

Case Study Three  
Middle School Series

EMERY MIDDLE SCHOOL:  
TEAM PLANS TO USE ASIAN  
STUDIES TO REFORM  
CURRICULUM AT LOW-  
PERFORMING SCHOOL

# INTRODUCTION TO CASE STUDIES

## INTRODUCTION

This school-based case study is one of 16 prepared by InSites, a nonprofit research organization. This case study is part of an evaluation of the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) and offers you an opportunity to study educators engaged in the work of promoting Asia in classrooms and schools. Understanding their experiences, impressions, and methods in teaching about Asia can help you determine how to foster attention to Asia in the context of your unique educational setting.

## ABOUT THE NCTA EVALUATION

Launched in 1998, NCTA is funded by the Freeman Foundation whose major objective is to strengthen the bonds of friendship between the United States and the countries of East Asia through educational endeavors. NCTA deepens teachers' knowledge about the literature, cultures, history, and art of China, Japan, and Korea. Teachers are drawn to participate in NCTA by receiving resource materials, presentations by Asia experts, stipends, and opportunities to participate in study tours and other enrichment activities. Since 1998, more than 3,500 teachers in 42 states have participated in the seminars. For more information about NCTA, visit [www.nctasia.org](http://www.nctasia.org).

In 2002, NCTA and the Freeman Foundation asked InSites to evaluate its work. The case studies are one of several products in the evaluation. For more information about the evaluation, see [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta).

## BASIS FOR CASE STUDIES

As part of the evaluation, InSites gathered information from teachers participating in NCTA seminars. This information was gathered in the spring of 2003 and serves as the foundation for the case studies. The schools represented vary in geographic region, type of school and community, number of NCTA teachers in the school, and teacher subject areas. To disguise

identities, InSites replaced the names of people, places, and schools with pseudonyms and altered some peripheral facts. In addition, InSites edited some quotations for clarity and length.

## USING THE CASE STUDIES

The case studies show teachers engaged in teaching about Asia and promoting the presence of Asian studies in their schools. Seminar leaders can use them to encourage NCTA participants to consider their role in fostering a sustained presence for Asian studies. However, even if you're an educator who hasn't been involved in NCTA, you can benefit from the case studies. Whether you're a teacher, an administrator, a professional development provider, or a policymaker interested in bringing knowledge of Asia to American students, the case studies can help you generate ideas for fostering a presence for Asian studies in classrooms and schools.

## STRUCTURE OF THE CASE STUDIES

Each case study begins with a vignette that introduces the central characters and focus of the case study. The case study then presents information about the school, district, and/or state, and a brief description of the NCTA seminar. Impact of the NCTA Seminar details how NCTA participants have used what they learned in their classrooms and schools. Next Steps presents multiple views about promoting a sustained presence for Asian studies at the school. Discussion Questions focuses on key points in the case study and helps you consider how these issues relate to your own educational setting.

## CROSS-CASE EXAMINATION

You can conduct a cross-site examination of features in these case studies by logging onto [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta). Information is presented by school and organized into three categories: context, seminars, and NCTA teachers.

# EMERY MIDDLE SCHOOL: TEAM PLANS TO USE ASIAN STUDIES TO REFORM CURRICULUM AT LOW-PERFORMING SCHOOL

## VIGNETTE

*Can middle school teachers use Asian content and resources to reform the curriculum at a low-performing school?*

When language arts teacher **LISA CABALLERO** saw the advertisement for the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia (NCTA) seminar, she was intrigued by its offer of instructional content about Asia, the availability of textbooks for teachers, and Asian resources for the school. Thinking that the Asian content and resources could provide a focal point for renewing the curriculum of the school, she convinced five other teachers to apply for the seminar. They applied in a time of crisis. Emery Middle School was on the state's list of failing schools and an empowerment team had been formed to restructure the school. The six teachers planned to use the information gained from the seminar as a springboard for writing a new social studies curriculum. They hoped that using Asia as a central theme would enliven the curriculum and help them improve student test scores.

A year after the seminar, the district's status has not changed. But the teachers have acquired knowledge about Asia that they have used in their classrooms. The middle school teachers also have a new principal committed to raising the achievement level of students. And some team members are still looking to use the knowledge and resources gained through the seminar to reform the social studies curriculum.



## Emery Middle School

Emery Middle School serves 300 seventh- and eighth-grade students. Of these, 100 percent qualify for free breakfasts and lunches. Ninety-nine percent of the students are African American and less than 1 percent are Asian.

# EMERY MIDDLE SCHOOL AND ITS COMMUNITY

Emery is a small city surrounded by a large metropolitan area. The tree-lined streets flow seamlessly from one metropolitan entity to the next. This urban community of about 20,000 has its own school district, consisting of two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.

Many residents live in low-income, Section 8 housing, and many families move frequently. Emery Middle School is known for taking anyone “who sleeps there” and for keeping students on its enrollment lists. But when students leave and come back into the school, it takes a long time for the records to follow so it can be difficult to determine students’ grade levels. There is little community involvement in the school.

Emery Middle School was placed on the Department of Education’s list of failing schools several years ago. Although an empowerment team was formed to restructure the school, students’ test scores have not improved. The empowerment team has hired a new principal—**KAY MOODY**, the fourth principal in six years — who is committed to improving student achievement. The new principal says that the school restructuring process has been slow and she anticipates additional changes. She doesn’t think the empowerment team is very aware of the NCTA seminar or NCTA attendees’ use of the Asian content in their classrooms.

The high school and middle school are housed in the same building. They share a library and, in some cases, share teachers, such as those teaching physical education and art. With the middle school on block scheduling and the high school on a typical high school schedule, the issue of scheduling is a source of contention. This year, the high school determined its schedule and made the middle school work around it. Middle school teachers lost their common planning time because they had to arrange their schedules to be compatible with those of the high school. In addition, each middle school teacher had to teach an extra class period.



## Professional Development

The state requires teachers to obtain 24 credit hours of continuing education to get permanent teaching certification. After that, they need 180 hours of professional development every five years to stay certified. But there is no leadership training and development in the district. This makes the NCTA 30-hour seminar an attractive option for teachers to begin to fulfill their requirements.

The curriculum at Emery is weak. Seventh-graders read at two to three years below grade level. There is no social studies curriculum in the elementary schools in this district, although the middle school is now teaching world cultures.

Although there is high turnover among students and administrators, the teaching staff has shown resiliency and a commitment to each other and to their students. *LISA CABALLERO* describes herself as a middle school teacher by choice. One NCTA participant says, “I love to teach, and when you do it here and have success, it’s probably unmatched anywhere else. That’s what keeps me going.”

## NATURE OF NCTA SEMINARS

Seminar leader *JANET COOPER CRAWFORD* began her career as a classroom teacher, mostly at the high school level. She has a doctorate in history with a specialization in Chinese history. At the time of the seminar, she was the associate director of the Asian studies program at a local university. Her position combined administration of outreach programs and presentation of seminars for teachers.

As a historian, Janet’s overall approach to the NCTA seminars is chronological. She devotes about 60 percent of the seminar to China, 30 percent to Japan, and 10 percent to Korea. Each session consists of approximately one-third lecture and two-thirds discussion and demonstration. Guest speakers lecture for about an hour of each three-hour session. Janet leads the other two hours, covering pedagogy, additional content, and introduction of curriculum materials. In addition to discussion during the sessions, the two follow-up sessions give teachers an opportunity to share the lesson plans they have created.



## Implementation Plans

The seminar leader, Janet Cooper Crawford, held two follow-up sessions to the NCTA seminar. Among other activities at these three-hour follow-up sessions, participants presented their implementation plans. These implementation plans were required, but teachers could choose to write either three lesson plans or an essay.

## IMPACT OF THE NCTA SEMINAR

Before these six teachers took the NCTA seminar, Asian studies were non-existent in the district. After the seminar, all the participants had incorporated Asian content in their classrooms. Sharing of lesson plans in the seminar provided Emery teachers with lessons they have used extensively in their classrooms. Several say that their own attitudes toward Asia have changed for the better or that their interest in Asia has been greatly expanded or enhanced. The experience of taking the seminar together also strengthened the team's sense of community.

Ben Myers, who teaches special education students, says he began the seminar with a negative attitude about Asia. But gradually his attitude changed. Now he has more interest in newspaper articles that relate to Asia and has noticed items he can use with his special education students. Although he expressed concern that the seminar did not directly address the special needs population, he discovered that one student who seldom reads books had completed an entire book about Korea ("Lost Names," a book that participants learned about in the seminar).

For history teacher **TOM WALL**, the seminar was both beneficial and enjoyable. He says, "I loved it. I learned a lot that I didn't know that I thought I did know. Being a history major you have to take 18 credits in U.S. history and 18 credits in European history, etc. So my actual knowledge of East Asia was not that strong. It gave me a lot of insight". Because Tom is going to be teaching U.S. history next year, he will be able to make some connections to East Asia, though not as many as he had hoped.

“What [the seminar leader] has done is allow me to look at Asia socially, economically, religiously, and politically. It opened up a whole new world for me, to the point where I enrolled in a one-week program afterwards — and I’ll be in the program again this summer. Definitely, it has enhanced my learning and allowed me to take the information to our students.” —

*NCTA teacher*

**FRANCO DIORIO**, a literature teacher, took the seminar because many of the students in this district have very little chance to be exposed to things outside their own unique culture and climate. He said he thought infusing his teaching with this new information and interesting content would help students improve their test scores. Language arts teacher **LISA CABALLERO** has used about half the lesson plans she received in the seminar follow-up sessions in her classes. She would like to attend another follow-up session, in a structured environment, and find out what other people have done with their materials.



## Key Points

- ❖ School in impoverished community on state list of failing schools.
- ❖ Six teachers attend seminar with intent to use knowledge and resources about Asia to reform curriculum.
- ❖ New principal committed to student achievement.
- ❖ Resilient, committed teaching staff.
- ❖ Loss of middle school planning time.



For more information about other seminars and participants, see [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta).

## NEXT STEPS

Principal **KAY MOODY**'s focus for the students is on "life after Emery." She wants students to know about other cultures. The principal wants to align the curriculum with both the state standards and the standards of the national New Standards Project. According to the principal, New Standards requires more depth in students' active engagement and critical thinking than do the state standards. She says, "We want students to know what's expected of them before we do assignments, know what it takes to get an A or a B. A lot of drafting of work, proofreading, redoing, critical analysis. As long as these things can be integrated with (NCTA), I'm totally in favor of it. Overall, I think it's great for the students to experience another culture. Many of them will not get any other opportunities."

During the seminar, the team envisioned using their training in Asian studies for more than new lesson plans. They wanted to build a curriculum that would be intriguing to students and help them incorporate basic skills into their learning. Rather than Asian studies being a relatively small component of the larger curriculum, they viewed it as central to the curriculum. The vision was constructed, in part, because the school did not have a basic curriculum that applied to the school as a whole. But the teachers' intention to use Asia as a springboard for creating a social studies curriculum has been thwarted by administrative and scheduling changes in the school. Currently, Emery is focused on the restructuring process and improving test scores.

While some members of the middle school team plan to meet over the summer to rewrite the curriculum, others are reluctant to commit to the planned development until they see commitment from the administration to make it work. They note that when the middle school team took the NCTA seminar, they had common planning time but that time was taken away by the previous principal. The new principal says that if she has any staff development money, she will do her best to put it aside to pay teachers for their curriculum development work.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### Supporting Information

Two reports from the NCTA evaluation provide helpful information for addressing the discussion questions.

***Teaching about Asia in American Schools: Keys to Success*** presents findings about the impact of NCTA seminars on teachers, classrooms, and schools. It also describes factors that affect the sustained presence of Asia in schools and classrooms.

***Teaching about Asia in American Schools: Tips for Seminar Leaders*** provides information about how seminar leaders design seminars to both increase teachers' content knowledge and help them foster a sustained presence for Asia.

Both reports are available at [www.nctasia.org](http://www.nctasia.org) and [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta).

1. What evidence do you see that NCTA teachers at this school are getting serious content about Asia into their classrooms? How satisfied are you with the level of serious content about Asia that they are getting into their classrooms? What factors challenge their ability to infuse Asia into their classroom curriculum? What factors support it?
2. How are NCTA teachers sharing what they know about Asia with colleagues? What other formal and informal strategies would you encourage these NCTA teachers to use to bring greater attention to Asia in their school curriculum?
3. One of the goals of NCTA is fostering a sustained presence or permanent place for Asia in schools and classrooms. How successful have NCTA seminar participants been in reaching that goal in this school? (See **KEYS TO SUCCESS** — [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta) — for more information on factors that are necessary or make a contribution toward reaching this goal.)
4. What strategies for recruiting additional teachers for future NCTA seminars could be used in this school or area to help ensure a sustained presence for Asian studies? (See **TIPS FOR SEMINAR LEADERS** — [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta) — for some practical information relating to seminar activities, including recruitment.)
5. Consider the conditions for supporting a sustained presence for Asia in the curriculum of schools described in **KEYS TO SUCCESS** and this discussion of Emery. To what extent do you think there is a sustained presence for Asia in your school?
6. What Asia-related initiatives and interests in your own community might enhance the teaching of Asian content in your school? (For example, is there a consulate, museum, business, university, community college, or organization of native Asians that could be engaged?)
7. What practical and feasible actions might you and your colleagues undertake to foster a greater long-term presence for Asia in your school and its curriculum?

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# Case Study Three – Middle School Series Emery Middle School: Team Plans to Use Asian Studies to Reform Curriculum at Low- Performing School

## About the Case Studies Series

This case study is one in a series of 16. The full set of case studies is listed below. You can access them at [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta).

### Middle School Case Studies

1. Baker Middle School: Media Specialist Promotes Asian Studies Schoolwide
2. Clemens Middle School: Seminars and Study Tours Help Foster Asian Studies
3. Emery Middle School: Team Plans to Use Asian Studies to Reform Curriculum at Low-Performing School
4. Hardin Middle School: Teachers Infuse Asia in Art, Geography, and History Classes
5. Hay Edwards Middle School: Teachers Bring Asian Studies to Rural School in Transition
6. Kaiser Middle School: Lone Teacher Mobilizes Interest in Asia
7. Wadsworth Middle School: Cross-Disciplinary Team Develops Strong Asian Curriculum

### High School Case Studies

1. Alternative School: Teachers Organize School Year Around Asian Theme
2. Beye High School: Teachers Fit Asia into Standards-Driven Curriculum
3. Evans High School: China Exchange Program Stems from NCTA Seminar
4. Jefferson High School: On-Site Seminar Enriches Asian Content in High-Performing School
5. Lincoln High School: Interconnected Initiatives Expand Presence of Asia
6. Meridian High School: Teachers Implement Asian Studies in Multiple Disciplines
7. Montview High School: Teachers Include Asia in Revised English and Social Studies Curriculum
8. Saunders High School: Critical Mass of Teachers Increases Asian Studies at Private School
9. South Lake District High School: District Collaboration Magnifies NCTA's Presence

For further information about the NCTA evaluation, see [www.insites.org/ncta](http://www.insites.org/ncta).

For information about the NCTA program and the five national coordinating sites, see [www.nctasia.org](http://www.nctasia.org).