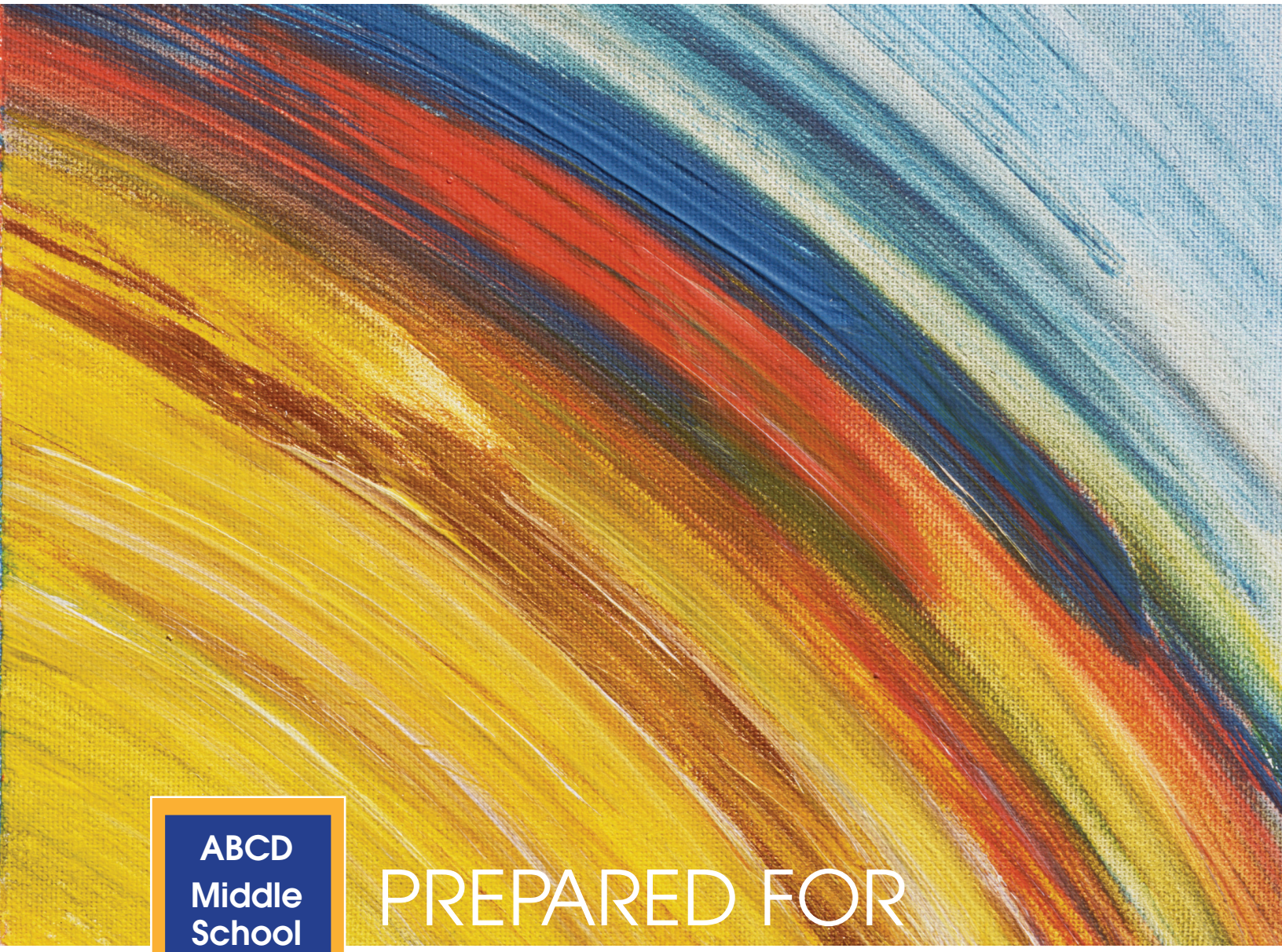
Instructional Practices ASSESSMENT



ABCD Middle School Logo

PREPARED FOR

ABCD Middle School Faculty and Administration

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Rutherford Learning Group
Development and Inspiration for Educators

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SECTION 1

Introduction, Purpose, and Rationale

The Artisan Teacher™ is a professional development initiative aimed at developing teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy is not merely a synonym for teacher effectiveness. The concept of efficacy includes effectiveness but adds the profound sense of satisfaction and professional fulfillment that follows from successfully applying well developed professional skills in a challenging environment. This skill set is developed through the long-term, systematic study of principles of effective pedagogy. As teachers increase their conscious awareness of these pedagogical principles and become more confident, consistent, and flexible in their application, student learning is enhanced and teacher efficacy is increased as well.

The Instructional Practices Assessment is an important current component of the Artisan Teacher™ initiative. It is essentially an assessment of the school's pedagogical repertoire. The IPA establishes a beginning point in the school's quest to equip teachers with ever more effective pedagogical principles and strategies. This beginning point provides a benchmark from which the school can mark progress in developing teacher efficacy for enhanced student learning. The IPA seeks to answer these questions:

1. What instructional practices are currently employed?
2. Which instructional practices are most commonly used?
3. What pedagogical principles underlie the most commonly used practices?
4. What patterns or trends exist in the pedagogical choices made by teachers?
5. What student outcomes are associated with the instructional practices most often observed?
6. Which current instructional practices show the most promise for enhancing student learning?
7. Which instructional practices might be abandoned in favor of higher yield practices?
8. Which instructional practices could be easily adapted to be more productive?
9. Which additional practices could be learned and implemented to further enhance student learning?

The Instructional Practices Assessment serves as an artifact on which a faculty can base ongoing, growth-evoking discussions on their pedagogical approaches, their current and future efficacy, staff development needs, and school culture issues.

SECTION 2

Assessment Methodology

The data contained in the Instructional Practices Assessment are collected through direct observation of classroom teaching. Analysis and interpretation of the observation results are presented to the faculty in written form and also in an interactive presentation/discussion.

The IPA team visited ABCD Middle School classrooms on May 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, and 10, 2019.

All teachers received at least one observation. Many teachers were observed more than once. A total of 26 observations were included in the assessment.

Classroom observations were typically between fifteen and thirty minutes in length. An IPA team member observed the class until she was confident that she had identified and examined the primary instructional practice the teacher was choosing to employ. Most of the time, the IPA observer examined the instructional practice that was underway when they entered the classroom. On other occasions, when it was obvious that the teacher was soon to transition into another practice, the IPA observer waited and observed the second practice from its beginning.

A three column observation instrument was employed (see graphic). The IPA observer, using this instrument, collected observational data in three domains; Instructional Practices, Student Work, and Classroom Environment.

Column 1

Instructional Practices: In this column, the observer watches the teacher in order to answer this question: Of the hundreds of possible instructional approaches, which one has the teacher selected to employ at this time? The top section of the column is used for notes, diagrams, scripted episodes of the teacher's dialog with students, and other data that help describe the teacher's instructional choices. One the practice is recognized, it is labeled and recorded at the bottom of the column.

THREE COLUMN OBSERVATION INSTRUMENT

Instructional Practices	Student Work	Classroon Environment
Observation and Artifacts	Observation and Artifacts	Observation and Artifacts
Labeling and Analysis	Labeling and Analysis	Labeling and Analysis

Column 2

Student Work: In this column, the observer watches the students in order to answer this question: What, exactly, are individual students and/or groups of students doing in response to the teacher's instructional practice. What is the nature of their work? The top section of the column is used for notes, diagrams, scripted episodes of the student(s)' dialog with the teacher or other students, actual work products or facsimiles of actual student work, and other data that help describe the students' responses to the teacher's instructional choices. Once the student work is recognized, it is labeled and recorded at the bottom of the column. This labeling often incorporates the names of specific themes from the Artisan Teacher™ lexicon, such as "Mental Models," "Performance Feedback," or "Locale Memory."

Column 3

Classroom Environment: In this column, the observer notes the physical, social, and emotional characteristics of the classroom environment and the impact these characteristics may have on the instructional practices and student work. The top section of the column is used for notes, diagrams, seating arrangements, descriptive words, and scripted episodes of student or teacher dialog that are explanatory of the classroom's culture, climate, affect, and level of community. Analysis and interpretation, if needed, is included at the bottom of the column.

Teachers are not provided immediate verbal or written feedback on the observation, since the purpose of the visit is to collect data that will be aggregated with all other observations into a set of whole school artifacts. However, knowing that teachers are interested in specific feedback, a time or times are established to provide specific feedback on a volunteer basis.

After the observations are completed, the raw data is then aggregated and examined for identification of patterns and trends. The aggregate of the data is then analyzed and interpreted and conclusions with recommendations are generated.

Limitations of the Methodology:

The Instructional Practices Assessment is intended to provide a school with a "scrapbook" view of its instructional practices. The "scrapbook of a vacation trip" analogy is fairly accurate. The vacation scrapbook provides snapshots of specific events that occurred on the trip. When all the snapshots are viewed together, one gets a sense of the essence of the trip through the lens of the one who snapped the pictures. However, the entire trip, with all the contexts, meanings, and events is not accurately reproduced in the scrapbook. The scrapbook does not attempt to portray everything that occurred on the trip, just a few of the episodes that, taken in aggregate, can provide one frame of reference for the trip.

Likewise, the Instructional Practices Assessment for ABCD Middle School is not an accurate account of all the teaching practices employed by the faculty. It is also not an accurate account of any one teacher's complete repertoire. It is a collection, analysis, and interpretation of short episodes of instruction that, in aggregate, provide an essence of the school's instructional practices through the frame of reference of the observers.

Specific Limitations:

1. Not all teachers were observed an equal number of times.
2. Each observation was brief and captured only the practice evident at the time of the observation.
3. The observation time frame was limited and the majority of the observations occurred on only six days in May, 2019.
4. The observations were collected by several observers.
5. All analysis and interpretation reflect the bias, frame of reference, and knowledge base of the observers.
6. The presence of the observer in the classroom may have subtly influenced teacher and/or student behaviors.

SECTION 3

Raw Assessment Data, without interpretation

Listed below, in no specific order, are the labels/descriptions of the instructional practices from the 26 observations. The data from each observation was captured using a three column observation instrument. These labels/descriptions were collected from the bottom of each instrument's Column 1: Instructional Practices.

1. Guided demonstration with guided note-taking + elaboration
2. Whole class lecture with questioning + individual student responses
3. Whole class assignment (worksheet) with individual support
4. Introductory activator/anticipatory set – whole class guided example building
5. Individual student work with teacher circulation and feedback
6. Students cycle through individual performance feedback sessions with teacher
7. Guided review with teacher questioning – individual responses
8. Whole class questioning with individual student responses
9. Individual seatwork with individual teacher feedback
10. Teacher presentation of content with visuals
11. Students prepare to individually re-teach previous content
12. Students prepare to re-teach previous content in small groups
13. Paired practice/review with teacher circulating to provide feedback
14. Guided note-taking with teacher questioning- individual responses
15. Small group project work with circulating teacher feedback
16. Guided demonstration with teacher questioning – individual responses
17. Whole group rehearsal with individual and group immediate feedback
18. Practice/rehearsal work with a partner
19. Whole class questioning with individual student responses
20. Whole class activity with whole group + individual feedback
21. Guided note taking with teacher questions- individual responses
22. Individual student project work with teacher circulation for feedback
23. Whole class discussion/notes + teacher questioning- individual responses
24. Paired practice rounds with circulating teacher feedback
25. Whole class questioning with individual student responses
26. Individual project work with circulating teacher feedback

SECTION 4

Patterns, Trends, Analysis, and Interpretation

Trends in Instructional Practices:

The most frequently observed instructional practice was:

Teacher provides whole class (or small group or individual) guided demonstration with supporting visuals, props, and elaboration.

This instructional practice was demonstrated with many variations. The essential practice consists of the teacher and the students working on the same thing at the same time with examples provided by the teacher. In math it might look like this: The students have a worksheet with 5 problems. The students also have a illustration or diagram to use for deeper understanding. The teacher works problem 1 on board or screen using the same set of resources. The teacher and the students move together through the formation of the solution. The teacher makes his/her thinking explicit as the teacher and students co-solve the problems in unison. In language arts it might look like this: The teacher, again using the board or screen, works through the correct identification of parts of speech in a sample sentence. The students have the exact same sentence in front of them and they label parts of speech in unison with the teacher while the teacher asks clarifying questions and makes the steps explicit. All the while, the teacher and the students are using the same prop (in this case a sample sentence) so that the demonstration is clear. In most cases teachers chose to work through several trials in the guided demonstration, each time eliciting students' responses that indicated the degree of mastery.

The 2nd most frequently observed instructional practice was:

Teacher poses questions to the entire class and takes individual responses.

This instructional practice consists of the teacher posing a question to the entire group and then selecting one student, or a sequence of students to answer the question. Typically, when the student answers incorrectly, the teacher asks for other ideas or provides the correct answer. When correct answers are given, the teacher uses the answer as a springboard to provide more context or additional related information. The questioning usually proceeds at a brisk pace, especially if the material is for review. The practice was used extensively for new material as well as for review purposes. Sometimes the teacher chooses responders from volunteers with raised hands and sometimes they choose responders intentionally to involve specific students.

The 3rd most frequently observed instructional practice was:

Teacher assigns a student activity (lots of variety here) and then circulates throughout classroom to provide individual assistance and feedback.

This instructional practice includes variations for all subject areas. Sometimes the work assigned was a set of math problems, sometimes it was a writing assignment, sometimes it was a set of vocabulary words with definitions to be searched out. Also, the practice was employed both with new curriculum and as a review strategy. Teachers typically provided lots of individual attention as they circulated, although they were often not able to get to everyone who needed their attention because of time constraints.

Trends in Student Work:

Observations in this domain focused on the degree to which and with what level of quality students were responding to the teacher's instructional lead. In other words… to what degree were students engaged in the actual work designed and assigned by the teacher?

School-wide, by approximately a 3 to 1 margin, student engagement during the observed instructional time was optional rather than mandatory. This means that the teacher almost always provided appropriate and well-designed opportunities for students to participate, but often stopped short of actually requiring them to do so. For example, a teacher might ask a well-crafted question to the whole class intended to focus their attention on the subject at hand and then require only one or some of the students to think of and then express an answer.

Of the three most frequently observed instructional practices, student engagement was highest when teachers were using guided demonstration. It was lowest when teachers were using whole class questioning with individual responses.

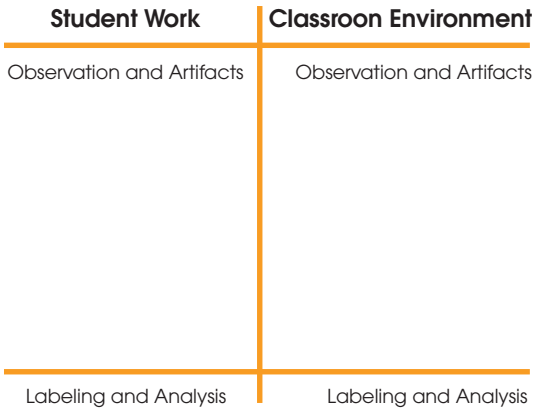
Students are often found working in groups, teams or pairs. This sets the stage for collaboration, but does not ensure collaboration. Still- students are used to, and generally skilled at, working together.

Students are often found creating meaningful artifacts of their learning. Mostly these artifacts were temporal, rather than systemically collected into a "portfolio" of sorts.

Trends in Classroom Environment:

The vast majority of the observational time was focused on instructional practices and the student work that followed. A few trends and items of interest that surfaced in column 3 (classroom environment) of the instrument are:

ABCD Middle School has a consistently safe and structured climate. Teachers use effective routines and rituals. Adults are calm, emotionally intelligent, and warm toward students. There is a tangible "family atmosphere" throughout the school that is positive and pervasive. This positive climate typifies individual classrooms and the school at large. Students and teachers appear to be mostly happy and grateful to be at ABCD Middle School.



There is a trend toward the use of external motivators rather than internal motivators in working with students. Teachers often mentioned points, credit, and grades as reasons for student engagement- rather than interest, the satisfying nature of the work of learning, or the inherent value of the knowledge/skill being taught. Usually, a mix of internal and external motivators is effective. ABCD students, because of the positive culture of ABCD, would likely be more receptive than normal of the use of internal motivators.

Teachers consistently communicated, in both overt and subtle ways, high expectations for students' work and a sense that the students were capable of successfully completing the work.

SECTION 5

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Build mandatory engagement strategies into each lesson

a. Overt responses: all, overt, during
b. Performance feedback: abundant, immediate, specific

Recommendation 2

Be careful of using questioning to introduce new content

a. Ask fewer Qs- get more, and deeper answers to each question
b. Reserve Qs for interest-building and after initial mastery

Recommendation 3

Enrich the design of initial experiences and first lessons

a. Accurate, complete, connected to reality, different
b. Create mental structures and optimize readiness
c. This reduces the need for warm-up and review – see recommendation 4, below

Recommendation 4

Consider shortening the amount of time in each class period devoted to warm-up/review work from prior lessons.

a. Design lessons to require less review by using mental models, locale memory, connection, and personal relevance
b. Warm-up/review did not appear to be homework driven – this is positive
c. Design review and rehearsal work into the middle of the lesson so that the beginning and end of each lesson can be strong, instructional, and memorable

OUTLOOK

ABCD Middle School is in an enviable position. Due to the overall talent potential of the faculty, the priorities of the administration, and the positive school and classroom environment, ABCD Middle School should expect a relatively rapid growth curve for increased teacher efficacy and student success as the above recommendations are implemented.