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## "Choosing My Words Carefully": Observing, Debriefing, and Coaching Four Literacy Teachers' Through Their Lessons

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“Choosing My Words Carefully”: Observing, Debriefing, and Coaching Four Literacy  
Teachers’ Through Their Lessons

by

Iveta Maska

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of Childhood Education and Literacy Studies  
College of Education  
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Communication

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to the three most important people in my life who continue to shape me into the person I am. To my always encouraging, abundantly supportive and ever faithful parents, George and Dagmar Maska, my humblest words cannot do justice in thanking you for the sacrifices you continue to give unselfishly and maximally. You never ever stopped believing in me even when I didn't believe in myself. This is your moment to realize it was worth it all! Mamo, an encouraging word from you is like a breath of life to my soul. Tato, your ever present, quiet, supportive love has given me a sense of security and reliance I so need. To my exuberant and intelligent son George, who is and always will be my own personal sunshine and greatest accomplishment in this life. Your precious spirit gave me the will to keep trying and writing, especially since you wanted your computer back! Thank you all for your cherished prayers. Enjoy the victory!

Ultimately, this work is dedicated to the glory of God and my savior Jesus Christ.

*Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.*

Proverbs 19:21

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## **ABSTRACT**

A safe environment, conducive to productive and transparent conversations, makes possible the improvement of literacy practices and strengthens teacher/administrator relationships for more honest and vulnerable conversations. In this autoethnographic intrinsic case study I conducted a self-study of my use of language and communication with four literacy teachers during debrief, after classroom walkthroughs, when coaching each on literacy practice. Furthermore, the component under investigation was the debrief meeting where dialogue is the key ingredient for discussing teacher classroom practice. The study was approached through identifying characteristics from my personal and professional background, to my interactions with the four literacy teachers and the insights and perceptions of my role and style as their administrator. Findings revealed, teachers in this study desired positive recognition and praise as a result of my informal classroom walkthroughs. I was able to influence the teachers' beliefs through debriefing and nurture those beliefs about themselves to enhance their attempts to teach their students more effectively. Student engagement increased as the teachers began to unpack the why, what and the how of their teaching during debrief meetings. School wide improvement efforts were also supported as teachers were able to look past themselves when they reflected on connections made to the next grade level or the previous grade level to help understand literacy curricular decisions and goal setting. The findings were discussed as they apply to the debrief experiences realized by both administrator and teacher.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

“There is in the world no rock or tower of such a height that it cannot be scaled by any man (provided he lack not feet) if ladders are placed in the proper position or steps are cut in the rock, made in the right place, and furnished with railings against the danger of falling over.”

Jan Amos Komensky (1907). *The Great Didactic of John Amos Comenius*, p. 238.

### ***My Personal Journey***

“Who belongs to the child in the stroller in front of the store?” shouted the store clerk through the early morning crowd of fresh bakery buyers crammed into the two-aisle neighborhood grocery. No one answers and again the call goes out. A woman just two customers behind the serving counter, fidgets impatiently for the line to move so she can buy the allocated amount of bananas just delivered. The store clerk moves expectantly among the patrons inquiring who might be the child’s mother. The woman can’t hold off not responding anymore even though she would be the next one to get service in line. With a tired voice she quietly responds to the store clerk, “she is mine.” All eyes turn on her as the clerk unpleasantly asks her to step out of line and escorts her out of the store. To her horror she finds her one year old, already able to respond in complete sentences, struggling and screaming to be set free from the stroller harness she hung from upside down, dangerously close to the cold gray pavement. The woman takes in a deep breath, thanks the store clerk and pulls the child firmly back into the stroller. As she settles her

in for the short walk back to the three-story townhouse around the block, she remembers what the hospital nurse told her when she left the maternity ward with her newborn. “You have a very beautiful child, however she’ll know how to make herself known! She knows what she wants and how to get it.”

Control, determination, and internal drive are characteristics of my life. From my earliest beginnings I had the tenacity to step out from the crowd often and defy systems or people when I believed a wrong occurred or an imbalance of power tipped unfavorably for someone. My mother veiled these tendencies, in my formative years, under the shroud of independence and inquisitiveness. Later, I would learn to channel these energetic tendencies to navigate life and leadership as an educator.

My personal journey starts in a Czech family living a moderate lifestyle in the town of Brno, Czechoslovakia. Both my mother and father were born and raised in the midst of communism, nevertheless they did not agree with much of its premise. As a result of my upbringing and personality, I developed a natural tendency to directly oppose the basic tenants of a communist society. This tendency, for the most part, stemmed from my parents’ background.

My father was an established engineer and the family breadwinner. His father, a lawyer, spent many a weekend and summer vacation hiking around the Czech Republic sleeping in the woods with his two boys. His mother, a secretary, spent most of her time working and raising the two boys on minimal means. My father’s mother never expected much as far as a monetary contribution for the boys or the household. My father recalls how he valued an abundant meal because growing up he was apportioned daily meals and sometimes went without due to limited resources at his mother’s disposal. From an early age he had to learn to take care of himself, but always placed his

mother in the forefront giving over his wages to her so she could maintain the family. These lessons engrained in my father a strong sense of family loyalty and self-determination.

Responsibility, dedication, and hard work became characteristics taught to me by my father to later influence my leadership style. I am dedicated to the development of my teachers and go the extra mile with them in a mentality where to quit is not an option. I take time to listen and coach them. Many a day teachers find me busy at work on a project or preparing materials to make their teaching easier. It is never a problem for me to find answers, resources or solutions for my teachers needs. Often teachers express I genuinely care about them and I show a vested interest in their success. I have an open door policy. Many individuals seek me out for advice or as a resounding board so they can voice their concerns or frustrations. I am known for my trustworthiness and discreet mannerism. I find teachers will freely share personal information and seek my advice on a variety of topics. Moreover, there is an old Czech saying my father used when he made decisions; “measure twice and cut once.” This little saying has helped guide my leadership decisions by reminding me to step back, assess all the pieces involved, and then make a decision after everything possible has been taken into account. It’s kept me out of a few pinches when the urge to respond from impulse calls.

My mother, an educated clerical secretary, made it her life’s work to create a warm and organized home for my father and me. At nineteen, her father, was actively fighting against the fascists during World War Two by hiding weapons used by the partisans. As a result of his activities he was captured and incarcerated in a concentration camp in Austria for two grueling years. After his escape from Austria, he once again joined forces with the partisans in the fight against the Germans until

communism established itself in the Czech Republic. He was an opinionated man who stood behind what he believed, especially when it came to defending the weak. These extraordinary experiences caused my grandfather to suffer from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and as a result put a large toll on his family. Growing up my mother learned to navigate her home life by becoming a capable diplomat. My mother's practiced diplomatic skills later transferred to me and became my way of interacting with teachers.

My mother lived in a house built by her parents who where both born there. When my parents married they moved into the second floor of this townhouse as was customary for many other Czech couples. As any new couple beginning on a new life together, living in a parent's home simply added extra discontent to my mother and father. Not only did they feel they were living a duplicitous part of their lives at work and in the community, the cramped accommodations led to a desire to be on their own. They began to get restless and started contemplating escaping the communist Czechoslovakia in conjunction with my father's best friend who was also married and a father of a five year old son. Much of the constraints, rules and demands of this type of a society worked to create dissatisfaction in my parents and a yearning for a better life where choices could be made freely and your opinions held without prosecution. Conformity was difficult for my parents. They felt bothered they had to obey the government and could not do as they pleased. The government was involved in all aspects of every Czech's life, telling them where to vacation and with whom, dictating what school their child would eventually attend, and what profession she would have.

I recall the story my mother told me about how I was excluded from the local daycare because I was too loud and troublesome. Teachers complained I would not take

a nap and would wake other children loudly from their naps so I could play with them. They also said I refused to stay in line when we walked and I confiscated sand toys for my personal use rather than sharing with others. I was a talkative and argumentative child - traits I later learned to curb to serve me in my leadership capacity. Teachers said I was argumentative, uncompromising and determined to have my way. They warned if my parents could not get my behavior under control, I would have a difficult time in school if I even were allowed to attend school. Academics and “Trade Tracking” students were separated in elementary school and behavior grades were determining factors for academic entry. These foreshadowing’s infuriated my parents who exuded much energy in molding and channeling my energetic personality.

My parents sought freedom and choices not only for themselves, but also for me. Their curiosity was piqued by stories of countries outside of the iron curtain and they wanted to go there. The seed of escape was planted and planning began. Eventually our climactic escape came in the summer of 1977, beginning our lifestyle of flux. Slowly and silently my parents sold items here and there to compile a meager amount of money for our escape under the guise extra money would be needed for our vacation. My mother, father, a best friend, and I received permission to go on a vacation to Yugoslavia. Of course we would not be allowed to travel on our own, but with a government escort who would guarantee our return to Czechoslovakia.

In our hotel, on the island of Krk, Yugoslavia, my father and his friend got our tour guide drunk during a drinking contest where the tour guide drank Vodka and my father and his friend drank water. Once the tour guide went to sleep we made our escape initially by ferryboat, then by train and later by foot through the mountains between the boarder of Yugoslavia and Austria. We were a sad lot to behold. Using only

a hand drawn estimation map of the area, we crossed and re-crossed foreign borders leading us out of communist territory and then right back in again. Later, I would experience nightmares from the trauma of the escape where border patrols would shoot their weapons and hold back snarling dogs as we shimmied under barbed wire blockades. To this day I don't like the dark and am fearful of what may be lurking outside my home at night. Fear and destitution became additional categories of influence on my life. The drive to succeed at all costs is engrained in my soul.

I recollect a scene in the woods on the border between freedom and oppression. I was huddled with my parents under a dew-drenched bush, ankle deep in muck, waiting for border patrol to pass our area. The plan was to shimmy under the barbwire and through the ditch to the neighboring line of trees and make a run for it before the sun came up. My dad knew the border patrol typically did not have bullets in their weapons as they were for intimidation purposes rather than for actual use. As the patrol made his way by our hiding spot, suddenly he stopped. Instantly, my mother put her hand over my mouth and clutched me to her warm trembling body. No one breathed while the patrol lit a cigarette and took a long drag of it. I remember looking through the bush and seeing the red-hot tip illuminating the early morning backdrop. Tension and fear permeated our group. No one moved. Finally, the patrol flicked the cigarette butt to the side and sloshed off along the border. In the brief moment, tension snapped. Our little group moved forward and we slipped and dragged through a cold wet ditch. I remember not understanding the frantic nature of our actions. I did not understand why all of a sudden people were shouting at us in the dark. All I felt was the panic and fear emanating from my parents. It is a feeling I have never forgotten.



Eventually we made it to Vienna and set up residence with help and support from my father's friend and his family. Our stint in Austria was short lived. My parents believed we were not far enough from the communists who would punish my parents' escape with either lifetime imprisonment or death. The decision to leave Europe was the talk of most evenings. Motivated by pressing fear, for our safety and a desire to reach a better life, in November 1977 we arrived at Kennedy airport, New York City, as officially sponsored immigrants to the United States. Imagine a soon to be six year old little girl, a half empty suitcase with scant possessions, a hundred bucks, and parents with severely limited English embarking in a new life in a foreign land. Guts were not in short supply with my folks.

From the start it was hard on my parents. I am prideful, even though we came to this country with nothing; we never took support or handouts to get by. Czech's are a proud group and we were no exception. Pride, hard work, diligence and an innate desire to survive on our own two feet propelled my family forward. Initially, my father worked a variety of jobs at the same time and then settled on running his own delivery business for local print companies. He was the absentee parent. There were many weekdays when I wouldn't see him and my mother became my world. My father insisted she stay home to take care of me, but I think he feared for her. She was fragile in the beginning. She would get overwhelmed just venturing out to buy groceries at the end of our street. My mother's life path became one of selective seclusion and avoidance of society. She lived vicariously through my stories of school and my father's musings about his occupations. I think my mother's apprehensions with society caused me to wonder what there was to fear from people. As I began to live the immigrant life, I quickly realized there was a lot to fear and worry about when interacting with people. People were cruel

and unkind. Often I was at the end of stinging teasing and harassment from kids at school. I would be called “communist kid” and “fat foreigner.” I even felt shunned by the public school librarian who berated me for trying to check out a picture book. In her opinion, a child who could not speak English could not read and therefore was not allowed to check out books. Needless to say these and other painful experiences gave me enough reason to abhor school. Not being able to communicate correctly in English, I withdrew from others and clung to my mother.

I developed a cultural sensitivity within a diverse Czech immigrant community. Through our myriad of upward moves to better accommodations and living environments, we found a tight little Czech cluster in New York City and upstate New York. The Czech community made living in a foreign land more satisfactory to our family. I was able to connect with Czech kids like me. As I learned about the Czech immigrant’s similar stories of disappointment and conflict with unkind and indifferent people, I began to develop a sense of defensiveness and justice for others and me. My bold and determined nature helped prepare me to stand up for what was right. Later, as a school administrator it became my mission to lead compassionately and never deny anyone equal access to what education could provide. When we moved to Florida our world became a bit narrower. No longer were we connected to the immigrant Czech community. Loneliness marked my late teens and early young adult years. All the moves and different schools forced me to develop an independent, self-preserving stance.

Looking back, I can see how language – language that communicates - language with which I communicate with teachers is a conscious focus area for professional life. Because language was a roadblock for me as I grew up, I am intimately aware of how

language can make a person feel or react. Language either draws a person in or pushes them out into the cold. Often, I analyze what I said to someone and what it might have meant. I make it a habit to speak precisely, often practicing ahead of time how I will interact with someone or what I will say in a teacher workshop. I don't want to be misunderstood or miss the mark of what I am trying to communicate to others. Words are important to me and I desire to communicate well. I know language is a powerful key in relationship. When I could not communicate as a fresh immigrant, I was frustrated and felt shunned. I felt I was not an equal and became uncomfortable. I never want anyone else to feel shunned, so I work on my communication skills. I've developed acute sensitivity to not only what people say, but also how they say it. I can read what's behind the words based on the way they are spoken and how a person's body language goes with the spoken word. I take the opportunity to model cultural sensitivity for my teachers at every parent/teacher conference. I'm invited to meetings where language may be a roadblock to the home/school relationship. For teachers with learners who speak other languages, I try to make personal connections with students and families so the experience at school is pleasant. I've been recognized by our English for Speakers of Other Languages district supervisor as being one of the most culturally sensitive and cooperative administrators in the county.

Seeking fairness, standing up for justice and giving others the benefit of the doubt can be difficult to uphold as an administrator. For example, I experienced a year where many teachers were rifted to different available positions around our county. A teacher is rifted when there is an excess of teachers and not enough students to serve at one school and moved to another school where there are not enough teachers to cover all the students. The teacher is at the mercy of the district and may be moved grade levels or

content areas they are certified to teach. One teacher moved to my elementary school from a successful high school setting and began to flounder with the expectations placed on him as a support facilitator with our Exceptional Student population. It became necessary to coach and eventually document his activities. A district supervisor got involved and began to steer me in the direction to terminate him. I did not agree with this course of action. I was convinced if he were in a like position at the secondary level he would fair much better. The teacher felt the same and began to interview. He was eventually considered for a position at a local high school. When the Principal called me for a phone reference I was candid and honest about his struggles at the elementary level. Regardless, the Principal decided to hire him. When the district supervisor found out that he was hired at the high school, he was upset with my decision to support the teacher in this regard rather than complete the process towards termination. I could not destroy a teacher's career due to a lack of alternative placement that might make him successful. I was disconcerted about this situation and spent many hours reflecting on whether or not I did the right thing. I felt good about this decision because I learned later that the teacher was thriving at the high school level, even though my decision to help him was not in my best interest. I think as an administrator the concept of "all for one and one for all" became a precedent in the way I conduct business at my schools. My family worked this way, so naturally I grafted this into my role as the Assistant Principal. I feel a strong need to show my teachers I will stick with them to the end and their goals are valuable to me worthy to be pursued. I model responsibility on a personal level and one for the collective as well. My motto is "we are only as strong as our individual pieces working together." With the desire to establish stronger working relationships, I trust and believe in the innate good nature of my staff. I choose to hope

and believe people truly want to be great educators and do the right things for students. As a result, I often demonstrate the ability to forgive my staff for mistakes or poor choices they make and provide them with a way to demonstrate better decisions.

I developed a strong tendency to nurture from my mother who created a safe and warm environment in our living places as we moved around the United States during our immigrant years. Through her efforts, I have come to believe that language not only includes what is said, but what is not said or communicated through our workspaces and ways of operation in our roles. As an administrator, I consider my office a space to make comfortable for others. I decorate the walls with photos of fun activities I did with my family, my son's artwork and pictures of my pets. Furniture is arranged in a way so I can sit next to a visitor rather than behind my desk as if behind a barrier. I have comfort food available at all times and soft lighting with a plant or two adorning the windows. I use an "open door" policy and no matter how busy I get I stop to make note of someone passing my door. I believe nurturing the psyche goes hand in hand with developing a teacher. This skill stems from the silent language I have come to rely on when I relate to others.

I lead my staff through an act of professional development whereby I mold and guide them to their possibilities allowing each person to make decisions and learn from their mistakes. I believe I can nurture teachers into their potential through our relationship and the way I communicate with them. I believe people need someone to believe in them, like my parents believed in me, and coach them through opportunities. I know what it feels like to be supported by someone. I learned to wait patiently on professionals to make connections and establish realizations for themselves instead of telling them what to do and how to do it in their teaching practices. I enjoy soliciting

opinions of others and develop trust as I incorporate teachers in decision-making and participation in school goal attainment. Where there is no buy-in or hope there is no vision worth attaining.

### ***My Professional Journey***

Becoming an educator was not my intention. I don't want to sound cliché, but for me it was a calling first voiced by my mother and then realized by me much later. At times my upward mobility occurred in whirlwind fashion as if my potential was dormant and needed to be released at just the right time. I've had my share of successes and many pockmarks of failure I wish I could have avoided. Somehow I grew and became a strong educator and leader.

My first introduction to education was as a substitute teacher. As part of my degree requirements, I was to complete a final internship. My final internship was conducted at an elementary school where I did most of my substitute teaching. The intern teacher was an exemplary communicator and I quickly absorbed and assimilated many of her skills and strategies for my own pedagogy to use with my own class one day. She modeled how coaching could be used, through concrete examples from my teaching, to guide my development as a teacher. Later on in my career, I used the same techniques to guide teachers from their point of development. It was important to me to give positive feedback as well as constructive criticism. My intern teacher had a way of balancing the two without making me feel like I couldn't grow from where I stood in my teaching. She had the ability to be harsh and critical, but she chose to be optimistic and kind as she developed the potential she saw I possessed. The internship was so successful I was asked to fill a kindergarten/first grade position for the following school

year on the same team. I would be my intern teacher's team member counterpart for the next two years. Thereafter, I moved several towns over from my current teaching position and changed schools following the transfer of my Assistant Principal. During the summer, I convinced my former intern teacher and now colleague to join me at the new school. This was a huge change for both of us because it was our first experience with a Title One, inner city school. The skills we used at our previous school would need to be modified to fit our new student population. Flexibility in practice became a new skill to hone.

I enjoyed another year of teaching kindergarten/first grade. I became an internship teacher and had my first intern assigned to me the second half of the school year. Now, I had the opportunity to use the coaching strategies used on me in my internship. My intern was hired on to our school at the end of her internship and is still teaching there today. At the close of the school year, I decided I wanted to solely focus on emergent literacy. A reading resource position opened at my present elementary school for the following school year and I was selected to remediate the primary grades. This was a rewarding role as well. I had the opportunity to lead a group of paraprofessionals as they planned and remediated reading groups. In essence it was my first leadership experience to guide these women to successfully apply reading strategies to struggling readers. I learned how to navigate the different personalities and ability levels of the ladies and developed many nuances in dealing with them. I began to understand the concept "fair is not equal" when it comes to developing people. In addition, I had my first encounter with being shutout of a classroom because a teacher did not want me to see how she taught. Reading remediation was conducted inside of teacher's classrooms. I remember asking, "How can I be less of a threat to her?" I

understood her practices would be exposed to comment. I realized fear existed for her under these circumstances. She saw me as someone who might report to administration. I was not to be trusted. I began to reflect on how to earn access and trust. I knew I would have to find a workable balance between my role as a coach and how I served the teachers.

The next school year in 2002, I was promoted to Reading Specialist at a nearby middle school. I would get to observe my struggling readers from elementary school navigate the demands of middle school literacy. This position gave me a platform to develop quasi-leadership skills. The middle school Principal was a collegial and inspirational leader who developed many teacher leaders into administrators. Early on in my career he began to give me leadership opportunities and responsibilities along with encouragement to help build me up to an administrative role. In the Reading Specialist capacity I planned for whole school literacy initiatives, oversaw the reading classes, provided staff development, facilitated whole school testing, developed curriculum, reviewed textbooks and coordinated textbook adoptions. A defining moment occurred my third year in this role when I was invited to participate on a district team of professionals to develop and write the secondary literacy plan. Much of this work established the rollout plan for the literacy standards and benchmarks in grades 6-12 for future years. Through my work as a middle school Reading Specialist, I learned the communication necessary to productively navigate a politically laden school system.

Furthermore, I facilitated courses for teachers pursuing endorsement in reading through the University of Central Florida (UCF) and taught college level reading at a local community college. The program offered through UCF was titled Florida Online



Professional Development (ForPD). I spent many evenings of discussion with ForPD participants about literacy and its application in the classroom as well as grading volumes of assignments turned in by my loads of upward to 120 students. These courses gave me a professional outlet to share and learn about literacy on the cutting edge and I gleaned many new innovative ideas to help in my current school based position.

Relevancy is important when guiding others to try something new. I was a popular facilitator and many teachers requested to be in my sections. Course survey feedback showed my participants felt I was caring, helpful and genuinely in touch with my participants needs. For two summers in a row I facilitated this course from the Czech Republic. I began to see the power of technological literacy and the role it played for me personally.

My middle school Principal continued to engage me in conversation about pursuing administration. Prior to graduating with my second Master's degree (this time in Educational Leadership), I zipped through the Assistant Principal pool process conducted by the district. I was placed in the pool and began to interview for openings at the elementary level. This was a move I would regret for a long time to come because my leadership development was initiated at the secondary level. My middle school Principal was against my decision to become an administrator at the elementary school level from the beginning and argued that I was trained for an Assistant Principal position at the middle school level. He did not envision my leadership path starting at the elementary level. He urged me to reconsider, however my son would go to kindergarten in the fall and it would be great to have him at my school where I could keep a watchful eye on him. I was still apprehensive about my recent separation from

my ex-husband and had safety concerns for my son on my mind. Once I had made the decision it was not going to change my reality.

After just two months in the elementary Assistant Principal pool, I landed my first administrative position at a rural Title One elementary school. The school was mid-size housing roughly 750 students. We had several self-contained programs ranging from profound autistic to emotionally behaviorally disadvantage to gifted. For the first year, I spent most of my time administering within the special needs programs. I had no experience with exceptional student education to boast about from my previous background, but after four years as Assistant Principal here I was well qualified in this area as well. A caveat experience I received during my time at this elementary school was to develop and nurture a brand new reading specialist. This experience taught me lessons in listening and patience. I was a great doer and director, but definitely needed to grow in the area of active listening. I did not want my new reading specialist to fail and it became difficult to provide opportunities to help grow her knowing she might in fact fail at them. I learned instructional leaders needed to wait and be patient when teachers are assimilating new knowledge, otherwise the teacher may not receive it favorably. Rushing a person to act or implement new knowledge generally leads to fumbling.

A major pivotal situation developed my first year as an Assistant Principal. I was diagnosed with a benign tumor in my left carotid artery. It would need to be removed. I had a textbook surgery and an uneventful recovery. I was back to work after two weeks and put the experience behind me. Unfortunately, on a follow-up doctor's visit a year later, another two tumors were discovered in my right carotid artery. I was devastated and shaken by the news. I did nothing for a year and continued work while I sought out

multiple opinions from experts in the field. Suddenly, my perspective in life changed and a work site crisis surfaced.

After a year and a half into my first Assistant Principal position, the initial Principal was selected to open a brand new elementary school across the county. Her replacement was to be an established Principal from several counties away. Unfortunately, this Principal stayed into the second month of the new school year and then returned to her previous county. Next, a veteran Principal in our district was to be moved over to our school. She came and then moved to another state within three months. After about a month leading my school solo, a formerly retired Principal was hired to run our school. She was the interim Principal while we waited for the interview process to take place for the official new Principal. This occurred at the end of the school year. The school had gone through five Principals within an eight-month period. My communication skills were tested extensively during this turbulent school year. I learned many valuable lessons from each individual and the situations created by their vacancies. My modus operandi was laden with encouragement and motivation for the staff, persevering through feelings of abandonment and rejection, staying the course by teaching to the curriculum, and creating an atmosphere of “one for all and all for one.” I was proud because my school did well on state mandated assessments and eventually earned an “A” letter grade from the state. I received much support and praise from my supervisors on how I handled the school during these transitions. The following spring break I was to have my second surgery on the two tumors discovered the previous year. There was much apprehension going in, however my Czech resolve kicked in and I met the situation head on with God at my side. Returning to work after a three-week

recovery from a partially successful surgery, I finished the year under the newly hired Principal and my career began to take some unexpected turns.

The following summer, I applied for and obtained my second Assistant Principal position at an urban Title One elementary school. The school was approximately the same size as my former school. It was a nice neighborhood school with an established staff. The Principal was an eleven-year veteran administrator. During my interview with the new Principal, I expressed my desire to pursue the Principal position within the next couple of years. I was reassured we would actively work on this together and my goal would be reached. I began to develop a relationship with the Principal, however after three failed attempts at obtaining entry into the Principal pool I was beginning to doubt my abilities. I knew I was a capable and confident Assistant Principal. I began to feel powerless in this matter and turned my energies to the refinement of my instructional leader role.

My present work situation came to its climax when the Principal developed a serious health scare. We embraced the storm as a staff, however the signs of wear and tear were evident in all of us. The district conducted school survey's across the county and ours was one of the lowest for staff morale and administrative support. At the end of my third year the Principal was moved to a position at the district office and I was to stay on in my current position. A new district supervisor was assigned to our school as well as a newly hired Principal. My leadership style would adapt again to this seventh Principal. I was concerned for my future as a leader because of my constant need to recreate myself alongside the variety of vastly different Principal styles I was exposed to during the past seven years.

Over time, I sensed I was unchallenged, unappreciated, discontent and quite frankly stagnant professionally. As pay for performance was making its mark on education teachers began to feel frustrated and overwhelmed. We as administration began to ask for more from our teachers and provide less time to get more accomplished. Many teachers responded by bringing work home and coming in on the weekends to catch-up on grading, analyzing data and prepping for instruction. It was a maddening pace. My ability to communicate and connect well with my teachers was strained. I began to see professionals who believed in their abilities question and flounder with the new Common Core Curriculum. One supervisor shared teachers “should be happy they have jobs and stop complaining.” Adding further, “a teacher who is valuable does overtime and the ones who you don’t see after school working aren’t worth much.” I was abashed to think such an opinion existed about teachers where value was equated to the amount of time spent perhaps floundering through overwhelming demands and pressures from our system. I supported and coached teachers in time management and efficiency, so they would find time to rejuvenate. In my mind this was a line in the sand for me I would never cross. How could administrators be expected to wear their teachers out thinking this would be an effective way of achieving student growth? I had found balance was an important ingredient to instill in staff and me.

Feeling disconnected, powerless and disenfranchised, I eventually resigned my position and went back to the classroom. My son was getting older and so were my parents. They would need more attention. My father was contemplating retiring and spending more time at home. I sought more fulfillments in the work I was doing in education. I wanted to realize the need to build strong relationships through caring

communication. I began to draw my proverbial wagons together and reflect on my background, my beliefs about my educational role, and the current work before me. I knew to stay meant to go against strong convictions of the way I envisioned leading and with this realization I was spurred to go back to the classroom. I could not join the throng. Better would be to find a position more suited to my leadership style. I thought how peculiar these events reflected my personal past as a child and our early immigrant beginnings where disconnect in communication, fear and powerlessness marked our days, yet determination and verve spurred us along.

### ***My Role and Style as an Administrator***

Principals, as educational leaders, have evolved over the last 40 years in the areas of knowledge of content teaching, supervision of teachers, and response to school effectiveness as it subsequently impacts student achievement (Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing, 2012, p. 7). As I evolve as an instructional leader, I lay a foundation of accountability for all participants engaged in the educational process through mentoring, coaching, reflection and collaborative problem solving with teachers. For me, it becomes an even more specific challenge to be literacy knowledgeable. Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing (2012) state “to become the literacy leaders of their sites, elementary Principals need specific literacy knowledge, addressing the skills needed to assume the role of literacy leader. Literacy leaders then, use this understanding to lead literacy professionals, including the teachers, instructional coaches, and Para-professionals they supervise” (p. 7). Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom (2010) suggest instructional leadership plays a strong role in student achievement and teacher success in the classroom. If I, in my administrative capacity, operate under strong literacy

knowledge, then I have much to gain through the improvement of teaching and subsequent student learning. I have to become sensitive to what teachers say and don't say as they grapple with the content in going deeper and more intentionally with instruction. I have to be reflective and responsive to my teachers' needs and frustrations. I must take care to nurture and maintain strong positive relationships with my teaching staff, being ever mindful of how important our relationship is to the success of our students.

As an elementary Assistant Principal, one of my main functions is to supervise and monitor the achievement of all students by strategizing in conjunction with teachers, coaches, and other administrators through purposeful planning, staff development and classroom observations. This leads to discussions about teaching practices, assessments, and curriculum. With the introduction of Marzano (2007) the new challenge set before me was to frequently and regularly conduct classroom walkthroughs to informally monitor instruction and student learning. This new added element to daily school business caused me to question the approach to walkthroughs and ignited a desire to get proficient in debriefing effectively with teachers after a walkthrough. I simply don't want to make casual observations without providing feedback. I have always made efforts to coach teachers on curriculum and best teaching practices, so naturally I wanted the debrief conversations to be conducive to an approach for teachers to reflect and refine their practice. I firmly believe that I must develop a personal relationship with my teachers in order to know them well and be able to relate to them from their unique perspective. I want them to feel comfortable to trust the relationship enough to take risks by exposing areas of weakness or struggle. I desire for teachers to feel my support is genuine and constructive toward their development

free from judgment or criticism. My preconceived notions of this type of approach, as the instructional leader, included the reservation of how I would be received in classrooms, how I would navigate a negative debrief or met with resistance and whether or not the teachers would perceive me as a threat rather than a coach in these situations. Additionally, I feared I might not have a strong enough curricular knowledge base to engage in meaningful dialogue with the teachers thereby compromising the potential benefits of debrief and jeopardize our relationship. I desired to provide instructional support and be ready to make a suggestion or answer to teachers' queries. In essence, the journey would be an opportunity to "make stronger connections between who I was, am, and may be" as an instructional leader (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.156).

"Research and reflecting on personal experience can often provide us with patterns of characteristics to which many are likely to respond in the same way" (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 7). Therefore, when I become adept at debrief dialogue after a classroom walkthrough and reflect on my dialogue through a lens of instructional teacher coach, my resulting acumen illustrates how purposeful reflection can intermingle with my previous debrief experience and curricular knowledge base to build upon my relationships with teachers. Punch (1998) distinguishes the role of the researcher as either emic or etic or both during the course of the research. The emic researcher participates fully by taking an active role in the activities under study. The etic researcher will take an outsiders' objective view. Initially, my role will be emic as I engage in walkthroughs and debrief conversations with the teachers. Later, as I reflect on the taped and transcribed debriefs I will step outside of my role to make interpretations and form assumptions. This ebb and flow between emic and etic will enable me to experiences different perspectives within my study.



## ***Problem Statement***

“Virtually every variable that affects student achievement in school is itself likely to be affected by leadership” (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 133). For example, as instructional leaders, school administrators supervise and monitor the achievements of all students by working with teachers to align the curriculum, instruction, and assessment processes. This alignment of goals and objectives enables stakeholders to engage in the educational process to promote successful student performance through the use of a variety of benchmarks, learning expectations, and feedback measures to ensure accountability. Effective administrators understand the differences between technical challenges, problems solved by logic and intellect, and adaptive challenges, problems solved by a change of values, beliefs and ways of working (Heifetz, 1994). Additionally, administrators are required to give a response for accountability to government, school boards, community, school superintendent, teachers, students, and parents. With the planting of the seeds of standards-based education reform in the 1980’s to the enticement of grants such as the Race to the Top, the garden is ripe for the harvest of educational reform in teacher quality and it’s impact on student achievement (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004).

Gone are the days where some administrators unilaterally wielded the scepter of top down management. Taking the cue from the business world some thirty-five years ago, administrators stepped out of their offices and began to lead from the ranks of the teachers and the classrooms they managed (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Marzano, 2003; Reeves, 2011; Peters & Waterman, 1984). With the presentation of *Management by Wandering Around*, introduced to the business world by Frase and Hetzel in 1990, many educational administrators entered into a paradigm shift for a new dimension to

school leadership. Effective administrators know by getting “close to the action” in the classroom they will transform into instructional leaders who share collective responsibility in the day-to-day struggles and challenges teachers face as they meet the accountability demands of standards based instruction.

The school district established the expectation for all administrators in my county to increase the amount of time walking through classrooms. They wanted administrators to be present for instruction and to know what kind of instruction was in effect. From my many wanderings through classrooms, as an Assistant Principal in an elementary school of thirty-four teachers, I felt it was not enough to just walk through and inspect classroom instruction. I wanted to find an effective way to communicate the instruction I observed and my impressions of individual teachers’ classrooms. I believed there was value to this communication. I would benefit by discovering why the teacher used certain instructional moves rather than others. By default, I would build a relationship with the teacher and on future classroom walkthroughs I would be more in tune to the teacher’s unique teaching style. The teacher on the other hand would benefit by relationship as well receiving reinforcement, praise and direction specific to their needs. I found many teachers would seek me out to glean a comment from me about what I saw. Few were satisfied if I observed their teaching and then departed without expressing any verbal communication about what I observed. Often, teachers would be the first to engage in a conversation about my visit. Conversations with these teachers taught me future dialogue would either encourage or deconstruct a teacher’s professional image and ultimately impact our relationship moving forward. This knowledge weighed heavily on me because I desired to build strong relationships with my teachers. I knew frequent conversations about my walkthroughs would promote a

sense of efficacy in the teachers. For example, I noticed when I gave positive feedback to teachers about their specific classroom instruction they would increase their performance or frequency use of the instructional practice. It seemed as if teacher morale received an informal boost through these debrief conversations. Teachers began to open their classrooms more to me and appeared to anticipate my walkthrough. Some even shared their students would eagerly ask if I would join them for the day's lesson as if to encourage a visit. Others would talk to fellow teachers about a walkthrough and share our follow-up conversation with them, spurring the fellow teacher to share about a similar practice I would see in their room if I walked through. Teachers began to open their classroom doors, where in the past they would have stayed closed. All too often, I have felt frustrated and tenuous in dialoguing with teachers after walkthroughs. I worried how I would be received; always careful not to be too direct or stern yet giving constructive feedback to encourage teacher reflection and make them feel good about their work. I want to unveil the perspectives teacher's hold of me, as their instructional leader, and what their unique perspectives are on the debrief dialogue between us.

Administrators have come a long way to understand what is inspected in classroom instruction is expected of the teachers as they mediate student learning. Much in educational history has lead leaders to conclude getting into the thick of classroom action and becoming instructional leaders of the action enhances the learning experiences of students. As I review a brief history of education and how leadership has changed throughout, I am encouraged by the focus leaders now take on building relationships with teachers' to improve their development as well as increase leaders impact on the classroom.

In 1983 a report of Ronald Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform*, provided glum evidence American schools were failing on national and international scales as portrayed over various studies. For example, *A Nation at Risk (NAR)* showed Scholastic Aptitude Test scores fell "nearly 40 points" in mathematics measures and "over 50 points" in verbal scores (p. 114). Furthermore, on "19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison, with other industrialized nations, were last seven times" (p. 114). Further, "some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing and comprehension and about 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate" (p. 115). Staggering is "many 17-year-olds do not possess the higher order intellectual skills we should expect of them and nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay" (p.115). As a result of these outcomes, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, made a total of thirty-eight recommendations centered on four major categories. The recommendations are organized below under each of the four major categories: content, expectations, time and teaching.

Content: Students would complete four years of English, four years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies and half a year of computer science prior to graduating from high school.

Expectations: Admissions standards and standardized test scores used to gauge admission to four-year-colleges should be raised.

Time: The school day would be set at seven hours and the school calendar would be between 200 to 220 days.

Teaching: Teachers should reach high educational standards and exhibit the ability for teaching. Establish a successful evaluation system with a peer review component for rewarding outstanding teachers, encouraging average ones, and dealing with teachers who need improvement or removal. Jointly with the school board, administrators, and teachers develop career ladders for teachers to delineate between novices, experienced and master teachers.

*A Nation at Risk* became the catalyst to a hasty school reform crusade later identified as an effort based on misidentified reasons for what was wrong with public education. Rothstein (2008) states,

The diagnosis of the National Commission of Excellence in Education was flawed in three respects: First, it wrongly concluded that student achievement was declining. Second, it placed the blame on schools for national economic problems over which schools have relatively little influence. Third, it ignored the responsibility of the nation's other social and economic institutions for learning (2008, p. 3)

Guthrie and Springer (2004) further support *A Nation at Risk* had flaws with its comments:

...the federalization of education policy, a trend that accelerated with NAR and that now threatens the creativity and diversity of local school systems that have been among the nation's greatest strengths. Another has been the willingness to define student achievement exclusively by standardized tests, a trend that was spurred by NAR's flawed analysis of test score declines and that may have foreclosed reform on policies regarding other, equally important aspects of student achievement. A third was the

“crowding out” of social reform by school reform, the belief that all of the nation’s social problems can be solved by improving schools alone and an accompanying willingness to tolerate failures in other social institutions (p. 9).

Furthermore, in 1990 the Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque produced a report concluding there was no system wide crisis in public education as *A Nation at Risk* claimed. The Sandia Report (1990) found:

1. Between 1975 and 1988, average SAT scores went up or held steady for every student subgroup.
2. Between 1977 and 1988, math proficiency among seventeen-year-olds improved slightly for whites, notably for minorities.
3. Between 1971 and 1988, reading skills among all student subgroups held steady or improved.
4. Between 1977 and 1988, in science, the number of seventeen-year-olds at or above basic competency levels stayed the same or improved slightly.
5. Between 1970 and 1988, the number of twenty-two-year-old Americans with bachelor degrees increased every year; the United States led all developed nations in 1988.

The federally funded *Sandia report* did not negate the fact public education had problems, but on a global level American public education was holding it’s own among the other industrialized nations.

A decade later, in 1996, The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future produced *What Matters Most: Teaching and America’s Future*. This document called for “a dramatic departure from the status quo-one creates a new infrastructure for

professional learning and an accountability system that ensures attention to standards for educators as well as students at every level-national, state, local school district, school and classroom (The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).” Extrapolating from the conclusions of *A Nation at Risk*, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future centered on three premises: what teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn; recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers is the central strategy for improving our schools, and school reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions in which teachers can teach, and teach well.

The three premises serve as the foundation for the goal of The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future: access to competent, caring, qualified teaching in schools organized for success. In order for the Commission to attain its goal, five major recommendations were purposed. First, standards for both students and teachers would be established in education. The nation would institute professional standards in every state, establish accreditation for all schools, close failing schools, license teachers based on performance, and rank teachers through a National Board of standards (The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Second, revamp teacher preparation and professional development by organizing professional development based on standards for both students and teachers, develop teacher preparation programs, provide mentoring programs, and make available high-quality professional development (The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Third, adjust teacher recruitment and provide qualified teachers in every school. Its recommendation entailed giving districts ability to hire qualified teachers, create precise hiring practices, stop teacher mobility, and plan for an aggressive

recruiting campaign. The fourth recommendation was to encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill by establishing the National Board Certification incentive in every state. Furthermore, the commission called for developing a career ladder and removing incompetent teachers (The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Lastly, the commission addressed the need to create schools organized for stakeholder's success. This challenge would tackle reallocating resources, spending more on teachers and technology, and support Principals who lead high-performing schools through an understanding of instruction and learning (The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

Running on the heels of The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, in 1997 Congress requested to have a national panel formed to evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches used to teach children to read. This charge was taken up by the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) at the National Institutes of Health, in union with the Secretary of Education. It's members comprised of leading experts in the fields of reading education, higher education and psychology. The National Reading Panel produced a report titled, "Teaching Children to Read" (2000) three years later in April. The evidence based assessment of the reading research literature, over the past thirty-four years, unveiled eight areas relating to reading instruction: phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, text comprehension instruction, independent reading, computer assisted instruction, and teacher professional development in literacy best practices (National Reading Panel, 2000). The findings from this massive undertaking were used as the basis for the federal reading initiative of *Reading First* under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB,



2001). The *Reading First* grant in subpart 1 of NCLB attempts to assist schools in establishing research based reading programs for students in Kindergarten through grade 3.

Title 1, originally passed by Congress in 1965, provides funding for programs to serve the educational needs of the disadvantaged student. The *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 took center stage in the standards-based education arena, with a lasting impact on many aspects of education at all grade levels, since it's inception into law in 2002 by President Bush. This Act was created as a reform response to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) made provisions for funding K-12 education through professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement. NCLB detailed the role of the federal government on K-12 education with strong accountability measures for student achievement and how the role impacts literacy for all students. It encompassed a four-part plan including: accountability, flexibility and local control, parent options, and best practices in teaching. As a requirement under Title 1, of the federal law, NCLB requires each state to define adequate yearly progress for school districts and schools. This requirement was intended to strengthen academic accountability standards in schools through extensive high-stacks testing, such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Maleyko and Gawlik (2011) summarize Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), within the context of NCLB, as seeking to hold educational agencies and individual states accountable for making improvements in the quality of education for all students. It especially targets low-performing schools and closing the achievement gap between high and low achieving students and specifically the differences in achievement gaps of minority and non-minority students along with the advantaged and disadvantaged

students. State created assessment systems are used to measure whether or not students are meeting academic and grade level content expectations (p. 600). The *No Child Left Behind: A Parents Guide* (2003) describes AYP as follows:

NCLB requires each state to define adequate yearly progress for school districts and schools, within the parameters set by Title I. In defining AYP, each state sets the minimum levels of improvement-measurable in terms of student performance-that school districts and schools must achieve within time frames specified in the law. In general, it works like this: Each state begins by setting a “starting point” that is based on the performance of its lowest-achieving demographic group or of the lowest-achieving schools in the state, whichever is higher. The state then sets the bar-or level of student achievement-that a school must attain after two years in order to continue to show AYP. Subsequent thresholds must be raised at least once every three years, until, at the end of twelve years, all students in the state are achieving at the proficient level on state assessments in reading/language arts and math. (p. 8)

I am an administrator in a large Florida school district. My school district responded to Adequate Yearly Progress and the need to improve literacy for all students, by the implementation of research based teaching practices through Max Thompson’s Learning-Focused Model (Thompson, 2005). This resulted in a systematic overhaul of literacy teaching and accountability. The Learning-Focused Model is a model for school improvement design and reform through best practices centered on standards driven instruction. “In 2006, the USDOE announced that balanced achievement leads to the greatest increases in student performance and closes the achievement gap faster and

more long-term than stand-alone solutions. Learning-Focused provides the most comprehensive model for balanced achievement using a research-based framework and support solutions focused on learning” (Thompson, 2005). A major component of Learning-Focused Strategies is for administrators to supervise and monitor the level of implementation and use of research based literacy practices in individual teachers’ classrooms. Administrators who use supervisory monitoring add a higher level of accountability for student learning outcomes in reading through a framework of “best practices” and enables administrators to become active promoters of the focus on literacy through direct dialogue with teachers about their literacy teaching methods and strategies.

With the implementation of Learning-Focused Strategies and the state of Florida applying for funding from the *Race to the Top Program*, found in the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)* of 2009, the Florida school districts began redefining the way teachers teach, assess student growth and how teachers would be evaluated. The intent of the ARRA is to develop “education reform by supporting investments in innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness” (Race to the Top Program Executive Summary, 2009, p. 2). The grant was successfully awarded to the state of Florida. The target reform areas for the Race to the Top Program (2009) included the following:

1. Adopting standards and assessments aligned to prepare students for college or career to compete at the global level.
2. Creating and maintaining data systems to track student growth and success, and provide direction for teachers and Principals to improve instruction.

3. Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and Principals.
4. Improving lowest-achieving schools to be high performing.

An additional response by my school district to the *Race to the Top Program* was to implement Marzano's (2007) five-part framework for effective instruction found in *The Art and Science of Teaching* to support the advancement of teaching practices.

Administrators used the framework to help mediate the struggles between supervision and evaluation of teachers. Marzano (2011) purposed "five conditions must be met if a district or school wishes to systematically develop teacher expertise: (1) a well-articulated knowledge base for teaching, (2) focused feedback and practice, (3) opportunities to observe and discuss expertise, (4) clear criteria and a plan for success, and (5) recognition of expertise" (pgs. 3-4).

In review, these reforms have provided administrators a framework for frequent classroom walkthroughs and subsequent debrief dialogues about those walkthroughs. I was excited about the significance of teachers using clearly outlined best teaching practices and having opportunities to talk about those teaching practices as a byproduct of my classroom walkthroughs. Initially, when I started conducting walkthroughs I did not take the opportunity to share what I observed with teachers. I found many other priorities and job responsibilities got in the way and then time would pass making a post-walkthrough conversation out of place and awkward. This frustrated me because I felt there were many positive points to share with teachers as well as constructive comments to make. Teachers began to see walkthroughs as a secretive threat rather than a tool for supporting instructional development. At times, the Marzano framework for supervision became simply a teacher checklist of things to show off in a classroom

rather than a strategy to use to enhance student learning. I saw the potential in walkthroughs, but felt without the debrief conversation afterwards little meaning would be nurtured in my teaching staff. I desired to become a strong advocate of teacher instructional improvement as well as develop a solid professional relationship with teachers' to reinforce trust and risk taking. I had a need to be an active part of the instructional work.

Furthermore, the historical progression of events points directly to State and district attention to the significant role of teacher quality on student achievement. In order to reform education, teachers must be highly skilled and knowledgeable in the use of specific teaching strategies to maximize student learning (Strong, 1997; Stufflebeam, McKenna, & Nevo, 1994; English, 2005; Bickers, 1988; Hoy & Hoy, 2006). In addition, teachers who focus on developing best practices in the classroom embark on the forefront of meeting accountability in the area of reading achievement. Now more than ever, we administrators need to use adaptive leadership skills to respond to the high level of accountability in improving student achievement as the tide of dissatisfaction with public education, the wave of reform legislation and the lose of funds increases.

### ***Study Purpose***

My purpose in this autoethnographic intrinsic case study was to conduct a self-analysis of my language and communication used with four literacy teachers during debrief, after classroom walkthroughs, when coaching each on their literacy practice. I attempted to understand and interpret my language and communication from the collective perceptions of the teachers' and myself as my language and communication relates to my leadership role and style. I sought to illuminate the meaning of these

debrief meetings for the teachers and me. I wanted to know what circumstances surrounding the debrief made the teachers feel comfortable enough to share more about their literacy practices with me. Furthermore, I wanted to know what connections the teachers made from suggestions identified during our debrief meeting to enhance or modify each teachers' classroom practice as a result of our conversations. Moreover, I wanted to know what in my debrief language and communication created a sense of trust and risk taking for the teachers? A safe environment, conducive to productive and transparent conversations, makes possible the improvement of literacy practices and strengthens teacher/administrator relationships for more honest and vulnerable conversations in the future. The debrief is a means to an end when it comes to staff development, but it signifies more to me on a personal and professional level as I develop my leadership role and style. By identifying characteristics from my personal and professional background, to my interactions with the four literacy teachers and the insights and perceptions of my role and style as their administrator, I hope to discover what from my language and communication impacts the teachers' literacy practice.

I taped and transcribed all debrief meetings conducted with the four teachers at my school. I inductively analyzed and directly interpreted my written reflections on the taped debriefs, individually and through aggregated instances, to reach emergent understandings illuminating categories, patterns and discoveries about my instructional leadership, my relationship with the teachers and the debrief experiences. I triangulated common interpretations through narrative description and painted the understandings into vivid assertions. As Stake (1995) describes:

Keeping in mind it is the case we are trying to understand, we analyze episodes or text materials with a sense of correspondence. We are

trying to understand behavior, issues, and contexts with regard to our particular case. If we have very little time, we try to find the pattern or the significance through direct interpretation, just asking ourselves “What does it mean?” For more important episodes or passages of text, we must take more time, looking them over again and again, reflecting, triangulating, and being skeptical about first impressions and simple meanings. For the evidence most critical to our assertions, we isolate those repetitions and those correspondence tables most pertinent, challenging ourselves as to the adequacy of these data for assertions.

### ***Research Questions***

1. In what ways does my leadership role impact the debrief experience as I support four elementary teachers’ literacy practice?
2. In what ways does my leadership style impact the four elementary teachers’ views of our relationship and debrief experience?
3. In what ways does the debrief experience impact four elementary teachers’ perceptions, beliefs and thinking about their literacy practices?

### ***A Note on Professional and Personal Background***

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explain the role of the researcher is considered to be an instrument of data collection. The researcher is the human instrument through which data are arbitrated and collected. As such, readers of the research need to know what qualifies the researcher to conduct the research. It is the burden of the researcher to present her personal history and professional past to the reader, including

assumptions, biases and expectations (Greenbank, 2003). I am considered a loquacious communicator who is not hesitant to strike up a conversation with anyone on most any topic. Often you will find me sharing humorous stories to lighten a mood or use serious professional cogitations on topics you are interested to learn more about or struggle with in the classroom. The purpose of my study is to use self-analysis on my use of debriefing, after walkthroughs of my teacher's classrooms, in order to understand and interpret the collective perceptions and meanings of the experience as it relates to my previous debrief involvements and literacy curricular knowledge base. Many of my life experiences have substantiated or challenged my beliefs, values, biases and persuasions as they intertwined through my interactions and communications with staff. I bring to light how I came to be an Assistant Principal.

### ***Delimitations***

As in all qualitative inquiries, discoveries of my study are not generalizable to teachers or other administrators of elementary or non-Title I schools. This is the nature of case studies. The conclusions from my study may be limited in part by two factors: teacher participation in the study was voluntary with no random selection and my study is a self-analysis where I self report these data collected. My study was also subject to the limitations recognized in collecting data by taping and transcribing the responses of the debrief conversations (Patton, 2002).

I also recognize that others may analyze these data in this study and come to different conclusions due to their unique life experiences. My life experiences impacted what data I deemed important and how I interpreted these data. In addition, I cannot fully separate from my research and my role as the teachers' administrator when self-



reflecting on the debrief meetings. Denzin (1989b) claims “researchers bring preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied” (p. 23). Through my conscious effort of reflexivity, I enter the hermeneutical circle of interpretation and reflect and analyze how my perspective interrelates with the perspectives I encounter from my teachers during debrief. In turn, my teachers provide feedback on my interpretations to help narrow the focus on meaning of the interpretations. Patton (2002, p. 114) states, “Hermeneutics provides a theoretical framework for interpretive understanding, or meaning, with special attention to context and original purpose.” I am fully involved in the act of debriefing and cannot completely separate from the experience, nor do I desire to be removed. I am nested in the culture of the debrief situations and actively create interpretations with my teachers. As Moustakas (1994, p. 26) recognizes, “the crucial value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear and in their essence” is where the meaning of a lived experiences exists. Husserl (1970, p. 61) further states, “Ultimately, all genuine, and, in particular, all scientific knowledge, rests on inner evidence: as far as such evidence extends, the concept of knowledge extends also.”

A further consideration is that, the teachers consider me their administrative leader. I conduct evaluations on them and there is no doubt they wanted to present themselves in a positive way. The teachers may have desired to respond a certain way during debrief based on our relationship to each other whereby influencing the dialogue created. I cannot deny the imbalance of power in the relationship between the teachers and me. Our relationships are built on the premise that teachers are subordinate to the administrator, however the uniqueness to each relationship is what creates the dynamic

to a balanced relationship. I provide the medium to facilitate this balance through common conversations about classroom instructional observations.

### ***Definitions of Terms***

**Adaptive Leadership** - Adaptive administrators understand the differences between technical challenges, problems solved by logic and intellect, and adaptive challenges, problems solved by a change of values, beliefs and ways of working, by skillfully applying adaptive leadership. Heifetz (2004) states adaptive leadership is the ability to respond to a situation that demands a response outside of the leaders current skill set or repertoire; it consists of a gap between aspirations and operational capacity not able to be closed by the expertise and procedures currently in place. Therefore, the leader either adapts new ways of dealing with this new created situation or does not adapt and fails. Heifetz (2004) views leadership as the “activity of mobilizing people to tackle the toughest problems and do the adaptive work necessary to achieve progress” (p. 24), this as a process requires innovation and input from all stakeholders. Heifetz, R.A., Kania, J.V., and Kramer, M.R. (2004). Leading Boldly. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 2(3), 20-32.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** – No Child Left Behind requires states to measure Adequate Yearly Progress for schools receiving Title I funds with the goal of all students reaching the proficient level on reading/language arts and mathematics tests by the 2013-2014 school year. In the state of Florida, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) measures minimum levels of improvement. AYP targets must be set for overall achievement and for subgroups of students, including major ethnic/racial

groups, economically disadvantaged students, limited English proficient (LEP) students and students with disabilities. If a school receiving Title I funding fails to meet its AYP target for two or more consecutive years, the school is designated "in need of improvement" and faces specific consequences (NCLB, 2001). No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. (January 8, 2002). Retrieved July 6, 2012 from <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf>

**Autoethnographic Intrinsic Case Studies** – an intrinsic case study is the “preferred method when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are posed, the investigator has little control over events, and the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context. This situation distinguishes case study research from other types of social science research” (Yin, 2009, p. 2). Stake (1995) expounds that case studies can be intrinsic, instrumental or collective. Intrinsic case studies are any cases, in which a researcher is interested, “not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case” (p. 3). I have placed myself in this case study and therefore consider this inquiry an autoethnographic intrinsic case study. Autoethnography refers to “studying one’s own culture and oneself as part of that culture - and its many variations” (Patton, 2002, p. 85). Pace (2012) explains autoethnography as a “qualitative method that combines characteristics of ethnography and autobiography. Autoethnographers, in part, reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural or social understanding, which was the main goal of this research. The output of an autoethnographic study commonly takes the form of an evocative narrative written in the first-person style such as a short story or novel” (p. 1).

**Clinical Supervision** - consists of the administrator meeting regularly with instructional staff to give evaluative feedback on observed teaching and other professional activities in a structured way creates opportunities for the staff member to actively participate in the process (Cogan, 1972). The purpose is to assist the instructional staff to learn from his or her experience and progress in expertise, as well as to ensure good teaching to students. Primarily used through the *Art and Science of Teaching* evaluative model. (Pajak, 2003; Cogan, 1972; Goldhammer, 1969; Ascheson & Gall, 1997)

**Debriefing** – Feedback given after an informal classroom walkthrough where the administrator talks openly and freely with the teacher about teaching and learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2001).

**Informal Classroom Walkthrough** – A brief visit to the classroom, by the administrator, for observation of the day-to-day teaching and learning leads to dialogue about what was observed after (Peters & Waterman, 1984; Frase & Hetzel, 1990; Downey, 2004; Elmore, 1996; Graf & Werlnich, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Institute of Learning, 2006).

**Self-Study** – a study of the self from a constructionist viewpoint. It is designed to describe individuals' perspectives, experiences, and meaning-making processes. Often, describing individuals' value and beliefs from a narrative perspective (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

**Supervision** – when an administrator gages the level of implementation and use of research based literacy practices in individual teachers’ classrooms by conducting formal walkthroughs to observe the implementation and give teachers specific feedback on their literacy practices. The Learning-Focused model, is accomplished by means of regularly scheduled walkthroughs focused on a predetermined area of instruction or on a student instructional outcome expectations (Thompson, 2012).

**Title I Schools** - a provision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act passed in 1965, is a program created by the United States Department of Education to distribute funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families to improve the academic achievement of these students. Title I Schools in Pasco County are defined as schools with 63% of their student populations on either free or reduced lunch (NCLB, 2001).

## **Chapter Two: Review of Research and the Related Literature**

Where thoughts come from, whence meaning, remains a mystery. The page does not write itself, but by finding, for analysis, the right ambiance, the right moment, by reading and rereading the accounts, by deep thinking, then understanding creeps forward and your page is printed.

*Stake, R.E. (1995). The art of case study research, p. 73.*

### ***Introduction***

Conducting this literature review has provided me the opportunity to organize the knowledge to understand how the role of the administrator has developed and how the role has impacted teacher relationships as it relates to evaluation and supervision. I became aware of the demands accountability has made on the interplay within classrooms, teachers and administrators. I discovered how classroom walkthroughs came to be and the different ways they could be conducted in teacher classrooms. Finally, I was able to grasp the power administrators have on the direction of instruction through the use of their conversations as they participate in administrator/teacher relationships for the good of student achievement.

The premise that the administrator has an influence on their school has been a well-accepted idea, as portrayed in the past decades of research leading up to current times. Research in the arenas of school effectiveness and school change determined

strong administrative leadership were one of the key influences within the school to impact teacher performance, student achievement and school wide-improvement efforts (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 1982; Hall, Rutherford & Griffin, 1982; Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, Ouston & Smith, 1979). Furthermore, the last 50 years of educational research has shown the administrator, as instructional leader, is a critical component within the United States school system (Criscuolo, 1974; 1984; Donnemoyer & Wagstaff, 1990; Hallinger, 2003; Goldhammer, 1969; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Murphy, 1988). The following review of the relevant literature features: a historical perspective on supervision, the “yellow brick road” of accountability in education, dealing with supervision in a climate of change, problems with supervision, supervision models, walkthroughs, historical overview of the walkthrough, models of walkthroughs, walkthrough and teacher flow, walkthrough and self-efficacy and walkthrough and the debrief conversation.

### ***A Historical Perspective on Supervision***

Hallinger and Heck (1996) concluded the administrator is arguably the most important change agent in influencing school effectiveness efforts, school reform and teacher evaluation, as well as being a significant component of change. In order to gain an understanding of the role the administrator plays on today’s teacher supervisory practices, it is vital to follow the development of supervision from its earliest beginnings, to its long journey, right up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Supervision’s past is also studded with much dissatisfaction and critique. Such terms as chaotic, insufficient, weak, and lacking value have been attributed to the inadequate descriptions of teacher supervision as it relates to improvements in teacher practice and student achievement (Haefele, 1993;

Soar, Medley, & Coker, 1983; Scriven, 1988). Throughout the rocky history of supervision it has sustained the test of time and has maintained a foothold within the educational fabric as a necessary beacon for school effectiveness of today. Glanz (1995) posits, “The field of supervision has been a practical one, concerned more with administrative and supervisory strategies for school operation than with analysis and introspection” (p. 95). As such, early on Ayer (1954), and later Doyle & Ponder (1976), and still later Glanz (1994) have successively concluded supervision has not been given enough attention throughout history to be documented well enough to give a full historical perspective of its development and its reaching effects within education.

### ***Humble Beginnings to the 1800’s***

As America began to receive its early colonists, many among them sought educational opportunities outside of the home for their children. Tyack (2003) makes note colonists started forming schools to encompass such features as “non-graded primary education, instruction of younger children by older, flexible scheduling, and a lack of bureaucratic buffers between teacher and patrons” (p. 14). One such group among the colonists was the Calvinists from New England. They wanted to make citizens literate so they could read the Bible for themselves, which in turn spurred on the New England Puritans to unite with them in a mutual effort for religious literacy and understanding (Alfonso, Firth, & Neville, 1981). By doing so, education loosely organized around religious reasons, soon becoming a focus for the civil government with the passing of the Old Deluder-Satan Law in 1647 by the Massachusetts legislature. The law upheld reading, writing and grammar to be supported by local educational communities to further the religious principles of the citizenry (Olivia & Pawlas, 2004).



With public support, the arena for education moved from an interest of parental controlled home schooling to a control of the school by the community in which it was created. Throughout the 1800's this community school theme prevailed and with it came the first wave of supervisors. As more and more immigrants arrived in the new world, cities grew larger and became concentrated hubs of civil activity. Schools in the cities began to organize at a much faster rate than those in the rural areas. City schools began to create an infrastructure with a headmaster and school committee to help oversee and guide school operation decisions. On the other hand, Tyack (2003) explains the problem with rural education "was that rural folk wanted to run their schools and didn't know what was good for them in the complex new society" (p. 21). Ellwood P. Cubberley (1914) supported this claim made by Tyack, concludes "the rural school is today in a state of arrested development, burdened by educational traditions, lacking in effective supervision, controlled largely by rural people, who, too often, do not realize either their own needs or the possibilities of rural education" (p. 105-106). Whether a school was in the rural or urban setting the function of the supervisor was to see if the teacher was abiding by high moral and strict religious values, as well as a close alignment to the government ideals (Alfonso, Firth, & Neville, 1981; Tyack, 2003). Prior to the turn of the century, Tyack (2003) portrays the teacher under the supervision of "the school trustees who hired them, the parents and other taxpayers, the children whose respect-and perhaps even affection-they needed to win" (p. 18) in order to maintain their teaching position. The shift of teacher supervision to a "supervisor" was a significant move.

## ***The 1800's***

Tyack (2003) continues to paint a canvas of schools during the 1800's as inconsistently, unprofessionally and randomly supervised through a lens of authority and control, that did not focus on teacher instructional practices or on student achievement. The educational professionals of the time recognized a need for educational change. The National Education Association (NEA) Committee of Twelve on Rural Schools in the late 1890's agreed on a set of remedies for bringing rural and urban schools under a unified system. Tyack's (2003) summary of the remedies includes: a consolidation of schools and transportation for students to those consolidated schools, providing expert supervision by county superintendents, removing schools from the political arena, providing teachers who are professionally trained, and connecting the curriculum to the community at large (p. 23). The NEA was after creating a "one best system designed by professionals" so the schools would become a "standardized, modernized 'community' in which leadership came from the professionals" (p. 820-821). As the supervisory responsibility shifted from the laymen to the professionals, specifically to Principals and superintendents, the new role of the Principal began to emerge as a response to the new educational system. Spain (1956) explains:

No definite date can be established for the emergence of the Principalship, but evidently, by around 1800 responsibilities began to be centralized to some extent. Early reports of school systems contained references to the 'headmaster, head-teacher or Principal teacher.' These early "Principals" represented an administration convenience rather than positions of recognized leadership. Maintaining of discipline, administration of plan,

regulation of classes, classification of pupils and establishment of rules and regulations were the primary duties of these Principals (p. 24).

By the close of the nineteenth century, Principals were established and functioning to control and inspect the schools they ran.

### ***The 1900's***

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, supervision was a necessary feature of the consolidated schools. On the agenda was a purposeful effort to manage and control the consolidated schools by supervisors and committees. These controls lead to intricate systems of instruction and evaluation for teaching and for the behavior of teachers (Glanz, 1991). However in the early beginnings of the supervisors' charge to evaluate teachers, often they would continue to miss the mark on exactly what to evaluate. Ellett & Teddlie (2003) suggested early teacher evaluation was a function of a teacher's moralistic and ethical perspective rather than a focus on on their knowledge base about effective teaching and learning as defined by more current conceptions (p. 103). Supervisors gave high marks to teachers who showed outstanding membership in the community, had a high school level of basic reading skills and were good role models for their students. Ellett & Teddlie stated, "thus, teachers were largely evaluated on their personal characteristics rather than evaluation procedures informed by a knowledge base about effective teaching and learning" (p. 103).

The climate for and factors in supervision began to change during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century with the new thoughts of Frederick Taylor on scientific management and behaviorism in psychology and education (Tracy & MacNaughton, 1989). Scientific management focused supervisors on "efficiency levels, standardized tests and scales,

and the improvement of the teaching act through criticism of instruction” (Barr & Burton as cited in Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004, p. 6). Directly resulting from the scientific management theory, supervisors began to use goal setting, objectives, and specifications with teacher supervision. The educational research community began to focus on the connections between teacher behavior and student achievement outcomes.

During the mid-twentieth century, a more humanistic approach to education began to define the approach to supervision. Goldhammer (1969) described supervision as a process for developing teachers’ self-awareness and independence, combined with a spirit of cooperative initiative to improve classroom practice. Often, supervisors would operate under more collaborative and cooperative ways with teachers. This communitarian focus on instructional supervision brought with it the notion to improve instruction and school success through collaborative, democratic work between educators to maximize student achievement, teacher development, and educational equity (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001). Smith & Andrew (1989) defined instructional supervision as a blend of the following leadership responsibilities: supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development. Teachers’ needs rather than the needs of the supervisor became the primary purpose of supervision.

The 1950’s and 1960’s were froth with educational researchers trying to determine what effective teaching methods produced the greatest variety of student outcomes. Ellett & Teddlie (2003) explain with “the cold war and international political events (e.g., launching of the Sputnik satellite by Soviet Union and the subsequent space race) also contributed to a strengthened focus on classroom-based research to identify

effective teaching methods, particularly in math and science classrooms” (p. 104-105). Federally funded models of competency-based teacher education (CBTE) in select universities began to develop programs comprised of core sets of behaviors and skills, and were necessary in developing effective teaching in classrooms. This time period brought an innovative spirit to education, including Individually Guided Instruction, mastery learning, teaching machines and programmed instruction to list a few. With these new changes, educational improvement was not centered on the teachers, but on the programs as byproducts of the theory and research (Smyth & Hunter, 1984). The supervisor would essentially need to develop understanding in these newly developed classroom approaches in order to have credible views of teacher effectiveness as part of the approach. No longer could supervision center only on control and management of schools.

“Reform” as a goal itself became the new wave in education, as government at all levels became increasingly active in pursuing manipulation of student achievement results through changes in educational policy, structure, and teacher preparation (Hallinger, 1992; Murphy, 1990). Furthermore, a teacher-centered approach to supervision became the sole focus as school leaders sought to have their teachers become reflective educators (Garman, 1986). Siens & Ebmeier (1996) point out,

The critical task of the supervisor is to help teachers more successfully engage in reflective behavior, which is thought to be a necessary element of professionalism. From this perspective, supervisors should help teachers enrich the repertoire of images and exemplars that form the basis for reflective practice, and they should help teachers use this repertoire to enhance their understanding of teaching. (p. 301)

The overall intent to reform, as well as the individual reform themselves, impacted much of supervision as well as other educational areas, as Ellett & Teddlie (2003) list: 1.) changes in teacher education programs; 2.) designing and implementing school-based management and decision making models; 3.) establishing administrative academies; changing procedures to license teachers and administrators; 4.) developing new approaches to student assessment and testing; and 5.) establishing various incentives-based programs for schools, teachers, administrators and students. These reforms lead to an age of evaluation and accountability for students, teachers, administrators, schools, districts, and states. As Ellett & Teddlie (2003) conclude, “Having emerged from a decade of increased educational accountability through the use of criterion-referenced, state-mandated minimum competency testing programs for students (Berk, 1984; Jaeger & Tittle, 1980; Pipho, 1978) and given the historical harmonics of student-centered versus teacher-centered models of reform (Cuban, 1990), it is no surprise teacher evaluation became a center piece of educational accountability and reform in the USA” (p. 106) at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As educational supervision entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Ellett & Teddlie (2003) summarize a “variety of new conceptual and methodological developments in teacher evaluation, teacher effectiveness, school improvement and school effectiveness has emerged” (p. 107). The key to nurturing these new approaches to supervision is to shift the existing evaluative systems from a focus on the teacher to a focus on the learner. Only then can we recognize the impact and value expert teaching has on the learner’s achievements.

## ***The Yellow Brick Road of Accountability***

In today's schools it is evident there is a focus on student achievement outcomes, measured by stringent and multileveled accountability systems from the level of national, down to the classroom and student level. Educational supervisors have been impacted drastically with the ever-demanding wave of change outcomes encompassing school goals, objectives, directives, responsibilities, programs, and supervision. This climate of exacting and continuous change has spurred policymakers and politicians to hold schools accountable for student achievement outcomes, causing a direct and prevailing shift in the responsibilities of administrators, superintendents and school boards (Duke, Grogan, Tucker, & Heinecke, 2003; Goldberg, 2004, 2005; Ladd & Zelli, 2002; McGhee & Nelson, 2005; Tucker & Coddling, 2002b). Reform in school accountability would shift "attention less on compliance with rules and more on increasing learning for students" (Elmore, Abelman, & Fuhrman, 1996, p. 65).

The sparks to these reform initiatives evidenced in schools today can be traced back to the early 1980's, specifically to a report prepared by the Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools for the Southern Regional Educational Board (1981) and a report from the National Commission on Excellence in Education titled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform (1983)*. The findings of this study painted a poor picture of educational quality of America's schools and stressed a focus on teacher quality and curricular standards. During the same time when *A Nation at Risk* was published, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) showed European countries were surpassing the American student in public education in these curricular areas (Stigler & Heibert, 1999). The outlook for education was

portrayed as bleak. However, the Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools for the Southern Regional Educational Board (1981) recognized the following:

In our deliberations during the winter and spring of 1981, the Task Force was mindful that over the last generation the South has made tremendous strides toward the improvement of education. It is no small accomplishment, for example, that within the past 30 years the region has moved from having less than half of its young people graduate from high school to today's rate of nearly 75 percent. The expansion of higher education has been equally astounding, with enrollments in public institutions alone now 10 times as high as 30 years ago. (p. iii)

Supporting further the picture for low quality of American education, *A Nation at Risk* pointed out Scholastic Aptitude Test scores fell “nearly 40 points” in mathematics measures and “over 50 points” in verbal scores and on “19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison, with other industrialized nations, were last seven times” (p. 115). Further, “some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing and comprehension and about 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate” (p. 115). Staggering is “many 17-year-olds do not possess the higher order intellectual skills we should expect of them and nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay” (p.115). In response to these findings, the Commission made a total of thirty-eight recommendations centered on four major categories: content, expectations, time, and teaching. Content revisions would focus on the core curriculum of study with a strong emphasis on high expectations and standards. It established a student would



complete four years of English, four years of mathematics, three years of science, three years of social studies and a half-year of computer science. Time spent in instruction each day would be set at seven hours and students would attend school between 200 to 220 days a year. Most pertinent to this study were the following recommendations. Teachers would be required to reach a high level of educational standards and exhibit an expert ability for teaching. The teacher evaluation system would be revamped to include a peer review piece for rewarding outstanding teachers, develop average ones, and remove ineffective teachers. To accomplish these recommendations, *A Nation at Risk* charged school boards, administrators and teachers with developing and implementing career ladders to differentiate between the novices, experienced and master teachers. The admission standards to four-year-colleges would be raised. Marzano (2003) makes the conclusion:

The effects of A Nation at Risk persisted through the 1990's. Indeed, some authors (Bennett, 1992; Finn, 1991) cite the report as one of the primary sources of evidence for public education's decline. Although A Nation at Risk was sufficient to cast a negative shadow on education throughout the 1990's, a newer study, the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), was interpreted as evidence of the ineffectiveness of U.S. education. (p. 3)

In 1996, The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) produced *What Matters Most: Teaching and America's Future*. Calling attention to "a dramatic departure from the status quo-one creates a new infrastructure for professional learning and an accountability system to ensure attention to standards for educators as well as students at every level-national, state, local school district, school

and classroom” (NCTAF, 1996), *What Matters Most* set the stage for the standards-based reform. Standing on the conclusions of *A Nation at Risk*, the NCTAF developed three building blocks on which to ignite their desired changes for education. Attention was brought to teacher development, expressly the premise of what teachers know and what they can do to influence student learning. Next, establishing criteria for recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers as a central strategy for improving our schools. Lastly, purposing school reform cannot succeed unless it focuses on creating the conditions in which teachers can teach, and teach well (p.10).

The NCTAF used *A Nation at Risk* for its goal of every student accessing competent, caring, and qualified teaching in schools organized for success. Even though the NCTAF identified obstacles such as low expectations for student performance, unenforced standards for teachers, flaws in teacher preparation, weak teacher recruitment, lack of professional development and rewards for teachers, and schools structured for failure rather than success, NCTAF was not deterred from its goal. Five major recommendations were purposed. First, establish standards for students and teachers. The nation would institute professional standards in every state, insist on accreditation for all schools, close failing schools, license teachers based on performance, and use National Board standards for the benchmark of accomplished teaching (NCTAF, 1996). Second, facelift teacher preparation programs and professional development by establishing standards, for both students and teachers in organizing teacher education, professional development and establishing mentor programs (NCTAF, 1996). Third, fix teacher recruitment and provide qualified teachers in every school. This recommendation gave districts equity in their abilities to hire qualified teachers, create efficient hiring practices, stop teacher mobility, and plan for

an aggressive recruiting campaign to attract top teachers and incentives for teachers needed in shortage areas (NCTAF, 1996). The fourth recommendation was to encourage and reward teacher knowledge and skill by participating the National Board Certification incentive in every state. Furthermore, the commission called for developing a career ladder, and for removing incompetent teachers (NCTAF, 1996). Lastly, the commission addressed the need to create schools organized for student success. This undertaking would reallocate resources, spend more on teachers and technology, and maintain Principals who are instructional leaders who lead high-performing schools (NCTAF, 1996). The NCTAF encouraged it would take hard work and cooperation from the educational community to meet the goal.

As a response to the NCTAF's call, Congress, in 1997, requested to have a national panel formed to evaluate the effectiveness of various reading approaches on student literacy learning due to the difficulty of the nation's students in learning to read and develop literacy skills to be successful in life. The Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), Reid Lyon, and the Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, joined forces to explore research on teaching in the area of reading. Members consisted of leading experts in the fields of reading education, higher education and psychology. Three years later this group, subsequently recognized as the National Reading Panel (NRP), put its findings of effective reading approaches into a report titled, *"Teaching Children to Read"* (2000). Reviewing the past thirty-four years of evidence based reading assessment research, the NRP focused it's attention on the following segments of reading research to inform the direction of reading instruction: phonemic awareness instruction, phonics instruction, fluency instruction, vocabulary instruction, comprehension instruction, computer assisted instruction, and teacher

professional development in literacy best practices (NRP, 2000). The findings from this massive undertaking were used as President George W. Bush signed the basis for the federal reading initiative of Reading First under the No Child Left Behind Act into law on January 8, 2002. Critics of the NRP's meta-analysis of reading research findings contend there have been numerous miscommunications and disconnections made from the *2000 NRP summary report* and the *Reports of the Subgroups*. Dr. Elaine M. Garan, in her book *Resisting Reading Mandates* (2002), presents the discrepancies in alignment with the NCLB mandates have been established for schools to follow in teaching reading. What Garan (2002) found was often the mandates did not match the findings, yet were recognized as the "scientific" expectation for teaching reading and establishing the basis for federal funding. Moreover, other criticisms of the NRP report have focused on issues of process and method to exclude other avenues of reading research to inform best practices in reading (Allington, 2000; Coles, 2001; Cunningham, 2001; Garan, 2002, Krashen, 2001; & Yatvin, 2002).

The *Reading First* grant, in subpart 1 of NCLB, attempted to assist schools in establishing research-based reading programs for students in Kindergarten through grade 3. This grant sought to provide funding for schools seeking to implement proven and innovative reading instruction to support NCLB's goals. Through the establishment and subsequent reauthorization of *Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965, Congress ensured funding would be made available for programs to serve the educational needs of disadvantaged students such as NCLB. Title 1 intended to guarantee all children would have equal, fair and substantial opportunities to obtain a high quality education from public schools. Furthermore, Title 1 would prepare students to reach minimum proficiency on State academic standards and assessments.

These gains were to be made with selected reading programs to successfully meet the NRP's scrutiny.

NCLB was created to reauthorize the federally legislated Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The intended purpose of the amended ESEA, now referred to as NCLB, was to detail the role of the federal government and the impact it would have on K-12 education. The federal government's new role on accountability for student achievement would put a focus on highlighting scientifically researched best practices, expanding educational options for parents, and giving more control and flexibility to the local education body. As a requirement under Title 1, of the federal law, NCLB requires each state to define adequate yearly progress (AYP) for school districts and schools. Under AYP, each state sets the minimum levels of measurable student performance for their districts and schools must be achieved within the specified time outlined by the law. This requirement was intended to strengthen academic accountability standards in schools through extensive high-stakes testing, such as the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. According to the US Department of Education NCLB Publication (2002),

Under the act's accountability provisions, states must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. They must produce annual state and school district report cards that inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making

adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run. (p. 1)

NCLB, leaves little doubt school administrators should be instrumental in the push to help teachers improve instruction and student learning while holding teachers accountable for student achievement. Reeves (2004) explains,

In holistic accountability, leaders embrace the opportunity to be accountable. They identify various aspects of their approach to their work, such as specific behaviors in their coaching of colleagues, the way that they use their discretionary time, and the manner in which they implement their values. These behaviors can be observed in a measurable fashion and then reported with the same consistency and rigor, as is the case with student test scores or teaching behaviors. (p. 1)

### ***Supervision in a Climate of Change***

In the effort of reforming and transforming schools, in an age of limited resources and funds amongst a demand for higher accountability, administrators must demonstrate a high level of interest in implementing and maintaining the best practices in supervision will bring forth a strong return on teacher growth and development (Cooper, 1983). McEwan (2003) states:

...the Principalship has zoomed back into view again. Policymakers have discovered that teachers, tests and textbooks can't produce results without highly effective Principals to facilitate, model, and lead. A variety of panel's initiatives all focused on a redefinition of the Principal's role-have

called for a new kind of Principal leadership in the building of caring, learning, and leading communities (p. xxi).

In the state of Florida, my school district's response to Adequate Yearly Progress and the need to improve literacy achievement for all students resulted in a systematic overhaul of literacy teaching and accountability. In order to bridge the literacy achievement gap of all students in Pasco County, Max Thompson's Learning-Focused Model was established in 2005 for all Title 1 schools. The Learning-Focused Model is centered on standards driven instruction through best teaching practices for school improvement and reform. The model is explained by Thompson (2012) as follows:

The US Department of Education reported that implementing a Balanced Achievement Model leads to the greatest increases in student performance and closes the achievement gap faster and more long-term than stand-alone solutions. The Learning-Focused Model realizes the importance of clearly focusing on and collaboratively planning for learning. School and district leaders play a critical role in planning for learning; therefore, leadership that provides high support with high accountability is pivotal in increasing student performance and achievement. A clear focus on planning for learning requires leaders to understand the characteristics of a quality plan, know how to get started, and what planning for learning is and is not. Learning-Focused provides the most comprehensive model for reaching Balanced Achievement using a research-based framework and support solutions focused on increasing student achievement through lesson planning (p. 8-9).

A major component of Learning-Focused Strategies is supervisory monitoring whereby administrators can gauge the level of implementation and use of research-based literacy practices in individual teachers' classrooms by conducting walkthroughs to observe implementation and give teachers specific feedback on their literacy practices.

Supervisory monitoring, according to The Learning-Focused model, is accomplished by means of regularly scheduled walkthroughs focused on a predetermined area of instruction or on a student instructional outcome expectation. Walkthroughs are regularly scheduled informal classroom observations conducted by an administrator. Walkthroughs are intended to add a high level of accountability so the supervisor impacts the teacher and the teacher impacts student learning outcomes in instruction through a set of best practices. Administrators, in the role of supervisors, are enabled to become active catalysts in the focus on literacy through direct dialogue with teachers about their literacy teaching methods and strategies. After a typical five to ten minute walkthrough in a teacher's classroom the administrator follows up with an informal debrief meeting to discuss what was observed. An informal debrief meeting is a meeting set-up between the administrator and the teacher to provide feedback from the administrator's walkthrough of the teacher's classroom instruction. Through this administrative coaching it is intended for the teacher to reflect on their teaching practices for increasing student achievement. With the implementation of Learning-Focused Strategies and the state of Florida applying for funding from the *Race to the Top Program*, found in the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)* of 2009, Pasco County Schools began the work of redefining how teaching, assessing student growth and evaluating teachers would be handled. The intent of the ARRA, which is currently in the process of being reauthorized under Barack Obama's, "*A Blueprint for*



*Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*”, is to develop “education reform by supporting investments in innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness” (Race to the Top Program Executive Summary, 2009, p. 2). The grant was successfully awarded to the state of Florida and the work of transforming the school system began. There are four target reform areas found in the *ARRA (2009)*. The first is adopting standards and assessments to prepare students for college or career to compete at the global level. The state of Florida adopted the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts and Mathematics. The Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) in 2010, are...

...the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K-12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school (p. 3).

In addition, The Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts are built...

... on the foundation laid by states in their decades-long work on crafting high-quality education standards. The Standards also draw on the most important international models as well as research and input from numerous sources, including state departments of education, scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, educators from

kindergarten through college, and parents, students, and other members of the public. In their design and content, refined through successive drafts and numerous rounds of feedback, the Standards represent a synthesis of the best elements of standards-related work to date and an important advance over that previous work (p. 3).

Accordingly, Florida is a participant in the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) has the primary goal of implementing a common assessment aligned with the Common Core State Standards.

The second reform area for ARRA is in creating and maintaining a data system to track student growth and success, and provides direction for teachers and Principals to improve instruction. Currently, Florida's FCAT is the primary student data collection system at the state level. Each individual school district, in Florida, has its own student data base system. The third AARA recommendation is a focus on recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and Principals. The Merit Award Program (MAP) was established in 2007 in Florida. The MAP is a performance pay program for Florida's K-12 educators. At this point, however many school districts have not made any provisions for connecting teachers to this incentive. The fourth and last reform under *Race to the Top* calls for improving the lowest-achieving schools to be high performing. Florida offers grants such as the School Improvement Grant program to fund low achieving schools across the state with the school's improvement initiatives.

Pasco County School's response to the *Race to the Top Program* was to adopt Marzano's (2007) five-part framework for effective instruction in *The Art and Science of Teaching* to enhance the teaching practices of all levels of teachers by outlining and coaching them into becoming expert teachers. Marzano (2011) purposes "five

conditions must be met if a district or school wishes to systematically develop teacher expertise: (1) a well-articulated knowledge base for teaching, (2) focused feedback and practice, (3) opportunities to observe and discuss expertise, (4) clear criteria and a plan for success, and (5) recognition of expertise” (pgs. 3-4). Numerous studies have shown the impact an effective teacher has over their students learning and achievement outside of any other single influence in the school (Haycook, 1998; Marzano, 2003; Nye, Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2004).

### ***Instructional Supervision and the Administrator***

As administrators move forward with the goal of attaining better school results they must keep in mind the significant role teacher quality plays in student achievement. In order to reform education, teachers must be highly skilled in best practices, knowing when to use which skill to maximize student learning (Strong, 1997; Stufflebeam, McKenna, & Nevo, 1994; English, 2005; Bickers, 1988; Hoy & Hoy, 2006). Now more than ever, administrators need to use adaptive leadership skills to respond to the high level of accountability in improving student achievement as the tide of dissatisfaction with public education, the wave of reform legislation and the loss of funds increases. Adaptive leadership, as defined by the Pasco County School District in Florida, is displayed through administrators who have the skill to understand the differences between technical challenges (problems solved by logic and intellect) and adaptive challenges (problems solved by a change of values, beliefs and ways of working) (Pasco County Schools Website, 2013).

Instructional supervision deals with the aspects of social construction and the by-product of social exchange between the supervisor and the teacher (Berger & Luckmann,

1966). Gordon & Ross-Gordon (2001) define instructional supervision as a collaborative, democratic relationship among educators who strive to increase student achievement and the development of teachers. Smith & Andrews (1989) further add instructional supervision is a combination of several leadership responsibilities to include supervision of classroom instruction, curriculum development and staff development. Glickman (1985) states instructional supervision involves five key responsibilities; direct assistance to teachers, staff development, group development, curriculum development, and action research to connect teachers growth with overall school goals. Payak (1989) adds a set of additional functions to instructional supervision: planning, organizing, facilitating change, and motivating staff. All in all, the connecting element to effective instructional supervision is the ability of the administrator to understand curriculum and be able to communicate about the curriculum with teachers to enact change to increase student achievement.

King (2004) argues for school reform, it is crucially important for school leaders to be directly involved with instruction and teacher development through capacity building (p. 304). Capacity building means administrators need to be actively involved in developing teachers' ability to know what and how to teach for improvements in student-learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Elmore, 2000; Marzano & Arredondo, 1987; Marzano, Pickering, Arredondo, Blackburn, Brandt, & Moffett, 1992). In order for administrators to accomplish this more active role in teacher development, they must themselves develop. For example, King (2004) gives the following suggestions for leaders: (1) create shared goals conjointly with teachers for student learning; (2) establish an atmosphere of purposeful collaboration among the teaching staff; (3) utilize strong problem solving strategies with alternatives to solutions; (4) give

teachers the power to have ownership and influence in their work. In becoming active leaders in school reform, King (2004) shares the following:

Shared commitment is strengthened when Principals work with teachers to establish shared goals for student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, 1994) to align student learning with school wide professional development (Conley & Goldman, 1994; Golding & Rallis, 1993), and to buffer their schools from conflicting external influences (Louis, Krause, & Marks, 1996). (p. 307)

In addition, developing research-based practices in the classroom is at the forefront of change in meeting accountability in the area of reading achievement. Research based practice is often construed as teaching practices demonstrated by research to be an effective learning practice implemented by teachers to maximize student's learning outcomes. As DuFour (2002) states, "schools need leadership from Principals who focus on advancing student and staff learning" (p. 12). It becomes an even more specific challenge for Principals to be instructional leaders in literacy. Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing (2012) state,

...to become the literacy leaders of their sites, elementary Principals need specific literacy knowledge, addressing the skills needed to assume the role of literacy leader. Literacy leaders then, use this understanding to lead literacy professionals, including the teachers, instructional coaches, and para-professionals they supervise (p. 7).

Administrators are charged with supervising and monitoring the achievements of all students in literacy by strategizing with teachers and coaches through purposeful classroom observations, and through discussions about those observations. These

literacy discussions also include best teaching practices, assessments, and curriculum. “Virtually every variable affects student achievement in school is itself likely to be affected by leadership” (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 133). Principals, as literacy leaders, have evolved over the last 40 years with an emphasis on knowledge of content teaching, supervising teachers, responding to school effectiveness and having a subsequent impact on student achievement (Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing, 2012). By transforming into instructional leaders, administrators lay the foundation of accountability for all participants engaged in the educational process through mentoring, coaching, reflecting and collaborating in problem solving with teachers. Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom (2010) confirms instructional leadership plays a strong role in student achievement and teacher success in the classroom. Administrators who are able to develop themselves as strong instructional leaders in literacy have much to gain in impacting improvement in literacy teaching and student achievement. A review of the literature supports the notion of the role of the Principal and teacher supervision are related to meeting the challenges of student achievement and school accountability.

### ***Supervision Models***

#### ***Clinical Supervision***

Clinical supervision was created from the works of Cogan, Goldhammer, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education during the 1950's. At the time supervisors were searching for a more meaningful way to give evaluative feedback to teacher interns about their teaching and create opportunities for the teacher intern to actively participate in the process. Pajak (2003) explains about the term “clinical supervision”

as borrowed by Goldhammer and Cogan from the medical profession,

...where it has been used for decades to describe a process for perfecting the specialized knowledge and skills of practitioners. Essentially, clinical supervision in education involves a teacher receiving information from a colleague who has observed the teacher's performance and who serves as both a mirror and a sounding board to enable the teacher to critically examine and possibly alter his or her own professional practice (p. 5).

Initially the model of clinical supervision formed out of an attempt of supervisors to objectively and scientifically discuss classroom observations through a lens of collegial coaching, rational planning, and flexible inquiry-based discussions about student learning. Cogan (1972) defines clinical supervision as such:

The rationale and practice is designed to improve the teachers' classroom performance. It takes its Principal data from the events of the classroom. The analysis of these data and the relationships between teacher and supervisor form the basis, of the program, procedures, and strategies designed to improve the students' learning by improving the teacher's classroom behavior (p. 54).

Cogan's cycle of supervision consisted of eight phases:

Phase 1: Establishing the teacher-supervisor relationship

Phase 2: Planning with the teacher

Phase 3: Planning the strategy of observation

Phase 4: Observing instruction

Phase 5: Analyzing the teaching-learning processes

Phase 6: Planning the strategy of the conference

Phase 7: The conference

Phase 8: Renewed planning

According to Goldhammer (1969) clinical supervision is supervision “up close.”

Typified by close classroom observations, collections of detailed observational data, and intimate focused interactions between teachers and supervisors, Goldhammer (1969) outlined a five-stage process for clinical supervision he termed as the “sequence of supervision.” Goldhammer includes the following steps:

1. A pre-observation conference conducted by the supervisor with the teacher to discuss what would be observed in classroom during the lesson.
2. The supervisor would complete a classroom observation.
3. The supervisor completes an analysis on the notes collected from the classroom observation and the conclusions would be used to plan for the post-observation conference.
4. A post-observation conference conducted by the supervisor with the teacher to discuss what occurred in the classroom.
5. The supervisor shares the analysis of the post-observation conference with the teacher.

Pajak (2003) elaborates the five-steps of Goldhammer’s clinical supervision as follows:

#### Stage 1—Pre-observation Conference

The teacher mentally rehearses and orally describes the upcoming lesson,



including the purpose and the content, what the teacher will do, and what students are expected to do and learn. The supervisor learns about and understands what the teacher has in mind for the lesson to be taught, by asking probing and clarifying questions.

#### Stage 2—Classroom Observation

The teacher teaches the lesson as well as possible. The supervisor records events occurring during the lesson as accurately as possible.

#### Stage 3—Data Analysis and Strategy

The teacher helps make sense of the data (if directly involved in this stage). The supervisor makes some sense of the raw data and develops a plan for the conference.

#### Stage 4—Conference

The teacher critically examines his or her own teaching with an open mind and tentatively plans for the next lesson. The supervisor helps clarify and build upon the teacher's understanding of the behaviors and events as they occurred in the classroom.

#### Stage 5—Post-conference Analysis

The teacher provides honest feedback to the supervisor about how well the clinical supervision cycle went. The supervisor critically examines his or

her own performance during the clinical supervision cycle.

In summary, the purpose of stage one in the clinical supervision model is to prepare the supervisor in orienting to what will be observed in the classroom during the observation. Therefore, it is a time for interaction to reduce the anticipatory anxieties the teacher may have for the upcoming observation. Goldhammer (1969) stated the data in stage two of the clinical supervision model “are employed as a source of tomorrow’s problems for supervision” (p. 61). It is of utmost importance for the supervisor to capture the observation data in full detail, avoiding generalities. Stage three provides the administrator an opportunity to analyze what was captured in the data and plan for the post-observation conference. Here the supervisor negotiates what will be shared as far as what issues need to be addressed and what goals will be set. According to Goldhammer (1969), “The hope is that the teacher’s confidence in supervision is more likely to be inspired if he perceives that Supervisor has put a great deal of work into it than if the Supervisor appears to be working off the cuff” (p. 67). The supervision conference gives the teacher time to plan for the next clinical supervision sequence, details next steps in the supervision, provides recognition and praise for the teacher, and addresses possible solutions to areas of weakness in the teachers teaching. The final stage of the clinical supervision model is the post-conference analysis. Goldhammer (1969) expounds “that examined behavior is more likely to be useful-for everyone-than unexamined behavior; that, perhaps, the only truly worthwhile existence is an examined existence” (p. 71).

Clinical supervision in this light, offers the teacher a safe platform to reflect on classroom practices for increasing student achievement outcomes. The supervisor’s role

is to embrace the efforts put forth by the teacher and to provide coaching for improvement (Cogan, 1972; Goldhammer, 1969; Ascheson & Gall, 1997).

### ***Complications of Clinical Supervision***

There is extensive research and support for clinical supervision. However, Reavis (1977) points out clinical supervision's basis, a dependency on the quality of the relationship created between the supervisor and the teacher, is in question with some researchers. Some researchers have found clinical supervision to promote a nature of democratic, non-threatening based relationships between supervisor and teacher (Wiles, 1950; Harris, 1963 & 1997; & Sullivan, 1980). In contrast, others have found teachers view the supervisor as authoritative, scrutinizing, or removed from the realities of the classroom (Blumberg, 1974; Walker, 1976; & Smyth, 1997). Harris (1997) further supports the belief clinical supervision stifles teacher development, especially with seasoned teachers' needs, and does little to improve student learning. Likewise, Hargreaves (1994) claims a collegial interdependent relationship is not a quality of clinical supervision and therefore does not promote growth in teachers professionally or a growth in students academically. Therefore, Sergiovanni (1991) stresses teacher's individual needs should be the focus of supervision because teachers are individuals whose make-up is comprised of needs, skills, and competencies unique to themselves. Various other approaches to supervision exist in the literature to provide an alternative to the "one-size-fits-all" approach to teacher supervision.

## ***Differentiated Supervision***

Differentiated supervision allows for the teacher to choose the supervisory mode best suited to their individual needs. Glatthorn (1997) states, “if teaching is to become more of a profession and teachers are to be empowered, then they must have more options for supervision” (p. 4). Teachers under variable approaches to supervision value the opportunity of choice, and appreciate the professional dialogue with it. The development of the teacher is based on their specific needs, their desire to commit to improving those needs and active leadership of a committed supervisor. Differentiated supervision offers teachers four techniques to include: intensive development, cooperative professional development, self-directed and supervisory monitoring.

The first technique Galtthorn (1997) presents is the intensive development option. Teachers choosing this technique typically focus on one area of concern in their practice and along with the supervisor, purposefully focus on this one area until it is mastered. This technique is the most akin to clinical supervision.

The cooperative professional development technique centers on teachers, participating in teacher development groups, observing each other’s professional practice and providing feedback Galtthorn (1997). This type of collegial environment affords many opportunities for exchanges of feedback between colleagues in support of professional practice. Galtthorn (1997) would expect teachers to “hold professional dialogues, conduct action research, observe and confer with each other, and develop curriculum and learning materials” (p. 7). McLaughlin and Yee (1988) affirm this type of a collegial environment stimulates and motivates teachers to develop as professionals.

The next technique choice is the self-directed approach. Glatthorn, (1997) advocates teachers have the ability to work independently and supervise themselves. In

essence, the teacher sets his or her own goals, implements a plan of action, obtains feedback, and then shares the results with supervisors. Feedback would be obtained primarily from student journals, portfolios and videotapes, in addition to soliciting feedback from supervisors.

The final technique, and most intensive, is administrative monitoring. According to Glatthorn (1997), “the intensive evaluation is used to make high-stakes decisions: grant tenure, deny tenure; promote, not promote; and renew contract, not renew contract” (p. 7). A teacher under administrative monitoring would expect regular and frequent announced and unannounced classroom observations, conferences with supervisors in regards to instructional practices and the supervisor using a research supported evaluation tool to evaluate performance. Glatthorn (1984) stressed the importance of “drop-in supervision” or more familiarly, a classroom visit by the supervisor unannounced, to see the teacher’s normal teaching practices and the climate of the classroom. These visits should last no more than ten to fifteen minutes and the teacher must be provided feedback to use for ongoing assessment of instructional practice and climate in the classroom. Differentiated supervision provides supervisory options to teachers at their individual levels and stresses the importance of teachers actively investing in their professional development.

### ***Danielson & McGreal Supervision Model***

Danielson and McGreal (2000) base teacher supervision on Danielson’s standards for effective teaching. A teacher in this model of supervision would show mastery of the standards through an array of sources and information about their professional practices. The framework for this supervisory model consists of a three-

track system to include probationary teachers, experienced teachers and marginal teachers.

Track I is the starting point for all probationary or rather beginning teachers. This is the Beginning Teacher Program. According to Danielson and McGreal (2000) the purpose of this track is for supervisors to obtain usable and reliable data to allow them to make decisions about retaining probationary teachers who would be offered tenure and continued employment. Following along the tenants of clinical supervision, probationary teachers would participate in a cycle of supervision to incorporate a pre-observation conference, a classroom observation, and a post conference. In this track teachers are supported to develop professionally, through cooperative efforts on the part of the supervisor and the teacher. Significant time is spent observing the probationary teacher through formal and informal classroom observations. Additionally, Danielson and McGreal (2000) suggest supervisors stay for extended-duration observations, ranging from two hours to a full day, to collect classroom data. The observations are not evaluative in nature. Rather they provide data and evidence for use in reflecting and discussing about teaching practices and student learning. The supervisor's role is to collect data, provide induction activities, and engage in feedback or artifact conferences with the teacher. The teacher collects artifacts in this track to evidence growth in the standards for effective teaching. Possible artifacts include lesson plans, student work, examples of written feedback given to the students, logs of parent contacts, tests, student surveys and any other artifacts the supervisor has requested. These artifacts will be used as part of a conference to discuss the teacher's progress. All the data collected from artifacts, conferences and observations during Track I provide the basis for the teacher's final evaluation. Danielson and McGreal (2000) recommend

supervisors use a combination of a rating scale and a written narrative at the point of the final evaluation.

In Track II, Danielson and McGreal (2000) “imply an acceptance of alternative forms of assessment and a commitment to change the evaluation system” (p. 117) on the part of the teacher by participating in professional growth through a structured and collegial system. The majority of teachers in this, “professional development track,” are neither probationary nor marginal and have demonstrated the standards of effective teaching. Individual school districts set the parameters for this track. Teachers set goals and create action plans to target the standards of effective teaching to impact student learning. Through staff development options such as peer coaching, action research, portfolio development, curriculum development, implementation of instructional strategies, or structured professional dialogue groups teachers can decide to work collaboratively or independently on their goals. As the teacher engages in attaining goals, the activities and artifacts collected along the way build the evidence used during discuss and reflect in the summative portion the evaluation. As in Track I, the supervisor would put in writing the conclusions and final results.

Track III is the “teacher assistance track” and helps marginal teachers develop their capacity to meet the standards for effective teaching. Danielson and McGreal (2000) assert, “the purpose of Track III is to provide organizational support and assistance to teachers who are not meeting the district’s teaching standards” (p. 137). This track is not for the probationary teacher. Teachers in this track are not viewed as needing to be removed, but rather as teachers who need to improve on one or more standards for effective teaching. Typically, a focused and time sensitive action plan is put in place along with intensive involvement from the administrator or appropriate

assistance team. If, however, improvement does not occur then the teacher may be placed under disciplinary action or dismissed.

### ***Developmental Supervision***

Glickman (2004) states, “A good description of developmental supervision is that it provides teachers with as much initial choice as they are ready to assume, then fosters teacher’s decision-making capacity and expanded choice over time” (p. 206). In other words, the supervisor’s goal is to determine where the teacher is in their professional development and then supervises the teacher, at the appropriate level, in order to help the teacher become more self-reliant and reflective. The supervisor would select from one of these four supervisory behaviors moving forward with the teacher: (1) directive control, (2) directive informational behavior, (3) collaborative behavior, or (4) non-directive behaviors.

The supervisor under directive control behavior is attentive to the teacher who is functioning at a low level of development or the survival level. The supervisor takes directive control of what he or she expects from the teacher as a result of planning for improvement. Glickman (1981) expounds:

“A directive orientation to supervision would include the major behaviors of clarifying, presenting, demonstrating, directing, standardizing, and reinforcing. The final out come would be an assignment for the teacher to carry out over a specified period of time (p. 17).

Teachers supervised under the directive informational approach are still supervised through an administratively lead plan, however the teacher is given some



choice as to what strategies they might incorporate into the plan. These teachers are typified by a sense of confusion or lack of knowledge about a practice (Glickman, 2004).

The teacher supervised through collaborative orientation is focused on mediating the learning environment for their students. These teachers benefit in their development from a more collaborative supervisory approach. They are able to identify problems in their teacher practice, however struggle with creating solutions. They need guidance from their supervisor to maintain growth with instructional improvement. Glickman's (1981) states, "A collaborative orientation to supervision would include the major behaviors of listening, presenting, problem solving, and negotiating. The end result would be a mutually agreed upon contract by supervisor and teacher that would delineate the structure, process, and criteria for subsequent instructional improvement" (p. 23).

The last supervisory behavior is nondirective supervision. The teacher functions at a level where they want to impact students outside of their classroom, as well as other teachers. According to Glickman (1981),

The nondirective orientation to supervision rests on the major premise that teachers are capable of analyzing and solving their own instructional problems. Only when the individual sees the need for change and takes major responsibility for it, will instructional improvement be meaningful and lasting. Therefore, the supervisor wishes to act as a facilitator for the teacher by imposing little formal structure or direction. This does not mean that the supervisor is passive and allows the teacher complete autonomy. Instead, he or she actively uses the behaviors of listening, clarifying, encouraging, and presenting to channel the teacher towards

self-discovery. The supervisor leaves the discovery to the teacher but takes initiative to see that it occurs (p. 31).

Glickman (2001) said supervision should be based on a “Super Vision” of effective teaching. The optimal goal for developmental supervision is for the teacher to gain full responsibility of their professional development. Giving teachers the choice in the course of action taken during supervision, gives teachers the respect and validation to do what is necessary in increasing student achievement.

In conclusion, the various models of supervision discussed differ in the amount of choice given to teachers in the kind of supervision they will be under. However all the models stress the importance of structure in the application of supervision and the importance of relationship with the supervisor. The supervision models can be placed on continuums representing structure of implementation of each model, choices afforded to teachers and engagement between the supervisor and the teacher within the use of a particular model. Clinical supervision offers the least amount of choice, on the part of the teacher, with the most structured form of supervision through a process of pre-conference, observation, supervisor analysis of collected observation data, post-observation, and an analysis sharing session between the supervisor and the teacher. On the other hand, differentiated supervision, the Danielson and McGreal model, and developmental supervision provide teachers with choice at various stages of supervision, depending on the teacher’s needs, through tracks or levels to support teacher reflection and professional growth. All the models presented here have supervisory coaching through dialogue as a component to inform instruction for impact on student learning. Not one model would thrive without the conversation about what was observed and

what next steps will be put into place from the observation. I present the continuum for the supervision models in Figure 1.

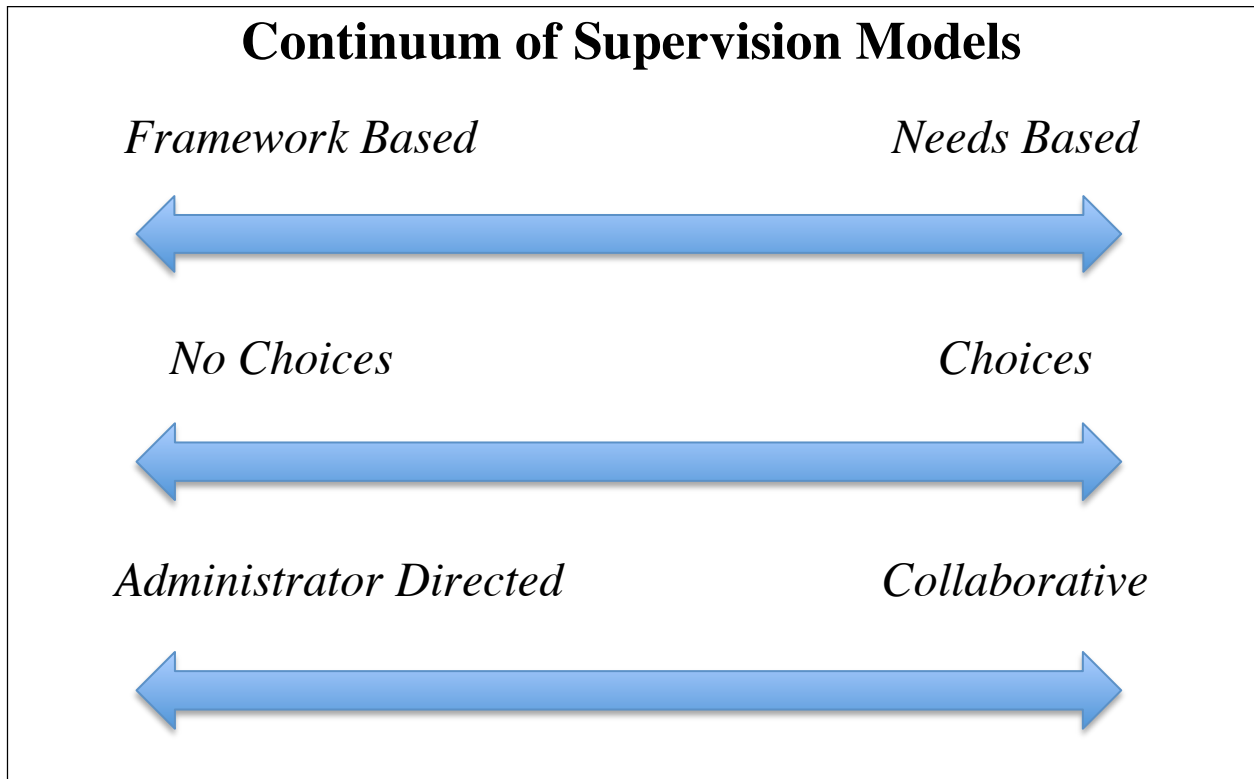


Figure 1. Continuum of Supervision Models.

### ***Walkthroughs an Introduction***

Visits to classrooms, by supervisors, have been a common practice in public schools since they began. A classroom walkthrough is a quick, organized observation requiring the Principal or supervisor to frequently visit classrooms to look for specific instructional practices (Fink & Resnick, 2001). Initially, in the history of walkthroughs, the purpose for supervisors to visit a classroom took on a surface view of what was occurring, often focused on structure and task, to make an evaluative judgment of the teacher and student behavior. Today, walkthroughs have a variety of purposes and foci.

Informal in nature to observe a specific activity, the walkthrough serves as a means of data collection to lead to dialogue about practice to enhance student achievement. The walkthrough is described in the literature as a powerful force for change through collective participation between supervisors and teachers (Peters & Waterman, 1984; Frase & Hetzel, 1990; Downey, 2004; Elmore, 1996; Graf & Werlnich, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Institute of Learning, 2006). Blasé and Blasé (2001) point out supervisors who support quality instruction and student learning “talk openly and freely with teachers about teaching and learning” (p. 71). The talking happens in or as the result of supervisor walkthroughs. Teachers describe Principals’ behavior who regularly walkthrough classrooms and discuss the instruction found within to be supportive of collaboration, providing feedback and opinions, modeling effective instruction, providing professional development and praising effective teaching (Blasé and Blasé, 2000). In the past, research has been limited when it has come to a focus on the debrief conversations that follow walkthroughs.

Peterson (2004) defines the walkthrough as an informal short visit to the classroom, by a supervisor, focused on improving instruction and student learning. Typically, a walkthrough is unscheduled and lasts five to ten minutes. While the supervisor is in the classroom he or she blends into the activity and may ask students questions about the learning. Particular attention is directed to any evidence of implemented school teaching expectations and how it may be impacting students. Once the walkthrough is over the supervisor reflects on the information collected and then meets to conference with the teacher in order to share insights and advice.

One of the benefits of conducting frequent and regular walkthroughs is for the supervisor to gain a “snapshot” of the daily teaching activities, perhaps not in evidence

when conducting an expected formal evaluation. When these “snapshots” are pieced together, they paint a mosaic of a teacher’s strengths and struggles with classroom instruction. In a sense, the supervisor can glean a fuller picture of what the teacher can offer to students from a multi-walkthrough cycle. Furthermore, the classroom walkthrough encourages reflective dialogue between the supervisor and the teacher, allows the supervisor exposure to the curriculum, provides visibility of the supervisor in classrooms, and increases teacher efficacy and collegiality with the supervisor (Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002; Elmore, 2000, Eisner, 2002). The walkthrough in Graf’s (2005) view “...brings the teacher and the Principal into the cultural center of instruction” (p. 201).

### ***Models of Walkthroughs***

#### ***Management by Wandering Around***

Management by Wandering Around (MBWA) became an official term in 1982 when Peters and Waterman (1980) labeled what successful companies were doing, through their management style, in order to supervise employees. A manager’s typical day was spent out and about, watching and talking with employees, and helping to troubleshoot potential problems as they came across them. They knew what was happening in their companies from the perspectives of the workers and made the workers aware of what and how to extend production from the inside out. This concept of supervision has a long history prior to its named identification. For example, Alexander the Great was in a pickle when his Macedonians tried to go against his military plan in the war with Persia. Instead of staying back in the comfort of his military headquarters, he went down to the frontlines to speak to his men to come up

with a solution to get them to fight. He was successful. Another example, of this management style is during the 1992 Gulf War when General Colin Powell would go down to the troops to ascertain their conditions and what they might need to get the job done. Effective Principals are out in classrooms watching, listening, speaking and acting on the info they receive. They align with teachers in the cause to increase student achievement more than just manage what happens behind the classroom door. They wander with a purpose as they walkthrough their schools.

Hewlett Packard became the big platform for MBWA to take flight. Trueman (1991) explains the Hewlett Packard had their managers trained on MBWA to enhance their management skills and they were expected to use it actively. Peters and Waterman (1988) further make claim to the fact that highly successful companies made sure to have their managers involved with employees on the job first hand. As MBWA developed in the business sector, soon education researchers started to take an interest in the concept being used with teachers.

Frase and Hetzel (1990) introduced MBWA to education during 1990 and administrators quickly adopted it. MBWA helped define the walkthrough for education. Frase and Hetzel (1990) believed because it was so successful in the business world it could do the same for education. MBWA directs supervisors to spend more than 50% of their time out in classrooms everyday. By doing so they would see and hear first hand what may need to be provided or worked on to solve problems before they grew. Through MBWA's interactive and interpersonal approach to supervision, the supervisor is able to connect with teachers in a collegial and non-threatening participatory way where dialogue between the two becomes the catalyst for future action. When teachers

feel they are being heard and valued because the supervisor cares enough to visit frequently and regularly to talk about their needs, student achievement goes up.

Frase and Hetzel (1990) stress the walks need to be grounded on three basic fundamental values: trust, openness and caring. Trust established between supervisor and teachers provides a sense the supervisor is dependable and supportive. This means the teacher has confidence in the supervisor and is willing to communicate openly about the work being done at the school. Openness implies the supervisor allows teachers the platform to openly share their concerns and struggles in a safe and understanding atmosphere knowing the supervisor will take them seriously and be willing to help support them. When a supervisor displays genuineness in caring about the individual teacher and the students at their school then they are no longer focused on their personal gain, but rather aim for the gain of others. Cohen (1983) states highly effective schools have these three values as a trademark for how the supervisors live out their days interacting with teachers, students and families.

Furthermore, the classroom walks should be purposeful and productive. Frase and Hertzal (1990) offer the following in focusing a classroom visit: (1) know what the “look-fors” are for the classroom; (2) how is discipline handled in the classroom to enhance student learning; (3) effective time management with the MBWA process; (4) how does the environment impact a positive and safe learning experience for students. With this focus in place the supervisor can spot areas of strength or weakness within the teacher’s teaching to share with them at a debrief opportunity after the visit. The information collected and captured from a classroom visit can be used to provide staff development and coaching to teachers needing support. Accordingly, if a teacher does not make improvements then these frequent visits to the classroom can build a case for

a teacher's removal if necessary. Supervisors should keep some form of record from classroom visits.

When the MBWA is applied consistently and regularly by supervisors it leads to improved classroom instruction (Teddlie, Kirby & Springfield, 1989) and improved teacher perception of Principal effectiveness (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Blaze, 1991; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1991; Sagor, 1992; Valentine, Clark, Nickerson & Keefe, 1981; Wimpelberg, Teddlie, & Stringfield, 1989). Accordingly, it has shown an impact for improving student discipline and student acceptance of advice and criticism (Blaze, 1987; Blaze 1991). Other significant findings of the MBWA are increased teacher efficacy (Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Frase, 1998), enhanced teacher satisfaction and higher frequency of "flow" experiences (Frase, 1998), improved teacher attitudes toward teacher appraisal (Frase, 1998) and higher student achievement across socio-economic and cultural lines (Andrews, Soder, & Jacoby, 1986; Andrews, R. & Soder, R. 1987; Heck, 1991; Heck, 1992; Louis and Miles, 1991; Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

### ***The Downey Classroom Walk-Through***

Carolyn Downey was an administrator in the 1960's who showed her teachers she cared about them and their work by executing classroom walkthrough as a strong part of her professional practice (Downey et al., 2004). Teacher feedback was positive and Downey felt the classroom walkthrough established opportunities for professional dialogue. Soon after this discovery, Downey was trained on the Madeline Hunter (1984) model for teacher evaluation in 1968 and added the practice of suggesting strategies to improve teaching practice as part of the post evaluation conference. Downey attended a training conducted by Sue Wells Welsh in 1971 and incorporated the self-analysis



strategy into her classroom walkthrough repertoire. Then in 1994, Downey took training from Art Costa's Cognitive Coaching and adopted the concept of reflective thought to the observation follow-up conversation for her classroom walkthrough protocol (Downey et al., 2004). Downey's walkthrough "was moving toward a more collaborative and interdependent practice in which reflection was the focus" (Downey, et al., 2004, p. 10). The purpose of Downey's classroom walkthrough is to support teachers in becoming responsible and self-analytical individuals who seek to improve their practice through teacher decisions and not simply on their actions (Downey et al., 2004).

Downey's walkthrough model is called the three-minute walk-through model. Short visits to classrooms allow the supervisor to make visits to multiple classrooms on a given day, thus covering a lot of ground. Furthermore, Downey (2004) supports with frequent visits to the same classrooms gives the supervisor a stronger idea of the patterns and teaching decisions the teacher makes. The model contains five components to occur within a three-minute observation window. The components are: (1) observe if students are actively engaged with the instruction; (2) determine the curricular objective; (3) identify how the curricular objective is being taught; (4) read the walls of the classroom; and (5) identify any potential safety or hazard concerns.

First, upon entering the classroom, the supervisor makes note of what the students are doing and if they are "oriented to the work" (p. 21) addressed by the curricular objective being taught by the teacher (Downey et al., 2004). She or he looks to see if the student activity aligns with the goal of the lesson and if all students are engaged. Second, the supervisor identifies the specific curricular objective the teacher is focusing his or her teaching on and if the objectives are aligned with the district

expectations. Third, the supervisor looks for what decisions the teacher is making with the curricular objective and decides if these practices effectively get the point across to the students. “Instructional practices are those practices a teacher uses to teach the objectives, such as questioning skills, use of nonlinguistic representations, grouping strategies, and informal assessment strategies” (Downey et al., 2004, p. 33). The fourth component turns the supervisor’s attention to what is displayed on the walls of the classroom. Downey et al. (2004) calls this “walking the walls.” The purpose is for the supervisor to orient him or herself to the displayed student work and determine what was taught and what might come next in the teaching. Furthermore, supervisors can view student portfolios, graded papers, or writing samples to support the findings of curricular objectives and instructional practices. The key of this component is for the supervisor to view as much of a sampling of student work to be able to identify the objective or teaching strategy used to teach the objective. In the fifth and final component, the supervisor will pay attention to any potential safety or health hazards identified in the classroom. Some of the hazards could be identified are loose wires, broken chairs, adequate lighting, dangerous chemicals, or unsafe room arrangement of student desks.

In addition to the supervisor focusing on the five components during these informal classroom walkthroughs, consideration should be made to identify potential topics to share with the teacher during a post-observation conversation. Follow-up conversations do not need to occur after every single walkthrough, however at some point the supervisor should debrief a teacher on what was observed and what the supervisor may have to say about it. The goal is to have teachers reflect on the information provided, over the course of several classroom walkthroughs (Downey et

al., 2004). Downey (2000) describes the three types of follow-up conversations as follows: (1) The direct follow-up conversation is led by the supervisor who gives feedback to the teacher and then coaches the teacher through the feedback conversation; (2) The indirect follow-up conversation calls for the supervisor to have the teacher reflect on the segment of what the supervisor observed in the classroom and then provides a reflective type question for the teacher to reflect on, (3) The interdependent conversation places the supervisor in a position to ask the reflective question during the follow-up conversation with the teacher and then continues the conversation at a later time if the teachers is receptive to continuing with the conversation. During this type of follow-up the supervisor may visit the classroom again for additional walkthroughs, whereby building on the conversation started previously in the future.

When all of the components of the Downey walkthrough model are implemented the results produce a climate of collaboration and reflection. Downey's walkthrough model aims to growing teachers professionally and improving teaching practice from each teacher's level of development.

### ***The Learning Walk***

The Institute for Learning (IFL), at the University of Pittsburgh, in 1997 developed a procedure to provide professional development to supervisors on the walkthrough method of supervision. In 2001, IFL termed this professional development The Learning Walk. The Learning Walk instrument is included in a three-year professional development program offered by the Learning and Research Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh. IFL defines the walkthrough as an organized

visit, by the supervisor, to the classroom using the lens of the Principles of Learning (POL) to identify effective instructional practices. The POL include the following Learning Walk elements: organizing the walkthrough, defining the expectations, using fair and credible evaluations, recognizing successes, observing academic rigor in a thinking curriculum, conducting accountability talks, collaborating on the identified knowledge gained from the Learning Walk, providing a way to self-manage the learning, and learning through an apprenticeship approach to professional development.

The Learning Walk is comprised of three types of levels to entail the purpose for the walkthrough; they include: (1) observational, (2) collegial, and (3) supervisory. Participants in the Learning Walk include the Principal, district staff, and/or teachers. The purpose of the Learning Walk will determine who could potentially be invited to participate. For example, if the focus were to observe the implementation of the POL then the Principal and a district person could conduct these walks to determine any areas of concern with the POL implementation. If on the other hand, the Learning Walk is focused on the aspect of the POL to deal with instruction and student learning then the Principal could include teachers in these data gathering classroom visits to develop a collective sense of collaboration for next steps in goal setting in this area.

A typical classroom Learning Walk lasts between ten to fifteen minutes. The participants would visit several classrooms in one day to collect data. Data would be collected from observations of what the teacher is doing, what the students are doing, viewing student work and displays, and dialoguing with students about the learning focus for their activity (Institute for Learning, 2012). Opportunities to debrief, between participants, after each classroom Learning Walk is encouraged prior to moving on to the next classroom. During these short debriefs the participants would share their

observation findings, group similar findings together and note possible questions to ask the teacher when they meet later. Once the Learning Walks are completed, a group debrief follows immediately after in order to hear the findings on the aspects of the POL implementation from the Learning Walk participants. The collective dialogue in this debrief would lead to goal setting for future staff development or teacher support on identified areas of weakness in the POL and allow for a plan to be made for future Learning Walks (Institute for Learning, 2012). The Institute for Learning further brings resolution to the debrief from a Learning Walk:

Talking with others about ideas and work is fundamental to learning. But not all talk sustains learning. For classroom talk to promote learning it must be accountable to appropriate knowledge, and to rigorous thinking. *Accountable Talk* seriously responds to and further develops what others in the group have said. It puts forth and demands knowledge that is accurate and relevant to the issue under discussion  
([http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/index.php/resources/principles\\_of\\_learning](http://ifl.lrdc.pitt.edu/ifl/index.php/resources/principles_of_learning)).

In summary, the Learning Walk is an informal tool used to identify professional development needs that come directly from the classroom to enhance teaching and learning process (Institute for Learning, 2012).

### ***The Walkthrough Observation Tool by Otto Graf and Joseph Werlinich***

Otto Graf and Joseph Werlinich (2002), from the Western Pennsylvania Principals Academy (WPPA), created a Walkthrough Observation Tool focused on collecting classroom data centered on teaching and learning through sharing

perceptions and ideas with teachers. The teacher and the Principal are key players in the instruction and learning process when this tool is used. Graf and Werlinich (2002) share the Walkthrough Observation Tool is designed to change the culture of the classroom and school at large where the teacher and the supervisor work together to view, discuss and revise the instruction to the fulfillment of the students learning needs (p. 4). As a result, a strong collaborative environment is created and continuous supplies of staff development areas are identified.

Each classroom walkthrough has an intense instructional focus observed through the use of “look-fors.” Graf and Werlinich (2002) define the “look-fors” as “specific descriptors of conditions when present in classrooms enable students to improve their achievement and learning levels” (p. 4). “When identifying those things we believe make a difference in student learning, it’s imperative that we measure those factors against standards of cognitive learning and not rely entirely on intuition about what promotes student learning” (Graf & Werlinich, 2002, p. 5).

Walkthroughs should be conducted regularly and frequently. Graf and Werlinich (2002) posit,

Implementation of the Walkthrough Tool is a developmental process. It begins with the Principal being visible in the classrooms. Once in the classrooms, the Principal can validate teachers’ positive efforts and use of effective practices. Validating teachers’ efforts builds trust. Along with validation, Principals can encourage continued use of effective practices (p. 6).

Once the Principal is on their way to conducting walkthroughs, he or she can begin to encourage teachers' to visit other classrooms whereby the notion of the collective "we" do the work to meet the students needs is reinforced.

Graf and Werlinich (2002) organize the walkthrough by the following steps:

1. Conduct a preliminary walkthrough to collect baseline data about students, curriculum and school.
2. Conduct a walkthrough meeting with the staff. Share the expectations for the purpose and process of the walkthrough. Detail the expectations for colleagues walking through each other's classrooms stressing the importance of confidentiality and non-judgmental attitude. Establish participant guidelines.
3. Establish the "look-fors" for subsequent walkthroughs. These are conducted conjointly between the Principal and the teachers.
4. Connect the "look-fors" to established teaching standards. This allows for the development of a common curricular language and helps to identify missing elements within the curriculum.
5. Schedule the walkthrough. Share the schedule and the "look-fors" with the teachers. Allow for five to ten visits to classrooms.
6. Decide on what data to collect before the walkthrough. These include: student work samples, teacher behaviors, student learning behaviors and physical layout of the classroom.
7. Collect the data. Typically the participants take notes of what is seen to later share out during the post-walkthrough debrief opportunity.
8. Observe student behavior and student work. Graff and Werlinich (2002) stress the importance of how the activities, during a walkthrough, impact student

learning. “Talking to students about what they are doing and how they evaluate their work presents a wonderful opportunity for assessing effective teaching and learning” (p. 9).

9. Validate effective teaching practices.
10. Debrief with teachers. Provide the teachers with specific feedback grounded on firsthand observation from the walkthrough.
11. Provide feedback to the whole staff. Start with the presentation of validated effective teaching and learning and encourage further reflective practice.
12. Coach one another through discussion about instruction and learning.
13. Establish the walkthrough process as a pervasive part of the culture. Principals need to be visible in classrooms in order for walkthroughs to make it into the school culture and stay there.
14. Prepare for staff development opportunities as a result of walkthrough use.  
Embrace teachers, students and the Principal as part of the learning community.

By practicing the above steps of the Walkthrough Tool a school will establish a culture of change, focused on effective teaching, to lead to increased student achievement. Graff and Werlinich (2002) summarize “the Walkthrough Observation can be the needed connector that advances learning for everyone” (p. 11).

In summary, classroom walkthroughs play an important role in improving teaching and learning. All the walkthrough models discussed portray the walkthrough as a tool for effective informal supervision of teaching and make possible a platform for dialogue between the supervisor and the teacher to establish a sense of reflective practice. Observation and debrief, as part of a walkthrough, keep administrators in touch with the work of classroom teachers and provides for meaningful collaboration for



teacher development. The effective administrator plans for regularly scheduled classroom walkthroughs and values the time spent coaching teachers from the gathered observations. Furthermore, the walkthrough models support the practice of classroom walkthroughs as a powerful tool to “drive a cycle of continuous improvement by focusing on the effects of instruction” (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007). The benefits of classroom walkthroughs, as summarized by Ginsberg and Murphy (2002), gauge the school climate, create a team atmosphere between administration and teachers, make administrators more familiar with curriculum and teaching practices, establish the administrator as the instructional leader and instructional mentor, and give students the impression administration and teachers value their learning. In contrast, some teachers may experience distrust and resistance to administrative walkthroughs and debrief dialogues due to various pressures.

### ***The Walkthrough and Teacher Flow***

Supervisors and teachers are inundated with extraordinary levels of pressure from without and within the walls of their schools. Stress from high-stakes testing to budget shortages to rigid evaluation systems to work overload to demands from parents has caused many teachers to feel downcast and isolated from other teachers and the administration (Litte & McLaughlin, 1993; Steinberg, 1998). Added layers of pressure can cause teacher morale to drop. As layers of pressure accrued in the provisions under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it became difficult to establish connections between supervision and teacher quality. Yet, Principals were called to annually attest to whether or not their school is in compliance with the “highly qualified” teacher requirement. In addition, schools must account for annual yearly progress objectives

for student achievement on state assessments. As a result, it is imperative Principals provide professional development to teachers focused on increasing student academic success. Over the past few years, teachers' job satisfaction levels have dropped, and studies show teachers are leaving the field of education due to an overall decline of morale within the school climate (Basom & Frase, 2004; Perie & Baker, 1997; Public Agenda Foundation, 2000; Scholastic, 2000). Furthermore, Basom and Frase (2004) state the problem with teacher moral is "due to a persistent fascination on the part of educational administrative governance with mechanized models of management" where the teachers are treated as "machines" rather than the schools' "internal clients" (p. 242). Teachers need to be motivated and have job satisfaction in order to impact student learning (Zhu, 2001). If teachers feel distrust with their administration, for whatever reason, they may be resistant to the opportunities for professional growth benefits of the classroom walkthrough.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) developed a theory around the positive nature of experiences when there is intense involvement in an activity and how this relates to intrinsic motivation of the individual to impact the workplace for increases in productivity. He termed the concept in his activity as "flow." The more positive experiences you have, the more intrinsic motivation you feel, the more flow. Downey et. al. (2004) defines flow as "the most satisfying and motivating experience a person can have" (p. 23). Basom and Frase (2004) define flow experiences as "periods of deep, intense involvement in activities that challenge but do not overwhelm one's skills" (p. 243). This definition connects to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) characterization of flow as "the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to

matter, the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at a great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (p. 4).

Caouette (1995) conducted a study where she interviewed six teachers about their thoughts on flow narratives read to them. They were asked to share any connected experiences to the narratives. Caoutte (1995) found the teachers described flow as a point of being lost in the work, losing track of time and feeling a sense of wonder. Teachers feel flow and have many work factors influence the frequency and quality of the flow experience in turn manifest itself in the impact on student achievement outcomes (Caouette, 1995). Gray (2003) found similar responses from an eighteen-teacher interview study where teachers explained flow experiences when students were engaged in what was being taught.

Basom and Frase (2004) point out if schools want to increase the levels of cognitive engagement for students, they must focus on the variables conducive to creating a school culture connected to teacher’s flow experiences. Zhu (2001) further claims when teachers experience flow their student’s cognitive engagement increases and conversely if a teacher does not experience flow then the students cognitive engagement decreases. According to Frase (1998, 2001, & 2004), teachers frequently visited by a supervisor during a walkthrough teach within more flow experiences and feel more satisfied with the work they do in the classroom. Dialogue debrief can be the tie to lead teachers to connect with the classroom walkthrough whereby enhancing their flow experience. Multiple teachers reaching flow through dialogue about their practice with their administrator, could potentially enhance feeling good about what happens in the classroom and connect teachers to a broader community of professionals find value in sharing and growing together.

## ***The Walkthrough and Teacher Self-Efficacy***

Albert Bandura first introduced the concept of self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) defined it as

...people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives.

Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (p. 1).

Patricia Ashton expanded self-efficacy's construct into the educational setting in 1984 when she documented the connection between teacher's self-efficacy through confidence in bringing about learning outcomes with students. Ashton (1984) dichotomized teaching efficacy as general and personal. General being the extent to which a teacher believes his or her students can learn material and personal as the extent to which a teacher believes her students can learn under her instruction. Ashton and Webb (1986) found there is a strong predictive link between teacher-perceived self-efficacy and student achievement. Teachers in this study who had consistently high levels of self-efficacy had students with higher achievement than their low-leveled self-efficacy teacher counterparts. There is a strong connection between teachers' self-efficacy and subsequent improvement of teaching and student learning (Caprara et al, 2006; Geijsel et al, 2009; Goddard et al, 2000; Guskey, 1994; Locke, 1997; Hoy & Davis, 2006; Raudenbush et al, 1992; Ross, 1992, Ross, 1994; Tschannen-Moran et al, 1998; Turgoose, 1996; Watson, 1991). Teachers' efficacy beliefs influence the amount of effort teachers put into teaching, their willingness to adopt new teaching strategies, and their ability to persevere in the face of challenges (Bandura, 1997). Dufour and Berkey (1995) posit teacher and organizational self-efficacy is a critical component for school

improvement. Teachers who believe all students can learn have a high level of self-efficacy because they put those beliefs into action. Administrators who are knowledgeable about their teacher's beliefs and sensitive to nurturing those beliefs, aim to enhance teachers' attempts to teach all students through dialogue about instruction. If administrators are not careful to nurture productive belief systems in their teachers, then teachers and students will reap the negative side effects of those poorly developed beliefs.

Chester and Beaudin (1996) found the number of walkthroughs was related to changes in teacher self-efficacy beliefs. When classroom visits are frequent and purposeful teachers' self-efficacy increases because they feel valued by the supervisor. Equally as important is the time given to debrief and dialogue about observed classroom practices between the Principal and teacher. Accordingly, Chester and Beaudin (1996) explain:

Schools can influence teachers' feelings of efficacy and empowerment, however, when they provide opportunities for collegial interaction, when supervisors attend to the instructional dimension of teachers' roles, and when consideration is given to how resources are allocated. Schools that offer opportunities for teachers to reflect on teaching and learning with their colleagues and for administrators and teachers to collaborate and communicate, as well as support the use of instructional resources, foster more positive changes in self-efficacy beliefs of both novice and experienced newly hired teachers than schools where such opportunities are limited (p. 253)

Frase (2001) and Gray (2003) observed the amount of walkthrough visits had a positive impact on teacher self-efficacy in various areas. The studies showed frequent classroom walkthroughs by the Principal can affect the level of efficacy teachers feel and the teachers perceived efficacy of other teachers. Furthermore, these frequent classroom visits increased teacher's efficacy of evaluations, the school as a whole organization and predicted the frequency of teacher flow experiences.

Walkthroughs conducted by the Principal have a direct impact on the culture of their schools and specifically on teacher self-efficacy. According to Blasé and Blasé (2004) Principal classroom walkthroughs have the potential to increase teacher morale, motivation, self-efficacy, and the feeling of security. Teachers who possess high self-efficacy improve student achievement because they believe they can impact all students to learn. Involved Principals, who visit classrooms regularly, should be able to support teachers with their instructional practices thereby creating opportunities to pull the teachers out of potentially isolating classroom worlds. Dialogue is the vehicle for constructive feedback to help bring light to changes in instructional practice for impact on student achievement.

### ***The Walkthrough and Staff Development***

Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2001) defined professional development as education of educators in continuous and focused improvement of quality of education for students. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) reported professional development is crucial to educational success, however research has revealed teacher professional development is inadequate in its design and does not

bring teachers closer to improving their teaching practices and fails to positively affect teachers' professional growth (Guskey, 1984; Joyce & Showers, 1995). Annunziata (1997) said of professional development offerings, they are one-shot deals, feel-good sessions, make-and-take opportunities, bag-of-tricks exhibitions to be faddish, superficial, and consultant driven. Due to staff development that lacks of meaning and purpose and no relation back to changes in teacher practice, Orlich et al. (1993) found little evidence for professional development connecting back to student achievement. Fullan and Steigelbauer (1991) found professional development did not have a lasting effect on teacher practice unless it was designed to provide continuity between what teachers learn and what goes on in their classrooms.

Some evidence can be noted in favor of staff development. Walkthroughs conducted by Principals can improve teachers' attitudes toward professional development (Downey, 2004). Frase et. al (2001) connected Principals' classroom visits to teachers' perceptions of the quality of staff development offered and to the subsequent flow experienced resulting from implementing ideas and practices gained from staff development. Furthermore, when Principals are supportive of teacher professional development and teachers are actively involved in the planning of their own learning processes through dialogue, teachers' growth opportunities and reflection that guides it are more likely when teachers are willing to take the risk of changing their instructional practices in an effort to increase student learning (Ashkanasy & Gallois, 1987; Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Frase, 1998; Lefcourt, Hogg, Struthers, & Holmes, 1975; Miller & Irving, 1995; and Wilhite, 1990).

Professional development has the potential to change the course of teachers' professional practice to impact student learning. King (2004) concluded Principals and

teachers developing a shared commitment, built on established shared goals, for student learning and aligning the student learning with school wide professional development will positively impact teacher growth with classroom practice. This ideal can be accomplished with frequent and regular classroom walkthroughs where data is collected and feedback discussions are generated to set goals for professional development.

### ***The Walkthrough and Classroom Instruction***

The classroom teacher has positive impact on student achievement (Wright, Horn, and Sanders, 1997). The Principal plays a role in increasing student achievement by supporting the teachers through supervision, staff development and coaching to help bring about the necessary change to ultimately impact student achievement and the broader instructional culture. Wright et al. (1997) found the teacher is the most important factor affecting student achievement. After analyzing 100,000 student test scores in the United States, Wright et al. (1997) found the “immediate and clear implication of this finding is that seemingly more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor” (p. 63). In support of these findings, Sanders and Rivers (1996) found elementary students who had three consecutive years of ineffective teaching scored much lower on standardized tests than students who had the benefit of having an effective teacher for the same time period.

Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield (1989) stress the importance of Principals focusing attention on effective teaching practices to improve instruction. Principals in effective schools are instructional leaders as well as catalysts for implementing instructional practices through new innovations. Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield found effective schools



had Principals who conducted walkthroughs with an academic purpose, had teachers focus their instruction on mastery of the basic skills students needed to be successful, displayed academic success around the school, and encouraged teachers to teach interactively. When Principals implement frequent and regular walkthroughs, along with strong dialoguing through feedback opportunities, they can provide teachers opportunities to reflect on their current practices and increase their effectiveness through instruction to reach higher student achievement levels.

Pollock and Ford (2009) believe good feedback is a direct means for Principals to impact teachers classroom instruction whereby creating an effect in the students learning. Principals should provide feedback directly from classroom observations that are related to instructional decision-making and delivery. In addition, the focus of the feedback should explicitly drive teachers to improve the quality of verbal or nonverbal, written and recorded or reported feedback they in turn provide to their students. “Feedback to teachers that is specifically targeted to planning, instructing, and assessing, rather than being only complimentary praise, is a golden key to fostering cooperative work with teachers that results in improved student learning” (Pollock & Ford, 2009).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) completed a meta-analytic study spanning over twenty-five years focused on classroom, school, and leadership practices highly correlated with student achievement. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) wanted to answer the following questions: Do the focus and quality of leadership have significant relationship to student achievement? And what specific leadership responsibilities and practices have the greatest impact? The first finding was leadership had significant, positive correlation between effective school leadership and student

achievement. The second finding was effective leadership is identified under twenty-one key areas of leadership responsibility that are significantly correlated with student achievement. Of the twenty-one key areas of leadership; visibility, relationship and monitoring serve as reminders to conducting walkthroughs, establishing a strong relationship with teachers, and providing constructive feedback through supervision impacts teachers and students. The final finding is effective leaders not only know what to do, but how, when, and why to do it. They know which school changes will impact student achievement, what the impact will be on staff and community, and how to adjust their leadership role to meet the demands of the change.

Quality teaching cannot be neglected, as neglect has a deep impact on student achievement. One way to show teachers quality instruction matters is to conduct walkthroughs on their instruction and provide feedback specific to the teachers being supervised. As instructional leaders, Principals must be academically focused and knowledgeable providing constructive feedback to increase student achievement through teacher practice.

### ***The Walkthrough and Principal Effectiveness***

Hallinger and Heck (1996) portrayed the Principal as a key player in school effectiveness and school reform. Teachers want and need Principals whom they believe are effective and will support them by providing knowledgeable instructional leadership to enable teachers and students to thrive. According to Bandura (1993) collective efficacy of teachers is positively connected to school achievement. Principals must maintain teachers' high perceptions of their abilities and beliefs in order to lead an effective school. One way to do this is through the classroom walkthrough. Principals

conducting classroom walkthroughs must have an established clear focus for the walkthrough and show their commitment to the instruction and curriculum (Smith & Blasé, 1991).

Principals must prioritize how often and how much time is spent visiting classrooms. Research shows the Principals daily schedule does not include much time for classroom visits and as a result even less time is spent on discussing curriculum and developing teachers (Howell, 1981; Martin & Willower, 1981; Kmetz & Willower, 1982; Frase & Streshly, 1994). Furthermore, the positive effect on frequent and regular classroom visits increases teacher efficacy as it relates to the teacher's belief about themselves, other teachers, professional development, the administrator, and the teacher flow experience (Frase, 1998; Frase et. al., 2001). In addition, classroom visits by the Principal focused on curriculum and instruction lead to higher student achievement (Andrews et. al., 1986; Andrews & Soder, 1987; Heck et. al., 1990; Heck, 1992). Eisner (2002) even suggests Principals should spend at least a third of their time in daily classroom visits.

According to Andrews and Soder (1987), Principals who are resource providers, instructional leaders, good communicators and are visible have more meaningful interactions about curriculum and instruction with teachers who in turn view them as effective.

### ***The Debrief and Perceived Teacher's Attitude Toward Supervision***

Teacher evaluations have been portrayed in the literature as of little value in impacting teachers flow experiences or improving classroom instruction. Evaluation means holding teachers accountable and judging their efficiency (Sullivan & Glanz,

2000). Many teachers who have had poor evaluative experiences due to the administrator's lack of ability in the evaluative process see little value in the process. Haefel, 1993 states, "that the training of evaluators is nonexistent in most school systems, haphazard in others, and unsystematic where it does occur" (p. 25). If administration is not well trained to evaluate a teacher effectively and does not apply evaluation procedures consistently across teachers then teachers lose trust and a sense of value in the evaluative process. Feedback given to teachers from such a troubled system does not mean much to changes in instructional practices. Additionally, the little value placed on evaluation has the potential to diminish teacher flow and decrease efforts in improving classroom instruction (Nevo, 1994; Duke, 1995; Frase & Streshly, 2000).

Frase (1998) reports overall, teachers have a favorable view of evaluations when they are purposeful and the supervisor is encouraging and more of an instructional coach. The teachers want supervisors to visit their classrooms more frequently and have curricular conversations around the teaching practices observed. Teachers want to be supervised with a purpose and with value. Often the evaluation process does not lend itself to produce the desired effect on teacher practice, however supervision with purpose and coaching from the supervisor can produce such an effect. Bass (2008) describes the supervisor's teacher relationship as follows:

Leadership can be understood as a transaction or exchange of material, social, and psychological benefits. In a fair and profitable exchange, the benefits to both the leader and follower exceed their costs. In the transactional process, leaders and followers reinforce each other's behavior with either reward or punishment – preferably reward, and

preferably reward that is contingent on fulfilling the transacted role arrangements. But the exchange may be less rewarding; it can involve management by exception or punitive discipline (p. 398).

Sullivan and Glanz (2000) state supervision engages teachers in instructional dialogue for the purpose of improving teaching and increasing student achievement. Ongoing, developmental and differentiated supervision, involves supervisors and teachers, promotes teacher development, gives opportunities for dialogue interaction, allows for fault-free problem solving and increases student achievement (Zepeda, 2003; Danielson & McGreal, 2000; Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, & Poston, 2004; Glatthorn, 1997; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004; Oliva & Pawlas, 2004; Sergiovani & Starrat, 2002). Blasé & Blasé (1998) investigated the perceptions of 800 teachers in graduate programs in the U.S. about their experiences with staff conferences. They found “ineffective Principals who criticized teachers privately often failed to provide them with alternative suggestions to what they were doing and threatened them instead” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 130). On the contrary, Principals who were positive, enthusiastic and praised teacher instructional efforts copiously were viewed as effective and motivating. Blasé and Blasé (1998) stress in order for administrators to be effective communicators in instructional debriefs with teachers they must utilize a variety of tactics. They present the view:

Principals who are good instructional leaders develop a deep appreciation for the potential artistry of an instructional conference with a teacher – that magical, creative, intuitive, and reflective talk – as they discover the complexity and challenge of conducting an effective conference. Principals struggle to balance content with direction, human concerns with

organizational goals, the need for growth with the press of inertia, and formal structure with creativity” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 19).

Blasé and Blasé further state effective Principals are informed instructional leaders and prepare for debriefs with the knowledge in the end teachers’ will grow professionally and as a byproduct develop stronger relationship with the administrator.

Blasé and Blasé conclude on instructional conferences:

As a critical component of instructional leadership, the instructional conference should be positive, reflective, and motivating to a teacher. Our findings persuade us that solid efforts by Principals along these lines can produce significant results for teachers’ classroom performance.

Conversely, abandonment of teachers or an attitude of condescension on a Principal’s part can cause significant damage to teachers and, ultimately, the students with whom they work” (Blasé & Blasé, 1998, p. 47).

This chapter reviewed the literature related to the historical perspective of supervision, accountability in education, dealing with supervision in a climate of change, problems with supervision, supervision models, walkthroughs, models of walkthroughs, walkthrough and teacher flow, walkthrough and self-efficacy and walkthrough and the Principal. Debrief conversation is identified as an element within these areas to have the potential to enhance instruction, student learning and relationship building between teachers and administrators.

## **Chapter Three: Method**

Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods-but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case.

*Stake, R.E. (2000). Case studies. Handbook of Qualitative Research, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 435.*

### ***Introduction***

My study was conducted through the lens of an autoethnographic, intrinsic case study. I wanted to know in what ways my leadership style and role impacted the interactions between my teachers and myself during debrief meetings after classroom walkthroughs. I also wanted to learn what my teachers' perceptions were of their experiences in debrief meetings. Moreover, Stake defines intrinsic case study to deal with a researcher's interest in a particular case and the desire to "learn about that particular case" (1995, pg. 3) as it exists on its own. In my intrinsic case study, the interest under consideration is the debrief meeting. For the purpose of my study, debrief meetings are operationally defined as meetings in which I participated after an informal classroom walk through. The intention of the debrief meeting is to discuss observations in four of my teacher's classrooms during literacy instruction. In order to initiate a debrief meeting between these teachers and myself, I first conducted

classroom walkthroughs to collect observation data to share during the subsequent debrief meetings with each teacher. Next, I conducted the debrief meeting and fully immersed into the experience with each teacher by engaging in in-depth, constructive dialogue about each respective classroom walkthrough. By audio recording the experience, I did not worry about manually recording these data through note taking and was able to fully attend to the interaction between teacher and me as it naturally developed. Later, I developed my understanding of each interaction by playing back the audio taped debriefings in order to actively illuminate my understandings of the experience. I repeated the playbacks to deepen my understanding and actively verify my resulting reflections through a written account of my initial reactions, thoughts, and biases (LeVassure, 2003). This process served as my means of bracketing (LeVassure, 2003). Throughout, I conducted member checks (Patton, 2002). Participants reviewed verbatim transcripts. Additionally, each participant reviewed a one-page summary of findings. I asked each participant to note approval of each transcript and express agreement with the one-page summary. Further, I brought together the essential elements illuminated through my data analysis and recognized the emergent patterns and relationships. Lastly, I merged my reflections and feedback from member checks with the findings. This became my creative synthesis and led me to make several assumptions about our shared lived experiences of debrief and how the debrief could be navigated by other administrators to effectively coach teachers to improving classroom practice in literacy.



## **Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this autoethnographic intrinsic case study was to conduct a self-study of my use of debriefing, after walkthroughs in four teacher's classrooms, to understand and interpret the collective perceptions and meanings of the experience as it relates to my leadership role and style.

## ***Research Questions***

1. In what ways does my leadership role impact the debrief experience as I support four elementary teachers' literacy practice?
2. In what ways does my leadership style impact the four elementary teachers' views of our relationship and debrief experience?
3. In what ways does the debrief experience impact four elementary teachers' perceptions, beliefs and thinking about their literacy practices?

## ***Design of the Study***

The design of my study formed across the parameters of a qualitative, autoethnographic intrinsic case study to explore the perceptions of my debriefing language as it centered on literacy understanding and teaching practice of four elementary teachers. The purpose of the study is to conduct a self-analysis of my use of debriefing, after walkthroughs in four teacher's classrooms, to understand and interpret the collective perceptions and meanings of the experience as it relates to my leadership role and style, previous debrief involvements and literacy curricular knowledge base. I attempted to illuminate the perceptions held from debrief by the four teachers and me as we engaged in conversations about their classroom practice. How is my

administrative role viewed by the teachers when I employ classroom walkthroughs and subsequent debrief conversations? What perceptions can I make about my administrative style as I debrief with teachers? What insights do the four teachers have about implementation of recommended literacy practices, as it relates to the teachers' expertise with literacy understanding and practice implementation?

I am the Assistant Principal of a Title 1 Elementary school in a large, West Central Florida school district. Moreover, I conducted this study at the school where I served as Assistant Principal for four years. I spent time walking through the four teachers' classrooms and making informal observations of their instruction. We then met to debrief about what I observed in their classrooms. I audio taped the debriefs using my iPhone, created verbatim transcripts, coded and categorized patterns illuminated from the data and organized the data around emerging categories. Along the course of the study I made direct interpretations of the data as they occurred. Later, returning to the issues presented to make connections to these data and layer my interpretations as they relate to my leadership role and style. The first layer being a close analysis of the debrief data along with initial reactions. Second, I identify what from the debrief experience is related to the teachers' perceptions of my administrative role. The final layer reveals connections to my personal history as it relates to my leadership style.

The aim of my study was to lift patterns and categories as they surface from our collective perceptions of the debrief meeting and address the three research questions through interpretation of these perceptions. I observed the teachers instruction either of reading or writing when I conducted my regular classroom walkthroughs on the four teachers. For my first question, I focused on the ways the debrief experience impacted my leadership role in supporting the teachers. I wanted to know how I could help the

teachers with implementation of the curriculum and their teaching practice. The second question explored the perceptions the teachers held about my leadership style during walkthrough and in the subsequent debrief. I wanted to know what leadership style I portrayed and the views the four teachers had of our relationship as a result of my leadership style. The third question focused on the ways the debrief experience impacted four elementary teachers' perception of their literacy practice. This issue targeted what practices the teachers currently employed, what they hoped to accomplish by using these practices with students and how I might help inform their literacy practice.

The debrief conversation is the major event structure. I engaged in debrief after an informal classroom walkthrough I conducted over the course of the first semester of the 2013-2014 school year. I audiotaped each debrief conversation. I transcribed the debrief language used during these dialogues and coded for discovery of patterns and categories. I locked all hard copies of these data in a file cabinet in my home office. I stored all electronic debrief tapings in a database under password protection on my home computer and backed up the files nightly. I did not include any of these data or information collected during my study into the teacher's personnel files. Later, I kept these data in a locked file cabinet and/or electronically zipped disc stored in my home office file cabinet. I will keep this disc for five years after the study. At the end of the five years, I will shred these data.

### ***Researcher***

According to Stake (1995), an intrinsic case study researcher initially begins to collect data when an interest in a case is born through first impressions and connections

to the case. “A considerable proportion of all data is impressionistic, picked up informally as the researcher first becomes acquainted with the case. Many of these early impressions will later be refined or replaced, but the pool of data includes the earliest of observations” (Stake 1995, p. 49). Since I consider this inquiry an autoethnographic intrinsic case study, I present my professional development and researcher background through “creative narratives shaped out of [my] personal experiences within the culture” of my school district (Goodall, 2000, pg. 9). My purpose is to provide a glimpse into how my past, background experiences, and personal biases may influence this research.

I am a forty-one year old, white female who is an Assistant Principal in a large school district in Florida. I have over sixteen years of educational experience. My mother was the one who saw me as a teacher, but I never dreamed I would one day be an administrator leading teachers. Armed with my Bachelors degree in Psychology and Masters degree in Elementary Education, I started my career as a kindergarten/first grade teacher under the umbrella of continuous progress (Pasco’s Vision, 2014) and inclusion (Pasco’s Vision, 2014). My school district defined continuous progress as a classroom setting where students could access learning at different developmental levels that surpassed grade specific delineations, hence the combination of kindergarten and first graders. My inclusion classroom not only consisted of basic education students, but also was diversified by deaf and hard of hearing, slow learning disabled and emotionally handicapped students. My teaching team was composed of three other teachers who taught a range of grades from kindergarten to second grade. I was professionally guided by the other teachers through a strong emphasis of coaching one another and sharing teaching responsibilities of all of our students across kindergarten to second grade. The team leader did not rise above the rest of the team, but rather

joined ranks with us in sharing the development and learning of both the teachers and students on our team. Our motto was: “A team who shares together, thrives together!” We all succeeded or we all fell: it was up to us, which way the team went. Frequent team meetings and conversations centered on improving our teaching practices helped develop me into a reflective educator who regularly sought out better ways to meet my students needs. Here is where my beliefs in relationship with others and constructive coaching began to take root.

As I moved along in my educational career, I began to develop a desire to share the lessons and growth I enjoyed on my team. I began to look for other opportunities to impact the educators around me. On this journey, I moved schools and became a team leader. Several interns joined my classroom and I used many opportunities to have constructive conversations about their practice and how I reflected on mine. Shortly after, I left the classroom and worked on literacy as a Reading Resource teacher at the elementary level. I completed certification in reading, as a result of my course work for my Ph.D., and sought a Reading Specialist position. One became available at the secondary level and I took my skills from elementary there. My administrator, at the middle school, gave fuel to my leadership abilities and provided me with plentiful opportunities to grow them. Year after year, I enjoyed leadership development in staff development, curriculum planning and program implementation. Armed with school based experiences in literacy and opportunities with the district, such as writing the middle school K-12 literacy plan and up-training teachers for literacy best-practices, I started to build a passion for coaching. As I began to see an impact that reached past content, grade, and educator; I was encouraged to pursue my educational leadership degree and a second Masters degree was born. Upon graduating, I entered the Assistant

Principal pool for the elementary level and landed my first administrative position. Now, I was able to implement coaching for instructional practice across my own school based on the extensive training I had been under for the past eight years. This was truly a time where I felt the tires met the road and I would be able to see the impacts of my coaching on the educators at my school.

I see great value in using informal classroom walkthroughs and debriefing as a coaching tool for increasing teacher effectiveness. I have experienced the struggles and difficulties with conducting debrief meetings at the end of observations and have a desire to inform myself and other administrators of possible productive debrief practices and language to use when we debrief with a teacher to improve instruction in literacy.

In my quest to identify characteristics that potentially enable or hinder my teachers' acceptance and reflective use of debrief feedback given by me. I have completed the full four days of Learning Focused Strategies (Thompson, 2005) training along with my teachers. I must establish a sense of co-ownership of the learning involved to fully implement the program, I have participated in numerous group meetings to discuss the implementation, results, and feedback given on the walkthrough at my own school. I have seen first hand how debrief language can potentially help or hinder a teacher's view of his or her own literacy practices in the classroom. I approach this study from the position of seeking to find ways to support administrators in keeping the lines of communication open with teachers as we effectively coach our teachers through debrief conversations focused on implementing effective literacy practices.

## **Participants**

I conducted this study at a Title 1 Elementary School where I was the Assistant Principal. Title I is defined as a program to provide financial assistance to schools with high numbers or high percentages of poor children to help ensure all children meet challenging state academic standards. All Title I schools in this school district have been aligned to common expectations of school improvement and have certain distinguishing features. These include: implementation of Learning Focused Strategies as presented by Thompson (2005), adherence to class size mandates, have similar demographics within the population, use the Marzano (2009) teacher evaluation system, provide aligned staff development opportunities, and implement the ninety minute reading block to utilize the same Language Arts curriculum.

I asked all of my teachers, kindergarten through fifth grade, if they would like to participate in this study. Four teachers volunteered to be in the inquiry. I asked the teachers to give permission for their walkthrough debrief meetings to be audiotaped throughout the first quarter of the 2013-2014 school year. Two of the teachers are within their first two years of teaching and two of the teachers are past ten years of teaching. I audiotaped the four teachers' debrief meetings. I used no identifying features with the tapping or transcriptions other than an alias name to identify these data from each teacher. The teachers had the right to not answer any questions, and to stop the debrief meetings at any time. The teachers could choose to discontinue their participation in the study at any time.

Teacher's participation in this study was voluntary. Participating or withdrawing from this study had no influence on the teachers' employment or relationship with me.

Upon completion of the study, I shared the findings with each teacher if they requested. I followed Institutional Review Board requirements.

### **Data Collection**

“The case study approach to qualitative analysis constitutes a specific way of collecting, organizing, and analyzing data; in that sense it represents an analysis process” (Patton, 2002, p. 447). The case study is a product of an analysis process based on Patton’s suggestions. Analysis takes place through the deconstruction and interpretation of the data as it is reconstructed. Stake (1995) expounds, “analysis should not be seen as separate from everlasting efforts to make sense of things” (p. 72). Initially, the study’s direction and its interpretations developed through inductive content analysis where analysis begins through an open perspective of the case and then leads to greater focused and detailed interpretations as the data saturates down to the common interpretations formed out of the case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Stake (1995) purports the use of direct interpretations throughout an intrinsic case study because the goal is to understand the case. Direct interpretation derives meaning across portions of a single instance of data. To find meaning in the single instance it is pulled apart and put back together again more meaningfully (Stake 1995, p. 75). As a by-product of direct interpretation, similarities emerge from multiple instances of these data and patterns begin to surface. In this study, I engage in direct interpretation of the multiple debrief meetings I employed with the four teachers. I illuminate the patterns revealed in the debrief conversations with the teachers through analysis and synthesis of direct interpretation. My desire is to understand the meaning of the teacher’s perceptions of the way my role and style, as instructional leader, drives



the debrief conversations. Since this inquiry is also autoethnographic, I reflexively explored my personal and professional experiences and interactions with others as a way of achieving broader social understanding.

The context of my study involved classroom walkthroughs during the literacy block, and teacher participation in debrief meetings after each walkthrough for a 6-week cycle. As the administrator at this particular school, I have regularly conducted informal walkthroughs throughout the school year. In the case of these participants, I scheduled informal classroom walkthroughs during the 90-minute reading block twice a week for six weeks. After every walkthrough, I met with each teacher for about ten minutes in order to debrief and give feedback on what I observed during the classroom walkthrough. I audiotaped, transcribed, coded and analyzed multiple informal debrief dialogue meetings with the four teachers during the first quarter of the 2013-2014 school year. Immediately, I began direct interpretation of these data as I collected it by keeping a reflection journal of my impressions and thoughts of the classroom walkthroughs and debrief meetings.

Interpretations occurred throughout this study. Patton (2002) defines interpretations as “attaching significance to what was found, making sense of findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order on an unruly but surely patterned world” (p. 480). At my discretion, I determined the amount of taped debrief dialogue meetings taken once I reached saturation of identified categories. After I completed all of the classroom walkthroughs and debrief meetings, I used my initial reflective interpretations to initiate broad categories of the transcribed debrief meetings as I engaged in analysis. I identified key expressions, terms and practices common among

the individual teachers in this study. Patton (2002) states, “analyzing such an indigenous practice begins by understanding it from the perspective of its practitioners, within the indigenous context, in the words of the local people, in their language, within their worldview” (p. 455). In this way I defined the context of the study.

Next, I turned my analysis to the categories illuminated and connected the categories to my research questions. The conclusive interpretations shed light on my specific use of debrief with my teachers to explain our collective perceptions. I began to define the initial patterns of meaning. As I continued to interpret these transcribed data, I refined the categorical lists of similar dialogue responses from the teachers about their experiences with the debrief meetings to clarify each category’s collective meaning. Patton (2002) explains, categories bring “a general sense of reference” and how it is “manifest and given meaning in a particular setting or among a particular group of people” (p. 456). Categories provide a framework for these data in order to make interpretations of the case study as it relates to the participants and myself. Examples of categories in this study are feedback, validation, and opportunities. Furthermore, I moved beyond simply labeling these data and placing it into categories. Patton (2002) discusses, “Illuminating indigenous typologies requires an analysis of the continua and distinctions used by people in a setting to break up the complexity of reality into distinguishable parts. The language of a group of people reveals what is important to them in that they name something to separate and distinguish it from other things with other names” (p. 457). While analyzing the transcribed data, I separated the dialogue into distinguishable parts that could be grouped together to illuminate specific meanings of the teachers’ perceptions of the debrief meetings and how my role and style as instructional leader impacted the debrief meetings. Stake (1995) refers to this type of

analysis as making “interpretations” and purports, “analysis should not be seen as separate from everlasting efforts to make sense of things” (p. 72). Similarly, Guba (1978) describes the process of convergence as necessary to identify the recurring regularities in these data to reveal patterns to eventually be placed into meaningful categories. As a synopsis, I recognized well-founded meanings from the identified categories and the attributes listed under them. I perceived and interpreted, “how people construe their world of experience from the way they talk about it” (Frake, 1962, p. 74). By sifting through the transcribed debrief meetings and my reflective interpretations, I was able to relevantly categorize these data and make parallel connections between the teacher’s experiences and perceptions of my role and style as the instructional leader.

Lastly, Stake (1995) argues in order to achieve verisimilitude I must triangulate my data. Triangulation entails the use of different data sources to support or disprove findings. Stake informs, “We recognize that case study is subjective, relying heavily on our previous experience and our sense of worth of things. We try to let the reader know something of the personal experience of gathering the data. And we use triangulation to minimize misperception and the invalidity of our conclusions” (p. 134). I initiated triangulation by using my self-reflections of the taped debrief meetings to make connections to my interpretations of these data. Essentially, I replayed each taped debrief over while I “eavesdropped” in on the conversation taking down impressions and thoughts as they surfaced through my reflective process. Moreover, I expanded my interpretive meanings through the use of Guba’s (1978) category checklist based on the following four premises: determine internal and external plausibility of these data, establish inclusivity of the data set, verify the data by an outside reader, and verify the

data through member checking. Guba (1978) further instructs that categorical data needs to be examined for meaning in unity and contrasted from the other categories of individual meaning. I accomplished this by going back and forth through the transcribed debrief data to clarify the categories and determine which data would be included or excluded from each identified category. Guba (1978) explains, these data will be extended further off the known information, bridged together, and surfaced as new information might be considered for inclusion to the existing information. Once I reached saturation and redundancy with these data I concluded the process.

Additionally, I enlisted a fellow doctoral student who was well versed in qualitative research to review my culminated category interpretations. Finally, I asked the teachers, in my study, to review their transcribed debriefs, the study interpretations and the subsequent conclusions. I discussed any issues or discrepancies with each individual involved in the refining process and I made decisions on excluding or including items under discussion. I used feedback offered from the doctoral student and the teacher's member checks to further inform the conclusions of this study.

My final step was to solidify my interpretations beyond the descriptive data (Stake, 1995). I made conclusive interpretations of my role and style as the instructional leader and provided conclusions on strategies for other administrators to use during debrief meetings after classroom walkthroughs with their teachers. Of important note, I asked each teacher to give me permission to digitally audiotape our debrief dialogue meetings. The questions I used during the debrief meetings were modeled from Thompson (2005) and questions I personally generated. These questions focused on identification of what the teacher's perceptions were of the debrief meeting and how they viewed my role and style as administrator.

## **The Walkthrough as Supervisory Monitoring**

Supervisory monitoring involves collecting data during an informal classroom walkthrough conducted on a teacher. The walkthrough can be defined as a brief pass through a classroom whereby the administrator looks for evidence of research-based practices in literacy being implemented by the teacher and used by the students (Thompson, 2005). Downey, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston (2004) further define the classroom walkthrough as a frequent, informal, short classroom visit by an administrator to look for specific components of proven instruction, whereby the administrator fosters a mentoring or coaching, rather than an evaluative, relationship with the teacher. Prior to the beginning of a new school year, I meet with my leadership team to discuss what areas of teaching would be addressed for the upcoming school year based on the school wide data collected from the previous school year. These data included formal and informal student academic data, survey data from staff and students, attendance reports, and behavior data. Typically, these areas, identified collectively, are areas in need of improvement. These identified areas of focus become the non-negotiables the staff implements for the new school year. As part of the non-negotiables, literacy practices were clearly defined and outlined. The purpose of the walkthrough is to verify evidence of implementation of the literacy practices. I give feedback, targeting the literacy practices being used, based on my walkthroughs of teacher's classrooms.

For the 2013-2014 school year, the literacy practices agreed upon by the teachers are as follows: full implementation of a ninety minute uninterrupted reading block to include thirty minutes of teacher directed whole group reading instruction, use of an essential question and academic rubric to target a literacy skill, and a sixty minute

rotation of small group reading instruction targeting specific student literacy needs at the struggling, on-level, and advanced level of literacy. Furthermore, teachers are required to pull low achieving literacy students for an additional thirty minutes of instruction outside of the ninety minute reading block during a common time in the morning. I looked for these literacy practices currently being implemented at my school using the walkthrough and audiotaped debriefs with my four teachers identified as participants in my study.

Furthermore, I used a set of questions to ask the four teachers about their use of research based literacy practices in the classroom, as well as made reinforcing statements when a research based literacy practice was observed. The four teachers received feedback during the debrief meeting, after a walkthrough was completed in their classroom, at a later agreed upon time. Audiotaped debrief meetings were transcribed, coded and analyzed.

This qualitative study is focused on my perceptions and the four elementary teacher's perceptions of my use of debrief conversations after classroom walkthroughs. I illuminated the influence my debrief language had on the reactions and adjustments that were unique or similar between the four teachers as it related to their literacy practice. My hope was these dialogue debrief meetings would shed light on the kind of administrative feedback that hinders or helps teachers' to implement the researched based literacy practices that lead to increased levels of student achievement. Additionally, I was interested in knowing what elements of the debrief conversation were conducive to developing a positive relationship with each teacher and what the teachers perceptions were about debrief. I wanted to know from them what would make the experience more meaningful and useful to their present instructional needs.

## ***Debrief Meetings***

I conducted debrief feedback meetings with four classroom teachers at the end of informal observations labeled as walkthroughs. I audiotaped all debrief meetings using a Macintosh iPod and then transferred to a computer. Debrief meetings consisted of the dialogue debrief created between the teacher and me after a classroom walkthrough. Observations were focused on the teachers' use of research-based literacy practices during the 90-minute reading block. The debrief meeting focused on interviewing the teacher about what was demonstrated in the classroom, my feedback and what the teacher might do next in their use of literacy practices.

The purpose of the audiotaping was to collect data on my debrief dialogue used with the four teachers, in order to reflect on the experience as the instructional leader in my building. The information obtained from the taped interviews was strictly confidential and will be destroyed five years after the completion of the study. Patton (1980) states, "The purpose of interviewing is to find out what is in and on someone's mind" (p. 196). Through the debrief meetings, I collected the individual perceptions and experiences of the teachers on their literacy practices. The debrief dialogue was designed to capture the perceptions, thoughts and feelings experienced by the teachers and me from the walkthrough, my feedback, how the teacher's perceived my style and role through dialogue as it occurred during our debrief meeting. Particular attention was made to identify the benefits/limitations of our debrief dialogue and how it impacts the teachers' views and implementation of literacy practices. Questions consisted of open-ended response questions. According to Patton (1980), "The purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and

capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of question categories” (p. 28).

### ***Data Analysis***

I submitted the application form to do research in Pasco County schools. Approval for the study was granted. I conducted the study at the Title 1 elementary school where I am Assistant Principal. I met with teachers at the beginning of the school year to share my plans for this research and invited them to be part of the study. Once I had obtained permission from the four teachers to participate, I conducted a minimum of two 90-minute reading block walkthroughs per week, for six weeks, in each of their classrooms. After each walkthrough, I met with the teacher during planning time to collect feedback during debrief meetings. I audiotaped the conversation for each debrief meeting. I transcribed each audiotaped debrief meeting verbatim and analyzed content for emerging patterns based on similarities, differences, patterns and categories. Patton (1990) states, “content analysis is the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. This means analyzing the content of interviews” (p. 381). Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (1998) claim, “Analysis involves working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what to tell others” (p. 157). I categorized these data in order to make interpretations about my role and style as an instructional leader based on the perceptions of the teachers and myself. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), “Qualitative analysis is a relatively systematic process of coding, categorizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of a single phenomenon of interest” (p.



364). I kept the data confidential to the satisfaction of the participants and as specified in the submission to the International Review Board.

I used the modified interpretation of Brown and Gilligan's (1992) narrative analysis through the Listener's Guide to analyze the taped debrief meeting data. In using this guide, I analyzed the taped debrief data three a minimum of three times, each focusing on a different aspect of my guiding questions. My first pass was focused on responses dealing with the debrief experience and the impact it had on the teachers' perceptions of their literacy practices. My second pass was focused on comments dealing with the benefits and/or disadvantages of debrief language as it relates to the teachers' views of my role as their administrator. My final pass was focused on the perceived impacts debrief conversation had on my administrative style when I made decisions on how to support the teachers' in their literacy practices. These data obtained from the audiotaped transcriptions were analyzed for commonality and connections to the emerging categories.

Lastly, I provided a descriptive summary following the data analysis with warranted connections to the research literature. A necessary process in qualitative research is to connect findings and interpretations illuminated from my study. It is my hope the findings in this descriptive study, will be useful in developing guidelines for administrators to use as part of their dialogue language during classroom observation debrief meetings. By doing so, I believe administrators can positively impact teacher's willingness to reflect on and improve their literacy practices to improve student learning achievement outcomes. I am confident administrators can do this in a way that separates them from the negative qualities of evaluation whereby they establish a mutual relationship of trust, openness and honesty with each teacher they serve.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

The real voyage of discovery consists not of finding new lands but of seeing the territory with new eyes.

*-Marcel Proust*

### ***Introduction***

I conducted an autoethnographic, intrinsic case study as a self-analysis of my use of debriefing, after walkthroughs in four teacher's classrooms in the school where I was Assistant Principal. I wanted to learn how my debriefings influenced four teachers' literacy practice. In addition, I desired to understand and interpret our collective perceptions and meanings of the debrief experience as it related to my administrative role and style.

The method of data collection was personal interviews, embedded in debrief meeting discussions. I conducted debrief meetings after classroom walkthroughs on four elementary teachers. The walkthroughs and debrief meetings took place over six weeks and were conducted during each teacher's 90-minute reading block. I audiotaped each face-to-face debrief meeting on an iPod and completed verbatim transcriptions. Moreover, I reflected on my perceptions of the debrief experiences with each teacher. The following research questions guide my study:

1. In what ways does my leadership role impact the debrief experience as I support four elementary teachers' literacy practice?
2. In what ways does my leadership style impact the four elementary teachers' views of our relationship and debrief experience?
3. In what ways does the debrief experience impact four elementary teachers' perceptions, beliefs and thinking about their literacy practices?

In this chapter, I profile each of the four teacher participants. I present initial findings through close analysis of the debrief data in connection to me as a participant of debrief. Next, I make further interpretation of these data through my involvement as it relates to my leadership role. Finally, I interpret how these data inform on my leadership style as it has been developed throughout my administrative history.

Furthermore, I report the categories of results as they emerged from the debrief meetings with the four teachers. I illuminated the categories from the teachers' perceptions of the classroom walkthroughs as shared during the debrief meetings, as well as the teachers' reflections on their literacy practice. Accordingly, I refined categories from my perceptions and interpretations of the debrief meeting interactions as it related to teacher literacy understanding and practice implementation. I present the major and minor categories in Table 1.

### **The School**

The four elementary teachers, who participated in this study, teach at a Title One elementary school in a large school district in Florida. The elementary school serves pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students in a suburban community. In the most

Table 1. Major categories and Minor categories.

Major Categories	Minor Categories
The debriefing justifies and/or validates the direction of teacher literacy practice.	Be honest and genuine when giving feedback.
Reflect on literacy practice to help the teacher with implementation and direction of specific literacy strategies.	Give specific feedback with connections to literacy practice, teachers and students.
Coach and scaffold through debrief feedback to impact the direction of teacher literacy practice.	Validate teacher risk taking based on student needs and the connections made to their literacy learning.
The debriefings cultivate a strong relationship between teacher and administrator.	Lack of time, limits the quality of connections between each classroom walkthrough and the respective debrief conversation.
Give the teacher an opportunity to “show off” their teaching abilities by time spent in observation during walkthroughs.	Recognize debrief as an affirmation process to gauge how the teacher perceives their literacy practice. Make the teacher feel good about what they are doing and confirm what they should be doing.
Provide detailed and differentiated feedback, specific to the teacher, on the informal classroom observation you conducted and offer validation, support, praise and next steps for the teacher for specific development in the use of literacy strategies and methods.	Do frequent and regular walkthroughs, along with debrief meetings, to help release the pressure associated with being observed and allow a platform for collegial discussion.
An important component of debrief dialogue is to make connections of what was observed and how it is related to school goals, curriculum and other teachers.	Give specific praise to guide literacy practice development.
Conducted regularly and frequently, the walkthrough can provide administration the necessary visibility and validity in feedback.	Give teachers choices and the ability to decide what next steps they would like to take with literacy practice implementation. Use open/ended dialogue to allow teachers to come to their own conclusions and then support their next steps.
In walkthrough have active interaction with students and share highlights from those interactions with the teacher at debrief.	

recent years, the total enrollment has typically been around 580 students. The student population regularly consists of 70.3% White, 22.3% Hispanic, 2.3% African American and 1.7% Asian. Within the typical student body, 17.7% are special needs, 79.5% economically disadvantaged and 7.3% are speakers of other languages. In terms of academic achievement, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (<http://fcats.fldoe.org/fcats/>), used to measure student and school progress from year to year, for the 2011/12 school year reported, 67% of students passed in reading, 56% in math, 56% in writing and 41% in science. Most of the students either walk to school or arrive by car. Daily average attendance rate is around 94%, and transiency is prevalent throughout the school year. The staff has experienced little turnover and many teachers have made their career at the school. Several staff members have taught at this school for over twenty years. Teacher moral is well developed and staff easily overcome stressful school situations by problem solving and working together to enhance learning for all students. Teaching teams rarely reorganize.

### ***Introduction of the Teachers through Their Lens***

Four teachers participated in this study: Mary, Sari, Jessica and Danya. Their names are pseudonyms. All of the teachers are females and white. Their ages range from thirty-four to forty-eight. Three of the four teacher's backgrounds do not involve educational work settings in their previous careers and as a result entered the field of education later in life. All but one teacher has a degree in education. Danya is a first year teacher, Mary is a second year teacher and Sari and Jessica have taught for over ten

years each. Each teacher, except Danya, was familiar with what a walkthrough entailed and knew what to expect. None of the teachers had experienced regular debrief

Table 2. Summary of participants' profiles.

	<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Teaching Background</b>	<b>Positions Held in Educational Setting</b>
<b>Danya</b>	Bachelors Degree in Business Administration	7 Months	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	Substitute Teacher Instructional Assistant Classroom Teacher Social Committee
<b>Mary</b>	Bachelors Degree in Education	1.7 Years	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Classroom Teacher Lead Literacy Committee Math Committee
<b>Jessica</b>	Bachelors Degree in Education  Masters Degree in Educational Leadership	10 Years	Kindergarten 1 <sup>st</sup> Grade 2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Classroom Teacher Summer School Teacher Extended Day Teacher Curriculum Liaison Science Committee Clinical Education Mentor Team Leader SAC Committee Student Council Coordinator Lead Literacy Team Student Mentor
<b>Sari</b>	Bachelors Degree in Education	12 Years	1 <sup>st</sup> Grade 2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	Classroom Teacher Private Tutor Home School Evaluator Reading Intervention Teacher Team Leader Vice President PTA Vice President SAC Social Committee Health Committee Wellness Committee Safety Committee

meetings after a walkthrough. Table 2 provides a breakdown of each teacher's background. Following Table 2 is each teacher's narrative introduction of how they entered into teaching. To the extent possible, I have maintained the style and words of the informants. In order to make their communication more readable, I have edited their language for filler words such as "um" and "you know", but always in ways consistent with what the participant said. All of the introductory narratives were successfully member checked with the individual participants. In order to maintain confidentiality of the subjects, pseudonyms were developed.

### *Danya*

Danya's story started approximately six years ago. Before she became a teacher she worked in retail for 26 years. She managed and opened Walgreen stores, which she said, "was a pretty stressful job." During her time at Walgreens she went to college and got her degree in business, but never planned on staying in retail. Humorously she shares, "they kept giving me raises and promotions and before you know it's 26 years later and you're not really happy with what you're doing." As years passed, she had a son and became his Sunday school teacher. When he started Cub Scouts, she became the den leader. When baseball became an interest to her son, she became team mom. She was often around little children and enjoyed the interactions.

Her son went to the neighborhood elementary school from kindergarten through 5th grade. When he was in 4th grade, Danya noticed advertisements for teachers at his school. She had a bachelor's degree and could teach. She recalls:

"Come teach! They were begging people to come teach. That kind of got me thinking. So when my son was in 4th grade, I talked to his classroom teacher one day

and she told me how she got into teaching. She was encouraging. At that point I really started thinking about doing it.” Danya had a good salary at Walgreens and worried about the big pay cut she would face as a teacher. For the next three years, she worked on paying off bills and saving money. Her family did whatever it took to help her transition to teaching.

On her days off from Walgreens she volunteered in her son’s classroom. She thought this would at least give her an idea of what it would be like in the classroom. She had some apprehension about interacting with students and dealing with behaviors on her own, but the teachers at the school encouraged her. She recalls, “You have to be firm, but you don't have to humiliate the children. So I guess it was a learning experience also.”

She retired from Walgreens and started substitute teaching. She wanted to be prepared when she went into the classroom. She had observed many people failed at teaching because they had no prior preparation. They had no idea what they were in for. She wanted to be prepared as much as possible when she went in the classroom. Substituting provided her with the teaching experiences she wanted and gained her valuable connections with various schools. In addition, she enrolled in college to earn her teaching certificate. Eventually, she took the elementary education K-6 test and passed. Once certified, she began to look for teaching positions. Through the long term subbing, she decided teaching elementary school made her the happiest. She shares: “I was so excited when I got the second grade position this year. It is challenging, but I like the challenge. I actually can say I love my job. And I love the kids.”

Danya still needs to take three college classes and pass one more test to get her full teaching certificate. Danya was a kindergarten substitute teacher when I became the



Assistant Principal. Danya is a bubbly teacher who “doesn’t want to be mean to students.” This endearing quality has brought her difficulty with classroom management. Often, we discussed strategies to focus her students on the tasks at hand and how to stop inappropriate behavior with others. Danya likes to springboard ideas with me. Danya and I talk through the necessary steps to accomplish new literacy strategy implementation with the students. Typically, she asks me to come observe her use of these strategies to get instant feedback for necessary adjustments she will make the next time she uses them. She is receptive to instructional suggestions and quickly tries them out. Her undertaking is to rapidly gain the knowledge necessary to teach reading and to teach it well. She grapples to gain the necessary skills in literacy to teach her students as she engages with daily instruction. I would describe our relationship as one of trust and openness. Rarely, does she hold back how she feels about her struggles and successes in the classroom. Her desire is to get better and fast. Her positive proactive attitude makes her a valued member of the second grade team.

### *Mary*

Mary grew up in a family of teachers. She describes herself as a “natural with kids.” She recalls, “In the Sunday school nursery they would always put me with the little kids who were crying and didn't want to leave their parents.” This affinity did not drive her to teaching at first. She worked in interior design and later with event planning. Mary describes herself as organized and gregarious, so naturally she was drawn to working with people. In college she spent much time trying out one major after another until she finally settled on a degree in education.

When she married, she contemplated having children and felt a teaching schedule would fit her personality and new life. She reminisces, “You know if I’m going to have kids I really need to go into a profession that will work with time so I would be able to spend time with my kids.” Same time off meant family vacations. Growing up in a teacher family, Mary spent summers traveling.

Mary admitted school always came really easily to her. She proudly tells, “I was always straight A’s. Things came too easily for me and I got bored, so I got in trouble.” Traveling with her parents helped curb her energies and gave her hands on learning experiences. Mary chuckles as she recollects, “When I was in high school, I went to see the Coliseum. I went to see the Arche de Triumph. I went to physically see these things we were studying in school. Being a kinesthetic learner it had a lot more value for me.” She eventually completed her Bachelor’s degree at Washington State, even though doubting, she was going to finish. She lost her scholarship due to changes of her major and a miss count of credits completed towards her degree. These setbacks held her from entry into a Master’s degree for a year.

Once enrolled, she enjoyed the program track, but had to deal with transferred credits and the unexpected death of her mom during her internship. With a crackling voice and tears in her eyes she discloses, “My mom was my mentor, of course. She was a teacher. Taught for 36 years in the public school system. Dynamic. Teacher of the Year three times. She was the only one who kept me going. She was sixty. I had two weeks to finish my semester having just lost my mother at thirty-one.” With the support of her college professors, Mary was able to finish college and honor her mother’s wishes of becoming a teacher. She knew education was “what she should be doing.”

Mary began to interview and had one rejection after another. She began to develop a defeatist attitude. She realized she was doing everything except talking about herself as a teacher. Armed with her new interviewing technique she ventured to get her first teaching position. I interviewed Mary for a fourth grade position at my school. She recalls, "I first interviewed with you. It's so hard because you're sitting there and it's kind of like American Idol or kind of like these shows where there's not really dialogue back and forth. It was the first interview I had sat in where I felt comfortable. The conversation you and I had was comfortable. It was like we were friends having coffee. We were conversing about my background and my teaching and why I wanted to be there." Mary actually interviewed for a previous position and did not get the job. For this interview, she interviewed with me first, which she felt helped her be prepared for the group interview. She felt comfortable and eager to face the panel. Her positive takeaway was the feedback she received from the panel after the interview.

She taught fourth grade for the next two years and began to strengthen her skills as an educator. She shares, "I'm really glad I stayed in fourth because I am much more comfortable. I know my environment. I know what I'm teaching. I'm not just trying to stay afloat. I have a better grasp on what I'm doing, so it's easier to do enrichment and go deeper with the curriculum." Mary needs to feel comfortable in her instruction. She understands I may have to make unfavorable decisions on behalf of my teachers that later may turn out to be right decisions based on the circumstances. Mary has proven to have the ability to reflect on these decisions and align with the expectations needed for teachers to respond. I think this is a higher order skill used by more seasoned educators. She has a strong desire to be a contributor to education. Often, her responses come through the kinesthetic aspect of her personality to satisfy her need to

get things right and not feel like a failure. She laments, “I just felt like I wasn't who I knew I could be in the classroom and so it was really discouraging. I just cried. I would get so frustrated. I felt like I wasn't reaching these kids. I'm not doing what I'm supposed to be doing.” Mary naturally reflects on her teaching. When she does she tends to involve others in her cogitations to glean different perspectives. She has a knack for taking the best information revealed to her back to the classroom.

As a first year teacher attending meetings, she would get “overwhelmed with all these terms thrown out with all sorts of lingo.” She would sit in our math meetings and literally cry because she was so overwhelmed with all of the information. She struggled with foreign concepts so basic to other educators. She reflects, “No one teaches you how to communicate with parents. I learned last year the hard way. I didn't know when you tell a parent they're kid is not doing so hot that it would get me in trouble with the parent quickly. They don't want to hear it.” She attributes her professional growth to her supportive teammates. She shares, “It's been positive, you know, my team was supportive last year. Made me feel like I can do this. This years been completely different cause I really feel like I'm more of a contributor than a taker. I'm more of a collaborator. More of a giver type person.” As Mary grows professionally through the ups and downs of daily experience, she deepens her understanding of teaching and learning. This translates directly to her students and she thrives in the classroom.

Mary is an active participant in school-based trainings. She finds embedded staff development useful, but prefers the direct support from coaches in her classroom, “When I have the physical, kinesthetic, hands on, I can see it, I can do it, I can feel it type experiences verses someone telling me to do this or that.” Mary needs a concrete experience to internalize new knowledge. This fact is useful to our communication

because I know by explicit demonstration she will understand more clearly than if I describe to her what I'm trying to get across. I make it a point to provide her with samples and materials she can review. I've observed her regularly lingering on a kinesthetic aspect of a lesson to get her point across, often using mnemonics to get the students to graft the knowledge into their brains. She states, "Auditory is what's hard for me because I don't learn that way. I have the quirky songs and silly things as part of my instruction. That's how I tick as a teacher." She needs concrete examples. Mary needs to be shown how rather than told.

From the beginning my relationship to Mary has been raw, honest and rich. I related to her at her interview because she reminded me of how I was as a young educator. Our personalities are similar, so it's easy for me to understand where she is coming from. She loves to provide detail when explaining herself or telling stories. Details are important. She is confident to almost a fault and doesn't dwell long on what others think of her to get her point across. To her teaching is about doing it right and getting it right. Similarly, I struggle with perfectionism. It cripples me from moving forward, stuck in dissatisfaction with the way I work the details of the task. Because of our attention to detail our conversations tended to be deep and long, but two roosters can stand off with each other so I have to be careful not to make her feel challenged by my strong personality. Being a solid educator is important to her. Once she told me, "like you, I'm a rebel" when I shared a frustration with a policy to be challenged. I think it's easier to lead teachers you can relate to on a personal level.

## *Jessica*

Jessica describes herself as a life long learner. She recalls, “I had two neighbor friends that where in the third grade and they liked to play school. They taught me how to multiply. And I thought that was awesome! From that moment, I wanted to teach.” She attributes her desire to be an educator to wonderful elementary teachers who helped her cope with the turmoil in her life when her father left the family. Jessica claims her consistency and support came at school, it was stable. She was challenged in the higher classes and the teachers enriched her, but more importantly showed care towards her.

Jessica’s initial college choice was to study business, however education drew her in later and she changed majors. After graduation, with a Master’s in education, Jessica had the opportunity to teach in Australia. She gained valuable lessons teaching in Australia and brought back many strategies to her future classrooms in the United States. Jessica eagerly shares, “You teach everything in Australia, the specials, the health, and every morning you'd walk in and you'd say good morning class. And they'd say good morning so and so. And at the end of the day, the bell would ring and they would sit there and wait for you to say good afternoon class. And they would say good afternoon and then they would leave. Now, I greet my class every morning and we do the good morning class and they do the good morning Mrs. Jessica. I also hug them at the door when they walk in. Everybody gets a hello by name with a hug. That's how we start our day. We have that unified team where we work and we learn and we have fun together.”

After Jessica spent a year in Australia, she returned to the United States to get married and substitute teach while looking for a permanent teaching job. She recalls

her struggles, “I didn't know then, that most of the teaching jobs were already promised to the people in the system, in the network or someone's nephew or niece. I didn't know that.” Subsequently, Jessica got divorced and was offered a full time position with benefits in a company business she worked part time for the last couple of years. Despite the fact she was involved in running an international multimillion-dollar business she kept renewing her teaching certificate year after year. Emphatically, she knew for a fact, she would teach one day. Eventually, she expressed to the owner she desired to work part-time because of job stress and demands with her young daughter. The company refused her request.

Coincidentally, Jessica and her new husband began to contemplate a move to Florida. She gave a three months notice to the company and began to plan for the move. With faith, Jessica moved with no guarantee of a teaching job. She was hopeful she would get hired because of her dream to teach. She spent time volunteering at her daughter's school. When summer rolled around she worked kinder gym and the church's Awana Club. She began to lose hope of ever teaching and fulfilling her dream. Unexpectedly, a local school contacted Jessica about a position. A special needs teacher, a seasoned veteran, had to take a leave of absence from her primary class. After her first year teaching, it took Jessica some time to find a permanent position. When she did she spent the next four years bouncing from one grade to another at the elementary level. Eventually, she settled in at fourth grade. She says it's her favorite grade, but I know each grade was also her favorite grade.

As Jessica fulfills her dream, she begins to look ahead to a new horizon. She tells, “Now that I have my masters in educational leadership, I don't really want to run a physical school. But, when I grow up I'd like to either run a virtual school or teach

college. I just have to get started and get ready to leave the classroom. I love the kids though, and like Mary says, you can have a lot of hard days, but when everybody walks in with a hug and you just have that relationship, everyday is different and everyday is great and when you get the awe, yes...that's why I'm here. It's hard to leave that kind of an environment.”

I will never forget the first time I met Jessica. It was in the hallway my first day as the new Assistant Principal. She walked up to me, introduced herself and then gave me a great big bear hug. I wasn't used to complete strangers doing this, but it was her way of welcoming me and not the last time I would get big hugs. Jessica makes me feel guarded when I communicate with her. She exudes a need for constant acceptance as an educator and as a person. This causes tension with relationships to others. On many occasions she shared with me her personal, as well as professional, concerns with issues to plague her in the past as new issues developed around her during my administration. Due to her concerns she has learned to “watch her back” and worries about the opinions of others. She attributes this stance to the many unsuccessful attempts at entering the field of education.

Jessica needs to feel she is appreciated and valued as an educator. My feedback to her tends to be reassuring, positive and encouraging. Often she requests rich detail about my feedback to better understand a situation or a circumstance. When giving constructive feedback I have to be careful not to hurt her feelings and cause resentment to keep her from moving forward. She thrives on recognition and enjoys it when I leave encouraging notes during classroom walkthroughs. This is an easy task because Jessica implements innovative teaching ideas and loves to show them off.



## *Sari*

Sari attributes her journey to teacher as shaped by the people around her. She recalls, “When I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I was always on the lower end of learning. With that stigma and the label associated with slow learners, I felt like a failure. We moved to Florida and I started at a new elementary school. I had this phenomenal teacher! She invited me into being a learner. She created ways for me to be successful and from the start saw me as equal. I never had a label when I walked in.” Through the care of her elementary teachers, Sari found a way to be successful in school. It led her to college and a degree in education.

When Sari graduated she realized jobs were scarce. She worked at the local hospital, but once again defined by things around her, was laid off. Her first job was as a reading coach at an elementary school. She had come full circle to work with students who struggled to read. Sari recognized to “teach is really a partnership of what you already know and what you are going to learn on the job. That learning on the job is what’s going to ground you, what’s going to make you who you are at the core.” Sari teaches through an edict of care. She quickly gets to know the families her students come from and the struggles they deal with. She finds ways to reach them. She informs, “You really learn a lot of different ways to get the students to like you, to get them to trust you, and once you have relationships the learning comes a little easier.” On many classroom walkthroughs I have observed her trying new strategies out to reach all of her students.

When Sari had her daughter she knew she wanted to become a stay-at-home mom. When her son came she resolved to stay home with him as well. During those four years she went to the school district office and took leadership courses. She

became the PTA president. She wanted to know how she could make a bigger difference coming back to the profession. She stated, “The learning was important for me because from the teacher perspective you try to reach students one way and as a parent you try to reach them another way. I found value to fuse the two together.” Sari developed an outsider’s point of view and blended it with her parent point of view to enhance her teaching. She came back enriched.

When her two children started school, Sari came back to teach at the elementary level. Her present reality reflects insights from Marzano’s Learning Focused Strategy and the different leaders at the school who have “shaped her and developed her teaching core.” She shares, “I always do what I think is right for the kids. I always get the biggest thrill out of innovating something after I get the aha.” Her students are important to her. Sari gives them what she thinks they are going to need to survive in the world. Through interactions with students she sees the essential things some kids need. Sari has become perceptive to student needs and reflects often on her practice. She emphatically expresses, “They need to be told boundaries. They need to be given feedback. They need to be shown right from wrong. They need to be told you love them. Without feedback they have no reflection. Without thinking about why something happens you can make the same mistake twice. And so I understand the relationship between parents and the kids. It’s a communication. It’s the core of everything.” Sari regularly lets students know how they are doing and what they can do to get better at it. She bonds with her students and has an evident relationship with them. In addition, Sari believes the student is the important connecting piece between the teacher and the parent. Parents need to be a part of the educational process through connected relationship. Unified in this way, she claims, her students’ soar. Sari feels “until you

make connection your hitting walls.” Both her experiences in and out of the classroom make her the educator she has become. She thinks it’s dynamic when it all works together for the good of the students.

Out of the four teachers in my study, I have had the longest relationship with Sari. Previously, we taught together and then reconnected when I joined my present school as the Assistant Principal. To Sari, communication is important. As I lead her I make certain I clearly and concretely express expectations. She not only wants to know what is expected, but why. The why must be defined and she must internalize it for herself before she moves forward. She requests constructive criticism often and desires to have a strong relationship with me. She prefers to learn through experiences and practice with as many hands on opportunities as possible. She is not a person who goes to training, absorbs the content and then quickly implements it in the classroom. Sari utilizes a set protocol to how she instructs and how she communicates with students and colleagues. I make it a point to recognize her protocol and use it to connect her to new knowledge. Over the years, I have noticed her teacher with-it-ness comes through her sequential instruction and repetition in practice. Her prescribed way of teaching makes her the main actor who has rehearsed extensively to present her lesson at her maximum ability level. I think if she were not prepared this way at this level she would become distressed in her teaching. To her this is something to avoid. With Sari, I like to listen to how she forms her understanding and then I try to find places where I can insert suggestions or new ideas to complement what she already does. Typically she reflects deeply and then goes into action.

Danya, Mary, Jessica and Sari share a common passion and desire to be great educators. All believed teaching was something they wanted to do and were good at

doing. Teaching was not a first career for Danya, Jessica and Sari who, after college, worked in the business field for a collective total of over 50 years. Each one had strong, positive teacher role models either as students or as mothers of children in school inspired to pursue teaching. Sari even described a teacher who worked with her patiently and dedicatedly in elementary school when Sari experienced a slow start to her learning. Now, she reflects on how her own teaching was impacted by this teacher when she works with students who have difficulties with learning. All four of these teachers are well on their way to inspire the next generation of educators.

### ***Addressing the Research Questions***

In this section I address each research question presented in this study through a close analysis of the taped debrief meetings. I make interpretations of my involvement as a leader and relate my personal history to the impact on my leadership role and style. This section proceeds in a layered fashion, presenting my interpretations as they relate to my leader role, leadership style and how my personal history impacts my leadership. I use direct quotations and excerpts from the taped dialogue debrief meetings throughout this section to highlight the participants' responses as they illuminate my interpretations of these data.

### ***Positioning My Part in the Debrief Experiences***

As I look back, I realize the debrief conversations quickly became an activity I thoroughly enjoyed and found time to do, despite other demands on my time. I looked forward to sitting down and having a relaxed conversation about the classroom walkthroughs conducted each week. If I missed debrief with the teachers, I would be

swiftly informed about how disappointed they were that I did not share my observations and perceptions.

When I began the informal classroom observations, I was too eager to share what I observed. I would hastily and meticulously describe the walkthrough not allowing the teacher to get a comment in edgewise. As I listened to the taped debriefs I recognized I needed to slow down my part of the conversation and share enough to give the teacher an opportunity to make insights and offer their perspective. After all, the conversations should center on the teacher and become a mutual exchange of reflections.

Additionally, I posed multiple, simultaneous questions to the teachers confounding their answers. This positioned the teacher to respond in a prescribed and predictable way based on the questions I asked. Accordingly, the teacher would gather clues from my questions to include in her response. It was important for me to choose words that did not give weight to what I observed in respect to value or personal preference. I was interested in the teacher's perceptions and already knew what my own personal perceptions were. By holding back and listening more, I was able to make the teachers feel comfortable to share a response potentially free of rhetoric they thought I wanted to hear in order to please me. This subtle way of communicating during debrief helped to diminish the effect of the imbalance of power I brought with me as an administrator to the debrief. I listened more and spoke less as I collected the data of debrief conversations. At first, it was difficult for me to stay quiet and not jump right in to the conversations. I would cue myself by placing a finger across my lips when a teacher responded to my questions or had a thought to share. In my mind, I would pull back from the conversation when I sensed that I was taking center stage in the conversation and the teacher was sitting back potentially disconnecting from the discussion. Active

listening became a skill I consciously applied during debrief. I began to use open-ended questions to get at the teachers' thinking about what I observed. I was thrilled to hear their comprehensive responses. I found if I came on too strong and dominant with my dialogue, I stifled the teacher from the opportunity to be an active participant in the conversation. My natural tendency was to take the lead and hold on to it when collaborating with others. I learned to give myself permission to be led and not worry about where the leading was taking me. I found contentment in the journey and became comfortable taking a back seat view of the landscape as debriefing unfolded. I learned the teacher and I desired to feel a sense of co-ownership of the conversation in order for end results of the conversation to have value towards end effects or actions on either of our parts.

Furthermore, data collection became I illuminated three major categories from the extensive debrief data. Predominantly, my teachers' wanted fulfillment through the debrief conversations centered on *feedback* of my classroom walkthrough observation, *validation* of their practice, and *opportunities* to concomitantly reflect on their teaching.

### ***Feedback***

Feedback incorporated aspects of relationship building, justifying or explaining classroom instruction, and collaboration with other professionals. Mary made it a point to characterize the debrief feedback as "not really a critique, but more so just what you saw" during a classroom walkthrough. It is a way to report back on what was demonstrated in the classroom at face value without judgment or criticism. I learned that in order to capture how each teacher felt about what I observed it became

important to consciously maintain my responses and body language free from apparent judgment or disapproval of what I observed. I developed a “matter-of-fact” stance when reporting out what I witnessed in the classroom rather than give substantiation of what I thought or felt about the observation. I wanted the teacher’s voice to be heard before we negotiated the reflective piece of the debrief conversation.

Jessica shared her reaction to feedback affirming, “Without the feedback and without the conversation there is no acknowledgement or recognition in the risk effort and you become stagnant, robotic or even forget about risk taking.” As an administrator, I run the risk of micro-managing and directing teachers based on the nature of many conforming aspects of our school day. As I develop my leadership skills, I have found teachers respond minimally to this type of a leadership style. Just like Jessica expresses, a teacher stops taking risks and gives back a low level of compliance. The potential of conversation in debrief allows the administrator and the teacher to negotiate around the expected to allow for the unexpected when it occurs in the classroom. Deviations became acceptable under certain circumstances because I was aware of the particular teacher’s teaching style and the reasons behind the instructional maneuvering that resulted from the unique teaching situations in her classroom. To me this is the exciting work of instructional leadership.

Furthermore, Jessica explains the importance of conversation time, “You just have to take the time to have a conversation after a classroom walkthrough. The walkthrough without the conversation is meaningless. With no feedback we don’t know if you liked what you saw or we don’t get the chance to explain ourselves. Why we weren’t doing reading in the reading block. I think we feel a need to explain ourselves because we are held accountable and judged just because there is no feedback.” Jessica

expressed the need to explain what I observed in the classroom if it deviated from what was expected. To her it was important what I thought. She felt concerned I might get the wrong idea about her instruction if she was “caught” teaching off of her schedule. She felt it necessary to inform me of her instructional decisions to avoid the perception of getting in trouble. Moreover, she wanted to know if I liked what I saw. When I affirmed her through my observational feedback our relationship grew and her self-efficacy was reinforced. Jessica confirms this assumption by stating, “The focus is the feedback and the analysis of the feedback. The relationship and the growth attained by the experience is what grows,” free from disapproval and reproof.

Similarly, Danya felt the time spent in debrief conversation takes on personal importance for her. In mid dialogue she ardently expressed, “I need feedback and reflection!” Since Danya is a first year teacher, she self-recognized feedback and reflection helped her be successful in the profession. She doesn’t know what she doesn’t know, so our conversation becomes a trail of crumbs to knowing. Another important aspect Danya received from our debrief conversations is the connection to other professionals. I have the flexibility to walkthrough many classrooms each day. I see and experience instruction on a continuum. When appropriate, I am able to connect Danya with other teachers who can inform her instruction. After sharing what a third grade teacher does with writing journals Danya reflects on her writing instruction, “I want to meet with the third grade teacher and connect with what she is doing with her students. My kids could be her kids next year, so it would be a good transition for them if I modified on her writing instruction. I could build on it.” She identified by “connecting with another teacher I can become a better teacher and learn new skills.” Similarly Sari recognized, “It’s always good to collaborate.” Without the occasion of a debrief



conversation these types of connections would not be possible at such a specific individual level between teachers. Isolation is not an option with these teachers. Either they want to share a practice or they want to receive a new practice working well with others. Collaboration is the avenue that can accomplish this curricular exchange.

### ***Validation***

Validation of instructional practice entailed time I spent in classroom observations and debriefs, along with visibility and interaction with students. Sari stated, “The debrief can be powerful and impacting. It validates what I do in the classroom.” She points out the debriefs “either re-evaluated how I teach and gave me some direction towards the common core. The debrief conversation is an affirmation process. It’s going to fine tune me as a teacher.” It is evident Sari finds debrief valuable to inform her instructional practice. The dialogue gives her clues and insights into curriculum implementation through an active conversation she can return to when engaged in subsequent debriefs. Sari can try new strategies in her classroom, without pressure, because of the direction of the conversations in debrief. The relationship we established allows for this flexibility and risk-taking. She is no longer experimenting on her own, but has a sounding board through debrief to help her reflect on a practice we have discussed previously. Often, preliminary debrief conversations established a plan for these curricular risks. Sari expresses, “By you listening to me, me listening to you, I feel more well-rounded” referring to her instructional practice.

With the debrief conversation, I seek to affirm classroom practice to push teachers to new heights. A critical conversation from me does not produce benefits for my teachers or me because of the general punitive aspects it entails. Never do I want my

teachers to feel like it is a “gotcha” conversation. I genuinely want successful teachers who feel good about what they do. Sari points out, “With a conversation there is less guessing. We want to make sure we hit the mark.” A conversation about observed teaching strengths not only makes my teachers feel good, but also positions each teacher to do or try the next instructional leap. Mary shares her impression on instruction, “I feel like it backs up what I’m already doing. Justifies, and says, yes you are going in the right direction”. Clear articulation of instructional direction is important for leaders to express, especially when new initiatives are being implemented for the classroom. Teachers need clear directions and then affirmation they were on the right track. Danya expresses, “I need to know if I’m doing the right thing or the wrong thing.” I minimized the instructional practice guesswork for my teachers by what I choose to say to them in debriefs. This fact keeps my conversations as simple and clear as possible reinforcing the teacher’s decisions in direction of their teaching. Sari identifies, “I think it helps keep me on the path and this is a good thing and it steers into the common core.” As well as Danya states, “hitting the right targets is important, so you are on the right track.” The debrief conversation is a mutually negotiated experience between teacher and administrator where curricular reverberations reach back into the classroom.

Of significance here is the assumptions brought up by the teachers in reference to students’ voice in debrief conversations. Ultimately the importance of instruction is to inspire students to actively influence their academic growth. Mary points out, “It’s exciting to know the students are making those connections as a whole for the administrator observing and the teacher teaching. It’s powerful. Makes us proud.” Mary wants me to recognize her students are engaged in the lesson and demonstrating understanding of the curriculum being taught. She draws the connection between the

administrator and the teacher both get something out of the recognition of students learning. It evokes pride in each. These types of accomplishments should be acknowledged during a debrief conversation as a way to reinforce the teacher/administrator relationship in a positive way. Furthermore, sharing students' struggles, successes and comments from the lesson sheds light on the attainment of instructional targets. Sari shares the following about her students, "Even in the debrief, I want to hear what they have to say when I'm not there. I really like to know what they know all by themselves." It can also reveal the instructional struggle lived by teachers when students just don't get it. After a classroom walkthrough where Jessica recognized her frustration with the lesson, she states, "the other joy teachers get to share on a walkthrough is for you to walk a mile in their shoes and see what we have to live with when you're breaking your back everyday and you're working hard, but then you still get these random answers that don't connect at all" from the students. Jessica suggests there is a limited amount of recognition and appreciation for teachers. She makes a plea for empathy. In order for me to have an appreciation of the day-to-day struggles with instruction and student, I need to view the teacher's work from their perspective and make a conscientious effort to empathize with their struggles. There is a humanistic aspect to our relationship that craves to be nurtured. I can choose for my debrief conversations to soothe or disregard the essence of the human connection. I choose to empathize and take the teacher's perspective. This position has enabled my relationships with my teachers and made possible candid conversations about their classroom instruction. It builds trust and that's good when potentially difficult conversations are broached.

## ***Opportunities for Reflection***

A comfortable working relationship was established between the teachers and I during debriefs. I began to turn attention on the reflective aspect of our conversations. The reflection holds the most power for teacher growth. The debrief provided a platform for reflection of each teacher's engagement of instructional risk taking and a desire to grow professionally through negotiations of their struggles in the classroom.

As part of reflection, the teachers sought and expressed a sense of feeling good about their classroom instruction. Danya enjoyed the debrief and the positive feelings she experienced. Danya articulates, "I always leave debrief feeling good about what I do. I take it positively. It gives me ideas of how I can extend things in my teaching, otherwise I feel like I get stale." She expounds on the benefit she receives, "It gets my brain going to think about new ideas and different ways of teaching or what I could do. Sometimes you think you are awesome with something and then you find it flops on you. It's good to talk through those types of situations with someone." Talk reasserts the need for Danya to reflect and affirms her instructional practice. Danya wants to, "build on" what she does in the classroom and collects tips to "try out later." For Danya it is an opportunity to think about ideas bounced back and forth in the conversations. She will decide if new ideas will be attempted in her classroom or if old practices will be revamped. She alludes to a sense of feeling supported when she engages in conversation with me. Danya relishes the help she receives when she "questions" whether or not what she is doing through her instruction is "right or wrong." For Danya the conversation helps her resolve classroom situations that did not go as well as planned. Similarly, Mary expressed, "I feel like it's going to make me better overall, one, to build confidence especially as a new teacher, and two, to fix things because obviously I'm new." The talk

becomes the catalyst for change in practice. The benefit of conversation is the support received from me to help move the teachers forward or make possible reflective changes in each teacher's instruction. For the teachers', future instructional steps become safe to take because of the support.

The debrief conversation helps teachers think of instruction differently. Danya shares the debrief conversation, "offers me an opportunity to just talk about literacy and gives me different ways I can teach it with the kids." As her administrator, I have a responsibility to be the instructional leader. The debrief conversation is a key activity with the potential to create a foothold for literacy discussions to impact teachers at their specific level of understanding and practice. Accordingly, it has the prospective to give teachers added information to reflect on how students are responding to instruction. Sari states, "The reflection comes from the fact you're enjoying the path I'm taking the kids on. So this type of instruction is going to continue." Sari avows she will magnify the instruction supported through debrief discussion and the relationship we have built up. Part of her reflection is based on the recognition I have made note of the path the students are on and I enjoyed the direction of the path. Her instruction has been affirmed and she will continue to extend it.

Similarly, Mary demonstrates the trust between herself and I during a debrief conversation when she exposes a teaching practice used in opposition of the reading block schedule. She divulges, "To me what I'm doing is more valuable because I'm giving my kids what they need at the time. And at that time, for the students to make a connection to the learning is more important than being at reading centers at the time I was supposed to be at reading centers. So, I accommodate my students' needs based on what we have to get done today." She makes these statements because of the established

trust in our relationship. She is aware I support and expect teachers to follow the reading schedule, however she also knows I respect teacher instructional judgment during the flow of instruction to enhance student learning and achievement. It was a risk for her to share this with me during debriefs and my response was important in maintaining our relationship. It is important to have a “give and take” attitude when conversing with teachers during debrief about their instruction. I was careful not to send the message to violate the reading schedule should be a regular occurrence, rather I was affirming her instructional flexibility at the time and led the conversation to focus on how these types of modifications could be planned for in the future within the schedule.

### ***Concluding Remarks on the Close Analysis of Debrief Experiences***

Upon reflection of the debrief experience, I learned the teachers think about and question their current literacy practices and desire to validate the practice being used based on the conversation from the debrief. They question their practice and, as a result of doing this, they begin to change or justify their thinking about literacy and how it plays out for each of them in their respective classrooms. I have found the teachers want and seek out the justification and validation of what they do in the classroom from me. They like to know they are going in the right direction and hitting the right targets in the curriculum. This means they make connections to what I’m looking for in their teaching to directly reconnect back to the curriculum, the students and to fellow teachers.

The teachers take feedback from debriefs and talk through ideas and next steps with me. Ideas suggested and used in the classroom are shared at future debriefs.

Reflection focuses on the successful and unsuccessful strategies and what adaptations were made to make the strategies work. When the teacher's come across information other teachers are doing the same or similar teaching practice in their room the teacher's identified a sense of cohesiveness as co-members of the teaching staff. Of note was a connection I made to the teachers' debrief experiences. I conducted separate debriefs on each teacher and yet they used the same language when they were describing their reflecting on practice and the need for validation of what they do. An assumption can be made that teachers seek feedback to justify their practice and they like to know they are not far off from their peer group when it comes to targets and strategies in their practice of literacy.

Furthermore, there is a debrief impact on novice *and* veteran teachers, however the depth of the impact differs based on the level of expertise with practice the teachers possess. I found that the two novice teachers in this study, Danya and Mary, responded to debrief language at two different levels. Danya responded to my observations from walkthroughs with short, close-ended responses that lacked others' depth and reflection. Often, she did not elaborate on her responses and waited for what I would offer as ideas and thoughts within the conversation. I led the conversation and had to give concrete examples of what I meant about the feedback I gave her and how what I was sharing connected back to the reading and writing curriculum and/or practices. It was evident her educational experiences were at a young, formative stage and this forced our conversations to a generalized validation level. Mary was able to reflect and compare her current practice to what she did in her first year and identify what changes she had implemented this year in her instruction. Our conversations tended to be relaxed and matter of fact, getting to the point quickly because Mary had experiences to ground her

thinking in order to make justifiable connections. She is at a stage of developing her identity as an educator.

Jessica and Sari, the two veteran teachers, tended to respond with deep reflection, providing specific detail from their teaching, and used well-thought out responses grounded within their extensive years of educational experiences. Both had tried and succeeded or failed with literacy practice implementation and could reflect and make connections to their current classroom realities. When I would share constructive criticism, both teachers would quickly measure what they did in the classroom to what I was saying either by reflecting on their own and then offering next steps readily to what they might do next as a result. However, for each teacher in my study, I found each was receptive and willing to make curricular adaptations and adjustments as a result of specific conversations focused on their individual unique needs.

Walking through a classroom and not expressing any feedback on the walkthrough leaves teachers wondering and apprehensive about the walkthrough. Jessica made the point by stating, “if you knew the impact every time an administrator walked through and the fact we have this opportunity to build relationship and maybe we even do have that relationship makes it so much nicer. If you don’t have that and you walk through we’re left wondering and comparing and taking notes and hoping they noticed this and hoping they didn’t notice that.” My teacher’s want me to walkthrough and discuss what I saw and what my impressions were about student learning and literacy practice use in each classroom. I have found my relationship to each teacher is important, sought out and appreciated.



### ***Debrief Experiences Impact on My Administrative Role***

With the dynamics of school operation my administrative role is by necessity multifaceted, however with debrief the data suggests the teachers' particularly want me to be in the role of coach. Specifically, my teachers expressed a need for me to keep a wide berth between my role as evaluator and as coach during debrief in order to establish a strong relationship and level of trust with each teacher. When I am in the role of coach, Jessica points out she "gets detailed feedback" to specifically support her unique efforts in her classroom and as a result our relationship grows and expands. These data suggested I primarily foster relationship through feedback as it validates teacher practice and encouragement efforts through positive praise and recognition of practice.

Feedback to Jessica means, "the focus is on feedback, acknowledging the strengths, and helping me improve on my weaknesses." Teachers want to know what strengths and weaknesses I see on a walkthrough and they want to talk about them. Mary expresses, "I think the debrief initially is about suggestions you have made to me and then you looking further down the road to see if those suggestions are being addressed." Teachers want to know what I think, what I saw from the students and what suggestions I may have for them. The debrief to Danya is meaningful because I "stay long enough to notice the connection between the essential teaching point and what the students are doing." Sari describes my role in the debrief as understanding "the process of how the kids are using the materials and resources" being provided. Sari goes on to point out she wants to "hear how the kids are doing" when she is not with them. Subsequent walkthroughs become times where the teacher can point out a new strategy or adjustment they made from a conversation or idea generated from debrief.

As Mary states, “it makes us proud” to show off the good stuff. Danya suggests, I “keep doing a couple of class stops and then debrief to save time. Keep the conversation going, although I think some teachers can be negative or even defensive about a walkthrough or a conversation with administration. It’s important to have relationship built up to avoid this outcome.” The bottom line is to debrief with specific feedback and to debrief often in order for the conversation to grow and the relationship to get stronger.

What exactly do the teachers expect of my role as instructional coach? Sari informs, “I think you scaffold all the time. Coaching is a nice word to describe what you do.” Giving teachers coaching and scaffolding on practice can only become fruitful if a strong positive relationship exists between the teacher and me. Teachers need to know I will listen to them about their struggles, triumphs and failures with practice and they will not receive any punitive ramifications from sharing or risk taking. Sari describes her expectations of my instructional coach role as someone who should “listen and facilitate the needs” of what I observe in the classroom. Sari states, I should “listen and focus reflection on what the teacher’s explaining. Use what you’ve heard to progress, remediate, or offer different resources to approach the teaching through different methodologies.” I need to be knowledgeable and resourceful when giving feedback. I should have ready a bank of resources I can dip into to help guide teacher’s development in areas of practice where they struggle. Sari claims, “You have to tell somebody what you see going on, but you have to have ready in your back pocket these things you can do to fix it.” When I am caring and open to problem solve or offer resources to help with a teacher’s attempts with best practices, I build on a relationship to allow for risk taking and critical self-reflection.

As instructional coach, I assert in order for a teacher to take risks in practice, I must establish a relationship where risks are taken. When I give feedback I need to acknowledge risks were taken by the teacher and focus the conversation on what was learned from the risk in practice and where the teacher might go from there as a result of the risk. Trust must be enhanced through our conversations by the removal of judgment or punitive remarks about a practice explored through the teacher's risk efforts. Furthermore, by connecting the benefits of taking a risk in literacy practice to the connections made to student activity, I allow the teacher to see other viable teaching options are possible whereby I encourage implementation of alternatives in practice. At this juncture, I scaffold for risk taking in practice by frequent and regular walkthroughs conducted along with debriefs that highlight the connections being made between practice and students' response to the practice. As Mary points out my "focus is on correlating the connection to the students with the teaching" I see in the classroom. I specifically begin to identify the pieces of instruction aligned with best practices and our school wide goals. Ultimately, I look for strong connections to the common core and how the teacher navigates student learning towards those ends. Sari states, "You see the direction we're going in, so you can see if we're steering in the right direction with you or you can start seeing us stagnate in the place we shouldn't be. You spur us in the direction you need to go, so we need to hear that. We need to know if we're already doing this, keep doing it because it's feeding into what's coming next."

In addition, the teachers' recognized part of my role as encourager through recognition and praise of the positive aspects of their instruction. I deliver copious praise to support and encourage the teacher to continue on the path they have taken with the instructional risk in their literacy practice. Danya conveys, "Praise is awesome.

Makes me feel somebody cares enough to watch me.” I realize my feedback needs to be specific to the individual and the instructional level they demonstrate within their literacy practice. I pay particular attention in the connection of the teacher’s practice to the curriculum and current practice within the school to align the teacher’s thinking for the right track and move to the next step in their use of literacy strategies.

Differentiating becomes possible through debrief when individual teacher’s needs are taken into consideration and aligned to the school wide goals for practice in literacy. Teachers need to feel they are part of a greater whole within the school teaching community and it’s administration’s job to nest them there. To this end, I need to ascertain the abilities of the teachers I observe and provide them with what they need for professional growth because of the knowledge. The frequent walkthroughs provide me with a continuous set of experiences to build on to precisely differentiate on the teacher’s needs and build on our relationship. Mary expresses, “One, our relationship is better because you kind of understand me more as a teacher and I kind of understand more your side as an administrator.” Our debrief conversations are fertile ground to share the highlights from the instruction from our perspectives and what was hoped for from the instruction. The debrief conversation provides a vehicle for influence on reading and writing practice I would not have had through the required formal evaluation or random classroom visits. By being purposeful to schedule the informal walkthrough and intentionally seek to share feedback opportunities through debrief my influence was enhanced with the teachers.

As I engaged in frequent classroom walkthroughs and then subsequent debriefs, I had the opportunity to give empathetic supportive feedback and scaffold each teacher in the areas each teacher wished to recognize and wanted to talk about. Jessica stated,

“When I’m doing a good job or you liked something in my teaching I get praise and I love it.” Through these personal debrief conversations a common language was established. I was able to bridge understanding of current curricular demands in literacy to highlight what was working well in the classroom and what direction the teacher needed to move in to add the next level of implementation with the curriculum. I had the opportunity to recognize and discuss the work being done with such literacy practices as guided reading, vocabulary instruction and journaling. I become more aware of what was happening in each classroom. Some of the by-products of my debriefs produced more risk taking by the teachers’ as evidenced by their implementation of new literacy strategies when differentiation was used in reading and writing, connections made to other teachers in sharing of best practices, and gave me a better understanding of the curriculum gaps and inconsistencies the teachers faced as they implemented-standards based learning and progress monitoring with literacy. I believe it is vital for administrators to purposefully plan for informal walkthroughs along with subsequent, related debrief meetings in order to encourage and motivate teachers to teach to the next level in their individual practice development. I contend first hand informal observations, in a seamless continuum of conversation around the observations, are more powerful than team meetings, formal observations, and professional development created under a “one-size-fits-all” umbrella.

I understand the importance of developing a strong relationship with teachers and developing me as an instructional leader. By walking through classrooms and debriefing with teachers, I am made more aware of what the current realities exist in today’s classrooms and what knowledge I need to have in order to feedback effectively with my teachers. To be an effective curricular coach, I need to be able to identify the

gaps and inconsistencies in the instruction at my school and provide viable ways to address them. If the teachers don't view me as an instructional leader they are less likely to put value into the debrief outcomes. Without taking the time to do walkthroughs and have relevant conversations no one benefits.

Providing ideas and choices for modifications or additions to literacy practice implementation in the classroom provided teachers enough ownership of their practice to take next steps. Danya claims, "You give me ideas on how to extend my lessons, how to incorporate them into other things and how you see what I am doing in the classroom." Without this type of idea exchange Danya would not be able to make specific reflections on her instruction. Danya views my instructional coach role as a safe avenue for her to frequently ask how she could improve on her instruction.

Jessica shares, "Specific praise and questions, as well as ideas are shared, show the administrator has knowledge of learning and the curriculum." I provided specific praise and encouragement of the teacher's literacy practice. I was able to see an increase of use and enthusiasm to share insights about those practices the next time I debriefed with the teachers. Jessica states, "If you've been recognized for the things you're doing and you've been reminded of the things that are going well, you use it even more in the classroom. It becomes a more conscientious and natural thing to do because it was reinforced." The teachers' reflections were deeper and more purposeful to substantiate what they did and what they might do next. Jessica summed it up well by stating, "the other joy teachers get to share on a walkthrough is for you to walk a mile in their shoes." The point is I need to get out there, start walkthroughs, and converse about them. Without the conversation literacy practice will not evolve, as purposefully and powerfully as it can when professionals get synergistic through conversation.

### ***Debrief Experiences Influence on My Administrative Style***

My leadership style becomes a matter of intensification of how I want to lead in all of my capacities as an Assistant Principal. From my personal history, the underpinnings of my leadership style are ever present in my daily dealings in the operation of my school. The difference in exposure of my leadership style becomes a matter of the amount of degrees of transparency I decide is appropriate based on the circumstances of my activity. To intensify my personality when conversing with my teachers during debrief has been a difficult task. I tend to get familiar and comfortable quickly with individuals, so I had to be careful not to stifle or domineer the conversation by wielding control of its direction. Growing up as a strong independent individual poses a problem when I need to bring my personality under control to actively listen to another. A debrief conversation, after an informal classroom walkthrough, is like a shared dance between two people with interchanging leads that creates a balanced semblance to complete the dance for the enjoyment of the on lookers. In debrief, I get to lead at times, but mostly follow the lead of the teacher's dialogue as it trail blazes to horizons not predetermined. There is a stark contrast between this type of teacher/administrator interaction and the evaluation process.

When conducting an evaluation I have to remove *me* from the affective aspect of coaching and become precise in using the tools of evaluation. To create this type of an atmosphere I have to dig deep into me to put on the mask of unemotional and impartial evaluator who has no concern or care for creating relationship. I think back to my childhood where I lived one way at home in my protective, caring environment where I could be me and the outside setting where I would put on my self-persevering mask to protect me from harm. I get the same feelings now when I conduct an evaluation. I

have to remove me from the teacher and the observation. I am to be detached without value-laden comments or supportive statements. My post follow-up meeting is extensively planned and scripted to address the evaluation of the teacher. Language used is free of value statements and praise, such as, “I liked” or “Good Job.” So, I stick to the facts and I connect them to the rubric used for evaluation. In the motions of evaluation, I am at my lowest tone of the dynamic side of my leadership style. I leave the meeting feeling empty and I imagine the teacher does as well.

On the other hand, when coaching through debrief after an informal classroom walkthrough, I can freely converse and discuss my observations through a two-way conversation with no predetermined endpoint. I can be animated and excited. I can be closer to who I desire to be as an instructional leader, embracing of my teachers and supportive to their efforts. Sari expresses, “When the walk through is just part of a regular, expected occurrence then the pressure for a debrief is not as high as during an evaluation cycle.” In this setting both the teacher and I would be in conversation about the teacher’s specific practice observed and together generate ideas to lead to instructional next steps or simply validate the practice itself. Jessica stresses, “a little bit of encouragement, just goes so far” when giving feedback. I can choose to give value statements and praise to reinforce the recognition of on-target teaching and as a result strengthen our relationship so coaching can take place. Sari recognized my use of praise and stated, “You make me feel good about what I am doing that gives me a sense of self-accomplishment.” Jessica goes on to further point out, “specific praise helps me to reflect on the positive things I’m doing. Sharing ideas helps me promote lesson development and improvement with literacy.” The debrief becomes a symbiotic entity only able to exist and thrive when both the teacher and I trust each other enough to



honestly and candidly converse about successes and disappointments of the observed classroom instruction. I am able to nurture hope. After all, my history was determined by hope and it's pursuit. I truly feel the urge to help push my teachers to success because I was afforded so little to succeed from the struggles of immigration. I want to remove obstacles for teachers in an effort to increase their impact on instruction. I do not want to disappoint them in this endeavor. Once this type of relationship is established I tend to become protective of it and make every effort to nurture it every opportunity I come across.

Therefore, my style is either subdued or roused by the type of leadership activity I engage in, the particular players involved and the circumstances of the situation. My style depends heavily on language as the vehicle I use to either draw a relationship closer or hold it at a distance in order to execute a leadership duty to be accomplished through protocol or formality. The latter leadership duty conflicts with my caring, congenial and gregarious style. I know how powerful a harsh word can be to an individual from all the bullying I experienced as a school-aged child and I know how soothing a caring soft spoken word can create confidence and safety. I choose to promote my teachers with my words. Care is taken in choosing the words I will use to encourage and reinforce thinking and growth.

The teachers portrayed my leadership style during debrief through statements that deal with relationship and the way I communicated feedback to them. Jessica stressed, "It's impossible to do anything without relationship. It's impossible." Relationship makes a school thrive beyond the simple function of operation. I am a communicator and believe just like Jessica "if you can communicate you can build relationship" with others. Jessica goes on to state, as "the trust builds and the interest

builds then the value builds because of the relationship.” There are no options for failure with this type of relationship. The mentality I grew up with stressing “all for one and one for all” prevails in my leadership style. I do not seek out recognition; rather I prefer to recognize the value of the contributions of others in the efforts of moving our school forward. My mother nurtured in me a sense of recognizing the special features of my individuality and what could be done with those features to help the family and others. For me this rings true through my daily communications with others.

My focus on relationship must be supported in an atmosphere of comfort and trust where the teachers can feel free to openly express and share their struggles and successes about their instruction free of judgment or punishment. Sari expresses, “I like the debriefing because everybody deserves critique without knowing it’s an evaluative type of thing.” When I debrief I go to the particular teacher’s classroom rather than have the teacher come to my office. My office has the potential to create barriers to open communication due to the nature of business conducted there. By going to the teacher’s classroom, I feel I am more equal to where the teacher is coming from. The aspect of fairness and equality engrained in my growing up gives me a way to pay attention to these types of details. As an outsider coming into the United States it was important to create an environment where the family would feel comfortable living in a foreign land. Comfort is a staple of my upbringing and a characteristic of my leading. I want my staff to feel comfortable around me and in dealing with me. Mary stresses, “It needs to be comfortable when you come into my classroom otherwise the relationship isn’t strong enough for trust to be established. Getting to sit and talk about what you observed makes me feel like I did a good job and I get feedback that tells me what I did well and what I can improve on. I look forward to it. It’s nicer when you are

just coming in here and observing and then having a conversation. I don't feel the pressure this way." With each debrief, I make every effort for the teacher to feel comfortable, safe and supported. Regularly, I include comfort food and bring resources to support conversation. I enjoy taking pictures of student activity or artifacts from my classroom walkthroughs to enrich debrief and develop my relationship with the teacher further by sharing in the experience. This attention to detail means I spend necessary time engaged in classroom walkthroughs and debriefs.

All administrators dream of having more time to get accomplished what we need to get accomplished. The debrief conversation demands time. The time must be quality time. Time was carved out and unhindered to allow our conversations to flow and feel satisfying for the teachers and me. Jessica makes note, "The debrief means we are taking the time to do something good that's going to benefit not just us individually, but our lives, our experience, our growth, our future, and then the future of everyone else we impact. It means we've made it a priority. It's become important enough to do. It makes it more valuable and more special and more life changing. Even in a walkthrough, taking the time to stay and sit with the students makes their energy go up ten levels." I am selective about what takes up my time as a leader. For example, I spend as little time in my office as possible. I meet with teachers and students on my walkabouts around campus. This allows me to attend to questions or requests from teachers, discipline students and oversee the operation of my campus. I believe the human capital trumps any other tug on my time. Granted paperwork comes home often and I am usually the second one on campus next to the plant manager in the morning, but the benefit outweighs the effort. Time management and planning remind me of my father's saying to, "measure twice and cut once." The hard work he displayed for me

growing up has given me the ability to know what my priorities are and how to plan for them. I am dependable. Teachers know if I promise something it will be taken care of and delivered. I am true to the phrase, “I mean what I say and I say what I mean.” That’s what my father taught me and it has always served me well. I try to avoid opinions such as this one voiced by Sari, “It gives me a chance to show you what I’m doing where else normally within the day structure you only come down when you have to get something accomplished.” I don’t want my teachers to feel as if I only visit their classrooms to accomplish business. I want them to view my visit as something meaningful, an opportunity to share in our conversations about their instruction. Jessica reverberates my sentiments by stating, “I notice your interactive visits and it makes me feel you liked something that happened and it was good. It’s not so much the words you say, it’s the energy exchange and the personal experience between the two of us that makes a difference to me.” This is the essence of how relationship can be nurtured through debrief conversations from frequent informal classroom walkthroughs.

I approached each debrief with an open mind to the possibilities each teacher might bring to the conversation. I embrace possibilities because so often the potential of my possibilities as a child were squelched because of my immigrant status, conditions I could not control or loose. I am in control of what I can say to each teacher through my conversation. I feel a strong urge to be kind and positive in what I say and how I say it, knowing well from personal experience how I felt when others did not afford me the same courtesy and care. My language is free of judgment and criticism. I speak in an upbeat way and positively encourage each teacher in areas I feel would move them to the next level in their instruction. Danya suggests I “keep it positive and offer ideas.” I

pay particular attention to how I express feedback to each teacher during debrief. I exude a sense of belief in the teachers. The same belief expressed and demonstrated by my supportive mother. I use generous amounts of rich descriptive detail when retelling what I observed. During a retelling, I insert questions to solicit why the teacher used this strategy or a different strategy almost leading them to reflect on their practice before I share what I think. I hold back still, being careful to draw the teachers out to come to their own conclusions first. Danya finds value in these open/ended questions because she “likes to fill in the endings” to these kinds of questions because it gives her the “opportunity to give her own personal thoughts” before I share my views. This makes the conversation balanced because we both have vested ownership in the discourse.

I want to build up the teacher’s self-efficacy and have each identify areas of instruction they could improve. Regularly, I give notes to inspire as I leave from a classroom walkthrough. This gives each teacher immediate gratification whereby enhancing our relationship further. It is important to me to recognize the individual and leave them with a sense of accomplishment. Sari shared, “I don’t think you understand how much you do in the classroom until somebody comes in and leaves you a sticky note.” Not only do I leave notes for the teacher on walkthroughs, in addition I have expanded to leaving notes for students attached to displays of their work. There is a level of permanency when you put your thoughts to writing. Permanency is important in my mind because it lasts. Experiencing immigration through our unpredictable journey has left me with a need to make statements in life with permanency. I am not afraid to exhibit this behavior as a leader. Often, leaders are instructed to not put anything in writing to be used against you by an employee. The written word is

powerful and permanent. As a leader I use it to encourage and recognize my staff. Sari substantiates, “I think conversation is your strongest factor, but the written word is a close second. Whenever you don’t have the human contact it goes down a level in my mind.” Sari makes a good point that without the human relationship a written note pales in comparison. I prefer the face-to-face communication rather than the alternatives. When asked to clarify her thoughts on conversation Sari stated, “It’s a chance for me to show you something and get feedback from you. How you feel about it and maybe problem solve off the cuff. What worked and what didn’t work. What works better and how I felt about it. It helps you to explain why your doing the things you are doing in the classroom. By you listening to me, me listening to you I feel more well rounded.” As our conversations evolved, I was able to drawn connections between the teachers. I called on the veteran teachers to share their strategies with the younger teachers. This opened the opportunity to further connect literacy practice among the four teachers. Sari made light of my persistence to encourage her to share a writing practice to another teacher. She laughed as she shared, “I have random teachers asking me about what I do with my writing journals and if they can look at samples from my kids. I know you are behind this!” Direct communication diminishes the guessing from a note left to interpretation. It gives each participant the opportunity to ask questions and clarify answers. Body language can be read and used to enhance assumptions. Conversation has mutual benefits.

## **Chapter Five: Conclusions, Personal Reflections, and Recommendations**

“Employ your time in improving yourself by other men’s writings so that you shall come easily by what others have labored hard for.”

*-Socrates*

### ***Overview***

In this autoethnographic, intrinsic case study, I conducted a self-study of my debrief language, after walkthroughs in four elementary teachers’ classrooms in order to understand and interpret our collective perceptions and glean meanings of the experience as it relates to my leadership role and style. I used debrief data to inform on the following research questions:

1. In what ways does my leadership role impact the debrief experience as I support four elementary teachers’ literacy practice?
2. In what ways does my leadership style impact the four elementary teachers’ views of our relationship and debrief experience?
3. In what ways does the debrief experience impact four elementary teachers’ perceptions, beliefs and thinking about their literacy practices?

After each classroom walkthrough, I met with each of the four teachers for debrief meetings about what I observed and to make connections to the teacher’s thoughts as conversation unfolded. The debrief meetings were taped, transcribed, and analyzed to determine what perceptions and meanings from my debrief language

impacted my teachers practice and our relationship as it related to my role and style as a leader.

I identified aspects of successful dialogue interactions between the teachers and me. These indicators influenced my teachers' expertise in literacy understanding and practice implementation in their classrooms. I spent six weeks in a cycle of informal classroom walkthroughs and debrief conversations. After each walkthrough, a debrief conversation was conducted with each teacher. Each debrief conversation was audiotaped. The debrief language during these meetings was transcribed and coded for discovery of patterns and categories. Further analysis was given to these data as I began to reflect and connect my role and style as the Assistant Principal to add layers of meaning to the discoveries. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore and analyze individual and collective beliefs, values, and perceptions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). My study was designed as a qualitative, intrinsic case study following Stake's (1995) guidelines, to seek to explore the impact of my use of debrief language after informal classroom walkthroughs to increase literacy knowledge and best practices in my four teachers' classrooms.

I used Stake's (1995) set of suggested guidelines for conducting this case study. Following is a brief outline of the guidelines and how they were applied to my study. Initially, I identified the issues in my case and listed them through my three research questions. Stake (1995) terms this the anticipation phase of the study. I began to think about the field observations I would conduct. I formulated explanations and definitions of the classroom walkthrough and the debrief meetings. Matters of confidentiality were addressed and planned. I presented my research plan to my staff and asked for teacher volunteers to participate. Four teachers came forward as interested participants and I



organized myself for the informal classroom walkthroughs and debrief meetings. I began initial field observations and taped the debrief conversations using my iPhone. I continued to further develop conceptualizations as data began to be collected through direct interpretations. Interpretations and assumptions continued to formulate as data saturated throughout my data collection phase. I reflected and reconsidered my study questions in light of preliminary data gathering activities and allocated attention to different viewpoints and conceptualizations by peer review and teacher reflections. I continued to collect data and engage in validation of assumptions derived from the observations and debrief meetings with each teacher. I classified the raw, transcribed data and began to make interpretations through pattern and theme illumination. Select vignettes were documented from these data. Furthermore, I collected additional support data from my field notes and individual reflections. I used all my data sources to triangulate my assumptions and interpretations. Analysis of data included review of the raw data under various possible interpretations. I searched for patterns and sought linkages with my outcomes. I tentatively considered and reconsidered pieces of dialogue data for inclusivity or exclusivity from developing groupings. This practice was used until I was satisfied with the meanings drawn from the grouped dialogue data. Next, I conveyed tentative conclusions, organized according to my issues, and started to organize for my final report. In order to provide my audience the opportunity to understand my study, I described the setting extensively and organized my report in narrative form. I choose narrative form because of the autoethnographic nature of my study. Pace (2012) explains “autoethnographers, in part, reflexively explore their personal experiences and their interactions with others as a way of achieving wider cultural or social understanding” (p. 1), which was the main goal of this research. The

production of an autoethnographic study commonly takes the form of a narrative written in first-person style. My narrative focused on my administrative role and style as the center of inquiry in this study. My final activity involved a series of drafting, revising, and peer reviewing as the finale to the completed report.

My literature review produced descriptions of different walkthrough models used across schools, however, there existed several common elements that connected the walkthroughs of each model: (1) brief visits are focused and regularly conducted, (2) informal observations survey best practices in instruction, (3) observers collect teaching and learning data, and (4) debriefing meetings occur after each walkthrough. I followed the five steps outlined for my informal walkthroughs. My study focused on the conversation in a debrief meeting, particularly how it informs the teachers' understandings and practices of literacy. More specifically, I wanted to know what impact my leadership role and style had on the subsequent conversations.

Of significant note is the role that praise plays in the current culture of teaching. I found the teachers in this study desired positive recognition and praise as a result of my informal classroom walkthroughs. The fact that I am a strong advocate of positive praise falls directly in contrast to my role as the teachers' evaluator. In order to genuinely recognize and praise the teachers' instructional efforts aimed to support professional growth, I maintained a position in debriefing as outlined by Carl Rogers (2007) in his work on psychotherapy. Carl Rogers (2007) presented the problem of enabling clients to undergo constructive personality change in order to experience "greater integration, less internal conflict, more energy utilizable for effective living" (pg. 240). I believe teachers experience a similar problem when faced with potentially stressful and unfavorable debriefing experiences with supervisors who desire growth in

the teachers' instructional practice. This type of a situation does not lend itself well to coaching teachers for improvements in their instruction.

When I use specific praise with the teachers I recognize and maintain the key conditions outlined by Carl Rogers (2007) to maximize the effect of positive praise on teacher instructional development. I identified the psychological aspect to the contact in debriefing experienced by the teacher and myself. I recognized the condition of the teacher and myself as we approached debriefing. The teacher is under a state of incongruence that is displayed through the teacher's vulnerability or anxiousness. I, on the other hand, exude a congruent or integrated stance in the relationship while debriefing. As I engaged in debrief, I exercised unconditional positive regard for the teacher. During the debrief I manifested an empathic understanding of the teacher's internal frame of reference from the walkthrough and endeavored to communicate the experience from my perspective. Lastly, I was able to use positive praise as an effective communication tool to address the teacher through my empathic understanding and unconditional positive regard of her efforts with her instructional practice. As I maintained this effort during debrief, and continued over the period of walkthroughs conducted, the teacher showed potential to experience enhancement of her instructional practice. I used positive praise to establish a path of instructional success for my teachers. By utilizing the underpinnings of Roger's psychotherapeutic theory when offering positive praise during coaching in a debrief, I am better able to avoid the negative ramifications of my role as the teachers' evaluator.

The following section addresses each research question with regard to the elementary teachers' debrief interview meetings and the related literature. The literature supports the findings of this study in the areas of implementing informal

walkthroughs with debriefs and the effectiveness of the debrief conversation for impacting teachers understanding and practice of literacy in their classrooms. My findings support the idea that my leadership role and style have an impact on various aspects of my school, specifically in the areas of teacher performance, student engagement and school wide improvement efforts.

### **Teacher Performance**

Teacher performance (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978; Fullan, 1982; & Hall, Rutherford & Griffin, 1982) was impacted with each subsequent walkthrough and debrief session I conducted with each of the four teachers. The participating teachers became more reflective and looked forward to sharing newly implemented literacy practices from their classrooms. Zhu (2001) found that when teachers were motivated and felt satisfied on the job their impact on student learning increased. The teachers in this study began to share their ideas with each other and engaged in dialogue on a more frequent basis. Toward the end of my study it was evident the teacher's comfort levels increased with me and with each other as each shared more openly about their classrooms then when I began the informal classroom walkthrough and debriefs. Conversations became more fluid and open (Chester & Beaudin, 1996). I could quickly jump into a debrief conversation either by picking up elements from a previous conversation or quickly summarizing my last walk through in the teacher's classroom. The atmosphere became relaxed and comfortable over time. I found it pleasant to bump into the four teachers' around campus and share a knowing look or make a quick encouraging comment specific to their practice. Our relationships bloomed and my teachers began to fret over the impending end to my study because they knew the pace

of our work would change the regularity of these activities (Frase, 2001 & Gray, 2003). It was something I did not look forward to. By recognizing the teacher's self-efficacy, as described by Bandura (1994), I was able to influence the teachers' beliefs through debriefing and nurture those beliefs about themselves to enhance their attempts to teach their students more effectively. The self-efficacy plays an important role in improving teaching and student learning (Caprara et al, 2006; Geijsel et al, 2009; Goddard et al, 2000; Guskey, 1994; Loke, 1997; Hoy & Davis, 2006; Raudenbush et al, 1992; Ross, 1992; Ross, 1994; Tschannen-Moren et al, 1998; Turgoose, 1996; Watson, 1991).

## **Student Engagement**

Student engagement (Brookover & Lezotte, 1977; & Rutter, Maugham, Mortimore, Ouston & Smith, 1979) increased as the teachers began to unpack the why, what and the how of their teaching during debrief meetings. When I highlighted each teacher's use of a specific literacy strategy each in turn expressed they benefited through the validation of the practice and felt the practice was therefore on target to support the students within the curriculum (Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield, 1989). Encouraging statements and praise became hallmarks to support the teacher's efforts for student learning (Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). Connecting resources with the present curriculum created an avenue for risk taking to increase student engagement. The teachers wanted to know what I saw the students doing and what the students said as the instruction unfolded. This became a personal progress-monitoring tool for teachers as a continuous feedback loop to inform their practice (Pollock & Ford, 2009). I could tell students were more engaged and purposeful in the literacy lessons we discussed and

the teacher's shared they felt a boost in confidence when I recognized these new developments in each classroom.

### **School Wide Improvements**

School wide improvement efforts (Edmonds, 1979) were also supported as my teachers were able to look past themselves when they reflected on connections made to the next grade level or the previous grade level to help understand literacy curricular decisions and goal setting (ASHkanasy & Gallois, 1987; Lefcourt, Hogg, Struthers, & Holmes, 1975 & Wilhite, 1990). With the informal classroom walkthrough and resulting debrief conversation a regular support system was realized for each teacher. This made possible deeper understanding of the common core curriculum and recognized good literacy practice in the common core's application in each teachers' classroom. In all these areas, the conversations during a debrief about what I observed in the informal walkthrough provided the teachers' direction with curricular teaching decisions, praise in support of what they were doing, and carte blanche to take risks in literacy strategy use (Blasé & Blasé, 1998 & Frase, 1998). As a result, the relationship between the teachers and me deepened and made each subsequent debrief more comfortable and collegial in discussion about the reality of instruction in each teacher's classroom. The mutual level of trust became the unifying ingredient to progress our conversations and efforts (Miller & Irving, 1995).

### **Instructional Leaders in Walkthroughs & Debriefs**

Expressly, as the instructional leader, through the use of the walkthrough and debrief meetings, I played a supportive and facilitative role in the development of my

teachers (Donnmoyer & Wagstaff, 1990; Hallinger, 2003; Goldhammer, 1969; & Murphy, 1988). I was able to specifically identify individual teacher's needs presented in their literacy practice and provided resources and supports necessary to lead each to a higher level of instruction . With my open nurturing and supportive stance in debrief, I was able to build upon the relationship established with each teacher. This helped to pave the way for each teacher to take risks in their instruction and make necessary changes in their classrooms. The direction of curriculum implementation (Criscuolo, 1974; 1984; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004) was impacted as I assumed the role of the instructional leader. The potential for school improvement increased when I grew my knowledge of current literacy trends and practices, observed instruction and conversed with each teacher to stay abreast of what the current reality of classroom instruction was in light of current curricular mandates (Dowell, Bickmore, & Hoewing, 2012). One way I can increase my knowledge and skill with literacy curriculum is to read professional literature, attend professional development trainings and actively participate in literacy curriculum planning with my teachers. By maintaining a fluid curriculum conversation thread with each of my teachers I can make the biggest impact on the current instruction in my building. There is no substitute to staying connected to the pulse of my school than pure and simple relationship and solid conversation about specific successes and concerns with each teacher (Berger & Luckmann, 1966 & Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 2001). When I'm invested in the teachers they become invested in our unified goals. Managing the learning environment within the ranks of my teaching staff will increase my school goal outcomes.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

The conclusions of this study add significance to the current body of research for the use of the walkthrough and the debrief conversation by administrators as a potential platform to impact teacher literacy practice. McEwan (2003) supports this assumption by stating, “teachers, tests, and textbooks can’t produce results without highly effective Principals to facilitate, model, and lead.” He goes on to make the claim, “a redefinition of the Principal’s role-have called for a new kind of Principal leadership in the building of caring, learning, and leading communities.” Using the informal walkthrough with debrief opportunities to give feedback on the walkthrough, opened the door for collective participation between the teachers and me (Peters & Waterman, 1984; Frase & Hetzel, 1990; Downey, 2004; Elmore, 1996; Graf & Werlnich, 2002; Eisner, 2002; Institute of Learning, 2006). Collective participation is the collaboration between the teacher and me as the discussion develops around feedback from an informal walkthrough. It allows for an expansion of ideas and next steps created conjointly between the teacher and me to address highlighted literacy practices identified in the walkthrough. As the instructional leader, I take the time to develop and nurture a strong relationship with my teachers. I become familiar with each teacher’s teaching style and understand how each navigates the curriculum to present to students. Quality enriching debrief conversations can only occur if a significant amount of investment is put into the effort of knowing a teacher well enough to take the risks needed during a debrief about her practice. The benefits not only help the teacher, but also generate satisfaction in me as an instructional leader.

In addition, the walkthrough and the debrief are conducive as a feasible platform to Marzano’s (2011) five conditions which encompass; (1) a well-articulated knowledge



base for teaching, (2) focused feedback and practice, (3) opportunities to observe and discuss expertise, (4) clear criteria and a plan for success, and (5) recognition of expertise can become the avenue for sustaining teacher development in literacy understanding and practice implementation. If I am seen by the teacher as knowledgeable on curriculum and instruction then the teacher will value the ideas and suggestions provided by me during a debrief. If I focus my feedback on a specific aspect of instruction observed and what is in the best interest of the teacher's instructional development then the teacher is more open to be coached. If I can scaffold a teacher through clear expectations, planning and support resources I will have the pleasure to experience the teacher's successes in the classroom as a symbiotic process because I am vested in the teacher's development through our relationship. I found that I needed to be knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction, as well as willing to learn alongside of my teachers in order to be viewed as a contributor to the teaching efforts of the teachers.

Smith (1994) described, "reflection-on-action" as, "fall(ing) back on routines in which previous thought and sentiment has been sedimented. As we think and act, questions arise that cannot be answered in the present. The space afforded by observation, supervision and conversation with our peers allows us to approach potential answers. Reflection requires space in the present and the promise of space in the future" (p. 150). Schon (1983) supports the notion a debrief discussion, between the teacher and administrator, becomes possible to reflect on the feedback as a way to "frame the problem of the situation, they determine the features to which they will attend, the order they will attempt to impose on the situation, the directions in which they will try to change it. In this process, they identify both the ends to be sought and

the means to be employed” (p.165). I found I could guide a teacher’s reflections on curriculum implementation and teaching practices through informal observations, such as the walkthrough and brief debrief meetings, to develop her reflective nature to build a positive impact on her students’ learning and achievement (Haycook, 1998; Marzano, 2003; Nye, Konstantopoulos & Hedges, 2004; Payak, 1989). The ability of the administrator to understand curriculum and be able to communicate about the curriculum with teachers creates effective instructional supervision (Elmore, 2000; Marzano, Pickering, Arredondo, Blackburn, Brandt, & Moffett, 1992, Darling-Hammond, 1998).

The debrief conversation, conducted shortly after the informal walkthrough, positively influenced teacher literacy practices, as it was revealed through reflection done by the teachers after feedback on the observed practice (Ginsberg & Murphy, 2002; Elmore, 2000; Eisner, 2002; Downey, et al., 2004). Additionally, validation of practice was felt by the teachers’ through the conversation provided during debrief (King, 2004; Teddlie, Kirby, & Stringfield, 1989; Smith & Blasé, 1991). Moreover, relationship building, between the teacher and me, increased with each subsequent debrief as we began to listen to each other and trust each other as valid participants in the teaching (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004; Frase, 2004; Zhu, 2001; Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Frase, 2001; Gray, 2003; Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Lastly, when I coached and supported each teacher in their respective curriculum efforts they began to express a view of themselves as effective educators capable to rise to the next developmental level with curriculum and practice (Pollock & Ford, 2009; Wright, et al., 1997; Downey, 2004; Frase, et al., 2001; Ashkanasy & Gallois, 1987; Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Frase, 1998; Lefcourt, Hogg, Struthers, & Holmes, 1975; Miller & Irving, 1995; and Wilhite, 1990).

My feedback encompassed open/ended questions that prompted each teacher to actively share her individual reflections about observed literacy practice during each debrief conversation after a walkthrough. The teacher's reflections often represented increased use or adjustment to the literacy practice in question. Often I connected my teachers to new resources or other teachers who could inform on their next steps with new or enhanced literacy practice implementation. I realized by doing so the teachers' increased their risk taking when trying out new aspects of literacy instruction and were eager to share what happened as a result. These actions on the teachers' part validated my assumption that conversations free of judgment, ridicule or entrapment created an atmosphere where each could take risks in their instruction. These reflections encouraged the teachers to focus more on best practices in literacy and continued to feed the evolving conversation with me. The teachers in this study expressed a favorable opinion of the opportunity to talk about their unique perspectives in their literacy practices as a result of the informal walkthrough and then the subsequent debrief conversation. I was not recognized as a threat or as someone who would judge them and later give verbal disapproval or reprimands for mistakes made in the classroom. The teachers understood the purpose of the debrief conversation and embraced it.

This study revealed the debrief conversation positively reinforced a sense of validation for each of the teacher's in their literacy practices. The teachers believed the debrief conversations played a meaningful role in informing their literacy instructional practice with a platform to know they were on the right track in their instruction. Furthermore, the teachers made the same conclusion when they identified an inconsistency in their instruction and found value in the discussion around possible ideas and options for adjustments to their instruction. The teachers craved to know if

they were on the right track and sought out validation from me. I felt debrief allowed me to be more aware of what was happening in each teachers classroom from their perspective over a sustained period of time. My perspective became enriched by taking in the perspective of the teacher's about their practice when we debriefed. By taking the time to observe and then later discuss what I saw in each teachers practice I was able to understand how each decided to use the practice I observed and how it fit into the sequence of each lesson. Without the conversation I would not have a connected sense of what I was actually observing when I engaged in the walkthrough. The conversation makes connections for me and gives me a broader understanding and appreciation for the instructional nuances used by each teacher as they move through the curriculum. Once I had this understanding I could add more meaning to the reflection the teacher and I went through during the debrief. Without a comfortable and trusting relationship to nest the conversation into I would not have gained the level of deep reflecting I was able to have in each subsequent debrief. The debrief provided me a platform to promote the sharing of best practices and make connections to other teachers on those best practices. As a result of our mutual conversations, I believe it became possible to develop a common language around literacy instruction and as a result the conversations became more meaningful each time they occurred. Furthermore, it made me more aware of each teacher's unique literacy practice and professional development needs.

I learned that the debrief conversation had a positive impact on the relationship developed between the individual teachers and myself. I became more intimate with each teacher's instructional style and literacy practices because I got to observe first hand how each implemented the practices individually with her classes. Mutual trust

and our comfort levels seemed to increase with each walkthrough conducted and collegial debrief completed. I began to take greater risks in sharing my views and reflections of the feedback as each teacher engaged in the debrief conversation. I shared my struggles in growing professionally in an effort to connect with their struggles. More and more, the four teachers would share honestly their thoughts, feelings, struggles and successes with their literacy practice. I felt as if I was part of what was being created in the classroom rather than someone just looking in and commenting on what was seen there. I had a sense that I was an active and valuable contributor to our collective dialogue. I became conscious about my engagement in the debrief conversations. My thinking about walkthroughs and the debrief conversation shifted to internalized automaticity. Often, I would prepare for debrief in an effort to provide anticipated resources, materials or encouragement to the teachers. I began to see my work as an instructional leader shift to a broader appreciation and understanding of curriculum and instruction as it existed across my school. Through debriefing I began to sense an expanded awareness of our collaborative problem solving on specific areas of curricular literacy implementation in each of the teachers' classrooms and how this thinking could potentially be a reflection of my school at large. As the study progressed and my relationship to each teacher developed, I began to feel the energy of eagerness and expectation as I looked forward to the next walkthrough and conversation between each teacher and me. I felt my leadership role and style reinforced through the rich reflective conversations I was engaging in with the teachers. I became a better instructional leader as I engaged in the act of leading instruction through my activities with the four teachers.

My study supports the research for classroom walkthroughs and the use of debrief as influential tools in the development of teacher instructional practice. The debrief conversations highlighted in this study provides a comfortable and non-threatening way to coach teachers on literacy practice. I learned using walkthroughs and debrief conversations as an avenue for focused improvements on teacher instruction can reduce the tension associated between an administrator and teacher when conversing about classroom observations. I came to the conclusion the debrief conversation supported what the teachers were already doing in the classroom and validated their literacy practice. I was able to identify the teacher's efforts with effective practice and openly discuss areas of practice that could benefit from enhancements. Due to the informal nature of debrief, risk taking occurred more often as I conducted more walkthroughs and conversations focused on coaching. I was becoming more familiar and comfortable in observing these classrooms and so were the teachers. I came to the conclusion that I could not afford to miss out on the long extending benefits frequent and regular informal classroom walkthroughs and debriefs can bring as a positive impact on literacy practice implementation for the teachers' and myself as an active participant of the classroom. I became entrenched in the classroom's activities and looked forward to further new insights from the students as well as the conversations with the teachers. I refrained from critiquing or criticizing the teachers' efforts and took the position of asking them open/ended questions to hear their thoughts on the instruction. When I took the risk to develop a mutual relationship with my teachers and openly encourage safe sharing of their literacy practice, I opened a synergistic tap with no floor. I felt liberated to praise the teachers' efforts whereby I specifically reinforced the teachers' instructional strengths or recognized newly

implemented practices. In this type of a relationship to the teaching staff, the possibilities are limitless to what can be done for improving instruction and meeting student needs. I would not miss this opportunity if I could engage in it.

### ***Personal Reflections***

I began this dissertation journey as a first year administrator who had no idea how powerful it is to be connected to the teaching staff and the curricular needs of the school. I knew whatever topic I would eventually select to focus on would need to be something impactful on my professional approach to curriculum and instruction from the perspective of an instructional leader. I wanted to walk away from this project with more meaning and usefulness than when I started, not only for me, but also for other administrators with a passion for instructional leadership. For me the topic naturally needed to center on visibility and relationship, so I naturally selected walkthroughs and the debrief conversation. The research supports my belief that a well-established administrator/teacher relationship is one of the important key factors to improving understanding about literacy practice. The debrief conversation allows me to focus my efforts on opening lines of communication about individual teacher classroom practice and how I can support her to greater success in those practices. When healthy conversations develop from walkthroughs and teachers act on the conclusions from those conversations, they will impact classroom instruction and increase student achievement.

I admire the courage of the four teachers who joined my dissertation journey by allowing me to come into their classrooms, on a frequent and regular bases, to informally observe them and then embark on daring conversations about literacy

practice. These teachers have demonstrated to me the debrief conversation makes a difference to their practice. The lessons learned from the conversations were insightful. The teachers began to expect and look forward to the walkthroughs and debrief conversations, often stating how disappointed they were when I did not visit on a given day or would excitedly tell me what I could expect if I came on a certain day. Even the students would comment they were expecting to see me so I could participate in the lesson. To me it felt like I was part of the teaching and learning, not just by-standing and taking note of what I observe. If we do not develop relationships by engaging in professional conversations, then we continue to isolate ourselves from each other, best practices will not be shared as powerfully, teachers will not feel validated in what they do in the classroom and connections will cease that are vital to the success of our schools as a whole.

In summary, I learned several valuable lessons from this autoethnographic intrinsic case study about my role and style as an instructional leader. First, it is vitally important to build mutual trust with each teacher I coach and supervise. In doing so, I first began to develop my relationship with each teacher by becoming familiar with her personal background. I sought to know who each teacher was as a unique individual and then secondly as a faculty member. As I engaged in debrief conversations, I opened myself to actively listen to and truly hear each teacher's unique struggles, successes and failures experienced in her literacy practices. I recognized the teachers' wanted a sustainable relationship with me built on trust in order for us to have transparent and honest conversations. When I established a firm foundation of trust with the teachers, I was able to effectively coach each teacher in her pursuit of successful literacy instruction.



Next, I recognized the teachers' looked forward to and requested I visit their classrooms announced and unannounced. On several occasions, I found myself visiting the teacher's classrooms in order to continue my engagement with their students or observe a special lesson planned for by the teacher. I had become part of each classroom's culture. The teacher's wanted me in their classrooms actively engaging with students and the curriculum free from threat or judgment. I attribute the teacher's desire for these types of classroom visits to the trust established through frequent informal observations and debrief conversations. It became evident I needed to prioritize my schedule for informal walkthroughs and debrief meetings on a regular expected basis. Time was what I made of it; otherwise time could not be regained.

Moreover, the teachers' wanted to know what I observed in their classrooms and what I thought about what I observed during informal walkthroughs. I was surprised to find the teachers' welcomed constructive feedback whether it was positive or negative. I gave praise when praise was warranted and constructive criticism when absolutely necessary; always ensuring I would provide specific feedback and support. It was clear to me the teachers' wanted validation of their literacy practices. I realized it was vital I give specific validation statements as part of the debrief conversations and refrain from criticizing what I observed. I gave directly observed feedback with positive comments intended to encourage and heighten the confidence of the teachers' allowing each one time and space to share their unique perspectives of the informal observation to refine their literacy practice. In essence, together the teacher and I, became accountability partners through the experience of the enacted lesson and subsequent debrief conversation.

Furthermore, I found self-reflection became an essential by-product of a classroom debrief conversation. The debrief conversations inherently led to self-reflection on the teacher's part, either during the debrief conversation or shortly thereafter. As a result, I made commitments to each teacher to provide curricular support and follow-up feedback as she ventured forth to improve literacy instruction. I established a sense of collaboration in the debrief conversation. Together, the teacher and I refined literacy instructional ideas and negotiated practice implementation options during reflection as we made curricular connections. It became evident to me the teachers' self-reflections impacted classroom instruction as I made forthcoming informal classroom observations. Often, I would observe the teacher's implementation of new literacy practices discussed during a former debrief conversation.

### ***Debrief Feedback Recommendations for Administrators***

Prior to conducting informal classroom walkthroughs and debrief meetings, it is important to inform the faculty on why the process will be implemented and what the teachers can expect throughout the process. I recommend establishing clear working definitions of informal classroom walkthroughs and debrief meetings for your school. Much depends on successful communication, especially during the debrief meetings. Meaningful debrief conversations depend on feedback.

I recommend providing specific feedback each time an informal classroom walkthrough is conducted. Seek first to verbalize feedback directly to the teacher during a debrief meeting within a day or two after the classroom walkthrough. If verbal feedback is not possible then provide a written communication of what was observed with an option to meet with the teacher at a later time to discuss details. Specific

feedback should include what was observed during an informal classroom walkthrough at face value. I tell the teacher directly what I observed in their practice, without using value statements, and how the students responded to the practice. I balance my feedback, in a debrief conversation, with a largely disproportionate amount of praise and exemplar highlights from a walkthrough rather than, “I Gotcha” or negative statements about what was observed. I use open-ended questions to allow the teacher an opportunity to respond and reflect from their unique perspective. At this juncture, of the debrief conversation, I do more listening than talking as the teacher reflects upon his or her instructional practice. As the debrief conversation comes to a close, I provide constructive feedback that includes recognition or generation of new teaching ideas, options for enhancement or modification of current teaching practices, and/or instructional choices and support for implementation in the teacher’s classroom (Blasé & Blasé, 2000). In addition, I offer and encourage the teacher to make connections with other teachers who exemplify the use of teaching practices that may benefit his or her instruction. Feedback, through debrief conversations, creates synergy that sustains strong working relationships between administrators and teachers.

### ***Implications and Recommendations for Further Research***

As I reflect on the implications that my administrative role and style had on communication with the teachers, I recognize the importance of identifying key traits in myself that either enhanced, or diminished my relationships with the teachers. My repeated use of key positive communication skills led to improved constructive, open, and transparent communication with the teachers. As a result, trust was established

and I was able to effectively communicate and coach the teachers on their use of literacy instructional practices.

“Reflecting on personal experience can often provide us with patterns of characteristics to which many are likely to respond in the same way” (Sergiovanni, 2009, p. 7). Therefore, I challenge other administrators to use reflective measures to identify their own key communication traits that enhance or diminish relationships with their teachers. It is my hope that reading my experiences and contemplating my reflections, and the four teachers’ candid descriptions about their personal and professional journeys, will provide insights for administrators who engage in debrief sessions. I also hope administrators will have the courage to reflect on their own debrief experiences to better understand the impact his or her administrative role and style has on the relationship established with his or her teaching staff. This type of brave reflection has the potential to create dynamic relationships and change a school’s morale for the better. It is my hope that others will consider replicating this study at their schools after conducting informal walkthroughs and engaging in debrief conversations with teachers.

I found this study gave me insight on how powerful the debrief conversation could be in informing on individual teachers’ instructional practices. Prior to conducting this study, I did not realize how much teachers desired to have me actively involved in their classroom instruction and engaged with their students. Building relationships through debrief conversations after a classroom walkthrough is a beneficial way to create sustainable communication with teachers in support of quality instruction to support student achievement.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### Debrief Questions

1. How did the debrief dialogue meetings help you with your understanding of literacy practices?
2. How did the debrief dialogue meetings help inform your literacy instruction?
3. What activities did you engage in after the debrief dialogue meetings?
4. How did the debrief dialogue meetings impact your reflections about literacy practice?
5. In your opinion, how did the debrief dialogue meetings impact student literacy achievement in your classroom?
6. In what way did the dialogue debrief meetings impact your literacy practices with current or new practices?
7. Describe your recent observation debrief meetings.
8. In your own words, what does the observation debrief meeting mean to you?
9. What is the administrator's focus during a debrief meeting?
10. What kind of feedback do you get from the administrator during a debrief meeting?
11. What advice would you give an administrator about the dialogue used during a debrief meeting, for future debrief meetings after teacher observations?

## APPENDIX B

### Teacher Invitation Letter

September 2012

Dear Teacher:

This is a formal invitation to participate in my doctoral dissertation research study, *Literacy Practices: The Perceptions of an Administrator's Debriefing Language in Creating Literacy Understanding in Teachers*, under the direction of Dr. James King at the University of South Florida (USF IRB #9430). I am conducting a research self-study of the use of debriefing language, used after a classroom walkthrough, to consider the impact of teacher expertise with literacy understanding and practice implementation in the classroom for improving student literacy achievement. I will need four participants.

The research study will involve current classroom teachers at Fox Hollow Elementary School that engage in teaching the 90 minute reading block. Participation will involve non-mandatory informal classroom walkthroughs during your 90-minute literacy block and participation in debrief meetings after each walkthrough. Informal classroom walkthroughs will be scheduled during your 90-minute reading block twice a week for 5 weeks. After each informal walkthrough, I will meet with you for about 10 minutes to give you feedback on the classroom walkthrough. Each debrief dialogue will be audiotaped with your permission. The purpose of the audiotaping is so that I can collect data on the debrief dialogue used in order to reflect on my practices as an instructional leader. The information obtained from the taped interviews will be strictly confidential and will be destroyed upon completion of the study. During the study, no identifying features will be used with the tapping or transcription other than a code to identify your data from other participant's data. You have the right not to answer any questions, and to stop the debrief meetings at any time. If you participate in this study, name or school will not identify you.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. Participating or withdrawing from this study will not have an influence on your employment or relationship with the researcher. No data or information collected during the study will be entered into your personnel files. Additionally, for your privacy and confidentiality that in only authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, the USF Institutional Review Board, and any other individuals acting on behalf of USF, may inspect the records from this research project. Upon completion of the study, I will share the findings with you at your request. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone, 727-774-7600/727-251-9721 or email, [imaska@bellsouth.net](mailto:imaska@bellsouth.net). To obtain answers to questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB office at 813-974-5638.



Sincerely,

Iveta Maska

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me. The researcher has carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation.

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I accept the invitation to participate in the study.

Print First and Last Name of Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

90-Minute Reading Block Time:

\_\_\_\_\_

Time Available For Debrief Meeting:

\_\_\_\_\_

Print First and Last Name of Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### School District Permission Letter

August 2012

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am currently a doctoral student in the Department of Childhood/Language Arts/Reading Education at the University of South Florida and the elementary Assistant Principal at Fox Hollow Elementary School within Pasco County School District. The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance with my dissertation study.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an administrative self-study of the use of debriefing language, after a classroom walkthrough, to consider the impact on teacher expertise with literacy understanding and practice implementation in the classroom for improving student literacy achievement. The aim of the study is to identify the primary indicators of successful dialogue interactions between the administrator and the teachers that may lead to an impact on increasing student literacy achievement.

I am seeking to invite teacher participation, that will involve classroom walkthroughs during their literacy block, participation in debrief meetings after each walkthrough, and completion of a survey at the end of a 6 week cycle. Each debrief dialogue will be audiotaped with the teachers permission and strict confidentiality will be maintained.

I would like to conduct my study starting the first week of September and ending 6 weeks later in October. It is my hope to secure your approval and start inviting participants for the study.

Please feel free to contact me at school (727)774-7600 or by cell (727)251-9721 should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. Upon your request, a copy of the findings will be made available to you upon completion of this study. I thank you in advance for your cooperation and wish you a positive beginning to the 2012-2013 school year.

Sincerely,

Iveta Maska  
Assistant Principal  
Fox Hollow Elementary School

## APPENDIX D

### Protocols

#### Walkthrough Protocol

- Observe and take note of teacher behaviors.
- Observe and take note of student behaviors.
- Observe artifacts and activities.
- Observe the environment of the classroom.
- Observe the structure of literacy learning used.

#### Post-Walkthrough Debrief Meeting Protocol

- Ask the teacher about their thoughts on the lesson observed.
- Ask the teacher to recall the student behavior observed during the lesson to support their thoughts about the lesson.
- Ask the teacher to recall the teacher behaviors/strategies used during the lesson.
- Present the teacher with feedback collected about student behaviors and explore the comparison between student behavior observed and student behavior preferred.
- Present the teacher with feedback collected about teacher behaviors and explore the comparison between teacher behavior observed and teacher behavior intended.
- Inquire for implications about the achievement of the lesson's purpose.
- Inquire for explanations as to why the student behaviors were or were not performed.
- Collaborate about alternative teaching strategies or behaviors that could be used in the future.
- Ask the teacher to evaluate the debrief process and the administrator's conferencing skills.

## APPENDIX E

### Expedited Approval for Initial Review (IRB)



DIVISION OF RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE  
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669  
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799  
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-5618

October 25, 2012

Iveta Maska, M.A.  
Childhood Education and Literacy Studies  
911 Nodding Shade Dr.  
Brooksville, FL 34604

RE: **Expedited Approval** for Initial Review  
IRB#: Pro00009430  
Title: Literacy Practices: The Perceptions of an Administrator's Debriefing Language in  
Creating Literacy Understanding in Teachers

Dear Ms. Maska:

On 10/25/2012 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 10/25/2013.

Approved Items:

**Protocol Document:**

[Dissertation 10-22-12.doc](#)

**Consent Document:**

[Teacher Invitation Letter 10-22-12.docx.pdf](#)

**Please use only the official, IRB- stamped consent document(s) found under the "Attachment Tab" in the recruitment of participants.** Please note that these documents are only valid during the approval period indicated on the stamped document.

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review categories:

- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to,

research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John A. Schinka, Ph.D.".

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson  
USF Institutional Review Board