**Tick Tock, Tick Tock: Time Flies**

*“Learning blocks allow students to develop their literacy skills, explore topics thoroughly, engage in research and enquiry in all subject areas, and apply their learning in new contexts*. (Kraemer and Overholt)”

*“In collaboration with teachers, the principal ensures that learning blocks are given priority when planning schedules. Using a backward design planning model and considering a variety of factors such as gym availability and special education support, they develop and monitor routines and practices that support uninterrupted learning time as non-negotiable.* (Kraemer and Overholt)”

I have chosen these two statements from the e-journal , *Where does Time Go?* by David Kraemer and David Overholt, around which to base my observations. My school makes good use of the timetable within the school day. We are on an 8 day cycle; we start at 8:30 with a ten minute homeroom period and then classes run all day with the exception of an hour for lunch. The entire school is taught in 40 to 80 minutes blocks. We have another short homeroom period at the end of the day at 3:40. The homeroom periods allow time for announcements, attendance, and so on and minimize the loss of teaching time. The school works on a rotational basis and pupils move to their different classes on a set timetable; each subject has its own allocated time block(s) including English.

Within the daily timetable, teachers are scheduled for collaborative planning and meeting time. I think this is an excellent use of time. This is a decision made by our administration and often they are part of our planning. Backwards plans in particular are something we all work on together. Our VP oversees all of these in each grade. It is a very efficient use of our time and allows then, for us to be more focused on instructional strategies that provide opportunities for assessment for learning and as assessment as learning.

It is true though, that some time is lost due to settling in and transitions between classes. In any case, teachers all use available academic time differently. The text points out that teachers who not have clear sense of how they’re using their available learning time, don’t use it efficiently. On the whole I feel my school is adept at creating an environment that optimizes instruction and student learning. We have to be cognizant of available learning and instruction, and we have to make the best use of it! I wonder whether it has something to with our status as an IB school. Our students are externally examined and as teachers we have an extraordinary responsibility in instructing them well enough to enable them to earn their diploma at an international level.

Efficient use of time is only one factor of effective instruction; students need to be engaged and of course since we all have a vast range of learning differences in our classes there are huge implications! “The amount of engaged time is the most potent predictor of literacy learning.” ( Allington and Cunningham, 2007) Effective planning therefore is critical. In my grade six class there is one day where I have them for 160 minutes straight! I have to make optimal use of the time. I find I tend to plan in blocks of 20 minutes or so, especially for these younger students. The nature of the task, its difficulty and interest level are all taken into consideration. Even my grade 12 students respond best to chunked time.

I learned about “chunking” when I worked in England. I attended a workshop by Allistair Smith about accelerated learning. His approach uses chunking, multiple intelligence activities, and brain functioning to make effective use of time in teaching and learning. The National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) suggests there are six strategies that help students learn vocabulary by active processing in rich instruction and to retain words through engaging review. In her article, *Words Are Wonderful: Interactive, Time-Efficient Strategies to Teach Meaning Vocabulary* (2005), Margaret Ann Richek talks about strategies for mastering word acquisition effectively and efficiently. I got a lot of good ideas from this article and it made me very aware of how much more efficient and effective I can become in my use of time.

The text explores of extending instructional time. A variety of options is presented and I think teachers/schools are very good at creating ways of finding extra chunks of time where quality teaching can take place. The students benefit enormously from these extensions as it is often small group instruction. At my school each of us gives Extra Help sessions before and after school once or twice a week. In addition to this, older students may make appointments to seek help from a teacher. These sessions are a form of the ‘extended - day’ plan and are invaluable to both teacher and student.

An area of improvement at my school would be not to make everyone so busy. The students and teachers alike are often stretched to the limit! I am directing the school play for example, and have students who are doing that, playing a sport, on the house council, and homework! Goodness knows what they do outside of school. I also teach in two different departments in two different grade levels which are at opposite ends of the spectrum. With the exception of Modern Languages, Music and Art every other teacher is in a similar position. We have long, full, very satisfying days but I do wish that I had additional time to put more creative thought into my planning! As Faye Brownlie said in the webcast we watched at the beginning of our course, time is of the essence and while she was talking specifically about features of effective literacy instruction this notion is entirely relevant here!