

**Charter Renewal Evaluation
Multicultural Learning Center**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Multicultural Learning Center (MLC) is an independent charter elementary school with approximately 220 students¹ located in the San Fernando Valley that seeks its renewal in the 2005-06 school year. This report represents an evaluation of the school's practices and student outcomes based on archival data and data collection conducted in spring 2005 that included interviews with administrators, support providers, teachers, and parents, and multiple observations of classroom instruction and various school meetings. MLC seeks to promote multicultural understanding and student achievement through dual language immersion in English and Spanish, constructivist instruction, and the use of the arts.

Our analyses revealed a somewhat mixed picture with regard to MLC's success in meeting these objectives. MLC has largely succeeded in providing the kind of educational experience set forth in its charter petition, providing students with an engaging learning environment that incorporates instruction in Spanish and English, uses the arts, and is highly interactive. Students were active (expressing themselves frequently and using a variety of modalities) and focused on learning at exceptionally high levels. MLC's record regarding student achievement is mixed, with consistent achievement found in Spanish language assessments and a more complex picture in achievement on English language CSTs. MLC students have shown solid performance in assessments given in Spanish and have outpaced the rate of growth of similar LAUSD students in learning on a year-to-year basis. When assessed in English, MLC students have underperformed relative to students at nearby schools and similar schools in the district,

¹ SIS Spring 2004-05.

as reflected in their API scores. However, in the most recent year (2004-05), MLC students showed strong gains relative to other students in the District.

Thus, MLC's promising, though difficult, model has shown many positive results in promoting student motivation for learning and achievement in Spanish, but further clarity and more time is needed to determine its ultimate success at improving student achievement in English. It is recommended that MLC carefully consider the reasons for its strong improvement in student performance in English this past year and build upon this success. Several practices are suggested, based on the findings in this evaluation.

OVERVIEW

The Multicultural Learning Center (MLC) is an independent charter elementary school with approximately 220 students² located in the San Fernando Valley that seeks its renewal in the 2005-06 school year. This evaluation is a case study of MLC's practices based on interviews and observations conducted in Spring 2005 and an analysis of longitudinal data, focusing on student achievement scores on the California Standards Tests (CSTs) and the Aprenda (a norm-referenced test of achievement in reading and math, administered in Spanish). We evaluate MLC's practices in light of the methods and goals set forth in its charter petition and intended student learning outcomes. It should be noted that MLC seeks to achieve several goals beyond student achievement outcomes on standardized tests, including such things as promoting multicultural understanding, preparing students to be literate and fluent in Spanish and English, and developing students' multiple intelligences through constructivist instruction and use of the arts. Because of this, we evaluate MLC's program elements in their own terms and address the extent to which they support student achievement.

BACKGROUND

Charter Petition Summary

The Multicultural Learning Center's 2001 charter petition identifies the problem of the achievement gap between students of different ethnic and different socioeconomic backgrounds in the San Fernando Valley, and proposes a range of practices designed to meet the needs of the variety of students that the school intended to recruit. Consistent with this plan, MLC proposed to recruit San Fernando Valley students from a variety of backgrounds, saying, "Dual language students will be recruited to maintain a 50:50 ratio between English and Spanish dominant

² SIS Spring 2004-05.

speakers” and, “approximately 50 percent of the MLC students will be eligible for free and reduced lunch and approximately 40 percent will be classified as LEP” (p. 2). Recruitment was to reach parents from “a mix of cultures and economic backgrounds (who) will choose to enroll their children at the Center because they identify with the principles and values inherent in the Center’s vision” (p. 2). In this way, the school intended to recruit a student body diverse in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and English and Spanish proficiency.

Based on an analysis of MLC’s charter petition, evaluators developed a list of key practices that MLC planned to implement and then confirmed with school administrators that these accurately reflected the school’s priorities. These included dual immersion in English and Spanish, constructivist pedagogy, and use of the arts to support instruction. Based on their reading of the research literature, including the work of Nancy Cloud, Fred Genesee, and Else Hamayan (p. 5), MLC committed to using an immersion model whereby students spend 90% of instructional time in Spanish and 10% in English in grades K-1, with English instruction increasing 10% per year thereafter. One major rationale for this approach is that it provides substantial opportunities for English-dominant students to be immersed in Spanish, which would otherwise be difficult for most of them, whereas Spanish dominant students typically have more opportunities to learn English. In addition, this approach helps build on the Spanish dominant student’s language fluency to support their learning of English, in the long-term. Second, MLC proposed to use constructivist pedagogy, that is, pedagogy based on the fundamental idea (as expressed in MLC’s charter petition) that “children, in the pursuit of questions they have about the world, gather information and create meaning for themselves” (p. 11). MLC’s charter petition refers to the work of Jean Piaget, Howard Gardner, Lev Vygotsky, Leslie A. Hart, and Benjamin Bloom with regard to the value of “using a wide range of materials,” “flexible

groupings and team teaching,” “social communication,” “reflection,” planning instruction that “makes use of a child’s previous experiences,” and “higher-order thinking” (p. 4-5). Third, based on the work of Elliot Eisner, a professor of education at Stanford, MLC proposed use of the arts in instruction. In particular, the charter petition summarizes Eisner’s view as also emphasizing the value of using “multiple forms of representation, or symbol systems (i.e., numbers, words, pictures) to represent how we construct knowledge and make meaning in every discipline.

Thus, MLC’s agenda is to bring together a varied student body and provide educational experiences that incorporate immersion in Spanish and English, and an instructional approach that provides opportunities for experiential learning and artistic expression.

School Demographics

MLC’s student demographics have remained consistent in its first four years, with few noteworthy changes in the size or demographics of the student population. MLC students closely resemble students at nearby schools, as can be seen in Chart 1. For both MLC and nearby schools³, most students (83%-91%) are Hispanic, most are eligible for free or reduced lunch (89%-91%), over 60% are LEP, and half or nearly half have parents that did not graduate from high school (40%-51%). This data suggests that MLC has successfully recruited students similar to students in its local area. However, this pattern is not entirely consistent with its intended goal to have a diversity of students in that all of the categories listed above are overrepresented as compared with MLC’s original vision. The demographic characteristic that has the greatest implications for the school’s success is the overrepresentation of LEP students (62%), which means that fewer than planned English proficient students are present to interact

³ The four closest elementary schools to the Multicultural Learning Center are Canoga Park Elementary, Hart Street Elementary, Melvin Avenue Elementary, and Sunny Brae Elementary.

with these LEP students and help with their English language development. However, this disproportionate pattern is only somewhat askew, since the 38% of English proficient students still represents a substantial portion of the student population at MLC.

Chart 1. Demographics of the Multicultural Learning Center and Nearby Schools

		School Demographics ⁴	
		Nearby Schools ⁵	MLC
<i>Student Ethnicity</i>		% of Students	% of Students
	American Indian/Alaska Native	0%	0%
	Asian	5%	1%
	Black	3%	1%
	Hispanic	83%	91%
	White	6%	7%
	Filipino	2%	0%
	Pacific Islander	0%	0%
<i>Student Meal Program</i>			
	Free breakfast/Lunch	81%	81%
	Reduced price	10%	8%
	Full pay	3%	11%
	Non-Participant	7%	0%
<i>Special education</i>			
	Students With Special Education Eligibility	10%	7%
<i>Language Status</i>			
	EO	19%	17%
	IFEP	9%	12%
	LEP	63%	62%
	RFEP	7%	9%
<i>Parent Education Level</i>			
	Not high school graduate	40%	51%
	High school graduate	18%	12%
	Some College	9%	8%
	College graduate	7%	6%
	Graduate school	2%	9%
	Decline to state	22%	13%

⁴ SIS Spring 2005.

⁵ Percentage of students at Canoga Park Elementary, Hart Street Elementary, Melvin Avenue Elementary, and Sunny Brae Elementary.

An examination of MLC student residential locations shows that 85% of its Hispanic students live in the residential area of one of the nearby schools whereas only 6% of White students, and no Black or Asian students, live in the residential area of a nearby school. Conversely, 14% of Hispanic students⁶, 94% of White students, and 100% of Black and Asian students travel to MLC from outside of the immediate area. Thus, the school has mostly recruited from the nearby area with limited recruitment across the San Fernando Valley, and thus its demographics closely resemble those of local schools. Compared to its goals, MLC's demographics have an overrepresentation of Hispanic, LEP, and students eligible for free and reduced lunch and under representation of White, English proficient, and students ineligible for free or reduced lunch. This indicates that MLC has not focused on recruiting students most likely to perform highest on standardized tests, but it may create some difficulties for the full implementation of their model.

METHOD

Data collection involved observations, interviews, and review of records. Data collectors visited MLC from late February through early April in 2005. Data collectors used standard observation and interview protocols tailored to MLC's distinct emphases, which they identified from the charter petition and then confirmed with the principal in the initial meeting. We interviewed administrators, support providers, teachers, and parents. In order to represent a variety of parent perspectives, we interviewed parents we met at different school activities. Teachers were interviewed based on a probability sample across all grades. One class each from grades K-5 was observed for two consecutive half-days in the morning, and classes in grades 1, 2, and 4 were observed an additional two half-days in the afternoon for a total of about 62 hours of instruction. Observers fluent in Spanish observed classes that incorporated Spanish instruction

⁶ 1% of Hispanic students did not have a home school residence reported.

and they wrote down classroom dialogue in whatever language was spoken in class. We also observed a parent meeting, a parent council meeting, a science fair, and two professional development meetings.

All observation notes and interviews were put into electronic format, either by typing observation notes or transcribing interviews, with Spanish dialogue typed in Spanish and also translated into English to support analysis. All notes were then coded using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis program. Two coding systems were used, one for coding classroom observations and another for coding all other data. The coding method and analysis process for analyzing classroom instruction are explained in greater detail in Appendix A – Instruction Analysis and Appendix B – Expanded Observation Categories. A model for showing the relationships among the components of classroom instruction and achievement is also shown in Appendix A.

FINDINGS

Teaching and learning are prioritized as key focus elements of renewal evaluations. Because of this, findings are presented by first presenting features that provide a context for understanding the classroom, then moving in sequence towards understanding classroom practice and student outcomes.

Parental Involvement

MLC's student population was seen to mostly reflect the demographics of nearby schools. According to the charter petition, parents are considered to be an integral part of a student's education and a valuable resource for students.

MLC asks each parent to sign a commitment to volunteer three hours per month at the school and offers several opportunities for parental involvement. The parent council has committees that address a wide range of issues at MLC including fundraising, retention and recruitment, and technology, among others. Parents are also invited to volunteer in classrooms and a committee of parent educators (parents who are educators by profession) gives input into instruction at MLC. Parent involvement in these areas is reportedly high and parents often take initiative and offer their services to meet perceived needs of the school.

Interviews and observations indicated a high level of parental involvement at MLC, but this involvement was much higher for English-speaking than for Spanish-speaking parents. Teachers and administrators reported that parents are very responsive and involved but that they hope for more involvement from the Spanish-speaking community. It was also reported that more English dominant parents are informed, involved, and hold leadership positions than Spanish dominant parents.

MLC administrators expressed awareness of the cultural divide in parent participation and reported launching new efforts to improve school-parent relations. MLC now hosts four content-themed family nights throughout the year where parents are invited to discover the instructional material that their children are learning. A recent science family night was well attended and students made presentations in both Spanish and English. At an informal open-ended discussion known as 'A Second Cup of Coffee,' parents are invited to ask questions or share thoughts or concerns with administrators on a weekly basis. An annual picnic is another opportunity for families at MLC to build community and bridge the culture gap.

Administrators, parents, and teachers agree that relationships between parents and the school have steadily improved from the school's inception. Teachers unanimously call their

relationships with parents ‘good.’ Administrators and teachers said that they are very accessible to parents, and parents concur. Teachers report making efforts to involve parents in numerous ways—inviting them to assist in the classroom, inviting them to family nights, communicating with them via phone, email, newsletters, or in person, and assisting them in assisting their children.

The dual language program creates a challenge for some parents to assist their children at home. Some Spanish-only parents say that they feel ill-equipped to help their children with English homework, and English-only parents have similar sentiments regarding their children’s Spanish homework. Project GRAD—a program to help Spanish speakers help their children with English comprehension—is now offered at MLC and the school has plans to offer a track for English-speaking parents next year. All parties cite school-parent relationships as an area which they hope to see improve further in the future. MLC has made progress in this area, and teachers and administrators continue to show responsiveness toward parents by assessing parental needs and making additions or modifications to activities focused on parental support.

Professional Development

The MLC charter petition outlines its intention that professional development will focus on fostering collaborative efforts among teachers. This effort is to involve team planning and peer feedback and review as ways of “insuring that a variety of instructional strategies are employed to accommodate the diverse learning styles of the students.” Through this collaboration and peer evaluation “teachers define and identify their individual and collective professional development needs.” From out of these efforts teachers and administrators determine areas in which they need further professional development, and sessions are

scheduled. The petition further indicates that teachers will employ “continual learning opportunities at scheduled times throughout the year,” including three full weeks of staff development. Specific professional development topics, according to administrators, are also based on teacher requests, student test scores and assessments.

An understanding of the school’s practices was developed by triangulating information from interviews with teachers, administrators and coaches, and observations of professional development meetings. Teachers are given opportunities to attend various conferences, especially during the summer. According to interviews, in the summer of 2004, teachers mainly attended workshops at the Music Center and a language conference on the dynamics of language. Some teachers also attended conferences held by the California Association for Bilingual Education. Since teachers are not able to attend all conferences, they are expected to conduct knowledge transfers throughout the school year during professional development meetings. During these meetings teachers share what they learned from the conferences they attended. Several teachers indicated that gaining additional knowledge through outside professional development courses is not only encouraged, it is expected. Teachers are to work towards an area of expertise, such as math, music, or language, so they can become a resource for other teachers.

In addition, teachers and administrators identify two main goals for professional development each year. The goals for the 2004–05 school year were as follows:

- Differentiating instruction for all learners.
- Integrating the arts into the social studies curriculum.

Teachers then also determine two personal goals for their own development that may or may not be related to the school-wide goals. At the end of the year a reflection meeting is held to assess how well the year’s goals were achieved.

Teachers and administrators also indicated that professional development resources are made available to teachers throughout the year. Guest speakers on certain topics are invited. For example, during an observed professional development meeting a program director for a collaborative science program with Occidental College came to share information about the program and explain its benefits and how it might be implemented. Most teachers chose to attend this optional meeting. When asked about resources for their professional development, teachers most frequently mentioned coaches, the two artists in residence who help integrate the arts into instruction at MLC, and the curriculum coach.

The integration of art is a major focus for the school, and was one of the main school-wide goals. Thus the two artists in residence, a visual arts coach and a drama coach, are very active in providing professional development opportunities at the school. This is not done in meetings outside of class time. Instead, the art coaches come into each class and instruct teachers by modeling the use of art in lessons with the students. Teachers were positive about this process for art integration. Evidence of the use of art was observed in all classrooms, and several times during instruction teachers used art in various forms, visual, musical and dramatic, as a method for teaching. However, the artists in residence were not present at the observed professional development meetings and appeared to have less interaction with teachers outside of the classroom. Administrators reported that arts coaches provided professional development in prior years but had intentionally begun to focus more on working one-on-one with teachers in 2004-05.

MLC uses *Different Ways of Knowing* (DWOK) as its main curriculum, and has had access in the past to two coaches specifically for the implementation of this curriculum. Currently they still work with one of the coaches; however, this coach is now more of a resource

and not a regular participant in professional development meetings. Over the past two years, these coaches would plan approximately three to five Saturday workshops per year. At this time, all Saturday workshops are being planned internally in order to build MLC's internal capacity.

The professional development meetings observed included a full Saturday series that began with a session on English instruction followed by an introduction to a science program, and concluded with a session on using the Internet for instruction. A second Saturday session that focused on Math Trailblazers was also observed. During the first observed Saturday series, two facilitators led teachers in a discussion of the English program, beginning by having teachers brainstorm skills that students were expected to learn in each grade for this subject. The purpose was to work on English instruction because, according to one teacher, it "gets underlooked and students face a culture shock in third grade." This culture shock is reflective of the fact that formal English instruction does not begin until the third grade. Teachers expressed concern in interviews as well regarding the school's need to address students' progress in ELA as well as the need to improve test scores. This observed session was in accordance with the school's intention to have professional development topics that are responsive to the voiced concerns of teachers and the perceived instructional needs of the students. The meeting on using Math Trailblazers was focused on problem solving techniques and was led by a Math Trailblazers facilitator brought in for the training. The emphasis was on how different approaches to solving problems can help students learn. Both of these meetings were effective in giving teachers tools they could easily apply to their own classrooms and lesson planning.

In professional development sessions observed, presenters provided teachers with opportunities to participate in a variety of activities such as collaborative groups, presenting information and materials to the group as a whole, large group discussion, and small group or

partner activities, often organized by grade. Sessions were well-ordered. Initially, teachers were given time to access their own experience in the classroom to provide context for what they would be discussing. Next, the instruction portion of the session was presented in highly interactive format, involving discussion and activity. Finally, teachers worked in groups by grade level, or with partners, applying new tools to their own classroom through lesson planning and further discussion.

Teachers all showed high levels of commitment to learning from each other and from the facilitators of their training sessions. MLC is a small school with a small community of teachers who appear to know each other well. Consequently, professional development sessions are largely informal, welcoming and highly interactive. All teachers participated in activities and shared in discussions. Teachers offered examples of their own experiences, as well as certain problems they have had in class. This sharing led to further discussion and problem solving as peers and facilitators responded to situations presented by teachers. In this way, teachers were given opportunities to connect with their own instruction and to work with each other towards improving and expanding their methods.

All teachers interviewed praised the professional development available to them at MLC, and the Director stated she felt it was an area of great strength for the school. The number of resources and opportunities shared suggest that this is true. Though the sessions observed did not focus directly on the school's two main goals, the interviews revealed that art integration has been given much attention throughout the year. The second goal of differentiating instruction for all students was less apparent as a professional development focus, aside from a few references to conferences attended in the summer prior to the school year. It does, however, appear to be a

focus in the classroom. The artists in residence represent another professional development resource making an impact in all classrooms through one-on-one work with teachers.

Special Education

Data on special education was derived from interviews with administrators, since the school's inclusion model for providing services means that there are no special education classes, per se, to observe. The school seeks to provide students with early intervention prior to identifying them as eligible for special education by conducting an SST meeting of teachers administrators and parents and then working on a six-week program to see if interventions can successfully meet student needs. For students that are later identified as needing special services, the school provides full inclusion in general education classrooms, and contracts pull-out services for Resource Specialist (RSP), speech and language, occupational therapy, and counseling. As was noted in the section on demographics, 6.5% of students at MLC were identified as eligible for special education services in spring 2005, which is somewhat lower than the average of 9.9% at nearby schools. We had insufficient information to explain this difference, but it was notable that among nearby schools there was substantial variation in percent of students identified as eligible for special education, with MLC having the lowest percentage.

Bilingualism

MLC's charter petition sets forth the goal that students will not only be biliterate within five years, but will also achieve high levels of proficiency, performing at or above grade level in both languages. Our observations confirmed that the MLC environment is highly bilingual. Classroom instruction, student assemblies, and parent meetings are conducted in both Spanish

and English. Most teachers reported having previous bilingual instructional experience or administrative experience with dual-language programs. Administrators, teachers, and parents alike were highly enthusiastic about and invested in MLC's dual language education program.

Based on a review of research by administrators, the school adopted a 90/10 dual language immersion model, meaning that students receive 90% of instruction in Spanish and 10% in English in grades K-1. Instruction in English then increases by 10% each year until fifth grade when students learn 50% in English and 50% in Spanish. Parents and administrators confirm that teachers strictly enforce the sanction of language times and students are expected to assist their peer counterparts in language learning. This system puts MLC on target for their goal of student biliteracy by the fifth grade.

In practice, observations showed that for K-3, English instruction time closely matched the school's 90-10 gradual immersion model with the exception of Grade 4. The model proposes percentages of English instruction time for K-3 of 10%, 10%, 20%, and 30% respectively, while the observed frequency was 13%, 17%, 16%, and 24% respectively. Fourth grade represented the most substantial change from the model with English instruction time constituting 74% of classroom instruction, though the target is only 40%. The fifth grade cohort was taught 100% in English in 2004-05, though it is planned to be bilingual in 2005-06.

Administrators and teachers report that students have scored poorly on English assessments in the first few years of their schooling but say that this is an inaccurate measure of progress. Rather, administrators suggest testing English proficiency in the fourth and fifth grades and comparing MLC to other dual-language schools. Currently, MLC's goal of biliteracy by the fifth grade is not measurable as the dual immersion program has yet to reach the fifth

grade. This year (2005-06) MLC will produce its first class of dual immersion fifth graders, testing the success of MLC's dual-language program.

Use of Arts in Instruction

Proficiency in the arts is one component of MLC's goal for an educated person in its 2001 charter petition (p. 4) and in accordance with this goal the school has adopted a curriculum that incorporates the use of the arts as a way of creating multiple representations in the construction of knowledge. The charter petition says that the curriculum will integrate academic content areas with the arts with the intention that students will "experience daily opportunities...to develop proficiency in the use of the arts as tools for learning, creative thinking, and problem solving as well as assessment." Furthermore, students will "use the arts to solve problems, make connections across disciplines, and gain an understanding of self and an appreciation of others." In order to support such learning, the charter petition says that specialists and volunteers will be employed to assist children in developing proficiency in the arts, that teachers will be trained in communicating and understanding through the arts, and that students will apply visual and performing arts through community service projects. Data pertaining to the use of the arts was gathered through interviews, classroom observations, and an observation of a student assembly.

As stated in the charter petition, the school employs two part-time artists in residence to assist the development of students in the arts as well as to assist teachers in incorporating art into their lesson. Interviews with teachers and administrators indicated that MLC has also provided professional development to train teachers in the arts, such as a partnership with the music center and a two-year professional development series on incorporating art into social studies. When asked about resources for professional development, all but one teacher mentioned receiving

some professional development in the arts. However, only two teachers interviewed mentioned the artists in residence as a resource. Thus, the data suggests that teachers have not received significant input from the artists in residence to support their own teaching. We did not collect data regarding whether or not students were using art in community service.

Parents confirmed that the school makes use of the arts, and expressed positive feelings about this practice. One parent showed an appreciation of art as an interdisciplinary learning tool, but others did not. This suggests there may be room to help parents understand the school's vision for use of the arts in instruction.

Our observations indicated that through providing students daily exposure to art, MLC classrooms featured the arts, both as a means of presenting information to students and as a means of student expression, as an important element of instruction. Each classroom observation conducted demonstrated some inclusion of art and all teachers interviewed expressed an appreciation for the use of art in instruction. Across the classrooms observed, art was seen to be incorporated in a variety of forms (music, drama, poetry) and in most content areas (social studies, language arts, and science).

The extent to which art was incorporated varied from classroom to classroom and lesson to lesson, such that some lessons involved a great deal of artistic activity or had art as a central focus while in other lessons it was minimally present (for example, a teacher playing classical music while students worked). While in some classrooms art was incorporated at highly involved levels in a variety of content areas, in other classrooms this type of incorporation was only seen in one content area while other content areas contained little use of the arts. Highly involved art-based lessons were most frequently observed in social studies instruction. This was consistent with the statement by one teacher that when she incorporates art, it is usually in social

studies. Art was not observed in math lessons, but most lessons incorporated multiple ways to represent mathematical concepts such as manipulatives, charts, and a “centiwheel.”

Thus, the use of art is prominent in the instruction at MLC and artistic expression was present in various forms, and with great frequency, in all classrooms observed. Teachers receive extensive professional development in the arts and two artists in residence support art instruction by modeling lessons. Evidence suggests that the use of the arts are partially incorporated in three ways but could be further developed. First, math lessons were not observed to incorporate art *per se*, but they did make use of multiple means of representing knowledge both by teachers and students. Second, only one teacher mentioned using the artists in residence as resources outside of the classroom, but others did not, which suggests that more teachers could make use of the artists in residence as resources for leading professional development and lesson planning. Finally, parents appreciated the value of art instruction in itself but expressed only a partial understanding of the school’s use of arts to support learning in all subjects.

Instruction

Evaluation of classroom observations was based on intensive coding of classroom observation notes in order to depict the manner of instruction and evaluate its effectiveness in relation to factors of quality instruction derived from professional teaching standards. Prior to observations, data collectors interview teachers about their lesson planning and lesson goals. Data collectors observe classrooms by writing down the words and actions of teachers and students as completely as possible. The goal of observation notes is complete description, prioritizing instruction over classroom management, teachers over students, and word for word over summary. Observers then type notes, record their reflections about what they observed, and

these electronic files are coded for key elements using Atlas-Ti, a qualitative data analysis program. The narrative notes and codes serve as the basis for analyzing classroom instruction. Analysis focused on language arts and math instruction, and examined lessons taught in English separately from those taught in Spanish.

Language Arts Taught in English

Learning Goals - *Based on pre-observation interviews, to what extent did teachers plan lessons with clear, standard-aligned goals focused on student learning?*

Teachers articulated somewhat specific learning goals such as recognizing the difference between English and Spanish phonics. Learning goals were consistently below grade level standard, with a couple of teachers focusing on content at approximately two grades below standard. This level did not appear to be too easy for students, however, as reflected in observation data, and rather seemed to reflect the school's gradual progression in English Language Immersion, which formally begins in grade 3.

Management - *To what extent did teachers establish a supportive learning environment by varying instructional groupings and keeping students on-task?*

Teachers used a variety of classroom groupings and maintained high levels of student on-task behavior during Language Arts in English. Whole Class Discussion (40%) was the most common grouping; when adding time spent on Whole Class Discussions with other interactive formats of Groups, and Pairs, a total of 72% of class time was devoted to interactive groupings. Every five minutes, observers noted the percentage of students on-task, categorizing the results into one of four categories (low: 0-50%; medium: 51%-84%; high: 85%-99%; and all: 100%).

High levels of on-task behavior were evident during English language arts lessons, with all students on-task 55% of the time, and almost all students (85%-99%) on-task 38% of the time.

Thus, students were provided frequent opportunities to interact with the teacher and each other in a variety of groupings, and were consistently focused on academic work (see Charts 2 and 3).

**Chart 2. Classroom Groupings in Observed Language Arts Lessons Taught In English
(Percent of Time)**

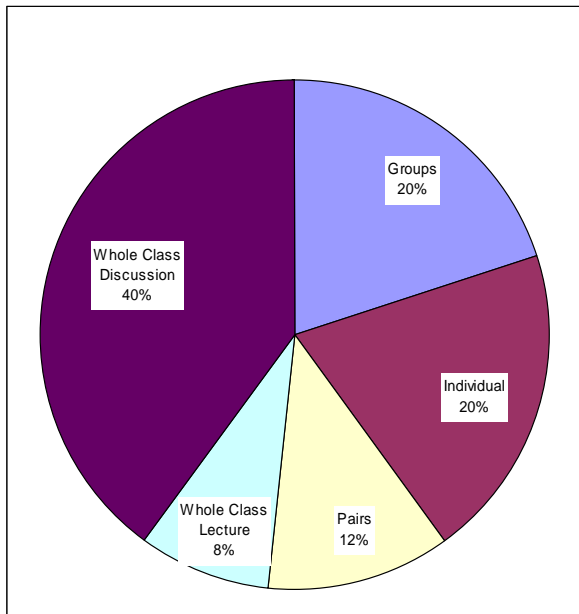
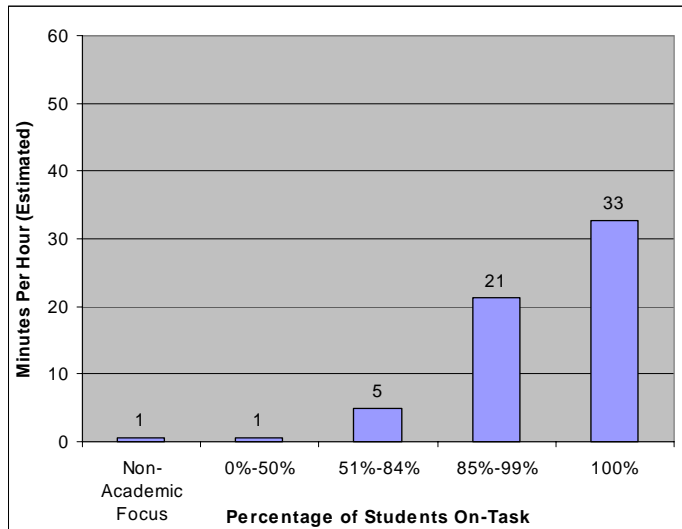


Chart 3. Students On-Task in Observed Language Arts Lessons Taught In English

(Estimated Minutes Per Hour)



Instructional Delivery - *How were lesson contents communicated to students? Factors include extent of focus on key understandings, orientation of students to content, logical order of presentation, modeling higher-order thinking, extent of students learning from each other as well as from the teacher, and use of multiple modalities.*

ELA lessons mostly focused on content that was below grade level (reflective of the school's progressive immersion in English that formally begins only in Grade 3), but the presentation of this information was rich in modalities, highly interactive, and well ordered and coherent. Teachers typically began lessons by reference to the learning goal and by connecting the topic with student prior knowledge, but a few lessons seemed to begin abruptly with little transition or introductory elements. Teachers used multiple modalities of presentation, including written, verbal (both teachers and students), visual (drawing, using objects, information on the board), and using movement or acting. Students were very engaged and encouraged to interact

with each other and with the teacher during lessons. Teachers often helped students to recognize the connections within lesson contents but did not provide many opportunities for critical thinking such as analysis or synthesis of information. Thus, students received richly presented, well-organized content. However, critical thinking and more in-depth discussions were rare.

Student Activity - *What was the nature and extent of opportunities for students to think and express themselves?*

Students were consistently given opportunities to express themselves, with most class time devoted to interactions between the teacher and students or between students in small groups or pairs. Students had opportunities to express themselves through drawing, writing and acting as well as speaking. Most students were given opportunities for making connections within the lesson contents, and occasionally, higher order thinking was observed; however, critical thinking discussions, when they occurred, were typically quite brief.

Assessment of Student Understanding - *What was the extent and focus of assessment of student understanding, and how did teachers follow up in class based on those assessments?*

Teachers were observed consistently assessing student understanding through discussions, individual questioning, or examination of student work. Throughout the lessons teachers called on various students to respond to questions or make comments. Follow-up on assessment was apparent in some cases. However, often it seemed that the teacher simply moved forward without taking much direction from student observations or thoughts. Consequently, student expression was not developed as much as perhaps it could have been and classroom discussions, while frequent, seldom addressed topics in-depth.

Synthesis and Evaluation - *To what extent did these elements fit together to provide students with opportunities to achieve the learning goals?*

Language arts taught in English took up only a small fraction of the instructional time observed at MLC. In grades K-3, Language Arts taught in English took up about 10% or less of classroom time, and in grades 4 and 5 this increased to over 25% of classroom instruction time. This is consistent with MLC's immersion model which provides only listening and speaking instruction in ELA until grade 3, when reading and writing are also included. Content was mostly taught below grade level, but appeared to be appropriate for students, as evidenced by their high level of on-task behavior and positive affect. Teachers taught well-organized lessons that incorporated extensive use of multiple modalities and were highly interactive. Connections in lesson contents were sometimes made explicit by teachers, but lesson contents were only infrequently linked with underlying concepts of broader significance. For example, in a lesson on using quotation marks, the lesson did not address why it is important to use them, which would have helped students to recognize that it helps communicate the specific words used by a speaker. Emphasizing linkages of content with key explanatory ideas helps students to understand the importance of concepts and how they relate with each other. Opportunities for higher-order thinking were not frequently seen. Teachers regularly connected lesson contents to students' prior knowledge or to other subjects.

Thus, ELA lessons were rich in presentation, well organized, and provided extensive opportunities for students to interact with each other and with teachers. Lesson contents were taught below grade level; however, this seemed to be aligned with student understanding. There appeared to be room for more extensive development of the ways topics related with each other,

that is, clearer organization around key understandings (though this was somewhat present), and this was especially true with regard to opportunities for utilizing higher-order thinking about the lesson contents. This pattern of instruction thus reflected an emphasis on incorporating art, at least in the sense of multiple representations by both teachers and students. It only partially reflected the types of critical thinking highlighted as an important component of constructivist instruction. Students were active learners, but the projects and tasks tended to be relatively circumscribed, rather than open-ended.

Language Arts Taught in Spanish

Learning Goals - *Based on pre-observation interviews, to what extent did teachers plan lessons with clear, standard-aligned goals focused on student learning?*

Teachers mostly described learning goals for Language Arts lessons in Spanish in general terms (such as “grammar”) or by describing the tasks that would be addressed without giving a clear sense of what students were to actually learn through these processes. A few teachers had more elaborated goals, mentioning the goal of having students use sensory details. Goals were at student grade-level standard.

Management - *To what extent did teachers establish a supportive learning environment by varying instructional groupings and keeping students on-task?*

Classroom groupings during Spanish Language Arts lessons were quite varied (see Chart 4) with the majority of time spent on whole class discussions (41%), groups (24%) and students working individually (24%). This pattern suggests a balance between teacher activity and student activity. Students were observed with very high levels of on-task behavior. Most or all

students (85% to 100%) were on-task 98% of the class time observed (see Chart 5). Thus, teachers provided considerable variety in their groupings, and maintained very high levels of focus on academic work.

Chart 4. Classroom Groupings in Observed Language Arts Lessons Taught In Spanish (Percent of Time)

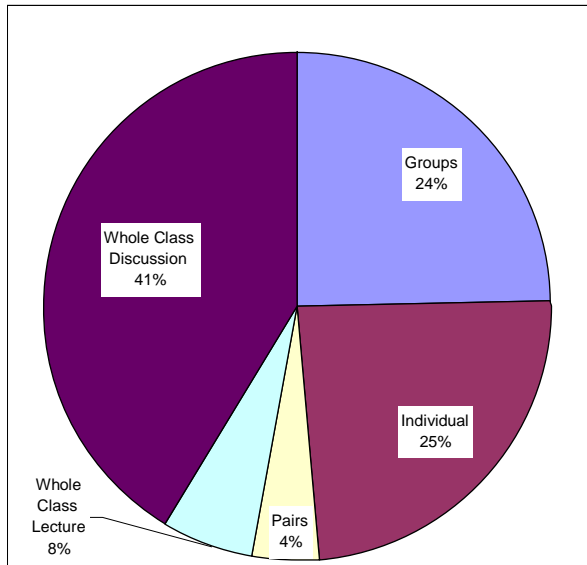
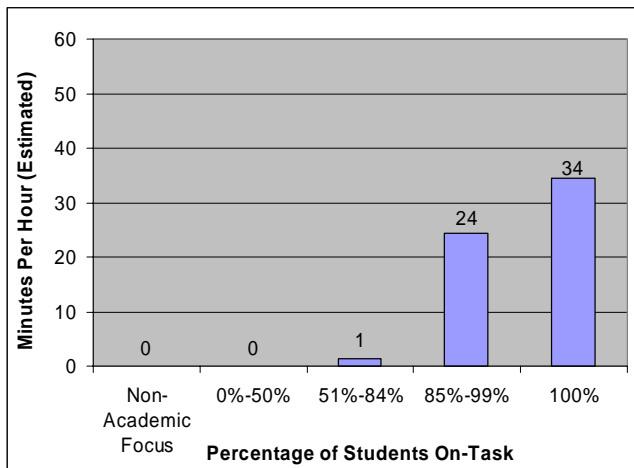


Chart 5. Students On-Task in Observed Language Arts Lessons Taught In Spanish (Estimated Minutes Per Hour)



Instructional Delivery - *How were lesson contents communicated to students? Factors include extent of focus on key understandings, orientation of students to content, logical order of presentation, modeling higher-order thinking, extent of students learning from each other as well as from the teacher, and use of multiple modalities.*

Students were presented with grade level content through discussions with teachers and other students through the use of multiple modalities. Content in Spanish language arts lessons was well ordered, often beginning with modeling of thinking processes by the teacher and classroom discussions followed by opportunities for students to apply the concept being studied. Teachers frequently introduced topics by making connections with concepts and students' personal and conceptual prior knowledge, but were inconsistent in providing students with learning goals or other prompts to help them orient to the learning tasks. Further questioning for critical thinking was also observed but was somewhat infrequent. In one such example, a teacher helped students consider why a paragraph needs a structure.

Key understandings were implicit in many of the lessons, but teachers seldom explicitly helped students to see the ways different elements of a lesson were interrelated. For example, a couple of teachers used a hamburger as a model of how to structure a paragraph, thus implicitly connecting the image of a burger with the need for order in a paragraph. However, these lessons did not draw out the meaning of this analogy, that is, why it is important to have structure in a hamburger or structure in a paragraph, so students may not have seen the significance of writing in an orderly way. Content was expressed using multiple modalities. Most classes were observed with a similar afternoon grouping setup that involved students working in multiple modalities while working on combined language arts and social studies lessons. Students used drawing, listening and responding, visual engagement, verbal interaction with peers or with

teachers, written work, presenting, etc. Students' high levels of engagement and on-task ratings indicate that teaching methods are very successful in maintaining student interest in the topics being covered. The lessons observed thus reflect a rich, orderly, and engaging presentation of lesson contents, but with only limited explicit support to help students to see the connections across what they were learning, and to engage in higher-order thinking.

Student Activity - *What was the nature and extent of opportunities for students to think and express themselves?*

Students were consistently given many opportunities to express themselves in a variety of ways. Students used art, writing, and peer and whole class interactions on a regular basis. However, they did not have much opportunity to initiate discussions or to think critically. Lessons involved a lot of activity, and provided students with opportunities to make personal connections, talking about their neighborhoods, and to connect with other subjects, such as social studies. Occasional critical thinking opportunities were presented to students but, for the most part, students did not engage in higher-order thinking.

Assessment of Student Understanding - *What was the extent and focus of assessment of student understanding, and how did teachers follow up in class based on those assessments?*

Teachers were observed consistently assessing student understanding through discussions, individual questioning, or examination of student work. Throughout the lessons teachers called on various students to respond to questions or make comments. Follow-up on assessment was apparent in some cases; however, it usually involved limited cognitive depth.

Students were helped to make some connections in the material but seldom engaged in critical thinking.

Synthesis and Evaluation - *To what extent did these elements fit together to provide students with opportunities to achieve the learning goals?*

Spanish Language Arts lessons were highly interactive and addressed grade level content through rich presentation of information using multiple modalities and students learning from the teacher and each other. Learning goals were sometimes stated to students but this was inconsistent. Lessons topics were consistently introduced by helping students connect them with prior knowledge and relevant personal experiences. However, lessons contents were only sometimes organized around central ideas, and provided limited opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking. Possibly related to the limited focus on in-depth understanding, teachers did not follow-up with students to address concepts in depth. Thus, the lessons were richly presented and highly engaging and interactive, and numerous connections were made with student prior knowledge and experience. Conceptual connections across the contents of a lesson and critical thinking were also observed, but were not consistently in evidence, nor were students consistently oriented to learning through providing learning goals at the beginnings of lessons (whether through explicitly defining a goal, or more subtly, by asking a question to engage student thinking about relevant issues).

Math Taught in English

Learning Goals - *Based on pre-observation interviews, to what extent did teachers plan lessons with clear, standard-aligned goals focused on student learning?*

The teachers varied in the clarity of their articulation of student learning goals, with one teacher articulating with some elaboration the importance of students understanding the concept of place value, and the other teacher providing only minimal details on learning goals. The teacher with a goal of teaching place value emphasized the importance of understanding the concept as a precursor to applying skills, thus explaining the linkage of lesson contents as they will be used by students.

Management - *To what extent did teachers establish a supportive learning environment by varying instructional groupings and keeping students on-task?*

Math lessons used a variety of groupings with whole class interactions the most common (58%) followed by students working individually (21%). Other groupings were also observed but were less frequent (see Chart 6). A majority of students were usually on-task, but for about a quarter of the time (15 minutes per hour) a substantial percentage of students were off-task or not engaged in academic work (see Chart 7). Thus, the groupings and on-task behavior were moderately supportive of learning, but students were off-task more often than is desired.

Chart 6. Classroom Groupings in Observed Math Lessons Taught In English (Percent of Time)

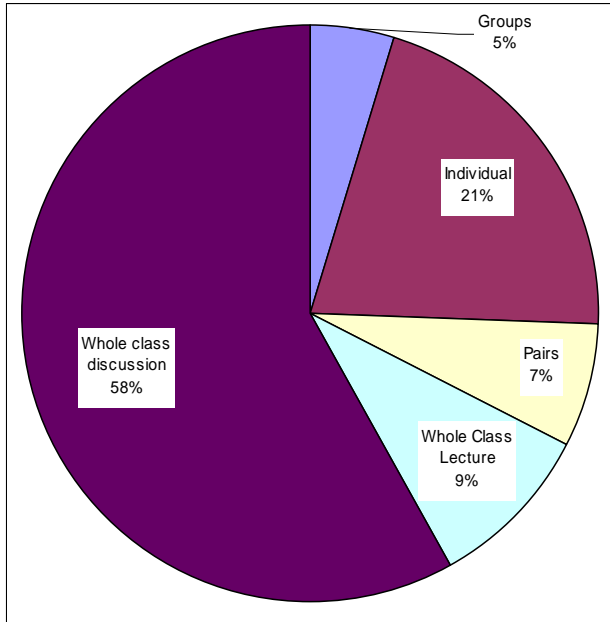
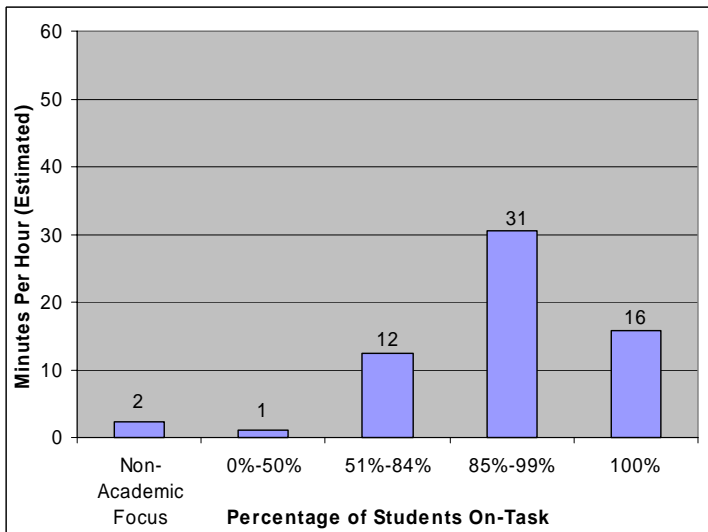


Chart 7. Students On-Task in Observed Math Lessons Taught In English (Estimated Minutes Per Hour)



Instructional Delivery - *How were lesson contents communicated to students? Factors include extent of focus on key understandings, orientation of students to content, logical order of presentation, modeling higher-order thinking, extent of students learning from each other as well as from the teacher, and use of multiple modalities.*

Mathematics lessons taught in English involved a mix of grade level content and below grade level content that was presented using multiple modalities including written, verbal (in discussion with teachers and with peers), and visual (connecting concepts with items around the room.) Lessons were presented in a logical order, and in both cases were organized around key concepts, in one case the concept of symmetry and in the other the relationship between fractions and decimals. However, these ideas were not made explicit and students sometimes had trouble grasping the underlying concepts of the lessons. Teachers helped students to connect with prior knowledge while presenting the lesson. For example, a lesson on symmetry involved students looking around the room to find objects that were symmetrical, and sharing that with the classroom. Thus, lessons were highly interactive and rich in modality or representation of information, but, despite the effort to support deeper understanding of the connections between mathematical representations and concepts, the conceptual depth of lessons was somewhat limited in both lessons.

Student Activity - *What was the nature and extent of opportunities for students to think and express themselves?*

Students were consistently given opportunities to express themselves during math lessons; however, similar to ELA instruction, these opportunities only occasionally engaged students in critical or complex thinking. Students were sometimes confused by tasks that were

not completely developed. For example, one class was asked to make fractions using four quarters. The teacher used the example that two quarters were half of a dollar. Since each quarter is not divisible by itself, and the whole (a dollar) was not itself a tangible entity in this lesson, several students came up with mathematically unreasonable answers. For example, one group gave the answer “two eighths” and another “one third.” The lesson then went on to other ways to provide students with opportunities to recognize the connection between fractions, percentages, and decimals. Thus, although the lesson provided implicit opportunities for more in-depth thinking, the underlying concepts were not always presented to students in a complete way and so some tasks were confusing.

Assessment of Student Understanding - *What was the extent and focus of assessment of student understanding, and how did teachers follow up in class based on those assessments?*

Teachers were observed consistently assessing student understanding through discussions, individual questioning, or examination of student work. Throughout the lessons teachers called on various students to respond to questions or make comments. Follow-up on assessment was apparent in some cases; however, it rarely led to further investigation of concepts and higher order thinking. Teachers seldom probed for deeper understanding of students’ reasoning.

Synthesis and Evaluation - *To what extent did these elements fit together to provide students with opportunities to achieve the learning goals?*

Math lessons taught in English are a small portion of the total number of math lessons observed at Multicultural Learning Center. Students were highly engaged, and the lessons were

highly interactive, making use of multiple modalities. Attempts to develop deeper understanding, such as seeing the interrelationships between concepts were present but incomplete. One teacher articulated the importance of teaching for conceptual understanding, while the other did not. Connections across lesson contents were emphasized in both classrooms, but the connections were not made explicit, which resulted in confusion for some students observed. Lesson contents were not consistently at grade level, and explicit expression about the connections within content (whether done by the teacher or by students) was not as well developed.

Math Taught in Spanish

Learning Goals - *Based on pre-observation interviews, to what extent did teachers plan lessons with clear, standard-aligned goals focused on student learning?*

The two teachers interviewed articulated student-focused learning goals for math, emphasizing the connections they wanted students to recognize in their math lessons. One teacher talked about wanting to prepare students to understand division by making connections between multiplication and logarithms and fractions. Teachers also referenced the standards as the basis for these goals. Teachers did not express the learning goals in specific terms, however, so it was not entirely clear how well the goals linked with the types of thinking and students would actually be doing. Overall, teachers demonstrated an intention to help students see the connections between math concepts within a lesson, and an understanding of how lessons fit into the larger progression of math understanding of their students, as opposed to seeing math instruction as exercises to be completed without an awareness of how they related to each other or student understanding.

Management - *To what extent did teachers establish a supportive learning environment by varying instructional groupings and keeping students on-task?*

Classroom groupings during Math lessons taught in Spanish were somewhat varied with the vast majority of time spent on whole class interactions/discussions (64%). Students also worked individually (20%) and in pairs (11%), and lecture was employed as a teaching method only 5 % of the time devoted to Math instruction in Spanish. No group work was observed (see Chart 8). Student on-task behavior remains very high, with most or all students on-task for 87% of observed class time. Throughout all lessons teachers effectively provided providing engaging environments for their students (see Chart 9).

Chart 8. Classroom Groupings in Observed Math Lessons Taught In Spanish (Percent of Time)

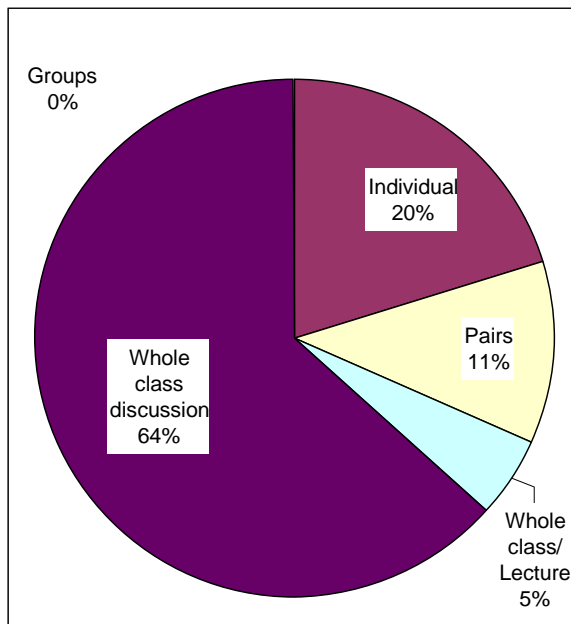
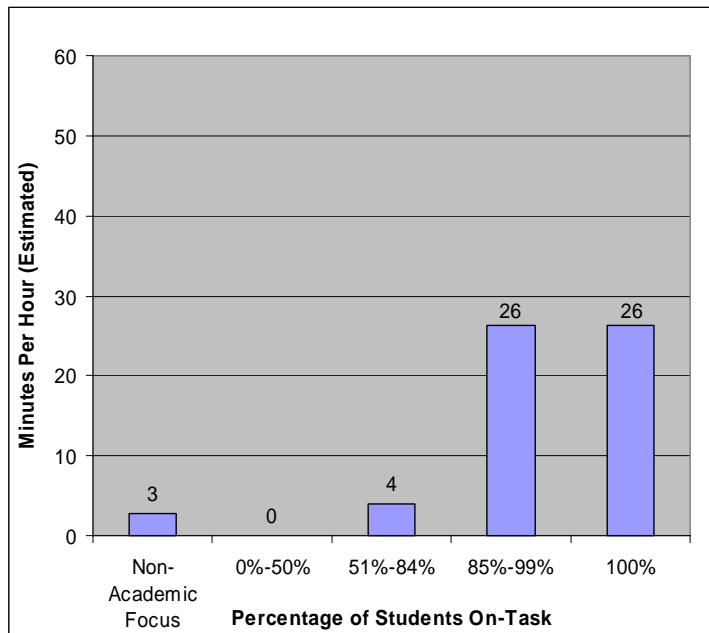


Chart 9. Students On-Task in Observed Math Lessons Taught In Spanish (Estimated Minutes Per Hour)



Instructional Delivery - *How were lesson contents communicated to students? Factors include extent of focus on key understandings, orientation of students to content, logical order of presentation, modeling higher-order thinking, extent of students learning from each other as well as from the teacher, and use of multiple modalities.*

Mathematics lessons in Spanish were very similar to those in English. Lessons were taught using multiple modalities including written, verbal (in discussion with teachers and with peers), and visual. Lessons were somewhat well-ordered. However, consistent with the lack of clarity in learning goals, the general direction or purpose of the lessons was not easily defined. Key ideas were seldom made explicit to students and thus lessons did not seem to have a main focal point around which they centered. Teachers did help students to connect with prior knowledge while presenting the lesson. Generally, however, the focus was more on completing computational tasks, rather than encouraging complex thought and investigation of mathematical concepts.

Student Activity - *What was the nature and extent of opportunities for students to think and express themselves?*

Students were consistently given opportunities to express themselves during Math lessons; however, similar to ELA instruction, these opportunities only occasionally engaged students in critical or complex thinking. Class time was mostly spent in discussion; however, students did have opportunities to work in pairs or in other ways to practice concepts such as estimating prices and other money values. While students were always highly engaged, they were not often directed to higher order thinking.

Assessment of Student Understanding - *What was the extent and focus of assessment of student understanding, and how did teachers follow up in class based on those assessments?*

As in all other subjects, teachers were observed consistently assessing student understanding through discussions, individual questioning, or examination of student work. Throughout the lessons, teachers called on various students to respond to questions or make comments. Follow-up on assessment was apparent with some teachers, but less so with others. Two teachers made clear efforts at follow-up, responding to student conceptual errors regarding whether to multiply or to add, and in another instance, evaluating the need to restructure the next lesson based on students' difficulty in grasping the concept. Other teachers were not observed to follow up with students based on their assessments of them. Consequently, student expression was not developed as much as perhaps it could have been in these classrooms.

Synthesis and Evaluation - *To what extent did these elements fit together to provide students with opportunities to achieve the learning goals?*

Math lessons taught in Spanish were similar to all other subjects observed in that students remained highly engaged throughout. Teachers effectively maintained student interest in math and thus kept them on-task. Teachers also demonstrated an emphasis on using multiple modalities in their lessons. Learning goals, however, were often unclear. Student expression and teacher assessment did not result in follow-up discussions to bring lessons more into focus, or to encourage greater depth and higher order thinking, though a few teachers did this better than others. And in most cases, the Key Ideas around which the lesson was planned were hard to identify because they were not explicitly stated.

Social Studies Instruction

Using the Different Ways of Knowing (DWoK) model, social studies forms the core of instruction at MLC. As such, we observed substantial amounts of instruction on social studies content, accounting for approximately 18% time observed. Examination of social studies lessons, which were not coded in-depth like language arts and math, showed that in comparison with instruction in these subjects, students were given more opportunities for project-based work, more opportunities for critical thinking, and lessons appeared to be structured around key concepts to a greater extent. They were highly interactive and students were mostly on-task, as in the language arts and math lessons observed.

Student Achievement

Performance Levels

In order to examine level of performance, we examined performance ranks on the California Standards tests for school years 2003-2005. Student performance is depicted on Chart 10 and Chart 11. As can be seen on Chart 10, which depicts performance on language arts, the percentage of students scoring Proficient or Advanced increased from about 15% of students in 2003 to about 25% of students in 2005, which implies that about 75% of students are Basic or below. There was also a modest increase in students scoring Far Below Basic in the past year. Chart 11, which depicts performance on math, shows that MLC students have increased in the percentage scoring Proficient or Advanced from about 15% in 2003 to about 32% in 2005. They have also decreased in the percentage scoring Far Below Basic in the most recent year. Thus, the majority of MLC students are not proficient in language arts and the majority is not proficient in math. Recent gains have increased students at the Advanced level of proficiency in both subjects and reduced the percentage scoring Far Below Basic in math.

Chart 10. MLC English Language Arts Performance Ranks (California Standards Test, 2003-2005)

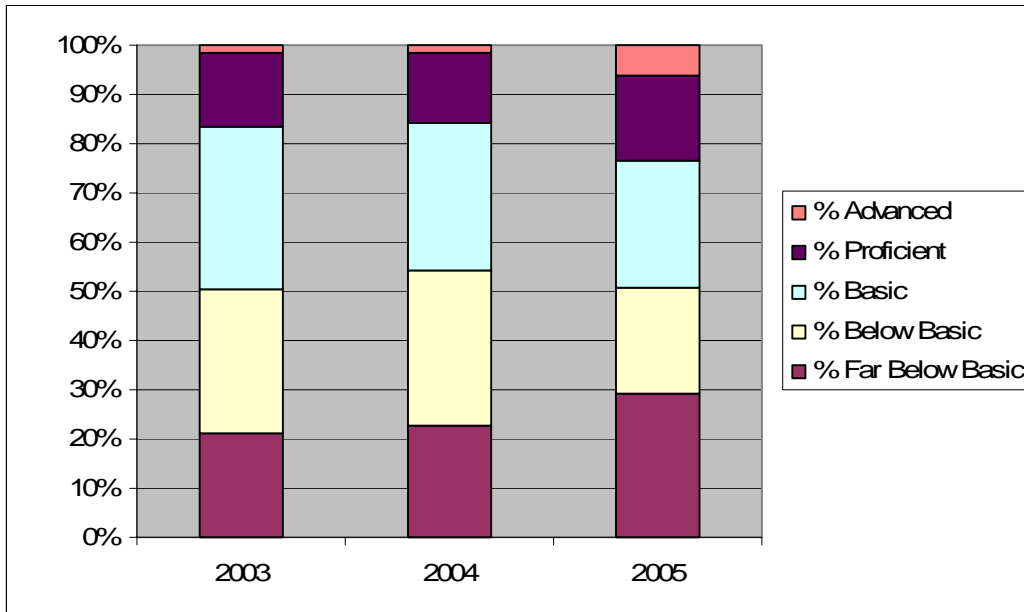
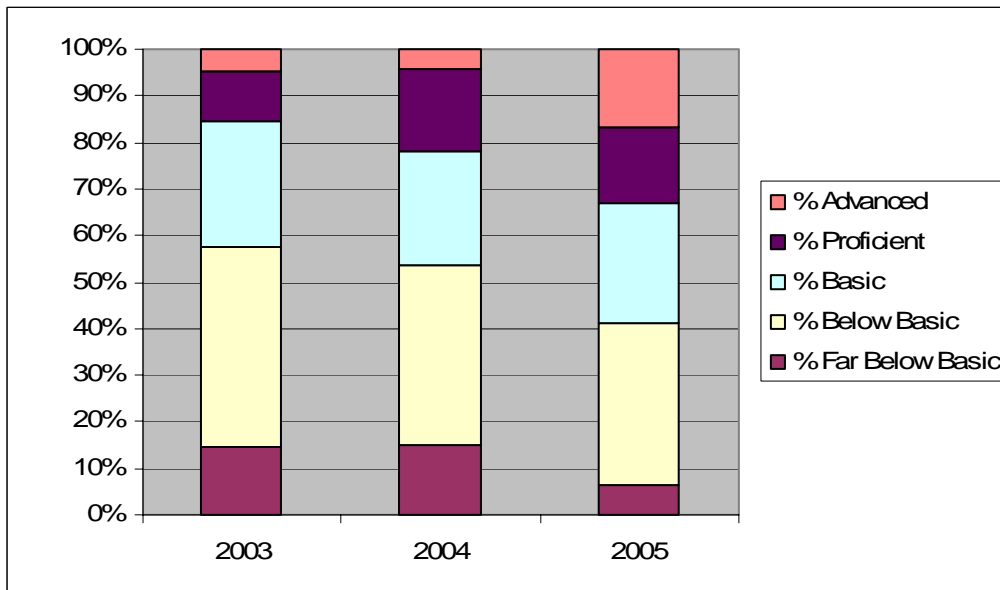


Chart 11. MLC Math Performance Ranks (California Standards Test, 2003-2005)



Academic Performance Index

A comparison of the most recent API scores between MLC and its nearby schools shows that MLC students were not performing as high as students at these schools (see Chart 12). An examination of the schools' School Characteristics Index⁷ (SCI) shows that MLC's characteristics closely resemble these other schools, so their scores are comparable. Although MLC's increase in achievement in this past year is likely to narrow this gap somewhat, these scores are not yet officially reported. Thus, as with other measures, MLC students have not yet achieved at the levels of other similar students in the district.

Chart 12. Academic Performance Index - MLC and Nearby Schools

	API Base 2004		
	State Rank (1-10)	Similar Schools Rank (1-10)	API
MLC	1	1	597
Canoga Park	2	7	644
Hart Street	5	10	706
Melvin Avenue	6	9	759
Sunny Brae	3	7	665

Achievement Gains

MLC's test score levels reflect a student population that performs below the district average, but do not tell how much individual students improved from one year to the next. In order to examine student progress more closely, we analyzed scores on the California Standards Tests (CSTs) in English language arts and math, conducting value added regression analyses.⁸

⁷ Calculated by the California Department of Education to determine comparable schools on the API.

⁸ Value-added analysis is similar to the use of matched gains as a measure of student improvement in one year controlling for prior achievement levels. Through 2002, the District published tables of matched gains on SAT9 test scores. However, state policy has shifted emphasis to the California Standards Tests (CSTs), which change content from grade to grade according to the standards for each grade. It is not valid to subtract CST scores to calculate gains. The analysis described here is a more sophisticated model that controls for prior test scores as well as individual characteristics including race/ethnicity, gender, age in months at the time of the test, English language

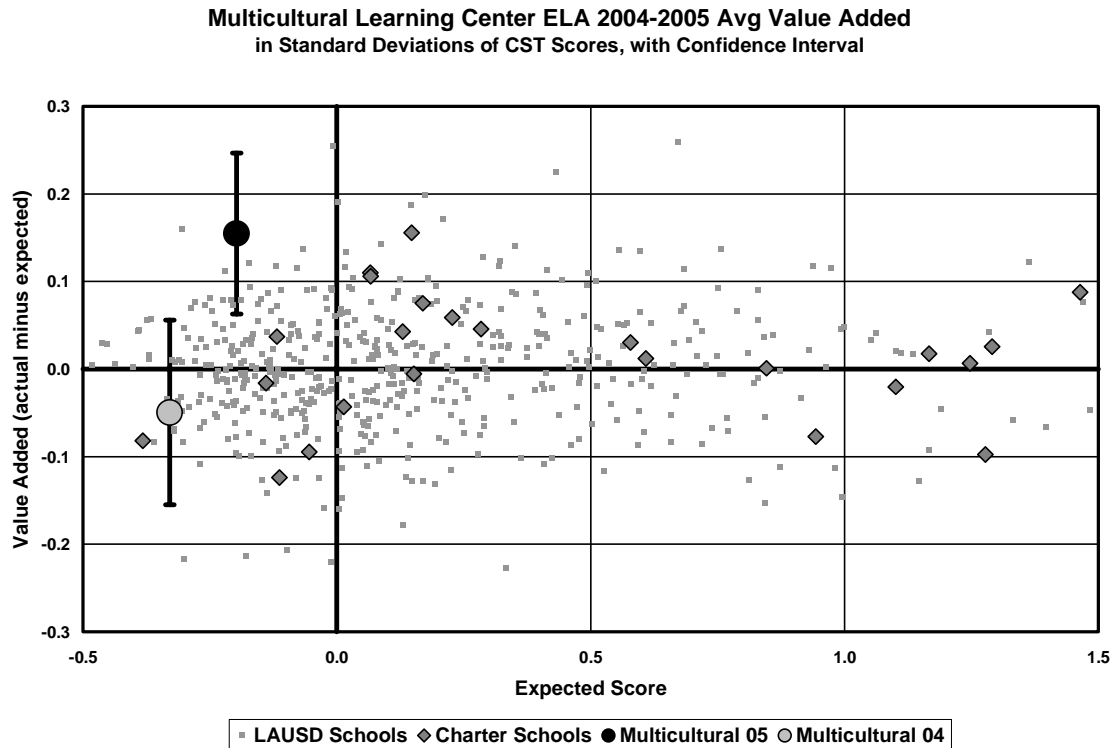
This approach calculates the average growth in student performance after controlling for prior scores and demographic/socioeconomic characteristics. For this analysis, we were able to obtain matched scores for 91 students comparing spring 2005 scores to expectations based on spring 2004 scores, and for 88 students comparing spring 2004 scores to expectations based on spring 2003 scores. (The value added analysis can only be done for students in 3rd grade and higher, because it requires prior-year 2nd grade scores for the analysis.)

English/Language Arts Value-Added Analysis

The value-added analysis of English/language arts test scores shows that MLC students could be *expected* on average to score 0.198 standard deviations below the district, but in fact scored an average of 0.155 standard deviations *above that expectation*. This places MLC in the 98th percentile of LAUSD elementary and middle schools in ELA value added, which is an extraordinary achievement. Chart 13 shows where the school fits in the distribution of schools across the district.

learning status, free or reduced lunch status, and parental education. The value added is the difference between a student's actual score and the score that similar students with the same prior scores could be expected to achieve in an average district school.

Chart 13.

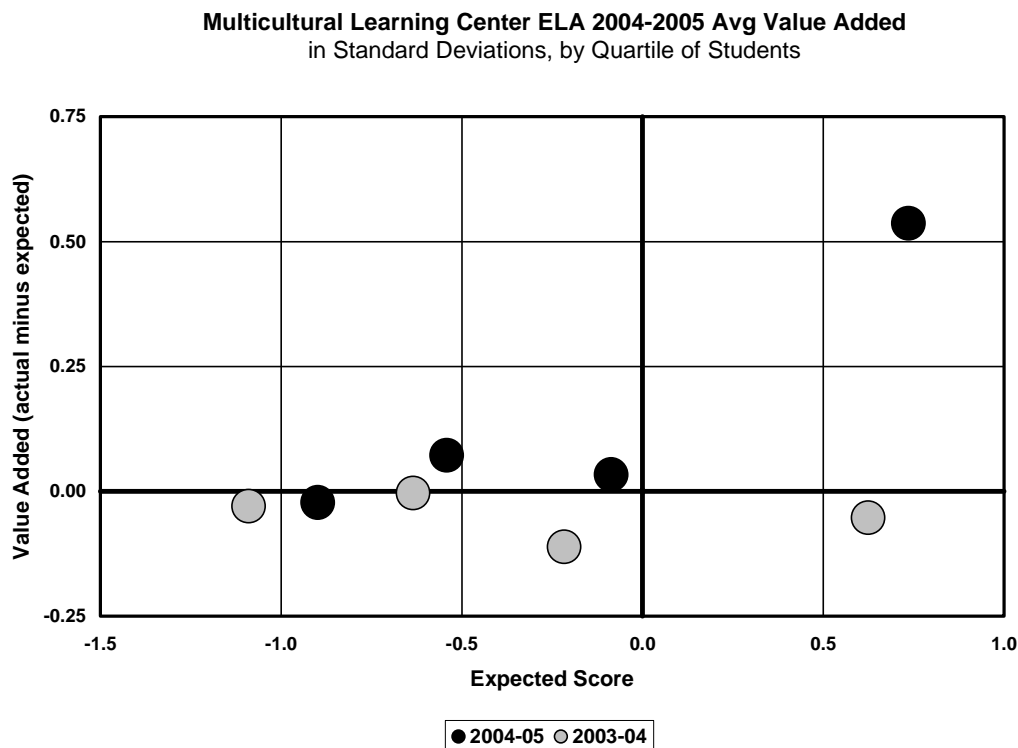


The horizontal axis of this graph shows a student's expected or predicted score in standard deviations above or below the district mean, and the vertical axis shows a student's value added in standard deviations above or below expected. The gray spots represent mean student performance at each district elementary school, and the darker diamonds represent mean performance at charter schools. The large black dot shows mean performance at MLC in the 2004-05 school year, and the large gray dot shows MLC performance in the 2003-04 school year. This graph shows considerable improvement from 2003-04 to 2004-05, with MLC now placing at the top end of the distribution in value added in spite of a student population that falls below the middle in predicted performance. The value added is significantly different from the district mean, as shown by the confidence interval on the graph.⁹

⁹ The bars above and below the black dot show the range of value added estimates that would be consistent with a *true* value added equal to the district mean, given the school size and the random variation among students in the district, at the 95% confidence level. If we took many random draws of 91 students from the district, we would get a

Chart 14 shows the MLC student population divided into quartiles based on expected test scores, with each quartile represented by a black dot for 2004-05 and a gray dot for 2003-04. This shows that the top quartile of students gained far more than their expectation in 2004-05 based on district averages, while the other three quartiles gained about as expected. This reveals that the school's improvement in ELA performance over 2003-04 benefited primarily the highest achieving segment of the MLC student population.

Chart 14.



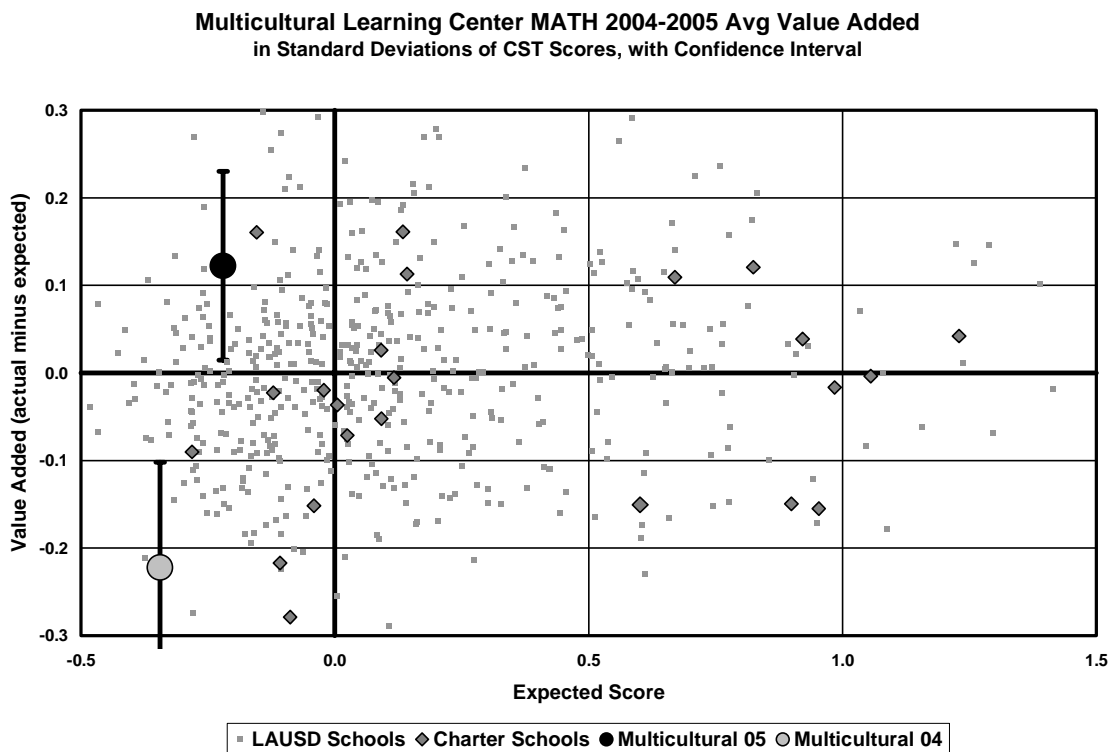
Math Value-Added Analysis

The value-added analysis of math test scores shows that MLC students could be *expected* on average to score 0.220 standard deviations below the district in 2004-05, but in fact scored an

mean as far from the district mean as MLC's less than 0.01% of the time. Thus, we can be more than 99.9% sure that MLC's difference from the district is not due to random variation.

average of 0.122 standard deviations *above that expectation*. This places MLC Charter in the 87th percentile of LAUSD elementary and middle schools in math value added. Chart 15 shows where the school fits in the distribution of schools across the district. It places low in expected score, but higher than the middle for value added. The value added is significantly different from the district mean.¹⁰ It represents an obvious improvement over 2003-04 value added, which was below the district average.

Chart 15.

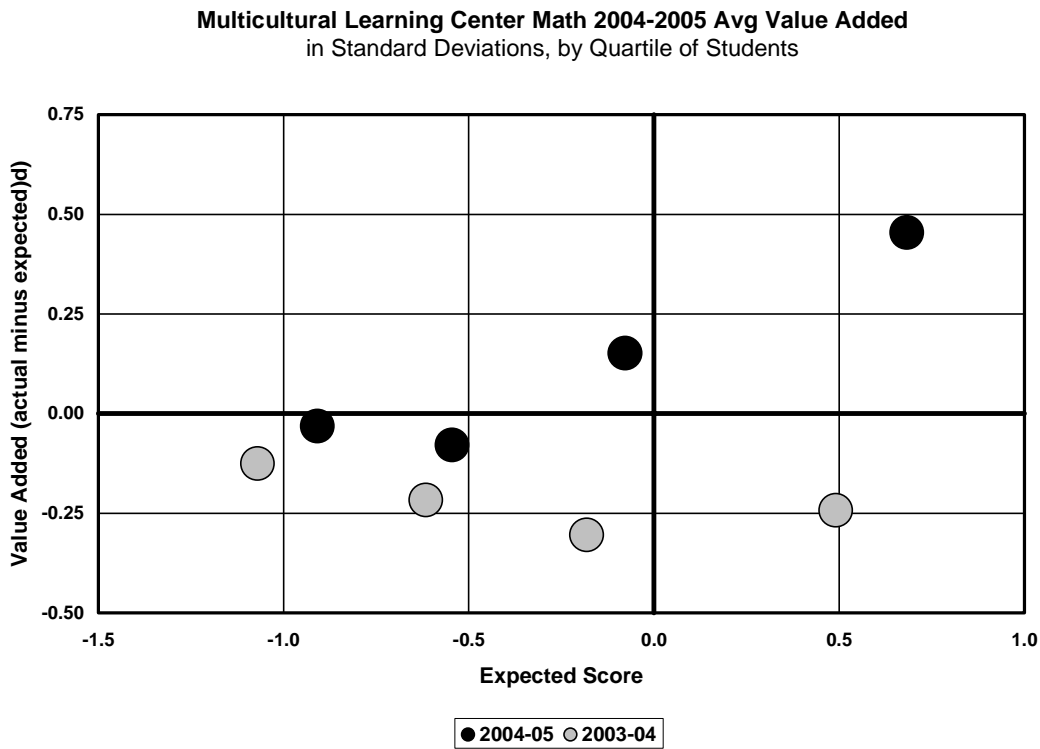


Breaking the MLC student population into quartiles based on expected test scores, Chart 16 shows that the highest quartile of students gained far above their expectation, the second highest quartile gained somewhat more than expected, and the lowest two quartiles did about as

¹⁰ If we took many random draws of 91 students from the district, we would get a mean as far from the district mean as MLC's about 2.9% of the time. Thus, we can be about 97.1% sure that MLC's difference from the district is not due to random variation.

well as or worse than expected. In math, it is the highest performing students who appear to gain the most from attending MLC. This graph also reveals that the improvement in 2004-05 performance over 2003-04 took place among all levels of students within the school, although to a higher degree among the higher performing students.

Chart 16.



Summary

Although MLC students generally scored below average on prior year tests, and thus could be predicted to score low on the 2005 tests, the school appeared to help many of those students achieve higher than predicted results in the 2004-05 school year. The gains are not well distributed across the spectrum of students, but are concentrated among the highest performing students. This analysis reveals significant improvement in the school over 2003-04, but shows that the improvement primarily benefited high-performing students.

Achievement Gains in Spanish

Given the school's bilingual instruction strategy, it may be relevant to look at student learning gains in Spanish, as reflected in scores in on the Aprenda Tests in language arts¹¹ and math, conducting regression analyses using data for the 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05 school years. These analyses are very similar to the value-added analyses described above, although with different data. Residual gains are calculated in such a way that the mean residual gain for the population, in this case elementary students in the district, will be zero, or very close to it. Residuals higher than zero reflect larger gains than other similar students and residuals lower than zero reflect lower gains than comparable students in the district. As can be seen in Chart 17, MLC students grew at a faster rate than comparable LAUSD students in Spanish achievement in both of the past two years as measured by the Aprenda. This growth is statistically significant, i.e. different from the district, in both subjects in the 2003-04 school year but not in the 2004-05 school year.¹²

Chart 17. MLC Student Achievement Gains

Test	Subject	Year	
		2003-04	2004-05
Aprenda	Reading	.50	.17
	Math	.21	.14

* $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

** $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

¹¹ Identified as "Total Reading" on the Aprenda.

¹² The gains in 2003-04 are significant at the .95 level in reading, and at the .99 level in math.

This contrasts with the value-added results for tests in English. MLC students gained at a rate in 2003-04 much higher than that of other district students in Spanish, but lost ground in English. However, in 2004-05 MLC students gained at a rate much higher than district students in English, but showed only slightly better growth than the district in Spanish. This suggests that there may be a tradeoff between gains in Spanish and English, but it could also reflect the progress of the school in moving students from Spanish-based to English-based instruction over time.

As seen in Chart 18, the distribution of Aprenda growth by quartile roughly parallels the finding noted above for CST value added, showing the most educational benefit for higher-performing students. Quartile 1 represents the lowest-scoring students and quartile 4 represents the highest scoring (in the prior year). Student growth on the Aprenda dropped from 2003-04 to 2004-05 for all quartiles on reading, with the largest drop occurring in the lowest quartile. Similarly, on math, gains dropped or stayed the same for each quartile, with the largest declines occurring in the two lowest quartiles, although the least decline was in the bottom quartile for 2004-05. Combined with the CST value-added analysis, this pattern indicates that MLC's increased test score gains have come from the upper half of its students, in both English and Spanish.

Chart 18. MLC Aprenda Gains on Aprenda by Quartile (mean standardized residuals)

Quartile	Total Reading		Math	
	2003-04	2004-05	2003-04	2004-05
1	0.46	-0.29	-0.20	-0.05
2	0.19	0.04	0.20	-0.14
3	0.61	0.45	0.30	0.21
4	0.85	0.51	0.59	0.59

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The Multicultural Learning Center has embarked on a complex and ambitious set of educational approaches and objectives, seeking to provide a positive social environment and a dual immersion program in English and Spanish that will meet the needs of a variety of students, enabling them to succeed academically in both English and Spanish. Findings present a somewhat mixed picture with regard to their success in meeting these objectives. MLC has largely succeeded in providing the kind of educational experience set forth in its charter petition, providing students with an engaging learning environment that incorporates instruction in Spanish and English, uses the arts, and is highly interactive. Students were active (expressing themselves frequently and using a variety of modalities) and focused on learning at exceptionally high levels. Teachers have numerous opportunities for professional development, and there is strong parental involvement. One area for further development is that features of constructivist instruction such as longer-term projects and critical thinking were consistently incorporated in social studies lessons but were only occasionally present in other subjects.

MLC's record regarding student achievement is mixed, with consistent achievement found in Spanish language assessments and a more complex picture on achievement on English language CSTs. MLC students have shown solid performance in assessments given in Spanish and have outpaced the rate of growth of similar LAUSD students in learning on a year-by-year basis. When assessed in English, MLC students have underperformed relative to students at nearby schools and similar schools in the district, as reflected in their API scores. On a yearly growth or value-added basis, though, MLC students showed strong gains in 2004-05 relative to other students in the District. This was consistent with our observation of classroom instruction,

which found that instruction was generally strong. This strong rate of growth reflected a large improvement over the past performance of MLC students based on testing in English.

How, then, do these results speak to an understanding of the effectiveness of MLC's practices? Contextual factors are important for interpreting these results, especially MLC's dual-immersion school model, its status as a fairly new school that began in 2001, and its theory of action, which proposes that mastery of Spanish helps students in the long-term to stronger mastery of subject matter in English. It may not be surprising that MLC students have underachieved on English-based tests relative to students from other LAUSD schools, because the school's model provides only a small proportion of their instruction in English. As a relatively new school, MLC has faced a significant challenge to implement a distinctive educational model effectively. Data suggests that MLC has succeeded in providing quality instruction in English and Spanish, and strong Aprenda results are consistent with this. Our observations indicated that instruction in English was also strong in 2004-05, and student growth on CSTs reflects this analysis. MLC's value added on the CSTs in 2004-05 was among the highest schools in the district. We observed that students were enthusiastic and focused on learning. To some extent, therefore, MLC has been a qualified success in its implementing its model and this has resulted in a number of positive indicators for student outcomes.

Nevertheless, MLC has mostly fallen short on some of the academic goals it set forth in its charter, and MLC students have not achieved at the levels of similar LAUSD students. On page 13 of its 2001 charter petition, MLC proposed several benchmarks for student achievement with regard to school-based assessments, Spanish language assessment (Aprenda and Sabe), and Stanford 9 assessments. First, the school reports that they have monitored student performance in portfolios and that students are performing as expected in the charter petition. Assessing its

performance on other measures is more complicated. Students are no longer administered the Stanford 9, and CSTs do not have percentile scores, so the goal¹³ for SAT/9 scores cannot be assessed directly. However, the median score on the CSTs was Below Basic in English and Basic in Math, which does not reflect a pattern of more than half of students scoring above the mean. Thus, scores in English achievement do not technically fall below the benchmark that was set, since the SAT/9 is no longer administered, but the most comparable scores (CSTs) fall below the types of scores envisioned. With regard to achievement in Spanish, data strongly suggested that students fell just short of the goal.¹⁴ It was not possible to do a definitive assessment of achievement in Spanish because data was not available on the SABE, and it was not known which students began MLC after grade 1. In 2004-05, 69% of students scored at or above the 60th percentile in language arts and 63% at that level in math, which appears to fall short of the school's goal of 80% of students scoring at this level. In mentioning these goals, it is clear that they are quite stringent considering the demographics of the school, and they therefore might not be appropriate as a criterion by which to make a final determination of MLC's success. With regard to overall achievement reflected on API, MLC has underperformed as compared with its nearby schools. Thus, at this point, MLC has met some but not all of its academic goals.

MLC's promising, though difficult, model has shown many positive results in promoting student motivation for learning and achievement in Spanish, but further clarity and more time is needed to determine its ultimate success at improving student achievement in English. Recent strong gains in English suggest that this is possible, but several issues ought to be further clarified. First, expectations regarding acceptable outcomes need to be revised and clarified. MLC has not met the very ambitious goals for achievement in English set forth in its 2001

¹³ 50% of 2nd and 3rd graders, 60% of 4th graders, and 70% of 5th graders scoring at 60th percentile or higher.

¹⁴ 80% of students beginning in grades K-1 are to achieve at the 60th percentile on Aprenda or SABE.

charter petition, and it seems reasonable to reconsider defining more appropriate, but rigorous goals. Similarly, MLC administrators have been rightly proud of achievement in Spanish, but this may not be sufficient to address the requirements for student achievement set by the state and federal governments. Therefore, it is critical to clarify the District's expectations for student outcomes (including whether or not the school should be held to its original, highly ambitious benchmarks).

Our data also suggests that a couple of factors may further strengthen student achievement at MLC. First, their performance could presumably be strengthened by recruiting a student population more balanced with respect to English-language proficiency, in accordance with the school's initial model. To this point, MLC has recruited a higher percentage of students with Spanish as primary language than was intended. This poses a difficulty for their model because students learn language from each other as well as from the formal curriculum, and so the low proportion of primary English-speaking students is not ideal for supporting students to learn English. Second, MLC made substantial progress in achievement on the CSTs this past year, and ought to consider how to continue that trend. Our evaluation was limited in its ability to detect changes in practice because we did not observe the school's practices the prior year. Data suggested a few possibilities for improvement.

First, analysis of student gains suggested that there may be a tradeoff in performance in English versus performance in Spanish. This tradeoff seems most likely to be a function of devoting more time to one subject in class or in lesson planning, or perhaps a combination of the two. Another change suggested in one interview was that professional development topics are now chosen to respond to concerns expressed by teachers whereas past topics were mostly chosen to help teachers to practice according to the school's philosophy, which reflects a natural

transition from being a start-up school to moving towards more stability and consistency. Our observations noted that teachers and administrators expressed a sense of urgency to focus on standards, and this may have contributed to greater improvement. Third, we observed that instruction appeared strongest in social studies, with lesson plans that seemed to reflect greater integration of content and more higher-order thinking. MLC may want to consider how to adjust instruction in language arts or math to be more like social studies instruction. Also with regard to instruction, although lessons appeared carefully planned, there seemed to be room for growth in deeper presentation of lesson contents. This would help students to see the most important connections, which requires careful attention on the part of teachers to identify such “key ideas” during lesson planning. MLC administrators may want to analyze the reasons for the recent improvement and explain how they plan to build upon them.

Three concerns remain about the prospects for MLC’s model to succeed in promoting strong performance in English language assessment. First, although strong average student gains in the most recent year provide encouragement about MLC’s ability to promote student achievement, students have not consistently shown strong gains over time, and their overall level of performance is lower than students in nearby schools. If MLC is to attain continued long-term growth, this difficulty needs to be carefully understood and addressed. Second, MLC students have much less instruction in English than average for students in the district or state, so it seems unlikely that if they are held to the same standards that they will be able to reach them at comparable levels. The expectations for MLC ought to realistically take this into account, either by adjusting the ways MLC is held accountable (and it is not clear that this is an option) or by adjusting MLC’s model to make it more closely in line with expectations, for example, by providing more instruction in English. Third, recent improvement in English performance

occurred mostly in the upper half of MLC students (as rated by prior year's scores). Overall improvement must be strengthened by increasing the performance of the lower half of students as well.

Finally, more time is needed to assess the long-term impact on students of participating in the dual-language program at MLC. Data suggests that MLC students are motivated and active learners, that they learn content in Spanish at faster rates than other district students, and recent indications suggest that they may be gaining in English as well. It is also recommended that the district help MLC in determining how to evaluate the effectiveness of the model for promoting academic success in English.

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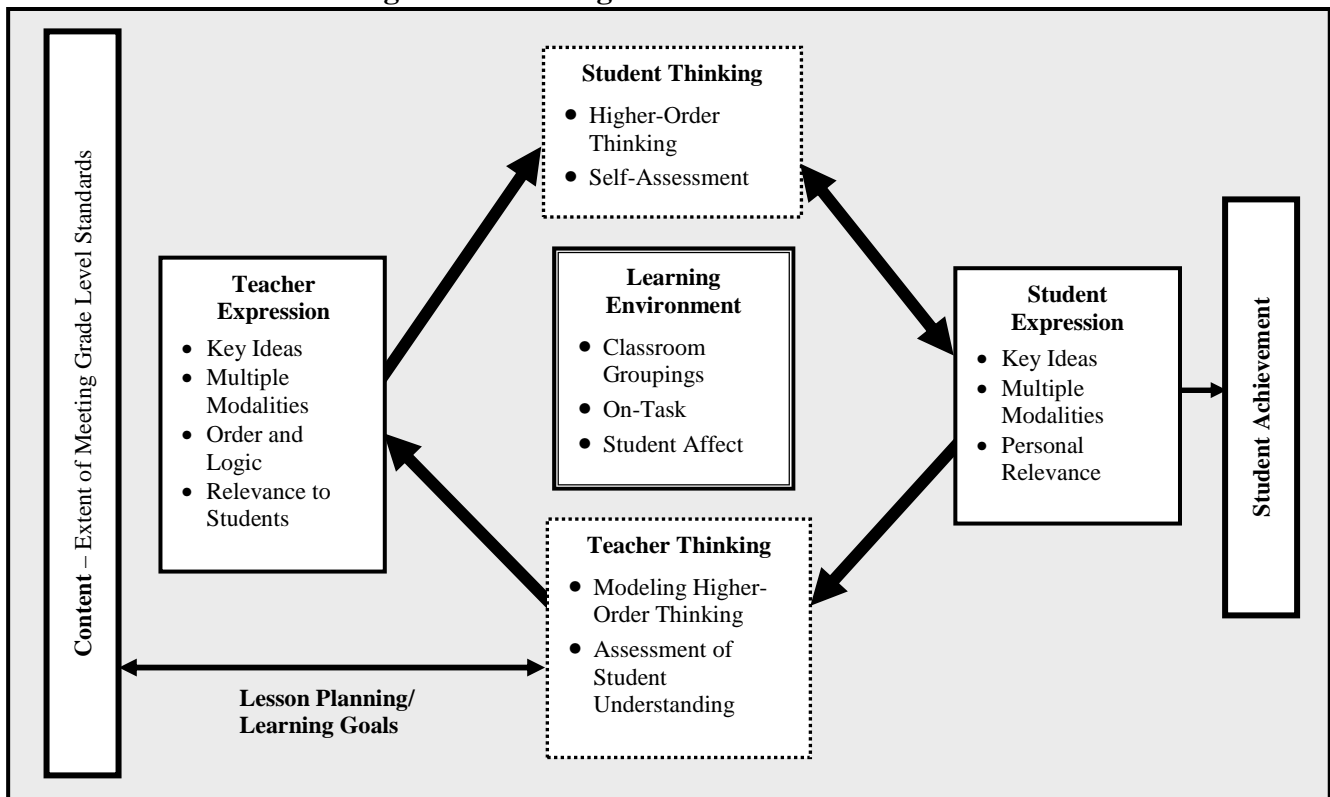
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Appendix A – Instructional Analysis

Two aims guided the approach to analyzing classroom instruction. First, it was important to ground the analysis in features of quality instructional highlighted by the research and theoretical literature (Bloom, 1956; Brophy, 1999; Bruner, 1966; Shulman, 1986), and professional teaching standards (California Standards for the Teaching Profession, and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards). These sources identify many of the same elements, including such things as academic rigor and supporting students to be active learners, but vary in how they relate them together, or in some instances, treat different elements as discrete with their interrelationships not spelled out explicitly. A second goal was to represent the instructional emphases of different pedagogical philosophies, especially constructivism and direct instruction.

In order to connect the elements of instruction in a single model, a conceptual map was developed, focusing on Communicating and Processing Information in the Classroom (Chart 19). This model traces the connections between teacher and student thinking and communication, along with the sources of teacher thinking and the outcome of student achievement. A quick scan of Chart 19 shows that the actors are teachers and students, and the actions are divided into thinking and expressing. Thoughts cannot be observed directly, rather, they must be inferred from the expressions of both teachers and students. This process of inference is central both for data analysis and for the work of effective teaching, in which teachers must try to understand student thought processes through interpreting their communications. This model assumes that teachers have access to information that students need to know, and that student achievement, broadly considered, is the key outcome of teaching.

Chart 19. Communicating and Processing Information in the Classroom



Prior to utilizing the concept map to describe the overall patterns of instruction observed, various aspects of instruction are analyzed. These categories were derived from the model, and were designed to be descriptive of the various areas represented in it.

Learning Goals - To what extent did teachers plan lessons with clear, standards-aligned goals focused on student learning?

Management - To what extent did teachers establish a supportive learning environment by varying instructional groupings and keeping students on-task?

Instructional Delivery - To what extent was communication of lesson content to students characterized by orderliness, cognitive complexity, economy/simplicity, and use of multiple modalities?

Student Activity - What was the nature and extent of opportunities for students to think and express themselves?

Assessment of Student Understanding - What was the extent and focus of assessment

of student understanding, and how did teachers follow up in class based on those assessments?

Student Achievement – What knowledge did students demonstrate on formal and informal assessments?

Learning Goals are determined through a pre-observation interview with the teacher. In the classroom, the learning environment (*Management*) provides the basis for all activity of communication and thinking. Because of the focus on communication of information, classroom management is included through indicators of effective classroom management, not on the processes that lead to these results. *Instructional Delivery* refers to the arrows that point towards **Student Thinking**, and includes not only the features of the communication, but also the thinking implied by the communication. As can be seen, information can be communicated by the teacher (including textbooks and other materials) or from the expressions of other students. *Student Activity* refers both to opportunities for students to think and to express themselves. *Assessment of Student Understanding* refers to the extent to which teachers create opportunities for students express themselves, and what the teacher did to follow up based on those expressions. Analysis of the relationship between the elements of a lesson, therefore, involves relating the findings from the different elements of observation (*Learning Goals, Management, etc.*) guided by the linkages shown in the diagram. The linkages reflect flow of information, and thus the content of what is being taught remains central to interpretation of each one of them.

Perhaps the concept of economy of presentation is among the least familiar in current educational literature. Economy in presenting lessons was described by Jerome Bruner (1966), who emphasized it as a feature of presenting information in a way that does not place excessive cognitive demands on learners.

“Economy in representing a domain of knowledge relates to the amount of information that must be held in mind and processed to achieve comprehension. . . It is more

economical to summarize the characteristics of free-falling bodies by the formula $S = \frac{1}{2}gt^2$ than to put a series of numbers into tabular form summarizing a vast set of observations made on different bodies dropped different distances in different gravitational fields.” (Bruner, 1966, pp 45-46).

Of course this example is not meant to reflect how a lesson would be presented in practice, but it highlights the principle. The sequence of presenting information can also contribute to its economy, since well-ordered presentation minimizes the need for repetition. The concept of economy can be applied to all subject areas, and requires that teachers themselves know the connections between related concepts in their fields, and to think through how to present information in the most comprehensible way. This element was difficult to represent visually in the diagram, but is included in the written analysis of instruction. Lessons that center on key constructs support student understanding by providing simpler ways for students to organize the information they receive.

Some possible misinterpretations of this model should be recognized, and this can be done in reference to the analytic questions that are linked to it. First, although a left-to-right flow of information is common, this is not necessarily normative. A class could begin with student expression, which would lead to teacher thinking, and then the cycle could continue from there. Analysis of the relationship between the elements would still involve the extent to which they fit together to support student achievement. Second, similar to the first issue, this model should not be read to imply that teacher-directed or direct instruction is preferred to student-directed learning or constructivist instruction. Student-directed learning is reflected by the recognition that students can learn from each other (the arrow pointing from **Student Expression** to **Student Thinking**). The features of constructivist instruction as well as direct instruction are represented in the model, but different emphases and goals might be determined in each. Constructivist teachers might have broader learning goals, or the goals might not be fully specified before an

assignment, but effective teaching still requires some goal-orientation, and input to students based on those goals. Third, student achievement does not necessarily refer only to standardized test results, and can include a variety of student representations of their thinking, including speech, a written paper, or a project. The implication, though, is that student learning needs to be expressed in some form, or it is impossible to confirm that it occurred.

The full model involves subcategories of many of the elements in the visual diagram, and these can be found in Appendix B – Expanded Observation Categories.

Appendix B - Expanded Observation Categories

Teacher Thinking

- Receiving Information
 - Attending/Perceiving
 - Reading
 - Comprehending
 - Connecting with prior knowledge
 - Categorizing
 - Memorizing
- Utilizing Information
 - Recalling
 - Describing/Defining
 - Comparing
 - Questioning/Clarifying
 - Solving/Computing
 - Connecting information
 - Related concepts
 - Real-life situations
 - Inquiring/Investigating
 - Analyzing/Synthesizing
 - Evaluating
- Assessing Student Understanding
 - Comparing with learning goal(s)
 - Inferring nature of misunderstanding
 - Diagnosing reason for misunderstanding
 - Determining response

Teacher Expression

- Content
 - State Content Standards
 - Curriculum
 - Teacher's Learning Goals
- Order
 - Accessing prior knowledge
 - Learning goals
 - Presenting lesson
 - Assessing Student Understanding
 - Feedback
 - Responding to student question
 - Re-presenting information
- Focus
 - Information
 - Discrete facts
 - Related facts
 - Procedures
 - Concepts
 - Questions
 - Instructions
 - Thinking process
- Modality
 - Kinesthetic
 - Manipulating
 - Moving
 - Dancing/Playing
 - Realia
 - Technology
 - Audio
 - Computer
 - Video
 - Verbal
 - Speaking
 - Singing
 - Reading
 - Written
 - Text
 - Drawing/Painting
 - Charts/Diagrams

Learning Environment

- Instructional grouping
- On-task behavior
- Respect and responsibility
- Physical Environment

Student Thinking

- Receiving Information
 - Attending/Perceiving
 - Reading
 - Comprehending
 - Connecting with prior knowledge
 - Categorizing
 - Memorizing
- Utilizing Information
 - Recalling
 - Describing/Defining
 - Comparing
 - Questioning/Clarifying
 - Solving/Computing
 - Connecting information
 - Related concepts
 - Real-life situations
 - Inquiring/Investigating
 - Analyzing/Synthesizing
 - Evaluating
- Student Self-Assessment

Student Expression

- Content
 - State Content Standards
 - Curriculum
 - Teacher's Learning Goals
- Focus
 - Information
 - Discrete facts
 - Related facts
 - Procedures
 - Concepts
 - Questions
 - Instructions
 - Thinking process
- Modality
 - Kinesthetic
 - Manipulating
 - Moving
 - Dancing/Playing
 - Realia
 - Technology
 - Audio
 - Computer
 - Video
 - Verbal
 - Speaking
 - Singing
 - Reading
 - Written
 - Text
 - Drawing/Painting
 - Charts/Diagrams