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# Increasing Student Engagement In The Middle School Classroom

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INCREASING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL  
CLASSROOM

Elisa V. Biancalana

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements of  
Doctor of Education

National College of Education

National-Louis University

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# NLU Digital Commons Document Origination Statement

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This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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## ABSTRACT

There is a need to improve student engagement in the middle school classroom. This change plan seeks to determine the level of student engagement in the classroom using the Instructional Practices Inventory tool. Classroom walkthroughs will be conducted to determine the level of engagement in the classroom. The data collected during the walkthroughs will drive the professional development needed for teachers in order to be able to implement teaching strategies that increase the level of student engagement in the classroom. The effective implementation of this change plan will ensure that teachers will work collaboratively in order to design engaging instruction for the students.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE CHANGE PLAN DISSERTATION

This change plan dissertation makes recommendations for implementing instructional strategies that increase student engagement in the classroom. As a result of conducting research pertaining to student engagement, I have learned that it is important to differentiate between the levels of student engagement. Upon first glance, students may seem to be engaged, but at a closer glance, they may be simply filling out a worksheet with basic recall questions. It is important to carefully observe the type of learning that students are doing in the classroom to ensure that they are engaged in activities that stimulate their thinking and move them to problem solve or create. Teachers should have the opportunity to collaborate in collegial conversations related to instruction and strategies that promote student engagement in the classroom. It is important for teachers to observe their colleagues teach a lesson and/or view a video to analyze the level of student engagement present in the classroom.

This project has helped me grow as an administrator and allowed me to understand how I can support teachers with their instruction and help them grow as a professional. As a school or district administrator, I need make classroom visits or observations a daily part of my schedule. In order to understand the type of instruction that is taking place in the school, I need to be in classrooms on a consistent basis. Conversations between the teachers and I are also a critical component of improving instruction in order to promote student engagement in the classroom. As a school community, it is important for us to all agree upon what a high level of student engagement looks like in the classroom and what types of activities students should be involved in during instruction. The Instructional Practices Inventory is one tool that can

help us begin our journey to understanding and measuring student engagement. The practice of having open conversations and observing one another leads to a school community that has trust in one another and is invested in working together to increase student engagement and achievement in the classroom. As a school or district administrator, this is the type of community I hope to build among my staff.



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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Statement of the Problem

“In recent years, professional journals, school improvement books, and sessions at professional conferences have been replete with discussions about the importance of student engagement. Increasing the time students spend meaningfully engaged in learning is associated with increased student achievement. Increasing the time students spend in higher-order, deeper thinking is also associated with increased student achievement, and just as importantly how students develop life-long thinking skills” (Valentine, 2010, p. 1).

“At the most fundamental level, to optimize learning, a teacher must ensure that students are engaged in the learning process. The kind of engagement that optimizes task performance is not simply measurable time on task or attending to a lesson, but rather active engagement in academic tasks – the student is actively doing math, reading material at a non-superficial level, and making strides toward task accomplishment” (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 42). In order for optimal achievement to occur, it is imperative for teachers to improve student engagement in the classroom. “In many schools, it is common for educators to fall into the trap of blaming others for the underperformance of their students. Uninvolved parents are a frequent trigger of blame, as are students typically accused of being unmotivated and not working hard enough” (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 2).

Unmotivated students or student misbehavior are two issues which are frequently brought to the forefront when talking about the lack of student engagement in the classroom. Teachers address this lack of engagement by sending students to the office

with a referral for misbehavior. Students that are sent to the office miss quality instruction time. This is occurring regularly – for some students it is occurring daily or weekly. Teachers are not addressing the cause of the lack of engagement in the classroom. Instead, they send the problem out of the classroom and continue instruction with students that are compliant. “Teachers are more positively responsive to students who initially show high levels of engagement, and they are more neglectful of those students who initially show low levels of behavioral engagement” (Boykin & Noguera, 2011, p. 49).

Students exhibit negative behavior in the classroom because they are not engaged in the lesson the teacher is presenting. This may be occurring because the material that is being presented is not at the academic level for the student. The lesson may be too easy or too difficult. Teachers need to assess the present level of their students and scaffold their lessons to meet the students’ needs. “In today’s classrooms, students are rarely grouped by ability, and every classroom has the full bell curve of aptitude, from very low to very high. When teachers teach, they teach to the lower third of the class. So everybody at the top third of the graph is doing a lot of waiting, getting more repetition. That’s when boredom and bad behavior set in” (Cleaver, 2008, p. 28).

Lack of engagement may occur because the students are not actively participating in the classroom activity. Paulo Friere makes the following statement in regards to lack of engagement, “a careful analysis of the teacher-student relationship at any level, inside or outside the school, reveals its fundamentally narrative character. This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being

narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness” (Friere, 2005, p. 71)

As Friere’s studies show, instructional lessons need to be planned that allow students to engage in discussion with their peers and to think critically. Many students spend time passively in the classroom as the teacher serves as lector. “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. They do, it is true, have the opportunity to become collectors or cataloguers of the things they store. But in the last analysis, it is the people themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other” (Friere, 2005, p. 72). Information is released to students but they are not provided opportunities to process or apply it.

### Rationale

This topic interested me as an administrator because studies by Robert J. Marzano have focused on high student engagement and show a correlation between high engagement and high student achievement (Marzano, et al., 2001, p. 5). It evolved during my first year after researching teachers’ perceptions on high frequency discipline

issues for the first part of this dissertation on program evaluation. If students were engaged in the classroom instruction, there was less student misbehavior occurring.

As I explored this topic, I was also interested in focusing on the effects of classroom instruction and teacher expectations in the classroom. Teacher expectations also play a part in having high levels of student engagement. Classroom expectations could vary greatly among different classrooms and teachers. I wanted to know if there was any relationship between the type of instruction that was taking place in the classroom and the level of student engagement in class.

With Common Core quickly becoming a reality in schools each and every day, we need to ensure that students are receiving quality instruction. Currently, we test students each spring using the ISAT test to measure their mastery of reading and math at each grade level. We are held accountable by the state with review of their scores. It is our district goal to show continuous growth in the areas of reading and math for all students. If students are highly engaged in the classroom, research shows that the students' achievement scores will increase (Marzano, et al., 2001, p. 5).

Currently, my district utilizes the *Charlotte Danielson Framework for Teaching* to evaluate teachers. This framework has served as a benefit in assisting the district to ensure that teachers are delivering quality instruction to the students. It has also supported teachers and administrators in focusing on areas of improvement. Another tool that has also been implemented in the district in regards to student engagement is the *Instructional Practices Inventory*. This tool has allowed teachers and administrators to begin having conversations on student engagement and instructional practices that increase engagement (Valentine, 2005, p. 1).

## Goals

The goal of this change plan was to improve student engagement in the classroom. Upon evaluating this topic, it was my intent to review how we can increase the level of student engagement in schools and research the tools we can use to measure engagement. One tool that I wanted to research was the *Instructional Practices Inventory*. It is a tool that my district currently uses to measure student engagement three times a year. Teachers and administrators walk through classrooms briefly to identify the number of students that are engaged in instruction. The data is collected and reviewed by the school. I wanted to review this data to see if the discussions and professional development that had been taking place regarding instructional practices was increasing the percentage of students that are engaged in the classroom.

In order for change to take place it was important to utilize Tony Wagner's research on change in education. "Our education system was never designed to deliver the kind of results we now need to equip students for today's world – and tomorrow's. The system was originally created for a very different world. To respond appropriately, we need to rethink and redesign" (Wagner, et al., 2006, p. 1). Wagner recommends looking at the whole system or a "perceived whole whose elements 'hang together' because they continually affect each other over time and operate toward a common purpose" (Wagner, et al., 2006, p. 97).

If student engagement is to be increased in the classroom it was important to review the instruction that is taking place in the system, or in this case the school. It was important to be "thinking systemically about the challenges and goals of change in schools and districts, the 4 C's – competency, conditions, culture, and context" (Wagner,

et al., 2006, p. 98). This change plan looked at how each of these areas has an effect on improving instruction in the classroom in order to increase student engagement. We need to look at the school as a system “in which many interrelated features together produce results” (Wagner, et al., 2006, p. 123).

As a result of analyzing change, it will be important for teachers to understand what high student engagement looks like and the instructional strategies that promote these high levels of engagement. Professional development on instructional strategies will be necessary for teachers. Time for teachers to visit other classrooms may also be necessary in order for teachers to observe what classroom instruction looks like in which a great percentage of students are highly engaged.

Teachers and administrators will also need to be trained in the walk-through method used with the Instructional Practices Inventory. Teachers need to understand the background of this instrument and how it measures student engagement. Teachers need to know what types of activities teachers need to plan in order to ensure high student engagement in the classroom.

Another method that teachers and administrators will need to be familiar with is the instructional rounds process. “The rounds process is an adaptation and extension of the medical rounds model, which is used routinely in medical schools and teaching hospitals to develop the diagnostic and treatment practice of physicians” (City, et al., 2010, p. 3). While medical rounds includes a medical team that “visit patients, observe and discuss the evidence for diagnoses, and, after a thorough analysis of the evidence, discuss possible treatments” (City, et al., 2010, p. 3), an instructional round would involve educators at all levels of practice – district administration, school administration,



and teachers – that “work together to solve common problems and to improve their practice” (City, et al., 2010, p. 3).

### Demographics

The focus of this evaluation was at the middle school level reviewing the level of student engagement of middle school students enrolled at Judson Junior High School located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago, IL. There are approximately 543 students at Judson Junior High School. The make-up of the students is 39.6 % White, 38.3% Hispanic, 6.9% African American, 12.9% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, and 2.1% Multiracial. They come from diverse socio-economic background with 46.9% Low-Income. 17.8% are Limited English Proficient students and 12.1% of the students have Individualized Education Plans.

## CHAPTER TWO: ASSESSING THE FOUR C'S

The goal of this change plan was to improve student engagement in the classroom. As I evaluated this topic, it was my intent to review how Tony Wagner's four areas of change – context, culture, conditions, and competencies – impacted the goal (Wagner, 2006, p. 98). These four areas play an important role in the way in which the change occurs and how it affects the stakeholders.

The first area that played a part in the change process was the context. One area that impacts the improvement of student engagement in the classroom is high student achievement. The vision of Judson Junior High School is to ensure that there is high student achievement. Teachers and administrators place high expectations on the students. Students and teachers measure their progress throughout the school year by setting goals and monitoring them throughout the school year. Teachers plan lessons that challenge students to their fullest potential. In order to do this, teachers review students' goals and assessment results in order to plan instruction that promotes high student achievement.

Judson Junior High School is also known for being child-centered. Teachers work closely with each of their students and get to know them in order to provide an education path that meets their needs. In order to do this, teachers progress-monitor their students and conference with them on a regular basis. Teachers also plan activities where the students are in charge of their own learning and that allows time for the teacher to monitor student learning in the classroom.

Another positive factor in the area of context was that there was collaboration between the teachers and the administration. Regular meetings and planning

opportunities take place on a regular basis. Teachers meet with grade level teams and their administrator on a daily basis to discuss instruction and student achievement. Teachers also plan in conjunction with the administration the topics that are covered at professional development sessions and faculty meetings. Teachers and administrators work together to ensure the success of all students and high achievement.

One factor that was a challenge in this section was increasing parent involvement in the education of their child. While some parents regularly collaborate with the staff to support their child, there are still many that are not involved. This is challenging because these parents have children in school that could benefit from their support at home on their schoolwork. Many times it is even challenging for staff to communicate with these parents or find a time to schedule a meeting to discuss the progress of their child.

A second area that impacted the improvement of student engagement in the classroom was culture. Judson Junior High School boasts a culture of high expectations for students. This culture is framed around the vision of the school. The mission of Judson Junior High School is to provide quality student learning for high student achievement through a child-centered, teamed teaching structure. Administration and teachers work together to ensure that this shows through in instruction on a daily basis.

Another factor that worked in favor of the school's culture was the district's support of a new initiative called Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI). "The primary purpose of IPI was to develop a school-wide picture of student learning practices that could serve as the basis for faculty reflection and instruction improvement" (Valentine, 2010, p.1). The district administrators, school administrators, and teachers were all working with each other to learn about the protocol and the information that can be

obtained from utilizing the protocol. The district had begun sending teachers and administrators to workshops to learn about the process and how it can be used to benefit instruction for our students.

Since this had been introduced at the building level, there has been great interest shown by the teachers in learning about the process. Teachers had volunteered to attend the IPI workshops that had been held throughout the school year and others had expressed interest in attending future workshops. Teachers wanted to know how this tool could assist them in improving student engagement in the classroom. It had also sparked interest in teachers to review their lessons and revise them to ensure that students are highly engaged during instruction.

The first IPI walkthroughs were conducted in January 2012. The walkthroughs were announced to staff a few days prior to their commencement. Both teachers and administrators took part in the process of observing classroom instruction for three periods. During the process, most teachers were not hesitant to have administrators and their colleagues in the classroom. Teachers were accustomed to having administrators in the classroom because they are observed formally and informally on a regular basis.

While high expectations are the norm and visitors are welcome in the classroom, there were still some challenges that need to be taken into consideration. First of all, while many teachers were interested in improving student engagement in the classroom, there were others that may not always plan instruction that is engaging for students. They may plan engaging lessons when necessary but once administrators or visitors leave they continue to implement lessons that do not engage all students.

Another aspect to take into consideration was that teachers do not have the opportunity to observe the instruction of their peers. Teachers do not have time set aside in their schedules to observe what their colleagues are doing to engage students. They discuss it at meetings but do not physically enter the classroom to observe. The only teachers that take the opportunity to observe a colleague are new teachers that take part in the mentoring program in the district. These teachers have the opportunity to observe their mentor twice throughout the school year and the mentor can also observe his or her mentee.

A final factor in this area was that teachers had become accustomed to sending students to the office for off-task behavior. If a student was not engaged in their learning, they were sent to the office to work for the rest of the class period. This had become part of the culture at James Junior High School. This did not happen with all teachers but it did occur on a regular basis with a handful of teachers.

“Conditions are the external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 101). One factor that was an asset in this area was the fact that professional development was available for teachers and administrators. This past school year, teachers and administrators at all three junior high schools and district administrators participated in professional development workshops pertaining to the IPI protocol. Additional teachers would have the opportunity to attend workshops as opportunities became available.

Professional development had also begun to occur during team planning times. Teachers had the opportunity to learn about the IPI process and had begun analyzing data as a result of the classroom walkthroughs. Teachers had discussed the results of the

walkthroughs and had begun talking about how student engagement can be improved in the classroom.

With the IPI process, teachers also had the opportunity to observe their colleagues during the walkthroughs. Generally, it was the administration that conducted classroom walkthroughs throughout the school year. With this process, teachers were also able to observe the instruction that is taking place in the classroom and determine if the students are engaged in the classroom instruction. Teachers were also able to have conversations about the engaging instruction that is taking place in classrooms throughout the school building.

A challenge in this area was that in order for the IPI process to be effective, more teachers needed to be trained in how to recognize high levels of student engagement. Currently there were about fifteen teachers across the three grade levels and all content areas that were trained in IPI. While there were a handful of teachers that are trained, most teachers have not attended the workshops.

Another challenge in this area was that teachers and administrators needed to have a clear understanding about what student engagement looks like. In order for this protocol to work effectively to improve instruction, all stakeholders needed to be using the same language. When entering a classroom, all observers needed to know what high student engagement looked like and also know how to analyze current instructional practices to determine if revision is necessary to increase student engagement.

The final area that guided improved instructional practices in the classroom was competency. Currently, IPI was being implemented into Judson Junior High School to improve instruction. Teachers and administrators were observing each classroom teacher

multiple times throughout the school year to determine if students were highly engaged in classroom instruction.

As the IPI protocol had been implemented, there had been open communication between administrators and teachers. Teachers had learned about this protocol during team planning times and faculty meetings. Teachers that had already been trained in this protocol had also discussed what they had learned about the process during common planning times.

The data available after the classroom walkthroughs had also been analyzed to measure the level of student engagement at the school. Walkthroughs took place in January and April of 2012. Teachers and administrators compared the data from these dates to determine if any improvement had been made with student engagement.

Currently, not all teachers had been trained in the IPI protocol and this presented a challenge with planning instruction. Teachers needed to recognize what high levels of student engagement looked like in order to being to plan. Teachers could not plan lessons to improve student engagement in the classroom if they did not know what it looked like.

Finally, teachers had not had a lot of time to review the IPI data. Teachers were still learning about the IPI protocol and needed to understand that first before they could fully analyze the data generated from the walkthroughs. Teachers needed to have time to understand how this data related with assessment data that was collected as students were monitored on their progress throughout the school year.

### CHAPTER THREE: PERSONAL IMMUNITIES TO CHANGE

Student engagement will increase when quality instructional practices are delivered on a consistent basis. To ensure that instruction was meeting the needs of the students, it was important for administrators to visit and observe classrooms on a regular basis. As an administrator, I need to make a commitment to visit classes more often to see the instruction that is taking place. The evaluation framework that is in place in the district allows for ample opportunities to visit the classrooms.

With the framework, I am committed to observing pre-tenured teachers formally two or three times throughout the school year. The tenured teachers are observed formally a minimum of one time every other school year. With each formal observation, a pre-conference is scheduled to discuss the lesson objective. It is an opportunity to also learn about the area(s) that a teacher may need support on and would like an administrator to observe. After the classroom observation, a post-conference is scheduled to review the lesson and have a conversation on the areas that are going well and areas that may need to be improved.

Informal classroom observations are also what I am committed to scheduling throughout the school year. Pre-tenured teachers are observed informally minimally once during the year while tenured teachers are observed minimally twice during their evaluation cycle year. There is no minimum informal observation requirement for “off cycle” tenured teachers.

I am fortunate that the district has provided a structured evaluation plan for teachers with classroom observation requirements. It is an integral tool in keeping me on track to ensuring that I am in the classrooms and observing the instruction that is taking



place. While the tool provides expectations for classroom observations, it is my goal to visit classrooms informally more often. As an instructional leader it is my belief that if I am in the classrooms consistently, I will have a better picture of what is taking place instructionally. It also allows me to meet with the teachers on a regular basis and have a conversation on the informal observation. These conversations become meaningful to both the teacher and myself because the teacher knows that he or she will receive assistance throughout the year and I will understand how I can support the teachers.

With my commitment to visiting classrooms more often, I also need to review what is impeding me from doing so as often as I would like. One task that impedes me from observing teachers is getting caught up with paper or office work. During the school day it is quite common to be working with students that are sent to the office. Assisting and mentoring students throughout the school day can take up a significant amount of time. Along with this comes paper work that needs to be filled out or entered into the computer in order to document a student meeting.

Other office tasks that interfere with observing classrooms is registering new students, meeting with parents, or translating for families when necessary. These are all integral parts of my job that need to be scheduled in a different fashion in order to allow me to complete classroom observations. It is important for me to schedule blocks of time during my day to observe instruction in order to do so on a regular basis. If time is not allotted in my schedule, chances are it may be overlooked for those tasks that come up during the school day.

Another area I need to reassess is the number of times that I visit pre-tenured and tenured teachers. Since many of the pre-tenured teachers are new to the field or have

only been in it a short amount of time, I tend to focus my classroom visits on these teachers. Upon reviewing the number of observations I completed during the past school year, the number of times that I visited pre-tenured teachers' classrooms outnumbered the number of times that I visited tenured teachers' classrooms.

While pre-tenured teachers may need support on implementing instructional strategies or classroom management with ease, tenured teachers may also be facing these same obstacles but may be more reticent about seeking support. Instructional strategies or initiatives that are being implemented into the district for the first time are new to all teachers – old and new. As an instructional leader, I need to dedicate the appropriate amount of time to all teachers to ensure that the strategies are being implemented correctly and that the initiative is being followed with fidelity.

A pre-tenured teacher may also feel more confident to ask his or her mentor or the evaluator for support in the classroom. With the post-conferences, the areas of focus are discussed in a non-threatening manner and the teacher is able to receive the assistance he or she needs. A tenured teacher may not always be as direct in seeking assistance. If support is necessary, the only manner in which the evaluator will know is if he or she is in the classroom. It is imperative for me to ensure that I am visiting and supporting tenured teachers as much as pre-tenured.

As I work towards keeping my commitment to visiting classrooms on a more consistent basis, I also need to keep in mind the commitments that are hidden or competing with what I am aiming to accomplish. For example, I fear how the staff will react to the tough conversations that may come up during the post-conferences. I fear how this will affect the relationship I have with the teachers in the building. I also ponder

how this may affect the manner in which we work in teams to plan and meet the needs of our students. It is my intention to build stronger relationships with the increase of meetings with the teachers but I also need to understand how the teachers are feeling about the process and how they may react to the outcome of the instructional conversations.

Another hidden commitment is that I fear the amount of work it may take to act upon my findings in the classroom. If I am in the classrooms more often, I may find more instructional practices or strategies that are not working well and need to be addressed. I may have to plan more time to meet with teachers to support them in their practice in addition to completing the observations and conferences that are required for the district evaluation framework. This will also require a commitment on the part of the teacher to schedule time to discuss instruction and plan goals to address any issues.

A final commitment that may compete with increasing the amount of time I spend in the classrooms is determining how much support I will receive to more teachers to improve their practice. Professional development will aid in assisting teachers grow in their practice, but time will need to be devoted to ensuring that teachers receive it. Additionally, some professional development requires a financial commitment. If the finances are not available to commit to professional development, other options will need to be sought in order to support the teacher. Professional development could be facilitated during team planning time by the administrators, but the question looms as to whether I will have the expertise to support the teachers or whether I may need to be trained first in order to assist.

The big assumption I hold regarding my immunity to change is that student engagement will be high if teachers implement higher-order thinking activities and differentiate their instruction. If all teachers are consistently implementing critical thinking activities, there is no worry that students will be engaged at all times during instruction and will not be sent out of the classroom to the office. It is difficult to predict if this will happen consistently in all of the classrooms. Teachers may plan these activities some of the times, but whether they are taking place regularly is uncertain. In order to ensure that this is taking place, I will need to conduct classroom walkthroughs and use the IPI rubric to determine the level of student engagement.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design Overview

This change plan determined ways to increase student engagement in the middle school classroom. A quantitative research design was used for this change plan.

Classroom walkthroughs were conducted three times during the school year using the Instructional Practices Inventory rubric to measure the level of engagement in the classroom. All classrooms were visited during a three-hour time frame.

There were six levels of student engagement that teachers and administrators would seek to observe during the classroom walk-through. “Three broad categories associated with student learning were identified that might serve as the foundation for the IPI. They were characterized as student-engaged instruction, teacher-directed instruction, and student disengagement” (Valentine, 2005, p. 3). The highest level of engagement with a rating of six was student active engaged learning. The next rating of five was student-learning conversations. “Student active engaged learning includes research, hands-on and authentic instruction, problem-based learning, cooperative learning, and other types of engaged learning when the instruction engages students in higher-order thinking. Student learning conversations is a specific type of higher-order learning experience coded when students are constructing knowledge through student-to-student talk” (Valentine, 2005, p. 4).

“A significant amount of learning can occur when teachers work directly with students in learning experiences commonly referred to as teacher-directed instruction” (Valentine, 2005, p. 4). A rating of four went with teacher-led instruction. Student work with the teacher engaged received a rating of three. “Teacher-led instruction forms the

broadest, most common grouping of learning experiences, including most forms of teacher talk, lecture, and direction-giving. Student work with the teacher engaged includes teacher-supported learning experiences such as worksheets or other written activities that do not engage students in higher-order thought” (Valentine, 2005, p. 4).

“The IPI concludes with two coding categories affiliated with the concept of disengagement: ‘Student Work with Teacher not Engaged,’ and ‘Student Disengagement’” (Valentine, 2005, p. 4). A rating of two was student work with the teacher not engaged. The lowest rating of one applied to complete disengagement.

“Student work with the teacher not engaged is essentially the same as student work with teacher engaged except that the teacher is not providing support or being attentive to the students’ learning. Student disengagement categorizes instances when students are not engaged in learning associated with the curriculum” (Valentine, 2005, p. 4).

“Data collected and profiled must be consistently accurate per the coding categories. If not, then the reflections, goals, and professional development based upon the data might foster inappropriate changes in instruction or programs” (Valentine, 2005, p. 5). The data gathered using the rubric from the classroom walkthroughs gave teachers and administrators a clear view of the type of instruction that was taking place in the classroom. “To obtain valid and reliable data for faculty analysis and decision making, the procedures used to collect the IPI data must be consistent within each data collection and across different data collections” (Valentine, 2005, p. 6).

It was clear the percentage of time that students are engaged during instructional activities and the amount of time that students are completely disengaged. This data also revealed how much of the instruction was teacher-led and how much time students spent

actively discussing the instructional topic with the teacher as facilitator. It also revealed how much time the teacher was engaged during instruction and how much time he or she was disengaged.

Upon reviewing the data there was an urgency to address the amount of time that students were disengaged in classroom activities. Teachers and administrators would have to review how much time students were not engaged and determine how to change the instruction in the classroom so that students were actively participating in the activities. Teachers and administrators would have to set aside time to revise the activities that were being implemented in the classroom that were not engaging students. Utilizing teacher plan time to collaborate on revising lesson plans was a necessary next step in increasing student engagement in the middle school classroom.

#### Participants

The participants in this study were the teachers and students at Judson Junior High School located in a northwest suburban school district approximately 20 miles from Chicago. There are 543 students and teachers in the school. The teachers in the school district are 86.9% female and 13.1% male. According to the 2012 Illinois Interactive School Report Card, 91.4% of the teachers are White, 0.2% of the teachers are African-American, 5.8% are Hispanic, 0% are Asian, 0% are American Indian, and 0.4% are Multiracial. 16.4% of the teachers have Bachelor's degrees and 83.6% have Master's degrees. The average teaching experience of the teachers is 13.3 years.

Classroom walkthroughs took place three times throughout the school year during a three-hour block of time. A group of teachers and administrators trained in using the Instructional Practices Inventory rubric conducted the walk-throughs together. The

students that were in the classrooms are in grades six through eight. There are approximately 543 students at Judson Junior High School. The make-up of the students is 39.6 % White, 38.3% Hispanic, 6.9% African American, 12.9% Asian, 0.2% American Indian, and 2.1% Multiracial. They come from diverse socio-economic background with 46.9% Low-Income. 17.8% are Limited English Proficient students and 12.1% of the students have Individualized Education Plans. The data from the *Instructional Practices Inventory* was reviewed and discussed by the teachers and administrators in relation to the type of instruction and engagement in the classroom.

#### Data Collection Techniques

Data was gathered from the results of the data collected using the Instructional Practices Inventory rubric. I chose Judson Junior High School to conduct my research study because it was located in the district I work. In order to begin the research study, I contacted the assistant superintendent of the district and explained the basis of my study. I explained the purpose of reviewing the data collected from the IPI classroom walkthroughs. I clarified that my intention in reviewing the data was to determine the current level of student engagement in the classroom.

The classroom walkthroughs took place in January, April and October of the 2012-2013 school year. Three building administrators, three classroom teachers, and two or three district administrators participated in the classroom walkthroughs. Prior to beginning the walkthroughs, the observation team of teachers and administrator met to review the rubric and split up into smaller groups of three to observe the classrooms. A school map was numbered and each of the four small groups was assigned a starting point in the building. As the teams walked through the classrooms, they followed the



map in numerical order so there were not too many observers in the classroom at one time.

“A data collection should include at least 100 observations and preferably 130-150 observations. Data are commonly collected throughout a “typical” school day and represent a proportionate sampling of learning experiences from all learning settings (classrooms)” (Valentine, 2005, p. 6). Data was also reviewed by the team in order to ensure inter-rater reliability. “Participants’ codes for the learning scenarios are determined independently and then shared with all other participants” (Valentine, 2005, p. 7).

Teams began observing five minutes into the class period to ensure that there was ample time for the teacher to manage classroom tasks and begin the lesson. Teams spent approximately two to three minutes in each classroom observing the level of engagement in the classroom. They rated the level of engagement at the moment they entered the classroom. Some observers may have asked the students what they were doing in order to clarify the level of engagement. Observers used the level of engagement for the majority of students in the classroom. The teams stopped the walkthroughs five minutes before the end of the class period. This allowed time for the teachers to conclude their lessons before the start of the next class period.

All four teams reconvened at the end of the first period. One administrator tallied the ratings from each of the teams and noted the ratings on a spreadsheet. This information was used to calculate the level of engagement of students in the classroom. During this time, team members also debriefed the observations and asked for

clarification on ratings. This process was repeated two more times during the course of the three-hour period.

The IPI rubric (*Instructional Practices Inventory*) was used to gather data on the level of student engagement in the classroom. Validity and reliability of the tool were important to this research. “High validity means the data collector is accurately coding the classroom engagement observations per the six categories” (Valentine, 2005, p. 7). The team had to ensure that they were collecting the data and accurately assigned a rating to the level of engagement. “Reliability is the data collector’s accuracy across multiple similar observations over time” (Valentine, 2005, p. 7). The observations took place over the same time period three times throughout the year. I reviewed the data from the IPI rubric to determine the percentage of time that students were engaged in classroom activities. The IPI rubric also identified the level of teacher engagement or disengagement in the classroom.

#### Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected during the IPI walkthroughs was used to develop themes in regards to the percentage of time that students were engaged or disengaged in classroom instruction and the types of activities that kept students engaged in classroom activities. I reviewed the data to see what similarities and differences are present within the grade levels.

The data was used to determine the steps that could be taken to increase the level of student engagement in the middle school classroom. The strategies were shared with the teachers and implemented in order to begin decreasing the number of students that

were sent to the office for off-task behaviors and increase the number of students engaged in classroom instruction.

## CHAPTER FIVE: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

The goal of this change plan was to improve student engagement in the classroom. “Most recent studies of student engagement treat it as a predictor of academic achievement, inferring that being disengaged, or disaffected from school, causes poor academic achievement. However, the theoretical literature argues that it is low achievement that causes students to withdraw from school, or that engagement and academic achievement go hand-in-hand” (Williams, 2003, p. 9).

This review defines student engagement and what it looks like in the middle school classroom. The instructional strategies that play a role in improving student engagement are also be addressed as well as ways educators can increase student engagement. Once effective teaching strategies have been identified, it is imperative that the level of engagement is measured.

### Student Engagement

Student engagement is a term that presents itself in schools each and every day. Teachers and administrators refer to student engagement when they review the lessons and instructional strategies that are utilized to instruct students each and every day. “Researchers have recently used the term engagement to refer to the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, and participate in academic and non-academic school activities. Its definition usually comprises a psychological component pertaining to students’ sense of belonging at school and acceptance of school values, and a behavioral component pertaining to participation in school activities” (Williams, 2003, p. 8). Some students do not feel part of the school environment and

choose to avoid participating in every day school activities.

When we observe or discuss how students participate in the classroom, we refer to the manner in which they are engaged in an activity. “The term student engagement is used in the broad sense to refer to students’ attitudes towards schooling and their participation in school activities. The term disengaged from school is used to characterize students who do not feel they belong at school and have withdrawn from school activities in a significant way” (Williams, p. 8). Effective schools focus on certain factors to maximize student engagement. “The important drivers of student engagement are teacher-student relations, high expectations for success and a positive disciplinary climate” (Costante, 2011, p. 4).

It is important for educators to ensure that students are engaged in their education on a daily basis. “We know that students who are engaged in the life of the school, engaged in their own learning, and engaged by what and how they are learning are far less likely to fall through the cracks” (Costante, 2011, p. 1). Engaged learning will also benefit “struggling learners who make up some 25 percent of the student population” (Costante, 2011, p. 1). The more times that a student is engaged in his or her learning, the more successful he or she will be in the classroom.

Although student engagement implies the manner in which a student is engaged, it is also necessary for the instructor to provide ample opportunities in the classroom for the students to participate. “High student engagement is not simply a result of ‘good students.’ Classroom engagement is the result of many elements such as building relationships, reflecting on grading and rewards, committing to guiding principles, routines and procedures, developing foundation skills, design for rigor and relevance,

personalized learning, active learning strategies, literacy focus, and a stimulation classroom environment” (Jones, 2008, p. 2). Without instructional activities that allow student participation, it is not possible to promote or increase the level in which a student interacts in the classroom. Teachers also need to get to know their students and build relationships with them in order to sustain a great amount of student engagement.

### Effective Teaching Strategies

The instructional strategies a teacher uses in the classroom plays an important role in a child’s learning. “Teachers who actively engage students use hands-on lessons that require students to use multiple learning skills and higher order thinking to construct meaning and knowledge. Such activities often require students to merge their personal experiences with new concepts and skills. Based on student readiness, interest, or learning profile, teachers may also provide differentiated instruction by adjusting the content, process, required products, or learning environment to accommodate variance among learners” (Richards, 2005, p. 2). Teachers need to get to know their students and understand their background. This is essential in order to appropriately provide the necessary accommodations that ensure success and engagement in the classroom.

This type of learning highly contrasts the passive learning that Paulo Freire mentions has filled many classrooms through the years. In the past, teachers deposited information into students as they listened passively in the classroom (Freire, 2005, p. 72). Today’s students are presented with active instructional strategies that “have been associated with increased student achievement: higher order thinking, cooperative learning, and independent practice/homework” (Richards, 2005, p. 3). “Deeper learning engages the learner who actively explores, reflects, and produces knowledge rather than

recalls and regurgitates” (McGee, 2004, p. 1).

“Bloom’s Taxonomy has provided a foundation for developing learning objectives designed for learners to acquire knowledge, although it was originally thinking are arranged from simple to complex; the taxonomy is built on the assumption that the more complex or higher-level thinking skills are built on the simpler or lower-level thinking skills. The skills at the top of the hierarchy have come to be thought of as higher-level thinking skills and those lower in the hierarchy have come to be thought of as lower-level thinking skills” (Kagan, 2005, p. 1). The order begins with the simplest skills of creating and continues up the hierarchy with evaluation, analyzing, applying, understanding and remembering.

Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching is another tool used in relation to effective instructional strategies. “The framework for teaching identifies those aspects of a teacher’s responsibilities that have been documented through empirical studies and theoretical research as promoting student learning” (Danielson, 2007, p. 1). The framework is divided into “four domains of teaching responsibility. The domains are Planning and Preparation (Domain 1), The Classroom Environment (Domain 2), Instruction (Domain 3), and Professional Responsibilities (Domain 4)” (Danielson, 2007, p. 1). There are 22 components embedded within each of the four domains.

The Danielson Framework is based on the ideas of constructivism. “Teachers who embrace a constructivist orientation understand that they are the adults and that they, together with their colleagues and in line with state standards, determine what students will learn. Constructivism recognizes that, for all human beings – adults as well as children – it is the learner who does the learning. People’s understanding of any concept

depends entirely on their experience in deriving that concept for themselves” (Danielson, 2007, p. 15). According to Danielson, “Creating an environment in which students take responsibility not only for their own learning but also for that of their classmates might, in some situations, represent a considerable departure from past practice” (Danielson, 2007, p. 38).

### Increasing Student Engagement

“All members of the school community can join forces to develop school-wide practices that cultivate student engagement beliefs, values, feelings, motivation, behavioral habits, and skills that are at the crux of high levels of student engagement” (Jones, 2008, p. 1). One way in which teachers can promote student engagement in their classrooms is to “begin every activity with a task that 95 percent of the class can do without their help” (DeFrondeville, 2009, p. 1).

“It is easy to observe the lack of student engagement when students are slouched in their chairs and not listening to the teacher or participating in the discussion. Many teachers who constantly see disengaged students put the burden on the student and lament that they could be better teachers and have better results if they had the opportunity to work with a ‘better’ group of students” (Jones, 2008, p. 2). Instead of focusing on wishes or what could be, teachers and school leaders need to begin building a strong foundation of student engagement by analyzing who the stakeholders are in their school and working with them.

Another way to promote student engagement is to build a relationship with the students. “Most students will not do their best in classes when they feel that teachers do not have an interest in them or care about their future. Students can sense whether the



teacher cares or is simply ‘going through the motions’” (Jones, 2008, p. 2). The classroom environment is also a critical aspect in terms of student engagement. “Classrooms need to be physically comfortable and mentally stimulating” (Jones, 2008, p. 3).

Teachers can increase student engagement in the manner they plan and execute their lessons. “To anticipate that each student will learn in the same way, at the same speed, and using the same material is an unrealistic expectation. Teachers can create a more engaging classroom situation by getting to know their students and using examples. Students invest more of themselves, work harder, and learn better when the topic is interesting and connected to something that they already know” (Jones, 2008, p. 5).

#### Measuring Engagement

“A key to increasing student engagement is finding efficient ways to measure it. When something is measured, summarized, and reported, it becomes important, and people pay attention. The quest for student engagement must be conducted in the context of a comprehensive data system for measuring student learning” (Jones, 2008, p. 23). Two ways to measure student engagement are conducting classroom walkthroughs and utilizing the Instructional Practices Inventory process.

“The walk-through can be defined as a brief, structured, non-evaluative classroom observation by the principal that is followed by a conversation between the principal and the teacher about what was observed” (CSRI, 2007). “The walk-through is designed to increase the number of classrooms that principals visit, so brevity is a must” (CSRI, 2007). “The evidence collected from a classroom walk-through can drive a cycle of improvement by focusing on the effects of instruction. Classroom walkthroughs enable

teachers to get to the heart of what students are doing and understanding in a different and holistic way” (Cervone & Martinez-Miller, 2007, p. 1).

“If walkthroughs are going to improve teaching and learning, feedback to teachers is essential” (Kachur, 2011, p. 3). The feedback given to teachers can be written or oral. “As much as school administrators are involved in conducting walkthroughs, classroom teachers can also be involved as participants visiting colleagues’ classrooms. Teachers need follow-up and support, not only from those who supervise them, but also from their peers” (Kachur, 2011, p. 3). A final element that is critical with classroom walk-through is trust. “Teachers need to see and believe that walkthroughs are supportive, not threatening. When teachers are not merely informed, but actively invited and involved in the design, participation, and evaluation of any walk-through strategy, trust is more likely to be evident” (Kachur, 2011, p. 3).

A second way to measure student engagement involves the use of the Instructional Practices Inventory. “The Instructional Practices Inventory process is a set of strategies for profiling student engagement on six categories so faculty who study the profiles will view the data as a fair and accurate representation of engagement across the school and thus be comfortable collaboratively studying and problem solving the data and creating a sustained focus on student engagement that will influence student learning. In the IPI process, teachers collect data about school-wide engagement, teachers facilitate the study of the data, and teachers have the opportunity to apply their knowledge from that study in their respective classrooms” (Valentine, 2010, p. 1). Jerry Valentine a professor at the University of Missouri and his graduate assistant Bryan Painter developed the IPI in 1995.

When using the IPI, “observations must take place on ‘typical’ school days where there are no unusual circumstances occurring that would disrupt the normalcy of the data, such as field trips, assemblies, flu epidemics, etc. Most observations last from one to three minutes in length” (Valentine, 2005, p. 6). The walkthroughs are meant for observers to gather a snapshot of student engagement. “A typical observation day will result in approximately 125-150 observations, with a minimum of 100 observations expected” (Valentine, 2005, p. 6).

According to Valentine, “The more frequent the collaborative study and problem solving and the more the faculty’s study relates directly to classroom instruction and learning, the greater the impact on student achievement. Maximizing student achievement across a school’s student population requires more than an increase in engagement, an increase in higher-order, deeper learning, and meaningful faculty collaborative study” (Valentine, 2010, p. 1).

The implementation of instructional rounds is another way teachers and administrators can review and measure the level of engagement in the classroom. “The rounds process is an explicit practice that is designed to bring discussions of instruction directly into the process of school improvement” (City, et al., 2010, p. 3). Teachers and administrators form a “network” that works together to observe the instructional strategies taking place in the classroom and make recommendations for school improvement based on the classroom observations.

The network can help others learn from the observations made in the classroom and suggest professional development opportunities that would benefit teachers’ instructional practices. “The rounds process is about creating and modeling a specific set

of ideas about how schools and systems can learn from their own practices, develop a more acute understanding of the next problem they need to solve, and take control of their own learning in ways that are more likely to lead to sustained improvement over time” (City, et al., 2010, p. 10). The instructional rounds promote a collaborative approach to improving student engagement and achievement.

“The process of rounds requires participants to focus on a common problem of practice that cuts across all levels of the system” (City, et al., 2010, p. 5). The team can review classroom instruction to determine which types of strategies best increase student engagement and which practices need to be improved. According to City, “virtually all districts we have worked with have markedly changed their improvement strategies over the course of their work with us, building on the knowledge and shared vision of teaching and learning they have developed through the use of instructional rounds” (City, et al., 2010, p. 5).

## CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The goal of this change plan was to improve student engagement in the classroom. Upon evaluating this topic, it was my intent to review how we can increase the level of student engagement in schools and research the tools we can use to measure engagement. The tool used during this research was the Instructional Practices Inventory. This section will present the findings and interpretations of the research study data. I have summarized the information collected during the data collection using IPI and also analyzed and interpreted the data.

Data was collected during the months of January, April, and October of 2012 (Appendices E, H, & K). All classrooms – core (Math, Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts) and non-core (P.E., Music, Fine and Practical Arts) were visited during a three-class period time frame. During the January visit, 154 core classrooms (Appendix F) were visited and 64 non-core classrooms (Appendix G). In April, 114 core classrooms (Appendix I) were visited and 37 non-core classrooms (Appendix J). During the visit in October, 105 core classrooms (Appendix L) were visited and 45 non-core classrooms (Appendix M).

Student engagement was measured using the six categories on the Instructional Practices Inventory. The first category on the *Instructional Practices Inventory* is *Student Disengagement* in which “students are not engaged in learning directly related to the curriculum” (Valentine, 2010, p. 1). During January and April 2012 there was 11% disengagement in the classrooms. This percentage went down in October 2012 to 3%. Valentine’s typical percentage in this category is 5-10% (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

According to the data collected, there was more disengagement in non-core classes in January (14%) than core classes (9%). The same was true in April 2012 with core at 10% and non-core at 16%. During the month of October, the percentages were 3% for core and 4% for non-core. The decrease in disengagement in October could be the result of teachers having analyzed the January and April data during the previous school year. Adjustments may have been made to maximize instructional time and minimize disengagement. Typical data shows that more than 5% will be seen in core classes and less than 5% in non-core classes. The data at Judson is similar to data in effective schools where the percentage is less than 3% (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Table 1  
*Student Disengagement*

| Type of Class    | January 2012 | April 2012 | October 2012 |
|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Core Classes     | 9%           | 10%        | 3%           |
| Non-Core Classes | 14%          | 16%        | 4%           |
| All Classes      | 11%          | 11%        | 3%           |

The second category of IPI is *Student Work with Teacher not Engaged*. In this category, “the teacher is not attentive to, engaged with, or supportive of the students. The teacher may be out of the room, working at the computer, grading papers, or in some form engaged in work not directly associated with the students’ learning” (Valentine, 2010). Teacher disengagement was at 5% in January 2012, went down to 1% in April 2012 and increased in October 2012 to 4%. Valentine’s typical results show that in middle schools 10-20% of teachers are disengaged (Valentine, 2005, p. 11). Judson is more in line with effective schools in which the percentage of teacher disengagement falls between 5-10% (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

The data shows that teacher disengagement was 5% in both core and non-core classes in January. During the month of April, there was 0% teacher disengagement in core classes and 3% in non-core classes. In October, disengagement went up to 2% in core classes and spiked up to 9% in non-core classes. After analyzing the data, there is more teacher disengagement in non-core classes than core classes. Valentine’s studies show that the percentage in core classes is more than 20% and in non-core classes it is less than 20%. Judson’s percentages lie closer to the more effective schools that range between 5 and 10% (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Table 2  
*Student Work with Teacher not Engaged*

| Type of Class    | January 2012 | April 2012 | October 2012 |
|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Core Classes     | 5%           | 0%         | 2%           |
| Non-Core Classes | 5%           | 3%         | 9%           |
| All Classes      | 5%           | 1%         | 4%           |

*Student Work with Teacher Engaged* is the third IPI category. In this category, “students are engaged in independent or group work designed to build basic understanding, new knowledge, and/or pertinent skills. The teacher is attentive to, engaged with, or supportive of the students. Student higher-order/deeper learning is not evident” (Valentine, 2010, p. 1). The data in January showed 25% engagement, 24% engagement in April, and 43% in October. This data is similar to Valentine’s typical data of 20-30% for middle schools (Valentine, 2005, p.11).

In January there is 30% engagement in core classes and 26% engagement in April. During the month of October, there is 43% engagement in core classes. In the non-core classes, there is 13% engagement in January, 16% in April and 43% in October.

The data shows that there is less higher order learning during the month of October than in January or April. This could be due to the fact that teachers are still working with students to develop these deeper learning skills. According to Valentine’s studies, more than 25% of students are working with the teacher engaged during core classes and less than 25% in non-core classes. The high percentage in October correlates with the less effective schools for non-core classes. Effective schools fall between 15 and 25% (Valentine, 2005, p.11).

Table 3  
*Student Work with Teacher Engaged*

| Type of Class    | January 2012 | April 2012 | October 2012 |
|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Core Classes     | 30%          | 26%        | 43%          |
| Non-Core Classes | 13%          | 16%        | 43%          |
| All Classes      | 25%          | 24%        | 43%          |

The fourth IPI category is *Teacher-Led Instruction*. For this category, “students are attentive to teacher-led instruction as the teacher leads the learning experience by disseminating the appropriate content knowledge and/or directions for learning. Discussion may occur, but instruction and ideas come primarily from the teacher. Student higher order/deeper learning is not evident” (Valentine, 2010, p. 1). In January 28% of the instructional time was teacher-led. During the April visit, 30% was teacher-led and in October 29% was teacher-led. The percentage of time was similar during all three visits. Valentine’s studies indicate that 35-45% of engagement in this category is typical in middle schools and effective schools (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Core classes in January showed teacher-led instruction for 29% of the time and non-core showed 28%. In April teacher-led instruction accounted for 32% of the time for



core classes and 24% for non-core classes. During the October visit, 32% of the instruction was teacher-led in core classes and 22% in non-core classes. Teacher-led instruction was similar for all three visits in core classes. This shows that teachers are consistently teaching students new concepts for one-third of the instructional time. In non-core classes the percentage drops to approximately one-quarter. This may be due to the fact that students are not learning a new concept each day but rather spend a longer time practicing a skill. According to Valentine, core classes are higher than 40% and non-core classes are less than 40% (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Table 4  
*Teacher-Led Instruction*

| Type of Class    | January 2012 | April 2012 | October 2012 |
|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Core Classes     | 29%          | 32%        | 32%          |
| Non-Core Classes | 28%          | 24%        | 22%          |
| All Classes      | 28%          | 30%        | 29%          |

*Student Verbal Learning Conversations* is the fifth IPI category. In this category, “students are engaged in higher-order thinking and developing deeper understanding through analysis, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and/or synthesis. The higher-order/deeper thinking is driven by peer verbal interaction. Conversations may be teacher stimulated but are not teacher dominated” (Valentine, 2010, p. 1). During the months of January and October, only 2% of students engaged in verbal learning conversations. There was an increase in April to 8%. This data is similar to Valentines in which he shows the typical percentage falls between 3 and 5% (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Core classes in January show 3% of the students engaged in conversations as opposed to 0% in non-core classes. During the month of April, there were 8% of the students engaged in conversation and 0% in non-core classes. In October, 2% of the students were conversing in core classes and 2% in non-core classes. The highest percentage of verbal learning conversations took place in April. This could be because teachers have worked with students throughout the school year to develop higher order conversational skills. Verbal learning conversations rarely occur (2%) in non-core classes or are not observed. Students in non-core classes may spend more time engaged in practicing a skill than talking about it. In core classes and effective schools, the typical percentage falls between 5 and 10%. In non-core classes the percentage drops below 5% and that is what the data shows at Judson (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Table 5  
*Student Verbal Learning Conversations*

| Type of Class    | January 2012 | April 2012 | October 2012 |
|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Core Classes     | 3%           | 8%         | 2%           |
| Non-Core Classes | 0%           | 0%         | 2%           |
| All Classes      | 2%           | 8%         | 2%           |

The sixth IPI category is *Student Active Engaged Learning*. In this category, “students are engaged in higher-order thinking and developing deeper understanding through analysis, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, and/or synthesis. Engagement in learning is not driven by verbal interaction with peers, even in a group setting” (Valentine, 2010). In January 29% of the students were actively engaged in higher-order learning and 28% in April. During the October visit, there was 19%.

Typical middle schools are between 15 and 20%. Judson is much higher during January and April (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Core classes in January show 24% of students engaged actively in their learning and 40% in non-core classes. During the April visit, 24% of students in core classes are actively engaged and 41% in non-core classes. In October 18% were engaged in deeper learning in core classes and 20% in non-core classes. The lowest percentage of active student engagement occurred in October. This may have occurred because students are still developing these skills at the beginning of the school year. The percentage is higher during the January and April visits in non-core classes. Student objectives in these classes may lend themselves more readily to discovery or exploratory learning because students may be expected to authentically demonstrate their knowledge more frequently. Typical percentages are less than 15% for core and less than 25% for non-core. Judson's percentages are similar to the percentage for effective schools of less than 25% (Valentine, 2005, p. 11).

Table 6  
*Student Active Engaged Learning*

| Type of Class    | January 2012 | April 2012 | October 2012 |
|------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Core Classes     | 24%          | 24%        | 18%          |
| Non-Core Classes | 40%          | 41%        | 20%          |
| All Classes      | 29%          | 28%        | 19%          |

## CHAPTER SEVEN: A VISION OF SUCCESS

This change plan looked to improve student engagement in the classroom. In order for this change to take place, it was important to review the context, culture, conditions, and competencies (Wagner & Kegan, 2006, p. 98). All of these areas play an important part in realizing change and ensuring a vision of success.

One of the most important areas in context that will enable this plan to be successful will be to ensure that there will be high student achievement and that it will be child-centered. If teachers review data and monitor progress, they can better understand the students in their classroom and design lessons that meet their academic needs. Teachers that review the IPI data that is collected throughout the school year can assess the level of student engagement in their classroom and determine the steps they need to take to increase the level of engagement.

Teachers will also be provided with time to collaborate with their colleagues and also the school administrators. It is important for all building staff to work together in order to promote a context of high student achievement. Teachers and administrators need to continuously set aside time to meet in order to plan for instruction or analyze data in regards to student assessment or engagement. An open and transparent relationship will enable students to be successful and promote a high achieving environment for students.

A challenge that may continue to exist in schools is parent involvement. Parents may not be involved because they are working or because there is a language barrier which causes parents to not feel comfortable in the school environment. The language barrier may also not enable parents to help their children with their schoolwork when

they are at home. Parents may have to depend on the school to ensure that their children are receiving the support they need in order to be successful in school. According to Wagner's research on change, it is important that all adults are involved in a child's education. "A basic assumption is that all adults become responsible for all kids. None of the problems we experience are ours alone" (Wagner, 2006, p. 72).

Culture also plays a role in the success of this change plan. As teachers and administrators work together, they will need to focus on a school-wide plan to ensure high student achievement. Data from local and statewide assessment results will enable staff to determine the strengths and weaknesses within the school and among their students. Teachers will need to continue to work with their grade level teams to provide a sound curriculum for all students on a daily basis.

It is imperative that there is teacher buy-in for the *Instructional Practices Inventory*. The school district will need to continue to support teachers by providing funding for training and allotting time for teachers to meet to review the data regarding student engagement. Ideally the district would provide training or send a group of teachers to training each year until all teachers have been trained to use the protocol.

Once teachers are trained in Valentine's IPI, there will be more opportunities for teachers to take part in classroom walkthroughs. Teachers would be selected on a rotating basis to participate in the walkthroughs that take place three times during the year. An increase in IPI walkthroughs may promote more teachers completing peer observations. Currently, only new teachers and their mentors complete peer observations. Moving forward with IPI may initiate an interest in teachers observing their colleagues and having conversations about instruction.

Increased student engagement not only impacts academics, it also will play a role in behavior. Once the percentage of students actively engaged in classroom instruction increases, the number of students exhibiting off-task behavior will decrease. Students that are engaged will not act out in class or show signs of boredom. The number of students sent to the office for off-task behavior will be less and the behavior data will improve alongside the increase in student achievement.

The conditions that are necessary to improve student engagement in the classroom also need to be reviewed. Teachers will need to continue to be provided professional development opportunities in order to stay current on best practices. IPI training is a necessity but also opportunities for teachers to explore the impact that increased technology may have on student engagement. Professional development could be offered during the school day during the teachers' planning period or team time. Offering workshops at the teachers' school and during the day will enable the school to train all teachers and ensure attendance by all staff. Only offering training outside of school hours will limit the number of teachers that will attend.

Teachers should also be allowed to participate in classroom walkthroughs in order to assist in assessing the level of student engagement at Judson. Teachers that participate in the walkthroughs will have a clearer picture of the type of instruction that is taking place throughout the school building. They will also be able to observe the types of instructional strategies that are being implemented. Many of these strategies could be shared with teachers during team planning or faculty meetings.

As more teachers are trained in IPI, there will be a large percentage of teachers that will understand and know what high student engagement looks like. They will have

a clearer view of the types of activities that promote deeper learning and ensure active engagement. Teachers will be able to share these ideas with their colleagues and have a clearer picture of what exemplary lessons look like.

The final area that needs to be considered is competencies. Open communication between teachers and administrators will need to continue in order to discuss instructional strategies and future initiatives. IPI is one tool that could be used in order to improve instruction. Data is readily available and teachers can begin to analyze the results of the walk-through to promote high student achievement. Teachers might also consider reviewing Bloom's Taxonomy, cooperative learning, and technology in order to incorporate these into their daily lessons.

It is important that time be allotted for teachers and administrators to review the IPI data and review the levels of engagement in core and non-core classes. Teachers can review the data and discuss the results with their colleagues to determine what instructional strategies can be implemented in order to increase the engagement and promote higher-level learning. Teachers need to look for trends in the IPI data from year to year and between each walkthrough. Conversations will need to take place to determine why the data looks the way it does and what the teachers can plan in order to increase student engagement.

Providing a common plan time for teachers to plan together and/or analyze data together is a necessity in order for success to take place. Teachers are more apt to work together when time is allotted for individuals to work together. Teachers at the middle school level teacher at different times of the day that without a common planning time, it may prove to be difficult to work with another staff member to plan an instructional

lesson. A common plan time will also give staff the time to plan long-range projects that promote deeper learning and higher-order thinking.



## CHAPTER EIGHT: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CHANGE

“High levels of student engagement are important indicators of student learning and reflect high levels of student motivation and commitment” (Danielson, 2009, p. 56). If students are not highly engaged, they tune out and misbehavior is apt to occur. “When students are not engaged, they may be bored, particularly if they are asked to complete what they regard as meaningless exercises, filling in the blanks on a worksheet, or answering low level questions at the end of a chapter in a textbook. Lack of student engagement can lead to other undesirable consequences, of course, such as running around the room or taunting the teacher or classmates” (Danielson, 2009, p. 56).

The first step that needs to take place in order to increase the level of student engagement is to observe classrooms and measure the current level of student engagement in the classroom. The *Instructional Practices Inventory* is one tool that can be utilized to measure the current level of engagement. “The primary purpose of the IPI is to develop a school-wide picture of student learning practices that could serve as the basis for faculty reflection and instructional improvement” (Valentine, 2005, p. 2). During my research, teachers and administrators had the opportunity to observe classrooms and the instructional strategies that were being utilized to engage students. After the classroom visits, teachers and administrators had the opportunity to discuss the strategies that scored high and the types of activities that increased the level of engagement.

Before the IPI is introduced in the school, it is important that the district provide professional development for teachers and administrators on the Instructional Practices Inventory process. “While developing a level of awareness about the instructional

experiences is important, establishing purposeful professional development and continuous conversations is also important for significant change in teaching practices” (Valentine, 2010, p. 4). As more and more teachers experience the IPI training, they will have a better understanding of the tool and how to utilize it. They will also understand the importance of in terms of measuring student engagement. The teachers that had the opportunity to participate in the IPI walk through were able to experience first hand the instructional strategies being utilized in classrooms in which student engagement was high.

Teachers and administrators will need to be registered for the IPI workshop and training. The workshop is offered various times during the school year so it is important for district administrators to schedule staff for the training. “Numerous strategies will be shared for engaging teachers in the process of data analysis that can lead to faculty commitment to periodically collect and study the data, set goals for engaged learning, and identify and design professional development to meet these goals” (Valentine, 2010, p. 4). Once teachers have had the opportunity to attend the training, they will be able to participate in the IPI walkthroughs. The teachers that had prior training in the IPI process were able to experience the walkthrough during the research had a better understanding of what high levels of student engagement looked like and could determine ways to tweak a lesson in order to increase engagement.

After teachers and administrators are trained in IPI, walkthroughs need to be conducted to analyze levels of engagement. “Periodic data collection and analysis are important. Some schools collect data annually, most do so each semester, some do so quarterly, and a few collect it monthly” (Valentine, 2005, p. 10). A plan for Judson

would be to implement the IPI walkthroughs minimally once each quarter. “All faculty members should be involved in the processes of analysis, reflection, and problem-solving” (Valentine, 2005, p. 7). The more staff members that have an opportunity to participate in the walkthrough and the more frequently it occurs, the more buy-in and understanding there will be among the teachers.

Implementing instructional rounds would be another avenue to visit in terms of improving student engagement in the classroom. “Instructional rounds sit at the intersection of three current popular approaches to the improvement of teaching and learning – walkthroughs, networks, and district improvement strategies. The idea behind instructional rounds is that everyone involved is working on their practice, everyone is obliged to be knowledgeable about the common task of instructional improvement, and everyone’s practice should be subject to scrutiny, critique, and improvement” (City, et al., 2010, p. 5). With the implementation of instructional rounds, teachers and administrators would have the opportunity to continuously participate in school walkthroughs and conversations related to instructional improvement.

“In rounds networks, colleagues (superintendents, central office personnel, teachers union leaders, professional developers, principals and teachers) gather regularly to engage in and develop the practice of rounds together, over time developing a community of practice that supports their improvement work. The process of rounds requires participants to focus on a common problem of practice that cuts across all levels of the system” (City, et al., 2010, p. 5). While the IPI walkthroughs focus on student engagement, teachers and administrators participating in rounds would be able to hone in

on best practice instructional strategies that would ensure student engagement and high student achievement.

“Rounds is a four-step process identifying a problem of practice (the specific problem of instructional improvement that the school and school system are wrestling with and would like the network’s feedback on), observing, debriefing, and focusing on the next level of work” (City, et al., 2010, p. 6). The school could focus on the issue of student engagement and use the rounds to determine the steps that would need to be taken to increase the active learning in the classroom. “The network divides into smaller groups that visit a rotation of four or five classrooms for approximately twenty minutes each. In classrooms, network participants write down what they see and hear, gathering descriptive evidence related to the problem of practice” (City, et al., 2010, p. 6). These observations are critical because the network is “gathering data directly related to the work of teaching and learning” (City, et al., 2010, p. 110).

After the observations take place, the network will gather to debrief. “In the debrief, the participants work through a process of description, analysis and prediction” (City, et al., 2010, p. 6). Each observer will share his or her findings to the group. “The purpose of the debrief is to consider the collected evidence together and to move from agreeing on what people saw to eventually agreeing on what learning would result from what they saw” (City, et al., 2020, p. 116). The network will analyze the evidence and discuss the next level of work. The next level of work is “recommendations for the school and system to make progress on the problem of practice” (City, et al., 2010, p. 6). The recommendations should be shared with all stakeholders. “However a network

decides to address the question of what happens next, it's important to make this individual work public" (City, et al., 2010, p. 131).

Once the walkthroughs and rounds have been implemented, it is important to provide professional development time for higher order lesson planning and student engagement. Teachers and administrators should meet together in teams to review the work they will participate in to increase student engagement. "If the adults who work in schools and in complex school systems are actively learning about the relationship between their work and the work between teachers and students in the presence of content, then support for improved instructional practice will increase and become more effective and the work of teachers and students will become more effective" (City, et al., 2010, p. 166).

Teachers will meet in teams and review data from the IPI walkthroughs and also data from state and local assessments such as MAP (Measure of Academic Progress) or ISAT (Illinois Standard Achievement Test). This data will give teachers a snapshot of the academic background of the students in their classrooms. This data can be used to develop higher order lessons that can be shared by the teachers during common plan times.

Teachers need time to talk to each other about the instructional lessons they are implementing in their classrooms. As teachers plan lessons that keep students actively engaged in instruction, they need to consider two ideas. "The first of the big ideas is for teachers to critically examine what they are teaching and to ensure that their learning outcomes reflect high-level learning important to the discipline, represent a balance of different types of content (knowledge, skills, etc.), and develop conceptual understanding

rather than merely facts and procedures” (Danielson, 2009, p. 33). Teacher can examine their lessons to determine if what they have planned will give students the opportunity to think deeply and demonstrate their knowledge.

“The second big idea refers to how students learn. For them to acquire important concepts and skills, students must be mentally active, making connections formulating hypotheses, linking new understanding to what is known, participate in in-depth, structured reflection, and engage in collaboration” (Danielson, 2009, p. 36). As teachers collaborate in teams, they can discuss how to revise their lessons to ensure that students are thinking and learning at a higher level.

Teachers working in professional learning communities during their team plan time will lend itself to teachers reviewing their lessons, sharing examples of their lessons and ideas on differentiating instruction, and collaborating on lesson planning with their colleagues. “Carefully structured and facilitated teaching teams improve instruction because they allow teachers the opportunity to engage in tangible, detailed, and goal-oriented discussions about their practice on an ongoing basis” (Mednick, 2004, p. 11). Drive-by planning time will not ensure teaching and learning occurring at a higher level and will not increase student engagement or achievement. “In a professional environment where teachers’ opinions are respected and acted upon, continual instructional and curricular improvements are achievable; they are not just rhetoric” (Sahakian & Stockton, 1996, p. 52).

Peer observations will also aide teachers in improving instruction to engage students. “Peer observation allows teachers to learn more about themselves; thus they become better teachers, bringing more knowledge to the classroom. When teachers learn

from one another, they develop varied instructional techniques and new ideas. This results in more interesting teaching and more opportunities for students to grow” (Sahakian & Stockton, 1996 p. 52). After the observations take place, teachers need the time to talk about the instructional practices they observed taking place in the classroom. “Teachers need time and support to talk about teaching, reflect, and observe one another’s classrooms on a weekly, if not daily, basis if they are to make lasting changes in their classroom practice” (Mednick, 2004, p. 11).

“Teachers learn best from each other – from trial and error in the classroom, from talking to colleagues, from instructional coaches and leaders, and from doing this over the course of their career” (Mednick, 2004, p. 11). High student engagement is critical in order to increase high student achievement. “Our students don’t learn because of what we do; they learn because of what they do. Our challenge, then, is to design learning experiences for students that are interesting and that yield the learning we desire” (Danielson, 2009, p. 36.) During the IPI walkthroughs, teachers had the opportunity to walk through their colleagues’ classrooms and view the instructional strategies that were taking place. In many classrooms, they had a clear-cut idea of what high levels of student engagement look like.

Teachers that can experience and observe what high student engagement looks like by participating in IPI walkthrough can be a school’s best resource in educating other teachers. The teachers that participated in the IPI walkthrough had a clear picture of the instructional practices that are being implemented at Judson and the students’ participation in the classroom activities. They can facilitate a conversation with their peers to share what they observed and discuss the types of strategies that best engage

students. It is important for teachers and administrators to collaborate with one another in order to provide the best learning opportunities for our students that ensure engagement and success in the classroom.



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APPENDIX A

Baseline 4 C's Analysis for AS-IS

**Context**

- High student achievement
- Child centered
- Collaboration w/administration & teachers

**CHALLENGE:** More parent communication/involvement

**Culture**

- High expectations for students
- District support of Instructional Practices Inventory (IPI)
- Teacher interest in IPI
- Teachers welcome administrators in the class

**CHALLENGES:**

- Some teachers “talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk.”
- No peer walk-throughs or observations
- Students sent to the office for off-task behavior

**Context**

- High student achievement
- Child centered
- Collaboration w/administration & teachers

**CHALLENGE:** More parent communication/involvement

Improve Student Engagement in the Classroom

**Competencies**

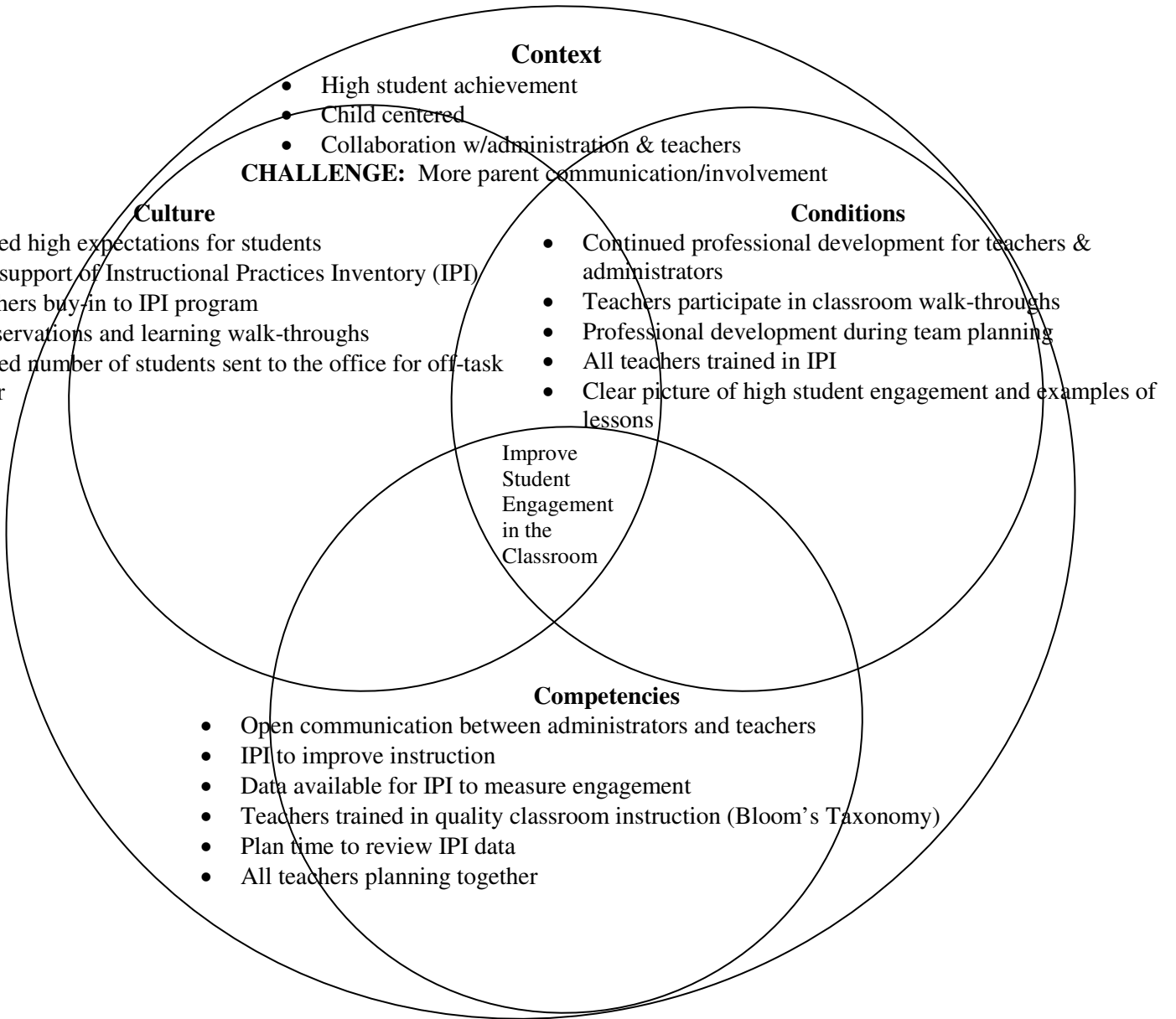
- Open communication between administrators and teachers
- IPI to improve instruction
- Data available for IPI to measure engagement

**CHALLENGES:**

- Teachers need training in recognizing/planning for high student engagement
- Time to review IPI data

## APPENDIX B

Baseline 4 C's Analysis for     TO-BE    



APPENDIX C

**Personal Immunity Map**

| 1   | 2   | 3  | 4  |
|---|---|--|--|
| Commitment  | Doing/Not Doing   | Hidden/Competing Commitments   | Big Assumption   |
| <p>I am committed to getting into the classrooms more often and having meaningful, sometimes tough conversations about instruction with teachers.</p> | <p>I get caught up with “office work” instead of completing walk-throughs and classroom observations.</p> <p>I fulfill district expectations of the evaluation process.</p> <p>I visit pre-tenured teachers’ classrooms more often than tenured teachers’ classrooms.</p> | <p>I fear how the staff will react to the tough conversations. Will it affect the way we work as a team?</p> <p>I fear the amount of work it may take to act upon my findings in the classroom.</p> <p>I fear the amount of support I will receive to more teachers to improve their practice.</p> | <p>Student engagement will be high if teachers implement higher-order thinking activities and differentiate their instruction.</p> |

APPENDIX D

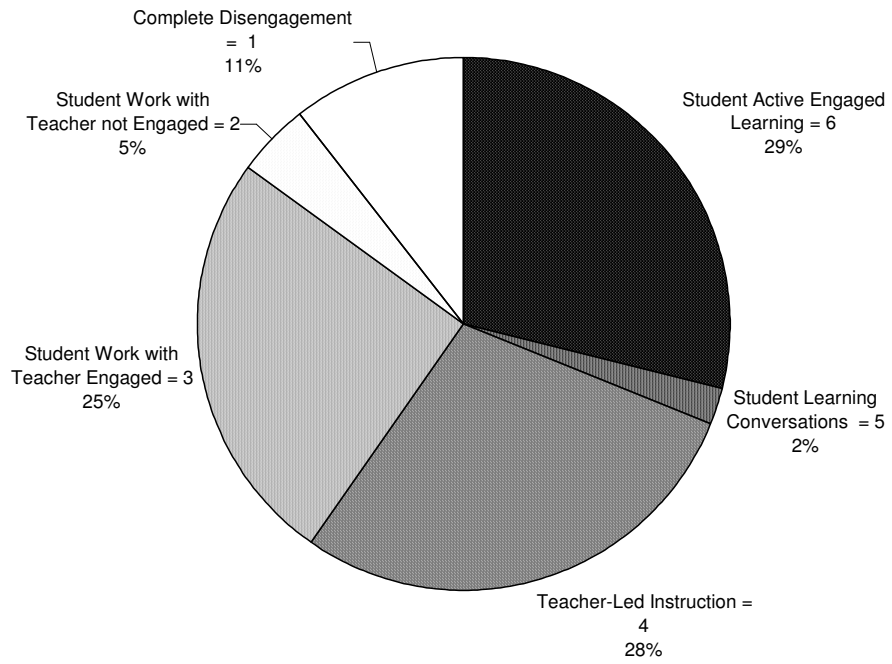
| Strategy   | Action   |
|--|--|
| Professional development is needed for teachers and administrators.                            | Register teachers and administrators for IPI (Instructional Practices Inventory) workshop/training.  |
| Conduct walk-throughs to analyze level of engagement.  | <p>Schedule IPI walk-throughs quarterly</p> <p>Implement instructional rounds</p> <p>Analyze IPI data at team meetings.</p>  |
| Provide professional development time for higher order lesson planning and student engagement. | <p>Professional development in teams:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Review IPI and MAP data</li> <li>* Technology cadres will develop higher order lessons</li> <li>* Teachers will share lessons during team meetings</li> </ul> |
| Improve professional learning communities during team plan time.                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Review curriculum lessons once a week</li> <li>* Share concrete examples of differentiated lessons</li> <li>* Collaborate on lesson planning in team with content area colleagues</li> </ul>            |
| Teachers observe each other.   | Peer observations will occur during the school day.  |

\*Big Assumption: Student engagement will be high if teachers implement higher-order thinking activities and differentiate their instruction.

\*Actionable Test: Conduct classroom walk-throughs and use the IPI rubric to determine the level of student engagement.

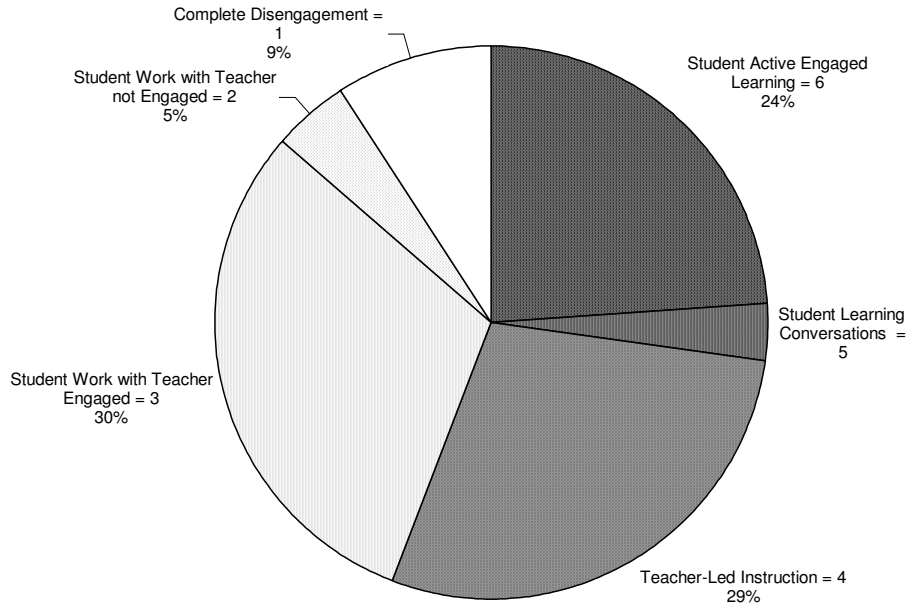
APPENDIX E

**Instructional Practices Inventory - All Classes  
(JUDSON) - (January  
2012)**



APPENDIX F

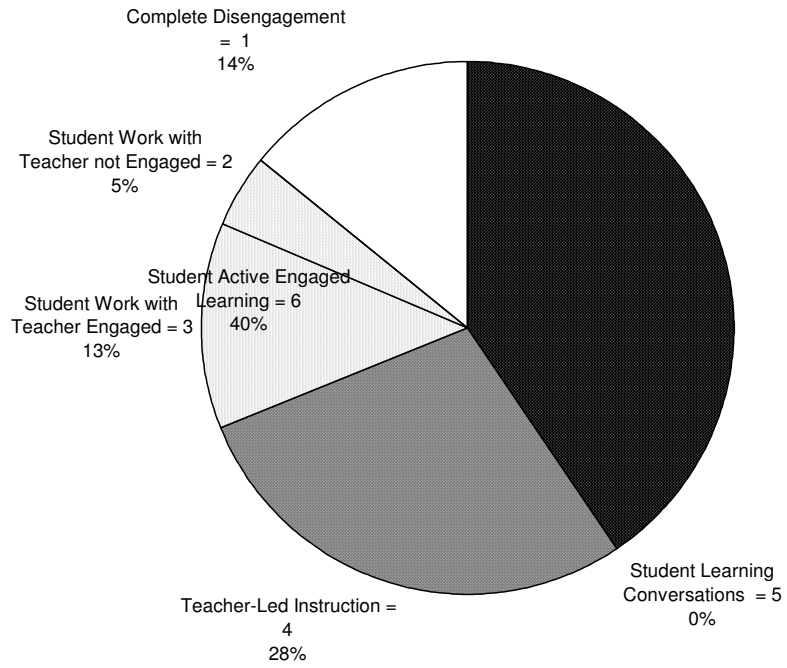
**Instructional Practices Inventory - Core Classes  
(JUDSON) - (January 2012)**





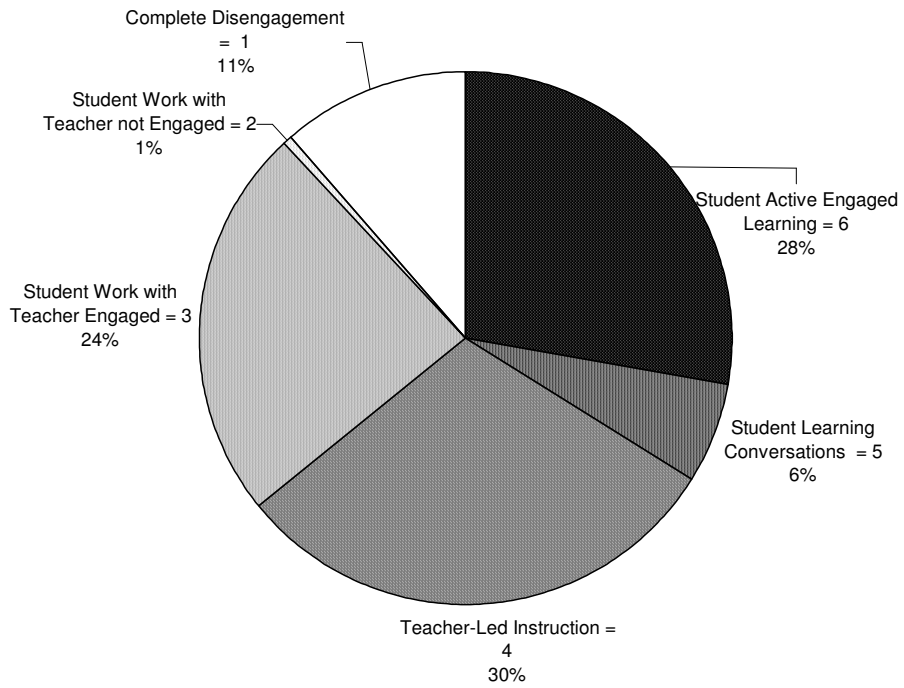
APPENDIX G

**Instructional Practices Inventory – Non-Core Classes  
(JUDSON) - (January 2012)**



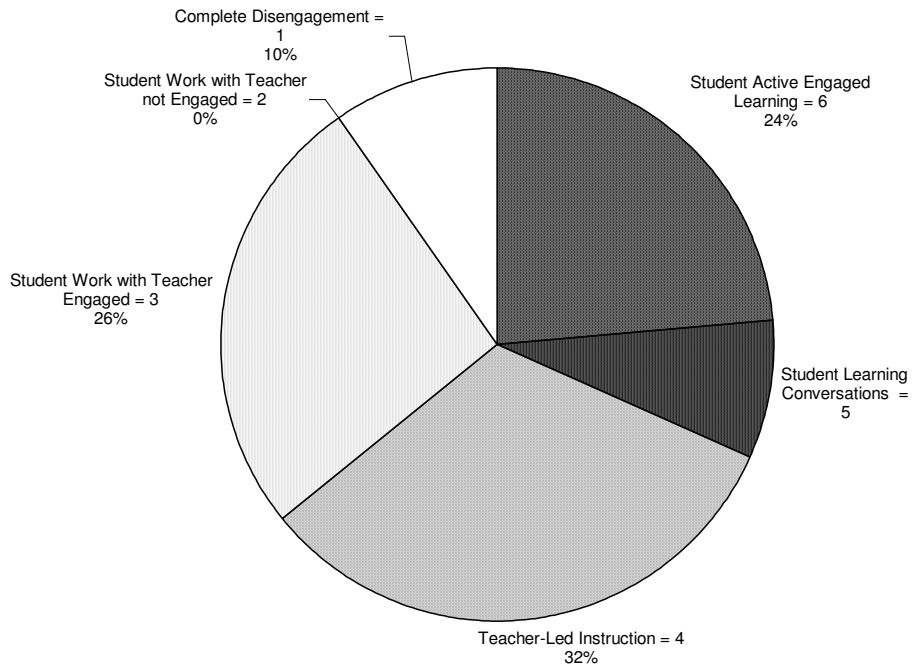
APPENDIX H

**Instructional Practices Inventory - All Classes  
(JUDSON) - (April 2012)**



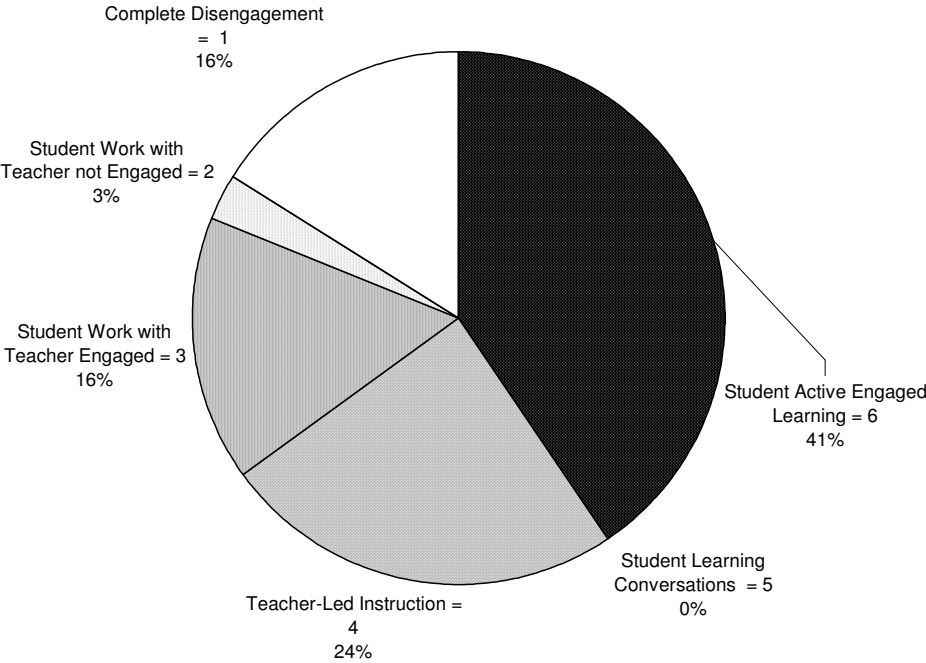
APPENDIX I

**Instructional Practices Inventory - Core Classes  
(JUDSON) - (April 2012)**



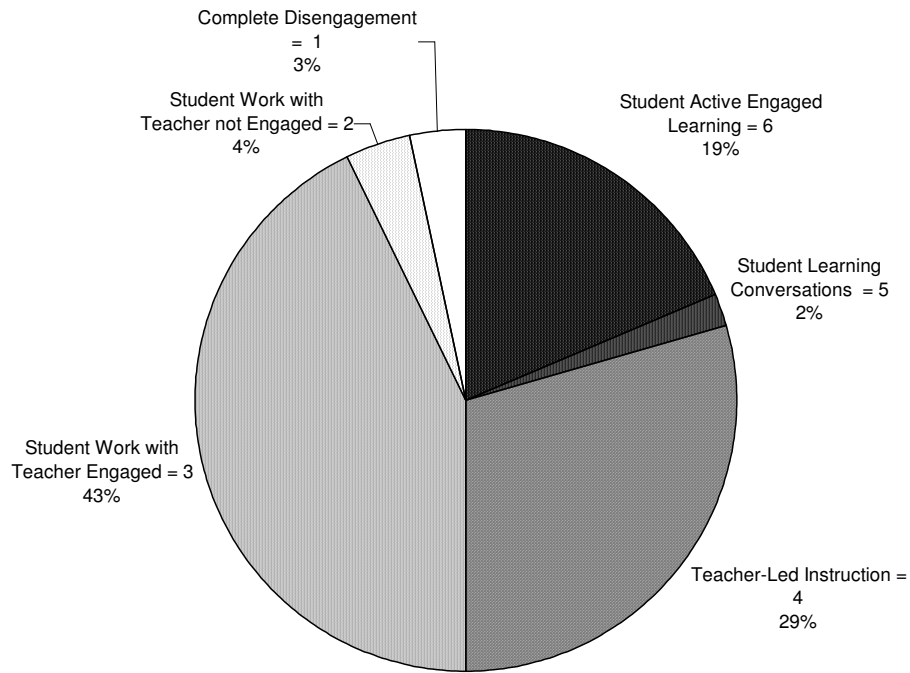
APPENDIX J

**Instructional Practices Inventory – Non-Core Classes  
(JUDSON) - (April 2012)**



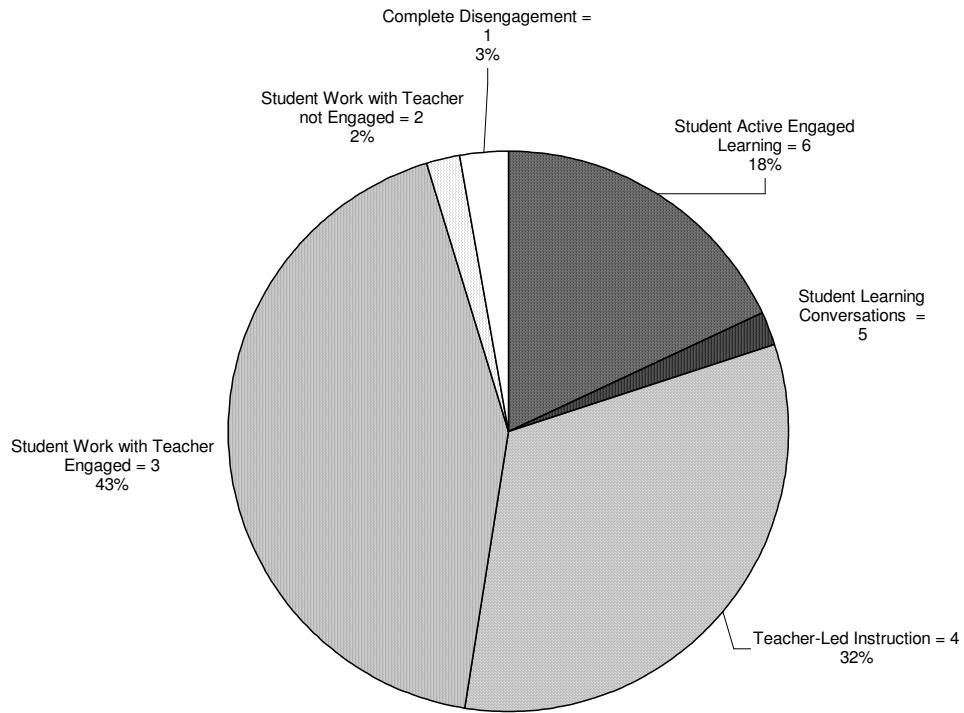
APPENDIX K

**Instructional Practices Inventory – All Classes  
(JUDSON) - (October 2012)**



APPENDIX L

**Instructional Practices Inventory – Core Classes  
(JUDSON) - (October 2012)**



APPENDIX M

**Instructional Practices Inventory – Non-Core Classes  
(JUDSON) - (October 2012)**

