

Adjusting to the Block Methodology and Instructional Strategies

Training

The success of block scheduling will be determined by the ability of teachers to incorporate a variety of teaching strategies within the new allotted time frame. To make this transition, teachers should receive extensive training to help them expand their teaching repertoire so that they can serve the needs of their students better. A NASSP study of the Restructuring of the American High School (1996) states:

Ultimately, the responsibility for implementing instructional strategies rests in the hands of individual teachers who should prepare themselves well and be able to utilize a variety of strategies, in addition to lecturing, for effective student learning.

Staff development can include some of the following topics: cooperative learning, curriculum integration, team teaching, assessment, learning styles and multiple intelligences, as well as the use of technology.

How Children Learn

Much research has been done dealing with how children learn best. In his book *Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner theorizes that there are many forms of intelligences and that:

1. All of us possess these intelligences and can use them productively.
2. Most people can develop each intelligence to an adequate level of proficiency.
3. Intelligences usually work together in complex ways.
4. There are many ways to be intelligent within each category.

The seven intelligences identified by Gardner are: Verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, musical/rhythmic, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal.

Traditionally, schools have taught to the students who are verbal/linguistic and/or logical/mathematical and many of our students have become labeled at risk, low achievers, or unmotivated because they were not taught in the ways in which they learned best. If we believe that all students can learn, then it is our responsibility to address each student's particular way of learning.

The Foreign Language Advantage

Foreign language teachers are at an advantage in addressing the different ways in which students learn since traditionally they have used varied activities to help their students develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. The lecture style of instruction has always been limited even though the amount of teacher talk is still substantial. However, one must keep in mind that true learning does not take place if teaching is reduced to dispensing facts and drill of skills.

Focusing Instruction

While we recognize that a 90-minute class has to include more activities, too often, switching to a longer time frame means adding additional unrelated activities. It is important to remember that the various activities will not help students internalize the language unless the activities are related in their focus and unless they have practical applications inside and outside the classroom. It is when language is recycled in many different and meaningful ways that students begin to make the language theirs.

Lesson Plan Suggestions

To address this point, Canady and Rettig (1995) recommend a three part lesson plan which includes:

1. Presentation of material by the teacher
2. Application of information
3. Synthesis and closure

They recommend that the application phase be especially stressed since it is with this phase that students have the opportunity to internalize information.

A sample lesson format is displayed in figure 7, page 24. Additional formats and sample lesson plans from NC teachers are included in Appendices B and C, pages 55-82.

The 90-Minute Class

For the successful 90-minute class, it is important to consider the variety of activities as well as the time element. "Classes of 90 minutes are best divided into three 30-minute sections, two 45-minute sections, or three 20-minute sections with a 15-minute opening and closing" (Gerking, 1995). Time should be divided to include interactive and independent activities. In addition, teachers will want to incorporate the proper mix of active vs. "downtime" activities.

The qualities of an effective 90-minute lesson plan are as follows (source unknown).

- **Variety**
Mental and physical activities, center of attention (teacher, single student, group presentations, guest speakers), learning styles, blocks of time, intensity.
- **Transitions**
If you are moving from one activity to another, you are going to lose some people UNLESS you make your transitions smooth, logical, and clear to students.
- **Time to Present Information**
Don't get so wrapped up in student-centered activities that you forget to plan time for presenting new information (by the teacher or a student.)
- **Time for Student Practice**
90 minutes allows more time for teacher-guided practice in the classroom.
- **Time for Review and Closure**
Remember to review the previous day's activities, as well as those of the current lesson, to keep students thinking about where they have been and where they are going.
- **Wise and Careful Planning**
Don't fall into the trap of thinking, "oh, we've got 90 minutes so we don't have to start as quickly as we used to"--you still need to use all that time in the most educationally sound manner possible.

Physical Well-Being

The students' physical well-being cannot be overlooked. While it is not necessary to take a formal break within the class, teachers from Northwood High School in Chatham County recommend scheduling structured opportunities for movement in the room. Such physical activities could include the moving in and out of cooperative activities, the reorganization of desks for projects or viewing of video segments, the assignment of work at special stations, etc.

LESSON PLAN

Teacher: _____ Subject: _____

Lesson Focus/Topic(s):

Language Objectives:

Learning Context (Relationship to unit, area of study, sequence):

	Strategies/Activities	Time	Materials
Introduction/Warm up			
Guided Practice			
Switching Gears			
Assessment			
Closing			

Figure 7: Sample Lesson Plan Format

I. METHODOLOGY

Communicative Competence

The goal of the North Carolina foreign language program is to develop communicative competence in another language. To develop the ability to communicate in another language, language functions needed for daily survival in the language are stressed over the linguistic form. Students are often placed in real-life situations where negotiation of meaning becomes of key importance.

Methods

Over the years, many approaches and methods have been applied to the teaching of another language. North Carolina's teachers are often using an eclectic approach, combining elements of various methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Natural Approach, and Total Physical Response (TPR).

Natural Approach

The Natural Approach, designed by Krashen and Terrell (1983), is based on the theory of second language acquisition. Its primary goal is communicative competence through language acquisition rather than language learning, i.e., the ability to use grammar rules rather than the conscious understanding of the rules. It moves the students from the listening mode to the speaking mode by first involving students in comprehension activities requiring no language then moving to questions requiring single word answers, either/or questions where the answer is provided, and finally moving students into speaking in phrases and sentences without error corrections. With this methodology, students are expected to acquire the language rather than learn about it.

TPR

Gina Doggett, in the ERIC Digest article "Approaches to Language Teaching" (1986), describes the TPR (Total Physical Response) method as follows.

Asher's approach begins by placing primary importance on listening comprehension, emulating the early stages of mother tongue acquisition, and then moving to speaking, reading, and writing. Students demonstrate their comprehension by acting out commands issued by the teacher; teacher provides novel and often humorous variations of the commands. Activities are designed to be fun and to allow students to assume active learning roles. Activities eventually include games and skits.

II. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

There are many existing strategies which can be applied to teaching on a block schedule. The following are a few examples:

Cooperative Learning

The September 1992 ERIC Digest defines cooperative learning as:

...Students working together in small groups on tasks that require cooperation and interdependence among all individuals in each group. Students help each other to complete learning tasks and are rewarded for providing that help (Jacob & Mattson, 1987).

Research

Research in the area of cooperative learning stresses that cooperation promotes higher achievement than interpersonal competition or individual efforts.

Components

The essential components of cooperative learning are:

- a. Positive interdependence
- b. Face-to-face interaction
- c. Individual accountability
- d. Interpersonal and small group skills
- e. Group processing

Strategies

The implementation of cooperative learning can include some of the following strategies:

- **Round-Robin:** Round-robin is designed to keep team members equally involved throughout an activity, and teaches the skill of taking turns.

An example in a foreign language class could be to divide the class into groups of five and to give each person within the group a different color magic marker. One after the other, students would be asked to write down an idea to be incorporated into a group task.

- **Basic Jigsaw:** Form groups of six (home team). Ask the students to count off, numbering themselves one through six. Give directions that all one's will go to table one, all two's to table two, etc. At the new table

configuration, participants learn the information and become experts. Time will vary according to the complexity and volume of material. After a given amount of time, participants return to their original tables (home team). Each participant who is an “expert” on the topic teaches the others at the table the information just learned.

- **Numbered Heads Together:** This strategy allows for students to review. Students are put in groups, and each student is given a number. After a question is asked or a task assigned, the group works on the task. The answer is given only by the student with a specific number, i.e., the students with the number “three” in a group would answer the question.
- **Learning Partners:** This strategy is usually done with student pairs. Students may be assigned a number (1 or 2). Ask students to turn to their partner and ask him/her something about the assignment, to describe how to do what you have just taught, to summarize the 2-3 more important points of the discussion, or whatever fits the lesson.
- **Team Practice and Drill:** In this model, the learning of the material is up to the group. Following a traditional lesson, each group gets together to practice.
- **Bookends:** Before a film, lecture, large group class discussion, or reading, have students summarize with their partners (2-3) or group (4-5) what they already think they know about the subject and come up with questions, discuss new information, and formulate new questions. The thinking strategy K-W-L works well here.
- **Line up:** This activity can be done fairly quickly. The teacher asks the students to line up according to their birthday, height, etc. Students go around the room interviewing one another and line up accordingly. The teacher can then confirm by asking each student to state the information.
- **Four corners:** This is a movement activity. Each student moves to a corner of the room representing a teacher-determined alternative. Students discuss within corners, then listen to and paraphrase ideas from other corners.

Group
and
Pair Work

There are many acknowledged advantages to group and pair work.

- They create a more positive and less threatening environment
- They encourage multiple points of view.
- They motivate the students by increasing the amount of conversation and enriching the variety of practice. This is especially important if we consider that under a 4x4 or alternate day scheduling, students receive 30 hours less of instruction.

Group and pair work are often mislabeled cooperative learning. Traditional learning groups place more emphasis on the task and less on positive interdependence and group processing. Often the social skills are assumed and/or ignored. There is less individual accountability in this setup. Some suggestions for group and pair work in the foreign language class include the following:

- a. Interviewing/surveying classmates in the target language to obtain information.
- b. Role playing according to given or invented situations. In her book *Testing and Teaching for Oral Proficiency*, Judith Liskin-Gasparro suggests the following guidelines when creating role play for novice students.
 - (1) Connect the role play to the theme and language that students have recently learned. Reduce the need to say something they have not yet learned.
 - (2) Direct the conversational exchange.
 - (3) Write the instruction so that students repeat a pattern or structure several times.
 - (4) Incorporate courtesy formulae.

Students at the intermediate level can perform with more success when the role plays meet the following guidelines.

- (1) Pick a context. First line of introduction sets the scene and is addressed to the students.
- (2) Write broad, open-ended instructions for the students' part. Students have to create with the language.
- (3) Make sure the students ask most of the questions

Technology

Technology is revolutionizing the way we live, and we must look at ways to integrate it into the teaching and learning process. Block scheduling provides an ideal opportunity to involve the students in the use of technology through CD-Roms, the Internet, E-mailing to pen-pals in different states or countries, laser discs, videos, multimedia, and School Television (STV) programs.

Computers

Integrating technology throughout the instructional program helps students feel more comfortable and enjoy using 21st century technology. For this reason, computers should be incorporated into the classroom activities. They can be used to access new information, but they should also be available as word processors to type, edit, organize written information and with other software tools, such as spreadsheets, data bases, and graphics software which can be used to create charts and graphs. They also can be effective with multi-media presentation software or with software programs designed to offer tutorials and/or enrichment activities for students who need additional involvement with the language.

Internet

Modern technology and the Internet offer an additional advantage to the language learners by enabling them to access a wide range of information that is current and relevant and a variety of authentic materials which may not otherwise be available to the language students in North Carolina. In addition, it is a powerful motivator for students who are used to an electronic society and who may not be challenged by the exclusive use of the high school textbook.

Technology can enhance second language instruction and foster communicative competence by allowing the students to interact with locations and people worldwide and therefore promoting the use of language in real life situations with a “real” purpose.

Activities the Internet

The ASCD video-based program *Teaching and Learning for with the Internet* suggests the following educational activities to be realized through the Internet:

- Keypals, which help students understand their peers in other parts of the world by exchanging e-mail messages over the Internet.
- Global Classrooms, which provide a way for large groups of students from different countries to discuss a topic selected by the teacher.
- Internet Databases, which provide students with access to more, and more current, information than could ever be possible through textbooks.
- School-Based Internet Home Pages, where students make their work accessible to students, schools, and communities around the world.

Multimedia

The use of technology should not be limited to the students; teachers can integrate technology throughout the instructional program by preparing materials using software programs such as Microsoft Works, Writing Center, KidPix, Hyperstudio, Powerpoint, and Persuasion in order to enrich the existing curriculum. Students can also use those programs to create multimedia presentations for the whole class, the community or another audience outside of the classroom setting. Once they select the presentation format for their project, they can use Quicktake cameras, camcorders, audio recorders, a scanner, etc. so that they can capture live data out in the world, bring it back, incorporate it into their project, and work with the living language instead of textbooks and workbooks.

A foreign language teacher in Langley, WA, states that with the 90-minute block scheduling, she has more flexibility to use computers and technology. She organizes

her classroom in four stations: computers, listening center, small TV, and conversation. This arrangement fosters a more student-oriented classroom and allows each student to interact with modern technology.

A unit titled *You and Your Community* involving foreign languages and technology is included in Appendix D, page 83 along with a short list of resources page 83.

Other Media

The use of videotapes, movies, STV, satellite and television programming in the foreign language (Univisión, French-TV Magazine, Spanish-TV Magazine, etc.) can enrich the learning experience provided they are shown when appropriate and with a specific purpose in mind. Listening comprehension activities, oral discussions, and written assignments can contribute to the development of the language skills when they accompany the video or film. For maximum benefit, a video or film shown in English should be paired with language activities, thus reinforcing the tenet that language and culture are inseparable.

Curriculum Integration

As stated in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, "Foreign language learning expands the educational experience of all students by connecting with other disciplines in the school curriculum either formally or informally." The foreign language can be the means to expand and deepen the students' understanding of other areas rather than being the focus of instruction. Foreign language teachers need to recognize the possibilities for making connections among disciplines. They can collaborate with teachers from other content areas to develop integrated units reinforcing concepts, content and skills. But, within their own classroom, they can also allow for integration by strengthening logical and natural links with other disciplines. However, the need to be familiar with goals, objectives, themes, and skills from a variety of disciplines is of utmost importance when planning for integration.

A sample lesson integrating the topic of immigration (ELP) with foreign language instruction is included in Appendix D, page 75.

Active Learning

Active learning is based on the constructivist's view that "...Learning becomes an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience" (Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, and Perry, 1993, p. 5). Students are actively engaged in the learning process instead of sitting passively while the teacher lectures and they exert some autonomy and choice within the learning environment. The responsibility for learning shifts from the teacher to the learner. When learning, students have to relate the new information to their prior knowledge. For this reason, learning cannot be decontextualized and limited to memorizing verb endings, vocabulary lists, and parts of speech.

The document *The Block: Possibilities for High School Instruction* suggests involving students in the learning process through a variety of ways, including cooperative learning, interactive lectures, questioning, critical thinking, problem solving, and role-play. In an active classroom, students are empowered to take charge of their learning. With this newfound responsibility comes dignity, energy, self-management.

