

GORE HIGH SCHOOL

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PRINCIPAL'S SABBATICAL

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The purpose in taking this sabbatical was to build some knowledge around how a principal can provide meaningful formative evaluation for teachers in terms of their teaching practice. The vehicle under investigation for the above purpose was "four minute walk throughs". (4MWT).

I acknowledge the support of the Gore High School Board of Trustees and the following schools for allowing me to join them for training; Waimairi Primary School, Te Awamutu College and Baverstock Oaks School. I thank the following schools for giving of their time to share with me their implementation journey around 4MWT; Middleton Grange, Tauranga Boys College, Rutherford College, Long Bay College, Summerland Primary School, South Auckland Seventh Day Adventist School and Holy Cross School Henderson.

Executive Summary:

4MWTs are a tool for teachers to learn from each other by visiting classrooms in teams (two or more) and having reflective conversations about each walk through within those teams, as distinct from giving feedback to the teacher visited. These "bottom loop" conversations are very powerful in changing teaching as they focus on best practice. They also build trust and a strong collegial environment. Walk throughs are able to enhance practice more quickly than traditional professional development alone because teachers are intrinsically motivated to change. "Top loop" conversations do happen with teachers who have been visited but only in the form of reflective questions, not judgemental evaluation of practice. Further, if the teacher visited is doing walk throughs the top loop conversations will happen naturally in a high trust environment and can become a valid component of a formal appraisal system. 4MWTs encourage teachers to become interdependent and at best, can be instrumental in moving teachers from being experienced to expert.

Purpose and Background:

The principal's role as a learning leader is to develop quality teaching and sound pedagogical practice. The pertinent question is?

- How do we enable quality teaching?
- How do you know it when you see it?
- How do you use school sweeps to enhance it?
- How do you conduct effective classroom visits?
- How do you give good feedback and "next steps"?
- How do school leaders create an environment/culture which allows teachers to grow professionally and in profound ways?
- How do you de-privatise classrooms?

- How do leaders authentically provide opportunities for coaching to occur?
- How do leaders differentiate professional growth and learning for teachers?
- How do leaders distribute leadership and empower those holding management units to go about influencing teaching and learning in colleagues' classrooms?
- How do leaders create a culture where professional relationships drive teacher-teacher interactions rather than personal relationships?

The questions and the answers to them are *not* about summative evaluation (measuring teacher quality). Rather they are about *enabling quality teaching (formative evaluation)*. When carrying out research before my sabbatical, the tool that impressed me most was a concept known as a "Walk Through", a method of data collection and reflection consisting of walking around the school, being in many classrooms for short periods of time.

Programme Outline:

My sabbatical programme involved:

- a) Researching literature on walk throughs and classroom observations;
- b) Gaining experience and training in how to conduct 4MWTs;
- c) Examining implementation in some schools through on site visits, discussion and observation; and
- d) Practising walk throughs in schools.

Section 1: Setting the scene

The walk through model described in this report has been developed over a period of forty years from the work of Dr Carolyn J Downey¹. Interlead Consultants (NZ) have adapted and developed this model into the four minute walk through (4MWT).

Downey, as a principal visiting classrooms in the 1960s, soon realized that her short visit, coupled with meaningful dialogue, was a most effective approach to focus on staff members' professional growth. She learned the Madeline Hunter (1968) approach to teacher evaluation where the principal was supposed to intervene in a teacher's practice by suggesting strategies for improvement. Downey then added a self-analysis portion to the Hunter model deliberately leaving the staff with a reflective question after a walk through. In the early 1970s, Art Costa's training on Cognitive Coaching encouraged Downey to move more and more towards informal, brief walk throughs with a focus on reflective conversations with teachers. Downey states "The idea of moving from an inspectional approach to supervision to a reflective supervision approach began to take shape. Why would anyone want to be in an inspectional situation unless the person was seen as marginal?"² Downey found that the Hunter approach worked quite well with relatively inexperienced teachers and that the Costa approach was working better for teachers who were experienced and more independent. Rather than being told by the "boss" how to change or reinforce certain practices, they seemed to embrace new ideas better through reflective dialogue.

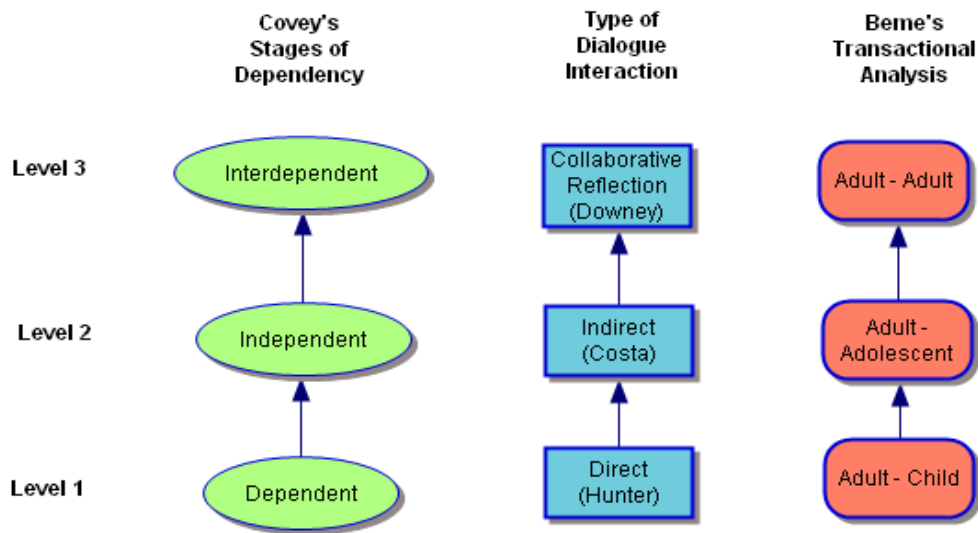


Figure 1: Downey's Flow of Supervisor/ Employee Relationships

Two further influences went on to shape Downey's final model. The first was Steven Covey (1989), who advocated moving employees from a dependent relationship with a supervisor to an interdependent relationship, going through the independent stage along the way. The second was Eric Berne's transactional analysis which described the supervisor's relationship with employees as adult-child, adult-adolescent, and adult-adult.

As depicted in Figure 1, the dependent relationship is one of adult-child. This often benefits the novice teacher who needs a supportive, nurturing relationship. Many supervisors use the same relationship with experienced teachers, which has a very different effect on the teacher. The independent level (level 2) is often used by staff members, who are operating in a paternalistic and benevolent manner. The ideal is the interdependent, collaborative adult-adult relationship where professional conversations are collaborative, learning together.

Moving teachers to reflective inquiry

Pedagogy is the way teachers teach children to learn, *andragogy* is the processes, systems and structures that best support adults in their learning. While they are similar, they are also significantly different. Normally, adults don't like being treated as children and often 'play the game' in hierarchical situations. While traditional common practices of appraisal and quality assurance, such as planned observations and planning inspections *may* glean sufficient evidence for attestation against the professional standards, they are fundamentally flawed as a process of effective staff development. We need a different paradigm.

Teachers require "direct, differentiated and sustained assistance"³ to develop as adult learners. Teachers are at all different places and stages (see Figure 2). Feedback and learning that may be required as a novice is quite inappropriate for an expert teacher. Professional conversations need to be different for staff at different stages. Adults learn when the process is based on reflective dialogue, and this is the foundation of the Downey model of walk throughs.

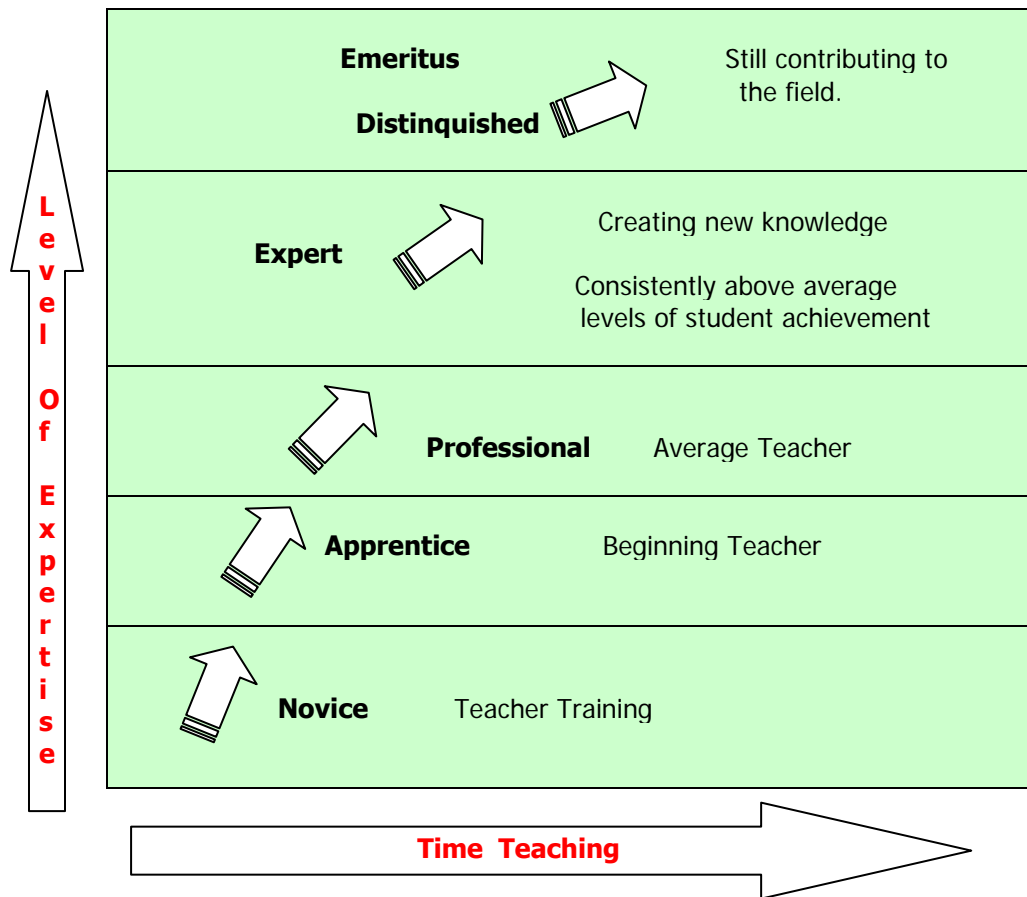


Figure 2: Teaching development stages

Section 2: Conducting walk throughs – the ears and eyes department.

The Downey walk through asks the observer to consider the following:

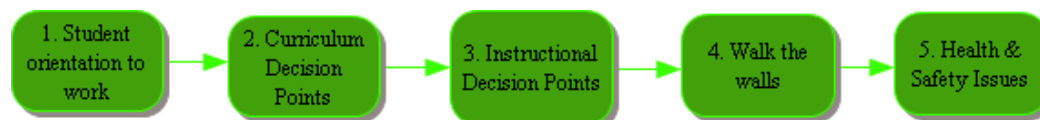


Figure 3: Downey's 5 step walk through

1. Student orientation to work: This happens in the first 5 seconds as you approach the room or walk in the door. What are the students doing and where is their attention? Don't disrupt or acknowledge anyone if you can help it – you are a fly on the wall – be unobtrusive.
2. Curriculum decision points: We are looking for 3Cs.
 - © Content: The skill, knowledge, process or concept to be learned by the students.
 - © Context: How are students demonstrating to you that they are learning? Look for their responses, information given or a context shared. Listen to student conversations or teacher-student conversations.

© Cognitive Type: In the taxonomy of thinking, at what level are students operating? (blooms – knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation)

3. Instructional decision points: The practices the teacher uses.

- ∫ Generic: What we would expect good teachers do and perhaps some “why didn’t we see” observations (notes and questions – not judgements!).
- ∫ School: Identifying the school wide strategies being used (e.g. literacy, thinking skills etc). This is an area where schools can focus on how imbedded their own priorities have become in actual practice.
- ∫ Specific: Any specific research based subject specific practices (e.g. the numeracy project). This may also be an area where the focus could turn to students or groups of students who have special needs.

4. Walk the walls: This is a scanning exercise, often useful to do to take attention away from you. How is the teacher using the environment to enhance teaching and learning? Note procedures, student work celebrated and what decisions teachers are making about what goes up.

5. Health & safety: Note any concerns.

Walk throughs are a different paradigm. It is important to make notes from which to ask questions – *not to* make judgements! Notes are not made during the visit, but afterwards, preferably after discussion with someone who went on the walk through with you⁴. *This part of the whole process is the hidden treasure – the ‘bottom loop’*. You begin to discover that it is not about the teacher you have visited, it is about you!



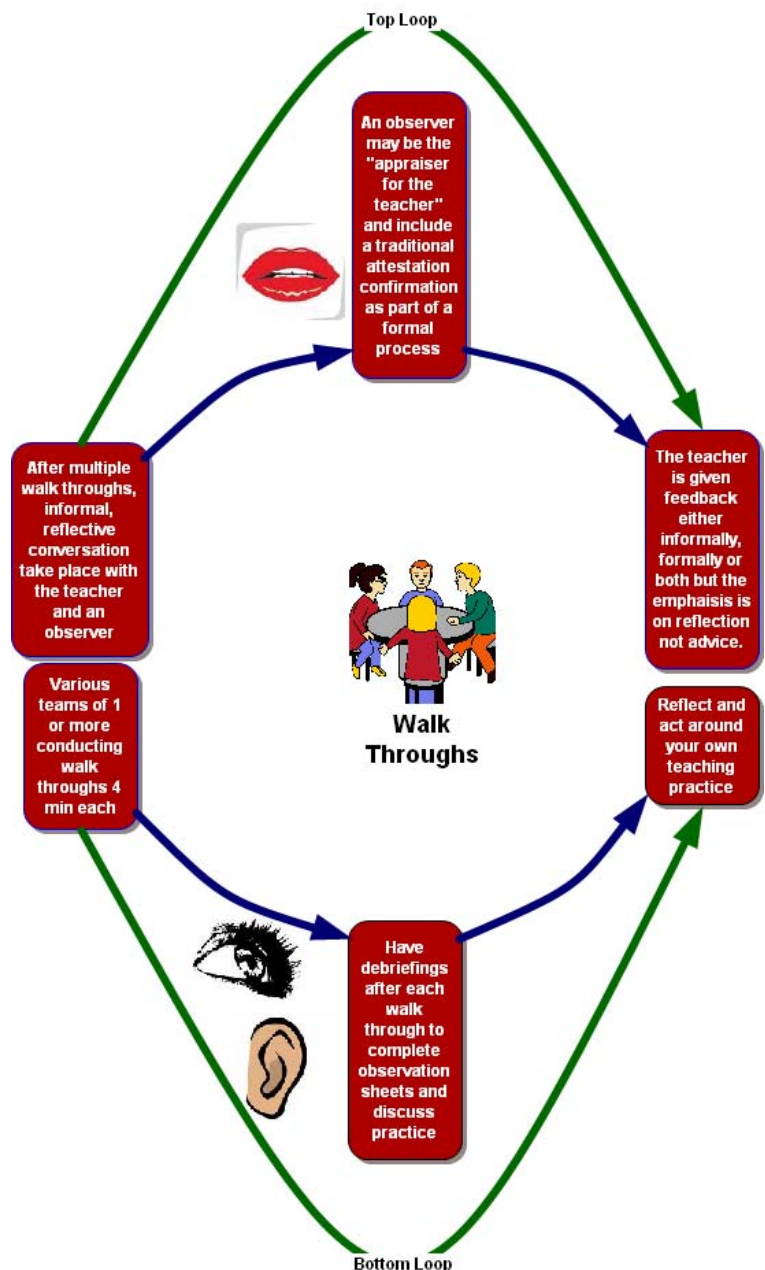
A mosaic.

Obviously, 4 minutes provides a snapshot only. Teachers will apologise that this or that wasn’t so while you were there – just reassure them of two things, namely it is not about them really and that you are building a mosaic – any 4 minutes is just that. Over time as a suite of visits are made, the mosaic becomes clearer and some patterns may be observed. This may present an opportunity to talk to the teacher being visited, not to do an appraisal or offer advice, but to ask some questions for their reflection. This is the **‘top loop’**. The bottom loop involves training your eyes and ears, the top loop is about developing a new voice, reflective collaboration.⁵

Section 3: Conversations – developing a new voice.

Over time and with practice, skill is built in the walk through process. This is also true of top loop conversations. We are working in a new paradigm. “Shifting from past based reactive conversations into future orientated generative conversations generates new possibilities for you and your teachers. Getting the follow up conversations to walk throughs ‘right’ is the single most important element to developing reflective practice, to moving teachers to positions where intrinsic motivation is the norm and to where relationships are based on interdependent learning.”⁶ Conversations will differ according to the dependency level of the teacher (Figure 1) but also need to build rather than inhibit collaborative partnerships.

At the heart of these new conversations is a reflective question. The two possible focus areas for a reflective question are in step 2 or 3 of the walk through process; the teacher’s curriculum and/or instructional decision making.



The attributes of a reflective question⁷

- Decision – the teacher is the decision maker rather than the person walking through – they decide how they teach. “How do you decide....?”
- Choice – we want the teacher to reflect on the choices they are making around about what is taught and how it is taught. “What criteria do you use.....?”
- About ones practice – it is not about a specific lesson. Observing lessons assists us to identify decision patterns teachers are making, which can become triggers upon which to frame a question.
- Focus on the future not the past. If you are used to giving advice, this will be a difficult change to make. Avoid past tense – so “when

you decided ..." becomes "When you are deciding...". Note the use of the word *are*.

- Many possible situations/contexts – singular to plural. Because you see 4 minutes and because a teacher teaches in multiple contexts every day, focusing on one is a potential pitfall. Use plural words. "units of work, topics, assessments etc"
- Neutral non judgmental statements. Try to move teachers thinking towards analysis, synthesis or evaluation rather than make comments like "I really liked the way you...., one way you could do this is...". Obviously, judgemental comments and encouragement is appropriate for a novice teacher but it is important to work at a much higher cognitive level with experienced and expert teachers.
- Positive presuppositions – assumes the person is thinking about and doing what is presented in the reflective question. In this way you can establish what is important, reinforce high expectations and move to an adult-adult base quickly. This is very powerful seed sowing.
- Honour what was observed but don't fall into the trap of discussing one pixel on the screen. "I have noticed a few times that...."
- Impact on student learning – end the question with some statement about the effect their teaching is having on student learning. "...to provide each student...". This depersonalises the question.

Constructing a reflective question

There are five elements of a reflective question.

- a. Situation
- b. Teacher reflection
- c. Choice
- d. Decision
- e. Student impact

Examples:

"When you are planning to have students work in groups^a and considering the dynamics of the students making up your class^b, what criteria do you use^c when deciding how groups are formed^d so that learning in your class is optimised^e?"

"When providing one to one student support at a time when you have 25 students in your room^a and thinking about balancing all of their needs,^b what criteria do you use^c when deciding which students to offer assistance to in the first instance^d so that all of your students are not disadvantaged^e?"

Hints: Learning to ask these questions requires persistence. Using step a. sets up the positive presupposition and makes the question more neutral. Don't focus on more than one teaching technique in one question. Don't fall into the past tense. Don't use them when a more direct approach is required to remedy something.

Section 4: Implementation

School visits have revealed some similarities but almost always unique approaches to implementing 4MWTs. In general, primary schools train either whole syndicate teams or leadership teams in small groups of 8-10 people. Secondary schools train senior management and middle management. By

training on site is small groups teachers are able to visit other teachers' classes to practice their walk through observations. All schools have similar walk through data collection as part of the bottom loop process. Once trained, some schools are visiting within teams that have been trained and fully understand the walk through process. Others are much more loose, conducting walk throughs alone and visiting teachers who have only a small understanding of why they are coming and therefore still expect traditional feedback.

Interlead publish a warning⁸ about implementation as they have had to conduct 'rescues' in a few schools where things have gone wrong. Because it involves teacher observation and can be seen to be closely aligned with appraisal, it is a high stakes tool and practitioners can get it wrong if due care is not applied.

The profiles of schools below have been printed with their permission and summarise their implementation of walk throughs as at the time of my sabbatical. I have used a sample of schools visited simply as examples.

Summerland Primary, Auckland⁹

The 6 team leaders and 3 senior managers are the lead team – one team leader is responsible for the implementation of 4MWT. Whole staff are being trained progressively. They have done two days training, the lead team have been also trained in the feedback conversations. The school has a four year action plan (2008 ->2011) with four 1 year phases: introduce(2008), implement(2009), imbed(2010) and sustain(2011).

Summerland has a high priority around building a professional learning community. It does not believe that walk throughs are compatible (at least in the development phase) with a traditional appraisal model because it is a totally different paradigm. They argue "that teachers can't be reflective and growth orientated in a judgmental environment; trust is too fragile to risk losing it over a measurement process. While quality assurance in teaching can be attested to if people "play the game" of appraisal, the process is fundamentally flawed as a developmental model for staff."

The real value in walk throughs has been in the post visit conversations between the teachers conducting the walk throughs.

Seventh Day Adventist Primary, South Auckland¹⁰

It began with a desire to change how leadership happened in the school. Appraisal was not working well and staff were open to anything to improve this.

The management team of four (principal and leaders of the senior, middle and junior teams) were trained first. They began doing it. All staff had a 20 minute briefing on what 4MWTs were. It became obvious that staff needed it and so the principal trained the staff. It was done in the three teams – senior, middle and junior school. One day's training shares the theory base and gave some practice at walk throughs.

Now having done the walk throughs there were conversations to be had. Again the four managers were trained. They are working with those conversations now and are just about at a place where the principal is to train the staff, who have been doing 4MWTs and now want to have the conversations. The conversations

are hard. The staff are naturally suspicious but the line is that “we (management) are learning – we want to make this place somewhere where we are all exceptional teachers and we need your help to do this. We are going to be trying new things – we will grow out of it and over time we hope that you will grow out of it.” Staff agreed that the tradition appraisal was cruel and dishonest because all involved acknowledged that they have played the game of charades and tick the box. They now appreciate that the 4MWT process is far more honest.

Conversations have been the biggest challenge. Getting the ability to release staff fast enough and often enough to make it work is the second biggest challenge, because frequency in the early stages of 4MWTs is important. Staff need about 15-20 each within the first month.

The school is using walk throughs within teams but also across the whole school without focusing on specific practice. The managers get a good feel for how staff are doing in their teams so that when professional standards are attested to honest conversations can be had. “Appraisal and attestation has just become a box ticking exercise but we know a lot more about our own school and our own practice and that is the bonus here. The more we go down this line the more staff will just use 4MWT to reflect on practice and accept appraisal and attestation as a box ticking exercise.”

Long Bay College, North Shore¹¹

4MWTs were introduced against a backdrop of an appraisal review. The staff felt the existing appraisal system had little worth and so were very receptive to a change. The goal was to focus appraisal on staff development. The appraisal system was reviewed to meet the MOE requirements around attestation and then to focus on the professional learning of staff. It was about developing reflective practice so that staff could articulate and recognize how they were teaching, particularly so that teachers could make the learning steps more explicit to the students. Each teacher is given a “Reflection on Learning Handbook” part of which has a self reflection sheet in it. The portfolio which shows evidence of goal achievement and the classroom observations used to help the reflection process are informed in part by 4MWTs. The appraiser has been renamed as the learning coach, who the appraisee chooses.

Training was done in two mixed groups of senior managers and heads of faculty (HOFs), and was specifically on the walk through process. HOFs are working with the walk throughs and gaining a feel and a confidence for the approach. Teachers and classes are becoming relaxed with people visiting their room. The next step is to give the whole staff a formal explanation of walk throughs. It is expected that HOFs will then train their own staff within their departments and do walkthroughs with them. The school works on a high trust model so rather than being too prescriptive about how 4MWTs will be done they want to keep discussing with HOFs how they are going and try to bring some common understandings across departments about implementation.

Rutherford College¹²

The model of appraisal needed to be modified because it was not reflective enough nor was it based on real world day in day out lessons. It also needed to be ‘allowed’ to open up the classroom borders at times other than performance

lessons. The school also wanted to develop a leadership model for all senior leaders that would bring this sort of change in thinking and process. Three days of 4MWT training has been given to the entire executive team and the faculty leaders. This has included the theoretical base, the walk through process and having the feedback conversations.

The “people doing the walking are doing the learning” so this school is determined to get general staff doing walk throughs in pairs. An initial school wide presentation was given to all staff to build some understanding of walk throughs to try to get staff to realize that their classrooms are simply the context. They need to understand the different paradigm especially with respect to the matter of trust. The Deputy Principal does 4MWTs with HOFs and they in turn are doing them with staff in their departments. HOFs have also been doing walk throughs together. The resulting discussions about learning are an exciting development. There are other signs of sound leadership development as a result of the 4MWTs. “As soon as you put the teacher in the role of the learner, they remember why they went teaching because they love to learn!”

The next step is to train the whole staff in small groups in the 4MWT process and to develop the HOFs ability to have reflective conversations. The school also plans to use 4MWTs to monitor aspects of curriculum implementation.

References

1. The Three Minute Classroom Walk-through; changing school supervisory practice one teacher at a time by Carolyn J Downey, Betty E Steffy, Fenwick W English, Larry E Frase, William K Poston.
2. The Three Minute Classroom Walk-through; changing school supervisory practice one teacher at a time by Carolyn J Downey, Betty E Steffy, Fenwick W English, Larry E Frase, William K Poston, Page 10 para 5
3. Interlead Learning Window One, Page 35 para 2.
4. A observation sheet is usually made up by schools with the five steps broken down into headings.
5. Top Loop and Bottom Loop terminology has been developed by Interlead and is their intellectual property. Interlead Learning Window Three, the whole booklet.
6. Interlead Learning Window Three, Developing a new voice Page 3 para 1.
7. Interlead Learning Window Three, Developing a new voice pages 14-19
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