



Chapter **3**

RESTRUCTURING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



SCHEDULING AND RESTRUCTURING THE SCHOOL DAY

Scheduling and restructuring of the school day is one of the most important considerations that should be addressed as a means to implement the vision of standards reform, not only for world languages, but for all of the content areas within the core curriculum. In order to achieve high academic standards, students need time for involvement in learning experiences or projects, extended discussions, and reflection. Teachers need sufficient time to research new instructional approaches; develop integrated, meaningful learning experiences; and design authentic assessment strategies. If we view our schools as learning organizations where students can achieve high academic standards, we need to overcome “time barriers” to provide more time for teachers to teach and students to learn.

The following recommendation was made in *Breaking the Tyranny of Time—Voices from the Goals 2000 Teacher Forum* (United States Department of Education, 1994):

Adopt a curriculum based on the principle of flexible pacing—one that allows students to move through their learning individually instead of in lock step, that permits them to take the time they need to learn, rather than just move through the material. The flexibility to meet students’ learning and developmental needs, and not mere administrative convenience, should provide the rationale for how time is apportioned. Restructuring our priorities should help us design a school day that is more educationally sound than our present one. (p. 9)

Time needs to be viewed from the perspective of being a resource—a resource that can be shaped and reshaped to meet educational needs. **Team teaching** and reviewing the school’s master schedule are examples of adjustments that have created time and increased teacher competencies in many schools. Another example is the extended time created by **block scheduling**. The instructional day is less fragmented and more focused, and students remain engaged with subject matter for longer periods of time. Additional recommendations may include the adoption of a **six-day cycle** and/or a reevaluation of scheduling priorities. Utilization of noninstructional time (e.g., study halls, lunch periods, efficiency in class movements, and use of opening and closing routines) might also be reexamined.

At the elementary level, one of the most effective and efficient ways to deal with time allocations is to plan a content-enriched curriculum. Elementary **mathematics** concepts can be taught with limited vocabulary and with use of manipulative experiences. **Science** experiences and discoveries can occur through the world language without risking the students’ ability to understand concepts. **Social studies** themes such as home, family, community, social patterns, and comparative cultures are very appropriate for presenting in a world language. Using this approach to help solve the scheduling problem has many positive effects on the learning process. Students’ understanding of concepts across disciplines is reinforced; retention of material is increased; second language acquisition is more effective; and opportunities for use of critical-thinking skills are enhanced.

At the **secondary level**, the rethinking of scheduling practices creates opportunities for expanding the world language curriculum outside the classroom and into the community. Field-based learning experiences (e.g., community service learning, working with cultural institutions and apprenticeships) are ways for students to learn and apply new concepts in meaningful and relevant ways, to develop workplace readiness skills and to facilitate making career choices.

STAFFING OPTIONS

The following information on staffing options and other delivery models has been drawn from the work of Curtain and Pesola (1994, pp. 38-47). Staffing is one of the most critical elements in insuring the success of the world language program. The value of a dynamic, enthusiastic, well-trained, and skilled world language practitioner cannot be overestimated. It is essential that teachers within any of the staffing models described below have excellent language skills and are committed to the new paradigm of communication-based language instruction.

It is important to recognize that **alternative models must be coordinated by the district's world language teacher/supervisor who is well versed in communicative-based instructional methodology and performance assessment.** It is the vision of this *Framework* that as a consequence of properly implemented and supervised alternative delivery, interest and enthusiasm for world languages will increase as colleges and universities fill the demand for endorsed world language teachers.

The following is a compilation of models for staffing elementary world language programs.

The World Language Teacher/Specialist Model

The world language teacher instructs only world languages, has a high level of language proficiency, and uses appropriate and culturally authentic teaching and learning strategies to promote effective acquisition of the world language. At the elementary level, s/he may be referred to as the *world language specialist*. The specialist meets with students for varying contact hours depending on the intensity of the program model adopted.

In FLES programs, the world language specialist presents new material that is reinforced by the classroom teacher. They work as a team to integrate language and content into instruction.

The Classroom Teacher Model

In the classroom teacher model, the elementary classroom teacher assumes responsibility for teaching the world language program. Note the following considerations:

- The success of this model is highly dependent on the desire and ability of the classroom teacher to develop the linguistic competence and necessary skills to effectively deliver standards-based world language instruction. The teacher must be willing to make the personal commitment and put in the extra time needed for planning and implementing a new program.
- Elementary school teachers who are required to “learn a language with the students” (through a commercial audio/videotape program) may not be able to develop the level of proficiency needed to reenter and reinforce the students’ language learning. They may not be able to teach

other subject content through the language using the interdisciplinary approach advocated by the standards.

- This model may be potentially effective when designed and coordinated with the district's world language specialist/supervisor who teaches some of the class sessions and selects additional materials or media support for the classroom teacher.

In support of his theory of comprehensible input, Stephen Krashen (1997) recommends a strategy for assisting in the development of conversational ability when a fluent or native-speaking world language teacher is not instructing the language. He proposes

the establishment of a library of print and aural comprehensible input...a vast collection of light as well as "serious" reading—comic books, magazines, novels, etc., and light as well as serious viewing and listening—quiz shows, comedy, drama, documentaries, etc., to provide the comprehensible input missing from the...students' environment. (p. 44)

Krashen maintains that this will help to reduce the problem of students acquiring a poor accent, because they will be receiving comprehensible input from interesting, authentic sources—sources other than a nonnative/fluent speaker. He underscores the value of self-selected listening and reading in guaranteeing comprehension and sustaining interest in learning a language.

The Nonspecialist Teacher/Volunteer Model

College students, preservice teachers, parents, or other interested and qualified adults from the community provide world language instruction. Note the following considerations:

- This option may not be suitable for long-term articulated world language programs because it demands an extended commitment and a high degree of reliability to deliver the program with consistency. It assumes that the nonspecialist has some methods training and/or experience working with students.
- This model may be effective under the supervision of the district's world language specialist/supervisor who serves as a resource for the nonspecialist and who carefully monitors the instructional process and goals of the program. This is a viable option for bringing languages that would otherwise never be considered for inclusion in the curriculum (e.g., Swahili or Hindi) and takes advantage of community language resources.

OTHER MODELS

The Media-Based Model

The media-based model uses technology (e.g., videotape, audiotape, and computer programs) as the primary vehicle for teaching world languages. Media-based programs are often implemented as alternatives to staffing models because of the lack of available qualified teachers and budgeting limitations.

The key to a successful media program is the quality and intensity of follow-up by a language specialist. Media-based programs supplement, but cannot replace, interactions that take place between the teacher and students. Note the following considerations:

- Media-based programs may not provide the meaningful interaction necessary for successful language learning.
- Media-based programs may not address the learning styles and needs of all students.
- High-quality media-based programs that meet the criteria for effective standards-based world language instruction are difficult to find. In addition, specialized knowledge is needed to evaluate their potential benefit for both immediate use and long-term effectiveness.

The Distance Learning Model (“Live Interaction” Model)

In a world language program using distance learning, the teacher is located at one site (the *base* site), usually with a group of students, and one or more groups of students are located at a *remote* site or sites. Remote sites usually are located in another school building some distance away. Video cameras, monitors, and microphones are located at the base and remote sites so that teachers and groups of students can see and communicate with each other. This model is most frequently used at the high school level.

Note the following considerations:

- The distance learning model is most effective when it is designed to incorporate sound language acquisition and learning theories. The telelinguist, studio teacher-facilitator, and local school facilitator must coordinate their efforts to maximize learning through carefully selected input, focused feedback, and practice in language output production.
- Several states with well-planned programs are experiencing success with this model. Mel Nielson and Elizabeth Hoffman (1996), from the Nebraska Department of Education, reported that once schools had a “means” of delivering language instruction, interest in doing so increased.

As a consequence of alternative delivery, all Nebraska secondary schools must now offer foreign language, up from about 60% in 1982. The number of students enrolled in foreign languages has grown by over 400 percent since the mid 1970s, increasing the demand for endorsed teachers. (p. 130)

- When the total number of students receiving simultaneous instruction exceeds the average class size, opportunities for students to produce oral language and teacher evaluation of individual progress are severely limited.
- Teaching on camera requires extensive preparation, skilled planning, and a high level of technical quality. Careful management is required to bring these factors together. It is critical that the teacher receive adequate preparation time to ensure a quality program.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

The goals of the Core Curriculum Standards can best be met by using a variety of instructional materials. These may include:

- nontraditional materials (e.g., interactive multimedia and computer software);
- supplementary materials (e.g., cassettes, videos, transparencies);
- culturally authentic materials (e.g., newspapers, magazines, brochures, menus in print or electronic format; and cultural artifacts such as food, art, or money); and
- basal materials.

A textbook should not be the sole curricular support in the world language program. A textbook represents only one resource for the curriculum. Other resources should include the nontraditional, supplementary, and culturally authentic materials mentioned above.

Teachers should collaborate on the selection of materials that encourage active learning and support the development of conceptual understanding. **Selection of the materials should take place only after curricular decisions have been made.**

The following lists of content criteria and pedagogical criteria for selecting world language instructional materials have been adapted from the *South Carolina Foreign Language Framework* (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Department of Education, 1993, pp. 43-45).

Content Criteria for Selecting World Language Instructional Materials

- Content is meaningful and can be easily related to the lives of students.
- Content includes language that is authentic and natural and based on real-life experiences.
- Language is viewed as a medium for logical-thinking processes and not as a collection of isolated words and phrases.
- Content places primary emphasis on communication skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.
- Grammatical structures and vocabulary are introduced naturally as components of themes and functions.
- Content is appropriate to the language needs, age levels, and interests of students.
- Cultural content is integrated throughout, reflecting multiethnic diversity within language groups and giving an accurate view of everyday life.

Pedagogical Criteria for Selecting World Language Instructional Materials

- Activities are open-ended and encourage creative use of language and negotiated meaning in a variety of situations.
- Activities call for higher-order thinking skills and reflection, not simply recollection of factual information.
- Activities are designed to meet the needs of students with diverse learning styles, including a variety of individual, pair, small-group, and class activities.
- Activities are student-centered and require student involvement and responsibility.
- An interdisciplinary approach is used with themes that encourage cross-disciplinary projects.
- Materials include ongoing assessments of all four communication skills, with emphasis on language proficiency.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

The latest instructional technologies, particularly the most interactive technologies such as computer-assisted language learning and advanced telecommunications, enhance the possibilities of providing world language instruction for **all** students. Technology brings languages and cultures into the classroom in an immediate and authentic way, transforming the world language classroom by re-creating the multidimensional nature of language as it exists within the visual, social, and cultural world.

The use of technology in the world language classroom has many potential benefits, including the following:

- It enhances student interest and potential learning by enabling students to communicate freely with more people from many parts of the world.
- It allows for individualized instruction while also providing opportunities to work collaboratively and apply knowledge to simulated and real-life projects.
- It provides practice, remediation, and assessment opportunities far beyond the scope of traditional practices.

Otto and Pusack (1996, pp. 151-152) discuss the advantages of using computer technology at the elementary and at the secondary level. They recommend **using computers as a bridge between the world language curriculum and other curriculum areas, thereby serving as a tool to access almost-unlimited sources of information and to expand authentic language experiences.** Learning then becomes more interesting to students. Students can be encouraged to use target-language data on CD-ROM or the Internet, recognizing that they may not be able to fully understand the entire text. The function of the teacher is to guide learners in finding and interpreting such information as songs, fairy tales, biodata from children abroad, maps, and magazines. The Internet is an invaluable tool for individual and group research, virtual field trips, daily news stories, job searches, and all types of inquiries and correspondence. Interdisciplinary multimedia projects may be put on CD-ROMs and made available to the school community.

It is important to interject that **new technologies cannot replace teacher-student or student-teacher interactions**. Oxford (1998) cautions that technology can assist in creating a meaning-focused, communicative language learning environment only if it becomes an integral part of the broader curriculum. Teachers must focus on learning objectives and then choose the type of technology and the tasks that meet the objectives.

Such instruction must have communicative competence as its cornerstone, provide appropriate language assistance tailored to the student, provide appropriate error correction suited to the student's changing needs over time, offer an abundance of authentic language input, provide interesting and relevant themes and meaningful language tasks, be designed for use by students with different learning styles, teach students to become better learners via explicit training in language learning strategies, use a variety of interaction types, and involve all language skills. (p.143)

The role of the teacher as the facilitator in setting goals, providing guidelines and resources, and providing suggestions and support to the student is a key factor in successful computer-assisted instruction.