

Preface

The approach to the classroom walk-throughs presented in this book was created by Carolyn Downey. It is unique. It redefines the professional relationships of classroom supervisory practice, it changes the language of the discourse itself by focusing on the relationships between teachers and principals, and it emphasizes a different level of content analysis regarding classroom work. It puts into practice the vision of what supervision should be, a vision that can be traced back to its early beginnings in the 1600s. While Downey's vision has been realized in isolated schools, it has yet to be reflected in the practices of the field as a whole. More than a model of principal-teacher interaction, the Downey approach is about changing an entire school culture.

It is because of the distinctiveness of this vision that we determined to write a book to more sharply differentiate its premises and potential. We wanted to (1) provide a source for a greater explanation of the approach to classroom walk-throughs created by Carolyn Downey; (2) establish greater clarity as to why this approach is preferred over others that lead to teacher growth and renewal and improved student achievement for all; and (3) provide an expanded contextual framework for the practice of instructional supervision, which is often void of any curricular linkages to larger organizational purposes. Too often in the past, teaching effectiveness was characterized as "curriculum-free" when, in fact, teachers are employed to teach state-adopted and locally approved curriculum content.

The Downey approach actually changes how principals approach supervision. In reality, we don't like what the term *supervision* has come to mean because it often smacks of a heritage of superior-subordinate relationships that hinder improved professional practice for educators, who require greater autonomy in their work, and it has a long history of gender discrimination in the public schools (see Blount, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989).

By definition, supervision of teachers has been one of the classic responsibilities of principals and supervisors in the schools over many

x • The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through

decades (Tanner & Tanner, 1987). Such supervision was the foundation of historic roles in administration such as the old-time, male, county superintendent who often rode on horseback over miles of unpaved roads to visit and “supervise” mostly female teachers in rural, one-room schools.

There can be little doubt that early exemplars of school supervision were based on industrial models. The long lines of gears, wheels, and conveyor belts punctuating the New England textile mills, which were teeming with gaggles of underpaid female workers arranged in rows, made it easier for the male shop foreman to oversee the work, point out deficiencies, and engage in immediate “corrective” actions. To a very great extent, such models are still common in the sweatshops of Third World countries where women and children still sew clothes today. There can be little doubt that the creation of the graded school was a mirror of the textile mills, with its rows of classrooms arranged next to one other, and the underpaid, half-educated female teachers working among very large groups of students and being “supervised” by male principals. Efficiency has been the watchword in supervision for a long while. The legacy of scientific management typified by Frederick Taylor’s clipboards and stopwatch can still be found lingering in proposals outlining alternative and cheaper forms of schooling.

This is the shadow heritage of school supervision, an unsavory lineage that still lingers in the hallways and classrooms of many contemporary schools. Though the rhetoric has been tailored to fit in with the newer, softer forms of managerial practices that emphasize “caring” and/or “collaboration,” the model of managerial control—and with it the inevitable “parent-child” relationship between principals and teachers—often remains firmly intact. This is why the word *evaluation* is a polyvalent term; that is, it contains many meanings and the secondary ones may have eclipsed the one intended. Evaluation is often not only ineffective, it is also feared by legions of teachers because it is frequently mindless, unhelpful, and punitive. Good rarely ever comes from it and many injurious results may accrue, which can lead to more work instead of improved work.

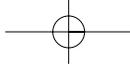
The Downey approach to classroom walk-throughs is situated on a different axis. It rejects the superior-subordinate hegemony of principals and teachers that is often swathed in covert gender discrimination and replaces it with a collegial, egalitarian model of professional practice. It is centered on an adult-to-adult model of discourse that involves professional conversation about practice. It rejects the “gotcha” model of inspection where the principal or supervisor is looking for “what’s wrong with this picture” and that is based on checklists and mindless conformity

to contextless classroom practices. It replaces the infrequent, formal “dipstick” model of evaluation with very frequent, short, informal exchanges between principals and teachers. These short exchanges are considered an ongoing and integral part of reflective teaching practice—a practice that is *paperless*, because it is a continuing conversation over time.

In short, the Downey approach to classroom walk-throughs sheds the ghosts of factory models and relationships and re-centers professional practice on a new axis, one embodied in the vision of what supervision was supposed to accomplish in the first place. It recognizes that part and parcel of classroom practice is the relationship of the teacher to the person supervising him or her, as well as the teacher’s relationships with students, parents, and other teachers. Everything in schools is *relational*, and never static. In this sense, the Downey model is not only fluid, moving, and dynamic—it is *antibureaucratic*, something that we will comment on later. This model is at odds with many bureaucratic practices that are not conducive to professional relationships that should rest on trust, fairness, egalitarianism, and autonomy between independent parties. The setting in which many teachers work is antiprofessional (beyond *unprofessional*).

So the Downey model is not just a model of supervisory practice that “fits” into bureaucratically organized schools; it is a model of changed relationships that will come to characterize an entire school. It is a way of developing a network of relationships as opposed to merely changing the principal-teacher dyad. In this sense, it is *radical*. It is this characteristic of the Downey approach that promises to alter the entire school climate and create a culture of high work performance for an entire school. This approach is about changing schools, one teacher at a time. That’s the only way the change is ever permanent.

This book is divided into two parts. The first part, Chapters 1 through 6, describes the pragmatics of our approach to walk-throughs from its early conceptualization to the development of the step-by-step process of collecting information from short classroom visits and using this information to engage in reflective dialogue with teachers. This part concludes with suggestions for implementing the process and describes examples of successful implementation of the model in a variety of settings. The second part of the book, Chapters 7 through 10, takes a longer view and explores the historical development of supervision, reviews the research base for the model, explains how this model is an example of discursive practice, and concludes with a chapter presenting how the model relates to the career cycle of the typical teacher.



xii • The Three-Minute Classroom Walk-Through

It is our hope that the ideas presented here will lead to more professionalism in the interchange among educators as we attempt to expand our skills and enable students to gain from their educational experience.

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