



**Examining middle schools that narrowed the Achievement
Gap in the Los Angeles Unified School District**

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Preface

Increasing the academic achievement outcomes of middle school students is among the highest institutional priorities of the Los Angeles Unified School District. This study focuses upon middle schools that narrowed the achievement gap in the areas of English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics between the academic years of 2003-2006. Success in middle school has been proven to be directly linked to student persistence and high school dropout (National Middle School Association, 2003).

Our study focused on schools that had increased the percentage of students scoring at the proficient and advanced levels on the California Standards Tests for English Language Arts and Mathematics, over a three year period. In developing our sample of teachers, we asked principals to recommend teachers whose practice positively influenced student achievement and the narrowing of the achievement gap at their sites. We then observed the teaching and learning that occurred in each teacher's classroom, interviewed them, conducted value-added analyses to measure the effect of their practice upon their student's achievement, and finally, analyzed their instructional practice according to the Quality of Teaching and Learning (QTL) Rubric developed by staff from Research and Planning.

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Introduction

Academic success in middle school increases the prospect of success in high school, post-secondary education and in the world of work (National Middle School Association, 2003). In contrast, students who do not perform well in the middle school context are more likely to participate in potentially injurious behaviors, leave school before graduation or experience other negative outcomes. Felner et al. (1997) identified a number of factors that *impede* middle school improvement, including: the inability to systematically transform classroom instruction, ineffective student-teacher interaction, and the inability of instructional staff to function effectively over time. Appendix A contains an extensive review on current middle school literature.

In an effort to examine the factors that influence middle school success, the Research and Planning Division identified seven LAUSD middle schools that narrowed the achievement gap for their African-American and Latino student populations in ELA and Mathematics over a five-year period (2001-2002 to 2005-2006). Importantly, while six of the seven schools had been designated as Program Improvement schools based upon the accountability components of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), we observed increasing numbers of African-American and Latino students functioning at proficient and advanced levels within these schools.

A. Study Goals and Research Questions

This study focused upon middle schools that reduced the achievement gap in the subject areas of English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics between the academic years of 2003-2006. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What factors are viewed by school staff as facilitating or inhibiting student achievement gains?
2. What pedagogical strategies contribute to academic achievement?
3. Do culturally relevant pedagogical methods and strategies influence instructional practice in the selected schools?

B. Methods and Data

a. Sample selection. In this study, we limited our initial selection to schools whose student populations were comprised of at least 40% minority students. Within this group of schools, we identified those that had narrowed the achievement gap by calculating the gain in the percentage of proficient/advanced students in 2006 as compared with the percentage of proficient/advanced students in 2002 on the California Standards Tests for English Language Arts and Mathematics. We then selected schools that had increased the percentages of African-American and Latino students scoring at proficient/advanced levels by at least 5% between 2002 and 2005. Achievement gains needed to be observable for both subgroups in order for the schools to be eligible for study inclusion.

In developing our sample of teachers, we asked principals to recommend teachers whose practice most positively influenced the increase of student achievement and the narrowing of the achievement gap at their sites. We then observed the teaching and learning that occurred in each teacher's classroom, interviewed them, conducted value-

added analysis to measure the effect of their practice upon their students' achievement, and finally, analyzed their instructional practice according to the Quality of Teaching and Learning (QTL) Rubric developed by staff from Research and Planning. Appendix B contains the QTL rubric.

b. Sample description. The schools included in this study vary widely in terms of their teacher stability (or turnover) and their students' demographics and academic performance. In order to maintain their anonymity, the schools have been given the following pseudonyms: Anderson, Barden, Catalina, Dover, East, Fortune, and Greenhill. The paragraphs below present a "thumbnail" sketch of each school. Each sketch is intended to introduce each school and as such, is written in the present tense.

Anderson School

Anderson enrolls over 1000 students. Approximately 87% of the students are transported from other areas in Los Angeles and 20% are classified as English Learners (ELs). The student population is overwhelmingly Latino and African-American, while the teacher population is more than 90% White. Anderson School provides students with a structured school environment that offers personalized instruction and school services. Most teachers are organized into vertical and departmental teacher teams by grade level and subject area. The school's principal believes that providing Culturally Relevant and Responsive Education (CRRE) is a critically important element in her school's efforts to improve teacher practice and student academic outcomes. She often visits classrooms, is involved in professional development, and requires students and teachers to maintain high expectations for classroom instruction and student performance. Finally, the principal emphasizes that, for students, knowing that they are known by, loved and cared for by adults on campus is critical to their academic engagement.

Barden School

The highest performing school in the sample, Barden draws students from a wide range of ethnic and socio-economic groups. As in all sample schools, the teaching staff is overwhelming White. Students at the school perform well perennially. The teachers, the principal, and administrators credit collaboration, mentoring and a common vision for school practice with their successes. Together they endeavor to meet high standards and support the academic success of all students. Despite their efforts, a notable achievement gap still persists on the campus between the performance of African-American and Latino students and their higher scoring White and Asian counterparts. For example, although the African-American students at Barden School tend to score much higher on standardized tests than their African-American peers from other schools within the sample, they are still the lowest performing ethnic group at Barden. That fact is of great concern to their principal, who makes improving their academic performance a school-wide priority.

Catalina School

Catalina School faces high crime and poverty rates in the environment surrounding the school. In previous years, Catalina was widely perceived to be one of the District's most dysfunctional schools. Currently, the principal is improving the school's operational efficiency and is well-regarded and loved by his staff. While not yet stellar, student academic outcomes also show signs of improvement. The principal is socially conscious and has hired a staff with a similar political and social orientation. In terms of managerial style, the principal is inclined to delegate authority over a given area (e.g., instruction and extracurricular activities) to capable and conscientious individuals. He credits his students' successes to quality teachers and strong departmental leadership. Also, he reports having worked tirelessly to develop positive relationships with the local teachers' colleges, which greatly improve his schools' success in teacher recruitment. His efforts are rewarded with a strong, youthful teaching staff that was trained in culturally relevant instructional practices during graduate study. In contrast with many of the sample schools, most Catalina students live in the immediate area near their school. In times past, the school endured insufficient amounts of basic materials and qualified teachers. Many of these challenges have been resolved, largely because of additional scrutiny and funding from the No Child Left Behind Act and the Williams¹ decisions. The principal's Spanish fluency facilitates his communication with the school's predominantly Latino student population and their families.

¹ In 2000, nearly 100 San Francisco county students filed a class action lawsuit against the state of California and other state education agencies, alleging that these agencies had failed to provide public school students with equal access to instructional materials, safe and decent school facilities and qualified teachers. The litigation was settled in 2004, and is referred to as the Williams decision. Resulting from this action, the State of California was required to allot local education agencies (LEAs) an additional \$98.80 for each K-12 student. These funds and all of the interest that they accrue must be used exclusively for the purchase of standards-aligned instructional materials in reading/language arts, mathematics, science and history-social science pursuant to California Education Code Section 60605.

Dover School

Like Anderson, Dover School is located in an affluent section of Los Angeles. The students at both schools, however, are either bussed from other neighborhoods or drawn from subsidized housing nearby. The student population is slightly over 1000 students, and over 40% are English learners. Like Anderson, Dover had been historically underperforming, but the current administration has greatly improved student achievement through developing targeted interventions for literacy and writing. At Dover, CRRE is notable in its absence; culturally relevant instructional practice is not enacted in Dover's classrooms, nor does its implementation seem to be an immediate priority for the administration. Due to its program improvement status, the school is subject to constant external scrutiny from district and state entities. While uncomfortable for the school's staff, the school's improvements are due in part to its addressing the recommendations tied to state and District officials' mandates.

East School

Like Anderson and Dover, East School is located in a comparatively affluent area, though most students commute from less prosperous areas of the city. The principal has a long tenure at the school and directly supervises nearly all aspects of school practice. Though the children seem happy, observers report that the school is not a particularly warm or congenial environment. Nearly 37% of the student population is categorized as English Learners, with 21% of these being redesignated annually. The school's staff believes that their students are successful because the school has an optimized testing program, and makes all instructional intervention programs available to all students. Staff members give ultimate credit, however, to their strong, experienced principal.

Fortune School

Fortune School is located in a lower middle class section of the city. Most Fortune students live in rental apartments near the school, rather than in single family houses. The student population is largely Latino, and like Catalina, the principal's Spanish fluency enables her to cultivate and maintain good relations between the school and the Latino community. Instructionally, the school works to incorporate individualized interventions and block scheduling throughout the school. She credits the LAUSD central office with teaching her staff about culturally relevant practice. While she appreciates the effort to date, she believes that her staff has not received sufficient training in these issues.

Greenhill School

The most troubled school in the sample, Greenhill has the highest rates of teacher turnover and student suspension among the selected schools. Not surprisingly, the school also has the lowest rate of student academic achievement. The school is located in an area with a high crime rate, active gangs, and endemic poverty. Though the campus is clean, Greenhill's physical plant shows signs of deferred maintenance. Like the principals at Catalina and Fortune, Greenhill's principal speaks Spanish which facilitates communication with the Latino parent community. Greenhill School has the highest percentage of English learners (as a percentage of the student body) in the sample, and the lowest rate of language reclassification, at 13%. Tensions between the school's major ethnic groups, African-

American and Latino, have been problematic in years past and the school faces safety issues. Because of the school's challenges, the principal reports making a number of structural and instructional changes, including: block scheduling, Saturday school, targeted interventions, validating students' prior learning, and incorporating Bloom's taxonomy into instructional practice.

Appendix C presents the CST outcomes for African American and Latino students in the seven study schools. As can be noted, for the years from 2002 to 2006, ELA outcomes for African-American students improved consistently and in a sharper upward trend than those of Latino students. Conversely, more Latino students were designated proficient or advanced in mathematics during the five-year period in question than were African-Americans. There was a notable drop in performance for African-American students in mathematics during 2006-2007. Latino students' mathematics performance also declined, but less significantly.

c. Data collection procedures. We collected qualitative data in the form of classroom observations, faculty and parent meeting observations, and instructional staff interviews at each school. In total, 126 days of classroom instructional practice and 23 school meetings were observed. We interviewed 35 administrators. A total of 42 teachers were observed and interviewed. We asked each interviewee questions regarding their campus roles and their opinions regarding the factors that improved student achievement on their campuses. Furthermore, we asked respondents to share their perspectives regarding the major challenges to instructional quality and student achievement within their schools. Finally, they answered specific questions regarding instruction, classroom practice, student-teacher interaction, and parent involvement, among other issues.

d. Data analysis procedures. We conducted quantitative and qualitative research analyses for the seven schools, in order to determine the patterns of behavior and opinion at

these sites. In this study, the phenomenon of interest was the improvement of student academic achievement, while the contexts were school specific. The interviews of the principals, administrators, and teachers, as well as the classroom observations, were analyzed by loading the field notes into Atlas.ti qualitative data management software and analyzing the notes using domains that are relevant to middle school contexts, instructional practices, and CRRE. The code frequencies were then tabulated using SPSS, a quantitative data analysis software program.

During the course of our research, we also conducted a value-added analysis that assessed the effect of teacher practice upon the academic achievement of students in their classes. School value-added analyses indicate whether a school (teacher) has shown growth in student achievement over a three year period, after taking into account students' previous test scores, demographics, socioeconomic status, and school characteristics. It uses scores from the California Standards Tests (CST) in English Language Arts and Mathematics to measure student achievement, and employs advanced statistical methods to measure the school's contribution to student growth on those scores.²

² Daley, G. (2008) "What is School Value Added?" Internal Document: Los Angeles Unified School District.

Findings are presented in three categories: a) factors viewed by school staff as facilitating or inhibiting student achievement gains, b) pedagogical strategies contributing to academic achievement, and c) the role of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Educational (CRRE) pedagogical methods and strategies. Each category is designed to respond to the study's research questions. The *Factors* section synthesizes the perceptions of the principals, administrators, and teachers regarding the factors that they believed either supported or impeded student academic achievement at their sites. The *Strategies* section examines the quality of classroom teaching and the impact of teacher practice upon student outcomes at the seven schools. Finally, the *CRRE* section analyzes issues involving the implementation of culturally relevant school practice.

A. Factors viewed by school staff as facilitating or inhibiting student achievement gains

When asked what factors lead to higher student achievement scores at their schools, there was no consensus amongst staff at a given school or between the schools in the sample. Instead, each respondent (be they principals, administrators, teachers, or other school staff) identified a number of factors that they believed converged to produce results. In fact, each of the principals presented an entirely different picture regarding the formula or group of strategies that they used to move their school(s) forward. On the other hand, there were certain themes that emerged across the role groups. In general, leadership, collaboration, and operational support (specifically tailored to each school's needs) were perceived to be the key school-wide practices that improved student learning. Moreover, the respondents described "distributed" leadership and collaboration as being essential to creating effective and sustainable systems for improving discipline and the quality of instruction on their campuses.

Leadership

When asked to describe their leadership styles, the principals provided descriptions that held relatively little in common on the surface. Some of this was due to the contextual specifics at each school and some of this was due to each individual's personality, strengths, and weaknesses.

At Fortune, the principal mentioned that she focused on instructional supervision, safety, parent and community relations, and staff job satisfaction. This picture conflicts somewhat, however, with some the comments made by administrators who described the principal as a person who delegated the responsibility of supervising instruction, rather than doing it personally.

At East, the principal often did everything, because he believed he knew how to do everything, and because the high rate of staff turnover at the school meant that the person that he had trained to do it was often not there very long. Generally, he was responsible for ensuring that school operations were developmentally responsive to the children and college preparatory, and she worked on the budget and professional development. At Dover, working with the parents and the community at large, maintaining the school's focus on instruction, compliance, ensuring that the systems were working effectively, and being a cheerleader for the school community were the principal's primary roles. The principal noted that she was struggling to define what optimal instructional practice "looked like" in her particular context. At Barden, the principal pointed to supervising instruction, maintaining the physical plant, addressing safety issues and interacting with parents and the community as the primary aspects of the job.

Greenhill's principal described her duties as supervising instruction, and providing a school environment that is safe and nurturing. Yet while she was aware of instructional issues on

the campus, she was also overwhelmed by the myriad operational challenges facing her school (e.g., teacher turnover, safety and discipline) and thus, less able to focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. She expressed that she was also struggling to determine what optimal instructional practice meant in that particular context. This later fact was also corroborated by teachers. The principal was perceived by most of the teachers to be remote and relatively uninvolved with classroom practice.

At Catalina, overseeing instruction, being a trouble shooter, setting high expectations for student achievement and coordinating the systems at the school were the principal's stated duties. The principal at East noted that he was struggling to determine what optimal performance meant in his particular context. Finally, at Anderson, the principal also supervised instruction and oversaw safety issues. Slightly different, however, was the fact that the principal believed that one of her primary duties was to shape the community by being a role model and a cultural visionary for the school. This was made possible through her knowing the children at her school. At the same time though, the principal reported that she, as some of other principals noted above, was struggling to determine what optimal performance meant in her particular context.

As the data above reflect, four of the principals saw themselves, and were seen by their staffs, as instructional leaders. Three principals saw themselves as delegators with respect to instructional issues, and had staffs who described them in similar terms. The principals at Anderson, Barden, Dover, and East demonstrated a deep understanding of the issues involving instructional practice on their campuses. The responses of the staff at each school corroborated the notion that the principals at these four sites operated as instructional leaders. In contrast, the principals at Catalina, Fortune and Greenhill described their own tendencies to delegate direct instructional oversight to staff that understood curricula and pedagogy better than they did. The

responses of staff confirmed these principals' practices by also remarking that their principals did not directly oversee instructional delivery at these three schools. At Catalina, this posture toward instructional leadership did not detract from the tremendous amount of respect and genuine affection that the school's staff had for their principal. While Catalina's staff raved about their principal, respondents at Fortune and Greenhill were significantly less enthusiastic.

Principals' perceptions of school-wide practices leading to improved student success vary from school to school.

At Fortune, the principal stated that she used parent involvement, strategic interventions, block scheduling, and small learning communities as strategies to improve student achievement. At East School, the principal said that he improved student achievement by creating an optimal testing environment, improving the quality of instruction and making any instructional intervention available to all students. Barden's principal, on the other hand, credited planning, extra funding (grants), collaboration, collegiality, disaggregated data analysis and mentoring by veteran teachers for their success.

At Dover, the principal mentioned that she focused on increasing literacy among her students and used coaches to achieve this aim. The school-wide strategy was developed with and monitored by external entities (from the California Department of Education and their supervisors from local district and central offices). More specifically, the principal stated that she believed that this external scrutiny had a positive influence upon instructional and administrative practices at the school. While she was the only respondent to mention this factor, she was able to delineate how this scrutiny had translated into improved monitoring and accountability and informed professional development at the school site.

Other principals articulated strategies that focused squarely upon improving teacher practice. Greenhill's principal, for example, said that her strategies included working to increase teacher fairness and caring, embedding culturally relevant education into classroom practice, focusing on academic rigor and state content Standards, and increasing parent involvement. At Catalina, the principal believed that hiring good teachers with healthy attitudes toward their students enabled the school to improve student achievement. She also mentioned staffing, good teacher attitude, high expectation, caring, a social justice orientation, and teacher attendance as the critical factors. Finally, at Anderson, the principal identified monitoring by veteran teachers, culturally relevant education, constructivism, structure and maintaining the school's focus on students as the primary factors at that school that caused improved student achievement.

Staff perceptions of school-level practices leading to increased student success focused on targeted interventions and creating optimal testing environments.

Staff from the seven sample schools provided a wide range of perspectives regarding the school-level practices that they believed lead to or prevented student academic success at their schools. The most frequently referenced topics were the use of targeted intervention programs and creating optimal testing conditions.

There were significant differences in belief that targeted interventions or assessments were important tools for improving student success. The principals at Anderson, Catalina, Fortune and Greenhill mentioned that they had experienced some success using targeted interventions, and that these efforts were a prominent part of their school-wide improvement plans. Administrators and teachers at these schools also mentioned that targeted interventions were a significant part of their instructional practice. Across role groups, the respondents mentioned that they specifically targeted particular sub-groups as well as individual students.

We identify some variation regarding the usage of targeted intervention programs to improve the performance of specific student groups (e.g., below basic students, Standard English Learners, children who read at below basic or far below basic levels). Some school staff focused their targeted interventions upon particular students who they observed to be on the cusp of improvement (e.g., from below basic to basic), as these students were identified as being strategically important to improving a school's API ranking. Barden and Dover also used targeted interventions, but seemed to place less emphasis on these strategies than their counterparts at Anderson, Catalina, Fortune, and Greenhill. Some school staff mentioned relying upon intervention programs that require individual school staff members to identify specific students for advocacy and mentoring (e.g., Catch a Rising Star). The sole dissenting school, East, mentioned that they avoided offering targeted interventions to students. Instead, they offered all available interventions to as many students as they believed could benefit from that particular service.

All of the respondents mentioned using tests (e.g., standardized, norm-referenced, or periodic assessments) to assess students' comprehension and disaggregated student achievement data to inform their instructional decision-making processes. Less universally, staff mentioned formative and summative assessments. East's principal believed that optimizing the schools' testing environment was a large part of his school-wide instructional improvement strategy. Teachers acknowledged that test preparation was a school-wide strategy at East and Greenhill, and agreed that a testing process that worked smoothly positively affected student academic achievement. They were more likely to credit quality teaching for student success, however, than effective testing. Generally, the respondents admitted that their schools did not do well at

assessing the academic performance of their lowest performing students or meeting these students' instructional needs.

At the classroom level, principals and administrators placed a heavy emphasis on their ability to recruit and retain good teachers. In contrast, teachers pointed to school factors – a positive school culture and climate and good leadership – that positively impacted their ability to be “good” teachers. When asked to specify the *classroom-level* factors that they believed improved student academic achievement, almost all principals and administrators attributed their students' success to their teachers' commitment and dedication. In other words, while the respondents mentioned a number of factors, each hinged on the presence of a “good” teacher in the classroom. In specifying the factors that improved student achievement, a Catalina administrator mentioned the following:

I have three: 1) attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers; 2) ensuring that every student has a planned, ongoing, systematic, up-to-date research based instructional program; 3) keeping focus on students' socio-emotional, physical and mental health.

Having “good” teachers was not taken for granted by any of the principals who we interviewed. “Good” teachers were happy, consistent, liked children, knowledgeable about their subject areas, and exhibited professionalism when carrying out their jobs. Principals further suggested that an increased focus on teacher preparation programs and on elementary level literacy and math programs would be the most effective means of ensuring that students and teachers are prepared to perform at the best of their ability in class.

In the excerpt below, Catalina's principal credited his focus on teacher colleges for his recruitment successes. Developing relationships with these institutions helped him to build upon his school's reputation as a place that supported faculty and cared about students in a challenging inner-city environment. Recruitment success built upon itself as his teachers helped him to draw

other effective, committed individuals to his school, and was perceived to be largely responsible for student success. The high number of teacher recruits from [a particular teachers' college], the comparatively low level of teacher turnover and the responses of Catalina's teachers substantiated the following excerpt from his interview:

Ninety-nine percent is staffing. [I have developed a] positive relationship with [a local university's School of Education]. [In] the core subjects I can get whoever I want. Special Ed is still difficult. People are happy, they stay unless they move. I hired good people and they recruited good people. If you get good people and support them, they'll do anything for you.

He reported that at Catalina, good teachers recruited other good teachers, and contributed to a healthy and supportive work environment. The principal also stated that capable teachers were less likely to encounter discipline problems in the classroom than their less able peers. In looking for new staff, he sought happy, capable people who were able to relate to his students. He also perceived the provision of a quality education to children of color as a social justice issue, and sought to hire individuals with similar beliefs.

Anderson's teachers credited their own hard work, high expectations, collaboration, and following grade level standards for students' success. A teacher at Anderson revealed: "working really hard. I mean we did work really hard, but even then we didn't see the results we really wanted because we're still a PI [program improvement] school. So we do work hard." Another teacher added, "High expectations, classroom management; achievement and management go hand in hand. We're here to learn; they have a job to do. I want them all to be smart and successful, like, you know, law abiding citizens and productive citizens in society and I let them know this."

At Barden, teachers attributed their success to strong leadership, collaboration among staff members, and a positive environment for students. One teacher responded, "I'd say we

work in a collegial way where we support and help and inspire one another.” Another teacher said,

I think the fact that the faculty and staff are generally very unified; we have very good leadership from our administrators and always have as far as I know. We have a pretty decent discipline record: we have an excellent teaching staff here. More importantly, we have a lot of personal support from teachers to students. Teachers like me who really care about the students – and I think students always know if an adult is faking it. Students feel cared for as they do in almost every case here. That immediately transfers to how well they work. I’m happy that I know not just students from my roster, but other students whom I can greet in the hallway and ask how they’re doing, etc. That helps students feel as though they belong, and that they are valued.

Teachers at Catalina attributed their students’ success to the strong leadership of the principal and the positive culture and climate. One teacher said, “[a] big part of it is really [Catalina’s principal] and the almost family-like atmosphere that he’s created here. It’s very comfortable.” Another teacher added, “. . . a comfortable environment where they don’t feel threatened by teachers, as a student, or by other students. There’s opportunity to learn and have fun and interact positively.”

Teachers at East were unified in vision, purpose and goal. They mostly attributed their students’ gains to raising awareness among the faculty and setting goals, adhering to the California content Standards, and following the pacing plans. One teacher said,

I think that the first thing is raising awareness, the more we talk about what’s going on, the more aware we are of what our goal is and which of our students are reaching that goal [and] which of our students aren’t...So just raising awareness and communicating. I think more of us are actively aiming for specific results and we talk about teaching to the Standards all the time.

Another teacher said, “I feel that our teachers are responsible for that; they all use the pacing plans that we’ve been given, we really push the agenda of the State. That and our principal; he really encourages and supports us in that way, as well as financially.”

Greenhill's teachers, on the other hand, attributed their students' gains to a small core of hard-working teachers. Teachers said they have a "classroom culture" rather than a school-wide culture; meaning that there is not a lot of communication or awareness about what is going on school-wide. They reported that their school lacked the supportive, collegial environment and positive culture that teachers at other schools described. In the words of one individual, "there's absolutely no leadership from the administration, no follow through or accountability by the administration, going both ways for them and for faculty that are not performing well." Further evidence that Greenhill's leadership has not entirely taken root is that no teacher from that school could or would describe what the school did to assess the instructional effectiveness for the lowest performing students, or any students for that matter. There was some evidence of cohesion and collaboration at the department level, but it did not extend beyond that. One teacher mentioned that within her department, "We'll do a lot of peer critiques, peer teaching."

In summary, principals and administrators across the seven schools felt that the classroom-level variable that most positively influenced student success was the presence of a good teacher in the classroom. Teachers spoke of the conditions they experienced that contributed to their ability to be good teachers for their students. Teachers at Catalina and Barden talked the most about strong leadership and issues of culture and climate – both students and teachers felt comfortable, cared for, and safe at those schools. They also discussed having a collaborative environment and unified staff, which teachers at East and Anderson also claimed.

Staff perceived there to be impediments to student academic success.

Respondents highlighted poor parent involvement, insufficient central and local district support, and poorly prepared students as the primary impediments to students' success. All

respondents viewed parent involvement as highly correlated to student academic achievement, concluding that the lack of parent involvement directly impeded their students' academic achievement. While their expectations of parents remained fairly consistent within role types, perceptions of the degree of involvement differed radically depending upon the interviewees' roles. Principals reported the highest levels of parent involvement as compared with teachers, who reported the lowest levels of parent involvement. Teachers found that parents were often minimally involved.

The respondents often described the assistance that they received from the central and local district administrators as being either ineffective or unresponsive to their needs. Administrators and teachers were most critical of the quality of this support. They perceived central administration usually did not understand the reality of the school site because they were often too far removed from the schools' contexts. Consequently, the strategies devised by central as solutions were ill-advised and not particularly useful.

In particular, the respondents complained that the District's emphasis on testing was often at the expense of teaching and learning. Furthermore, they believed that District meetings were often ill-prepared and did not support their work. As a case in point, they remarked that professional development activities provided by the District were often not tailored to specific school or grade level needs. Similarly, staff reported that their local district meetings were generally disorganized; and that local district support of daily school operations was insufficient and geared toward compliance or crisis management.

In regard to students, the respondents felt strongly that their students' poor academic preparedness hindered the amount of material that students were able to cover in their classes. In many cases, middle schoolers began classes without the requisite skills that would be required to

function at grade level. The lack of preparedness was sometimes due to the home environments from which the students came – poor diet, safety concerns, and low levels of physical activity – but was also linked to students’ own lack of personal motivation. Their inability to execute grade-level appropriate tasks often resulted in their falling further and further behind. This viewpoint was particularly prevalent among teachers.

The teacher respondents expressed the feeling that they did not have sufficient resources to improve academic outcomes for students who were functioning at “far below basic” or “below basic” levels. In their experiences, students’ lack of academic success negatively influenced their levels of motivation, and contributed to a downward spiral that contributed to student failure. In particular, Greenhill teachers emphasized that their students often came from difficult backgrounds and that they seemed to lack academic motivation. They also discussed how important it was to spark students’ interest in learning. In the words of one teacher: “A lot of kids enter my class unmotivated. That makes my job twice as hard. I try to get them motivated and to enjoy history.” Another pointed out, “We have certain groups of people that are economically disadvantaged disproportionately, and I think that’s obvious. I think the kids are already alienated because that’s the life that they’re living. I think it’s more about opening their eyes to different social and political aspects of their state of being. You’d be surprised at how motivated they get.”

Overall, principals, administrators, and teachers identified a few key factors that contributed to their ability to increase students’ academic success on their campuses. There was a consensus that four of the principals were leaders who focused on instructional issues. Others pointed to the presence of strong leadership and/or opportunities to collaborate with their colleagues. The school staffs also pointed to the use of targeted intervention programs to meet

the needs of their underperforming students and/or the creation of optimal testing environments. And while principals credited their efforts to recruit and retain good teachers for school improvement, teachers pointed to the positive school culture that enabled them and their students to function productively. On the other hand, there was consensus that there were real and persistent barriers that impeded student success. These barriers were the lack of parent involvement, the low levels of motivation and lack of preparedness of many of their students, and the less than optimal support provided by the local and central district administrations.

B. Pedagogical strategies contributing to student achievement

This section presents the findings from classrooms observations. The data document the proportion of time spent in specific classroom activities and the impact of instructional quality on student academic achievement. Thirty-six percent of the observations pertained to English Language Arts instruction, while 31% focused on Mathematics classes and 29% were Social Studies courses. Most instruction (79% or 143 classes) was delivered in regular class periods and addressed a single subject area for approximately 45-50 minutes. Within these regular periods, over 79% of classroom instruction time was presented in lecture format in a large group setting. The other classrooms observed block scheduling. Appendix D presents these findings in tabular format.

Across schools, students at Greenhill (the lowest performing school) spent the most amount of time per class period engaged in seat work or solo activities (an average of about 12 minutes per class period). Furthermore, they spent most of their time engaged in passive learning activities, such as listening to lectures and reading textual materials (approximately 35 minutes per class period). On the other hand, Barden, with the greatest academic performance and

growth, did not differ greatly from the other study schools in the way activities were structured within the class periods. Catalina teachers collectively spent the highest number of minutes (28.13) in large groups, while Fortune teachers averaged the highest number of minutes (4.19) in small groups.

In schools with relatively higher math gains for African American students, teachers taught fewer minutes in whole group settings and lectured less often, talking *with* rather than *at* their students. They also consistently spent more time monitoring students. With respect to Latino students, math teachers in greater gaining schools were significantly more likely to access students' prior academic knowledge during math lessons and to spend more time monitoring and addressing classroom management issues.

The following section examines the practices of teachers who received consistently high ratings on the QTL Rubric (See Appendix B). Table 1 presents data from four teachers whose practice we found to be exemplary based upon their QTL ratings using and the value added (VAM) progress of their students. For example, as can be seen in Table 1, Ms. Martinez's students from Anderson averaged a VAM score of .2717. A VAM score of at least .2 is considered educationally meaningful. Ms. Martinez consistently scored 2s and 3s on the QTL assessment (the range being 1-4). Her highest marks were in the areas of Discourse and Assessment.

Table 1: Comparison of Select Teachers Scores on Value Added and QTL Rubric Ratings							
	VAM ELA	VAM Math	Quality of Teaching and Learning Rubric Scores				
			IC	LE	Discourse	Assessment	LDI
Anderson							
Ms. Martinez	N/A	.2717	2	2	3	3	2
Barden							
Ms. Burnett	N/A	.4316	4	3	3	2	3
Catalina							
Ms. Chilton	.1938	N/A	3	3	3	2	3
Mr. Barkin	N/A	.3557	4	4	4	3	3

In the following section, we highlighted those aspects of teacher practice found to be exemplary. Each teacher is referenced by pseudonym. Ms. Martinez’s class opens with a student asking a routine question involving the development of a frequency table (See Appendix E for the transcript of observational excerpts). What doesn’t appear is that a significant disturbance from the classroom next door (i.e., student being removed from the classroom, teacher in tears, remainder of the students being released from class and roaming the halls) is occurring at the same time. Ms. Martinez did an excellent job of maintaining order in her class despite the disorder next door. Also, the quality of the discourse was very good.

In the passage presented in Appendix E, a variety of students demonstrated a high level of engagement in the topic, with discipline-specific discourse. The teacher’s questions were intended to discover what the learners knew, and to guide them toward a more refined understanding of the subjects under study. While there did not seem to be any specific discourse

that was intended to facilitate the oral language development of EL or SEL students, the teacher effectively used questioning to guide the students through the lesson. The students seemed to have a good understanding of the mathematical operations themselves. The teacher showed interest in learning from her students, and did an excellent job at encouraging the students to do their best, as well as including a variety of students in the lesson.

At Barden, we found that Ms Burnett's students also achieved high results. The teacher scored a very high .4316 in regard to her students' value-added math averages and also scored a "4" through the QTL rubric rating of intellectual challenge. Although the class was teacher-led, the learners spent more than 50% of their classroom time on higher order thinking skills, such as synthesis and analysis. The classroom tasks seemed to align specifically with content standards. The teacher translated the abstract learning to learners' specific contexts in an explicit and complete way. It should be noted that this lesson was the first in a series of three that examined algebraic equations. The excerpt in Appendix E is drawn from one of Ms. Burnett's classes.

Two teachers at Catalina, Ms. Chilton and Mr. Barkin, had by far the highest performances at the school. Ms. Chilton's students averaged .1938 VAM on the CST-English Language Arts tests, while Mr. Barkin's students averaged .3557 VAM in Math. Because Catalina teachers scored so much better and the school's culture in some ways seemed to be much more positive than many of the others, we thought that it was important to examine the school environment. Catalina's principal imbued a social justice orientation, which he insisted that his teachers share. In nearly all the instructional staff and administrators we saw universally high expectations. The principal endeavored to develop a personal connection with as many of his students as possible. The principal's efforts at teacher recruitment were aided by fostering on-going relationships with teachers' colleges. His efforts were rewarded with a strong, committed

young staff, most of whom had some level of training in CRRE pedagogy prior to accepting their appointments at Catalina. The school's staff seems to get along well, in that there seemed to be no obvious interpersonal segregation among the staff.

Ms. Chilton was rated a "3" in regard to intellectual challenge. During the lesson, students engaged in a literary analysis, wherein they examined the literary work that they had been reading. The excerpt in Appendix E shows students' tasks during part of the analysis. Other tasks included applying their knowledge to identify major literary devices, such as metaphors, personification, and similes. In addition, the instruction was standards-based.

Also at Catalina, Mr. Barkin rated a "3" in discourse. The teacher encouraged students to ask questions and take intellectual risks. Then the teacher connected concepts being learned to students' lives and identities. The teacher led whole-class discussions that allowed students to contribute and to be partners in the learning process. The teacher asked questions that activated prior knowledge and assisted learners' meaning making. The teacher asked "why" and "how" questions, continuing to query until students got the right answer.

C. The role of culturally relevant (CRRE) pedagogical methods and strategies

More than fifteen years ago, Gay (1992) highlighted the plethora of theoretical work on culturally responsive teaching, and decried the dearth of work detailing how to implement such pedagogies. A decade later, Gay (2004) noted that this gap remains. She argued that studies are needed to operationalize culturally responsive teaching so that the work of teaching can change at a functional level. The gap between theory and actions was found in the case study schools. Generally, respondents reported having a dual conceptualization of culturally relevant (CR) issues, making the distinction between CR pedagogical and CR human relations issues. While

they had a limited understanding of operationalizing CR pedagogy, they recognized the tremendous need to make human relations training more consistently available. They also perceived that this sort of training had been neglected by the District, and spoke to the desperate need on campus for such training. Their recognition of this unmet need, combined with respondents' perception that the District opted not to systematically address these issues resulted in considerable frustration, and in some cases, anger. Over 70% of the principals stated that many of the challenges that they experienced on their campuses resulted from their staff's:

- lack of understanding of students' cultural backgrounds
- inability to relate to students
- reticence to recognize or discuss CR issues.

Lack of understanding of students' cultural backgrounds. According to respondents, dysfunctional student-teacher interaction adversely affected instructional effectiveness, student academic achievement, classroom management, and the overall campus climate. Anderson's principal believed that school-wide problems often resulted from teachers' lack of sophistication regarding their students' cultures which ultimately, manifested themselves in a teacher's communication pattern. For example, she recognized that her staff often took personally their students' resistance of authority and confrontational speech (which could be legitimately offensive). She believed that teachers' reaction to challenges with adolescents was *the problem*, rather than the speech itself. The issue was magnified by the fact that school staff's perception of their own actions and belief systems often conflicted with their principals' perceptions of their staff's belief systems. For example, according to Anderson's principal, teachers often sent students to the Dean because of their negative views toward those students, rather than because of specific behavioral infractions. She described this challenge below.

If you ask my faculty, I think they would say that they are culturally relevant, but if you look at our referral rate, what kids are being sent to the Dean for... I think that if you ask the kids, they've got the real story. And they can tell ya. And that's something that we need to acknowledge. And that's our biggest problem; if you ask the teachers they'll tell you "we're down and we get it."

[PQ]

The Anderson principal made correcting unproductive communication a school-wide goal and directed professional development and other efforts toward training her staff to meet these needs.

Another administrator at Anderson reported that her school just “naturally” connected to students’ backgrounds and that students and teachers “easily” related to one another. Her account conflicted with the opinions of her principal, as well as with our classroom observations.

It's not something that we've felt that there's a burning need to bring in. It's just so much a part of our school, naturally. It's in just about every textbook now, in every subject area... now the testing is different, the textbooks are different, so it's all just sort of there. So teachers don't have to go out of their way to find materials to bring into class. And their attitudes are already there, so it makes it pretty easy. It goes on by itself when you're dealing with such a culturally diverse population.

[AQ]

Reticence to recognize or discuss CR issues. Most commonly, when asked about CR implementation, the respondents cited discussions only involving disaggregated data analyses, the usage of multicultural curricular materials, and engaging in cultural celebrations (e.g., Black History month) as their CR interventions. Principals from Anderson, Barden, Dover and East all said that they focused their efforts on raising basic awareness of CR issues among their faculty. Fortune and Greenhill principals also admitted having some significant obstacles to address in this regard despite their having received some training on CRRE.

When asked if they believed that students of different groups (e.g., race, gender or ethnicity) needed different classroom management approaches, not unlike the teachers, some principals believed that all students should be held to “the same standard.” Others argued that children from different groups should be treated differently, in light of their gender, cultural

background, or disability.

Teachers were asked whether or not they had opportunity to discuss socio-cultural or racial issues at their schools in an open and honest manner, and 68% of the respondents answered that they occasionally did so. Twenty-six percent of the respondents stated that these discussions never occurred, and 26% stated that these occurred only reactively in response to campus incidents. Nineteen percent stated that instructional staff at their school tried to work proactively in order to avoid incidents, while 12% said their school's conflict resolution programs were the extent of this work. Seventeen percent of the respondents mentioned not knowing whether or not these discussions occurred on their campuses.

Regarding training that dealt with issues involving culture, ethnicity, or disability in their schools, 75% of Barden teachers answered in the affirmative. At Dover, three of eight teachers reported receiving some CRRE related training. The other schools CRRE professional development totals were much lower, with Anderson reporting one out of four teachers having received the professional development, Catalina one out of six, East one out of five, Fortune two out of six and Greenhill reporting two out of five teachers. Overall, 74% of those interviewed did not feel that the District had provided them with sufficient support in embedding culturally relevant pedagogy and strategies into their classrooms

Principals at Barden, Catalina, East, and Greenhill described conversations regarding bias, inequity, race, and gender as being awkward and uncomfortable, but they believed that having these conversations was essential to their school's effectiveness. Several principals remarked that addressing racially offensive behavior on the part of teachers of color was especially awkward, in part because they themselves were not people of color. Dover's principal

formed a “diversity committee” in an effort to develop critical mass regarding these issues before addressing them with the entire staff.

Although generally quite critical of the perceived lack of commitment to offer CRRE training, the respondents were very complimentary of the efforts made by LAUSD’s New Teacher and Administrator preparation programs. In particular, the credentialing (BTSA, District Intern) and administrator preparation (involving AB 75 and the Administrative Academy) received high praise for their attention to these issues. ELA curricula were also cited for effectively addressing the backgrounds and interests of children from diverse backgrounds.

Principals, administrators, and teachers reported feeling particularly challenged because of their lack of knowledge regarding how to incorporate their students’ prior knowledge and experiences into math instruction. Teachers faulted the complete absence of CR math professional development for their inability to incorporate prior knowledge into instruction. Most stated that they had never attended a session where they were trained to incorporate students’ backgrounds into mathematics. Teachers who reported not using or knowing how to apply CRRE to math instruction also maintained that their departmental colleagues did not either.

When asked whether they believed that their students had culturally-mediated learning styles, 63% of the teachers answered affirmatively. Only six teachers stated that they did not believe that students from different cultures have different learning styles. These teachers felt that “every student learns in different ways.” Another six teachers felt as though they did not have enough experiential data to conclude that students of different cultures have different learning styles. Two teachers, who have been teaching for less than two years, said that they had read research literature stating that learning styles vary by culture, but had not observed it in the classroom. The passage below is drawn from an interview with one of these individuals:

There are studies that say that especially Pacific Islanders and Asian students work well with others, while African American and White students prefer individual work. I haven't noticed that to be true. Having read the research, I would say yes; but I don't think we can know what those learning styles are, and there's a lot of assuming. But every child has their own learning style.

Regardless of whether or not teachers associated different learning styles with cultural, racial or ethnic backgrounds, nearly all expressed that their students responded to different learning modalities. Such learning modalities included: visual, aural, and tactile learners. Teachers made the following statements: "I guess what I am saying is that regardless of culture, there are modes of learning that you can tap into and expose them to." "When you say 'learning styles,' I look beyond that, to learning styles that include kinesthetic, visual, abstract, linguistic, etc." "Every student learns in different ways. I have kids read, act things out, play games; I have the kids listen. Every time I plan a lesson I try to incorporate all the intelligences."

Teachers regularly mentioned feeling challenged to address the language needs of SEL and EL students in the same classroom at the same time. In the excerpt below, a Fortune teacher mentioned her efforts to support SELs, as well as her use of a strategy called "backwards" for students whose home language was Spanish:

Yes, because if I do say something like "English is backwards." Latino kids will respond to it and African-Americans won't. Everybody's gonna look at things differently. If I'm talking about Ebonics, sometimes the Latino kids won't understand what I'm talking about and the African-American students will. It depends on your cultural perspective. I just try to hit upon everything, as much as I can.

Our classroom observation data indicated that teachers placed a heavier emphasis upon SEL strategies than EL strategies. The teachers reported that their students were mostly at least functional English speakers, and that these demographics partially explained their choice of instructional strategies. When asked to specify "how" and "if" they addressed the language needs of their SEL and EL populations, 17 teachers responded that they modified assignments to target

SEL or EL students in their classrooms and used similar strategies for both SELs and ELs. In fact, six teachers described the strategies they used as beneficial for both SELs and ELs. At Anderson, a history teacher stated, “I have a class that’s half Latino and half African American...you know, I just think SDAIE is kind of good teaching strategies in general.” The strategies mentioned most often were visuals, modeling, scaffolding (or bridging), graphic organizers, group learning, targeted teaching, and accepting home language use. Some teachers used synonyms or analogies to convey meaning.

In response to interview questions about classroom language use, nearly half of the teachers said that they attempted to validate students’ home language during class time. One teacher stated that she wanted her students “...to understand that one [way of speaking] is not better or more important, and that they don’t have to abandon their way of speaking; instead be adaptable and able to communicate in one way at a job interview and another way with their friends.” Another teacher explained that he validated his students’ home language through code-switching and by exposing the students to literature that contained dialects within the narratives: “... validation and also exposure to Standard English and trying to bridge that with exposure to literature that might have both Standard English and dialectical aspects of native speech for African American culture.” Yet another teacher stated, “I try to make it explicit. Like in my grammar lessons I’ll say, ‘at home you might say, *I ain’t got no whatever...*’; then I’ll show them the double negative. When you’re in Academic English, this is what you say. That also works for English language learners; trying to make it clear that there are rules that govern how you speak African-American English or Chicano English, and then also Academic English. I just point it out to them and ask how they would re-word it if you were speaking to a professor.”

Math teachers claimed to spend a lot of time building subject-specific vocabulary, which was corroborated during our observations. “In mathematics, everyone is a language learner because you’re not born knowing mathematics. So I really try to go for concepts, so that’s why I use words like ‘hula’ and ‘disco’ instead of going straight to ‘cross multiplication’ and terminology like that. When we work with the associative property, we talk about what ‘associates’ mean in a business context, on a social level, and these groupings.” Another math teacher said, “For English language learners, an attempt is made to connect to home language. So we say *¿como se dice ‘equal’ en Espanol?*, and see if we can make a connection.” Another teacher discussed how the vocabulary used in word problems is challenging for ELs and SELs: “In math there’s a particular vocabulary and a particular kind of English throughout the textbook and [it] exists in word problems...and these days, most questions on the standardized tests are related to word problems. So all of the kids have some issues with the way the words mean. We have to work on word problems and translating them into ways that are workable.”

Discussion and Recommendations with Action Steps

This research examined school practice at seven LAUSD middle schools, in order to provide specifics regarding those aspects of middle school practice that helped to narrow the achievement gap, as well as those that did not. Despite significant challenges, each school's instructional staff reported developing strategies to improve student achievement. Although most appeared to care deeply for their students, our interactions with a majority of staff did not reflect a deep conceptual understanding of adolescent development or culturally relevant strategies. For example, the respondents described themselves as not having much of an understanding of their students' points of view or their likes and dislikes. Staff had a tendency to blame unprepared students and underinvolved families more than many aspects of their own school practice, be it instruction, classroom management, or student-teacher interaction.

The following school-wide issues were perceived to improve student success:

- 1. Leadership.* Certainly, effective principals were thought to be central to students' success and staff performance. Additionally, however, respondents remarked that schools that distributed responsibility for student success among all of a school's staff produced results.
- 2. Collaboration.* Staff associated working cooperatively on projects with school improvement and success. Conversely, they believed that less successful efforts often failed because they were developed without the input of a diverse group of campus stakeholders.
- 3. Operational Support.* Assistance from local district and central office staff was well received and perceived to be useful when it was specifically tailored to meet the school-wide and classroom level needs of a particular school site. Regrettably, much of the support offered to schools was perceived to be "canned;" or produced without regard to particular schools' needs.

Respondents identified the following classroom factors as positively influencing student achievement:

1. “*Good teachers:*” Teachers who understood their subject matter, who were skilled in pedagogy and who wanted to be where they were able to affect positive change.
2. *School wide support for classroom instruction:* Good teachers need support from strong leaders, collaborative work environments and safe and healthy school environments

Our observations demonstrated that good teaching resulted in student gains. However, quality instruction was not evident in the majority of the classrooms visited. Despite the fact that principals told us that they were nominating their best teachers, in most schools we saw excellent teaching in only 1 or 2 classrooms. Furthermore, several of the teachers we observed stated that this was their first or second year of teaching. The one school in which we saw the best evidence of both quality teaching and positive student outcomes was Catalina. It is important to note, however, that Catalina did not have the highest overall rate of student achievement. This distinction went to Barden.

With respect to CRRE, the teachers’ ability to relate to their students and frame their interactions constructively was perceived to be important, but not always observed. It is important to note that exemplary CR practice was not necessarily linked to the student performance. At Barden, the lack of CR practice was thought to be the single most significant hindrance to school improvement and to the academic achievement of students of color.

As discussed in Appendix A, the literature review, numerous researchers have found that distributed school leadership, quality instruction, rigorous curricula, supportive school environments and parent involvement positively affect student achievement outcomes. The case studies presented in this report speak to those factors from either a positive or negative perspective.

- *Instructional leadership*: Essential to school success, good principals keep learning and instruction at the forefront of school priorities. Instructional leaders of schools with large percentages of high achieving Latino students have been found to: 1) articulate a common vision, 2) facilitate school-wide and teacher-level goal-setting processes, 3) promote collegiality, 4) ensure the usage of data for decision-making, and 5) interact with parents and the community (Jesse, Davis and Pokorny, 2004).
- *Instructional practice*: Darling-Hammond & Ball (1998) maintain that successful middle school students who did well in algebra courses and received quality instruction from a highly qualified teacher who taught rigorous curricula. Highly qualified teachers are certified, experienced professionals with strong verbal and cognitive abilities, subject-matter knowledge and an understanding of how to plan and facilitate classroom instruction. Furthermore, effective teachers foster relationships with students by caring, paying attention to their students' problems and interests and acknowledging their students' level of effort.
- *Organizational structures*: Teacher teaming and flexible scheduling positively impact middle school students' academic achievement (National Middle School Association, 2001). Teacher teams share cooperative responsibilities for teaching and assessing the performance of the same group of students. Flexible scheduling refers to instruction that is organized into a few flexible periods rather than numerous, shorter periods. Flexibly scheduled periods typically last between 15 to 90 minutes longer than more traditional, 45 minute periods (Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine & Constant, 2004). Flexible scheduling is regarded as a developmentally responsive instructional delivery method, as it affords additional instructional time for creativity, requires critical thinking and problem solving and encourages interdisciplinary connections.
- *Personalization/culturally relevant instruction*: In order to tailor their school practice to address student needs, instructional staff must understand their students and the contexts that influence their behavior. In the LAUSD context, personalization connotes providing culturally relevant and responsive school practice. Gay (2000) and Ames & Miller (1994)

have found that before they care to learn, students must feel as though their teachers care for them. Teachers must respect the individual differences among their children, and have a sense of each child's strengths and weaknesses, family and cultural backgrounds, interests and learning styles.

- *Comprehensive support services:* The National Middle School Association (1996) underscored the importance of providing students with supportive programming that facilitates their successful adjustment between elementary and middle school. The transition between elementary to middle school is associated with declines in self-esteem, decreased academic achievement and motivation, and increased psychological distress. When implemented with fidelity, transition and advisory programs positively influence student achievement, persistence and a sense of well-being.
- *Parent involvement:* Parent involvement has been positively correlated with student academic performance, attendance rates, and classroom behavior, as well as students' sense of well-being (Epstein, 1995). Involved parents understand the interaction between parenting skills and students' success, are involved in their students' schoolwork, and maintain open lines of communication with school staff (National Middle School Association, 2003). Regrettably, parents of middle school children often become less involved with their children than they had been when they were younger. The National Middle School Association has identified two reasons for this reduction in parent involvement. First, middle schools are often larger, more complex organizations than are elementary schools, and these differences may intimidate parents. Second, middle schools are commonly farther away from students' homes than were their elementary schools, and this distance makes it more difficult for parents to be on campus. Positive relationships between schools and their students' families help to create an atmosphere that supports student learning. Phoning, newsletters, progress reports, and student-led parent-teacher conferences help to maintain open lines of communication.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. *Collaboration* was understood to be critically important to the success of school practice and student achievement. In most schools, school staff recognized the importance of collaboration for students' success. Students were less successful in school environments where staff did not collaborate with one another. Collaboration should be continually stressed, and the effectiveness of current vertical and departmental teacher teaming methods should be assessed.

2. *Caring teachers*. Nearly all of the teachers that we observed seemed to genuinely care for their students. Caring should be encouraged and made to be a component of each teacher's job description. Also, schools should continue their efforts to train staff to teach in a manner attuned to students' cultural backgrounds and informed by their stage of adolescent development.

3. *Positive student-teacher interaction*. The importance of positive student-teacher interactions in supporting healthy classroom management and student achievement should be highlighted. Also, professional development should be developed that trains teachers to more effectively communicate with their students. Also, instructional support teams should be dispatched to observe and retrain teachers who do not communicate effectively with their students.

4. *Deficit orientation*. Implement programs that address the enduring deficit orientation that we observed on school campuses. School leaders should focus upon student strengths in their critique of instructional practice and classroom management. This approach (strength models) should also inform staff's interaction with parents. Staff should work together to develop positive belief systems at each school.

5. *Operational Issues*. Develop and communicate a sense of urgency to improve the circumstances on campuses that are perceived as undermining school effectiveness and student achievement. These circumstances include: campus safety and school appearance.

Appendix A: Literature Review

Middle schools were originally developed as a means of providing early adolescents with “developmentally responsive” instructional practice (Picucci et. al., 2004; Clark & Clark, 1993; National Middle School Association, 2003). The National Middle School Association (2003) recommends that in order to meet adolescents’ developmental needs, schools should (1) adopt a shared vision, (2) promote high academic expectations, (3) actively cultivate parent/community partnerships, (4) recruit teachers who are committed to adolescent education, and (5) foster a healthy environment in which every student has an adult advocate. The following factors have been identified as the primary characteristics of successful middle schools: (1) instructional leadership, (2) instructional practice, (3) organizational structures, (4) personalization/culturally relevant instruction, (5) comprehensive support services, (6) and parent involvement.

Furthermore, numerous researchers have found that distributed school leadership, quality instruction, rigorous curricula, supportive school environments and parent involvement positively affect student achievement outcomes (Geiser & Berman, 2000; Mayer et. al., 2000; NMSA, 2003).

- *Instructional leadership*: Essential to school success, good principals keep learning and instruction at the forefront of school priorities. Instructional leaders of schools with large percentages of high achieving Latino students have been found to: 1) articulate a common vision, 2) facilitate school-wide and teacher-level goal-setting processes, 3) promote collegiality, 4) ensure the usage of data for decision-making, and 5) interact with parents and the community (Jesse, Davis and Pokorny, 2004).
- *Instructional practice*: Darling-Hammond & Ball (1998) maintain that successful middle school students who did well in algebra courses and received quality instruction from a highly qualified teacher who taught rigorous curricula. Highly qualified teachers are

certified, experienced professionals with strong verbal and cognitive abilities, subject-matter knowledge and an understanding of how to plan and facilitate classroom instruction. Furthermore, effective teachers foster relationships with students by caring, paying attention to their students' problems and interests and acknowledging their students' level of effort.

- *Organizational structures:* Teacher teaming and flexible scheduling positively impact middle school students' academic achievement (National Middle School Association, 2001). Teacher teams share cooperative responsibilities for teaching and assessing the performance of the same group of students. Flexible scheduling refers to instruction that is organized into a few flexible periods rather than numerous, shorter periods. Flexibly scheduled periods typically last between 15 to 90 minutes longer than more traditional, 45 minute periods (Juvonen, Le, Kaganoff, Augustine & Constant, 2004). Flexible scheduling is regarded as a developmentally responsive instructional delivery method, as it affords additional instructional time for creativity, requires critical thinking and problem solving and encourages interdisciplinary connections.
- *Personalization/culturally relevant instruction:* In order to tailor their school practice to address student needs, instructional staff must understand their students and the contexts that influence their behavior. In the LAUSD context, personalization connotes providing culturally relevant and responsive school practice. Gay (2000) and Ames & Miller (1994) have found that before they care to learn, students must feel as though their teachers care for them. Teachers must respect the individual differences among their children, and have a sense of each child's strengths and weaknesses, family and cultural backgrounds, interests and learning styles.
- *Comprehensive support services:* The National Middle School Association (1996) underscored the importance of providing students with supportive programming that facilitates their successful adjustment between elementary and middle school. The transition between elementary to middle school is associated with declines in self-esteem, decreased academic achievement and motivation, and increased psychological distress.

When implemented with fidelity, transition and advisory programs positively influence student achievement, persistence and a sense of well-being.

- *Parent involvement:* Parent involvement has been positively correlated with student academic performance, attendance rates, and classroom behavior, as well as students' sense of well-being (Epstein, 1995). Involved parents understand the interaction between parenting skills and students' success, are involved in their students' schoolwork, and maintain open lines of communication with school staff (National Middle School Association, 2003). Regrettably, parents of middle school children often become less involved with their children than they had been when they were younger. The National Middle School Association has identified two reasons for this reduction in parent involvement. First, middle schools are often larger, more complex organizations than are elementary schools, and these differences may intimidate parents. Second, middle schools are commonly farther away from students' homes than were their elementary schools, and this distance makes it more difficult for parents to be on campus. Positive relationships between schools and their students' families help to create an atmosphere that supports student learning. Phoning, newsletters, progress reports, and student-led parent-teacher conferences help to maintain open lines of communication.

Mission and Goals. Some variability exists regarding definitions of the middle school mission. Whereas the National Middle Schools Association specifies the purpose of middle grades education as “promot[ing] young adolescents’ intellectual development” (National Middle School Association, 2003, p.10), others have defined it simply as providing developmentally appropriate instructional practice or preparing students to successfully perform challenging high school work (Southern Regional Education Board, 2003).

Adolescent Development Characteristics. Specific to children between the ages of 10 to 15 years of age, adolescence presents children with the most rapid and profound changes that they will experience during their lifetimes, with the exception of birth and infancy (National

Middle School Association, 2003). As a consequence of these changes, academic motivation often declines notably during early adolescence (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). As compared with elementary and high school students, middle schoolers are more inclined to describe school as boring, and to question the value of their schoolwork and their own academic abilities. Predictably, lower levels of academic engagement lead to lower scholastic achievement rates. On average, girls are observed to have higher levels of academic engagement than boys.

The instructional effectiveness of middle school teachers depends upon teachers' understanding of adolescents' developmental characteristics and how these changes affect middle school organizational structures and instructional practice. The following review examines adolescent characteristics across a spectrum of developmental areas -- physical, intellectual, moral/ethical, emotional/psychological and social. The section below describes the implication of adolescents' developmental changes upon impact of these changes for school practice and classroom management.

Physical. School staff must be trained to be sensitive to the socio-emotional and psychological changes that adolescents experience and their impact upon their behavior. Teachers can ease the transition by helping students to realize that such changes are natural and experienced by all adolescents. Making good decisions regarding health and nutrition should be explicitly addressed and regularly reinforced. It is important for teachers to remember that their adolescent students' metabolism fluctuates significantly during the middle school years. Such changes necessitate that classes are structured to allow students time to freely move around their classes. Incorporating hands-on learning experiences (e.g., manipulatives, simulations or service learning opportunities) into classroom activities helps to offset students' short attention spans.

Intellectual. In order for students to learn optimally, teachers must understand adolescents' thinking and learning processes. Structured learning activities, as well as those that encourage more abstract thinking are developmentally responsive and help students to grow intellectually. Classroom lessons that examine real-world problems and help students to understand data through experimentation, analysis, and synthesis of specific problems address both learning styles. Active discussions, hands-on experiences, and role modeling during classes further support students' understanding of the process of intellectual discourse.

Moral/Ethical. Classroom instruction should include activities that foster reasoning and higher order thinking, in order to support students' moral development. Also, in order to examine the relationship between behavior and consequences, some in-class time should be reserved that require students to examine moral and ethical dilemmas. Such exercises provide students with hands-on experiences that help to clarify and cultivate their own morality, behavioral standards, and problem-solving abilities.

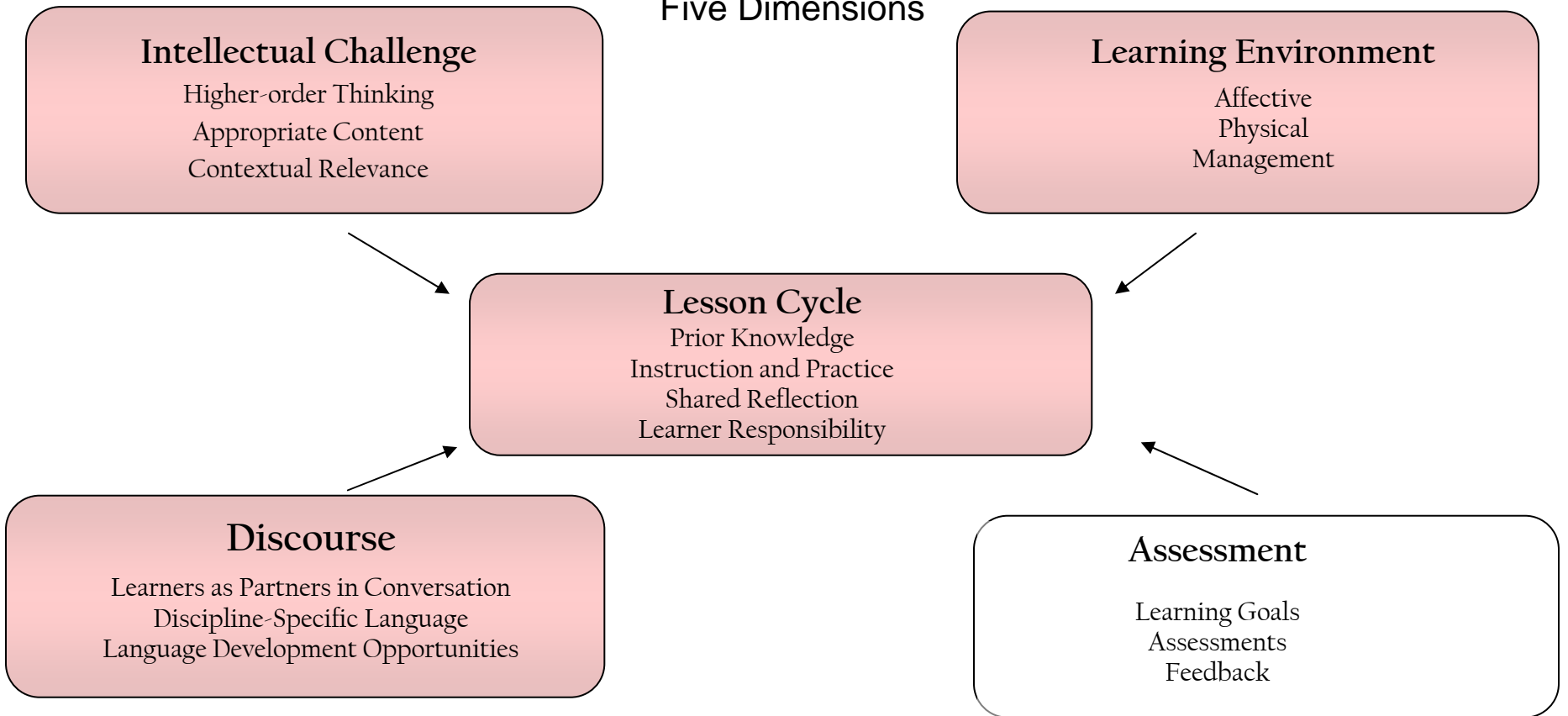
Emotional/Psychological. While a number of approaches can be used to help adolescents define their identities, the most important aspect of supporting adolescents psychologically is ensuring that every student know and be known by at least one adult on campus. Advisory programs provide students with information and support, but individual teachers should work to create relationships and rapport with their students and to build their self-esteem.

Social. Again, the need for healthy relationships with their peers as well as with adults on campus most directly influences adolescents' social development.

Appendix B: Data and Methodology

Quality of Teaching and Learning Rubric
LAUSD Research and Planning

Five Dimensions



Quality of Teaching and Learning Rubric

Dimensions	Levels			
	1	2	3	4
<p>Intellectual Challenge</p> <p>This dimension captures cognitive complexity or academic rigor of learning activities during instruction. Quality of intellectual challenge is determined by both learner and activity. Higher levels of intellectual challenge are associated with the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Higher order thinking:^a Skills such as communicating understanding of concepts, analyzing information, applying concepts, evaluating, or making connections (i.e., higher levels of Bloom’s taxonomy), Appropriate content: Learning activities that reflect a developmentally appropriate knowledge core (e.g., content standards and professional standards), and Contextual relevance: Teaching that helps learners transfer content to settings beyond immediate activity. 	<p>Learners engage primarily in low-level thinking tasks (e.g., memorization or recall of basic facts) and spend less time* on higher order thinking tasks (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation). Learning activities are not aligned with discipline-specific content standards. Neither task nor teacher helps learners transfer learning to other contexts.</p> <p>*<10%</p>	<p>Learners spend some time* on higher order thinking tasks (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation). Learners may be asked to describe, summarize, apply procedures. Learning activities align in a general way to content standards. Teacher sets out general expectation that learners transfer their learning to other contexts, but there is no specific discussion about how to do so.</p> <p>* About 10% to 20%</p>	<p>Learners spend a significant amount of time* on higher order thinking tasks (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation). They may explain, justify with examples, or make inferences. Tasks align in some specific ways to content standards. There is some discussion for how learners should transfer their learning to other contexts, but these directions may be incomplete.</p> <p>* About 20% to 50%</p>	<p>Learners spend most of their time* on higher order thinking skills (e.g., analysis, synthesis, evaluation). Tasks align specifically and comprehensively to content standards. Teacher translates abstract learning to learners’ specific contexts in an explicit and complete way.</p> <p>*>50%</p>
<p>Learning Environment</p> <p>This dimension examines the context of learning, including classroom cultural practices and norms as well as physical and interactional spaces that foster learning. This dimension considers the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Affective:^a <u>Emotional safety</u> (trust, respect, norms and opportunities for collaboration, encouraging learners to take intellectual risks); <u>Valuing learner identities</u> (integrating learners’ experiences into instruction in a positive manner, respect for cross-cultural differences, helping learners value and make learning relevant, treating all learners fairly); <u>High expectations</u> (teacher communicates that all learners can learn, improve, and engage in behaviors that foster learning and learners communicate high expectations for themselves and others), Activity management (classroom management) and organization: Evidence of routines. Transitions from activity to activity are smooth. Time is not wasted. Teacher ensures all learners are on-task and instills responsibility for self- and peer-management among learners, and Physical: Rich and stimulating physical learning environment (e.g., comfortable spaces, computers, manipulatives, evidence of student work). 	<p>Environment is primarily negative, with no safety for learners to express themselves and no support from teacher. Teacher does not appear to know or appreciate individual learners (e.g., does not bring in their backgrounds). Teacher may communicate low expectations (e.g., “I know many of you won’t do the reading.”). Time and activities may be poorly managed (e.g., wasted time, learner inappropriate behavior left unchecked, too much time spent disciplining learners) or overly controlled by teacher (e.g., learners are stifled). Setting may be disorganized, dirty, or resource-poor.</p>	<p>Environment is generally safe in that there is no hostile behavior (there may even be a generally polite tone), but learners are not encouraged to voice their thoughts. Teacher makes general references to learners’ backgrounds or to their experiences outside the learning setting. Teacher does not communicate expectations to motivate learners. Routines may be followed rigidly. There may be a few instances of unchecked off-task behavior. Teacher occasionally monitors learners’ completion of learning tasks. Setting is fairly well organized with sufficient resources.</p>	<p>Environment encourages spontaneous and supportive sharing of ideas among learners. Teacher refers in positive ways to learners’ cultures and experiences, knows individual learners’ interests. Teacher communicates high expectations to some learners. Learners rely on well-established routines. Teacher regularly monitors learners’ completion of learning tasks. Learners have access to supportive resources (e.g., technology). Learner work and useful references may be posted on walls. Spaces are clean, comfortable, and well-lighted.</p>	<p>Learners are comfortable giving each other critical feedback and taking intellectual risks. Teacher brings learners’ experiences outside of learning setting into instruction in positive ways and connects these experiences to the content. Teacher communicates to all learners that they are capable of mastering the learning at hand and of engaging in behaviors that foster learning. Setting and activities well organized and learners monitor their own work habits as well as those of their peers. Learners have access to a rich and stimulating learning environment and rely on well-established and efficient routines.</p>

<p>Discourse</p> <p>This dimension is the quality of dialogue teacher promotes and facilitates. In an instructional setting, high quality dialogue occurs when the following features are in place:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opportunities for all learners to participate as partners in conversation.^a Teacher facilitates learner-to-learner interactions, takes up learners' contributions, enables <u>all</u> learners to speak, asks questions that activate prior knowledge, probes for elaboration and evidence, and models language and strategies that facilitate discussion (e.g Socratic dialogue and clarifying questions), 2. Fostering use of discipline-specific language and academic language (e.g., through modeling), and 3. Language development opportunities specific to the needs of ELs, SELs, and SWDs (e.g., use of primary language, contrastive analysis, re-voicing, think-pair-share, verbalizing thoughts, repetition of instructions). 	<p>Learners do not engage in dialogue, or they have recitation-style exchanges controlled by the teacher. If teacher asks questions, they are mostly closed-ended, known-answer, directed at few learners. Teacher does not allow sufficient wait time for learners to respond. Teacher does not foster (e.g., model) use of discipline-specific language or academic language. Teacher may use slang or other forms of non-standard English unconsciously (e.g., the teacher does not explicitly contrast the slang from academic language). Teacher does not provide opportunities for ELs, SELs, or SWDs to develop oral language.</p>	<p>Teacher asks open-ended questions (e.g., what do you already know about this topic?) but does not follow up with probes for further understanding (e.g., moves to a different learner or interprets learner's response). Teacher may not allow sufficient time after posing an open-ended question. Teacher models discipline-specific language or academic language, but does not require learners to use it. Teacher provides minimal opportunities for ELs, SELs, or SWDs to develop oral language.</p>	<p>Teacher asks learners to expand their responses to open-ended questions through probes such as, "Why?" "Say more about that," or "Explain your answer." Teacher frequently asks questions intending to discover what learners know and to guide them to more refined and well-articulated understandings. Teacher models discipline-specific language and expects learners to use it. Teacher uses knowledge of discourse and learning styles of ELs, SELs, and SWDs to facilitate oral language development.</p>	<p>Teacher and learners engage in conversations and challenge each other to elaborate on their initial responses, such as by prompting, "Why?" "Say more about that," or "Explain your answer." Learners initiate this type of interaction. Teacher consistently asks questions intending to discover what learners know and to guide them to more refined and well-articulated understandings. Learners consistently use discipline-specific language and academic language. Teacher uses knowledge of discourse styles of ELs, SELs, and SWDs to facilitate oral language development.</p>
<p>Assessment</p> <p>This dimension measures how teacher uses information about learner performance to drive instruction and provides feedback to learners to support learning goals.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communication of clear learning goals and assessment criteria, 2. Use of information from formal and informal assessments (e.g., teachers' questioning learners to gauge what they are learning versus what the teacher is teaching) to alter instruction when necessary, and 3. Feedback.^a Teacher and peers provide information to learners about their performance compared to a standard. 	<p>Teacher does not provide learning goals or assessment criteria or provides these as activities (e.g., "we will work on chapter 2"). Teacher does not assess what learners are actually learning (e.g., through questioning, tests, tasks). Instructional feedback is either not provided or else does not support learning goals. It may be inappropriate (e.g., humiliating, punitive).</p>	<p>While they may be broadly stated (e.g. "to improve reading comprehension"), learning goals and assessment criteria are not clearly articulated. Feedback is provided, but it only signals to learners that they are making or not making progress (e.g, "that's right") but does not indicate how.</p>	<p>Learning goals and assessment criteria are articulated specifically (e.g., "character development in short stories"). Teacher assesses learners' performance and tailors instruction appropriately. Teacher provides feedback that explains what is good or bad about a learner's performance. Learners understand how to improve their work.</p>	<p>Teacher articulates clear learning goals and assessment criteria and reinforces these throughout the lesson. Learners demonstrate understanding of assessment criteria and their progress towards learning goals. Teacher monitors the progress of learners and provides feedback to inform the improvement of their work. Additionally, feedback is given by peers.</p>

^a Indicates most important component.

<p>Lesson Cycle</p> <p>This measures the coherence of a goal-directed process that includes a logical progression of activities. That is, the lesson contains a clear beginning, middle, and end and maps onto the following phases of an instructional cycle:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Accessing prior knowledge (beginning of the lesson - to motivate students and engage them in content of learning related to learning goals), 2. Direct, explicit instruction or opportunities for students to engage in inquiry, using guided and/or independent practice and move toward learning goals (middle of the lesson), 3. Shared reflection: Articulating shared understanding of what was learned, (end of the lesson) and 4. Fostering learners' responsibility to evaluate, monitor, and adjust their own learning (versus engaging in activity for activity's sake). This should occur throughout the lesson. 	<p>The only aspect of lesson cycle that is evident is direct and explicit instruction and/or opportunities for learners to engage in inquiry, opportunities for guided or independent practice. Teacher does not access prior knowledge and there is no shared reflection with learners at the end of a lesson. Learners are not held accountable for evaluating, monitoring, and adjusting their own participation and learning.</p>	<p>Teacher asks learners about their prior understanding. Teacher provides direct, explicit instruction or opportunities for learners to engage in inquiry, opportunities for guided and/or independent practice. However, there is no shared reflection with learners at the end of a lesson, nor are learners held accountable for evaluating, monitoring, and adjusting their own participation and learning.</p>	<p>Teacher asks learners about their prior understanding, provides direct, explicit instruction or opportunities for learners to engage in inquiry, opportunities for guided and/or independent practice. Teacher helps learners make connections between activities and gives learners opportunities to reflect on what they learned, but teacher does not hold learners accountable to evaluate, monitor, and adjust their own participation and learning.</p>	<p>Teacher determines learners' prior knowledge by asking them what they know at the beginning of the lesson, provides direct, explicit instruction, and/or opportunities to engage in inquiry, guided practice, or independent practice. It is clear what learners are supposed to learn throughout the lesson. Teacher and learners co-construct a summary of what they learned. Teacher holds learners accountable to evaluate, monitor, and adjust their own participation and learning.</p>
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<p>Lesson Cycle</p> <p>This measures the coherence of a goal-directed process that includes a logical progression of activities. That is, the lesson contains a clear beginning, middle, and end and maps onto the following phases of an instructional cycle:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Accessing prior knowledge (beginning of the lesson - to motivate students and engage them in content of learning related to learning goals), 6. Direct, explicit instruction or opportunities for students to engage in inquiry, using guided and/or independent practice and move toward learning goals (middle of the lesson), 7. Shared reflection: Articulating shared understanding of what was learned, (end of the lesson) and 8. Fostering learners' responsibility to evaluate, monitor, and adjust their own learning (versus engaging in activity for activity's sake). This should occur throughout the lesson. 	<p>The only aspect of lesson cycle that is evident is direct and explicit instruction and/or opportunities for learners to engage in inquiry, opportunities for guided or independent practice. Teacher does not access prior knowledge and there is no shared reflection with learners at the end of a lesson. Learners are not held accountable for evaluating, monitoring, and adjusting their own participation and learning.</p>	<p>Teacher asks learners about their prior understanding. Teacher provides direct, explicit instruction or opportunities for learners to engage in inquiry, opportunities for guided and/or independent practice. However, there is no shared reflection with learners at the end of a lesson, nor are learners held accountable for evaluating, monitoring, and adjusting their own participation and learning.</p>	<p>Teacher asks learners about their prior understanding, provides direct, explicit instruction or opportunities for learners to engage in inquiry, opportunities for guided and/or independent practice. Teacher helps learners make connections between activities and gives learners opportunities to reflect on what they learned, but teacher does not hold learners accountable to evaluate, monitor, and adjust their own participation and learning.</p>	<p>Teacher determines learners' prior knowledge by asking them what they know at the beginning of the lesson, provides direct, explicit instruction, and/or opportunities to engage in inquiry, guided practice, or independent practice. It is clear what learners are supposed to learn throughout the lesson. Teacher and learners co-construct a summary of what they learned. Teacher holds learners accountable to evaluate, monitor, and adjust their own participation and learning.</p>
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Appendix C: Sample Demographic Information

Percentage of Students Performing at the Level of Proficient and Advanced on the California Standards Test, English Language Arts (2002-2003, 2005-2006 & 2006-2007)				
		2002-2003	2005-2006	2006-2007
School	Ethnicity	%P/A (# Students)	%P/A (# Students)	%P/A (# Students)
Anderson	Black	11.9 (46)	21.8 (74)	20.4 (59)
	Latino	10.7 (95)	20.8 (173)	22.3 (252)
	Total %P/A	12.8 (180)	22.6 (289)	22.3 (252)
	Total tested	1,403	1,280	1,128
Barden	Black	33.0 (168)	42.6 (231)	46.8 (249)
	Latino	30.2 (182)	36.1 (258)	41.2 (300)
	Total %P/A	47.8 (937)	51.8 (997)	55.4 (1044)
	Total tested	1,961	1,925	1,886
Catalina	Black	5.8 (47)	11.1 (69)	9.5 (52)
	Latino	8.2 (130)	13.1 (231)	11.9 (204)
	Total %P/A	7.4 (178)	11.6 (279)	11.3 (257)
	Total tested	2,402	2,410	2,274
Dover	Black	14.7 (43)	28.7 (90)	23.8 (67)
	Latino	15.0 (128)	23.0 (204)	19.4 (166)
	Total %P/A	18.3 (242)	26.6 (349)	22.2 (275)
	Total tested	1,319	1,311	1,240
East	Black	20.3 (69)	25.7 (81)	28.6 (74)
	Latino	16.6 (124)	27.0 (236)	25.5 (208)
	Total %P/A	25.7 (349)	32.7 (477)	32.9 (437)
	Total tested	1,360	1,459	1,329
Fortune	Black	5.8 (28)	13.2 (59)	12.7 (50)
	Latino	8.8 (118)	15.5 (216)	15.7 (221)
	Total %P/A	8.0 (149)	15.1 (282)	15.3 (280)
	Total tested	1,855	1,873	1,828
Greenhill	Black	3.0 (17)	8.8 (38)	9.7 (36)
	Latino	7.8 (160)	13.5 (290)	15.3 (321)
	Total %P/A	6.8 (179)	12.7 (330)	14.5 (361)
	Total tested	2,641	2,603	2,482

Percentage of Students Performing at the Level of Proficient and Advanced on the California Standards Test, Math (2002-2003, 2005-2006 & 2006-2007)				
		2002-2003	2005-2006	2006-2007
School	Ethnicity	%P/A (# students)	%P/A (# students)	%P/A (# students)
<i>Anderson</i>	<i>Black</i>	8.0 (31)	13.9 (47)	6.2 (18)
	<i>Latino</i>	8.8 (78)	18.4 (153)	14.3 (109)
	<i>Total %P/A</i>	10.6 (149)	18.3 (234)	13.4 (151)
	<i>Total tested</i>	1,403	1,280	1,128
<i>Barden</i>	<i>Black</i>	21.6 (110)	40.0 (217)	32.7 (174)
	<i>Latino</i>	22.6 (136)	36.3 (259)	34.1 (248)
	<i>Total %P/A</i>	40.0 (785)	50.5 (972)	45.2 (852)
	<i>Total tested</i>	1,961	1,925	1,886
<i>Catalina</i>	<i>Black</i>	3.6 (29)	7.1 (44)	4.0 (22)
	<i>Latino</i>	5.8 (92)	13.1 (232)	11.9 (204)
	<i>Total %P/A</i>	5.1 (122)	12.7 (305)	9.9 (226)
	<i>Total tested</i>	2,402	2,410	2,274
<i>Dover</i>	<i>Black</i>	7.9 (23)	16.6 (52)	17.4 (49)
	<i>Latino</i>	11.9 (102)	26.7 (237)	23.1 (197)
	<i>Total %P/A</i>	13.3 (175)	26.0 (341)	23.3 (288)
	<i>Total tested</i>	1,319	1,311	1,240
<i>East</i>	<i>Black</i>	8.8 (30)	13.0 (41)	13.1 (34)
	<i>Latino</i>	12.9 (96)	20.1 (176)	21.2 (173)
	<i>Total %P/A</i>	19.5 (265)	25.5 (372)	25.8 (343)
	<i>Total tested</i>	1,360	1,459	1,329
<i>Fortune</i>	<i>Black</i>	2.1 (10)	7.4 (33)	3.3 (13)
	<i>Latino</i>	6.5 (87)	13.5 (188)	15.1 (213)
	<i>Total %P/A</i>	5.4 (101)	15.1 (282)	12.7 (233)
	<i>Total tested</i>	1,855	1,873	1,828
<i>Greenhill</i>	<i>Black</i>	0.7 (4)	3.7 (16)	3.0 (11)
	<i>Latino</i>	3.5 (73)	10.3 (221)	10.8 (227)
	<i>Total %P/A</i>	3.0 (78)	9.1 (238)	9.8 (242)
	<i>Total tested</i>	2,641	2,603	2,482

Chart One: Time Allocated to Specific Classroom Instructional Strategies								
		Anderson	Barden	Catalina	Dover	East	Fortune	Greenhill
Organizational Structure	Large Group	22.56	21.85	28.13	25.28	16.59	19.95	22.57
	Pair Share	.32	2.46	2.33	2.00	1.62	.67	1.14
	Solo	4.84	2.00	1.20	1.50	7.79	6.19	11.71
	Small Group	1.32	1.38	3.77	.25	.79	4.19	.36
	One on One	1.52	.46	.00	.50	.44	.86	.29
	Transitional	3.84	6.54	4.53	4.91	4.21	3.86	1.71
Classroom Activities	Oral	14.20	14.58	12.90	3.75	6.71	15.10	15.71
	Written	5.32	7.35	9.27	7.16	9.65	10.14	11.57
	Reading	.32	5.04	2.97	3.81	.12	5.00	7.14
	Listening	11.96	11.04	13.93	14.63	8.53	12.19	15.43
	Testing	.24	1.38	.00	1.41	1.44	2.00	1.21

Chart Two: Classroom Management*							
	Anderson n=25	Barden n=26	Catalina n=30	Dover n=32	East n=34	Fortune n=21	Greenhill n=14
Monitoring	0.16	4.46	1.43	3.16	4.68	2.0	6.21
Praise	1.92	5.38	9.0	4.12	4.71	2.95	3.57
Reprimand/ raise voice	10.04	4.00	0.70	3.69	4.88	2.71	1.50
Address CM in class	2.96	2.46	5.10	1.88	4.91	5.57	1.64
Send Ss out of room	0.96	0.46	0.0	0.0	0.79	0.0	0.0
Positive reinforcement method	0.28	0.0	0.70	0.50	0.24	1.14	1.29
Clear expectations /refer to rules	1.48	0.62	1.63	2.38	0.44	1.67	2.36
Address students one- on-one	0.32	0.31	0.20	0.13	0.41	1.05	0.0
Deal directly with parents	1.04	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.47	0.0	0.0

* Reported in mean number of occurrences

Appendix D: Field Note Excerpts from Exceptional Teachers

Ms. Martinez

Danielle (BF): Reads) *How many total possibilities are there?*

T: Danielle, what did you get?

Danielle: I got 26.

T: I agree with you. I would start writing this and doing it if you don't have the paper I would. 30 we have two number cubes. Sierra, what is 30?

Sierra(HF): One half.

T: Do we all see how you got that?

10:45 AM

T: The total is great than 4. Sit in your chair right. The total is greater than four. What is the total for 32. The total for the die are greater than 34. You add up all the possibilities the sums.

Demornae (BF): five –six?

T: Good, Demornae. Will you be able to come up here and show me how you did this.

T: What is the probability for 34?

AF: (IA)

T: Okay we're going to go over it. We're comparing two things, what method would help you find your answer?

BF: Divide 120 by 12.

T: You're absolutely right, you have two things you're comparing. How do you set up the problem,. Nelson?

Nelson (HM): The proportion.

T: We don't need help let me take care of it. The probability with one spin is 120 spins does that represent the total or the part. Quentin?

Quentin (BM): The part.

T: That's right

S: That's a nice name.

T: You're right Quentin is a nice name. We're going to find that out, Nelson is going to show us how to do that when he finds some space on the board (4 students working out problems.)

10:50 AM

T: So how many prime numbers on this spinner do you have?

HM: I have one, two, three, five, seven and eleven. So, six out of 12 possibilities.

T: Do you want to go up and show us? You don't, Jose? Why not, I want you to do it I'm asking you to do. Well participation you need to show us that you like us. Well can you give it a try? Alright but you don't want to give it a try.

BF: I'll do it!

T: You want to give it a try? Do you know what number we're on?

BF: No

T: Okay, then no you can't do it. Okay, Nandy (BF) you will do it? Nandy gets an A for participation today.

Ms. Burnett

T: Ok, lets go over these. Ok, let's do the first one. If you move the decimal over you'll get 360. # 2 is easy so I'm not going to go over it. Now for #3 can someone tell me what kind of math you used? Someone, anyone?

S1: Algebra equation.

T: Great, that's great. (Teacher writes the answers and the way to solve it on board as either she or a student talks).

T: Ok, now for #4, this is something we have not done yet but if you square any number you'll get a larger # so what we can do is square 35 and 45 and we'll see that these are the answer. Any question?... Ok, lets move on, I want to skip down to #7, here you have to multiply 4 by 4 and then add the exponents....Ok now, take out your homeworks. I don't even know what she (substitute teacher) gave you for homework last night. (Ss are busy taking papers out of their bags).

8:27

T: Ok, it's perfectly ok if you have not done all of it, I'm not going to collect it 'till Friday anyways so you still have time. And I'm here during recess if you need help as always... Ok so what does the direction says?... it says to simplify the terms. (these are very simple algebra expression and equations where students have to simplify them. T is writing the equations on board and asks Ss to walk him through simplifying the equations.

TWOB:

$$\begin{aligned}5T+3R+9T-10R &= 14T-7R \\ R+T-8R+13T &= 14T+7R \\ -R+4T+10T+8R &= 7R+14T\end{aligned}$$

(T calls Ss to read the questions and then try to simply it and T writes the answers on board)

8:38

TWOB:

$$\begin{aligned}12x-3y+x+2y &= 13x-y \\ 3(4x-3y)+x+3y &= 13x-6y \\ 494x-2y)-3x+7y &= 13x-y\end{aligned}$$

T: Ok, now that you know how to do some of these, let's finish up the rest of them in class. I'll walk around and answer questions. (Students are working nosily on their paper while teacher walks around and talks to individual students).

8:59

T: ok put your pencils down. Ok the purpose of this is not that you guys can do all of these when you go to high school or next year, but it's so you can remember these next year when you come back after summer break. Remember 7th grade is some strange stuff so you guys have an edge over other 7th graders since you've already seen these...ok, so you can finish off the rest of the for homework and we'll keep doing this until Friday....

Ms. Chilton

The literary analysis was a worksheet based activity that was due to the teacher on the day of the second period we observed.

T: O.k. One of your standards is to look at how who the author is influences what he writes and how he writes it. I want you to see what you can find out about Victor Martinez. I've already told you that some of the best stories from authors come from their own lives. Remember he is Mexican American. How do you see his cultures in his book? What some people in first period found helpful is to look at the back of the book to find out a little more about Victor Martinez. I want you to use your book for this warm up exercise.

W.U. [on the board]: Describe how you can see Victor Martinez's heritage in Parrot in the Oven. Cite specific examples.

T: Right now I just want your thoughts. You don't have to copy it down as long as you answer in complete sentences. Now I should hear minds thinking and not mouths talking. Heritage is tradition, culture, all those things that make a person who they are. You can look at specific examples in the novel or find thoughts from the biography on the back.

Mr. Barkin

T: Anyone have a friend from first period? [Some hands go up]. Ok, some people got really out of hand first period. I put them into a group, but no one knew how to do what they were responsible for. I had tutoring on Tuesday, but no one came to ask me. I won't get mad if you guys ask questions now, I want you to ask now. That's what today is for.

T: Ok, let's go over the 13 things list, and we can write down additions to the list if you hear something you want help on [As he goes through it, 'fraction to percent' goes up, 'adding fractions' goes up, 'dividing fractions' goes up, 'percent to fractions' goes up, and 'mixed number to improper fraction' / 'improper fraction to mixed number' goes up].

T: Thanks for this guys. It takes a lot of maturity to ask questions. We have a lot to do, and I appreciate you asking. Ok, so let's start with decimal to fractions.

This is a lot like translating...translating different languages. These are different math languages. Who here knows a different language [some hands are raised, T calls on a few of them].

LM: Spanish.

BM: Working on Spanish.

LM: Spanish.

LF: Spanish.

BF: Pig Latin.

T: Ok, these problems are like that. They mean the same thing, so we're going to translate them. Like 'teacher' to 'maestro'. So, 0.35 is hard to translate to a fraction. But if you know another way to read this...

Ss: Thirty-five hundredths.

T: Right. That's going to help you translate. [Writes down 35/100].

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