



Scheduling Instruction

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Scheduling Instruction

With so many demands on the teacher's day, it is getting increasingly harder and harder to have time to teach! I have had numerous teachers in workshops throughout the country tell me that they don't have the time they need to teach because they're too busy with such things as Red Ribbon Week, Just Say No campaign, assembly after assembly, spirit day, spirit week, spirit month, self-esteem programs, etc. The possibilities are endless, but they all cause interruptions and frequently get in the way of instruction! While all these programs may have merit, if they get in the way of reading and writing instruction, they become roadblocks to children's future, not enrichment. Robert J. Starratt (1996), in his book, *Transforming Educational Administration*, states;

“The organization of a school has to follow and support the efforts of teachers and students to maximize learning, rather than forcing the teaching and learning tasks into some preordained organizational structure.”

It appears to me that this belief system is missing from many schools. Why do teachers have to form their instructional schedule around lunch, recess, assemblies, etc.? Shouldn't all the ancillary services and programs (both remedial and enrichment) be scheduled around the classroom? This is correspondingly true with pull out programs. I did an informal study in several different classrooms where I tracked the average number of children that came and went during each instructional hour. I found that there were approximately five to ten kids coming and going every hour! The teacher was constantly obstructing their instruction with catching up returning kids and also getting and reminding children that they needed to leave for various programs! This cannot continue if we want to conduct significant instruction!

Think about everything that interrupts classroom instruction. In the project schools where I work for a three to five years period, we mandate that there be a minimum of two and a half-hour block of uninterrupted time for language arts instruction every day. We ask that everything else be subservient to the classroom during this time. Many of the schools have pull-in support services that come into the classroom during guided reading time and support the children in the room. In this way, children are not missing what is being taught in the room where they will spend the majority of their day. The goal is that children ARE NOT pulled out, even for Title 1, ESL, Reading Support, etc. We ask that administrators schedule all assemblies, school pictures, fire drills/disaster preparedness drills (unless there is a real fire or disaster), and other such activities after the guarded instructional time. It is in this way that the administration supports protecting this time and validates the importance of this time. It is also during this time that administrators can do school walkthroughs to view, monitor, and evaluate the language arts instruction.

Because specialists, such as art, music, P.E., and computer teachers are often part of teacher preparation time, it makes it very difficult to schedule this large block of time for the whole school. Figure 6.1 illustrates some of the ways around this. By creating different blocks for upper and lower grades, the specialists can work in the upper while the primary has their literacy block and vice-a-versa. At the bottom of Figure 6.1 is another schema, with the literacy block being grade level specific. It is important that we think outside the box about scheduling in order that students have the time they need and teachers have the opportunities they crave to teach.

Just having two and one half-hours of uninterrupted time does not guarantee that kids will be receiving a quality literacy program. Teachers should be using similar strategies that support the children from year to year. Appendix F presents a good summary tool that can be used to see what a school has in place. This literacy puzzle shows the instructional strategies we use to warrant continuity. This can be employed as a conversation to see

what teachers are currently implementing school wide to see if there is consistency in place. These teaching strategies can be best summarized as:

Option 1

All school on the same literacy block of time (specialist in classrooms)
i.e., 8:00 – 10:30 a.m.

Option 2

Primary and upper grades on different schedule

8:00 – 10:30 a.m. – Primary (specialist teachers pull out from upper grades)

12:00 – 2:30 p.m. – Upper (specialist teachers pull out from primary grades)

Option 3

Each grade level on different schedule

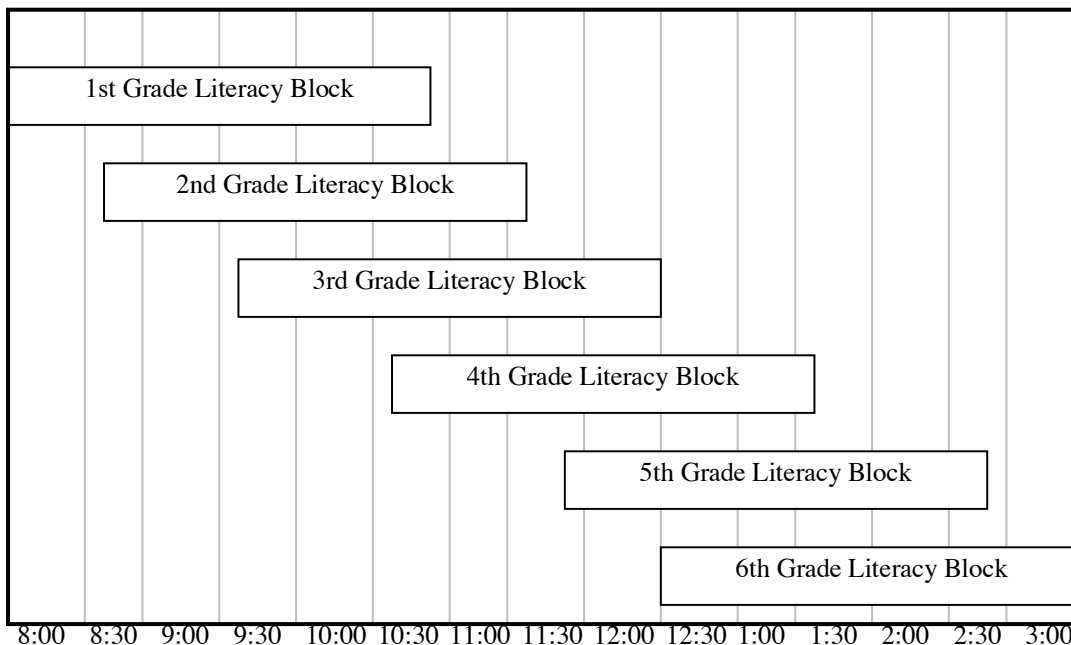


Figure 6.1

- Reading/Writing to children
- Reading and Writing aloud
- Reading/Writing with children
 - Shared Reading and Writing
 - Interactive Writing
- Reading/Writing by children
 - Guided Reading and Writing
 - Literature Circles for fluent readers
 - Centers
- Word Work

Many of these take place in the format of reading and writing workshop.

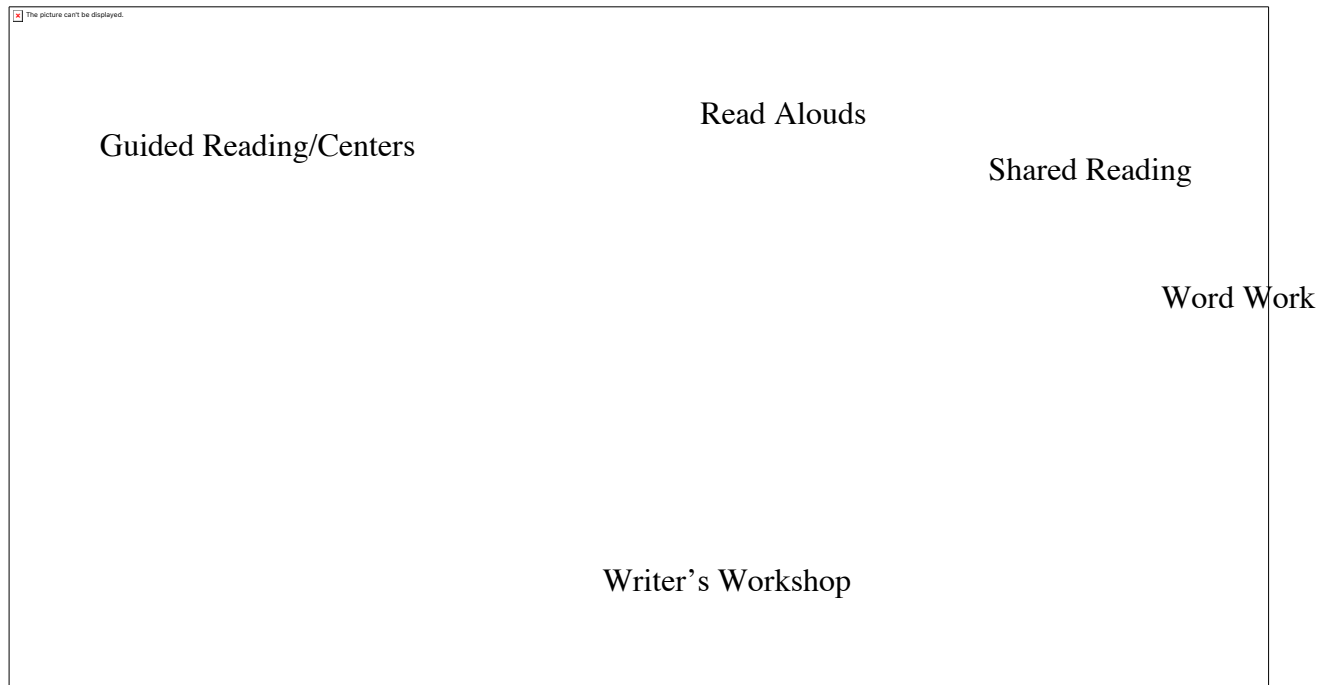
As you consider these strategies school wide, use the barometer test that at least 90% of teachers must be using the approaches listed (where applicable) in order to declare that a technique is in place in a school. Identifying what you have in place will lead you to what you need. Appendix G shows a puzzle without the specific instructional strategies. As you consider this with the teachers of your school, ask the question, “How are we providing reading and writing to, with, and by for all children?” Brainstorm strategies such as read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, etc., to see if teachers are using the same or different strategies at your school. This can lead to a great discussion about building consensus on what the important pieces are for your school.

Next, decide as a staff how much time should be spent in each of these instructional modes. Think about this in terms of the instructional triangle in Chapter 3 (Figure 3.1). First, break down which of your strategies are whole group, small group and independent practice strategies are. Then divide the time so children receive appropriate intervals of each of the strategies. Figure 6.2 and 6.3 illustrate the breakdown that I suggest to begin with. Scheduling the specific amounts of time in each of these strategies is very important. I have heard several teachers say that they had a

wonderful conversation with students that lasted a full hour! I get concerned because during that hour, I suspect many children check out of the discussion? It's difficult to keep all students engaged on a consistent basis during whole group anything. I ask teachers to work with timers and stay true to the schedule laid out. Teachers shouldn't become flexible with the schedule until they first have control of it. When teachers stick with the schedule, they ensure children are receiving a balance of instruction, learning, and practice time. Teachers report to me that they become more efficient with their teaching when they are working within a framework.

Finally, in figure 6.3, if the upper grade classroom has many non-fluent readers who need guided reading instruction, the sixty-minute slot for guided reading and literature circles should be increased in order that the teacher meets with the struggling readers every day, five days a week. These are the "at risk readers" and they desperately need to reach fluency before they leave the elementary school setting. Daily instruction is critical for growth! In addition, they need the daily practice time for independent reading and the rereading familiar text. The research tells us that the lowest readers read the least (National Academy of Education, 1984). Not only do these students need reading instruction, but also reading practice!

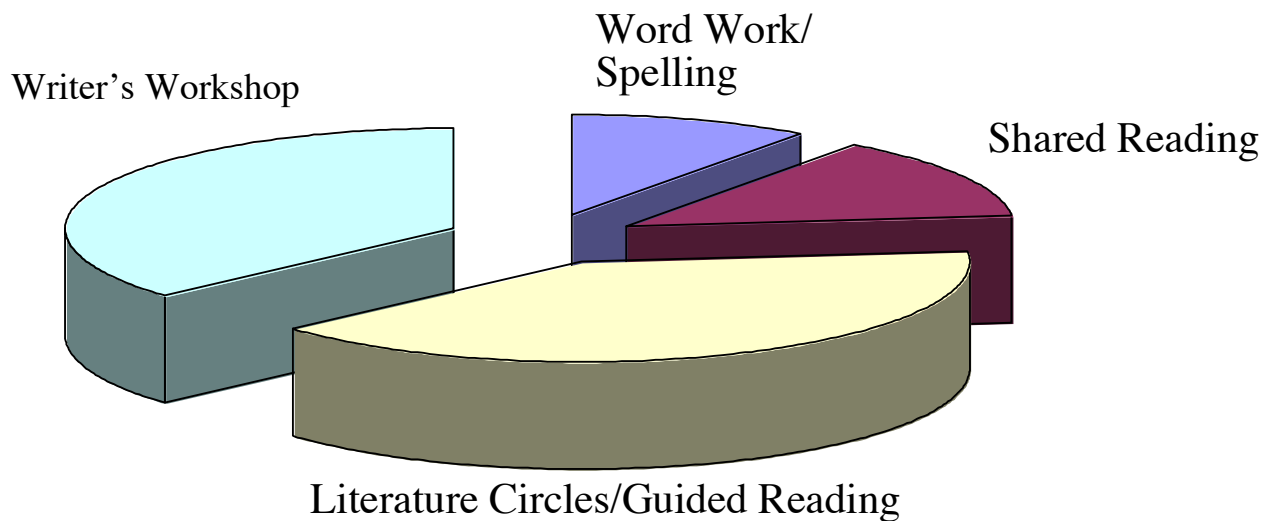
Scheduling the Primary Literacy Block 3 Hour Model



Word Work = 20 minutes
Read Alouds = 15 minutes
Shared Reading = 20 minutes
Writer's Workshop = 45 minutes
Guided Reading/Centers = 80 minutes

Figure 6.2

Scheduling the Upper Grade Literacy Block *2 1/2 Hours Model*



Word Analysis/Spelling = 15 minutes

Shared Reading = 25 minutes

Literature Circles/Guided Reading = 60 minutes

Writer's Workshop = 55 minutes

- ✓ Focus Lesson = 15-20 minutes
- ✓ Writing = 30-35 minutes
- ✓ Sharing = 5 minutes

Figure 6.3

Questions for Literature Circles

- *Does each teacher have at least two and one half-hours of uninterrupted language arts time?*
- *What activities are getting in the way of instruction at your school?*
- *How are teachers scheduling their instruction? Is there consistent time spent in the different strategies?*
- *Are teachers using the same strategies throughout your school or is everyone doing their own thing?*
- *How are specialists supporting the classroom instruction? Are they giving additional support, or supplanting instruction?*

Activities for Literature Circles

- *Survey how many children on average come and go from a typical classroom during language arts instruction. Consider how this can be changed to ease teachers from this daily circus.*
- *Follow some Title I or ESL children and see how many transitions he/she is expected to make. How much time is spent outside the classroom? How much classroom instruction is he/she missing that causes the child to be lost during other parts of the day?*
- *Chart the instructional strategies that are being used in each classroom. Check to see if there is continuity of strategies. In order to have continuity, at least 90% of the teachers must be using the strategies (and have the same definition of it). Come to agreement what strategies everyone should be using. Begin to form your schoolwide schedules.*
- *Make your own pie charts, as in Figures 6.2 and 6.3, to illustrate the schedules your school has agreed upon. Create a chart to hang in the lounge and revisit it every few months to see if modifications need to be made.*

Support Services Discussions

- *What staff development needs to occur in order for teachers to understand and use the instructional strategies?*
- *How can administration rethink scheduling events to not interrupt instruction?*
- *Are there enough materials (i.e., leveled guided reading books, shared reading books, novel sets for literature circles, independent reading books at various levels, etc.) for teachers to perform the strategies? How can budget be adjusted to get additional materials?*
- *Can schoolwide language arts block be put in place first, with recess and lunch being scheduled second?*
- *How can support services be scheduled so that they do not take children out of the classroom during language arts time?*