, and researchers have sought to clarify the activities of school leaders that do, in reality, contribute to creating such school cultures. In recent years, the practice of *walkthrough observations* has risen to prominence as a promising strategy for promoting a school culture which supports high student achievement.

Historically, the modern versions of walkthrough observations were rooted in management literature. In particular, the theory of “management by walking around,” popularized by Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman in the 1980s, provided a springboard for adaptation of the practice in schools. Peters’ and Waterman’s research revealed that successful executives did not remain cloistered in offices, but stayed in close contact with their companies’ operating core personnel. Building on this model, educators have added data gathering and reflective dialogue to the walkthrough process in ways that go beyond required formal classroom observations (Schomburg, 2006).

One of the approaches (known as *learning walks*) to such observations involved aggregating data by grade levels, departments, schools, or programs, rather than focusing on individual teachers. Various organizations and consultants, such as Lauren Resnick and Doug Reeves, promoted the implementation of this strategy by school districts (Bloom, 2007).

Related to this observation and data collection program was the web-based system used at a high school in Kentucky that reported 1,393 walkthroughs were conducted during the 2006-07 school year, about 30 per teacher. Fifty-five percent of faculty reported they liked being observed, 45% reported neutral feelings, and none objected to the routine observations. Eighty-one percent of the teachers were able to give an example of how walkthrough observations had improved their teaching. In addition, administrators reported that knowing what was happening instructionally in all of the classrooms reduced the number of conferences with concerned parents (Granada & Vriesenga, 2008).

Another approach, developed by Carolyn Downey (2004), focused on three-minute classroom observations designed to develop self-reflective teachers who regularly monitored their own pedagogical improvements.

Other versions of walkthrough observations promoted similar purposes, either program evaluation or teacher improvement. While implemented under different monikers such as *data walks*, *peer coaching*, *principal professional learning walks*, or *quick visits*, these techniques aimed to generate instructional program improvements through short, informal observations rather than traditional, full-class visits (Bloom, 2007).

What kinds of data were collected during walkthrough observations? Downey's (2004) process called for observation of student engagement, objectives pursued, and teaching methods employed. Resnick's procedure focused on student work and conversations with students in

which they described what they were learning (Abrutyn, 2006). Marshall (2009) advocated features of Downey's plan, calling for observation of classroom safety, objectives, teaching methods, student engagement, and formative, on-the-spot assessments. Each of these aimed to capture data about phenomena which research has shown were related to student learning.

Regardless of the particular logistics for walkthrough observations, trust relationships have been crucial to the effectiveness of such observations. Cudiero and Nelson reported, "The success of any learning walk depends on how well the instructional leadership team of the school organizes and prepares the school community for the process. In order for a staff to fully benefit from the feedback after a learning walk, trust must be built by making the process transparent" (2009, p. 19). They further noted that "schools and districts engaged in this process report that it has helped them change the culture of their schools from one of distrust and isolation to one of collaboration and openness" (p. 21).

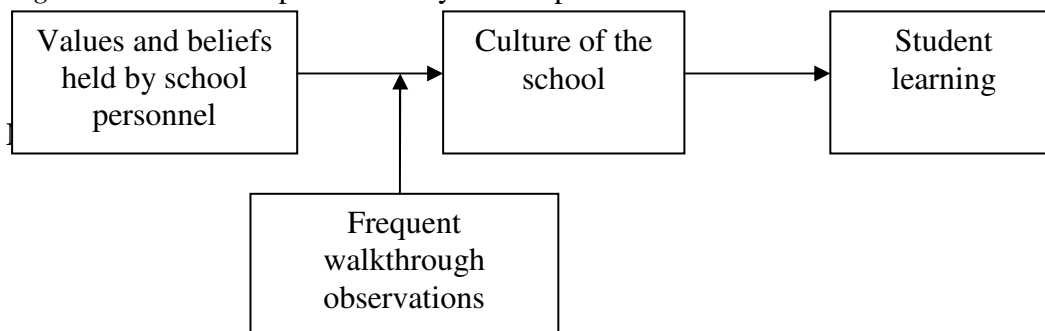
When walkthroughs were conducted properly and trust relationships built, the entire process resulted in positive outcomes characteristic of effective schools. Among other things, these outcomes included a culture of collegiality among staff, reflective discussions about teacher practice, a focus on student achievement, increased student engagement in the learning process, and a strong desire by staff to find out what works in classrooms (Abrutyn, 2006). In addition, Ginsberg and Murphy (2002) reported other benefits of implementing a daily schedule of short, unscheduled walkthroughs, including (a) administrators' position as instructional leaders was strengthened because they became more familiar with the school's curriculum and teachers' practices; (b) administrators were able to gauge the climate of the school; and (c) a team atmosphere developed between teachers and administrators.

Furthermore, additional positive outcomes involving both teacher and administrator perceptions were reported by Rossi (2007), including (a) teacher sharing of best practices, (b) increased principal awareness of what was happening in classrooms, (c) better principal understanding of curriculum gaps and inconsistencies, (d) improved quality of conversations about instruction, and (e) improved quality of student work.

However, negative outcomes could also accompany walkthroughs. Valli and Buese (2007) observed that teacher anxiety increased in a four-year study of 150 teachers in a district that instituted walkthroughs. When trust was low, the walkthroughs were perceived as compliance checks which increased distrust and tension. In another district, urban in nature, more than 50% of the principals believed that district staff members conducting walkthroughs were passing judgment on them (Supovitz & Weathers, 2004).

To summarize, previous research on school culture, teacher and administrator perceptions, and the dynamics of walkthrough observations provided the foundation for this study. The starting point was the relationship of collective teacher and administrator beliefs (school culture) to student learning. Upon this base, we placed the philosophy and practice of walkthrough observations as a means to improve student learning indirectly by directly contributing to the formation of a positive school culture. Figure 1 depicts the relationships of these elements. Despite potential difficulties, walkthrough observations conducted within an environment of trust promised to enhance schools' capacities to become learning communities.

*Figure 1.* Relationship of the study's conceptual elements



## Methodology

The plan for the study employed a pre-experimental, one-group, pretest-posttest design. First, teachers in selected Christian schools described their perceptions and values on a Likert-scale response pattern survey. Following this, each school administrator or designated supervisor conducted brief, informal, unannounced walkthrough (or drop-in) observations each week for each teacher for a period of four months. Finally, the same teachers described their perceptions and values four months later on the same, originally-administered survey. In addition, principals contributed their qualitative perceptions regarding the process of walkthrough observations. Finally, tests for significance revealed some changes in teachers' perceptions and values over the four month time period.

**Instrumentation.** To begin the study, we first developed an instrument designed to measure important aspects of teacher attitudes and perceptions related to student learning. Drawing on the work of Cotton (2003) and Zmuda, Kuklis, and Kline (2004), we constructed a list of 13 statements (see Table 1) describing attitudes and beliefs characteristic of teachers in school cultures that support good student learning. Teachers responded using a five-point Likert scale (*5-strongly agree, 4-agree more than disagree, 3-neither agree nor disagree, 2-disagree more than agree, 1-strongly disagree*) to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

**Pilot testing of study components.** The next stage of the study involved pilot testing of both the instrument and frequent walkthrough observations. From a convenience sample of Christian schools, five administrators agreed to participate in the pilot work. The purpose of this pilot work was to field test the communication documents, the instructions given to administrators prior to the treatment (frequent, informal walkthrough observations), and the data

collection instruments that would be used pre-and post-treatment to measure teacher perceptions. Also, administrators and teachers responded to open-response items. For example, the teachers' questionnaire included questions relating to their desire to be observed, their preference for feedback following observations, and their attitudes about the professional concept called reflective practice.

Table 1  
*Statements of Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes*

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1. I make written entries in a journal of my *reflections* on my teaching and student learning.
  2. I analyze *why* students learned or did not learn during specific lessons.
  3. I analyze what *evidence* I have if students learned or not.
  4. I consciously analyze reasons for selecting my *teaching methods*.
  5. I consciously analyze reasons for selecting *methods to assess student learning*.
  6. I align my lesson objectives and content with my school's curriculum for my grade or subject.
  7. I consciously reflect on how I would teach certain lessons differently in the future.
  8. I do not hesitate to try new methods or teaching techniques even though I am not 100% sure if they will be successful.
  9. I am confident that I can figure out a better way to teach a lesson in the future so that students will learn better.
  10. I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor observes my class.
  11. I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor provides feedback regarding his/her visit to my classroom.
  12. I welcome visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor.
  13. I believe that visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor make me a better teacher.

All administrators who participated in the pilot study committed themselves to observe all teachers for at least two to three minutes no less than once a week. Failure to do so did not require removal from the pilot study, but they were asked in the post-experiment survey to self-report to what extent they were able to conduct weekly observations.

As part of the pilot work, supervisors (some schools had more than one) conducted observations for a full semester. During that time, administrators occasionally prepared brief written comments for teachers and gave them to teachers following observations. Administrators



also engaged in informal curriculum/instructional dialogue with teachers as frequently as possible, a practice Downey (2004) preferred over the use of written notes in order to discourage establishing teacher dependency on affirmation from such notes after each visit.

The pilot work produced three helpful results. First, both faculty and administrators reported positive gains on the 13 belief and value statements at the end of the semester, offering promise that the intervention of walkthrough observations would have desirable effects. Though the sample size was too small in the pilot study (N=68) to establish significance at  $p < .05$ , all statements on the questionnaire showed at least modest gains when compared to pre-experiment responses. Second, participants also reported, anecdotally, positive to very positive attitudes toward frequent informal classroom observations. Third, suggestions for enhancing the study emerged and included the need for more specific training of the administrators prior to beginning the study and the improvement of communication between supervisors and teachers during the semester.

**Selection and training of participants for the full study.** Following the review of pilot study results, we recruited 10 new schools to participate in the full study. As with the pilot study, we employed convenience sampling, using eight Christian schools in the southeast United States and one school each from Texas and Colorado. All participating schools were members of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and were either nondenominational or church-sponsored. Their enrollments ranged from 61 to 629 students, with a mean of 244. Three schools spanned either pre-kindergarten or kindergarten through high school, while the remaining schools featured grade level subsets, such as the elementary grades only.

Following administrators' agreements to participate, they viewed an instructional video prepared at Columbia International University. The instructions (a) specified procedures for

conducting informal walkthrough observations of two to three minutes, (b) recommended features of classroom life to observe in two to three minutes, and (c) presented guidelines for follow-up notes for, or conversations with, teachers. The "recommended features of classroom life" directed observers to note teachers' participation in instructional episodes, curriculum content on which lessons focused, students' activities, and general observations about the classroom environment. A fifth area of observation, suggested by Downey (2004), centered on bulletin board content and displays of student work.

**Data collection.** Once schools were selected and administrators trained, activation of the study itself began at the start of the Fall 2008 semester. In the first step, teachers accessed the pre-experiment survey by way of *SurveyMonkey*, a web-based service which specialized in customized surveys and rendered data reports for researchers. Once the semester of walkthrough observations ended, teachers again accessed *SurveyMonkey* to record their responses to the same 13 statements addressed four months earlier. In order to permit pairing of pre- and post-experiment responses, teachers used self-constructed codes.

Though 143 teachers participated in either the pre-treatment or post-treatment survey, only 111 completed both surveys, making them usable for this study. Of those teachers, 25 (23%) were male and 86 (77%) were female. Years of teaching experience also varied among the teachers as shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Teachers' Years of Teaching Experience*

Gender	0 Yrs	1-2 Yrs	3-5 Yrs	6-10 Yrs	11-15 Yrs	16+ Yrs
Male	3	5	2	6	2	7
Female	2	7	8	21	27	21
Total	5 (5%)	12 (11%)	10 (9%)	27 (24%)	29 (26%)	28 (25%)

In addition to teachers' quantitative responses, administrators provided qualitative, open-responses to four questions:

1. From your perspective, what was the most valuable benefit of conducting frequent, two-minute observations during this past semester?
2. From your perspective, were there any negative effects of frequent, two-minute observations? If so, what were they?
3. From your perspective, how do frequent two-minute observations compare with infrequent full-class observations in enhancing supervisors' ability to develop, encourage, and evaluate teachers?
4. Will you continue conducting weekly, two-minute observations indefinitely? Why or why not?

**Analysis methods.** To assess changes in perceptions over the four months of walkthrough observations, we employed three statistical operations: (a) the *t* test for non-independent (paired) samples applied to each of the 13 survey statements; (b) factor analysis of the 13 survey statements; and (c) a second application of the *t* test, this time to three factors. To perform these calculations, we entered teacher responses on the pre- and post-experiment surveys into the Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program.

The first of these statistical operations was application of the *t* test for non-independent (paired) samples to each of the 13 survey statements. This procedure set the stage for determining if changes in the mean scores between the two surveys on each of the 13 statements were significant.

The second and third analysis activities focused on discovering if any of the 13 individual statements clustered together in factors. Following the identification of three factors, or groupings, we again applied the *t* test for paired samples to each of the factors.

## Results

Using these analysis steps, we discovered that three of the 13 survey statements evidenced significant positive change in teacher perceptions, as shown in Table 3.

First, survey statement number 5, *I consciously analyze reasons for selecting methods to assess student learning*, registered an effect size (Cohen's *d*) of .28, suggesting that walkthrough observations generated a low-to-moderate effect on this perception. A second statement experiencing significant ( $p < .05$ ) change was number 10: *I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor observes my class*. Its effect size (.31) also suggested that walkthroughs generated a low-to-moderate effect. Finally, statement number 11, *I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor provides feedback regarding his/her visit to my classroom*, also experienced a statistically significant increase while producing a low-to-moderate effect size of .32.

The second and third statements above represent perceptions focused on the teacher-administrator trust relationship, which apparently was enhanced during the walkthrough observation program. While previous research suggested that an already-existing trust relationship was a *pre-requisite* to effective walkthrough observations (Valli & Buese, 2007; Supovitz & Weathers, 2004), this study proposed that, in the Christian school environment, teacher-administrator trust can be *enhanced* as a result of walkthrough observations. Further support for this dynamic came from several principals in the study who reported that “teachers seemed to like more frequent visits”, “the feedback from visits seemed to strengthen trusting

relationships between teachers and administrators”, and “teachers enjoyed seeing me in their classrooms.”

Three other statements produced positive gains, though the gains were not large enough to qualify for significance at the  $p < .05$  level. They were: (a) *I analyze why students learned or did not learn during specific lessons*, (b) *I do not hesitate to try new methods or teaching techniques even though I am not 100% sure if they will be successful*, and (c) *I welcome visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor*. Effect sizes of these three statements were very low, ranging from .01 to .13. The absence of significant improvement in the perceptions of (a) and (b) may be attributable to one or more factors. For one, teachers may have already been analyzing why students learn or do not learn in specific lessons, or already been willing to try new methods.

Table 3  
Pre- and Post-Experiment Survey Statistics and Significance

Survey Items	Test	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Significance (two-tailed <i>t</i> )	Effect Size ( <i>d</i> )
1 - I make written entries in a journal of my <i>reflections</i> on my teaching and student learning.	Pre1	2.4414	111	1.18079	.288	-.14
	Post 1	2.2793	111	1.08855		
2 - I analyze <i>why</i> students learned or did not learn during specific lessons.	Pre2	4.3333	111	.77850	.516	.09
	Post2	4.3964	111	.56051		
3 - I analyze what <i>evidence</i> I have if students learned or not.	Pre3	4.2883	111	.75543	.123	.18
	Post3	4.4144	111	.59496		
4 - I consciously analyze reasons for selecting my <i>teaching methods</i> .	Pre4	4.1982	111	.77248	.295	.14
	Post4	4.3063	111	.72354		
5 - I consciously analyze reasons for selecting <i>methods to assess student learning</i> .	Pre5	4.0631	111	.81217	.039	.28
	Post5	4.2703	111	.68684		
6 - I align my lesson objectives and content with my school's curriculum for my grade or subject.	Pre6	4.5586	111	.72218	1.000	0
	Post6	4.5586	111	.61326		
7 - I consciously reflect on how I would teach certain lessons differently in the future.	Pre7	4.6216	111	.52317	.441	-.1
	Post7	4.5676	111	.59729		
8 - I do not hesitate to try new methods or teaching techniques even though I am not 100% sure if they will be successful.	Pre8	4.2252	111	.75900	.926	.01
	Post8	4.2342	111	.79721		
9 - I am confident that I can figure out a better way to teach a lesson in the future so that students will learn better.	Pre9	4.3964	111	.62201	.192	-.17
	Post9	4.2883	111	.67940		
10 - I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor observes my class.	Pre10	3.9640	111	.85203	.020	.31
	Post10	4.2162	111	.77934		
11 - I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor provides	Pre11	4.2432	111	.75337	.022	.32
	Post11	4.4685	111	.68517		

feedback regarding his/her visit to my classroom.						
12 - I welcome visits to my class by my administrator-supervisor.	Pre12	4.2973	111	.75792	.353	.13
	Post12	4.3964	111	.75413		
13 - I believe that visits to my class by my administrator-supervisor make me a better teacher.	Pre13	4.2091	110	.79095	.1.000	0
	Post13	4.2091	110	.82502		

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As a result, teachers did not report appreciable increases in these behaviors. Another factor which may explain the lack of significant change would be the substance, or content, of feedback given by supervisors after observations. Did supervisors specifically encourage teacher analysis of student learning in specific lessons, or did they specifically encourage pedagogical risk-taking in the classroom? If these emphases were absent, or secondary, in feedback, then one would not expect significant teacher growth on these behaviors.

The remaining seven statements produced either no changes or negative changes and low, negligible, or negative effect sizes. In all cases, the changes were not significant at the  $p < .05$  level. These statements were: (a) *I make written entries in a journal of my reflections on my teaching and student learning*, (b) *I analyze what evidence I have if students learned or not*, (c) *I consciously analyze reasons for selecting my teaching methods*, (d) *I align my lesson objectives and content with my school's curriculum for my grade or subject*, (e) *I consciously reflect on how I would teach certain lessons differently in the future*, (f) *I am confident that I can figure out a better way to teach a lesson in the future so that students will learn better*, and (g) *I believe that visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor make me a better teacher*. With the exception of statement (a), the absence of significant positive changes could be attributable to the two factors previously stated: (a) teachers may have already been behaving or perceiving at an acceptably high level prior to the walkthrough observations, or (b) supervisors may not have emphasized those behaviors or perceptions in feedback to teachers. The one teacher behavior that was an exception was *I make written entries in a journal of my reflections on my teaching*

*and student learning.* This behavior was being demonstrated by teachers with the *lowest* frequency of all 13 statements prior to the walkthrough treatment. The post-treatment teacher responses indicated an insignificant negative change in this behavior. In this case, we hypothesized that lack of time, energy, and conviction of need for journaling were the greatest contributors to the low frequency with which teachers journaled their reflections on teaching and learning. Are these reasons unique to Christian schools? Probably not. However, the common need in Christian schools for teachers to fill multiple roles and duties, coupled with home, church, and community responsibilities, usually places teacher time at a premium. Under this pressure, *journaling* appears optional to the Christian school teacher.

To further pursue our original research questions (*Would frequent, informal classroom observations by supervisors strengthen the effectiveness of administrators' instructional leadership in schools and would those same observations stimulate teachers' reflective practice and increase dialogue among teachers and administrators?*) we employed an additional analytical tool – factor analysis of the 13 statements. Using principal component analysis as the extraction method, we probed the post-experiment survey data to ascertain if factors (components) related to (a) administrators' instructional leadership, (b) teachers' reflective practice, and (c) dialogue among teachers and administrators existed. The resulting analysis weakly revealed two possible factors or components, as shown in Table 4 and the Figure 2 scree plot.

Table 4  
*Clustering of Factored Components*

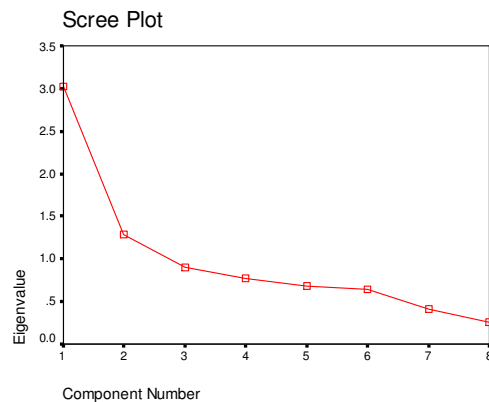
Component	Clustered Statements
1	I analyze what evidence I have if students learned or not. I align my lesson objectives and content with my school's curriculum for my grade or subject. I consciously reflect on how I would teach certain lessons differently in the future.

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	I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor observes my class.
	I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor provides feedback regarding his/her visit to my classroom.
	I welcome visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor.
	I believe that visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor make me a better teacher.
2	I make written entries in a journal of my reflections on my teaching and student learning.
	I consciously analyze reasons for selecting methods to assess student learning.

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Figure 2 Scree Plot from Factor Analysis of 13 Statements



Since there seemed to be no clearly identifiable underlying construct which grouped the statements in components 1 and 2, we dismissed the notion of classifying these statements under common themes.

However, in a final investigative action, we conducted another factor analysis, this time on just the statements contained in component 1 from the first factor analysis. The results showed the possible clustering of statements 10, 11, 12, and 13 (see Table 5).

Table 5

*Possible Clustering of Statements from Second Factor Analysis*

Potentially Clustered Statements	Component 1	Component 2
10 - I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor observes my class.	.844	-.221
11 - I am encouraged after my administrator/supervisor provides feedback regarding his/her visit to my classroom.	.815	-.185
12 - I welcome visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor.	.693	-.217
13 - I believe that visits to my class by my administrator/supervisor make me a better teacher.	.742	-.284



These statements relate to the quality of relationships between supervisors and teachers. Two of these statements (numbers 10 and 11) individually evidenced statistically significant increases over the four month span of the walkthrough observation treatment. However, when we applied the  $t$  test for paired samples to the pre- and post-experiment scores for the factors containing statements 10 through 13, the result was not significant at the  $p < .05$  level, though it was significant at the  $p < .10$  level (.094). Though these findings failed to establish clearly that factors of statements existed or that they were significant, they did weakly suggest that relationships between supervisors and teachers may be positively affected as a result of regular, informal walkthrough observations.

To corroborate, and perhaps explain, our findings, we called upon the qualitative comments of the nine administrators who responded to this part of the survey. (One administrator from the 10 participating schools abstained from submitting qualitative comments.) These administrators wrote brief responses to four open-ended questions, understanding that all responses would remain confidential and no connection would be drawn to their identity and the location of their schools.

The first question was: *From your perspective, what was the most valuable benefit of conducting frequent, two-minute observations during this past semester?* All nine respondents reported valuable experiences, especially the opportunity “to be more in-touch with the teachers and students”, “to develop a connection with the classroom”, “to have a better feel of what was going on in class”, and “to have a clearer picture of what is going on in each class.” Two observers mentioned being better equipped to assist with classroom management techniques. Two administrators expressed their love of being with the students and teachers and two

perceived that the staff enjoyed having them on a regular basis. One stated: “The most valuable benefit of the two minute observations is it forced me out of my office and into the classroom.”

The second open-response question was: *From your perspective, were there any negative effects of frequent, two-minute observations? If so, what were they?* Only two negative effects were reported: “Some teachers on campus were uncomfortable with this new system and felt like we were spying on them.” Related to this perception was the perspective of young teachers, “for new teachers, it seemed to make them nervous and anxious just because they were new to the profession.”

Some respondents misunderstood the survey question and included comments about negative *aspects* of the procedures. These comments included: “the pressure of trying to fulfill the requirement of once a week (in every classroom)”, “struggle to mix up my time frames as much as I anticipated I could”, and “I had difficulty dropping in at a good time.”

A third open-response question was: *From your perspective, how do frequent two-minute observations compare with infrequent full-class observations in enhancing supervisors’ ability to develop, encourage, and evaluate teachers?* All nine administrators reported positive aspects of this procedure when compared to the procedure for observing teachers for an entire class periods. Some administrators preferred the two-minute observations for such reasons as:

- Great for discovering classroom management issues prior to the full period observation;
- Teachers appreciated the immediate feedback and encouragement;
- Administrator was able to be better prepared to comment on student behavior in the classroom environment;

- Teachers were more consistent with their lessons since they didn't know when I was coming;
- I am better prepared to complete the summative evaluation at the end of the year;
- This approach will more likely give me an actual reading of what is going on in the classroom; and
- I have a better sense of the overall instructional "climate."

In addition, there were three comments about the balance between the traditional clinical observation format and two-minute observation: (a) I believe full-class observations are more helpful in terms of helping teachers with specific instructional issues; (b) I think there is benefit for longer observation times, but I think they should be balanced with shorter times on a regular basis, like the two-minute observation times we did. Using both in combination would give a better view of the teacher's craft; and (c) I think they are very effective, coupled with full class observations. Plus, it enhanced my ability to develop, encourage, and evaluate teachers because of the frequency. They were getting more immediate feedback even though it was not as thorough as feedback for a full class observation.

The final open response question posed to administrators was: *Will you continue conducting weekly, two-minute observations indefinitely? Why or why not?* All nine administrators indicated they planned to continue conducting weekly, two-minute observations. Their reasons for doing so included: (a) improved communication and better relationships with teachers, (b) the opportunity to stay in touch with positive aspects of the school, (c) the value of the approach as a component in the multi-faceted instructional supervision plan, (d) the benefit of frequent contact with students, and (e) teachers' favorable reaction to the process.

What, then, are the relationships of findings to the research questions? With respect to the first research question (Would frequent, informal classroom observations by supervisors strengthen the effectiveness of administrators' instructional leadership in schools?), the findings hint that administrators' instructional leadership may be strengthened as a result of improved relationships with teachers, evidenced by enhanced teacher encouragement following walkthrough observations and feedback. With respect to the second research question (Would those same observations stimulate teachers' reflective practice and increase dialogue among teachers and administrators?), the findings did not offer significant evidence that teachers' reflection on their teaching practices would increase as a result of a walkthrough observation program.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

From this study, two conclusions related to supervisory practice in Christian schools are drawn. First, the strength of trust relationships between teachers and supervisors is likely to be enhanced when a program of brief walkthrough classroom observations is practiced. Simply put, the frequency of administrators' visits to classrooms increased teachers' encouragement about their teaching, rather than creating apprehension. "Encouraged" teachers become "trusting" teachers, a condition that promotes improved pedagogy which eventually results in better student learning. Therefore, we recommend that administrators make informal walkthrough observations a scheduled daily activity, visiting each teacher no less frequently than once a week.

A second conclusion related to practice emanates from several non-significant findings associated with teacher's use of reflective and pedagogical practices known to enhance student learning. The study showed that the walkthrough observation program had no significant effect on teachers' (a) reflective journaling, (b) analysis of teaching methods, (c) analysis of student

learning, and (d) reflection on criteria for their selection of teaching methods. The fact that 35% of Christian school teachers entered teaching from previous careers (Hardman, 2010) may account for the lack of emphasis on these activities. By coming from other careers, such teachers likely experienced less formal teacher education training which would have emphasized these behaviors as aspects of professional practice. Reflection and analysis are important cognitive processes for teachers to activate when seeking to improve student learning. Therefore, administrators should construct their interactions with teachers following observation episodes so that teachers are prompted to engage these cognitive processes regularly.

While considering the aforementioned recommendations for practice, consumers of this research should weigh carefully the potential limitations and threats to validity inherent in this study. One threat to validity is the possible inequitable application of the walkthrough process among administrators who participated in the study. Though clear, specific training was given to these administrators, there remained the possibility that some applied the “treatment” more carefully and regularly than others. If this were so, the study’s results could be compromised.

Two potential limitations on the study’s generalizability should be raised. The first limitation relates to teachers’ years of experience. Though demographic data on teacher longevity were collected, no analysis of perception differences between teachers of various experience ranges was performed. Teachers with 0-2 years of experience may respond differently to walkthrough observations than would teachers with 3-5, 6-10, 11-15, or 16 or more years of experience. The second limitation on generalizability relates to the non-random selection of schools comprising the sample. Since the sample was a *convenience* sample, schools volunteering to participate may have *already* enjoyed positive supervisor-teacher relationships, whereas schools with less than positive relationships may have shied from taking part in the

study. The absence of data from such schools may limit application of findings to schools seeking to overcome negative supervisory environments.

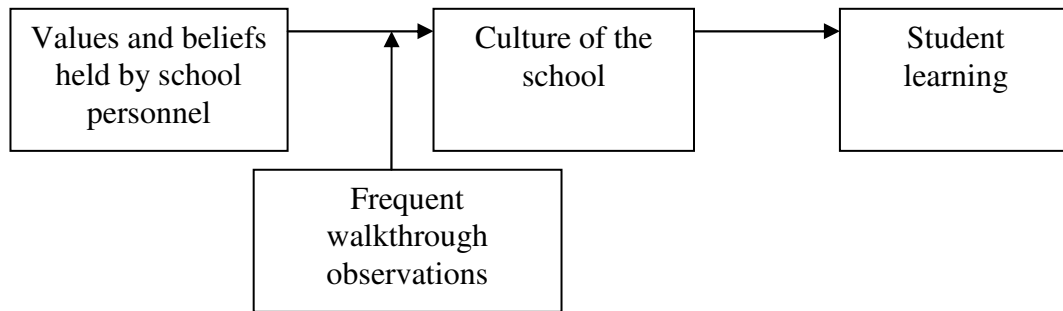
In addition to recommendations for practice, we offer two suggestions for further research. The first recommendation is to replicate this study (using a larger number of schools), including the walkthrough observations, but require teachers to demonstrate their reflective thinking about teaching and learning through journaling and focus group discussions. Since evidence of teacher reflection was negligible in the current study, we propose that a replicated study which adds required reflection activities may reveal additional insights regarding changes in teachers' perceptions toward supervision. The second recommendation for further research is to study changes in teachers' actual classroom practices over a full academic year in which they receive at least weekly walkthrough observations using Downey's (2004) model. This study should focus on changes in teacher classroom behaviors known to relate positively to student learning, rather than simply the teacher perceptions measured in this current study.

### **Summary**

At the core of an administrator's effectiveness is meaningful instructional leadership which necessitates intimate awareness of the teaching/learning activities of his/her school. At the core of effective teaching is meaningful reflection and analysis of the successes and short-comings of daily instructional episodes. These two core principles intersect at a powerful crossroads known as trust—the presence or absence of which creates or loses momentum in the flow of a school. The conclusions of this research link with the study's conceptual elements suggest that the conducting of frequent and on-going informal observations provide administrators and faculty with an opportunity to build levels of trust and to travel together past the point of this intersection for the benefit of individual students and the overall learning community.

(see Figure 1)

Figure 1. (Repeated) Relationship of the study's conceptual elements



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