

**Exploring Classroom Walkthroughs:
A Case Study of School Leaders' Learning and Professional Growth**

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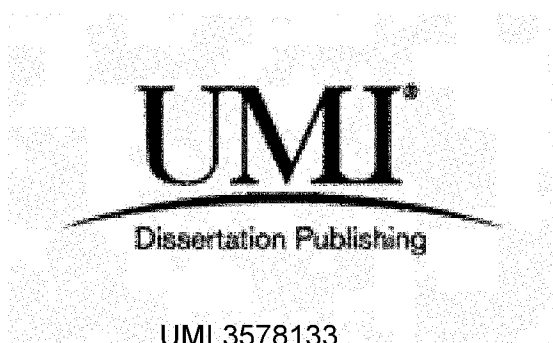
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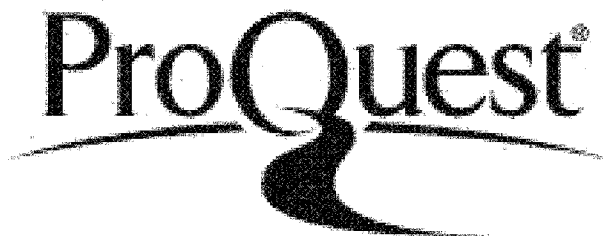


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APPROVAL PAGE

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Abstract

Connecticut's System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) has required the practice of classroom observations to ensure school leaders regularly monitor instruction in their schools and districts. However, literature suggests the use of non-evaluative, less formal classroom observations may also provide school leaders' with opportunities for collaboration, capacity-building, and professional development. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding the use of a district classroom walkthrough model and the influence this practice had on their ability to develop a common understanding of teaching and learning, construct meaning from their experiences, and enhance their efficacy as leaders. A single-case study design was used to explore the walkthrough phenomenon from the perspective of 12 school leaders in Regional School District A (pseudonym), one of 19 regional districts in Connecticut (including two towns). Social Practice Theory provided a critical lens in which to view the walkthrough model, specifically how school leaders' practices of collaboration, observation, discourse, and reflection contributed to their knowledge and professional development as members of the district's leadership community. Data from interviews, field notes, and participant post-observation documents led to a deep understanding of classroom walkthroughs in shaping identity, shared language, knowledge, and leadership effectiveness. Findings from this case study indicated walkthroughs had a positive influence on school leaders' evolving identity and relationship with colleagues, professional knowledge of instruction, and self-efficacy. However, data revealed the current walkthrough model was less effective in helping participants develop deeper and more meaningful understandings around instructional practices and in advancing broader goals for school improvement. Recommendations from this study called for a focus on

fewer problems of practice, an increase in the frequency of walkthroughs, and a district commitment to develop policies and protocols that would provide leaders with adequate time, resources, training, and support to develop and implement system-wide improvements as part of the walkthrough practice. Further, it was suggested the district include faculty and teacher leaders in discussions around effective instruction and use information from classroom walkthroughs in the development of more formalized plans for improving the quality of teaching and learning in the district.

Acknowledgements

So ends the journey that began five years ago and filled a good portion of my time, somewhere between leading a comprehensive high school of 1300 students, being a wife and mother, and keeping up with the myriad of challenges facing school leaders in Connecticut and across the nation. Although getting a doctorate had long been my dream, I will admit there were moments when I thought of putting off the work, or even abandoning it altogether. As my favorite author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, once noted, “We beat on, boats against the current...” Thankfully, those feelings were ephemeral moments of writer’s block, or despair, but I emerged with a renewed confidence and strength. My journey was far more enjoyable with the support of NCU committee member, Mia Mercurio-Morse. A special thanks to my warm and gracious committee chairperson, Dr. Sunny Liu, whose sound advice, genuine understanding, patience, and appropriate direction throughout the research process helped usher me to the finish line!

I could not have accomplished my goals without my loving family: Dad, Mom, Debbie and Robert. No matter when I asked any of you to drop what you were doing to become a sounding board, you were always there. A special thanks to my father, Robert Lisi, who might not have pursued his own dreams but always made sure his children strived to achieve theirs. I also want to thank my dear son, Nicholas, who continues to add purpose and beauty to my world. Most importantly, words cannot express the gratitude, appreciation, and love I have for my husband, Michael. Thank you so much for allowing me to pursue and fulfill a life’s dream.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the shadow of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), substantive changes in the Nation's education agenda have urged states to adopt a common core of challenging standards, implement accountability systems, revise core curricula, and select highly-qualified teachers and leaders. The mounting pressure by local and federal policymakers for school reform has prompted a paradigm shift regarding traditional norms associated with school leadership: the social contexts in which leaders work and the practices leaders engage in to ensure the success of their schools (Wagner, Kegan, Lahey, & Lemons, 2006). Within this new leadership framework, the notion of the sole leader working in isolation has been steadily replaced by collaboration and learning-centered practices as critical components of school improvement. The ability of leaders to work with colleagues, construct meaning around teaching and learning, and demonstrate growth as professionals will become the driving force in the renewal of public education (Padilla, 2009).

In his work, *Developing the Leader within You*, Maxwell (2000) defined leadership as a primary source of influence. In an era of increased responsibility for the success of all learners, classroom walkthrough models (also referred to in the literature as learning walks, three-minute walkthroughs, data walks, walkabouts, and instructional rounds) have been developed and implemented to deepen school leaders' understandings of instructional practices (David, 2008). According to current literature on school leadership, when leaders work as members of a team to observe classroom instruction, decisions related to curriculum and instruction are centered more appropriately on the needs of the organization (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010).

Using a non-evaluative classroom walkthrough approach, principals, assistant principals, directors and department chairs work as collegial members of the school organization -- observing instruction, sharing insights related to patterns and trends, and building a common language related to effective teaching and learning practices (City, Elmore & Teitel, 2009). Teitel (2009) argued in favor of district-led walkthroughs as a means for building a network of educators who would visit classrooms regularly in order for abstract concepts, such as student engagement or critical thinking, to be understood by leaders in greater depth and with greater consistency. Sergiovanni (2009) noted, "principals have a responsibility to help teachers improve their practice and to hold them accountable for meeting their commitments to teaching and learning" (p. 281). Contributing to the existing research in the use of walkthroughs and the potential impact this might have on school leaders' learning, professional development, and self-efficacy can support future iterations of this process.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation presents background information regarding contemporary notions of school leadership and external training and professional development, a historical perspective of walkthroughs, as well as school leaders' experiences and perceptions of classroom walkthrough practices as potential venues for learning, development, and self-efficacy. An overview of the study's purpose, problem statement, and primary research questions are included. A summary of the nature of the study and its significance have been summarized along with key definition of terms.

Background

Leading educational theorists now agree leaders can have a positive impact on sustainable school improvement when they are consistent in setting a purpose and are capable of dealing with the complexities inherent in their organizations (Fullan, 2005;

Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). As the central role of school leadership broadens in scope, the opportunities leaders have for learning and professional development will enable them to create and sustain cultures where effective teaching and learning are consistently evident (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). The trend for school leaders to reflect on, discuss, and derive meaning from their classroom observations as part of their practice has been grounded in contemporary literature (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Spillane, Healey & Parise, 2009). The leadership team in Regional School District A in Connecticut has participated in a classroom walkthrough model in an effort to enhance their knowledge and understanding essential for influencing teaching and learning and to increase their own competence.

Current walkthrough models used by districts in the past few years have been designed to increase the collective understanding of effective teaching practices as a means for advancing school improvement, a departure from traditional classroom observations linked solely to the evaluation and supervision of teachers. Dufour and Marzano (2009) opposed the typical classroom observation used primarily for teacher evaluation and called upon leaders to use their visits for the purpose of gathering authentic evidence of instruction and student learning. Thus, the use of many emerging classroom walkthrough models are not connected to the evaluation of teachers. Current theories have further supported professional leadership practices appropriately connected to reflection and assumption-building (Sparks, 2007). The intention of non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs has been to promote professional inquiry and critical discourse between and among school leaders at both the building and district levels.

Statement of the Problem

In order to meet the educational challenges and school reform mandates of the 21st Century, the beliefs, experiences, and practices employed by school leaders related to effective teaching and learning will be critical in shaping the quality of their schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). There is little debate regarding increased accountability for school improvement, and much of this has fallen squarely on the shoulders of school leaders. *Connecticut's Common Core Standards for School Leaders* requires school leaders to engage in inquiry regarding effective instructional practices and to increase their ongoing professional growth (Connecticut State Department of Education [CSDE], 2013). Given the lack of time and resources to manage all that is needed, today's school leaders must select professional practices to support their professional development and capacity as instructional leaders (Elmore, 2000).

School leaders have typically used observations of classroom instruction as a means of monitoring, supervising, and evaluating teaching and learning. However, school leaders have begun to work collaboratively within their districts to visit classrooms with a different purpose in mind. Although the literature is scant, non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs have begun to appear in school districts as a professional practice to facilitate leaders' discourse, shared knowledge, reflection, and self-efficacy (Babb, 2008; Little, 2007; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson et al, 2010; Steiny, 2009). The use of classroom walkthroughs of this nature may not only support school leaders efforts to gauge the quality of instruction (David, 2007; Ing, 2010; Lemons & Helsing, 2009; Marshall, 2009; Protheroe, 2009; Skretta, 2008; Steiny, 2009), but these practices might play a more substantial role in advancing school leaders' professional growth and effectiveness. Exploring classroom walkthroughs from the unique perspectives of 12

school leaders in this district provided a deeper understanding of the potential influence walkthroughs had on their evolving identity, knowledge, agency, and self-efficacy.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this single-case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding their use of a district walkthrough model and the influence this practice had on their ability to develop a common understanding of teaching and learning, construct new meaning from their experiences, and enhance their identity, agency, and self-reported efficacy as leaders. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews, researcher field notes, and participant post-observation documents. The unit of analysis centered on a suburban, regional Connecticut school district. A purposive sample of 12 school leaders included regional directors, building principals, assistant principals, and academic chairpersons with diverse backgrounds, supervisory roles, and levels of experience. The sample group was selected from a larger pool of 21 leaders from the district leadership team. Viewing the phenomenon through the theoretical lens of Social Practice Theory provided a relevant framework for investigating the topic, since school leaders in this district worked collaboratively, engaged in critical discourse, constructed meaning from their observations of instruction, and reflected on their experiences as a means of enhancing their learning and professional growth. Exploring the walkthrough model from the unique perspective of leaders shed light on the fidelity of the classroom walkthrough model and the manner in which this practice influenced identity, learning, agency, and self-efficacy among members of the leadership community.

Theoretical Framework(s)

Social practice theory (Holland & Lave, 2009), more specifically embodied in Wenger's (1998) communities of practice (CoP), provided a theoretical framework to

inform this inquiry. Learning situated within a social and organizational context was viewed in relation to the reflective practices, professional discourse, and meaning school leaders in this district shared as a result of their classroom walkthrough experiences. Schultz (2010), taking his cue from the earlier works of Dewey (1916) and Giroux (1994), explored the ways in which members from educational leadership communities leverage inquiry-based approaches to generate knowledge, power, identity, and experience. As part of their district walkthrough practice, participants in the study reflected on what they observed in classroom instruction, the language they used to describe their observations, and the meaning they ultimately attached to the significance of their work. In doing so, participants shared cultural meaning and social values as members of their school community to improve their own effectiveness and benefit the system-at-large.

Anthropologists Holland and Lave (2009), in their effort to conceptualize learning, asked a key question related to social process: “How are persons participating in the production of their lives, work, and relationships?” (p. 2). The theoretical tradition of social learning through inquiry-based practices was well-aligned with the nature and intent of this research. The use of non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs provided study participants in this school district an opportunity to formulate a professional identity, construct new knowledge, engage in critical discussions, and attach meaning through their collaboration as professional members of the school leadership community (Wenger, 1998).

Members in any community, through their participation, experience a sense of belonging, of becoming, and of doing. As Wenger (1998) claimed: “Such participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (p.

4). The school leaders involved in this qualitative study participated in non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs throughout the 2012-13 school year and sought to use the information from their observations of instruction to improve their individual and collective expertise and effectiveness. The collaborative nature of their work as members of the district leadership team focused on their own professional learning and growth rather than on the formal, direct supervision of their teaching staff. The reflective inquiry associated with classroom walkthroughs was further meant to help district leaders unpack inconsistencies and misconceptions in their language, knowledge, and practices in order to more appropriately support their work within the system. Social practice theory allowed for this researcher to investigate not only school leaders' perceptions of the classroom walkthrough model, but the potential influence this practice had on participants' beliefs, relationships, understandings, and actions.

Social practice theory provided a broader lens through which the walkthrough phenomenon was viewed with respect to meaning-making and capacity-building, but the descriptions from 12 school leaders engaged in the study emerged naturally rather than adhering to a particular theory (Wolcott, 2009). While learning as a social process had a close connection to the nature of this inquiry, an inductive, emergent approach was utilized in analyzing themes and patterns, as well as in developing assumptions from the evidence. Rather than remaining focused on purely cognitive explanations of professional learning, this researcher was most interested in how participants within this district perceived the social nature of their classroom walkthroughs and how this model supported them as instructional leaders, learners, and practitioners within their own school community.

Research Questions

This qualitative study sought to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding the practice of walkthroughs and the potential impact this could have on their learning, professional development, and self-efficacy as members of their district. Four key elements provided the foundation for the research questions: 1) The nature of the district walkthrough practice; 2) the degree to which the leadership team constructed new knowledge and shared understandings around teaching and learning; 3) the manner in which the walkthrough model as a professional development practice influenced leaders' identity, learning, and self-efficacy; and 4) the perceived value of the walkthrough practice in supporting leaders' ability to forward school improvements.

The following research questions prescribed a clear direction for this qualitative inquiry:

1. What influence, if any, do walkthroughs have on supporting leaders' shared understandings of teaching and learning evident in their school community?
2. How might the collaborative practice of walkthroughs shape individual and collective identity and agency among school leaders?
3. What are leaders' perceptions of walkthroughs as a vehicle for their own learning and professional growth?
4. In what way might walkthroughs influence leaders' self-efficacy?

The research questions represented a framework to guide this investigation and support a conceptual understanding of the walkthrough phenomenon. The first question sought to explore the use of the walkthrough model and the way in which school leaders developed individual and collective understandings of instruction through their classroom

visits. Describing participants' interactions before, during, and after a walkthrough, and what meaning they derived from their experiences, provided context to the phenomenon under study. The second question helped to explore how walkthroughs leveraged opportunities for leadership collaboration and critical discourse around teaching and learning. This question is significant, since collaboration and shared understanding are concepts associated in current literature with successful leadership (Fullan, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Wagner et. al, 2006).

The third research question was developed to consider the attitudes and beliefs held by the district leadership team regarding the fidelity of the walkthrough process in supporting their own professional development. In this context, professional development was defined as the activities and experiences that deepen leaders' understanding of pedagogy and instruction (Hirsch, 2009). The fourth research question was designed, specifically, to extend the third question and sought to explore leaders' perceptions of walkthroughs and the potential influence these might have on their own self-efficacy.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this single-case study was to explore school leaders' perceptions of a classroom walkthrough model implemented in their district. Although many approaches may be utilized in qualitative research, the case study was a natural fit for this inquiry. Yin (2009) emphasized the importance of a case study approach when researchers want to understand "complex social phenomenon...and retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events" (p. 2). Although school leaders' use of classroom walkthroughs for professional development may be viewed from a much broader educational context, grounding interpretations of this practice from within a specific, "bounded" educational organization allowed for a critical inquiry into

walkthroughs and the potential influence these practices have on school leaders. Like Yin (2009) and Stake (1995), Flyvbjerg (2006) attempted to counter misconceptions of case study, claiming researchers utilizing this design find their cases are typical or extreme or theoretically situated in some way. Focusing on one district as the unit of analysis in this study allowed for an authentic inquiry into walkthroughs as uniquely connected to the individual and collective beliefs, values, and practices of the leadership team. Ragin and Becker (1992) argued the value in studying observable patterns in phenomena was through smaller empirical units, leading to “theoretical and analytic insights in the study of the same phenomenon in larger units” (p. 15). Thus, this researcher was able to gain a richer understanding of the nature of classroom walkthroughs through the distinct voices, behaviors, and artifacts of leaders in this district and the manner in which this practice impacted their identity, learning, agency, and self-efficacy as members of their school community.

The unit of analysis was a suburban, regional school district in Connecticut, which included 21 school leaders at the central office, elementary, middle and high school levels. Principals, assistant principals, directors, and department chairs across the district had developed and integrated a walkthrough protocol as part of a collective practice to observe and make sense of instructional activities taking place in classrooms throughout the system. Although leaders in this district had been previously exposed to current research on walkthroughs, attended conferences on the topic, and received training from consultants, the walkthrough model used by district leaders was still in its infancy stage, implemented in its current form for two school calendar years: 2011-12 and 2012-13. School leaders in this district met as a community of leader-practitioners throughout the year to select a problem of practice, observe instruction, discuss specific

attributes and patterns associated with teaching and learning, and make assumptions based on their observational data. Exploring the walkthrough phenomenon from the unique perspectives of participants invested in this practice appropriately aligned with the study's purpose, problem, and research questions.

The selection of leaders from one regional school district was a deliberate choice. According to Yin (2009), case study design allows the researcher the opportunity to explore individuals, organizations, interventions, relationships, communities, or programs within an authentic context using a variety of data sources. The social and professional context in which school leaders in Regional School District A selected problems of practice, conducted observations, engaged in discourse, and ultimately derived meaning from their walkthrough experiences became the driving force for this inquiry. The triangulation of data sources provided a sound framework for examining the phenomenon (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Information collected through open-ended interviews, observations, field notes and document review was analyzed using an inductive process, allowing themes related to the topic to emerge in an authentic manner.

Significance of the Study

Research in the area of classroom walkthrough models implemented by school district leadership teams is limited. Much of the information on walkthroughs has been largely anecdotal in nature and focused primarily on its use as a means of impacting school improvement (David, 2008; Garza, 2010; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Protheroe, 2009; Wilson & Cook, 2009). Other studies have emphasized the use of classroom walkthroughs for the direct supervision of teaching and learning. Information to date has shown a positive correlation between the presence of school leaders in monitoring classroom instruction and school improvement (Colvin, Flannery, Sugar, &

Mohegan, 2009; Crum & Sherman, 2008; Ingo, 2010). The outcomes of this inquiry may extend an understanding of walkthroughs as professional practices leading to shared goals, commitments, capacity-building, and provide the impetus for further research and policy development. Since 21st Century leaders have become accountable for the quality of teaching and learning within the contexts of their educational settings, this study sought to explore classroom walkthroughs from the perspective of school leaders and the potential influence this practice had on their professional learning, identity, agency, and self-efficacy.

Definition of Key Terms

Agency. The concept of agency in leadership practice is rooted in the professional interactions between school leaders, their followers, and the context of the school setting to which they exert influence and change (Spillane, 2006).

Collaborative leadership. In this model, the leader or supervisor works as an equal member of a team with his or her colleagues or employees, allowing all members equal opportunity to present perceptions, make clarifications, solve problems, and negotiate a mutually acceptable solution. Collaborative leadership can be further defined as beliefs and deliberate actions shared by the principal and faculty, which facilitate school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Communities of practice (CoP). Based on Social Practice Theory, a community of practice refers to members of a group, community, organization, or culture who share similar concerns, experiences, practices, and beliefs and who work together to deepen their knowledge or find solutions to their problems through their interactions and pursuit of a shared enterprise (Rallis, Tedder, Lachman, & Elmore, 2006; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder, 2002).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Extending the standards work states have already developed as a foundation, the Common Core focus on teaching students conceptual understandings and procedures starting in the early grades. The Common Core aims to ensure all students master essential content and skills in order to prepare them for the demands of college and career (National Governors Association, 2010).

Critical discourse. Texts and oral themes focused on ways of representing knowledge, identity, cultural and social competence, and understanding (Rogers, 2004).

Data-driven decision making (DDDM). Data-driven decision making in education refers to teachers, principals, and administrators systematically collecting and analyzing various types of data, including input, process, outcome and satisfaction data, to guide a range of decisions to help improve the success of students and schools (Marsh, Pane, & Hamilton, 2006).

Effective Teaching Strategies-(ETS). The State of Connecticut identifies ten teaching strategies considered to be scientifically-researched best practices for teaching and learning. They are outlined by the State and include the following: identifying similarities and differences; summarizing and note taking; reinforcing effort and providing recognition; homework and practice; nonlinguistic representations; cooperative learning; setting objectives and providing feedback; generating and testing hypotheses; cues, questions and advance organizers, and the use of non-fiction (CSDE, 2013).

District reference group (DRG). Used by the State of Connecticut Department of Education, a district reference group (or DRG) is used to categorize the more than 150 school districts throughout the State. Within the DRG classification system, districts with public school students who have similar socioeconomic status and need are grouped

together. Grouping similar districts together as a means of categorization is useful in order to make legitimate comparisons among districts (CSDE, 2013).

Identity. Connected to social practice, identity within this context enables an individual or collective group to negotiate experiences and shape the meanings in order to define their community and their sense of belonging to that community. Thus, the concept of identity is appropriately linked to learning and embodied in issues of community, practice, and meaning (Wenger, 1998).

Mutual influence. The concept of mutual influence plays a significant role in organizational development and team processes. While a team is a group of people who share a common purpose, members have an ability to influence one another through the ongoing process of discourse, problem solving, and decision making opportunities (Cummings and Worley, 2008).

No Child Left Behind Act. Enacted in 2001, President Bush signed into law Public Act 107-110, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). NCLB mandates include educational reforms, which include the hiring of qualified teachers, meeting the academic needs of all learners, and the expectation for districts to make adequate yearly progress based on standardized test score data.

Professional development. The term professional development means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and leaders' effectiveness in raising student achievement. Professional development includes experiences and activities which build upon and help support educators' knowledge and depth of understanding in pedagogy and instruction (Hirsch, 2009).

Professional learning communities (PLC's). In the context of education, professional learning communities represent groups of educators working together to make improvements in teaching and learning (Dufour, 2004).

Reflective practitioner. An attribute that defines the teacher or leader as active, intuitive, and reflective of their actions in the learning environment (Schon, 1990).

SEED. Informed by a study (MET) by the Gates Foundation, Connecticut's System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) is a model evaluation and professional development system. Aligned to the State's evaluation guidelines, the system is intended to inform the implementation of model teacher and administrator evaluation plans being implemented in districts throughout the State during the 2012-13 school calendar year (CSDE).

Self-efficacy – The concept of self-efficacy from a leadership perspective defines the set of beliefs and confidence leaders have in their own competence. Leadership efficacy is grounded in professional development opportunities focused on a clear vision for learning and student achievement, collaboration, and shared purpose (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson et al., 2010).

Social Practice Theory – A theory which situates learning within the context of social interaction. Social practice theory, closely related to social constructivism, shifts the focus from purely cognitive processes to consider the social interactions that facilitate understanding and communication by members of various communities (Holland & Lave, 2009).

Social constructivism. A theory that has grown out of the works of Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Russian theorist, and underscores the belief that all knowledge is socially constructed and cannot be separated from the learner's experience within a social

context. People from a variety of cultures use tools, such as speech and writing, in order to negotiate their social environments and construct meaning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Walkthrough. The term walkthrough is used within a body of educational literature and refers to informal observations of classroom instruction, either by administrators or teachers, as a tool for assessing instructional patterns and trends, or as a means of increasing educators' shared understandings (David, 2008).

Summary

Recent studies have shown group-centered, or “distributive” leadership and organizational capacity for improvement as significant contributors to student learning (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). This, in turn, has led to a plethora of district-wide practices and professional development models to support the capacity of school leaders (City, Elmore, & Teitel, 2009; David, 2008; Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010). Classroom walkthroughs embraced by leadership teams have become a strategy for observing and reflecting on instructional practices evident across classrooms in a particular school district. Very few studies have described the manner in which walkthrough models have supported school leaders in their ability to collaborate with colleagues, make thoughtful inquiries into existing practices, reflect on strategies for school improvement, and build efficacy in their roles as administrators. This case study addressed the need to explore classroom walkthroughs from the point of view of leaders and determine how this practice might influence their knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning, the development of their identity and agency as members of their school community, and

their own self-efficacy as administrators. Considering the unique voices of members of the district's leadership team and the beliefs, perceptions, and practices they developed and shared as a part of their district's walkthrough model was integral to this qualitative study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this single-case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding their use of a district walkthrough model and the influence this practice had on their ability to develop a common understanding of teaching and learning, construct new meaning from their experiences, and enhance their identity, agency, and self-reported efficacy as leaders. The literature review chapter begins with an introduction and defines the changing role of leaders given national mandates and reform efforts to increase student learning. The review moves on to discuss the learning experiences leaders have had in pre-service and graduate courses to prepare for their important leadership roles. This is significant background information, since participants in the study are members of a district-level administrative team who participate in classroom walkthroughs for the purpose of increasing their own professional development and capacity as instructional leaders. The chapter further explores classroom walkthroughs from a historical perspective, discusses their current use as a practice in public school districts, and provides a comprehensive view of walkthroughs as a possible venue for informing the intellectual, organizational, and professional development experiences of school leaders.

The chapter is organized into five distinct categories: 1. Introduction: The Changing Role of Leadership in the 21st Century; 2. Historical Perspective of Walkthrough Practices; 3. Walkthroughs and Social Practice Theory; 4. Inquiry and Critical Discourse; and 5. Professional Development and Self-efficacy. While this single-case study focused on a district's use of non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs, social practice theory provided a plausible lens to understand the phenomenon and the

potential influence this practice had on school leaders' learning, identity, agency, and self-efficacy.

Documentation

Reference materials in this review were a result of the use of RefWorks online reference tool made available through Northcentral University (NCU) for its learners. The primary focus of searches included the use of databases, including EBSCOhost, Ebrary, ERIC, ProQuest, and Sage, which were essential in retrieving and reviewing relevant, scholarly, and timely information regarding this study's topic. Both current and seminal research was included and focused on themes related to leadership preparation, the use of inquiry-based methods and data collection to solve problems and initiate school improvements, collaborative strategies used by leadership teams, and the nature of learning as a social practice. Each of these areas drew upon relevant concepts of leadership and learning – both linked to the district's classroom walkthrough model. Key terms used during extensive database searches included leadership, classroom walkthroughs, learning walks, instructional rounds, classroom observation, professional development, professional learning communities, communities of practice, social practice theory, school improvement and self-efficacy.

Introduction: Leadership in the 21st Century

With the advent of school reform efforts at the federal and local level and the inclusion by states to adopt common core standards and curricula, school leaders share a greater responsibility in their roles as facilitators of school improvement and student achievement. Never has more demand been placed on educators and leaders to demonstrate improvement in teaching and learning. West, Peck, and Reitzug (2010) posed a correlation between the release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and the NCLB

legislation in 2001, citing the tremendous social and political leverage these documents have had on the responsibilities today's school leaders assume for student achievement. While *A Nation At Risk* provided a cautionary tale of how poorly American students were performing across the nation compared to their counterparts in other countries, NCLB intended to ensure all students were afforded quality instruction in order to meet higher standards.

Ensuring all American students achieve higher standards through NCLB has focused on the professional development experiences of school leaders and the implementation of practices to ensure internal accountability (Cobb & Rallis, 2008). Current literature emphasized the valuable role school leaders play in the change process and their deliberate efforts to utilize new strategies and skill sets in order to maximize organizational improvements (Fullan, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Reeves, 2008). Many leadership success stories exist, but school improvements have been largely predicated on leaders' commitment to reflection, collaboration, communication, and learning-centered practices implemented within their organizations (Chen & Reigeluth, 2010). Until recently, central office leaders and school boards had sanctioned discretionary powers to principals in order to manage and supervise the quality of educational practices occurring in their own buildings, often referred to as site-based management. In the wake of school reform measures, however, this flexibility afforded school leaders has been replaced with more specific NCLB mandates (Gardiner, Canfield-Davis, & Anderson, 2009; Nelson, McGhee, & Meno, 2007; Pepper, 2010).

Just as higher expectations and greater accountability have become the new norms for educational leaders, these goals have dramatically impacted the role, responsibilities, and practices of school administrators. Although some leadership autonomy still exists,

Marzano and Waters (2009) clarified the concept of defined autonomy, in which clear goals for student learning are initially set by central office administration while allowing building leaders to retain some authority and flexibility in meeting district learning goals. However, with the onset of new federal and State mandates, few would argue today's leaders have been given a clear charge to raise student achievement through the supervision of instruction and teacher performance. The Obama administration's Race to the Top (RTTT) fund has leveraged financial incentives to create the conditions for educational reform for States across the nation (Hanover Research Brief, 2011). The \$4.3 billion dollar grant provided the impetus for change, specifically applied to teacher evaluation systems with an emphasis on the use of data to determine promotion, retention, and tenure.

Current changes to Connecticut's teacher evaluation system, adopted on February 10th, 2012 by the State Board of Education will formally tie evaluation to student performance for the first time in State history (CSDE, 2013). In accordance with the State's plan, teachers will be evaluated based on several factors, including 45% student performance data, 40% supervisor observation, 10% parent feedback, and 5% student feedback (CSDE, 2013). A new evaluation system will facilitate the need for Connecticut school leaders to demonstrate a strong understanding of effective practice as evidenced by teachers.

Leadership Preparation

The fundamental changes affecting school leaders in the 21st Century have not been isolated to the United States. The changes regarding teaching and learning are directly related to the global economic challenges facing all nations and have led to a renewed awareness regarding education as the critical link to sustaining an international

competitive edge (Bush, 2009). With the increased burden on school leaders in the United States to establish the academic conditions necessary for improving teaching and learning, researchers have referred to the lack of quality pre-service and professional development programs. Provost, Boscardin, and Wells (2010) found state licensure and leadership programs in many states were not only responsible for the professional norms and expectations associated with school leadership, but were influential on leaders' perceptions regarding how these programs supported their ability to improve instruction and student performance. In light of this, researchers have continued to call for a revision of undergraduate and graduate programs to equip school leaders with the fundamental skills necessary to make a difference in their schools.

Literature on leadership has highlighted the significance of preparing contemporary school leaders for the magnitude of responsibilities they will encounter, including higher expectations for student achievement, diminished resources, and challenging conditions in the context of their school organizations (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2007; Sappington, Baker, Gardner, & Pacha, 2010). Grisson and Harrington (2010) found a majority of principals reported their traditional pre-service and graduate programs had not satisfactorily supported them in meeting the demands associated with their positions. After coding more than 200 course syllabi from 56 principal preparation programs, Hess and Kelly (2007) revealed only 2% of the graduate level courses addressed accountability and school improvement, while fewer than 5% addressed instruction on managing school improvement using data or empirical research.

The need for quality leadership has inspired new thinking and action regarding the preparation and professional development of school leaders through higher learning institutions. Walker (2012) envisioned a leadership preparation program in the form of a

collaborative partnership between school districts and post-secondary institutions, in which both organizations would assume responsibility for pursuing and collaboratively developing goals for leadership, learning, and growth. School districts across the country have responded by developing partnerships with local universities and colleges. According to Anderson (2003), in Chicago, the University of Illinois developed a proposal for a doctoral program to attract aspiring school leaders, which traded traditional classroom studies for authentic field work. Similarly, California's San Diego school system joined forces with a local college to support leadership training, while Boston Public Schools developed a partnership with Harvard and Boston universities in the creation of a higher quality leadership preparation program (p. 2).

The lack of quality leadership programs has motivated districts to develop internally-based professional development opportunities for leadership teams. Marzano and DuFour (2011) debunked the myth of the single, heroic leader capable of solving all of the school's issues alone and offered a new lens for leadership based on group-oriented problem-solving and learning. Despite a long-standing tradition of the autocratic leader at the helm, trends in school leadership have begun to favor job-embedded practices related to shared vision, collective understanding, and problem-solving strategies through collaboration (Wagner et. al, 2006; Reeves, 2008). In an effort to move schools toward this kind of systems thinking, Fullan (2009) posited the need to strengthen leadership capacity and commitment from within the learning organization. In a study by Braun, Gable, and Kite (2011), researchers found that building intellectual capacity was inextricably linked to building social capacity for collaboration. Findings from this study reported school leaders who engaged in professional development that offered opportunities for authentic, situated learning experiences were better equipped to develop

intellectual capacity for themselves and the teachers in their charge. This capacity-building has been linked to the use of a variety of classroom walkthrough models (Kachur & Stout, 2010), in which leaders are given dedicated time to visit classrooms and reflect on instructional practices common to their district.

Although classroom observations have normally connoted teacher supervision and evaluation, walkthroughs embraced by leadership teams have more recently emphasized internal knowledge-building to support system-wide improvements (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009; David, 2007). Using the extended metaphor of school leaders as catalysts, Hoerr (2008) described the role administrators now play in shaping the collaborative relationships among all members of the community and facilitating positive changes in the learning environment. While various supervisory practices, styles, and behaviors have been factors in the success of school leaders, a study by Reardon (2011) reported elementary principals' perceptions of their ability to improve the educational outcomes of their schools were dependent on the autonomy and support they were given to dialogue with members of their professional team. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005), following a meta-analysis of 30 years of research in the field, concluded school leaders' investments in learning-centered practices, aligned with the goals of their respective organizations, often resulted in desired levels of change. As a result, leadership teams capable of setting and sharing goals toward sustainable levels of quality have become a new priority for educational organizations (Senge, 1990).

A Historical Perspective of Walkthrough Practices

Historically, leaders' learning-centered practices have centered on monitoring instruction, evaluating teacher performance, and implementing improvements within their school settings to achieve desired student learning outcomes. Observing and supervising

classroom instruction has been at the forefront of leadership practices as opportunities for building leaders and department supervisors to monitor the quality of classroom learning experiences for students. Fullan (2009) highlighted the importance of building on leadership strengths in order to achieve school improvement results. Thus, leaders' observational skills and understanding of effective instruction have become critical facets of the role of the school administrator.

The practice of observing employees in their daily routines has been common in business management models as a strategy for advancing positive change in the organization. Studies have confirmed the most successful leaders of the past in business and industry remained closely connected to their employees and customers (Peters & Waterman, 1982). In the 1970s, Hewlett-Packard became well-known for their Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) philosophy. The company's managers frequently visited employees engaged in their daily routines in order to make recommendations for future organizational improvements (Peters & Waterman, 1982). The MBWA practice was later adopted by educational leaders in Community School District 2, New York City, in the 1980s under the direction of Tony Alvarado, Superintendent, and Elaine Fink, deputy superintendent, whose vision for their organization ensured principals remained closely attentive to the daily instructional needs of their schools. The district used the MBWA strategy as an accountability measure leading to successful system-wide improvement (Kachur et. al., 2010).

After examining the impact various leadership behaviors had on teaching and learning, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) posited that school leaders engaged in practices closely aligned with classroom instruction had a greater influence on student performance. Staying in close proximity to daily instruction has been more widely

accepted in educational systems as a way for leaders to assess the quality of teaching and learning occurring in their schools (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel; 2009; David, 2008). Other schools followed the work of New York's District 2, including Chicago Public Schools headed by Chief Education Officer, Barbara Eason-Watkins. Anderson (2003) noted district leaders in Chicago were determined to make reforms in the area of instructional leadership and reorganized the district into dozens of smaller units, each headed by an administrator and an educational team who would visit classrooms, review instructional practices, and offer feedback to staff.

Although empirical research on walkthroughs is sparse, literature has illuminated the challenges underlying walkthrough practices, the diversity of such practices within and across school systems, and the inconsistencies inherent in these models. The emergence of classroom walkthroughs in recent years has prescribed a general framework for administrators to examine the common characteristics observed in classrooms across districts, grade levels, and content areas. Marzano (2011) reviewed the historical significance of classroom walkthroughs used solely for evaluative purposes from post-World War II and throughout the 1950s, 60s, and 80s. "Few models in the entire field of education – let alone in the specific domain of educational supervision – have been as widely deployed, as widely disparaged, or as widely misunderstood" (p. 17). These classroom observation models had gained widespread use by school administrators in the 1980s and 1990s as clinical evaluation methods for monitoring the daily performance of teachers.

Although districts have begun to explore the use of classroom walkthroughs as a way of building shared knowledge and understanding of instruction in an effort to enhance leadership capacity, research has focused on the prevalence of classroom

observations for the supervision of teaching (Colvin, Flannery, Sugai, & Monegan, 2009; Crum & Sherman, 2008; Ing, 2010). The design of the mini-observation model, for example, prompted principals and supervisors to conduct frequent, short, and unannounced classroom visits to assess teacher performance and student learning over time (Marshall, 2008). While mini-observation practices have been conducted as formative assessments of individual teacher performance, the frequency and structure of these types of visits (e.g., including a post-discussion) made a successful shift away from more traditional, checklist approaches to supervision.

Grounded in theory on school leadership and employee relations, Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston (2010) developed their own version of the three-minute walkthrough for the purpose of promoting self-reflection and supporting leaders in improving their practice as instructional supervisors. School leaders participating in three-minute walkthroughs were expected to make note of student engagement, determine curricular objectives, and read the walls of the classroom for evidence of previous learning. The critical component of these walkthroughs, specifically the reflective dialogue between supervisor and teacher, had often been omitted or misinterpreted by district leaders (Downey et. al).

In the last decade, classroom walkthroughs embraced by school leaders have gained acceptance as a practice for monitoring the consistency and fidelity of instructional practices across a system. Frase and Hetzel (1990) published *School Management by Wandering Around*, (republished in 2002) to highlight the important lessons educators could learn from getting out of their offices, being visible, and offering feedback to teachers about the delivery of their instruction. Thus, themes from leading business models of the past have inspired districts to develop walkthrough practices for

their own purposes and in the context of their own unique settings, including *Learning Walks, Walkabouts, Instructional Rounds, Data Walks, and Mini-observations* (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010).

Depending on the needs of a particular district, a variety of walkthrough models have taken root. Cited in Marshall (2009), *The Learning Walk*, developed by Lauren Resnick and colleagues from the University of Pittsburgh, provided district leadership teams with a format for conducting classroom visits, often lasting several hours long and including a particular instructional focus, followed by reflections of a team's observations and a report to the principal. According to Davidson-Taylor (2002), observational data from learning walks have been used "to identify the areas a school should focus on for instructional improvement and staff development and training needs" (p. 30), and included the following steps:

- Developing teacher and staff training for walkthroughs
- Making daily classroom visits to observe teaching and learning
- Using data from visits to identify and implement strategies for instructional improvement
- Restructuring staff meetings to focus on instruction and student learning (p. 31).

Data on classroom walkthroughs has remained largely anecdotal in nature, highlighting the individual protocols leaders have used to fit their unique educational situations and settings. In his article, *Real-time Data from a Classroom Walk-through*, Flynn (2010) described his district's use of data walks to increase the effectiveness of instruction in his racially-diverse Illinois school district of more than 4,300 students. The inclusion of data walks in Freeport was purposeful and strategic, compelling leaders to become more highly visible in their school buildings and to use observational data from

multiple classroom visits to uncover instructional patterns and trends. As part of the Freeport data walk process, observers were expected to consider the following key questions during their walks:

- Is the learning objective evident (posted and understood) to the students?
- Is the learning objective aligned to state standards?
- What level of thinking is expected of the students?
- Are measurements being used to assess learning?
- What is the engagement level of the students in the classroom?
- What research-proven instructional strategies are evident?
- Does the classroom environment contribute to student learning? (p. 18).

In a study to uncover commonalities in the leadership approaches and instructional practices at successful schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia, Crum and Sherman (2008) articulated the use of Smartwalks secondary school principals utilized as part of their practice to foster a culture of high expectations for student learning. High school principals shared their classroom walkthrough protocols, and these involved frequent visits into multiple classrooms to observe what the teacher and students were doing, asking students questions about what they were learning, and reflecting on the feedback that would be useful to teachers during post-observation discussions. One principal in the study clarified her rationale for implementing walkthroughs in her building, “You collect data. You’re looking at actual learning and what the students are doing. I may go into a classroom and while the teacher’s teaching...ask a student... What are you doing on this?” And see if they knew” (Crum & Sherman, 2008, p. 574).

While some classroom walkthrough models have been designed to assess the ongoing delivery of general instruction, other approaches have been developed by school

leaders to look for critical domains fundamental to learning. In the third phase of a K-12 study on leadership, Sanzo, Sherman and Clayton (2011) documented middle school principals' use of the three-minute walkthrough to assess instructional practices related to students' use of higher order thinking skills (remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, creating) inherent in Bloom's Taxonomy. As a result, principals reported their ability to convey clear instructional norms for their teachers lead to higher expectations for student learning.

Walkthrough models have continued to transform in both structure and purpose, even taking cues from practices associated with the field of medicine. Questions regarding the implementation of walkthrough practices in supporting leaders' learning, professional development, and self-efficacy remain unanswered. City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel (2009) developed a model of classroom walkthroughs mirroring the medical rounds employed by physicians in hospitals. The practice of incorporating medical rounds in research hospitals has long-supported physicians' depth of knowledge and understanding of patient illnesses, diagnostic procedures, and approaches used in healing the sick. City et. al (2009), expanded upon this learning-centered model, originally developed by Cogan (1973) and educators at MIT in the 1960s, to develop the practice of instructional rounds (IR), a model framed around a problem of practice, classroom visits, and critical discourse amongst leadership team members. Like physicians who make rounds to visit patients and discuss their own insights for treatment protocols, educational leaders would use their "rounds" to increase the knowledge and skills necessary for making measurable improvements in the context of teaching and learning. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) pointed to the "knowledge of experts" (p. 9), and

explained how interactions, understandings, and discourse with other practitioners are embodied within a framework of cultural experience.

In their text, *Instructional Rounds in Education: A Network Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning*, City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) defined IR as a collaborative process for leaders to strengthen their own understanding of teaching and learning and to minimize the isolation often found in teachers' practices across a school system. According to City et. al (2009), the IR model includes four key components: identifying a problem of practice, observing instruction, debriefing, and focusing on next steps in the process (p. 6).

While IR emphasized for leaders a new approach for working together to reflect on the quality of instructional practices, a review of literature on IR conducted by Roegman and Riehl (2012) cautioned some of the potential challenges faced by the medical community might also apply to the educational version of this model, including leaders' challenges in relation to purpose, structure, pedagogical knowledge, level of expertise, and genuine voice of participants. A lack of empirical data regarding contributions these rounds have made in advancing school leaders' depth of understanding around instruction, professional growth, and in advancing school improvements continues to be problematic for districts thinking about using the model.

Whether walkthroughs are implemented for teacher evaluation, supervision of instructional practices, or the professional development of leadership teams, fundamental misunderstandings and variability connected to these practices still exist. Ing (2010) reported leaders' perceptions of improving instruction were not statistically correlated with the frequency of their classroom visits alone. Conversely, the study suggested principals' observations of classrooms, when purposefully linked to the goal of

improving instruction, contributed to the instructional climate of the school after controlling for school and principal characteristics. Informal walkthroughs, situated within the context of particular schools, appeared to be most useful to principals who perceived these practices as directly supportive of their goals for instruction and increased student learning (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007).

Walkthroughs and Social Practice Theory

Research on social practice theory provides a plausible lens for examining the social context through which learning and practice occur within communities and organizations (Feger & Arruda, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Printy, 2008). Leading educational theorists have suggested positive outcomes related to school improvement are more likely to occur when school leaders are given opportunities for collaboration, critical discourse, and professional learning (DuFour et. al, 2006; Fullan, 2009; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006; Reeves, 2008; Wagner et. al, 2006). In response, walkthrough models have been influenced by theories of learning, since the process itself has typically emphasized leaders' social interaction and meaning-making. Social anthropologists, Lave and Wenger (1991), describe learning as an "integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (p. 35). While the cognitive processes responsible for learning take place within individuals, the social component is integral for adult learning at the organizational level (Wilson, Goodman, & Cronin, 2007). The meaning leaders construct from their walkthrough experiences are co-dependent on their school settings and collaborative experiences with their peers.

According to empirical research in the field, learning becomes uniquely determined by specific circumstances and is largely influenced by the mental models, or belief systems, developed by individuals through their interactions with one another in

particular organizations and systems (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 2009; Goel et al, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991). Researchers studying the role of learning and educational leadership approached their inquiry with several key assumptions in mind: “schools are learning organizations in which collaboration, thinking, and taking action occur” (Carrejo, Cortez, & Reinhartz, 2010, p. 1). Thus, a broader definition of cognition has shifted from the notion of individualized learning to group learning situated within a given social context, which has an impact on the self-efficacy of learners. Social learning and practice was grounded in the theoretical work of Schon (1983), who believed practitioners in organizations often reflect on a particular phenomenon, connect to prior experiences, and engage in inquiries which serve to generate new understandings, action, and change. This reflection-in-action facilitates the building of professional knowledge to support future behaviors and practices.

Wenger (1998) through his work as social anthropologist defined learning as integral to *communities of practice*, where learning becomes primary to an individual’s or group’s experiences, beliefs, and practices within a specific setting. In connection with the theoretical beliefs of Dewey (1919), where learning is social and interactive, these cultural experiences are part of a social learning construct deeply rooted in active participation, belonging, meaning-making, and identity. Bouchamma and Michaud (2010) working with educational leaders in New Brunswick, studied the evolution of meaning, practice, community, and identity through the system’s use of a community of practice model for the enhancement of their teacher evaluation program. As a result of their inquiry, school leaders who exchanged supervisory experiences and challenges as a team of practitioners, gained practical skills in supervision, strengthened collegiality, and acquired new knowledge and meaning from their work.

According to Cunningham, Schreiber, and Moss (2005), given the demands of a new information age, adults will need to demonstrate problem-solving, decision-making, reflection and collaborative skills in order to compete with the global society. School leaders will need to embrace and model the same skills sets they are guiding their teachers to expect of all learners. Thus, authentic learning experiences should be embraced by all members of a community, or as Fink and Resnick (2001) refer to these experiences as “nested.” The interest on social learning has challenged former beliefs about meaning-making, placing less emphasis on individual mental processes and more on collaborative practices occurring within cultural, social, and organizational contexts (Arnseth, 2008; Booker-Thomas & Dellman, 2006). This organizational model for learning and practice from within a community was tested by the Chrysler Company in 1988, when Japanese takeover appeared to be a certainty (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). In response, the company formed small groups representing various functioning departments where leaders of these units met informally to strengthen communication necessary for sustaining system-wide improvements.

In districts where walkthroughs are primarily non-evaluative, leaders’ reflections and collegial discourse prior to, during, and following classroom observations have become fundamental to the process and the meaning derived by leaders as a result (David, 2008; Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010). In a variety of district walkthrough models, leadership team members observe instruction, reflect on the information they collect, share and refine their individual interpretations, determine solutions to problems of practice, and develop new understandings of teaching and learning to support them in their administrative roles. Gerard, Bowyer, & Linn (2010) conducted a study of secondary school leaders working within a community of practice to inform the

integration of technology into a new science curriculum. Through critical discussions around technology and science, the use of problem-solving approaches, and an effort to leverage knowledge from within the group, school leaders were able to facilitate improvements around technology-infused science programming in their own schools as a result.

Non-evaluative walkthrough practices have similarly inspired interaction and professional learning opportunities among leadership team members that may not have otherwise existed within larger public school systems. In a study of primary schools, Hallinger and Heck (2010) cited a positive relationship between leaders' collaboration and student performance, noting "The inclusion of a broader range of leaders in the school improvement process also provides expanded avenues for reshaping school improvement capacity, or conditions in the school that directly impact teaching and learning" (p. 13). Even within school superintendent groups in Connecticut, professional learning has taken the form of critical conversations and collaborative action in order to advance teaching and learning. Using the framework that learning is social in nature, school superintendents, under the direction of the Connecticut Center for School Change, worked within a community of practice – "a professional group sustained in the pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Rallis, Tedder, Lachman, & Elmore, 2006). During the early stages, discussions among members of the superintendents' group were not tied to real practice. Under the guidance of Richard Elmore, superintendents were asked to visit classrooms together in order to support their work as a community of learners and to organize their thinking with some common goals in mind. The group selected a district as "host" and identified a specific problem of practice related to the district, often tied to pre-existing data around instructional issues or low student performance. As a result, superintendents

began visiting classrooms and were expected to compile observational notes, setting aside personal bias or judgment, for later use in a debriefing session. Through this process, superintendents reviewed emerging patterns from observational data related to instruction, and the host superintendent used the collective data for reflection and future action (Rallis et. al, 2006).

Similar networks, or communities of practice, have emerged in the literature as opportunities for school leader professional development. According to Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2007), both novice and experienced principals perceived professional networking and collaboration as beneficial to their role as instructional leaders. Leadership teams who collaborated as professionals were better able to develop values, beliefs, norms, and practices around teaching and learning leading to school improvement. A study by Kensler, Reames, Murray, and Patrick (2011), using a communities of practice lens to guide their inquiry, found leaders' development of observational data and interpretive skills, dialogue between and among school leaders, and effective systems thinking skills resulted in continuous school improvement. Additionally, engagement in classroom walkthroughs supported school reform by promoting leaders' sharing of experiences, knowledge, and problem-solving strategies as colleagues (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). The collaborative practices evident in classroom walkthroughs, including the processes of observation, critical discourse, reflection and problem-solving, have provided an opportunity for districts to foster an open and trusting culture and sustained student learning throughout their organizations (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Inquiry and Critical Discourse

In a study by Lauer (2006), leaders developed an inquiry-based orientation and employed the use of data to make school improvements within the context of their own settings. According to David (2007), the implementation of district walkthroughs sharpened leaders' situational awareness of instructional practices common in their buildings, which included teachers' integration of approved writing programs or whether teachers were consistently fostering creative and critical thinking skills in their students. Further citing studies conducted by the Rand Corporation, David (2007) noted school leaders who had engaged in walkthroughs and collected observation data from practices observed in classrooms often conveyed a deeper understanding of effective instruction to the staff members in their schools.

The walkthrough models being implemented in districts have encouraged the use of reflection and critical discourse in order to make sense of observational data collected during classroom visits. Highlighting the power of observation and reflection, Booker-Thomas and Delman (2009) noted important educational outcomes associated with classroom walkthroughs. Through an analysis of interviews, observations, and student learning artifacts, school administrators who shared personal insights, engaged in critical conversations with their colleagues, and developed action plans as a result reported a positive influence on the quality of daily instruction within the culture of their schools.

The implementation of critical conversations has remained an important link to inquiry, reflection, and school improvement. Interpretations of what "meaningful" conversations might look like in the context of school systems have been difficult to clarify. Kohler-Evans, Webster-Smith, and Albritton (2013) defined critical conversations leading to the improvement of education as "purposeful, valuable, and

filled with intention (p. 19). However, Rock (2006) suggested the need for improvements in language and communication as a powerful precursor to critical conversations around the nature of work and improvement. In the context of these definitions, the use of classroom walkthrough models and similar in-house professional development practices could provide the vehicle for deliberate conversations about teaching and learning among school leaders and other stakeholders. The power of language and the need to develop a common language have been cited as critical components of many classroom walkthrough models (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; David, 2008; Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010).

Despite the variance in walkthrough models across school districts, researchers have pointed to the need for leaders to inquire and reflect on what they see and hear during classroom visits in order to develop a common language for and deep understanding of effective teaching and learning (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2007; Reeves, 2008; Wagner et. al, 2006). As leadership teams discuss problems of practice evident in multiple classrooms, a more consistent image of effective practice is developed. Through the use of a culture-equity audit and analysis of classroom walkthrough data of a rural Kentucky district, Cleveland, Chambers, Mainus, Powell and Skepple (2011) revealed only 40% of teachers had used differentiated strategies to meet the needs of learners. Powell and Kusuma-Powell (2009) revealed a relationship between leadership effectiveness and walkthroughs, where inquiry, reflection, and critical discourse connected to classroom observations helped leaders build and sustain cultures more highly focused on instructional improvements.

Literature has supported a link between school leaders' collaborative efforts to use informal, or non-evaluative, classroom walkthroughs to improve their collective

understanding of effective instructional practices and in their capacity to make system-wide improvements in teaching and learning. A study by Goldhorn, Kearney, and Webb (2013) reviewed more than 10,000 classroom walkthroughs by school leaders in the State of Texas. Although these walkthroughs were not meant to evaluate teachers regarding their performance, evidence suggested an increased reliability in school leaders' ability to know good instruction when they viewed it. Using a simple inquiry to guide their investigation, researchers asked the question, "Do you see what I see?" Findings from the study indicated leaders were consistent in observations and interpretations of effective practices around student engagement and classroom management strategies. However, inconsistencies in school leaders' interpretation of rigor were documented with some administrators linking this to behavioral compliance.

However, inconsistencies in school leaders' interpretations of effective instruction have been linked to a general lack of understanding. Current research on organizational change in education has focused on the important of school leaders in using diagnostic and intervention strategies to identify areas of weakness and promoting the use of collaborative data practices by teachers and administrators to facilitate system-wide improvements (Cummings & Worley, 2009; Hall & Hord, 2010; Murphy & Meyers, 2009; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). A study by Kelcey (2013), using classroom observation of teachers as a means of data collection, uncovered teachers' deliberate instructional actions played a role in the achievement of their students in literacy. Collecting observational data has been recognized as an integral diagnostic component of classroom walkthrough models. A report by the U.S. Department of Education in 2009, found the ability of school leaders to model the use of data in meaningful ways and

promote collaborative data practices within their schools was a critical factor in supporting school improvement.

School leaders' uses of classroom observation has long been considered a tool for leaders to make sense of what they see, hear, and understand in order to develop appropriate actions and make necessary instructional changes within schools and across districts (Evans, 2007). According to Cosner (2012), school leaders who have used observational inquiry and data collection methods for the purpose of reviewing instruction must model these practices, coaching other administrators and staff to develop a "schema" (p. 31) of effectiveness factors in order to discern what is or is not important.

Professional Development and Self-Efficacy

Implemented in a variety of forms and across a landscape of diverse school districts, the use of non-evaluative walkthrough models have become an opportunity for leaders to make inquiries into teaching and learning, work with colleagues, and share their understandings as practitioners (Garza, 2010; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010; Protheroe, 2009; Wilson & Cook, 2009). While literature has been devoted to leaders' use of classroom observations for improving instruction and teacher performance (City et. al, 2009; David, 2008; Marshall, 2009), fewer empirical studies have focused on leaders' perceptions of classroom walkthroughs as practices capable of enhancing their own professional development and self-efficacy.

The lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of walkthroughs in developing leadership capacity is problematic, even more troubling given the abundance of literature regarding leadership as integral to the change process and in the development of positive learning environments in which student learning needs to occur (Cameron, McIver, &

Goddard, 2008; Sparks, 2007; Zimmerman, 2011). Barth (2001) cited professional development opportunities for principals and school leaders as having become a virtual wasteland. Job-embedded, professional development practices, particularly non-evaluative classroom walkthrough models, have gained momentum as districts respond to the need to develop leadership capacity and facilitate change from within the organization in order to support student learning and achievement (Reeves, 2008). Horng and Loeb (2010) offered a dissenting opinion on these types of practices, pointing out the lack of time, expertise, and resources necessary for school leaders to conduct classroom visits, monitor instructional practices, and offer valuable support to teachers.

However, Lemons and Helsing (2009) provided a compelling argument for the use of walkthroughs as learning tools for public school administrators. School leaders who developed a purposeful, structured walkthrough model reported greater leadership competence and promising growth in overall student performance results. A review of the data confirmed the value of walkthroughs in making meaningful school improvement decisions. Abrutyn (2006) articulated the outcomes associated with his district's use of a classroom walkthrough initiative in Pennsylvania. As a result of their administrative walkthroughs, performance data was more appropriately used to inform decisions and leaders felt a greater sense of ownership of the learning process taking place in their schools. This correlation between walkthroughs and leadership efficacy was further noted by Bloom (2007), whose data analysis of walkthroughs models revealed school leaders generally reported higher expectations for their teaching staff and pursued goals aligned with the use of data in order to improve student performance.

The new call for leaders to reflect on their own capacity for instructional supervision is cited in the literature around walkthrough practices. McEwan-Adkins

(2011) discussed the importance for school leaders to assess the depth of their understanding of literacy in order to build proficiency for enhancing literacy instruction in their teaching staff. Evans (2007) focused on the mental models, or belief systems, held by school leaders who had engaged in system-wide classroom walkthroughs. As a result, leaders' professional beliefs about quality instructional practices contributed to leadership capacity-building and systemic change.

While student performance has been cited as an important indicator of school success by policymakers, leaders' perceptions and professional practices continue to be prominent contributors to individual, team, and organizational quality (Paglis & Green, 2002; Zaccaro & Nelson, 2008). McCollum and Kajs (2009) concluded that school organizations emphasizing a goal-mastery orientation were directly linked to school leaders' self-efficacy which, in turn, had a relationship to their overall performance and success. Further addressing a correlation between walkthroughs and leaders' feelings toward the process, Babb (2008) revealed higher levels of self-efficacy for leaders who reported district support and training than those leaders who were given little professional development or time allotted for the process.

Summary

Given national attention on school reform and the responsibility of school leaders to impact positive changes in the buildings and districts they serve, leadership preparation and ongoing professional development has become more critical (Fullan, 2011; Reeves, 2009). Changes in Connecticut's System of Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) plan regarding the supervision and evaluation of teachers have also increased the demands placed on educational leaders. Unfortunately, research on college and university leadership preparation has found many programs to be inadequate in providing

the skills and professional development necessary for leadership support given the complexity and challenges associated with their responsibilities (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Hess & Kelly, 2007).

Current educational literature supports the need for school districts to utilize in-house, professional development practices to foster a common set of beliefs, vision for, and depth of understanding around teaching and learning (Bottoms & Fry, 2011; Fullan, 2011; Reeves, 2008; Wagner et. al, 2006). Harris and Spillane (2008) described the concept of leadership with respect to the professional practices leaders embrace and called attention to the intricate patterns of collaboration, mutual influence, and agency as natural forces underlying school leaders' work. Further, the beliefs and experiences of group members in a given system or organization working and learning within a community of practice have shown a relationship to their sense of identity, learning, and productivity (Wenger, 1998). Within this context, school leaders' perspectives on the use of non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs may provide insights into these practices as integral to capacity-building and school improvement (DuFour et. al, 2006; Fullan, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006; Reeves, 2008; Wagner et. al, 2006).

Much of the data related to classroom walkthroughs has been largely anecdotal and focused on the evaluation of teaching or instructional programming. However, Danielson (2012) posited the critical importance of ongoing classroom observations in order to achieve a positive culture focused on quality teaching and learning. The use of mini-observations as touted by Marshall (2008) called for leaders to observe teachers with greater frequency, which would provide school leaders with greater acuity in recognizing effective (and ineffective) instructional practices. City, Elmore, Fiarman, and

Teitel (2009) using the medical rounds model as a metaphoric framework, promoted the use of instructional rounds, a non-evaluative walkthrough practice to support school leaders' professional learning and growth. Other walkthrough models have been developed to provide leaders with greater "situational" awareness and to enhance their understanding of instructional effectiveness, including the *Three-minute Walkthrough*, *Management by Walking Around*, and the *Learning Walk* (Downey et al, 2004; Frase & Hetzel, 1990; Marshall, 2008).

Despite a range of models and varying purposes for their application, classroom walkthroughs have continued to be implemented in school systems to support professional development and the supervision of teaching and learning. However, exploring non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs could provide new insights into these inquiry-based approaches and the manner in which these practices influence school leaders' professional relationships, learning, agency, and self-efficacy as members of the communities to which they belong (Holland & Lave, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2002). Thus, school leaders' perceptions regarding the integrity of the classroom walkthrough model implemented in their district – its purpose, structure, and usefulness – may offer a better understanding of leaders' ability to collaborate, develop a sense of belonging, construct knowledge, and strengthen their effectiveness as instructional leaders within the system they serve.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this single-case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding their use of a district walkthrough model and the influence this practice had on their ability to develop a common understanding of teaching and learning, construct new meaning from their experiences, and enhance their identity, agency, and self-reported efficacy as leaders. A qualitative study and flexible design supported the dynamic interrelationship between this inquiry's purpose, research questions, and methods (Maxwell, 2005). The following research questions provided a sound framework for this qualitative inquiry:

1. What influence, if any, do walkthroughs have on supporting leaders' shared understandings of teaching and learning evident in their school community?
2. How might the collaborative practice of walkthroughs shape individual and collective identity and agency among school leaders?
3. What are leaders' perceptions of walkthroughs as a vehicle for their own learning and professional growth?
4. In what way might walkthroughs influence leaders' self-efficacy?

Using a single-case study, meaning was constructed from the perspectives of the leadership team as they worked collaboratively to observe classroom instruction, make sense of their experiences, and use their collective knowledge to support them in their roles as administrators. An inductive approach allowed for themes and patterns related to leaders' engagement in a walkthrough model to emerge from within the context it was experienced.

Research Methods and Design

The study utilized a qualitative method. Cozby (2009) emphasized a focus on data through images and text, rather than numbers, as a distinguishing aspect of qualitative research. Through an exploration of a district leadership team's walkthrough protocol, reliance on thick descriptions resulting from the triangulation of data sources (e.g., interviews, observation and field notes, document analysis) uncovered multiple meanings and allowed for readers to develop personal "truths" or generalizations about the walkthrough phenomenon. Hence, a qualitative inquiry was an ideal method for a study of this nature (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009).

A single-case study provided for an authentic connection to the school leadership team engaged in the walkthroughs and ensured these participants were given an opportunity to reveal their individual stories (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Yin (2009) called for the case study to be used within a contemporary framework and within a real-world setting. While individual leaders in the system have used both formal and informal classroom observations for the purpose of teacher evaluation, the intent of the walkthrough model was to allow leaders to work collaboratively to enhance observational skills, reflect on common instructional practices taking place, and deepen their shared understanding of instruction in order to promote system-wide school improvement (Regional School District A, personal communication).

As part of this district's walkthrough protocol, school leaders were expected to work as a collaborative team by visiting classrooms and interpreting the consistency and quality of instructional practices. Moreover, the purpose of their collective work was to learn, reflect, and develop capacity as instructional supervisors within the context of the school community. Exploring participants' experiences and their perceptions regarding

the walkthrough model aligned well with the research purpose and problem statement. Golafshani (2003) encouraged the use of multiple methods for collecting data in order to achieve “multiple and diverse realities” (p. 604). Observing participants immersed in the process, keeping field notes, reviewing documents, and interviewing leaders enriched this researcher’s findings and added credibility to the process. Information obtained from these data points was matched up in an effort to discover and draw meaning from patterns to reveal a detailed story about walkthroughs and the perceived personal, social, and professional influence this had on participants.

Steps in the research design process involved acquiring an initial approval from the Superintendent in Regional School District A for a case study to be conducted in the district. After approval was received by the Superintendent, the letters of consent were sent to a purposive sample of 12 school leaders in the district to invite their participation, semi-structured interviews for all participants were scheduled and conducted, and observations of the walkthrough process were recorded by this researcher through field notes in both October and February. Given the timing of the study and the scheduling of classroom walkthroughs for school leaders in the district, these two observations represented the only viable option for this researcher. A review of participants’ post-observation documents, which included their personal and professional reflections following each walkthrough and what they learned in the process, completed the triangulation of data sources for this qualitative study. Table 1 further delineates the steps in the research process.

Table 1: *Research Process*

Steps in the Research Process	
1.	Superintendent approval of the single-case study involving members of the district leadership team was obtained prior to data collection.
2.	Researcher selected 12 members of the team based on diverse experiences, years of service, and varying leadership responsibilities in the school community.
3.	Letter was sent outlining the study along with consent forms to be signed by all participants.
4.	Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with each of the administrator-participants. Questions reflected open and fluid conversations, while ensuring some structure to align with the theoretical framework of social practice theory, specifically embodied in Communities of Practice (CoP).
5.	Researcher field notes and audio recordings of each session were transcribed following each interview session.
6.	Data was coded based on words, phrases, and “clusters” of text. Analysis was based on patterns and themes that emerged related to leaders’ perceptions of walkthroughs as a practice and a potential influence on their learning and professional development.
7.	Data will be coded both on emerging themes but also relevant to the theoretical framework of social practice theory. The use of Nvivo qualitative software supported the data collection and analysis.
8.	Use of an educator not associated with the district or participants was used as a peer reviewer to field test interview questions and review the study for bias and subjectivity.

Population

Participants involved in the study included district leaders, consisting of principals, assistant principals, regional directors and assistant directors, and department-level chairpersons (high school only) who were all members of the same Connecticut regional public school district and administrative bargaining unit. The unit of analysis for this study was a suburban Connecticut regional school district, which included four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school serving approximately 4,000 students from two adjacent towns. According to the State of Connecticut, the

district is part of a B DRG (District Reference Group), whose membership is defined by school districts socioeconomically similar to one another based on median household income, education level of parents, and percentage of parents who speak English (CSDE, 2013).

Sample

This inquiry utilized a purposive sample of school leaders who serve as building or district-level administrators with leadership roles and responsibilities, including the formal supervision and evaluation of staff. The sample group was selected from a larger pool of 21 members from the administrative team, and included 12 school leaders who shared similar responsibilities as school leaders but diverse supervisory roles across the district. Leaders selected for the sample included building principals at the elementary, middle and high school levels, regional supervisors of student support services, high school level academic chairpersons, regional directors of fine arts and athletics, and building-level assistant principals at the middle and high school levels.

The school leaders in the sample were intentionally selected to include a balance of genders, levels of experience, and roles and responsibilities. Participants included 6 males and 6 females. Since there are 21 leaders across the district, the sample size was 57%, which included 25% principals, 25% assistant principals, 25% academic chairs, and 25% directors. Participants in the study shared some characteristics, namely in their roles and responsibilities as school leaders and as members of the same bargaining unit (union) of administrators. School leaders described their responsibilities for ensuring the quality of programs and practices, and these were normally measured by in-house performance data, state-wide standardized test scores, student and teacher surveys, as well as anecdotal or observational information obtained by teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders.

The purposive sample was appropriate for this single-case study, which sought to yield data closely connected to school leaders' unique perceptions of the walkthrough practice, and allowed for thick, robust descriptions to emerge from the participants to increase validity. Guest, Bunce & Johnson (2006) recommended a sample size of 12 for case studies in order to achieve appropriate data saturation. Of the 12 study participants, two principals were selected from the elementary level, one from the middle school level, one director from the central office/district level, three from the high school department chair level, three assistant principals (middle and high school levels since none exist at the elementary level), and two regional directors from the fine arts and PE/athletics areas.

According to Onwuegbuzie and Collins (2007), the preferred sample size in any qualitative research should be driven by the study's primary purpose and research questions. A balanced selection process was necessary as some members of the leadership team were relatively new to their roles and to the district, both at the elementary and secondary levels. Thus, the 12 school leaders represented in this study cited varying levels of experience in the field of education and were responsible for different facets of the organization from department to building to district-level leadership roles.

Prior to the interview portion of the research, all 12 participants completed an on-line demographic survey using Survey Monkey prior to the collection of data from interviews, field notes, or participants' post-observation documents. While more frequently used in mixed methods approaches in research, Survey Monkey was an appropriate tool in collecting demographic data and initial baseline information about the participants' backgrounds, years of experience, and self-reported level of understanding

regarding the district's current walkthrough practice. Table 2 identifies participants' gender and education.

Table 2: *Participants by Gender and Level of Education*

<i>Gender</i>	<i># Participants</i>	<i>% Participants</i>
Male	6	50.0
Female	6	50.0
Total	12	100.0 %
<i>Degrees Held</i>		
Master's + 30	10	83.3
Doctorate	2	16.7
Totals	12	100.0 %

Participants involved in the study included school leaders in administrative roles from across one Connecticut school district, identified as Regional School District A. Based on the demographic survey, school leaders involved in the study also indicated their previous experience with classroom walkthroughs. Table 3 illustrates the distribution of leadership responsibilities at each level (e.g., high school, middle school, elementary school, and regional/K-12), years of experience, and the number of non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs study participants reported they participated over the last two years as members of the district. Participants were identified by letters for ease of distinction and to provide anonymity.

Table 3: *Participants' Level of Responsibility, Years of Experience, and Number of Walkthroughs*

Participants	Level of Responsibility	Years of Experience	Number of Walkthroughs
Participant A	High School	20+	8
Participant B	High School	20+	5
Participant C	High School	10+	8
Participant D	High School	10+	6
Participant E	High School	10+	5
Participant F	Middle School	30+	8
Participant G	Middle School	20+	2
Participant H	Elementary School	10+	3
Participant I	Elementary School	10+	3
Participant J	Regional/K-12	30+	5
Participant K	Regional/K-12	20+	3
Participant L	Regional/K-12	30+	8

Information from the demographic survey provided an initial baseline regarding participants' level of responsibilities, years of experience, and the number of reported non-evaluative walkthroughs they had participated in over the last two years.

Materials/Instrument

The materials for this study included the use of an iPad to take notes during interviews and field observations, as well as the use of a digital recorder to capture the entirety of each interview session. Letters were sent to selected district leaders describing the research project and soliciting their willingness to participate in the process (see Appendix A). A self-developed set of semi-structured and open ended questions were used during the interview process (see Appendix B).

A field test of the semi-structured interview questions sought to determine whether any inherent flaws, bias, or other limitations exist within the interview protocol in order to check validity. Questions were given to a school leader outside of the district

who had participated in non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs in a neighboring district in the past, but who was neither a participant in the case study nor affiliated in any way with the study participants. The critical review of interview questions allowed appropriate revisions to be made before implementation of the actual study (Kvale, 2007). As a result of this field test, two questions (Questions 11 and 13) were modified to provide better clarity and mitigate subjectivity or “leading” on the part of the researcher.

Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

While this researcher examined one model of a classroom walkthrough protocol, the extensive interviewing of participants, field observations, and analysis of participant post-observation reflection documents facilitated the emergence of experiences, ideas, and beliefs related to classroom walkthrough model and the perceived influence this practice may have had on participants’ professional development and capacity as leaders. Depicted by Trochim and Donnelly (2008), the use of an inductive reasoning process (Figure 1) allowed for ongoing interpretations and conceptual understanding of non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs and the potential impact this practice had on leaders’ collective knowledge, identity, agency, and self-efficacy. Conversely, as appropriate in qualitative studies, this inquiry began deductively, fitting in the theoretical framework of social practice theory to examine data around the leadership team’s perceptions of a classroom walkthrough model (Patton, 2002). Subsequent inductive analysis relied on observations of the walkthrough phenomenon and an exploration of patterns and trends found in the data, which led to the emergence of research findings. As Creswell (2009) described, researchers often move between the data and emerging themes and “build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up” (p. 175).

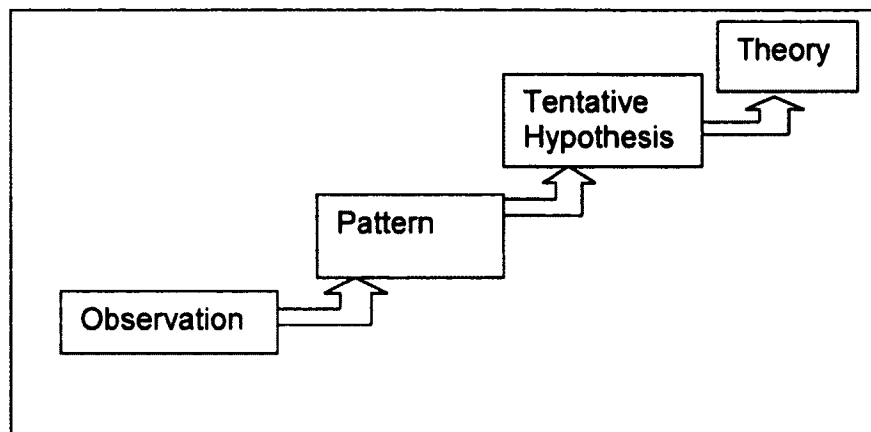


Figure 1: *A Schematic Representation of Inductive Reasoning*
Adopted from the work of Trochim and Donnelly (2008)

Since reality is conceptual and subject to participants' view of the world, triangulation using multiple sources of data provided a reliable framework for exploring this phenomenon (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). Collection of data included the conducting of open-ended interviews, observations of participants during two classroom walkthroughs, and the review of participants' self-reflection documents. Interview questions were structured around the research questions but remained open-ended in nature to solicit authentic responses.

A digital recording for each semi-structured interview was conducted, and the recordings were transcribed by the researcher with using verbatim transcription (Kings & Horrocks, 2010). Following each interview, this researcher conducted a preliminary analysis by hand of the data to begin to code the information and to identify common and divergent themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Transcriptions from interviews were then entered into Nvivo, a qualitative database system in order to increase the reliability of the case study (Yin, 2009). Cross-validation and data triangulation was achieved through the

gathering of data from multiple sources, which included semi-structured interviews, field observations, and participants' post-observation reflection documents (Yin, 2009).

The semi-structured interviews sought to obtain information regarding participants' perceptions around ideas and themes related to the research questions, particularly around the classroom walkthrough model used in the district. The following were sample questions used during the interview portions of the study:

1. What influence, if at all, have walkthroughs had on your understanding of teaching and learning across the district.
2. Describe the walkthrough practice, including any steps or practices associated with the process.
3. In what way do you believe walkthroughs might facilitate the critical discourse that occurs amongst members of the district leadership team?
4. How, if at all, has the walkthrough model contributed to your self-efficacy as a leader?

The interviews provided for in-depth descriptions of the participants' experiences, while observations of leaders' interactions during classroom walkthroughs over a two-month timeframe, field notes, and document review were equally essential in seeking confirmability and dependability. Contemporary research on the value of interviewing in qualitative studies points specifically to the act of interviewing as a social process, emphasizing the construction of meaning gleaned from interviews as influential to the deliberate decisions made during the investigation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Although there were many theories related to the structure of interviewing, adhering to a specific framework both guided and supported the epistemological considerations related to this qualitative inquiry.

The craft and the process for applying open-ended interviewing in qualitative studies have been identified in a variety of literature related to research design and methods (Patton, 2002), involving different kinds of “researcher preparation, understanding or conceptualization, and instrumentation” (p. 342). Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) extended the concept of interviewing as “intersubjective and social,” and formalized a 7-stage framework for engaging in interviewing and constructing meaning about a particular phenomenon. Their 7 stages of an interview protocol included thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting (p. 19). Within the context of this case study on classroom walkthroughs, the semi-structured interviews uncovered the personal and professional experiences and perspectives of 12 school leaders. The interviews sought to explore themes associated with classroom walkthroughs, describe leaders’ perspectives related to their engagement in walkthroughs, and validate and report the ultimate assumptions drawn from the experiences of the participants as members of a community of practice.

Reviewing documents related to the process, as well as post-observation reflections recorded by members of the leadership team, served as another rich layer of data for analysis. Within this study, the coding of data and interpretation of the information from multiple sources was critical to unpacking the underlying features of the research problem. According to Baxter and Jack (2008) case studies encourage both the pulling apart and reconstruction of the phenomenon under investigation. This researcher intended to construct meaning from the participants’ experiences and insights as they existed within the cultural, political, and social context of the district leadership team. This required the ability to listen actively, highlight key words and concepts from

interviews and documents, and consider themes and concepts as they emerged naturally throughout the study process.

The analysis of data involved reviewing individual responses the participants' interviews, reviewing notes from field observations, examining participants' post-observation reflection documents, and reading through and making sense of the data, tone, and meaning attached to the participants' words (Creswell, 2009). Being able to code the data involved a thoughtful selection of prevalent topics or themes, categorizing these themes through a "clustering" approach, assembling information to fit each category, and when necessary, reducing the number of categories. High frequency words and word patterns supported the emergence of broader categories and themes. While some of the analysis was accomplished by hand as a preliminary step, the use of Nvivo 9 qualitative software ultimately supported this researcher in organizing and classifying data, making reliable connections to emerging themes and concepts, and using a systematized method for reporting the results.

Assumptions

The underlying assumptions in this study reflected research on collaboration, discourse, reflection, and professional learning as the purposes for and potential influence of a non-evaluative classroom walkthrough model. It was assumed that school leaders in this study would respond honestly, openly, and without fear of reprisal for participation. Given this research had no connection to leaders' evaluations, nor would specific comments be shared with central office leaders, this was a reasonable assumption to make.

The opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of a district walkthrough model through the authentic experiences and perceptions of 12 leaders engaged in the

practice was the primary rationale for using a single-case study design. Assumptions were made regarding the study design: 1) single-case study would allow this researcher to solicit rich and robust data from the authentic perceptions of school leaders immersed in the process, 2) the triangulation of data from semi-structured interviews, field observations, and participant post-observation documents would add validity to the study, 3) Participants would respond openly and honestly about their perceptions regarding classroom walkthroughs, and 4) Social Practice Theory, embodied in communities of practice, would provide a unique lens in which to view the classroom walkthrough model as a practice for school leaders to leverage knowledge, meaning, and professional development. This researcher also assumed patterns from across all data sources would emerge naturally through a primarily inductive process, allowing for the development of broader conceptual themes related to the four research questions to inform this qualitative study.

Limitations

Limitations involved a lack of predictability and generalizability, as this case study was not quantitative in nature. Since the researcher and participants involved in the study were employed in the same district and worked as part of the leadership team, the potential threats to validity were considered. However, steps were taken to mitigate these issues, including the use of a peer reviewer to field test interview questions and audit the study to check for potential bias and subjectivity. Providing participants with information on the study prior to and during the investigation ensured transparency and elevated the credibility of the process as well.

As an integral facet of this case study, trust and credibility was further achieved through extended and ongoing connections with the participants. Although this

researcher is a member of the leadership team, steps were implemented throughout the process to limit personal and professional bias and conflict of interest. Since the walkthrough model in place in this district did not reflect any form of evaluation (either for teachers or amongst leaders), establishing neutrality during this study was feasible. Acting as neutral observer of the process, utilizing an outside peer reviewer, and acting as neutral observer rather than a participant during walkthroughs helped to mitigate these issues.

Delimitations

While some limitations existed, the study of a unique phenomenon in a single setting solicited the emergence of rich and robust descriptions regarding the walkthrough practice from the perspective of members of the district leadership team. The specific choice to narrow the scope of the research was equally integral to the case study design. The decision not to include teachers' perspectives regarding classroom walkthroughs enabled participant descriptions to remain closely linked to the potential contributions walkthroughs could make on the development of leaders' knowledge and understanding, and on their evolving identity, agency, and self-efficacy as members of their leadership team. Focusing on one leadership team in a regional school district allowed for an in-depth exploration of the walkthrough model and the implications of this model for school leaders' professional development and capacity.

Equally important was the decision not to include the district's central office leaders as participants in this study. Central office leaders, who include the Superintendent of Schools, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, the Director of Technology, and the Director of Operations, were not asked to participate in this study even though they had been engaged in classroom walkthroughs with other school leaders

in the past. Similar to the teachers, central office leaders have never been a part of the school leaders' bargaining unit and have had more direct supervisory roles in the hiring, evaluation, and discipline of school leaders across the district. Their perspectives, although valuable, would have changed the scope and intent of this inquiry.

Ethical Assurances

In applying a social constructivist worldview to my research, it is natural for both investigator and readers alike to build meaning from their individual experiences with the world (Creswell, 2009). While case studies of this nature are not meant to provide generalizations to other populations, qualitative researchers must demonstrate rigor and credibility to assure readers' trust in the study and its findings. Moreover, employing strategies to increase both confirmability and dependability required the use of a peer reviewer, which included field testing interview questions. In this study, clear and reliable documentation captured relevant concepts from both anecdotal and observational data. At the conclusion of the study, a data audit was conducted by an outside peer in order to review the data collection process and mitigate the potential for researcher bias (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

As a member of the leadership team in the district, it was critical to employ steps in order to ensure objectivity. Although some subjectivity is acceptable in a study of this nature, this researcher acted as neutral observer of the walkthrough process rather than active participant. This required setting aside personal assumptions and pre-conceived notions regarding the walkthrough phenomenon, refining observation and listening skills, and keeping detailed notes from field observations and interviews. Follow-up interviews were organized in order for participants to check the accuracy of the information obtained

throughout the study. Further, the integration of a peer reviewer helped to mitigate bias or unnecessary subjectivity arising unconsciously within the researcher's study.

As part of this inquiry, ethical concerns were also considered. This case study focused on district leaders in their current work environment, and it was important to recognize the general principles relating to the rights of the participants (Cozby, 2009). Although the study of typical educational practices does not naturally pose outward risks or threats, this study remained transparent in nature and afforded participants the opportunity for debriefing. Assurances were made to all research subjects that no consequence would be imposed for lack of participation. The disclosure of information about the nature of the study and reporting of the results to participants ultimately elevated the credibility of the research.

As part of this case study, assurances were made so that all participants were protected from harm. Research guidelines established by the Protections Office for Human Research (OHRP) of the United States government were followed, and this study adhered to the ethical practices, procedures, standards and mandates related to the IRB outlined in the Dissertation Center guide. Throughout the research process, all participants were given details describing informed consent procedures, provided explanations of their rights to privacy, and given assurances of confidentiality.

Prior to the interviews, field observations and note-taking, all participants were given letters of consent regarding their participation and time to ask clarifying questions regarding the process. Additionally, participants in the study were promised the right to privacy and informed of the steps this researcher would take in handling the data and compiling the results in order to ensure this process was accomplished with integrity. In

adherence to research guidelines, no data collection procedures took place prior to seeking and obtaining Northcentral University Institutional Review Board approval.

Summary

The use of a walkthrough model in this Connecticut school district has been at the forefront of the leadership team's work as a tool for professional collaboration, learning, and in their self-efficacy. While other methodologies might have proven useful for this qualitative inquiry, the single-case study design was thoughtfully aligned with the research purpose, problem statement, and questions. In order to gain a richer understanding of a walkthrough model as implemented by a team of school leaders, this researcher made a conscious decision to explore this model in one educational setting. Yin (2009) pointed out, "The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions" (p. 20). This single-case study allowed for a deliberate focus on the experiences and perceptions of school leaders collegially connected as practitioners invested in a classroom walkthrough model for the purpose of gaining a shared understanding of teaching and learning, developing identity and agency as members of their leadership community, and experiencing a growing efficacy in executing their responsibilities.

The unique perspectives of school leaders in this district provided valuable insights about their ability to learn from one another and make an impact on instructional practices taking place in their respective schools. Leaders in this Connecticut district collaboratively invested time, effort, and resources in classroom walkthroughs for their own professional development. Therefore, this study provided an authentic window into the walkthrough model as a social practice contributing to leaders' knowledge, professional development, and self-efficacy as members of their community. Further,

this case study added to the body of literature around non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs as a potential venue for building leaders' knowledge and capacity.

Chapter 4: Findings

Trochim and Donnelly (2008) noted the positive nature of qualitative research exists in the authentic narratives that emerge through investigation, offering the researcher an opportunity to derive meaning from the phenomenon under study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding their use of a non-evaluative classroom walkthrough model and the influence this practice had on their ability to develop a common understanding of teaching and learning, construct new meaning from their experiences, and enhance their identity, agency, and self-efficacy as leaders. A single-case study design allowed for an intensive, authentic review of school leaders' observational experiences, shared understandings, and perceptions related to their district's classroom walkthrough model.

After approval for the study was granted by the Superintendent of Schools, a letter was sent to 12 school leaders in the district as part of a purposive sample, informing them of the study and inviting their participation. Data collection and analysis began in August of 2012 and continued through February of 2013. This marked the onset of a new school calendar year for the district and the period in which school leaders would engage in non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs as part of a newer district practice, which had been implemented within the last two school years. A half-day of classroom walkthroughs, approximately 4 hours in length, took place in two schools in the district (elementary and middle) in October 2012 and February 2013.

This chapter includes a brief discussion of the analysis of data that led to this study's findings, a description of findings, evaluation of the findings, and a summary.

Results

Results from this single-case study have been organized around four research questions. Research questions for this study were developed in response to the study's purpose and theoretical framework. Questions guided the analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews, researcher observation and field notes, as well as participants' post-observation reflections. The following represent the study's research questions:

1. What influence, if any, do walkthroughs have on supporting leaders' shared understandings of teaching and learning evident in their school community?
2. How might the collaborative practice of walkthroughs shape individual and collective identity and agency among school leaders?
3. What are leaders' perceptions of walkthroughs as a vehicle for their own learning and professional growth?
4. In what way might walkthroughs influence leaders' self-efficacy?

Semi-structured interviews. Data analysis began with a review of the transcripts from 12 semi-structured interviews. Each of the transcripts were reviewed, line by line, in order to obtain an initial, holistic impression of the data and allowed this researcher to identify any emerging word patterns and themes connected to the research questions. Study participants were assigned letters for identification, which allowed for cross-referencing and to ensure participants' anonymity. The coding of data was inductive in nature, beginning with the coding of words, general ideas, and statements from participants related directly to the study's purpose, research questions, and theoretical framework. This process was used as an analytic strategy to uncover broader themes.

Researcher Observation and Field Notes. Data analysis and coding occurred for the transcribed notes from two field observations during October and February. As a neutral observer, this researcher did not have an interactive role in the classroom walkthrough process but was given permission by the Superintendent and study participants to be a “silent” observer of the walkthrough practice experienced by the district leadership team. Field notes were completed during classroom walkthroughs on two separate dates, and these included in-depth observations of the interactions and discussions among study participants and their colleagues. As part of the process, this researcher reviewed and coded participant comments, questions, and professional discourse observed and heard during classroom walkthroughs in October at the site of one of the district’s elementary schools, and in February, at the site of one of the district’s middle schools. High frequency words and word patterns emerged across both interview and field note transcriptions, enabling this researcher to cross-reference ideas within their given contexts and construct broader themes related to the study’s purpose and research questions.

Participant Reflection Documents. Analysis of participants’ post-observation documents was a critical element of this study’s triangulation. Documents included notes and self-reflections completed by participants as part of their classroom walkthrough experience. Information from these documents provided another rich layer of data related to participants’ individual perceptions of the district’s existing classroom walkthrough model and the meaning they derived as leaders engaged in the practice.

The data from across interview transcripts, field notes, and participant documents was analyzed and coded in relation to the four research questions. High frequency words were initially cross-referenced to determine the consistency of usage among study

participants and to explore the context in which ideas, insights, and perceptions were cited. Figure 2 below illustrates the high frequency words that emerged during analysis of data from across all sources and their relationship.

Observation	Collective Responsibility	Community
• process • common language • discourse	• opportunity for learning • competence • shared understanding	• collaboration • belonging

Figure 2: High Frequency Words

Data analysis was ongoing throughout this study, and the following words emerged as significant among study participants and across all sources: *observation*, *process*, *discourse*, *collective responsibility*, *opportunity for learning*, *competence*, *shared understanding*, *community*, *common language*, *collaboration*, and *belonging*. Further analysis uncovered three concepts as most frequently cited by all participants, and these formed the conceptual categories under which other high frequency words and word patterns were embedded and linked: *Observation* (148 references), *collective responsibility* (142) and *community* (139). Through the analysis of interview data, specifically in response to Interview questions 3-5, which focused on the classroom walkthrough process, steps, and general understanding of the purpose, the term *observation* was used by all participants to describe the primary purpose of the model, and participants agreed the walkthroughs provided the vehicle to collect observational

data related to district-wide instructional practices. Based on interview data, participants were consistent in outlining steps in the district walkthrough process: 1) Selecting a problem of practice, 2) Reviewing literature and research on the problem of practice, 3) Selecting a “host” school to conduct walkthroughs, 4) Conducting classroom observations across a variety of grade levels and content areas, and 5) Participating in a debriefing session.

Findings from across all data sources demonstrated participants’ consistent use of the term *collective responsibility*, which centered on their efforts as a leadership team to develop a shared understanding of teaching and learning as a means of supporting them in their roles as instructional leaders and to guide them in making meaningful school improvements. Similarly, participants considered their non-evaluative classroom walkthrough experiences as *opportunities for learning* and as influential of their own level of *competence*, or self-efficacy, in executing their responsibilities as members of the school community. The term *community* was repeatedly referenced by participants to describe their collective beliefs and practices and in their sense of belonging, commitment, and agency as members of their district’s leadership team.

The high frequency words and word patterns across data sources prompted the development of relevant themes in relation to the study’s research questions and theoretical framework of social practice theory. Further review of high-frequency words and cross-referencing these patterns across data sources led to the identification and development of six broad themes:

- Common language for describing teaching and learning
- Understanding of effective instructional practices
- Collaboration and community

- Collective responsibility and agency
- Opportunities for learning and practice
- Professional competence

These themes provided salient points for a rich discussion of the research findings and provided an appropriate and reliable context for reporting the results of this study in relation to each of the study questions.

Research Question 1: *What influence, if any, do walkthroughs have on supporting leaders' shared understanding of teaching and learning evident in their school community?* A central theme regarding participants' ability to describe teaching and learning emerged in response to Research Question 1. Through ongoing classroom observations and professional discourse among school leaders, a central component of this district's walkthrough process, participants perceived the classroom walkthrough model had adequately facilitated their use of a *common language* for identifying and describing teaching and learning practices in classrooms. Ten participants (83%) reported the walkthrough practice had addressed the development of a common language among members of their leadership team to describe instruction observed in classrooms across the district. A review of responses gathered from semi-structured interviews, field observations, and post-observation documents revealed participants' both generated and echoed specific educational terms when addressing what they perceived to be instructional practices taking place in classrooms across the district. Common responses from study participants across data sources included "meeting learner needs," "scientific research-based instruction," "differentiation," "formative assessment," "rigor and relevance," "student meaning-making," "language and literacy development," and "intellectual engagement." According to all participants, the use of a common language

was perceived to be the foundation for communication and integral to their leadership team's ability to identify attributes closely aligned with effective teaching and learning.

Data from interview transcripts revealed the identification of problems of practice, classroom observations, and debriefing sessions with colleagues played a role in strengthening the development of a common language among members of the school leadership team. Statements from a majority of participants confirmed this belief: "We have a stronger language, more crayons in our box when talking to teachers to help them improve," "walkthroughs are effective in creating that kind of collaborative community – around others who are speaking the same language, talking about same things, doing meaningful work as a group of people," "we're building a common vocabulary and a common focus," "I think common language builds a culture because language is culture," and "our walkthroughs have pushed us to look at instruction under many lenses but to agree upon the common lens to use."

Similarly, analysis of researcher field notes from the October and February walkthroughs reflected participants' consistent use of language to define and describe aspects of classroom instruction across all grade levels and content areas. As part of the walkthrough process, participants focused on problems of practice identified by the host principals at each of the school sites, read articles to gain a deeper understanding of the problems, gathered observational data, and met with their colleagues to debrief about their classroom experiences. School leaders involved in the study used common terms during their group discussions, and a majority of participants built on their colleagues' descriptions of terms. Participant I noted, "Take the idea of engagement; we all know now it is more than children just raising their hands and participating. Achieving engagement means working from an intellectually stimulating level." Participant G

contributed to the definition of student engagement as “active listening,” while Participant J included the need for teachers to “relinquish control to students.” Participant K referred to the “intellectual challenges student encounter” as a result of appropriately designed activities, and Participant E extended the definition of challenge by adding “the use of rigorous and relevant activities.” Figure 3 below displays participants’ use of a common vocabulary to reference instructional practices within their district.

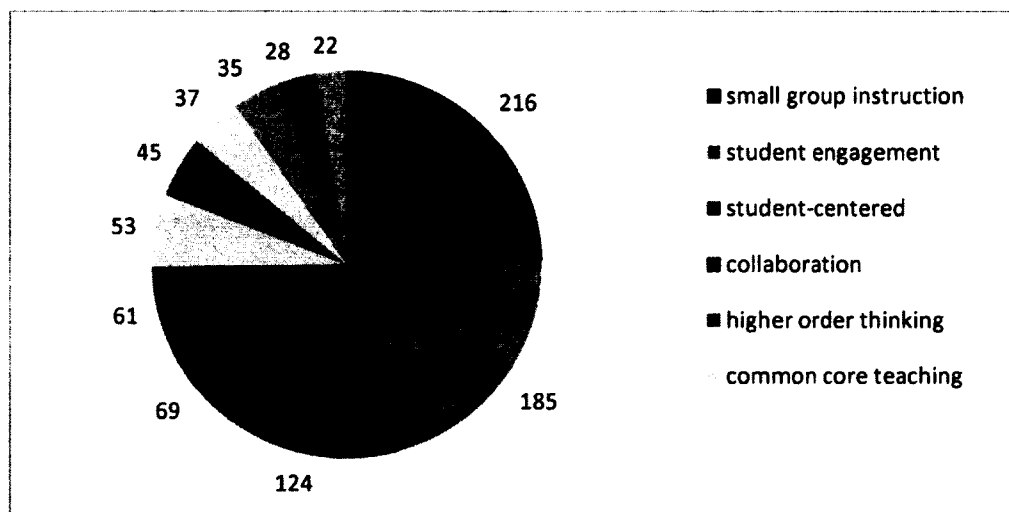


Figure 3: *Common Language References*

The three most common references to define effective instructional practices included small group (216 references), student engagement (185 references), and student-centered learning (124 references), followed by collaboration (69 references) and higher order thinking (61 references). The application of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) was referenced 53 times by participants in the data, reflecting leaders’ acknowledgement of Connecticut’s standards, in alignment with other states, as influential to their work. Study participants used these terms frequently when developing

and discussing problems of practice, reflecting on classroom observations, and during post-walkthrough debriefing sessions to share their walkthrough experiences.

Only two participants (17%) conveyed a contradictory perception toward walkthroughs and its influence on the leadership team's ability to frame a common language around classroom instructional practices. Noted in both interview responses both participants conveyed the opinion that classroom walkthroughs had neither been the impetus for or the vehicle to sustain the development of a common language among members of their leadership team. Participant H argued, "Some terms are never fully defined – for example, we didn't have a common definition of rigor, even though we strived to find it in classrooms." Similarly, Participant G stated, "While we are getting something out of the experience, I don't believe we are really tapping into a common language around concepts of engagement or active learning, since these look so different at every level." In their post-observation reflection documents, these two participants admitted to being cautious about the consistency of educational terms, with Participant G referencing terms used by the leadership team as "too full of jargon" and Participant H asserting "some concepts shared by members of our leadership team, such as rigor and differentiation, have lost a common meaning."

While a majority of participants felt strongly a common language was evident during discussions around effective instruction, another theme emerged in relation to Research Question 1: *shared understanding of instruction*. Data from interviews, observations, and document analysis revealed a belief among study participants regarding their leadership team's challenge in developing and sharing a deeper level of understanding around instruction necessary for effective teaching and learning and the consistent application of these practices in classrooms across the district. Participants'

ongoing struggles to develop deeper meanings related to instructional practice aligned with issues commonly found in communities of practice. Holland and Lave (2009) called attention to the natural conflict for persons working to achieve a shared enterprise and productivity as a group, especially where differences among members of a group are prevalent and where daily challenges exist across activities engaged in by its members.

Participants voiced difficulty in achieving a depth of understanding regarding what effective and ineffective instruction might look like, and this was perceived as a barrier to targeting mutually-accepted, quality practices all leaders in their district should expect to occur in classrooms. As a part of the debriefing sessions following walkthroughs in October and February, school leaders were directed by the Assistant Superintendent, who acted as facilitator, to consult their notes and offer ideas, insights, and reflections regarding the application of effective (and ineffective) instructional practices observed during classroom visits. During walkthroughs, all school leaders had been assigned to smaller subgroups with their colleagues. Participants in the study (12) were disbursed among groups with colleagues from the district leadership team (21). School leaders were asked to debrief in their small groups first and then offer responses during a whole group sharing.

Analysis of researcher field notes showed study participants provided multiple examples and interpretations of what they observed to be effective teaching practices utilized by teachers across grade levels. Typical responses included: “students creating their own learning”, “teachers’ ability to scaffold instruction”, “appropriate identification of deficits in student learning”, “teachers working with students in small group settings”, and “ensuring student engagement.” Participants further identified quality instruction as “the effective use of reading strategies”, “teachers differentiating instruction to meet

learner needs”, “the use of reader’s/writer’s workshop”, and “employing formative assessments to gauge students’ depth of understanding.”

Findings from both field notes and post-walkthrough documents further indicated the attributes of effective instruction of most value to participants were generally related to the leadership roles and responsibilities they held in the district. For example, participants at the elementary level focused largely on the use of a variety of reading strategies and student engagement as important components of a high-quality quality instructional program. School leaders at this level conveyed a general understanding of these areas and commented on these concepts with a higher degree of frequency, pointing to instructional strategies they considered integral to effective teaching: “guided reading”, “student focus”, “reading buddies”, “vocabulary development”, and “just right books.”

Conversely, participants at the middle school level were primarily concerned with their teachers’ ability to differentiate classroom instruction in order to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of all students, commenting on “learner needs”, “interest level”, “tiered activities”, and “student choice” to describe their perceptions and understandings of effective instruction. Participants at the middle level consistently called attention to the “whole child” and referenced “learners at the center of instruction.”

Participants at the high school level considered students’ understanding and application of sophisticated language as essential to a quality literacy program. School leaders at this level associated effective instructional opportunities with teachers’ ability to move students toward becoming “consumers of information” to engage students in “close reading of texts”, or to ensure learners could demonstrate “a critical stance when reading and writing.” Three study participants, whose primary leadership roles in the district were at the Regional/K-12 level, regularly pointed to “literacy across the

curriculum”, “students’ transfer of skills and knowledge”, and “interdisciplinary teaching.”

Evident in the responses from participants at the regional level was a focus on cross-curricular teaching and in the ability of students to apply their understandings of the content across all disciplines and as they moved from grade level to grade level.

However, participants at this level also made reference to district-level programs, such as Reader’s/Writer’s Workshop, which was important to their counterparts in other levels.

Table 4 highlights participants’ responses regarding identified attributes of effective instruction.

Table 4: *Frequently Cited Descriptions of Effective Instruction*

Level	# Participants	Frequently Cited Attributes of Effective Instruction
Elementary	2	reader’s/writer’s workshop; working in small groups; student focus; engagement;
Middle	2	just right books; basic literacy skills meeting learner needs; differentiation; students at center of learning; engagement
Secondary	5	critical stance; close reading of texts; rigor; skeptical consumers of information; relevancy; scaffolding
Regional/K-12	3	literacy across the curriculum; readers’ writer’s workshop; transfer of skills and knowledge; and interdisciplinary teaching
Total	12 (100%)	

Although participants used a common language for defining attributes of effective instruction, nine participants (75%) reported difficulty among members of their

leadership team in calibrating a shared understanding of quality instructional practices and their consistent application in classrooms across the district. This theme was prevalent in data taken from interview transcripts, specifically through participants' responses to Interview Question 7: *Do you believe this understanding of instruction and learning is commonly shared among administrative colleagues as a result?* Despite numerous walkthroughs over the last two years, participants reported classroom walkthroughs as having had a moderate influence on the development of a common language but pointed out this practice had less of an impact on the depth of understanding associated with these terms.

Responses during interviews confirmed participants' ongoing struggle to formulate and maintain a collective understanding and application of strategies school leaders in the district considered effective in supporting student learning. Participant K commented, "During walkthroughs we spend a lot of time focused on problems of practice, such as engagement, at other academic levels, but when I need to bring it back, I have difficulty translating this to my level." Participant H noted, "We continue to need a greater sense of clarity on what instruction needs to look like across the district." This lack of shared understanding was also described by Participant F, who believed school leaders lacked a "consistent understanding of the problems of practice (such as rigor or differentiation) at every level." Participant I commented on the "inability of the leadership team to get very far or go very deep" when discussing instructional practices used by teachers. Similar perceptions were shared by participants who admitted the district walkthrough practice had allowed leaders to begin to think about what quality instruction should look like as individuals, but it had not provided an opportunity to

“deepen, clarify, or modify those understandings to support instructional improvements” or “apply these concepts as a collective team with any degree of fidelity”.

In contrast, three participants (25%) articulated a more optimistic view of the classroom walkthrough practice in beginning to develop a solid understanding and shape a shared vision of effective instruction. Participant B stated, “Our leadership team has learned to come together about what they think good instruction should be and what it should look like at different levels.” Participant G perceived the leadership team had initially been “all over the place” but reported multiple walkthroughs “brought the leadership team to a new level of agreement on effective strategies around reading and writing across the district.” Another positive belief was shared by Participant A, who noted, “frequent conversations about sound practices and methodologies, such as readers/writer’s workshop and teacher modeling, have enabled leaders to share a consistent vision of effective instruction.” Participants’ positive perceptions, however, focused on district leaders’ shared understandings as a recent development, and these participants believed deeper levels of understanding regarding quality instruction had only begun to evolve through multiple walkthrough experiences.

Research Question 2: *How might the collaborative practice of walkthroughs shape individual and collective identity and agency among school leaders?* The theme of *collaboration and community* emerged from the data in response to Research Question 2. Although the district’s classroom walkthrough model was in its second year of implementation, all 12 participants (100%) reported collegiality and a sense of identity among members of their team had evolved and strengthened after multiple walkthrough experiences. Within the context of this study, collaboration and community referred to how school leaders worked together before, during, and following classroom

walkthroughs, the sense of belonging they experienced as a team, and, more importantly, the mutual commitments and responsibilities they shared as representatives of their district. The value participants placed on their collegiality and emerging identity was an interesting finding and aligned with the study's theoretical framework of social practice theory.

Findings from semi-structured interviews, and supported through participants' post-walkthrough documents, showed generally positive attitudes toward the use of walkthroughs in promoting professional relationships and an evolving sense of identity as members of their leadership community. Interview Questions 9 and 11 focused on these central ideas: *Has collaboration amongst members of the district leadership team changed in any way as a result of the district walkthrough initiative? In your perception, how might your active participation in walkthroughs shape your own or the group's identity as members of the school community?* Participant A noted, "The earliest Greek word that we have for community is Polis – from which we get the word political, and that means to be among those with whom one can speak. Our group has learned to have a voice." Participant F stated, "People are just faces and titles if you don't work with them on a daily basis. This process has changed that for the better." Similarly, Participant I discussed walkthroughs as having not only "fostered an interest in the opinions of their peers, but established comfort, respect, and relationships which have to do first with having good conversations."

Other statements from participants voiced the belief that the walkthrough model had fostered collaboration with their colleagues on a more consistent and meaningful basis. Participants B, G, H, and L all used the term "professional learning community," to describe how members of their district leadership team used the walkthrough practice

as a venue for identifying, discussing, and deliberating around district instructional goals and issues. Participant B discussed how the walkthrough model “used a collaborative model to help leaders hone classroom observational skills.” Participant G commented on the walkthroughs as having moved leaders to “discuss instructional implications associated with specific problems of practice,” while Participant H noted the walkthrough had fostered “a common language to use as a community of learners”.

Research on social practice theory, specifically around communities of practice, has centered on the practices and learning opportunities for people who actively engage in work together, problem-solve, and share a collective identity as members of a particular community (Wenger, 1998; Wenger & McDermott, 2002; Holland & Lave, 2009). The majority of participants in this study consistently made connections between their engagement in the classroom walkthrough model and the mutual bonds and level of commitment members of the district leadership team experienced. Participant J confirmed “school leaders had many discussions about what it meant to be a productive team” in the past, but pointed to the implementation of the current walkthrough model as having contributed to “stronger bonds, deeper understandings about each other’s and our own goals for student learning.” Participant L referenced the idea of “emerging leadership voices,” while Participant D attributed “increased confidence in working with and fitting in with colleagues” to the common time leaders shared before, during, and following classroom walkthroughs. Participant G cited a personal transformation after having engaged in multiple walkthroughs: “Others may have been surprised to learn that they had not noticed me or heard from me very much, but now I feel I belong, a place that is safe and comfortable to voice my ideas and opinions about classroom practice”. An evolving sense of unity among members of the leadership team was also conveyed by

Participant K, who revealed “grade level divisions are becoming non-existent as we are now committed to finding ways to enhance the effectiveness of instruction across the district, not just in our own schools.”

Data from semi-structured interviews showed relationships among members had improved over time, and leaders had learned to offer appropriate, constructive feedback to their colleagues as an expectation of the walkthrough process. Participant B emphasized school leaders had become less critical of their peers: “Initially, people were not able to separate their own value judgments when they reflected on the practices going on in their colleagues’ schools, but now we are building a team of experts.” Participant C stated, “You see people in a different light, what they’re passionate about regarding instruction, and how we can use this as part of our shared responsibilities.” A similar perception was offered by Participant A, who pointed to the acceptance of all leaders on the district team and their level of expertise, stating, “No one is more than or less than another.”

Results from this case study also shed light on the emerging theme of *collective responsibility and agency*. In the past several years, local and federal initiatives have added to the demands on teachers and school leaders for shared vision, uniform instructional practices, and a collective responsibility for ensuring student achievement. Connecticut’s Common Core of Teaching (CCT) and new teacher evaluation model, referred to in the legislation as SEED (System for Educator Evaluation and Development), were revised in 2012 to promote consistency and accountability within schools and among districts (CSDE, 2013).

Evidence across data sources demonstrated participants’ awareness of their responsibility as agents of the district to forward school improvements in light of State of

Connecticut mandates. However, while participants shared an increased sense of urgency to facilitate changes in teaching and learning, participants were divided on the use of walkthroughs to support them in accomplishing these goals. In response to Interview Question 11, which asked participants to reflect on whether classroom walkthroughs had *influenced their role as agents of the district*, six participants (50%) shared their confidence in the walkthrough model as supportive of their role as leaders and in helping making instructional improvements or forwarding priority initiatives. A positive assertion was made by Participant G, who stated “managerial tasks and more philosophical, abstract ideas are now communicated from the top down with greater fidelity.” Participant A reflected, “You often wonder whether you are on the same page as your colleagues, but discover not only are you on the same page ...but now you are a significant contributor to potential instructional changes in the district.”

Participants also identified the use of walkthroughs in helping them find solutions to issues they faced, and in their ability to support district programs that might improve the system. Participant B admitted, “The biggest epiphany for me was in seeing things used in other buildings, including the use of literacy strategies that might solve a problem with students’ reading performance in my own school.” According to Participant K, the system continued to improve since walkthroughs “supported leaders’ ability to gather empirical data with the goal of deepening understanding and planning forward.” Participant I believed walkthroughs had been instrumental in guiding leaders’ instructional goals, stating, “One great example was the district’s move to a Reader’s/Writer’s Workshop approach for teaching literacy skills. Watching classroom instruction across the district helped me to implement that, support it, and be able to defend it.”

Half of the participants conveyed skepticism in the use of walkthroughs as a reliable tool in helping leaders facilitate school improvements within their buildings and across the district. These participants identified the “large number of problems of practice”, the “infrequency of walkthroughs”, and the “lack of rigor” in the process itself as inhibitive of supporting leaders in their roles as district agents. Participant E argued the district had implemented “too many problems of practice to review in a year without enough consistency for improving anything with confidence.” A similar view was shared by Participant L, who noted, “A lack of connectivity with the process exists since walkthroughs are only conducted three to four times a year.” Participant F argued the leadership team needed to “focus on something that was not working, learn how to help staff instructionally in that area, and stick to it.” Participant C’s concern focused on the lack of rigor and depth associated with the process, stating, “We clearly never dig deep enough for any of us to forward positive and sustained change across the system.”

Findings from researcher observations and field notes supported this division among participants in the use of walkthroughs to support school improvement. During debriefing sessions following walkthroughs, it was apparent that this segment of the walkthrough model was challenging for some participants based on body language, long moments of silence, and less-developed responses. In each case, the identified facilitator (Assistant Superintendent) posed a focus question to all members of the district leadership team. This question provided a central cue for school leaders to review observational data, reflect on key “take-aways,” and engage in discussions about how they would use what they learned from their classroom visits. The facilitator gave district leaders an opportunity to “think about how information from your walkthroughs might be helpful to you in your own role as instructional leaders.” During this segment of the

walkthrough process, participants involved in the study, and their colleagues, had time to reflect quietly, talk to other leaders, and write reflections about how their inquiries into classroom instruction might be transferred into the development of future school improvements.

Participant responses during each debriefing session tended to be short and provided few, if any, substantive plans for school improvements based on information they had acquired from multiple classroom visits. Typical statements by study participants were general in nature and offered informal plans for future action: “There is a stronger urgency to ensure all teachers value intellectual engagement and higher order thinking in the classroom,” “integrating lessons that call for modeling literacy strategies must be in place across all grades.” “I think purposeful planning by teachers is the key, so I need to focus my own teachers on this”; “I saw many teachers speaking to kids about the thinking process. I will encourage that when I go back to my building”; “I didn’t see enough stretching of the lesson - for example, how students’ identification of character traits would make them better readers. This is important and should be integrated into classroom literacy experiences for students”; and “Connecticut’s Common Core Standards will push us to ensure students comprehend at deeper levels so we need to find strategies to make this happen.”

Research Question 3: *What are leaders’ perceptions of walkthroughs as a vehicle for their own learning and professional growth?* Consistent with research by Holland and Lave (2009), and Wenger (1998), concepts related to social practice and learning rely on the manner in which persons participate in and are shaped by their lives, their work, their relationships, and the communities to which they belong. As a district leadership team, participants recognized the walkthrough practice as having provided a

venue for learning. The theme of *opportunities for learning and practice* emerged in relation to this study's third research question. Participants' perceptions regarding their use of a non-evaluative classroom walkthrough model demonstrated a positive perception toward the practice in helping to support and shape their own learning.

Learning occurs in organizations where workers are bound by similar practices, belief systems, and challenges (Bandura, 1985; Goel & Mousavidin, 2008; Goel, Johnson, Junglas & Ives, 2010; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Senge, 1990). Participants in this study reported classroom walkthroughs generated new opportunities for meaning-making and for leaders' developing pedagogy around teaching and learning. A majority of participants attributed new learning to the district walkthrough model, emphasizing the leadership team's collaborative efforts to collect observational data and discuss problems of practice influenced their knowledge as leader-practitioners. Statements from participants during semi-structured interviews demonstrated a consistently confident attitude toward their learning and professional development. Interview Question 12 asked participants to *describe how classroom walkthroughs contributed to your professional development and growth as leaders*. Eleven participants (92%) articulated a positive view of their professional growth as leaders through their ongoing engagement in the practices associated with non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs.

Responses from participants included the following statements: "Being a member of the walkthrough has improved my insight into my own practice and has served as excellent professional development for me"; "the big thing I've taken away is a model of how people can assemble around a point of learning and growth"; "my own level of knowledge has increased after seeing different instructional practices that occur in other buildings"; "it's given me those aha moments"; "walkthroughs have provided me with

confidence when supervising and evaluating my teachers”; “I’m learning from the information we share as colleagues and building my skills as an administrator”; and “you hear from colleagues about things they see and understand that I didn’t so I am a better leader because of that experience.”

While the majority of study participants found walkthroughs supported their learning as professionals, one participant shared an opposing perspective. Despite reporting the belief in walkthroughs as having some merit, this participant conveyed the perception that non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs had not provided a substantive professional development experience, stating:

“I need a significant takeaway to improve my practice as a leader. That’s the piece that is missing – it was nice to see, feel good, but I never felt that I learned anything new. I’m familiar with it – our staff has already been doing this.”

Findings from this study showed the majority of participants perceived the professional discourse between and among members of their leadership team during walkthroughs had, as Participant A commented, “an apprentice-style impact” on their own learning. In response to Interview Question 10, which asked participants to describe how walkthroughs might have *shaped the critical discourse amongst members of the district leadership team*, Participants’ perceived the inspiration for critical discussions relied on routine activities associated with the district walkthrough model: “leaders’ use of classroom videos to model effective teaching,” “professional research of current trends,” “identification of problems of practice and strategies used to mitigate these problems,” “shared literature on educational pedagogy and methodology,” as well as

“observations of a variety of instructional practices across schools and grade levels in the district.”

Participant J noted, “My own growth has been around how we, as educators, respond to students...kids are smart, if we just say, ‘good job,’ that’s not enough. We need to teach them perseverance.” Participant G focused his own learning on the “cultural shift” leaders needed to make as part of their ongoing, professional growth: “We have to find ways for everyone – parents, students, and teachers – to understand that it’s ok for students to struggle. That’s real learning.” Participant I pointed out, “I go back to the article we read on student engagement. I now believe intellectual challenge is not for teachers to push students so far they can’t achieve, but provide supports so they can move their students’ progress forward.” Participant K offered, “I learned hands-on, active learning provides the impetus for intellectual engagement and challenge.”

Research Question 4: *In what way might walkthroughs influence leaders’ self-efficacy?* Through the analysis of data from interviews, field notes, and post-observation reflection documents, the theme *professional competence* emerged as related to Research Question 4. Cited in literature on school leadership, the positive perceptions leaders have for their practices and professional development experiences are integral to capacity-building, self-competence, and success in facilitating school improvement and sustained change (Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan & Hopkins, 2010; McCollum & Kajs, 2009; McCormick, 2001; Zaccarro & Nelson, 2008). Findings from this case study reflected current research in this area as a majority of participants (83%) reported the walkthrough model had a positive influence on their self-efficacy as leaders.

During interviews, participants shared favorable perceptions regarding their own levels of competence as instructional leaders through their engagement in multiple

classroom observations, critical discourse with colleagues, and opportunities for self-reflection. Participant I stated, “I now see the systemic implementation of a curriculum and can share that with my staff.” Conveying a strong confidence in the ability to supervise staff, Participant B confirmed, “During conferences with my teachers, I now bring an increased level of expectation regarding instruction.” In referring to the “bigger picture,” Participant E noted, “I can now support my teachers in seeing how everything comes together and what our goals are with respect to others in the district.”

Analysis of researcher field notes and participants’ post-walkthrough documents reflected participants’ developing sense of leadership efficacy. Participant D described how walkthroughs had sharpened observational skills and “triggered an ability to see things I wouldn’t have looked for independently.” Verbal and written responses from study participants further reported participants experienced higher levels of self-efficacy in coaching and supervising their teachers as a result of their involvement in multiple classroom walkthroughs. Participant G asserted, “I can now speak with some confidence when I conference with my teachers about methodologies that work to engage students on higher levels like conceptual questions, use of inquiry activities, and group problem-solving strategies.”

While a majority of participants cited a stronger sense of competence as instructional leaders in relation to the walkthrough model, two participants voiced a less confident view. While they agreed the process had proved beneficial to leaders in building collaboration, they argued the walkthrough practice had not served to develop leadership effectiveness in monitoring teaching and learning. One participant stated, “If I’m going to learn something – and the purpose is to learn – then I need a takeaway to improve my practice as a leader, and that’s the link we don’t have yet.” Another

participant believed the walkthrough model had not moved leaders to face challenging issues or deal with critical conversations:

“It goes back to the medical rounds on which this practice is loosely based; it’s about learning it better, deepening our understanding. But since we don’t ever want to rock the boat, make teachers feel uncomfortable, you are just observing, not moving forward, not really taking a critical look at things. We need to focus in more depth on strategies we all agree move students forward, make them think, and help them learn at higher levels. We haven’t quite gotten there yet.”

Evaluation of Findings

Increased demands and accountability measures across the nation have prompted school leaders to abandon isolation and work collaboratively with their colleagues, embracing job-embedded professional practices to ensure their capacity as instructional leaders (Cobb & Rallis, 2008). Current literature has defined the role school leaders now play in the change process and their efforts to utilize new strategies and skill sets in order to maximize instructional improvements (Fullan, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Wagner et. al, 2006). Using social practice theory as a theoretical lens, this case study sought to explore school leaders’ perceptions regarding their use of a district walkthrough model and the influence this practice had on their ability to develop a common understanding of teaching and learning, construct new meaning from their experiences, and enhance their identity, agency, and self-reported efficacy as leaders.

Results from this study were consistent with previous research regarding the benefits in-house professional development practices, including classroom walkthroughs, could offer school leaders in building relationships and acquiring new skill sets to enhance their capacity as supervisors and change agents (Elmore, 2009; Fullan, 2007,

2008; Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010; Wagner et. al, 2006). Participants' perceptions of their relationship with peers, their sense of belonging to the district leadership team, and their building of a common language to describe and analyze instruction influenced the value they attached to the walkthrough process.

In addressing Research Question 1 regarding leaders' shared understandings of instruction evident in their school community, triangulation of data from interviews, field notes, and post-observation reflection documents indicated a majority of participants continued to build a common vocabulary and engage in critical discourse around key instructional practices. This data aligned with previous literature on the importance of district leaders' ability to develop and sustain a consistent language around effective instruction as a precursor to capacity-building (Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2007; Reeves, 2008, 2010). Whereas only two participants perceived the walkthrough model had not promoted a common language among members of the leadership team, a majority of study participants perceived the identification of problems of practice, collection of classroom observational data, and debriefing sessions with their colleagues had helped to facilitate the use of a consistent vocabulary to describe the attributes of effective instruction.

On the other hand, a majority of participants perceived their engagement in classroom walkthroughs had not adequately yielded a depth of understanding among members of the leadership team regarding effective instructional practices and, even more importantly, the application of these practices in classrooms across the district. This conflicted with literature by McEwan-Adkins (2011), who reported practices promoting school leaders' ongoing assessment of instruction allowed them to target specific improvements in teaching and learning. Based on interviews, field notes, and

document analysis, participants in the study attributed the lack of time devoted to debriefing sessions and the selection of too many problems of practice as inhibitive of a shared understanding and application of effective instructional practices across the district.

Interestingly, and despite participants' perceived difficulty in developing and implementing a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning practices, participants agreed their work with colleagues during classroom walkthrough experiences was beneficial. With respect to Research Question 2, participants in the study recognized the walkthrough model as having influenced their sense of belonging and identity as members of the leadership team. Data from this study aligned with previous studies (Holland & Lave, 2009; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wilson, Goodman & Cronin, 2007), which cited connections between the social practices evident among members of communities and learning. More significantly, Holland and Lave (2009) expounded, "persons are historically produced in practice in relation to the identities, cultural genres, and artifacts that are central to the activities in which persons engage" (p. 5). Data from interviews revealed the emergence of a stronger sense of unity and commitment among members of the leadership team through the collaborative practices central to the district walkthrough model. Participants frequently pointed to classroom walkthroughs as helpful in unifying them as a team, allowing diverse voices to emerge, and inspiring a need for greater consistency and commitment.

While participants believed the walkthrough practice fostered a sense of identity and unity among members of the leadership team, participants were equally frustrated by their leadership team's inability to impact instructional improvements as agents of the district. Although each of the study participants understood their role as leaders and the

growing sense of urgency for ensuring student performance, half of the participants surveyed did not view the current walkthrough model as a viable practice in supporting school improvements as leaders. These participants voiced concerns regarding the use of the walkthrough model in increasing their ability to forward district initiatives or strategically impact instructional improvements across the district. Evidence from this study showed a discrepancy with previous research in which leaders' use of inquiry models, such as classroom walkthroughs, led to data-driven decisions leading to school improvement (Abrutyn, 2006; Cleveland, Powers, Mainus, Powell, & Skepple, 2011; McEwan-Adkins, 2011).

In previous studies related to school leaders' use of walkthroughs, positive school improvement outcomes were not associated with classroom observations alone but were more likely to occur when classroom walkthroughs were purposefully linked to the goals of improving instruction and student learning (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007; Ing, 2010; Lemons & Helsing, 2009; McCollum & Kajs, 2009). Data analysis from this case study highlighted participants' attitudes toward the inability of the walkthrough practice to support them in their role as agents of the district in planning for and executing the kinds of changes they believed were linked to school and system-wide improvement. Participants consistently identified the number of problems of practice addressed in a given year, the infrequency of walkthroughs, and the lack of time devoted to the development of school improvement plans as problematic.

Although participants agreed they faced challenges in developing a consistent and shared understanding of effective instruction, individual school leaders perceived their own learning and professional growth had been positively influenced by district walkthroughs. In response to Research Question 3, participant interviews and their post-

walkthrough reflection documents revealed observations of classroom instruction across the district, especially within schools outside of the participants' own areas of expertise, supported leaders in acquiring new knowledge and insights regarding teaching and learning. Thus, an ongoing and developing pedagogical knowledge base had emerged as participants collected and analyzed classroom observational information, engaged in critical discourse with their peers, and reflected on the variety of instructional practices implemented in K-12 classrooms. Participants reported the general scope of their knowledge had increased, since the walkthrough practice had promoted the identification of problems of practice, research on current trends in teaching and learning, and discussions around classroom observations as a means of informing leadership practice and development.

According to research in the field, the perceptions leaders have for their practices and professional development experiences showed a relationship to their prescribed level of competence (McCollum & Kajs, 2009; Zaccarro & Nelson, 2008). In addressing Research Question 4, findings from this study further showed a majority of participants felt confident the district walkthrough model had positively influenced their self-efficacy as leaders. Participants reported having more confidence in their own leadership responsibilities, and believed this level of competence would serve them well when working with their own faculties and in setting higher expectations for student learning in the future.

Summary

The study presented findings related to four research questions: the influence the walkthrough practice had, if any, on supporting leaders' shared understandings of teaching and learning; the potential for walkthroughs to shape individual and collective

identity and agency; leaders' perceptions of walkthroughs as a venue for learning and professional growth; and the influence walkthroughs might have on leaders' self-efficacy. Participants generally believed a common language was developed among members of the leadership team to describe and reflect on the attributes of effective instruction, but participants were divided on whether the walkthrough had supported a depth of understanding around instruction. Participants who took a more positive stance referred to the shared vision of teaching and learning among school leaders as an evolving phenomenon.

However, participants who did not believe the walkthroughs supported shared understandings described the lack of clear definitions and consistent application of instructional practices as a barrier to the integrity of the process and their responsibilities as instructional leaders and agents of the district. Participants referenced specific problems of practice, such as differentiated instruction and rigor, as not having been clearly defined or internalized in greater depth by all members of the leadership team, despite numerous walkthroughs. This less confident perspective highlighted the lack of clarity and consensus among leaders involving effective instruction and appeared to interfere with their ability to construct deeper levels of understanding.

While shared understandings was a concern, evidence from the study demonstrated a consensus among participants regarding the influence walkthroughs had on their emerging rapport with colleagues, their ability to work collaboratively to collect and review observational data, and in their emerging sense of belonging and mutual commitment as members of the leadership team. Through the implementation of a district-wide walkthrough model, participants uniformly described a stronger identity as

members of the leadership team and in their evolving relationships with colleagues as a result of ongoing collaboration, observation, discourse, and reflection.

Data from interviews and reflection documents indicated walkthroughs had contributed to participants' sense of confidence in their own professional learning and effectiveness. Participants cited identification of problems of practice, multiple classroom observations, and critical discussions with colleagues as having positively influenced their own learning and self-efficacy. However, participants remained divided on the use of walkthroughs in supporting their role as change agents for the school district. While half of the participants perceived the walkthrough as having impacted their ability to move forward district initiatives and improvements, remaining participants believed the practice had not offered adequate time, resources, or training necessary in using classroom observational data to generate plans for school or system-wide improvements.

Chapter 5: Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Higher expectations and increased accountability for student learning continue to encourage changes in the professional beliefs, decisions, and practices exercised by contemporary school leaders. While leaders in the past may have focused solely on managing buildings, faculty and students, today's leaders need to accept new roles as instructional leaders, work collaboratively to develop a shared vision, use data to inform their decisions, and engage in practices to support them in achieving school improvement goals to ensure student learning and achievement (Elmore, 2000, 2009; Fullan, 2009, 2011; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Reeves, 2008). In order to meet the requirements of local, State, and federal school reform mandates, the professional experiences and decisions employed by school leaders and teachers will continue to have a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Little, 2007). Literature has been replete with the growing number of districts using classroom observations to assess teaching practices and to support school improvement efforts within and across their systems (Babb, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson et al, 2010; Steiny, 2009), but few studies have addressed leaders' perceptions of the usefulness of walkthroughs and the role they might play in cultivating school leaders' learning, identity, agency, and self-efficacy.

This district's design and implementation of a classroom walkthrough model must be considered in response to Connecticut's Common Core Standards for School Leaders, requiring school leaders to a) engage in ongoing inquiry into instructional practices, b) use data to inform decisions, and c) work collaboratively to set goals for improving student learning (CSDE, 2013). While educational literature has continued to offer a

review of classroom walkthrough models as promising vehicles for evaluating instructional practices (David, 2008; Ing, 2010; Lemons & Helsing, 2009; Marshall, 2009; Protheroe, 2009; Skretta, 2007; Steiny, 2009), empirical data is needed from the perspective of school leaders regarding the opportunities walkthroughs might provide for improving their understanding of instruction, supporting their collaboration with colleagues, executing school improvements, and increasing their own effectiveness as leaders.

The purpose of this single-case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders regarding their use of a district walkthrough model and the influence this practice had on their ability to develop a common understanding of teaching and learning, construct new meaning from their experiences, and enhance their identity, agency, and self-reported efficacy as leaders. Specifically, the study's intent focused on the nature of the district walkthrough practice in supporting leaders' ability to build a deep understanding of pedagogy and instruction and the perceived value of the practice as a tool for professional development.

The study utilized a qualitative method. A single-case study provided the framework in which to explore the classroom walkthrough model through the perceptions of school leaders within a real-world setting (Yin, 2009). Through an exploration of a district leadership team's walkthrough model, the triangulation of data sources from interviews, researcher field notes, and document analysis uncovered multiple meanings and perspectives about this ongoing leadership practice. A purposive sample size of 12 school leaders from the district leadership team included regional directors, building principals, assistant principals, and academic chairpersons with diverse roles and levels of experience.

Limitations in this study involve a lack of generalizability, since the study was narrow in scope and not quantitative in nature. Thus, generalizing to larger populations was not feasible. Additionally, this researcher and participants involved in the study were employed as leaders in the same district and members of the same bargaining unit. This may have raised anxieties among leaders regarding anonymity, or caused a reluctance to speak candidly about issues inherent in the walkthrough model for fear of reprisal from other central office leaders. As a member of the team, the potential for personal and professional bias was another limitation. However, every effort was made throughout the investigation to mitigate these issues, included providing information about the study throughout the process to ensure transparency and employing an external peer reviewer to elevate the credibility of the study.

While this case study had its limitations, the study of a unique phenomenon in a single setting solicited the emergence of robust descriptions from the perspective of school leaders who were engaged in the process. Ethical dimensions were also considered, and while the study of leadership practices would not normally pose harmful risks or threats, this study remained transparent in nature and afforded participants the opportunity for debriefing. Assurances were also made with each participant that no consequence would be imposed for lack of participation.

This chapter outlines the purpose of the study and reviews implications related to the four research questions. Finally, the chapter presents recommendations regarding the fidelity of the district's walkthrough model, potential changes that would enhance leaders' learning, agency, and self-efficacy as a result of the practice, as well the possibility for future studies related to the use of classroom walkthrough models.

Implications

Implications related to the walkthrough phenomenon and perceptions of school leaders engaged in the process were viewed through the lens of social practice theory and participants' emerging identity, learning, and self-efficacy as members of the district leadership team. Departing from a purely cognitive framework, social practice theory associates the concept of learning and productivity with the social interactions that facilitate knowledge, transfer of skills, and communication among members of various communities (Holland & Lave, 2009). Studies by Hallinger and Heck (2010) and Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, and Meyerson (2007) reported both novice and experienced principals perceived professional collaboration as beneficial to their roles, responsibilities, and effectiveness as school leaders.

Like members of any professional group or organization, participants in this study were bound by similar goals and by the work they conducted within their school community. According to literature, the practices and behaviors members of communities engage in on a daily basis influence their collective knowledge, understanding, and productivity (Goel & Mousavidin, 2008; Holland & Lave, 2009; Wenger, 1998, Wenger & McDermott, 2002). Findings from this study were consistent with research on Social Practice Theory, where participants' beliefs, practices, and challenges associated with classroom walkthroughs generated new opportunities for collegiality, critical discourse, and the development of a common language around instruction. However, somewhat incongruent to this theory of learning was the inability of participants to develop what they referred to as "deeper" levels of meaning and shared understanding through the collaborative nature of their classroom walkthroughs.

Participants in this study conveyed a deep-rooted awareness of the urgency for addressing the quality of instructional practices based on their knowledge of local and federal mandates, including the emergence of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and a new Connecticut data-driven teacher evaluation system (SEED). The district's classroom walkthrough model was implemented with these goals in mind. Participants' efforts in this district to enhance their professional knowledge and skills through classroom walkthroughs emerged in the wake of increased accountability. School districts, similar to the one documented in this case study, have felt compelled to utilize in-house professional development practices positioned to enhance leadership collaboration, learning, and capacity-building from within their organizations as a systems approach to change (Elmore, 2000, 2009; Fullan, 2009, 2011; Wagner et. al, 2006). Therefore, school leaders in this district aspired to lessen their focus on traditional managerial tasks and more specifically on the professional practices capable of moving them closer to shared vision, problem solving, understanding, and self-efficacy (Marzano, 2011; Reeves, 2008).

The following section outlines the four research questions along with the implications of the findings.

Research Question 1: *What influence, if any, do walkthroughs have on supporting leaders' shared understandings of teaching and learning evident in their school community?* According to study participants, while district walkthroughs fostered the emergency of a common language helpful in discussing teaching and learning, participants felt deeper levels of understanding focused on exemplary instructional practices and how these practices were implemented in classrooms had not been equitably achieved by all district leaders. Participants were able to agree on common

terms associated with instruction, such as engagement and intellectual rigor, but the majority reported a lack of consistency and mutually-accepted understandings given the evolving nature of the walkthrough model and time devoted to the process. These findings reflected literature on school leadership proposed by Horng and Loeb (2010), whereas the scarcity of time, professional development, or resources may deter school leaders' efforts to function effectively as instructional leaders. Research participants perceived the infrequency of walkthroughs and lack of time devoted to debriefing and follow-up sessions as having had a negative impact on the development of shared understandings.

This discrepancy regarding perceptions of shared understandings among participants could be attributed to participants' diverse roles and levels of responsibility within the district. Data revealed participants across the elementary, middle, and high school levels placed higher value on areas of instruction closely linked to their own area of responsibility and grade levels in their charge. For example, while elementary principals discussed reader's/writer's workshop as a fundamental and effective component of high quality literacy programming, this was not necessarily set as a high priority for secondary leaders. While these differences were a natural part of the process, they may have contributed to the conflicting perceptions some participants conveyed.

While literature has demonstrated professional knowledge and learning occurs more readily through the beliefs, decisions, and actions of members in communities of practice (Printy, 2008), a higher degree of shared understanding and productivity among participants in the study was expected. Participants did profess classroom walkthroughs had impacted their learning, but they perceived the classroom walkthrough experiences had not influenced deeper understandings around critical instructional strategies and

practices likely to support school or system-wide improvement. Deeper understandings, in this context, focused on participants' construction of meaning regarding quality instructional practices, both in theory and in their application, that would positively impact student learning and achievement.

Research Question 2: *How might the collaborative practice of walkthroughs shape individual and collective identity and agency among school leaders?* Harris and Spillane (2008) reported the intricate patterns of collaboration, mutual influence, and agency as significant forces underlying the role of school leaders today. Participants in this study generally believed the district walkthrough practice had increased a sense of identity, belonging, and collegiality among members of the leadership team. Among social scientists, identity is defined as a “social construct” with individuals attaching significance to their sense of belonging and contributions to a particular group (Forsyth, 2009; Holland & Lave, 2009; Wenger, 1998; Wenger & McDermott, 2002). Data from interviews, field notes, and reflection documents uncovered participants' perspectives around the growing sense of respect and acceptance school leaders now had for the unique experiences, skills sets, and expertise of their colleagues responsible for different levels of the organization. Some participants called attention to the new voices emerging from the leadership group, and others emphasized the renewed respect leaders showed for their colleagues. More significantly, study participants experienced higher levels of comfort and confidence in working with their colleagues when analyzing instructional problems of practice, collecting and interpreting classroom observational data, exchanging ideas, and making assumptions about teaching and learning.

Literature on the use of inquiry-based practices and decisions driven by observational data, typical of classroom walkthrough models, had shown positive trends

toward supporting school leaders' goal-setting and school improvement planning (Abrutyn, 2006; Cleveland et. al, 2011; McEwan-Adkins, 2011). However, findings from this study suggested participants' roles as agents of the district in forwarding school improvements was not influenced by classroom walkthroughs. This made sense when viewed alongside the lack of shared understandings around instruction reported by participants. Although a majority of participants perceived the walkthrough practice had fostered a basic knowledge around instructional practices to facilitate student learning, participants were divided on the use of the walkthroughs in helping them develop and implement improvements in teaching and learning across the district.

Implications related to school agency and perceptions regarding the walkthrough model's ability to support school improvement emerged as a barrier to the integrity of the process. While some participants reported they observed exemplary instructional practices useful for their own faculties, or that might help them solve problems in their own buildings, other participants felt the walkthroughs had not served leaders adequately in this capacity. This perception was evident in data from interviews and during field observations in October and February. Participants had little time to discuss how they should or would use observational data to improve school or district practices. Participants who did speak up, were neither held accountable for specific plans, nor were they afforded the time to develop their ideas in any depth. As a result, not all participants were convinced walkthroughs supported them in making changes and improvements to enhance teaching and learning.

Research Question 3: *What are leaders' perceptions of walkthroughs as a vehicle for their own learning and professional growth?* Implications regarding professional development revealed participants' perceived their own knowledge had been enhanced as a result of the district walkthrough model. Although participants remained divided on the way they used walkthrough data to forward change and make strategic plans for school improvement, findings from this study reflected existing research in which informal classroom observations implemented in school districts had sharpened school leaders' awareness of effective instruction (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2010).

Based on interviews, field observations, and information obtained from post-observation reflection documents, classroom walkthroughs supported leaders' collective efforts to identify problems of practice, make assumptions about instruction, and engage in meaningful discourse to improve their knowledge as practitioners. Participants consistently reported they had learned from observing the work of their colleagues and the strategies they implemented to guide instructional practices evident in their buildings. Data demonstrated a majority of participants found the walkthrough model as complementary to their roles as leaders and supportive of their ability to obtain new insights around effective instruction.

Furthermore, implications of this study's research findings reflected contemporary notions of learning and social practice. According to Holland & Lave (2009), the "historical production of persons in practice" considers differences among participants and the challenges, conflicts, and frustrations occurring across activities and in light of those differences. Viewing learning through this lens, the ongoing struggles,

disparities and conflicts experienced by leaders actively engaged in this district's walkthrough model may be viewed as integral to learning and professional growth.

Findings from this qualitative study further reflected current research on school leadership, which suggested positive outcomes associated with teaching and learning are more likely to occur when school leaders have opportunities for collaboration and critical discourse (DuFour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; Fullan, 2009; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Reeves, 2008; Wagner et. al, 2006). The leadership group's collaborative efforts to view classroom lessons and discuss the implications related to problems of practice, as well as balancing the conflicts and contradictions arising from the process, may well represent authentic indicators of ongoing meaning-making and productivity. Throughout the interview sessions and during field observations, participants readily agreed their own general knowledge and common language had improved, despite the persistent belief participants had not arrived at deeper understandings or used observational data to facilitate instructional improvements. In Vygotskian tradition, differences faced by participants involved in the walkthrough model are both shaping and being shaped by the practices and cultural symbols leaders embrace and to which they attach value as members of the district leadership community (Vygotsky, 1978, 1989). Explored from this perspective, the collaborative work of participants in this study ought to be viewed as an ongoing, evolving, and necessary part of leadership development and productivity.

Research Question 4: *In what way might walkthroughs influence leaders' self-efficacy?* In light of studies on leadership efficacy, the perceptions leaders have for their practices and professional development experiences show a relationship to their self-reported level of competence (Bandura, 2000; McCollum & Kajs, 2009; McCormick, 2001; Zaccarro & Nelson, 2008). Positive implications for the use of walkthroughs in

developing leaders' self-efficacy were clearly evident in this study and aligned with beliefs and assumptions related to social practice theory. The social practice perspective provided a sound framework for understanding how participants' beliefs about their own efficacy were influenced by their walkthroughs –where participants engaged in critical conversations with their peers, shared their understandings, negotiated meaning, and transformed their knowledge as practitioners within their school community.

Implications from this study demonstrated participants' constructed beliefs about their own leadership effectiveness had continued to evolve during multiple classroom walkthroughs and the practices associated with this district model. Participants perceived the level of competence in their own roles and responsibilities had been influenced by observing instruction in their colleagues' schools, especially when their observations were of classrooms from areas outside of their own comfort zone. Findings aligned with studies highlighting the bridge between leadership capacity and school improvement (Cameron, McIver, & Goddard, 2008; Sparks, 2007; Zimmerman, 2011). Further, participants in the study pointed consistently to their dialogue with colleagues around specific problems of practice, such as active learning or student engagement, and their own ability to use the work taking place in their colleagues' schools as the impetus for reflection, meaning-making, and future action. Additionally, participants referred to the preparation prior to classroom walkthroughs, which routinely involved reading current literature related to an identified problem of practice, as a lens in which to collect observational data around effective practices that might be used in their own school settings. Participants referred to a stronger sense of confidence and comfort in using what they observed during walkthroughs as the impetus for working with members of their own faculty.

Recommendations

According to a recent study (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, Anderson et. al, 2010), in order for today's school leaders to make significant school improvements to increase student achievement, districts must invest in professional development opportunities to promote shared vision, set clear goals for student learning, and support practices to enhance leaders' capacity. Unfortunately, with the increasing responsibilities facing contemporary leaders, preparatory, state licensure and professional development opportunities offered at the college and university levels have continued to fall short in ensuring school leaders have the knowledge and skills needed to lead their schools toward meeting expectations for student learning (Grisson & Harrington, 2010; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Provost, Boscardin, & Wells, 2010). In light of increased expectations for leaders, districts have embraced in-house collaborative practices, such as walkthroughs, to enhance leadership knowledge and competence (Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010).

Studies confirmed leaders whose practices remained closely aligned with classroom instruction had a positive impact on student learning and achievement (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; David, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Through this district's implementation of a classroom walkthrough model, participants were encouraged to collaborate with their peers, collect observational data, engage in critical dialogue around instruction, and use their experiences to improve their practice as members of their professional leadership community.

Findings from this study had implications for identity, learning, agency, and self-efficacy. Through the lens of social practice, more specifically related to communities of practice, this qualitative study viewed learning as a social phenomenon, in which group identity, collaborative practices, and the construction of meaning was "constituted in the

experienced, lived-in world through ongoing social practice” (Holland & Lave, 2009; Lave, 1991, Wenger, 1998; Wenger & McDermott, 2002). From this perspective, the school leader-participants in this study – through their exchange of ideas and understandings, evolving relationships and identity, and the perceptions they held of their own competence – used the district walkthrough model as a source of shared cultural knowledge. While not a perfect system, this district could implement specific actions to improve the classroom walkthrough model and the positive outcomes it may continue to yield for members of the leadership team. Results from this single-case study indicated four areas school leaders should consider in order to ensure the fidelity of the district walkthrough model and its ability to cultivate school leaders’ development and growth related to professional learning, agency, and self-efficacy. These areas include the following:

- Select one or two problems of practice around which classroom observations, data collection, and critical conversations can occur in order to deepen school leaders’ shared understandings of effective instructional practices.
- Increase the frequency of walkthrough practices for leaders during the course of a year in order to support and sustain collaboration, refine observational skills, and facilitate ongoing, critical discourse among members of the district leadership community.
- Structure the classroom walkthrough model to provide adequate time, resources, and support for school leaders.
- Include faculty and teacher leaders in collaborative discussions around effective instruction and plans for increasing student learning that emerge as a result of classroom walkthroughs.

- Develop system-wide strategies and protocols to ensure data collected from classroom walkthroughs are implemented by all educators and stakeholders in more formalized ways to align with school and district improvement plans.

Data from this study revealed participants, while having developed a common language to discuss instruction, did not perceive classroom walkthroughs had allowed them to share or deepen a collective level of understanding around effective instructional practices, or the application of these practices consistently in K-12 classrooms across the district-at-large. In most cases, participants had a better understanding of and placed value on instructional practices closely linked to their own levels of experience and expertise. Therefore, the district must consider focusing leaders on one or two problems of practice per year, such as engagement or differentiation, around which extensive research, data collection, and classroom observations can occur. Focusing on fewer problems will lend greater consistency and rigor to the process for all members of the leadership team. This may include, but is not limited to, engaging district leaders in literature studies around one or several instructional practices integral to student learning, bringing in consultants with an expertise in a particular instructional area as a resource, and viewing videos of teachers modeling effective classroom practices. School leaders will also be encouraged to focus on research-based effective teaching strategies (ETS) as outlined by the State of Connecticut, such as identifying similarities and differences; summarizing and note taking; reinforcing effort and providing recognition; homework and practice; nonlinguistic representations; cooperative learning; setting objectives and providing feedback; generating and testing hypotheses; cues, questions and advance organizers; and the use of non-fiction. These practices will further align with mandated

training Connecticut school leaders will go through as part of their new teacher evaluation model (CSDE, 2013).

Offering opportunities to work collaboratively to identify effective instructional practices will increase leaders' expertise, deepen their understandings, and sharpen their skills in monitoring and assessing the quality of teaching and learning in their schools and districts (Booker-Thomas & Delman, 2009; David, 2007). The ability to demonstrate a consistent and laser-like focus on instruction and the data teachers use in making improvements to increase student learning will become critical as leaders in Connecticut respond to new legislation around the evaluation of teaching and learning. Through this new evaluation system, educational leaders will need to monitor and assess teachers' ability to increase student learning, progress, and achievement over time. This will include teachers' use of standardized test data, ongoing formative assessments, and student and parent feedback as indicators of their success (CSDE, 2013).

Although literature suggested staying close to classroom instruction through walkthroughs as integral to school improvement (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Kachur, Stout, & Edwards, 2010; Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2011), the infrequency of classroom walkthroughs was perceived by participants to be a deterrent to the fidelity of this district's current practice. School leaders engaged in district walkthroughs noted the lack of time and consistency had a negative impact on the usefulness of the walkthrough model. In order to mitigate this issue, the district needs to increase the number of opportunities leaders have for engaging in classroom walkthroughs throughout the year. While this may create issues for scheduling and supervision, since district leaders may be pulled from their own buildings, the format and the timing of this process can be revised to minimize the impact. For example, leaders might meet in smaller subgroups to

participate in walkthroughs and report their findings to the larger district administrative team. This would allow flexibility for scheduling walkthroughs and enable leaders to increase their ability to observe practices and engage in critical discussions around points of learning with their colleagues.

Findings from this study indicated participants' perceptions regarding the value of the walkthrough model was related to the leverage it had in supporting their learning, agency, and self-efficacy in a thoughtful and consistent manner. While the number of walkthroughs should increase to lend further credibility to this district's process, the frequency of walkthroughs alone may not increase leaders' confidence in supporting their work (Ing, 2010). Therefore, district leaders should consider reorganizing the walkthrough model to provide adequate resources and training in order for observational data to be purposeful in targeting school improvements system-wide. An improved structure could call for monthly discussions and interpretation of current trends and practices linked to problems of practice, goal-setting, and the development of school improvement plans. While the review of current literature around problems of practice is embedded in the non-evaluative classroom walkthrough model, school leaders' collaborative work throughout the year should facilitate the identification of instructional issues, the use of data to inform decisions around instructional changes, goal-setting, and the consistent development of school improvement plans as tied directly to this district's walkthrough practice.

Engaging district faculty in collaborative discussions around effective instruction and plans for increasing student learning should be addressed as an essential facet of the classroom walkthrough model. Since viewing, constructing meaning, and gauging instructional practice is at the heart of the walkthrough model, the inclusion of teachers in

this process may prove to be valuable in the future. During interviews, participants continued to focus back on school improvement and feedback from teachers as a missing component of the walkthrough practice. Teacher participation could take on a variety of forms, from open-ended discussions at faculty meetings, soliciting input from staff after a review of observational data, and developing school-wide improvement plans as a result of an analysis of instructional patterns and trends. Teacher leaders may also accompany school leaders on walkthroughs, or develop teacher-led walkthroughs similar to those practiced by leaders in buildings throughout the district. In this way, the knowledge, understanding, and self-efficacy developed in and reported by school leaders may be extended to those faculty members at the forefront of classroom instruction. In reciprocal fashion, school leaders in this district would reap the benefits of moving forward systemic improvements, impacting student learning, and fulfilling their role as effective district leaders.

Conclusions

In summary, this qualitative study sought to explore school leaders' perceptions around the implementation of a classroom walkthrough model and the potential impact it might have on their learning, identity, agency, and self-efficacy. The single-case study was utilized to generate robust descriptions and insights regarding the practice by those leaders engaged in the process as part of their leadership team culture. The walkthrough phenomenon as experienced by participants in this school district was further viewed through the lens of social practice theory. Concepts of learning, group identity, and efficacy were influenced by and exerted influence on the individual and collective behaviors, beliefs, and practices of the leadership team (Holland & Lave, 2009; Wenger, 1998, Wenger & McDermott, 2002).

Participants in the study understood and articulated the increased demands and accountability measures now facing Connecticut school leaders. Thus, the underlying rationale for developing the walkthrough model as a professional development tool was to improve their own learning and capacity to lead in order to improve teaching and learning across the district (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011; Reeves, 2011). Based on research findings, it can be concluded that participants were at ease in developing a common language for discussing the attributes of instruction but were challenged in achieving an in-depth understanding of quality instructional practices among all members of the leadership team. Participants blamed the lack of consistency in the walkthrough model and time devoted to the process as significant constraints.

However, results of this study showed the use of walkthroughs had increased participants' professional knowledge and relationships with their peers. This was significant, and the work taking place within their leadership team played a significant role in how participants felt about their own learning and competence as leaders. Participants perceived their classroom observations, discussions with colleagues, and reflections on instruction to have influenced their sense of belonging, knowledge, and self-efficacy as members of the leadership community. While findings from this study were positive in nature, a common theme among participants was the ineffectiveness of the walkthrough model in supporting their work as agents of the district and in being able to move forward district initiatives and changes, or to target specific areas for improvement. To this end, school leaders using non-evaluative classroom walkthroughs as a professional development tool should reflect on the purpose, the structure, and the practices innately connected to this type of model, as well as its usefulness in deepening

understandings around instruction and in supporting improvements in teaching and learning.

Findings based on responses to research questions and their implications led to the development of future recommendations. It was recommended the district select fewer problems of practice for leaders to focus on during the year and around which classroom observations and professional discourse could deepen school leaders' shared understandings of instruction. Increasing the number of walkthroughs leaders were able to engage in during the year was also recommended, since participants felt the infrequency of classroom visits interfered with their ability to achieve substantive and sustainable goals related to teaching and learning. However, increasing the number of walkthroughs would not be enough to support the fidelity of the process or school leaders' learning, professional development, or efficacy. This district would need to leverage time, resources, and central office support to ensure leaders' use of walkthroughs could lead to system-wide change and in their leaders' capacity to forward improvements in teaching and learning.

This case study demonstrated the use of a walkthrough model and its impact on school leaders' professional learning, identity, agency, and self-efficacy. As a community of practitioners, leaders in this study used the walkthrough model as a means of enhancing their individual and collective knowledge and skills as administrators. In doing so, they described an increased sense of belonging, collaboration, commitment, and a developing knowledge of pedagogy and instruction as a result of their observations and critical discourse with colleagues.

Sergiovanni (2009) asserted educational leaders have a moral obligation to engage in communities of practice centered on the foundation of their beliefs, values, and vision.

The primary intention of this study was to investigate the walkthrough phenomenon as the impetus for critical dialogue, reflection, and meaning-making around classroom instructional practices, and the manner in which leaders applied their shared understandings in their role as agents of the school district. Viewing this case from the perspective of leaders in one Connecticut regional school district shed light on the use of classroom walkthroughs as professional opportunities and the ways in which these practices influence learning, identity, agency and self-efficacy. Findings and implications from this case study may inspire future research in the area of classroom walkthroughs, as well as other in-house professional development practices, as a means of building and strengthening communities of practice in similar educational organizations and the leadership capacity of its membership.

Although this single-case study was not meant to generalize findings to other educational populations, implications from this inquiry contributed to a better understanding of classroom walkthrough practices as supportive of school leaders in their roles and responsibilities. Huber (2004) pointed to the expansive investments made by countries throughout the world in order to develop school leadership capacity. While the use of classroom walkthroughs are promising venues for the professional development of school leaders, future research should focus on whether the time and effort invested in these practices support leaders' learning, identity, agency, and capacity as instructional leaders and to what degree these practices benefit the quality of education within the communities leaders work.

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Appendix A:

Letter to School Leaders

Dear School Leader,

I am engaged in a qualitative study on your district leadership team's use of the classroom walkthrough model. Using a case study design, I intend to focus on school leaders' perceptions of the practice as members of the school community. I would like an opportunity to discuss my research with you and the possibility of your involvement as a participant in the study. This would include an interview with me when the research commences in June of 2012 as part of the data collection process.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience at 203-262-3255 so we can arrange a time to meet and discuss the research project. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Lorrie Rodrigue

Lorrie Rodrigue
Ph.D. candidate
Northcentral University

Appendix B:
School Leaders' Interview Questions

1. Tell us what your role is in the school organization.
2. How you define your responsibilities as a school leader within the district.
3. What is your understanding of the purpose of the district walkthrough practice?
4. Based on discussions with your colleagues from across the district during the walkthrough process, do you believe all members have a common understanding of the purpose of the district-led walkthrough practice?
5. Describe the walkthrough practice, including any steps or practices associated with the process.
6. Tell us what influence, if at all, walkthroughs have had on your understanding of instruction and learning taking place across the district.
7. Do you believe this understanding of instruction and learning is commonly shared among administrative colleagues as a result? Why or why not?
8. In what way do you believe walkthroughs have impacted your own professional knowledge and learning?
9. Has collaboration amongst members of the district leadership team changed in any way as a result of the district walkthrough initiative?
10. From your own perspective, how have walkthroughs shaped the critical discourse that occurs amongst members of the district leadership team?
11. In your perception, how might your active participation in walkthroughs shape your own or the group's identity as members of the school community?
12. Can you describe how classroom walkthroughs might contribute to your professional development and growth as a leader?
13. Do you feel classroom walkthroughs have influenced your role as an agent of the district? Can you describe?
14. How, if at all, has the walkthrough model contributed to your self-efficacy as a leader? Can you share any examples of this?

Appendix C:
Peer Reviewer Consent

This document represents a consent form for peer review of the qualitative study, entitled, *Exploring Classroom Walkthroughs: A Case Study of School Leaders' Learning and Professional Growth* being presented to Northcentral University as partial fulfillment of the dissertation for Lorrie Rodrigue.

You have been asked to review interview questions, examine data collection and analysis methodologies, and audit research findings contained in the dissertation as a neutral peer not currently affiliated with the study. As such, you agree to offer feedback and input, to the best of your ability, in order to help mitigate researcher bias or subjectivity in the process.

Thank you for your willingness to support the research on leaders' perceptions of classroom walkthroughs.

Lorrie Rodrigue

Date 4-20-2013

Lorrie Rodrigue, Doctoral Candidate, NCU

Jack Zmary

Peer Reviewer Name

Jack Zmary

Peer Reviewer Signature

Appendix D**District Superintendent's Letter Granting Permission for Study**

Regional School District A (pseudonym)

August 13, 2012
Ms. Lorrie Rodrigue
25-1 Macintosh Drive
Oxford, CT 06478

Dear Lorrie

:

As Superintendent, I grant permission for you to conduct a study during the 2012-13 school year. As I understand it, your qualitative study entitled **Exploring Classroom Walkthroughs: A Case Study of School Leaders' Learning and Professional Growth**, will focus on school leaders' perceptions regarding the classroom walkthrough process in our district and will include the need for interviewing of administrators, observations and note-taking, as well as document review.

You have permission to contact participants via letter and in person, as well as to conduct interviews with our administrators on site, when appropriate, at our Central Office location, or at the school locations for any of our building principals, academic chairpersons, or regional directors. These locations should be mutually-decided between you and the administrator-participants you have selected as part of your purposive sample.

It is my understanding that this holistic, single-case study will commence in August of 2012 or shortly thereafter. As part of this process, you will be allowed to accompany us on a district-led walkthrough as a neutral observer in order to take field notes for your study, speak to administrators, and examine documents related to walkthroughs in the district.

We look forward to hearing the results of your study.

Sincerely,

Frank [signature]

Superintendent of Schools