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Preface

Both the United States and Australia have shared a focus on the Middle Years of schooling as one of the key educational issues of the 1990s. In Australia however, Block Scheduling has remained virtually unknown.

Middle School reform movement. While the curriculum work and principles of U.S. reform leaders Ted Sizer and James Bean are widely known and increasingly utilised in Australian school, their advocacy of Block Scheduling as a necessary adjunct to Middle School reform has been overlooked. Block scheduling has become so widespread in the States that its use by schools engaged in reform is generally assumed.

In Australia, we seem to have wanted to turn to the end of the book first. We've skipped over the sections on timetable reform to read the exciting bits about what we actually do engaging students and teachers in teams and integrating/negotiating curriculum. Block Scheduling in its various forms however is the cement that in practice, holds the Middle school reform principles together.

The importance of this book by Robin Fogarty is that it draws attention to the essential nature of the links between Block Scheduling and Middle School reform. The sub title, "Its Not Just a question of Time" addresses those in the Australian educational scene who have tended to see Block scheduling as a bureaucratic issue removed from the real world of what happens in the classroom. It's not just a question of time, a comprehensive implementation of Middle school reforms requires Block scheduling.

The work of classroom teachers is be-devilled by curriculum fragmentation and an ever increasing rate of change. Politicians attempt to satisfy electorates by mandating changes to school programs so that the schools respond to whatever concerns are currently prominent. Drug education, driver education, civics, information technology, vocational education, physical fitness, LOTE, etc all get

shoehorned into the school, especially at the Middle school years. All worthy issues in themselves but contributing to the faster and faster spinning education treadmill and the fragmentation of student experience.

Middle school research has identified the need to slow down, to focus and engage our students. The emphasis is on teams, negotiated curriculum, integrated curriculum and real world experiences. Teachers need to be more flexible and responsive. Programs are to be uniquely built in consultation with colleagues and a specific group of students. Trotting out the same content year after year won't suffice. The danger with the Middle school reforms is that we may just add another layer of demands on already over stretched teachers and overcrowded curriculum.

Block Scheduling however provides schools with the tools for a meaningful implementation of Middle School reform. It makes possible the spaces for the teamwork, planning, negotiation and integration that are central to the emerging requirements. As Robin demonstrates, "Its not a question of time, it's a question of learning."

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The Four Period - Defined

“I’m concerned about extended periods. I teach English literature, and I don’t know how I’m going to use ninety minutes. I don’t have a lab set-up like they have in science or computers. So what am I going to do with the students for an hour and a half? They can only read so much, and I can only talk for so long.”

As an educational consultant, I replied, “It’s not a question of time. It’s a question of learning.” I went on to tell the teacher about the use of active-learning strategies, strategies that help students construct meaning and make sense of learning. I showed her several ideas from cooperative learning and suggested small-group work with graphic organisers. I told her that students can “map” their perception of a story, or they can compare two characters using Venn diagrams. We talked about using themes and studying entire genres rather than singling out one topic. In addition, I told her about the possibility of doing units in conjunction with other disciplines.

It’s not a question of time. It’s a question of learning.

Our brainstorming led to the idea of using multiple intelligences to ensure multidimensional learning. As I punctuated the discussion with specific suggestions, the English teacher joined in with additional ideas. Her body relaxed and her face lightened as she began to see the opportunities for energised learning.

At first glance, this teacher’s concerns seem grounded in a dilemma specific to her discipline, but they are relevant to other disciplines as well. Primarily, these concerns are (1) What do we do with block scheduling? and (2) How does our teaching change?

There are two models pertinent to finding the answers to these questions: the *bell times* and the *extended periods schedule*. The bell times refer to the traditional mailbox-slot

Instructional Strategies

As schools move toward a learner-centred approach and integrated, holistic learning that connects ideas purposefully, they recognise the need for large chunks of time. Paradoxically, when teachers get these chunks, they are not always sure how to orchestrate their teaching for the new time allotments.

Perhaps the answers lie within two realms: *instructional strategies* and *curricular frameworks*. The instructional strategies that seem most appropriate for the learner-centred approach to extended periods include the *cooperative learning* structure that ensures active learning, the incorporation of *graphic organisers* as tools for small group interactions, the *multiple intelligences* approach that taps the full range of human potential, and the focus on *higher-order thinking* that promotes rigour and challenge in student problem solving.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning strategies provide viable methods for the interactive classroom, but they require a shift from formal to informal, small groups to large groups, and lecture to guidance. Cooperative learning means individual involvement with roles and responsibilities, as well as teamwork and attention to group goals. Imagine triads working on building a model of the human cell to demonstrate their understanding in biology class or partners predicting their interview questions. Cooperative learning shepherds the interaction toward increased student ownership. In addition, cooperative learning provides a platform for learning about the social skills and social graces that are intrinsically related to the overall success of our students.

Graphic Organisers

Teamwork requires clear guidelines and student accountability. Graphic organisers such as analysis webs, mind

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES FOR BLOCK SCHEDULING			
Cooperative Learning	Higher-Order Thinking	Multiple Intelligences	Graphic Organisers
1. Rhetorical Question	1. Compare	1. Verbal/Linguistic	1. Webbing
2. Direct Question	2. Classify	2. Visual/Spatial	2. Mapping
3. Turn to Your Partner and...	3. Prioritise	3. Mathematical/Logical	3. Venn Diagrams
4. Think/Pair/Share	4. Evaluate	4. Musical/Rhythmic	4. Matrices
5. Triads	5. Cause/Effect	5. Bodily/Kinaesthetic	5. Fishbones
6. Dyads	6. Sequence	6. Interpersonal/Social	6. Flow Charts
7. 2-4-8 Interview	7. Hypothesise	7. Intrapersonal/Introspective	7. Priority Ladders
8. Traveling Cluster	8. Generalise	8. Naturalist/Physical World	8. Agree/Disagree
9. Cooperative Learning	9. Infer		9. Cause/Effect Circles
10. Jigsaw	10. Predict		10. 5 W Words
11. Wrap Around	11. Brainstorm		11. Right Angles
12. Human Graph	12. Personify		12. Pie Charts

FIGURE 5

maps, and Venn diagrams serve as motivating, visible, and productive tools.

Using large butcher’s paper and markers, students could gather information from a film on the circulatory system or create a prediction chart prior to a lecture on the causes of the Depression. Not only do the graphics foster reflective thinking and careful articulation among team members, they also provide visible evidence of thinking and accountability for the completion of the task.

Multiple Intelligences

Immersion in an experiment on chemical bonding, journaling in the maths class on problem-solving strategies, oral and written reports on how to stop the hiccups, the