

AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED SCHOOLS'
EXPERIENCES IN IMPLEMENTING
BLOCK SCHEDULING

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

**TOTAL OF 10 PAGES ONLY
MAY BE XEROXED**

(Without Author's Permission)

MICHAEL RONALD MURRIN



INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Overize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI[®]



National Library
of Canada

Acquisitions and
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale
du Canada

Acquisitions et
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

Our file Notre référence

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-62409-9

Canada

**An Examination of Selected Schools' Experiences in
Implementing Block Scheduling**

By

Michael Ronald Murrin

**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate
Studies in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education**

Memorial University of Newfoundland

August, 2000

St. John's

Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the various experiences of the administrators, teachers, and students with regard to the block scheduling experience at their school. In an effort to address anonymity and confidentiality the schools studied will be referred to as Cedar High and Woods High. At the heart of the matter was the question of whether or not the block scheduling experience was a positive one. The study was qualitative in design and used the open-ended interview technique. In total there were 15 participants interviewed.

The participants interviewed in this study generally agreed that their experience with block scheduling as it existed at their school was a positive one. Post-secondary preparation, early graduation, and increased course options were given as contributing to the positive nature of their experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Jerome Delaney, for his valuable assistance and guidance in the preparation of this document. I would like to thank my wife, Lynette and my children, Kelsey and Mark, for being so supportive and patient with me over the last three years that I have been working at this program. I am grateful that you were there with me.

I extend thanks to my parents, Harold and Marilyn, for reminding me over the years of the importance of an education and the value of dedication.

I would also like to thank my brother-in-law, Cyril, for answering so many questions.

Thanks to Phillip Caravan who made my summer stay away from home so comfortable.

Finally, thanks to the fifteen participants in this study who were so accommodating of my efforts.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| ABSTRACT..... | i |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | ii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS..... | iii |
| LIST OF APPENDICES..... | vi |
| LIST OF FIGURES..... | vii |
| CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM | |
| Introduction to the Study..... | 1 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 4 |
| Research Questions..... | 4 |
| Summary..... | 5 |
| CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW | |
| The Change Process..... | 6 |
| Block Scheduling..... | 10 |
| Conclusion..... | 25 |
| CHAPTER 3: DESIGN OF THE STUDY | |
| Introduction..... | 26 |
| Research Design and Methodology..... | 26 |
| Site Selection and Access..... | 28 |
| Data Collection..... | 28 |

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| Data Analysis..... | 30 |
| Summary..... | 32 |

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction..... | 34 |
| Organization of Interview Data..... | 34 |
| Emergent Categories and Themes..... | 35 |
| Benefits..... | 35 |
| Concerns..... | 41 |
| Program Delivery..... | 45 |
| Summary..... | 51 |

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction..... | 53 |
| Subsidiary Research Questions..... | 53 |
| What are the positive results of implementing block scheduling at your school?..... | 53 |
| What are the negative results of implementing block scheduling at your school?..... | 57 |
| Were there special considerations (in-service to administrators by district office/to teachers by administration/to students by school personnel) given to you in preparation for the block scheduling? If yes, in what form? | 59 |
| How has the delivery of courses been affected?..... | 61 |
| What impediments, if any, to implementing block scheduling have | |

| | |
|---|----|
| administrators encountered? How have these impediments been overcome?..... | 62 |
| General Research Question..... | 64 |
| Summary..... | 65 |

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Introduction..... | 66 |
| Summary..... | 66 |
| Conclusions..... | 71 |
| Recommendations..... | 73 |
| Concluding Comment..... | 74 |
| References..... | 75 |

LIST OF APPENDICES

| | Page |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| Appendix A: Research Questions..... | 83 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Figure 4.1 Summary of Emergent Categories and Themes..... | 52 |

CHAPTER 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction to the Study

One of the most critical and unresolved time allocation issues that schools face is the indisputable fact that some students need more time to learn than others. Reliance on traditional scheduling has made all students "prisoners of time." (National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994).

With the measuring stick for gauging the relative success or lack thereof of schools to deliver their programs being the results achieved on various standardized tests, the drive to maximize student achievement in our schools has led our educators to examine all influences on the delivery mechanism. Not the least of these influences is the allocation of time. The traditional six or seven period day, commonly found in our high schools and middle schools, is being evaluated as educators ponder the means to deliver their programs.

In an effort to more effectively utilize time in the delivery of programs in our schools, all types of creative alternatives to traditional scheduling formats have emerged. Copernican schedules with trimester classes (Carroll, 1989), four-block semester schedules (Edwards, 1993), and eight-block alternating day schedules (Hackman, 1995) are three of the more common alternative scheduling methods being experimented with today.

Many schools have primarily opted to implement either the alternate day (A-B)

schedule or the block semester schedule, commonly referred to as the 4x4. In the alternate day schedule, classes meet every other day for the whole school year, with classes running approximately ninety minutes each day. In the 4x4 schedule, classes meet every day for approximately ninety minutes, for the ninety days of the semester. Classes continue for the whole semester, after which students choose four new courses for the second semester (Shortt & Thayer, 1997).

These two types of schedules, as well as other variations, have been widely implemented in the United States since the early 1990's. A rough estimate of schools in the United States that have adopted some form of block of time scheduling is nearly forty percent (Cawelti, 1994). Schools in Canada have also been experimenting with block scheduling as a means of improving the use of time in schools.

The move to block scheduling is not a recent innovation. Educators in elementary and middle schools have been scheduling students into subject-oriented blocks such as Language Arts for decades. During the 1960's and 1970's, many junior and senior high schools experimented with some form of flexible modular scheduling where students partook of classes that were of different formats and lengths (O'Neil, 1995).

Toward the end of the 1980's, new teachers began entering the teaching profession with preparation in a greater variety of instructional strategies. They quickly discovered that teaching methods such as cooperative learning required much more time than lecturing and began searching for a change from the traditionally scheduled day. This led

to the rediscovery of the block schedule in this decade as a potential means for allowing teachers and students to break the chains of time and allow a more effective use of the limited time in school.

While the move to examine and experiment with alternate forms of scheduling may not be a recent innovation, the advent of the block schedule within the secondary school system in Newfoundland and Labrador is in its infancy. The Department of Education policy document New Directions for the 21st Century (1997, p. 9) states that "as schools move towards semesterization ... schools should consider pairing of one-credit courses so they can be scheduled in two-credit slots, ... offered in a nine to ten week block". These statements were the first direct mention of the sanctioning and encouragement for semesterization or block scheduling in Newfoundland. Schools such as Woods High in District 5 and Cedar High in Vista District offer two examples of alternative scheduling as it exists in Newfoundland today. Woods High is the first high school in the province to deliver their program through a total semesterization schedule. This is done through a common seven day schedule (thus 14 credit maximum) that has two credit courses finish at the midway point of the school year and a new slate of courses begin. Cedar High had the first 4x4 block schedule that is on a fourteen day cycle and allows a student to achieve 16 credits in one school year.

With Woods High and Cedar High as the examples of what can be achieved, the interest of the proposed research is the various experiences of selected schools in

implementing block of time scheduling as the means of delivering their programs. While many schools in various school districts of the province are showing an interest in alternative forms of scheduling (Clarenville High, Discovery Collegiate-Vista District; Marystown Central Regional High, Pearce Regional High-District 7), for the purposes of the study, Woods High-District 5 and Cedar High-Vista District was the focus of this research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed study was to examine the various experiences of the administrators, teachers and students with regard to the block scheduling experience at their schools. The schools studied were Cedar High-Vista District and Woods High-District 5. At the heart of the matter is the question of whether or not the block scheduling experience is a positive one. This study provides valuable information regarding the implementation of block scheduling in Newfoundland. This researcher is not aware of any study of this nature that has yet been completed in the province. This study should provide valuable information to schools and districts contemplating a move to block scheduling.

Research Questions

The major research questions that this study plans to address are:

1. How do school administrators describe their block scheduling experience in their school?

2. How do teachers describe their block scheduling experience in their school?

3. How do students describe their block scheduling experience in their school?

The questions that will be asked in the interview to seek out the responses to these questions include:

1. What are the positive results of implementing block scheduling at your school?
2. What are the negative results of implementing block scheduling at your school?
3. Were there special considerations (in-service to administrators by district office/to teachers by administration/to students by school personnel) given to you in preparation for the block scheduling? If yes, in what form?
4. How has the delivery of courses been affected?
5. What impediments to implementing block scheduling have administrators encountered?
6. How have these impediments been overcome?

Summary

This chapter has provided an introduction to the study outlining the purpose of the study, and listing the research questions. The value of the study to schools and districts was also briefly discussed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Change Process

When considering change as a function in an educational setting, it becomes obvious that there are many facets that are involved in the process. A review of the literature presents the focus of educational change occurring on many fronts. These include but certainly are not limited to change processes (Jenlink & Kinnucan-Welsh, 1995; and Ryan, Kilcher, & Hynes, 1993), stages of systemic change (Anderson, 1993; Wagner, 1993; Wannamaker, 1994; and Holzman, 1993), the role of the teacher (Watson, 1994; Weasmer & Woods, 1998; Hargreaves, 1994; and Steen, 1994), the emotion of change (Newberry, 1994; and Marshak, 1996), change as a collaborative effort (Korvetz & Cohick, 1993; Wagner, 1998; Wang, 1995; and Raywid, 1993), leadership roles (Coleman, 1993; Carrow-Moffett, 1993; Bennett, 1993; Houston, 1993; and Dizney, 1995), and the role of the student (Wacholz, 1994).

Fullan (1991) says that "change is a process, not an event" and describes the process as interactive and thus not a "linear" process (Fullan, pp. 48-49). He suggests that change consists of four phases:

1. Initiation
2. Implementation
3. Continuation

4. Outcome

Fullan contends that these four phases overlap, are interactive, and rely on each other. It is only when all four phases are considered, analyzed, and employed that any true, meaningful, and effective change can occur.

Berman and McLaughlin (1978b) identify a characteristic of innovation that greatly affects implementation outcomes, that is, the scope of change (p. 357). The authors describe four dimensions that influence successful implementation:

1. Centrality (how close the goals of the project were to major educational objectives of the district);
2. The nature and amount of change required;
3. The project's complexity;
4. Consonance (i.e., the fit between the project's goals, values, and practices and those of the schools and district (p. 357).

These are four very important tenets a change agent must and should consider not only in implementation, but in the initiation phase as well. Questions that come to mind include: How much change is involved? How difficult will it be to implement the change? If great change is needed, is the staff capable of undertaking the endeavor? Will the school board accept the innovation?

Possin's "Seven Behaviors in School Change" (as cited in Lunenburg, 1995) are powerful axioms that are paramount to the change process. While recognizing the importance of shared input from major stakeholders, he posits that we must also

acknowledge the role that effective and informed leadership can play to smooth the process of incoming opinions. Possin's behaviors are:

1. *Build a vision.* Successful principals for change communicate a vision of reform goals throughout the school. This vision is a clear idea of where the district is headed.

2. *Create a positive climate.* Principals for change encourage experimentation and permit faculty to fail from time to time. Heavy-handed monitoring for mistakes and failures dampens innovation. Principals also recognize success in others, rather than claiming all the credit themselves. They understand that success of their faculty is their success.

3. *Mobilize.* This means principals share the responsibility for student success with their teachers. Sharing responsibility for improvement can rapidly multiply reform efforts by engaging many faculty members throughout the school to contribute energetic and creative leadership for change.

4. *Engage community support.* Engaging community support - from parents, business, and other community resources - makes change more enduring. Supportive parents protect the change process. Business and community agency linkages add resources and affirmation to reform.

5. *Train.* Change through participatory decision making is complex and usually requires initial training in communication, group process, and decision making. Training in specific curricular improvements and assistance with problem solving during implementation of a reform are also helpful.

6. *Provide resources.* Successful reform is characterized by a central office that supports program development with adequate funding, staffing, supplies, and other resources. Building principals must request additional resources during school improvement efforts.

7. *Remove barriers.* Faculty involved in change may run into policy barriers or opposition from the public or from other faculty members. Successful changes are supported by principals who remove such barriers

by making policies flexible, finding creative ways to circumvent barriers imposed from the outside, and dealing with political opposition through power and persuasion. (p. 177)

Fullan (1991), when discussing the nature of educational and social change, states:

that there are three broad ways in which pressures for educational policy change may arise: (1) through natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, famines, etc.; (2) through external forces such as imported technology, and values, and immigration; and (3) through internal contradictions, such as when indigenous changes in technology lead to new social patterns and needs, or when one or more groups in society perceive a discrepancy between educational values and outcomes affecting themselves or others in whom they have an interest. (p. 17)

To illustrate Fullan's contention that change is a process we can look at the evolution of the concept of strategic planning as a model of strategic change. Redding and Catalanello (1992) identify four iterations in a series of strategic change models, each of the first three "dominated by a generally prescribed model of strategic change" (p. 48).

Redding and Catalanello further outline the iterations as follows:

1. The first iteration focused almost solely upon the planning of the strategic change by senior management.
2. A new model emerged in the late 1970's and early 1980's as an attempt to overcome the limitations of the planning-dominated approach. Second iteration approaches offer painstaking attention to the details of making the strategic change happen.
3. The third iteration placed an emphasis upon the creation of readiness for change in the organization as it did upon the planning and implementation of change...The new model of strategic planning recognizes the importance of three elements - readiness, planning, and implementation.
4. Today, a fourth iteration model of strategic change is emerging to compensate for the limitations of the earlier iteration - the learning

organization. There are four defining characteristics of the learning organization: Constant Readiness, Continuous Planning, Improved Implementation, and Action Learning (pp. 47-51).

Each iteration has grown out of concerns with the previous iteration. We should recognize that "the fifth iteration is just around the next bend" (Redding & Catalanello, 1992, p. 53).

With an awareness of Fullan's "non-linear process of change" (1991), Betman and McLaughlin's discussion on the "scope of change" (1978), McLaughlin's analysis on "stakeholder involvement" (1990), and Possin's "seven behaviors in school change" (1995), attention can now be given to alternate scheduling.

Block Scheduling

A review of the literature on block scheduling suggests that there are two distinct camps or schools of thought associated with the issue. One school of thought on the issue indicates a number of obstacles that many feel will serve to be the downfall of block scheduling as an effective, alternate means of presenting the program while the other school of thought points towards the benefits of implementing a block of time schedule as a means to better manage time in the school setting. These obstacles can be organized into seven major areas of concern: time constraints, scheduling/time-tabling, teaching techniques, absenteeism and mobility, curricular issues, student achievement, and preparation time.

Time Constraints: One of the greatest weaknesses that opponents to block scheduling often describe refers to the actual time constraints that will be placed on

teachers in trying to cover their prescribed curriculum. Though the classes themselves are longer, the actual number of hours of instruction for the total course is in reality less (Hurley, 1997; Queen, Algozzine & Eaddy, 1997; Staunton, 1997). Because the course only takes place for one semester, or for every other day, students actually end up with fewer hours of instruction in each course. Opponents to block scheduling argue that this will make it extremely difficult to cover the content of the prescribed curriculum.

Courses that have mandated final exams, as is required in many provinces and states, will become extremely pressure-packed for the teachers and students. It is difficult for a teacher to "shave off" items from the curriculum, when they know that certain materials must be covered for the end-of-course exam (Hurley, 1997). This pressure often leads to teachers having to race through the curriculum, relying mostly on lecturing and not using the variety of techniques that block scheduling should have allowed them to.

This time constraint pressure can lead to instruction which is scanty and lacking in motivation and appeal for students. This type of instruction can cause a spin-off effect of a reduction in student time-on-task, as students tune out the longer lectures the teachers now give (Kramer, 1997). Thus opponents to block scheduling point out that in reality the longer block of time class will eventually lead to an actual loss in instructional time in the long run.

Scheduling/Time-tabling: Use of the block schedule can also lead to some difficulties in arranging the timetable or schedule in an educationally sound manner.

Perhaps the greatest concern here is when courses are arranged in such a way that it allows for a very large gap in sequential learning (Wronkovich, Hess & Robinson, 1997). For instance, scenarios can be presented where a student might take first year Math or French in the first semester of one school year, then not take the next level of Math or French until the second semester of the following school year. This creates a gap of one full year from the end of one course to the beginning of the next. Those individuals who argue against block scheduling say that this type of gap is far too great, especially in subject areas such as Mathematics and foreign languages (Queen, Algozzine & Eaddy, 1997).

Another time-tabling issue evident in the literature is the possible danger of uneven scheduling. If students are not careful in their choices, or administration wise in its course offerings, the situation may arise where students complete one very "heavy" semester, in terms of workload, followed by a semester where the workload is too light or vice versa (Hurley, 1997). This often leads to situations where a student may have a very relaxing fall semester and then run into academic problems, when faced with an unbalanced difficult winter semester. Proponents of block scheduling argue that these issues are not really problems with block scheduling, but more of an issue of poor time-tabling and lack of student advisory programs to ensure that students complete a relatively balanced program in a reasonable sequence.

Teaching Techniques: According to the literature, a third problem associated with

the block scheduling movement is the apparent lack of variety in teaching methods. Many studies of block scheduling still indicate that the predominant teaching technique employed is the lecture method (Mistretta & Polansky, 1997).

Given that there is a time constraint in covering the prescribed curriculum, teachers rely on the traditional lecture method to facilitate the coverage of that curriculum. Often educators just take two traditional lessons and combine them to make one longer lesson. These teachers were comfortable with what they did before, so it is natural to try to fit this type of teaching into the new time frame.

In most studies reported, the teachers had been given training in various teaching methods, but the lecture was still being relied upon too heavily (Hurley, 1997). The predominance of lecture in some block schedules could be the result of several factors. Perhaps the administration was not clear in its expectations of the teachers, the teachers were untrained in or unwilling to experiment with various teaching techniques, or the time constraints forced teachers into using a speedier means of curriculum coverage. Whatever the reason might be, it seems that lecturing is still being relied on quite extensively, which can then lead to lack of student attentiveness and less time-on-task in the longer block of time schedule.

Absenteeism and Mobility: Another area of concern from the opponents of block scheduling is the disruptiveness of student absenteeism to student learning in this system and the difficulty in accommodating transfer students (Staunton & Adams, 1997).

Students who miss time from school in the block system are missing the equivalent of one and a half to two classes in the traditional system. Students who are ill for a period of time will therefore fall behind much more quickly than students who are following a more traditional six or seven period schedule. This type of disruption will certainly have an impact on student achievement.

As well, in this age of migrating people looking for work, moving a student from a school with a block schedule to one without, or vice-versa, would be a very difficult transition for a student to make. Not only would it be a difficult move for the student to endure, but it would also be a headache for administrators and teachers, in trying to decide where to place the student and how best to deal with this student who could be at very different points in the curriculum. These types of problems are logistical ones that have no easy solutions and can certainly serve as detractors to the success of a block scheduling initiative.

Curricular Issues: To carry out instruction in a block schedule requires some restructuring of the curriculum. What was once covered in 180 days now is to be completed in half the time. This means that teachers will have to redesign their curriculum. Unfortunately, much of the curriculum is specified at the provincial or state level, so it is not just a simple matter of cutting out a few topics here or there. The Department of Education will need to make any adjustments to the curriculum, if they are deemed necessary. Individual teachers will need to take the responsibility of making

adjustments to the manner in which they present the curriculum. Unfortunately, again most teachers do not have any significant training in curriculum development. This leads to some serious points of concern in trying to fit the curriculum into the shorter time frame.

As well, with regards to curricular difficulties, the argument is made that some courses may not be well suited to the longer class periods (Hurley, 1997). A good example would be a course such as keyboarding. This type of course mainly involves students practicing their keyboarding skills for a period of time. Ninety minutes of keyboarding could be rather long for most students to endure and the course could lose much of its merit. If block scheduling is to become the norm, opponents would propose that the prescribed curriculum needs to be altered and specific courses adjusted in order to fit the new time frames. This is not a task that most teachers have the training or the authority to do.

Student Achievement: Several studies of the effectiveness of block scheduling have indicated that there may be a slight disadvantage for students in certain subject areas, when the curriculum is being presented through a block schedule format. Areas such as Mathematics and foreign languages appear to be of some concern (Bateson, 1990; Marshall, Taylor, Bateson, & Brigden, 1995; and Wronkovich, Hess, & Robinson, 1997).

In these studies, student scores on standardized Math and Science measures were lower than those of students in traditionally scheduled classes. There has been some

debate as to the actual causes of such differences in scores, but opponents argue that it should at least throw up a caution flag to educators pushing block scheduling. Courses like Mathematics and Science may require a slower, more consistent pace and may not flourish well in block schedule formats. Proponents of block semesterization indicate that the studies done in British Columbia by Bateson (1990) and Marshall et al. (1995) show what can happen when attempting to implement a block schedule without proper teacher planning time, modification to the curriculum, and support for modified teaching methods (Kramer, 1997).

Planning Time: A final difficulty associated with block scheduling is the amount of planning time required by teachers. In order to make the necessary alterations to the way the curriculum is being presented, it will require teachers to use an inordinate amount of planning time. This type of planning time may not be available. Though the planning periods are longer and teachers have less preparation periods each day, they will need to plan for longer lessons. In a few schools, teachers were only able to have planning periods for half of the year. This places a tremendous amount of pressure and stress on teachers.

Even something as straightforward as planning for a substitute, if a teacher is to be absent, becomes more of a task in the block semesterization format. Activities for a ninety minute period may include several different facets, thus the planning could be quite time consuming. Therefore, the amount of required teacher planning time is considered to be another hindrance to the likelihood of block scheduling.

It is not hard to see why some educators are very hesitant about jumping on the bandwagon with regards to implementing block scheduling in their schools. With issues such as a shorter time period to work in, scheduling difficulties, student absenteeism, curriculum restructuring, and lack of planning time, many educators feel that it is important to proceed with caution before making wholesale changes that could have a negative impact on the quality of students' education.

While the case against the implementation of block scheduling has been well documented, there is also a strong base of evidence which points towards the benefits of implementing a block of time schedule. This evidence proposes that block schedules are a means to better manage time in the school setting. Ironically, many arguments put forth in favor of block scheduling are in direct contrast to those put forth against such schedules. A review of the literature regarding the advantages or benefits of block semesterization indicates seven major areas of positive performance. These include: student achievement, variety in teaching methods, depth of curriculum coverage, individualized instruction, interpersonal relationships/school climate, time for teachers, and at-risk-students.

Student Achievement: In direct contrast to the studies mentioned as arguments against block scheduling, supporters of block semesterization present much evidence that seems to indicate that this form of scheduling will have a positive effect on student achievement (O'Neil, 1995; and Fitzpatrick & Mowers, 1997).

There have been a number of positive indicators of success relating to student

achievement mentioned in the literature. Many schools note that there has been an increase in the number of students who are on the honor roll since the switch to block scheduling was made. As well, the grade point averages of students have tended to increase. These schools have also observed an increase in the number of A's and a decrease in the number of F's. Finally, they point to the rise in the number of students attending four-year colleges since they made the switch to block scheduling (Eineder & Bishop, 1997).

These positive indicators are used as evidence by the proponents of block scheduling to indicate the usefulness of this type of format. The students are benefitting from spending longer class periods at fewer subject areas. This can be directly noted in the manner in which their performance has improved.

Variety in Teaching Methods: One of the strengths of having a longer block of time to work with is the potential it allows for teachers to employ a variety of instructional methods in one class period. Though opponents argue that there is still too much reliance on lecturing in the block, the supporters of block scheduling present a completely different viewpoint. Many studies on the efficacy of block scheduling indicate a positive response from both teachers and students regarding the various teaching methods that are being utilized (Hackman, 1995; Fitzpatrick & Mowers, 1997; Hackman & Schmitt, 1997; Staunton, 1997; and Staunton & Adams, 1997).

In these studies, teachers discuss the fact that they are able to vary the approaches

being taken in the classroom. Each individual class period can be broken up into several different activities. There is much broader use of cooperative learning techniques, discovery learning, student-centered instruction and hands-on activities to name a few. The classroom no longer needs to be a passive place, but can become a much more active, invigorating environment for learning.

Teachers do admit that there will be times when the lecture method will be necessary. However, they note that even the most experienced teachers are responding to the challenge of finding ways to vary teaching techniques. The longer block of time allows teachers the opportunity to present students with material, work with that material, and review the same material, all in one individual class period. Time no longer forces the activities to be cut short.

Depth of Coverage: Another benefit proposed for moving to blocks of time scheduling is the depth of curriculum coverage that it affords. This is a direct counter-argument to the negative side which argues that it allows less content coverage; proponents of block scheduling argue that it is not the breadth of the curriculum coverage that the educators should be concerned with, rather the depth of the coverage of the curriculum. They argue that in this age of advancements in the amount of knowledge available to students, it is impossible to cover everything that a student could encounter. What is more important is to expose the students to the various skills that will be required to function in this changing world.

Blocks of time in the schedule allow teachers and students to explore topics in much more detail. There is much more time for student activities in the classroom, which allow students a greater opportunity to master the lesson content. Students can now explore topics further, integrate skills from various subject areas, complete joint assignments from team teachers and make use of the various technologies that are available (Canady & Rettig, 1995).

Advocates of block scheduling propose that the necessary changes to the curriculum need to be made to allow teachers a reasonable amount of time to cover the curriculum. It is better to do an in-depth job of covering a slightly lesser amount of material than to do a scanty job covering too broad of a curriculum base. Block scheduling will allow a better coverage of the curriculum. The students will have the time to look at things in more detail and have the opportunity to achieve mastery.

Individualized Instruction: In this era of gearing instruction towards the needs of the individual student, advocates of block semesterization indicate that this format for instruction will indeed allow a better opportunity to individualize instruction. Many studies present evidence that suggests teachers feel they are better able to address the needs of individual students (Eineder & Bishop, 1997; and Mistretta & Polansky, 1997).

The proponents of the block schedule argue that there are several reasons why teachers are able to individualize instruction. In the block schedule format, a teacher is responsible for fewer numbers of students at a particular time. This will allow teachers to

be better acquainted with the individual needs of the students. As well, each class period, being longer in duration, affords the teacher the opportunity to provide much more individual attention to particular students (Eineder & Bishop, 1997; and Mistretta & Polansky, 1997).

Teachers can be more observant of individual students who may be having difficulties and now have the time to employ various intervention strategies to help those students achieve success. In the traditional fifty minute class period, this sort of time did not exist. Unfortunately, students would often leave the classroom no further ahead than when they entered (Mistretta & Polansky, 1997).

Both students and teachers believed there was a greater opportunity to work together to achieve success. Students felt the teacher had more time to get to know them and to work more closely with them, and the teachers echoed those thoughts. Individual student's needs were more likely to be met in such an educational atmosphere (Eineder & Bishop, 1997).

Interpersonal Relationships/School Climate: A related advantage to individualized instruction discussed by proponents of block scheduling is the improvement in interpersonal relationships and school climate in the schools using block of time scheduling formats. Many schools that had switched to block scheduling had found an improvement in the relationships between teachers and students (Hurley, 1997) and between faculty as well (Mistretta & Polansky, 1997).

As was previously mentioned, teachers have fewer students to deal with in each semester of a block schedule. Conversely, students have fewer teachers to work with each semester. Thus, both students and teachers are able to better get to know each other. The opportunity exists for teachers and students to develop the rapport with each other that helps make the school a more relaxing place to function in.

Schools under the block scheduling format, report an overall improvement in the climate of the school. Students are more relaxed because they have fewer materials to organize, fewer teachers to get to know, and less changes to make in the day. Teachers are more relaxed for many of the same reasons. This calmer atmosphere can be identified in many schools, as they report fewer discipline referrals, less disruptions, and an overall more positive attitude towards school (Hackman, 1995).

Teachers in the block schedule also report the added benefit of developing better relations with fellow staff members. In this system, educators are afforded the opportunity to work together much more than would be possible in the traditional systems. Teachers participate in many cooperative planning activities, inter-disciplinary activities, and team-teaching projects. These types of activities encourage teachers to work together and combine their expertise. This collaboration leads to much better relations between teachers, as they seek to work together rather than trying to complete similar work individually.

The climate of block-scheduled schools is seen as a strong argument for switching

to such a system. All stakeholders report their schools as being more enjoyable places to be. If the climate of the school is one that is conducive to learning, this can only have a positive impact on student achievement.

Time for Teachers: The issue of time in schools and the amount of time that is necessary for a teacher to prepare activities to create a conducive learning environment is another area that is looked upon as a strength of block semesterization. Many studies of block semesterization point to the fact that teachers will experience an increase in planning time (Edwards, 1995; Hurley, 1997; and Kramer, 1997).

This increase in planning time is partly a result of the longer class periods. Instead of having a thirty or forty minute preparation period, teachers now find themselves with ninety minutes. This affords a teacher the opportunity to achieve a lot more preparation work that could not possibly have been completed under the old system. As well as having longer planning periods, teachers are preparing for fewer subject areas. This certainly lightens the load on a teacher and helps make planning time to be utilized more effectively.

Proponents of block scheduling also point to the decrease in the administrative tasks that are necessary in this type of format. Because there are less periods each day, there is less administrative paperwork such as attendance sheets and late slips that take up valuable time for a teacher.

Block scheduling will give teachers back some precious time. This is time that can

be used for development of curricular units, evaluation of student progress, and increasing contact with parents. Time is a valuable commodity and teachers can use as much as they can get.

At-Risk Students: A final benefit of switching to a block schedule system apparent in the literature is the potential impact it can have on at-risk students. Several studies of the efficacy of block scheduling point to the positive influences on at-risk students (Kramer, 1997; and Staunton & Adams, 1997).

At-risk students seem to benefit from only having to concentrate on a few classes at a time. There is less material to organize and fewer assignments and tests to keep abreast of. There is also the added opportunity to retake a course in the second semester that a student may have failed to receive credit for in the first semester. These types of benefits can be noted when the number of dropouts and the failure rates are examined. Research indicates that the failure and dropout rates decrease in block schedule schools.

The longer class period allows teachers the opportunity to present materials, have the students work with materials, diagnose problem areas and provide rededication strategies, all in one block of time. This seems to be just the sort of environment that many at-risk flourish in. In the traditional system, this time is just not available and these students, who might need that little extra attention, tend to fall behind and get lost in the shuffle. Block scheduling might be a possible strategy to help deal with the unique needs of such students.

Obviously, there are many strong points to be made for using a block schedule to unlock the chains of time. Schools that have endeavored to use such initiatives are reporting many advantages. Students are doing better, teachers are able to try many new teaching techniques and cover the curriculum in more detail, instruction can be individualized which seems to directly benefit at-risk students, and the school climate seems to improve, as interpersonal relationships between the stakeholders improve and the school becomes a much more calmer environment for staff and students. These and other benefits have many advocates of block scheduling trumpeting their cause, as they try to encourage other educators to push this scheduling format in their own schools. Time will tell if this type of format can indeed allow educators to reap the benefits being advocated.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the relevant literature focusing on alternate scheduling in the secondary school system. Specifically two schools of thought on the issue of block scheduling were presented, the argument for the implementation of such a schedule at the secondary school level was presented as was the argument against the implementation of any such schedule at the secondary school level. The relevant literature focusing on the change process as it relates to implementing change in an educational setting was discussed as it was felt that many of the issues surrounding the implementation of a new schedule would be related to the change process.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Chapter 3 provides a description of the research design and methodology, site selection and access, data collection and data analysis procedures utilized in the study. Possible concerns with the validity and reliability of the data are discussed along with a description of the steps taken to address those concerns. The ethical issues of the study along with the specific strategies used to address those issues are also described.

Research Design and Methodology

The notion of multiple sources of information as presented in the qualitative research component of educational research suggests that it will be necessary to carry out investigations through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Triangulation provides the indispensable ability to control for fallible information but at the same time allows for the unearthing of information that might have been overlooked with just one form of data collection. All the data collected holds the potential to cause changes in the direction and scope of the research as it opens doors into previously unexplored avenues for examination. Data collection entailed the common ethnographic techniques used by many researchers: interviews and observations.

Interviews are a prime source of information for studies of this nature in that they provide first hand insight into the experiences of the various stakeholders involved. Open-

ended interviews were conducted using guidelines discovered through research (Allan & Skinner, 1991; Bickman & Rog, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1990; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991; Sherman & Welsh, 1988; and Tilley, 1998). From the two schools a total of four administrators, four teachers, and seven students were interviewed. The interviews were taped, with the participants' permission. Interview dates and times were arranged prior to arrival at each school. Permission was gained from the appropriate personnel at both district offices prior to contact with the schools.

The questions that were constructed dealt with the goals of this study that were mentioned under the section Purpose of the Study. These questions were followed as the interviews dictated; other questions were asked following from the participant responses (Patton, 1990 and Seidman, 1991). The interviews were transcribed and coded. Analysis was conducted using qualitative analysis techniques as per the literature mentioned in the opening of this section.

Observations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Bickman & Rog, 1998; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Scott & Usher, 1996; Sherman & Welsh, 1988; and Stewart, 1998) also played a role in analyzing the experiences of the stakeholders within the school setting as it existed with the block schedule. Through observation a sense of pace and a feel for the culture of the school is possible. A day of observation was spent in both of the study schools. The focus of the observation was the pace and the culture of the school.

As the literature review suggests, there is a wealth of opinion on the issue of

block scheduling. While varied and diverse, an examination of the literature served to lend credence to the project.

In order not to cause any undue frustration, the study at each school was arranged during a week in which there were no mid-term or final exams and not just before or after a semester starting or ending. All participants were informed in writing and verbally that information gleaned from the interviews would be held in the strictest of confidence, and that their names would not be associated with any information that they provided.

Site Selection and Access

As indicated in the Introduction to the Study the number of schools presently offering their programs through a form of block scheduling in this province is fairly small. To that end, the two schools that have been following this type of scheduling for the longest time in our province will be the focus of the study. Woods High School and Cedar High School have both been using block scheduling for a number of years and are therefore suited to the purposes of this study. Contact was made with the directors of both school districts prior to approaching the school administrations to seek approval to conduct the study.

Data Collection

A qualitative approach serves best for the purposes of this study. Wiersma (1995) defined the role of this method as being done for the purpose of understanding social phenomena, the exact intention of this study. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe the

interview as "a purposeful conversation, usually between two people . . . that is directed by one in order to get information" (p. 96). It is designed to basically find out what is on someone else's mind. Patton (1990) states that "the purpose of open-ended interviewing is not to put things in someone's mind, but to access the perspective of the person being interviewed" (p. 278).

It was the intention in this study to pose open-ended questions to a selection of interviewees who have been chosen based on their suitability for the purposes of the research. The exact wording and sequence of questions was determined in advance. All interviewees (administrators, teachers, and students) were asked the same questions in the same order. All questions were worded in a completely open-ended format. The questions used included experience and behaviour questions, opinion of advantage/disadvantage questions, knowledge questions, and background questions that elicit respondents' descriptions of themselves. Each of these was used in Patton's typology as outlined in LeCompte and Preissle (1993), and would best serve to meet the expectations and objectives of the study's purpose.

Patton (1986) prefers this method of interviewing because "the truly open-ended question does not presuppose which dimension of feeling, analysis, or thought will be salient for the interviewee. The truly open-ended question permits persons being interviewed to take whatever direction and use whatever words they want in order to represent what they have to say" (p. 213). Best and Kahn (1993) note that the preferred

method for data collection is to tape record the interview if the respondent is willing. The participants were asked to allow for the recording of their interview sessions so as to guarantee the study of their exact responses. Each taped session was then transcribed to permit easier analysis of the information gathered.

Prior to the actual interview sessions each participating school administrator was provided with a letter explaining the intended purpose of the study. The written consent of each participant was requested regarding the possible tape recording of each session. At that time the participants were reassured of confidentiality to ensure that their identity would be protected. Each participant was represented by a number only and all audio recordings were used only by the researcher. Eventually, when all the data needed was transcribed, these tapes were destroyed. An effort was made to give meaning to and interpretation of the responses of the participants to get a more in-depth understanding of attitudes toward block scheduling. A qualitative approach allowed opportunities for interpretation.

Data Analysis

In the opinion of Patton (1990), "the challenge [of qualitative inquiry] is to make sense of massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify the significant patterns and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed" (p. 372). This stage of the research began once all of the taped sessions had been transcribed. The first step in analysing qualitative research involves organizing the

data. Because one of the main methods being used in this study was that of the interview, the data were organized by grouping answers together across respondents. Once the data had been organized, the researcher could describe the viewpoints of participants. It was only after the data had been organized and described that the researcher was able to begin the most critical phase of the analysis process, interpretation. "Interpretation involves explaining the findings, answering 'why' questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into analytic framework" (Patton, 1990, p. 375). The benefit of using open-ended interviews was that all respondents answered the same questions, thus increasing the comparability of responses. It also facilitated organization and analysis of the data.

Best and Kahn (1998) bring attention to the importance of confidentiality in reporting research results where information has been gathered through the means of participants. They state that "The ethical researcher holds all information that he or she may gather about the subject in strict confidence, disguising the participant's identity in all records and reports. No one should be in a position to threaten the subject's anonymity nor should any information be released without his or her permission" (p. 43). It is the intended purpose of the researcher to conceal names, locations, and other identifying information so that the people who have been interviewed will have their identity protected. Prior to the actual interview session each of the respondents will be provided with a written confirmation that all data will remain anonymous, ensuring them that their

identity will be protected at all costs. In addition, they were guaranteed that all taped interview sessions would be destroyed once the necessary data has been transcribed. Patton (1986) states that "when struggling with the process of analysis it is helpful to keep in mind that the basic purpose of qualitative analysis is to provide useful, meaningful, and credible answers to the evaluation questions" (p. 327). Therefore the researcher made all attempts to consciously guard against subjectivity, which often leads to bias, unreliability, and irrational reporting of the research findings. Objectivity was exercised to ensure that the findings clearly reflected the responses of those interviewed, the subjects to whom this study was dependent upon.

The validity of this study was enhanced by the sources of data. Triangulation ensures that analysis of results and trends is consistent across the data field. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) put forward the belief that researchers "use many kinds of data collection techniques, so that data collected in one way can be used to cross-check the accuracy of data gathered in another way" (p.48). The use of interview and observation as data collection techniques provided the level of accuracy needed in the research.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a description of the research design and methodology, site selection and access, data collection and data analysis procedures utilized in the study. Possible concerns with the validity and reliability of the data were discussed along with a description of the steps taken to address those concerns. The

ethical considerations of the study along with the specific strategies used to address those considerations were described.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Introduction

Open-ended interviews formed the basis of obtaining data for this qualitative study of the attitudes and perceptions of administrators, teachers, and students towards their experiences with respect to block scheduling in the secondary school system in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. These interviews also served to give insight into the participants' evaluation of block scheduling as an alternate means of delivering the high school program. This chapter presents and analyzes the interview data collected from the fifteen participants.

Organization of Interview Data

Open-ended interviews were held with fifteen participants from two senior high schools. All individuals interviewed had been exposed to both the more traditional fourteen or seven day schedule and more recently an alternate form of scheduling. Not all of the interviewees answered the questions in the exact order as they appeared on the interview schedule. This was because some of the interviewees provided much more in-depth responses to some of the questions as compared to others, resulting in some questions being answered before they were formally asked. Interviews, approximately forty-five minutes long, were conducted with four administrators, four teachers, and seven students.

Emergent Categories and Themes

This study examined students', teachers', and administrators' perceptions of their various experiences as related to the implementation of an alternate form of scheduling for program delivery in their school. Data were collected via interviews and researcher observation. Analysis of these data have revealed several major categories with underlying themes. Merriam as quoted in Delaney (1995) suggests that "the development of categories is a part of the analysis process and involves looking for recurring regularities in the data" (p. 79). Devising categories is largely an intuitive process, but it is also systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the investigator's orientation and knowledge, and the constructs made explicit by the participants of the study (Goertz & LeCompte cited in Delaney, 1995). A discussion of the categories and their respective themes follows.

Benefits

Analysis of the research data resulted in a number of themes recurring which fall under the heading "benefits". These benefits referred to what the participants felt were the positive results of implementing block scheduling at their particular school. Specifically those themes were:

- increased options
- improved focus
- improved post-secondary preparation

- enhanced student accountability
- improved climate/morale

Summarized in this section are comments from study participants that illustrate these themes.

Increased Options

Each of the groups interviewed identified “increased options” as a positive result of implementing block scheduling in their school. The implementation of the block schedule provided for a greater number of options for those in the system. Administrators felt that they were provided more opportunity to manipulate their programs and be more creative in meeting the needs of those served by the school system. Teachers felt that they were more freely able to access outside resources. Students felt that they now were able to access more of the curriculum. The following quotes support these comments:

Administrators:

It would allow students the opportunity to for those who care to do so to graduate in 2 ½ years giving them the opportunity if they so desire to go into the workforce and make a bit of money before they go to post secondary. Or probably even access post secondary earlier than they normally would...

Looking at alternate schedules moving your amount of construction of time per course closer to the 55-110 hours addresses the challenge for small schools to offer a variety of courses.

It is left to the creative genius of the school to decide what it is you want to do.

We can offer a broader curriculum to our students, we can change the program more to adapt to conditions

You're able to offer the students more courses, 48 credits as opposed to 42.

You've got some of your top students who want to do three sciences and now will get a chance to do Phys. Ed. but wouldn't have picked it up before because they've got no space for electives if you want three sciences.

Teachers:

Good for getting out in the community go curling etc. You know bowling or golf course, or skating right. So that's good because at senior high we want kids to get out in recreational stuff right.

It gives the students a good variety and gives them an opportunity to get out of the building, and they enjoy that.

The longer classes allow for more use of community resources.

Students:

Not only do you have like more opportunity to like to go through everything at once, but you can do your courses back to back. Like your Math and your French.

It is good for people who are having trouble with certain subjects. Because like you can organize it whereas like say Math, you can do like Advanced Math the first semester and if you are having trouble with that, then they are able to take the Academic Math the second semester like for grade 12's it is easier.

I think it is better because you got more chances to get your credits.

Improved Focus

The interviewees felt that the new schedule had resulted in a greater "focus".

They felt that doing fewer courses at the one time had resulted in being able to better focus on those courses. The semesterized schedule, with course time being closer to the province's Department of Education's requirements (55 hours per credit) had created a sense of urgency to meet deadlines and had resulted in better preparation on the part of teachers. The following quotes illustrate the feelings of the interviewees in relation to this:

Administrators:

And ah you know that doesn't decrease the amount of work that they do or the amount of homework that they may have but it is focused on far or fewer probably half the number of courses.

You know it doesn't necessarily get easier but it is more focused and so that's another benefit too for and also for teachers, teachers are not necessarily carrying as wide a number of courses and you know for their preparation and so on I think it is better.

As a result what happens is I think you're getting the teachers going into class with their courses much more well prepared and laid out, they know where they're going to be... as a result they're basically putting the message across to students that deadlines are essential, they have got to be met.

So I think people are much aware of the time and I we're creating this sense of what I'll call urgency and I think we're spending much more time on task. And I see that as a plus. Because I think, you know, we're getting better work from students as a result.

Teachers:

That makes them more accountable. They are more accountable. They realize they can't slack off.

Basically we knew what we had to teach, what our objectives were and we knew the time frame we had to meet them in. So basically we had to meet more objectives per class, that's all.

Like these kids only have 4 periods to get ready each night to prepare for the next day. That's an advantage, I think so there's only four periods to get ready, and the homework doesn't change that much, still the same amount of homework, just focused on fewer courses.

Students:

We get to do more courses but like less at the same time. So you have more time to concentrate on what you are doing instead of like worrying about all of them at once.

It is a lot easier to study for midterms and finals because you got a less time span to remember things in, and also like you have less books and less courses and...ah...

You get more work done. To me you get to concentrate on one subject.

Improved Post-Secondary Preparation

There was consensus amongst the administrators and the teachers that the alternate schedules did a good job of preparing the students for the post-secondary experience. The new schedule better "mirrored" what students would experience at college or university. This is illustrated in a question posed by one administrator and an example provided by a teacher.

Administrator:

... you're going back to university right now... when you start in September, when do you want to write your finals, December? or April? ... Then why should it be any different for students at this level and for staff here? Why is it the be-all and end-all for you at that level but can't work here?

Teacher:

A student who is interested in the sciences as an example. (Of mirroring the

post-secondary) They may have to go through a schedule like this and then have a three hour lab in university, right. So here we are at least once in a cycle saying now you have a certain teacher for 2 ½ hours a day which is similar to having that student, teacher, professor for a 1 hour class in the morning and then come back for that lab in the afternoon.

Enhanced Student Accountability

There was a feeling that the longer classes had served to make the students more accountable. Missing time would result in falling too far behind to catch, therefore students seemed to make the extra effort to attend school.

Teachers:

Well you're more accountable here to get in here ...look two slots one day. Okay now you won't get that in university. But there are students who come here not feeling well whereas ordinarily they would be home.

When they go to MUN or go to Marine, they're only going to face the same expectations. It's better preparation.

They got to be more accountable and sometimes you know in the old system you could miss a bit of time and catch up in no problem.

Attendance is better, there is less lateness.

Improved Climate/Morale

There was a sense that the new schedule had contributed to a better climate and morale around the schools. Teachers looked at their unassigned time as finally having something put back into the system and affording them the time within the day to accomplish some of the necessary out of class tasks. Students appreciated the break between classes and felt it allowed them to be fresher in each of their classes. The sense

of improved climate is echoed in the following quotes:

Teachers:

The break between classes has reduced smoking in the school and other related problems.

If you have a difficult class for example, you know that you only have them for half of the year and then you get a new slate of students. That sense of beginning all over again is refreshing.

Fewer student contacts at any one time of the year promotes getting to know students much better.

Students:

I like the 10-minute breaks between each class a lot more than actually having just one recess because you get a chance to relax and take time to get to your classes instead of like running around when the bell rings, and if you got something you need to get done before that class or get help or something you got ten minutes to do whatever. And you are more relaxed and stuff when you are going to the other classes.

If you don't like the subject, when the semester ends, it's like a new school year. You're not bogged down.

Concerns

From the research data a number of themes recurred which fall under the category "concerns". These concerns refer to what the study participants saw as the negative results of the implementation of block scheduling at their particular school. The following themes emerged in this category:

- increase in pace
- increase in workload

- sequential courses
- student attendance/transfers
- professional development

Summarized in this section are comments from study participants on these various themes.

Increase in Pace

For each group of interviewees the implementation of block scheduling at their school had resulted in some difficulty adjusting to the new “pace” now evident in the building. While administrators recognized that this was a concern that others in their building were having to deal with, both teachers and students suggested that there was a definite period of adjustment as they became more familiar with the new schedule. This trend can be seen in the following quotes:

Administrators:

...the toughest one is for students just entering, they're still in the mode that “all kinds of time yet sir”, “lots of time yet sir” and there's not. As a result the pace for them is quite a bit quicker, and it takes a while to catch up to it. Once they do they're okay, but I mean, it takes a while. They realize you know how quickly things are coming.

Teachers:

You'll go into your first couple of classes and you're trying to judge your time based on other years and then all of a sudden you find you're falling behind a little bit and normally you'll pick that up in a week or two.

If you have general courses or some really weak students 75 minutes a day is a problem... concentration level. You can only keep them for so long. You really have to pile the work on them.

75 is horrendous now, if you've got a good class no problem, academic or advanced, I had 3101 Language last term ideal, couldn't get any better. But you get a slot like this slot that I had earlier mostly really slow students for a Science course and then trying to keep them, well not really busy, but their concentration levels are not there.

Students:

I don't like the way things are sped up a lot more than if it was you had seven subjects. Like you wouldn't have every subject every day.

It is alright it is just a little fast that's all.

Increase in Workload

The increased "workload" experienced by the interviewees could be interpreted as another negative result of the block schedule initiative at their school. Administrators referred to the additional work created by the extra "start up". Teachers mentioned the attention needed to be given to employing additional strategies during a particular class and students referred to additional stresses of constant homework as areas of concern.

These concerns are echoed in the following quotes:

Administrators:

There is more work for the administration, guidance and the secretary, caused mainly by the additional startup times in the school year.

There have to be teaching adjustments and teachers have to use a variety of strategies to keep students on task during the extended periods.

Teachers:

But you get in some of the social studies courses, you take some courses like Family Living, or courses where there's not a lot of resource material and very little in the text book to cover you've got some, you've got a lot

of filling in to do. You take some of the courses like Career Exploration or Family Living again where there's no text book and you have to get the material yourself, it's very difficult. Seventy-five minute period every day, for five months that's a lot of work.

Students:

But you have the same four courses every single day, and if you have a lot of books and has to be done that night because you know you got the same four courses the next day.

Sequential Courses

Administrators and teachers identified the challenge of designing sequences of courses so that there isn't too much time between courses (e.g. trying to cope with gaps of one year between courses in the same discipline) as a concern created by the introduction of the new schedule. As one administrator put it:

...right now our level II's, our top level two students, not the academic but the top level II students, last year they did Math 1201 in the first semester, Math 2201 in the second semester, and they did Math 3201 last semester. So they're not doing Math this semester. Now imagine if I if don't get them any Math next year in Grade 12. That's a year and a half without having done Math and now you're going to go to university.

Student Attendance/Transfers

Two additional concerns that were consistently identified by teachers and administrators were students who missed class time and students who transferred. The concern about attendance is reflected upon by the teacher who said:

What about the student who's off school like extended sick leave? Well to be honest with you the negative about that is if you miss a month of a semesterized course you're in trouble.

The concern about transfers can be seen in the comments of the administrator who suggested:

A major problem I suppose is with kids who want to transfer, basically it has come up now a couple of times, it's a real headache, and it's a real problem for students transferring here from somewhere else. It was always a problem when they come from the mainland because they're semesterized up there in most provinces anyway. But if get a student from your school come here now how do they fit in here now? I mean the most we can offer at this point in time is 8 credits. So that's been a problem.

Professional Development

The issue of professional development and the role needed to be played by professional development in facilitating the change to the new schedule is well represented by the administrator who commented:

One of the biggest issues you have to deal with and probably the bigger your staff the greater the variety of opinions and so on is this whole issue of professional development, I think you need to prepare your staff in the staff meetings to look at the pros and cons of it and before they make a decision. I don't think it should be a simple decision of the administration to jump into alternate scheduling. It may work out well but you do I think need to prepare your staff and so that they can reflect on what might be the implications of this. What changes may I have to make in my instruction? What does it mean in terms of my workload? And you know I am reasonably comfortable in saying that most people under reflection would be willing to move to it. You know and certainly it is our experience, once you move to it, you don't go back.

Program Delivery

The following themes emerged from the data in this category:

- pace of presentation
- frequency of evaluation

- revisit teaching strategies
- access to resources
- professional development

A discussion of these themes with reference to participants' quotes follows.

Pace of Presentation

With respect to any impact on the delivery of courses as a result of the alternate schedule being adopted administrators, teachers, and students were in general agreement that the "pace of the presentation" of the material seemed to have increased. This perception of an increase in pace is evident in the following comments:

Administrators:

...the question of whether they can best learn in an alternate schedule that increases the pace of presentation that they have time to absorb and truly understand and develop the skills that you are trying to impart.

I think we can pick up the pace a little bit if we want in order to so that nobody suffers but I think everybody gains.

One of the things semesterization does is forces teachers to become aware of it much more quickly, but teenagers as well, it's right there, it's not months down the road. The final is coming soon.

Teachers:

We've got to follow strict time tables to meet the course objectives.

I find the pacing of instruction is critical for me and the students. It requires constant planning and evaluation of where you are. You need to establish that tempo of delivery and keep to it.

Students:

I don't like the way things are sped up a lot more than if it was you had seven subjects. Like you wouldn't have every subject every day.

It is alright it is just a little fast that's all.

Frequency of Evaluation

Another common impact on the delivery of courses attributed to the implementation of the new schedule was related to the evaluation scheme. All three groups of interviewees made reference to evaluation in one way or another when responding to this question. For the most part, the frequency of exams was identified as being affected, not the actual examination of student abilities. The following quotes reflect this:

Administrators:

It may affect it in the sense that a couple effects are that the mid-year exam instead of having a formal gymnasium sort of midterm you might have class tests which would be November, October or November. Then you will have your formal exams in January okay. So there is a little bit of change there. It is probably easier to schedule exams in January. In terms of it actually affecting the evaluation of students, I don't see it.

You have to be prepared to give evaluation at a greater clip, meaning that final exams in Language 3101 for example which could be finished in November might have to be scheduled six to eight weeks after the course begins.

Teachers:

...the only difference I think is that because you get the students so often your tests are you know shorter distances apart.

Like in the old system you might go like a month before you get the test whereas here now you are going two weeks. Two weeks you got a test, two weeks you got a test. But within that two weeks you have had sixteen classes.

So if the tests are more frequent and the information is coming at the students quicker so they got to keep on top of it.

Students:

It is a lot easier to study for midterms and finals because you got a less time span to remember things in.

Revisit Teaching Strategies

For administrators and teachers there was consensus that the new schedule had necessitated teachers revisiting teaching strategies with the aim of adjusting their teaching strategies to more adequately reflect the new time allocation as seen in the new schedule.

This consensus can be seen in the following quotes:

Administrators:

One of the I think greatest concerns that a school would have to concern itself with if you move to that kind of alternate scheduling if you are significantly altering the length of a period. Because you know there are some of us who still teach the way that we were taught, but I think more and more of us have looked at and tried to analyze you know how students learn. You realize that there are different types of learners in the classrooms; therefore, you know that you have to go with a some variety in how you present in order to maximize the number of students that you reach.

If we are going to go from roughly an hour period to seventy-five minutes, I think a school would have to seriously look at what are the implications for the way we teach. Can we continue to do now for a longer period of time the same as we were doing before.

Teachers:

We have to develop new instructional strategies to take advantage of block scheduling we can't just lecture twice as long.

I've found that the extra time lets me increase the number of activities that require my students to explore topics in depth.

With the extra fifteen minutes, is there another fill-in activity that you can do? That's something you'd have to do on your teaching style basically.

Access to Resources

Further reflecting on adjustment in teaching strategies was the recognition that the new schedule allowed for greater access to resources such as labs and community resources. The following quotes illustrate this:

Administrators:

Good for getting out in the community go curling etc. You know bowling or golf course, or skating right. So that's good cause at senior high we want kids to get out in recreational stuff right.

Use of laboratories and community facilities and other activities are facilitated by the extended periods.

Teachers:

It gives the students a good variety and gives them an opportunity to get out of the building, and they enjoy that.

The longer classes allow for more use of community resources.

Professional Development

When considering the three different levels for providing "special considerations" as implied by research question # 3, the interview data collected did not show any trend

that can be said to be evident in all three interview groups. Administrators had no in-service provided to them by district office personnel, but rather were the sources of the expertise needed themselves or had sought the necessary expertise to provide to staff and school board personnel. As one administrator recalled:

...a kid came down from Bathurst, New Brunswick and stayed at our house right. You know I was downstairs having a chat with her and she was telling me about their semesterization and how great it was. The way she built it up I said, 'God that sounds like a good thing.' So then I was just researching the literature and reading and said this is a good thing. Because I have been here you know for probably for 13, 14 years right and I knew I needed to get things moving again... So I actually went back to the principal of Bathurst and I arranged a conference. Took in everybody in the school, the superintendent at the time, a few board members and different things.

Another administrator recalled really starting to think about it:

when our Director asked me to do a presentation at an Administrative Council meeting to other principals about it.

For another administrator, it was more of a discussion session. He recalled:

We didn't provide inservice but we did take an afternoon, basically to discuss it among ourselves. Basically what we talked about is guys we're going to do this, I mean let's not go in there for 4 periods a day, an hour and 15 minutes each and lecture. If we're going to lengthen the class time, let's start getting a little bit more creative in the way we do things. So if you're going to lecture, do that for a half hour and then move on to something else but let's mix it up.

For teachers there were varying degrees of exposure to in-service. For one teacher it was virtually non-existent as his response to the question indicates:

Not for me because with the amalgamation of the schools here, I just walked into this. They said here is your teaching assignment, here is your

schedule, here is your timetable. I wasn't in-serviced at all.

For another teacher it was different:

We had basically I think we had what I think it was a morning session we had a staff in-service and we focused on semesterization for the morning session, and we actually brought in this speaker from New Brunswick who has been working with a semesterized system for quite a number of years right....we had a panel from GFA come down and talk about the pros and cons, we had a student, we had a parent, we had Dr. Taylor there, we had a teacher right. And then after that we broke into smaller groups and obviously subject areas...

For the students there was no mention of any formal preparation for the new schedule beyond the information that would be given out during a normal first day of classes.

Summary

This chapter provided a discussion of the various categories and themes which were evident in the research data (see Figure 4.1). Those categories were benefits, concerns, and program delivery. Themes explaining each of the categories were also discussed and quotations from study participants were cited for illustration purposes.

Figure 4.1 Summary of Emergent Categories and Themes

| C A T E G O R I E S | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | Benefits | Concerns | Program Delivery |
| T | Increased options | Increase in pace | Pace of presentation |
| H | Improved focus | Increase in workload | Frequency of evaluation |
| E | Improved post-secondary preparation | Sequential courses | Revisit teaching strategies |
| M | Enhanced student accountability | Student attendance/transfers | Access to resources |
| E | Improved climate/morale | Professional development | Professional development |
| S | | | |

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of students, teachers and school administrators with respect to their experiences with an alternate form of scheduling (block/semesterized) being utilized as the medium for delivery of the secondary school program at select schools in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The study was directed by general research questions with several subsidiary research questions (see Appendix A). Chapter 4 detailed the categories and themes which emerged from the data gathered in response to those research questions. This chapter will discuss the specific findings of the study as guided by the research questions.

Subsidiary Research Questions

What are the positive results of implementing block scheduling at your school?

Students, teachers and school administrators felt that the implementation of block scheduling at their school had resulted in a number of positive influences. These positive influences ranged all the way from program delivery to school climate. Various examples of those perceived positive influences in each school are provided in this section.

Cedar High School

In their interviews the students, teachers and school administrators from Cedar High School talked about several examples of positive influences which they perceived

had occurred as a result of their school implementing a block schedule to deliver the program. A number of those examples are listed below:

- the transition from junior high to senior high was improved;
- the workload was reduced;
- the sense of renewal after each semester;
- the allowance of a broader curriculum to be offered to students;
- the provision for students to avail of more of the program with the increase to 48 credits over their three years of the high school program;
- the emphasis on focus, accountability and preparation;
- the more accurate representation of the post-secondary experience for students;
- the allowance for teachers and students to get to know each other better.

As noted earlier in Chapter 4, under the heading "Benefits" the perceived positive influences of the implementation of block scheduling at the schools resulted not only in improvements to curriculum delivery and workload but also to school morale and climate. As one teacher stated, "If you have a difficult class, you know that you only have them for half of the year and then you get a new slate of students. That sense of beginning all over again is refreshing." This sense of improved climate is echoed by the student who appreciated the flexibility afforded during the day to "relax and take time".

Woods High School

In like fashion, the students, teachers and administrators of Woods High School expressed a number of examples of positive influences which they attributed to the implementation of block scheduling at their high school. A partial list of those positive influences is as follows:

- there were fewer courses for teachers to prepare for each semester;
- there were two entry points during the school year, meaning students could miss a semester without losing the whole year;
- students could more easily move from a general to an academic stream in courses like Language, Math, and Science;
- students found it easier to concentrate on a fewer number of courses;
- there was increased access to other resources like the stadium, the labs, and the resource center;
- the second startup had a regenerative effect, students have new teacher and new subjects;
- the break between classes reduced smoking in the school and other related problems.

The students, teachers and school administrators of Woods High School, as did the students, teachers and administrators of Cedar High School, expressed that the perceived positive influences of the implementation of block scheduling at their school were wide

ranging in that they were perceived to cover many aspects of school life. As one administrator so aptly stated, "it is left to the creative genius of the school to decide what it is you want to do."

This wide assortment of positive influences resulting from the implementation of block scheduling in secondary schools is consistent with similar results as reported in the literature on the advantages of block scheduling. Queen, Algozzine, and Eaddy (1997) identify the top five positive components of the 4x4 model to be as follows:

1. Greater flexibility in classroom instruction
2. Longer planning periods for teachers
3. Greater course offerings for students
4. One or two class preparations per semester
5. More time each day for in-depth study. (p. 93)

Hurley (1997) discusses improved working conditions, increased opportunity to enrich programs, improved relations between students and teachers, greater expectations of students by teachers, increased curricular options for students, and improved focus for both teachers and students (pp. 53-57) as examples of positive influences resulting from the implementation of block scheduling. Hurley summarizes by stating that the four-period day accomplishes several things. "It affords more course-taking options for students at the same time it relaxes the pace of the day, provides more class activity options, provides curricular enrichment opportunities, and enables teachers to build positive relationships with teachers" (p. 57).

What are the negative results of implementing block scheduling at your school?

For each group of interviewees the implementation of block scheduling at their school had also resulted in a number of perceived negative influences. Various examples of those perceived negative influences in each school are provided in this section.

Cedar High School

In their interviews the students, teachers and administrators from Cedar High School talked about several examples of negative influences which they perceived had occurred as a result of the implementation of a block schedule at their school. A number of those examples are listed below:

- the difficulty adjusting the new “pace” now evident in the building;
- the problem of longer instructional periods for weak students and the teachers of general courses;
- the perception of an increased workload that was seen as a negative result of the block schedule initiative;
- the problem of missed class time;
- the problem associated with students transferring.

Woods High School

Students, teachers and administrators at Woods High School responded in much the same fashion regarding the various negative influences that they perceived resulting from the implementation of block scheduling at their school. Those negative influences

included:

- the teaching adjustments required as teachers have to use a variety of strategies to keep students on task during the longer periods;
- the problem when preparation slots end up in one semester rather than spread over two teachers find that the workload is burdensome;
- the concern with coming to grips with the pace of the delivery of the material;
- the challenge of designing sequences of courses so that there isn't too much time between courses like French and Math;
- the concern about attendance.

For sheer volume the amount of data received from the interview participants at each school regarding perceived positive influences of the implementation of block scheduling was much greater than the volume of data received regarding the perceived negative influences of the block schedule initiative at each school. This is consistent with the researcher's assumption that the block schedule would be the preferred method of delivery for the secondary school program.

The various negative influences perceived as resulting from the implementation of block scheduling in secondary schools are consistent with similar results as reported in the literature on the disadvantages of block scheduling. Queen, Algozzine, and Eaddy (1997) identify the top five negative components of the 4x4 model as follows:

1. Loss of retention from one level of a course to the next level; for example, Spanish I taken first semester of the freshman year and Spanish II taken first or second semester of the sophomore year;
2. Too much independent study needed outside class;
3. Student transfers from schools not using the 4x4 model;
4. Limited number of new electives being offered;
5. Too much lecture method still being used in the classroom. (p. 93)

It is interesting to note that what some interviewees perceived as positive influences of the block schedule initiative were perceived as negative influences by other interviewees.

This is reflected by the administrator who prior to explaining why he felt that the new pace in his building was an advantage of the new schedule prefaced his remarks with the comment "...some people will point this out as a negative. I will point this out as being, if you would ask me, the major (positive) impact that I think can come from semesterization...".

Were there special considerations (in-service to administrators by district office/to teachers by administration/to students by school personnel) given to you in preparation for the block scheduling? If yes, in what Form?

Consistent throughout the relevant literature dealing with the move to a block schedule is the notion of change. Mistretta and Polansky (1997), Hoover (1999), Aguilera, (1996) and Shortt and Thayer (1997) all identify the change process as a key element to the success, or lack thereof, of the various block scheduling initiatives they have studied. Further to this, in breaking down the relative success of the change process staff development has been identified as a major contributing factor. Hoover (1999)

discusses "laying the foundation for successful change through long-term staff development" (p. 1) while Shortt and Thayer (1997) suggest that when teachers "are experiencing this level of change ... they need educational experiences that support the block as well as training in appropriate teaching practices" (p. 11).

Upon examining the responses to this question it is evident that the level of special consideration experienced by the interview participants ranged from none at all to full day in-servicing. Despite the wide range both schools would appear to have successfully implemented the change to the block schedule. This wide range of special consideration offered to the various administrators, teachers and students of the study's participant schools may well be a result of their readiness to embrace the change process and not this particular change initiative. As one administrator put it:

... we've developed a reputation over the past three or four years for innovation. We've received quite a bit of recognition last year. I guess that's not necessarily the result of just good ideas. I think there are a lot of schools with good ideas, a lot of staffs, a lot of administrators, teachers are afraid, as is human nature, of change. Afraid to take the chance. I think what if I were to characterize this staff, I would say to you that they are a staff of risk takers.

It is interesting to note that while there was a wide range with respect to the amount of special consideration experienced by the respondents to this question, the belief that in-service is needed to successfully implement such a change was held by all of the teachers and administrators who participated in this study.

How has the delivery of courses been affected?

Students, teachers and administrators felt that the implementation of block scheduling at their schools had affected the delivery of courses in a number of ways. Various examples of the perceived impact on the delivery of courses in each school will be provided in this section.

Cedar High School

In their interviews the students, teachers and administrators of Cedar High School identified a number of ways that they perceived the delivery of courses to have been affected by the implementation of the block schedule. A number of those examples are listed below:

- the tendency to give more homework;
- the perception that teachers were going into class with their courses much better prepared;
- the frequency of evaluation had increased;
- the pace of presentation of the material had increased.

Woods High School

There was considerable similarity in the responses of the participants from Woods High School to those of the teachers, students and administrators of Cedar High School. A partial list of the perceived affects of the implementation of block scheduling as identified by the participants from Woods High School include:

- afforded students and teachers the opportunity to avail of outside resources;
- tests in a particular course were a shorter distance apart;
- information was coming at students quicker and this required more homework for students to keep on top of the material;
- teachers were having to adapt their method of delivery to reflect the additional time available in a particular session;
- allowed for more in-depth study of more topics in the course.

The various examples of the perceived effects of the implementation of block scheduling on the delivery of courses are consistent with the relevant literature. Queen, Algozzine, and Eaddy (1997) identified "instructional pacing as the major skill for success in the block, with the ability to use a wide variety of instructional strategies close behind" (p. 93). As well, Hurley (1997) discusses "teachers having several opportunities to enrich their programs" through the use of such techniques as "breaking classes into three or four activities, ...building larger units of study, ...including more skill development and enrichment activities, and ...using more 'hands-on' activities" (p. 54).

What impediments, if any, to implementing block scheduling have administrators encountered? How have these impediments been overcome?

Upon examining the comments of the participants in relation to the notion of impediments to the implementation of block scheduling and the subsequent addressing of

these impediments it becomes clear that while neither of the administrators interviewed articulated encountering any resisters to the implementation of the block initiative, much effort was put into "heading-off" possible impediments. The comments of the participants indicated that they were acutely aware of the change process and that they felt that attention to the change process early in the block initiative had helped to make the transition a smooth experience for themselves and their students and staffs. One administrator felt that bringing staff on-side early in the process had served to by-pass possible problems later in the process. This administrator recalls that:

I went to staff and asked 'I'd like to try total semesterization and I'd like to try some alternate scheduling?' It got just a few minutes of discussion in a staff meeting and the staff said 'OK, put something together bring it back, we'll see what it looks like, we'll try it for a year, if it doesn't work we'll scrap it and go back to what we've got.' So that was all I asked for was a commitment to try it for one year. Put it together, last year was our first year doing it and it was extremely popular with parents, staff and students.

For another administrator staff preparation for the proposed move to an alternate schedule was important. This administrator suggests that:

I don't think it should be a simple decision of the administration to jump into alternate scheduling. It may work out well but you do I think need to prepare your staff and so that they can reflect on what might be the implications of this. What changes may I have to make in my instruction? What does it mean in terms of my workload? And you know I am reasonably comfortable in saying that most people under reflection would be willing to move to it.

While the comments of both of these administrators would seem to indicate that they are aware of the dynamics of the change process and the benefits of involving the staff in the

decision making process, there was no mention of the other significant stakeholders in the equation. The opinion of neither the students nor their parents was elicited prior to making the decision to move forward with the block schedule initiative. Despite this, the transition to the new schedule was successful.

General Research Question

The aim of this study was to examine the various experiences of the administrators, teachers, and students with regard to the block scheduling experience at their schools. This study and the above subsidiary research questions were guided by the following general research question: Was the block scheduling experience a positive experience? This section will discuss this question as it relates specifically to those subsidiary questions and to the study in general.

The subsidiary research questions formed the basis for the development of the interview questions that became the vehicle for the researcher to get the study's participants talking about their perceptions of the block scheduling initiative at their particular school. Study participants addressed what they perceived as the positive and the negative implications that were a result of the implementation of the new schedule at their school. They talked about the change to the new schedule as a process and the amount of input that they had in the process. They described the various effects on the delivery of courses that had resulted from the scheduling initiative. The study's participants also presented what they perceived to be impediments to the implementation

of the new schedule and discussed the various strategies employed for avoiding these impediments.

The responses of the participants represented a collective way of addressing the general research question as to whether or not the block schedule experience was indeed a positive one. It was obvious to the researcher as a result of the responses to the various research questions, that the alternate schedule experience was indeed a positive one for the majority of the study's participants.

Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study as guided by the general and subsidiary research questions. For each of these questions, summaries of participant responses were given, accompanied by appropriate quotations. Where relevant, the literature on block scheduling and the change process was cited and discussed with respect to its being supportive of, or contradictory to, the findings gleaned from this study.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides a summary of the study which includes the purpose, the methodology and the findings as guided by the general and subsidiary research questions. Included in those findings are a number of emergent categories and themes characterizing the alternate scheduling experience of the study participants. Section two discusses the conclusions reached by the researcher as a result of the various findings detailed in Chapter 5. Finally, in the third section, a number of recommendations arising from those conclusions are listed.

Summary

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the various experiences of administrators, teachers and students with regard to the block scheduling experience at their particular school. At the heart of the study is the question of whether or not the block scheduling experience was a positive one.

Methodology

The methodology used in the study was a case study approach whereby the researcher visited two high schools (one in the Vista School District and one in District 5) that had recently implemented an alternate form of scheduling as the vehicle for delivering

the secondary school program. During each visit the researcher conducted interviews with administrators, teachers, and students and observed several classes and various other activities that were going on each day. A total of 15 interviews were conducted.

Following this, the interview and observation data were subjected to a qualitative analysis procedure utilizing several strategies as suggested by Bogdan and Bilken (1992), Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (1990). These strategies facilitated the researcher's identifying various themes and patterns running throughout the data. In addition to identifying a number of emergent categories and themes, the researcher was successful in arriving at a number of findings and conclusions.

Findings

As well as the specific findings with respect to the general and subsidiary research questions that guided the study, a number of categories and themes describing the block scheduling experiences of the study participants emerged from the interview and observation data.

Those categories and their respective themes were as follows:

- benefits: increase in options; improvement in focus; improved post-secondary preparation; enhanced student accountability; improved climate/morale;
- concerns: increase in pace; increase in workload; sequential courses; student transfers/attendance; professional development;

- program delivery: pace of presentation of material; frequency of evaluation; revisiting teaching strategies; access to resources; professional development.

This study was driven by a general research question and several subsidiary questions. Each question accompanied by a brief summary of the responses to that question is stated below. The study was guided by the following general research question: "Was the block scheduling experience a positive one?" In the vast majority of responses the researcher found that the block scheduling experience had been a positive one.

The following subsidiary research questions were also utilized:

1. What are the positive results of implementing block scheduling at your school?

Each of the groups of participants listed several examples of positive results which in their opinion had come about as a result of the block schedule initiative at their school. Actual examples cited by the participants include the following:

the transition from junior high to senior high was improved; the workload was reduced; there was a sense of renewal after each semester; allowed for a broader curriculum to be offered to students; provided an opportunity for students to avail of more of the program with the increase to 48 credits over their three years of the high school program; an emphasis on focus, accountability and preparation; did a better job of mirroring the post-secondary experience for students; allowed for

teachers and students to get to know each other better; there were fewer courses for teachers to prepare for each semester; there were two entry points during the school year, students could miss a semester without missing the whole year; students were able to move easily from a general to an academic stream in courses like Language, Math, and Science; students found it easier to concentrate on a fewer number of courses; there was increased access to other resources like the stadium, the labs, and the resource center; the second startup had a regenerative effect, students had new teachers and new subjects; and the break between classes reduced smoking in the school and other related problems.

2. What are the negative results of implementing block scheduling at your school? Again each of the groups of participants listed several examples of positive results which in their opinion had come about as a result of the block schedule initiative at their school. Actual examples cited by the participants include the following: difficulty adjusting to the new "pace" now evident in the building; for weak students and the teachers of general courses the longer periods were considered a problem; for some there was a perceived increased workload that was seen as a negative result of the block schedule initiative; missed class time; students transferring; teaching adjustments required as teachers had to use a variety of strategies to keep students on task during the longer periods; when their preparation slots ended up in one semester rather than spread over two teachers

found that the workload was burdensome; coming to grips with the pace of the delivery of the material; the challenge of designing sequences of courses so that there is not too much time between courses such as French and Math; and the concern about attendance.

3. Were there special considerations (in-service to administrators by district office/to teachers by administration/to students by school personnel) given to you in preparation for the block scheduling? If yes, in what form? For each of the interview groups there was a wide range with respect to their experiences with special considerations afforded to them in relation to the block schedule initiative at their school. For some they were the vehicles driving the change and they were the source of expertise needed to provide staff and others with the relevant information. For others, there was exposure to guest speakers, and full-day workshops. Still others were offered no special considerations as a result of the new schedule.

4. How has the delivery of courses been affected? Each of the groups of participants listed several examples of ways that they perceived the delivery of courses to have been affected by the alternate schedule experience at their school. Actual examples cited by participants included the following: tendency to give more homework; the perception that teachers were going into class with their courses much more well prepared and organized; the frequency of evaluation had

increased; the pace of presentation of the material had increased; affords students and teachers the opportunity to avail of outside resources; tests in a particular course are a shorter distance apart; information is coming at students quicker and this requires more homework for students to keep on top of things; teachers are having to adapt their method of delivery to reflect the additional time available in a particular session; allows for more in-depth study of more topics in the course.

5. What impediments, if any, to implementing block scheduling have administrators encountered? How have these impediments been overcome?

The responses of the administrators within the study group to this question indicated that while there were no actual impediments to the implementation of the block schedule identified there was very much a pro-active approach taken by administrators to avoid any possible impediments which might occur.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions for making the transition from a traditional schedule for the delivery of the secondary school program to an alternate form of schedule a positive experience may now be stated.

1. Provide adequate opportunity for the entire staff to have meaningful input into the proposed scheduling initiative. While some may embrace the opportunity and become valuable assistants to the change initiative, others will have had the opportunity to voice concerns or demonstrate their indifference, both of which are

natural reactions to change.

2. Allow staff the opportunity to work through the change process

3. Become as informed as possible of the various options available to be used and maintain an open mind. What works in one school might not be the answer for another school. Devise a schedule that suits the reality that is the school; do not force the school to fit the schedule.

4. Keep the stakeholders involved and informed of the initiative; foster support where possible.

5. Develop a tool for evaluating the new schedule and its impact on the school.

6. Be pro-active in dealing with expected impediments. Good planning and awareness of the possible problems associated with the block schedule can help with the resolution of many real and perceived concerns.

7. Ensure that teachers get the necessary support that they will require to master the skills needed to teach in the new setting. Help with pacing of program delivery and exposure to different instructional strategies are essential.

8. Monitor the new schedule regularly to work out any "bugs" that are a reality of any change.

9. As much as possible balance, teacher and student schedules. Avoid semesters where there is no "unassigned time" for teachers and monitor student schedules to ensure that there is a balance between challenging and not so challenging courses

to avoid “slack” semesters.

10. Open a dialogue with other schools that have implemented a scheduling initiative and share experiences.

Recommendations

The results of this study highlight the need for future research in several areas.

Some recommendations for future research include:

1. An examination of the extent to which alternate forms of scheduling are employed in the secondary school system in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.
2. A study of the relationship between scheduling initiatives in the secondary school system in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the existing policy governing scheduling at the Department of Education.
3. A study of the perceived impact of scheduling initiatives on the current contractual agreement between the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association and the Government of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador.
4. A comparison of the various schedule options employed throughout the primary, intermediate and secondary school systems in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Concluding Comment

A final comment deals with the reality that exists in the education system of the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador and even in Canada as a whole today. This is a time of much change within the system characterized by the downsizing and downloading that have become so popular with the government of today. In an attempt to provide adequate programming schools have been amalgamated and in attempts to bring budgets under control teaching positions have fallen by the way side.

For small schools trying to expand their programs to offer their students as broad a curriculum as possible given their existing means the block schedule initiative as it has been pursued by the administration and staff of Cedar High School-Vista District may well be the best option to pursue.

REFERENCES

- 1995 Mathematics and Science assessment (1995). Timetables and student achievement. Retrieved 11/12/99 from the World Wide Web:
<http://sciences.drexel.edu/block/canadianstudy/5pagestudy.html>
- Aguilera, R. V. (1996). Block scheduling: Changing the system students can graduate from high school in three years. NASSP Bulletin, 25 (5), 1-4.
- Allan, G. & Skinner, C. (Eds.). (1991). Handbook for research students in the social sciences. London: Falmer Press.
- Anderson, B. L. (1993). The stages of systemic change. Educational Leadership, 51 (1), 14-17.
- Bateson, D. J. (1990). Science achievement in semester and all-year courses. Journal of Research in Science Teaching, 3 233-240.
- Bennett, K., et. al. (1993). Coaching for leadership: Moving toward site-based management. NASSP Bulletin, 77 (552), 81-91.
- Berman, P. and McLaughlin, M. W. (1978b). Implementation of educational innovation. Educational Forum, 40 (3), 357-358.
- Best, J., & Kahn, J. (1998). Research in education. (8th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Best, J., & Kahn, J. (1993). Research in education. (7th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bickman, L. (1998). Handbook of applied social research methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). Qualitative research for education (2nd ed). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Brown, J. (1991). Policy and policy-making. St. John's, NF: Memorial University of Newfoundland.
- Brown, J. & Sheppard, B. (1996). Education 6310 by distance education:

Administrative Theory and Practice I, Course Manual. St. John's, NF: MUN, School of Continuing Studies.

Canady, R. L., & Rettig, M. D. (1995). Block scheduling: A catalyst for change. Princeton, NJ: Eye on Education.

Canady, R. L. & Rettig, M. D. (1993). Unlocking the lockstep high school schedule. Phi Delta Kappan, 75 (4), 310 - 314.

Carroll, J. M. (1989). The Copernican plan evaluated. Andover, Mass: The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and the Islands.

Carrow-Moffett, P. A. (1993). Change agent skills: Creating leadership for school renewal. NASSP Bulletin, 77 (552), 57-62.

Cawelti, G. (1994). High school restructuring: A national study. Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 366 070).

Coleman, D. G. (1993). Transforming schools through instructional leadership. Thrust For Educational Leadership, 22 (7), 14-17.

Cunningham, R. D., & Nogle, S. A. (1996). Implementing a semesterized block schedule: six key elements. The High School Magazine, 3 (3), 28-33.

Davis-Wiley, P., & Cozart, A. (1996). Block scheduling in the secondary arena part II: Perceptions from the inside. Paper presented to the annual meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association, Tuscaloosa, AL. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 403 644).

Delaney, J. G. (1995). The relationship between school-based management and school improvement. A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Alberta in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Edmonton, Alberta.

Dizney, R. (1995). Do principals resist change? You bet. The Educative Educator, 17 (3), 48-47.

Educational Resources (1996, June). The change process and alternative scheduling . Retrieved: 11/12/99 from the World Wide Web:

<http://www.weac.org/resource/june96/schedule>.

Edwards, C. M., Jr. (1993) Restructuring to improve student performance. NASSP Bulletin, 77 (553), 77-88.

Edwards, C. M., Jr. (1993). Virginia's 4X4 high schools: High school, college, and more. NASSP Bulletin, 79 (571), 32-41.

Edwards, C. M., Jr. (1995). The 4X4 plan. Educational Leadership, 53 (3), 16-19.

Eineder, D. V., & Bishop, H. L. (1997). Block scheduling the high school: The effects on achievement, behavior, and student-teacher relationships. NASSP Bulletin, 81 (589), 45-54.

Fitzpatrick, J. E. & Mowers, M. (1997). Success and the four block schedule: Stakeholders buy in! NASSP Bulletin, 81 (588), 51-56.

Foote, D. K. (1996) Boom bust & echo. Toronto: MacFarlane Walter & Ross.

Fullan, M. G., and Steigelbauer, S. (1991). The new meaning of educational change. (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Gore, G. R. (1996). 1996 provincial exam results and timetables. Retrieved 11/12/99 from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.sciences.drexel.edu/block/canadianstudy/1996ExamResult.html>

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador: Department of Education (1997). The senior high school program: New directions for the 21st century. St. John's, NF.

Hackmann, D. G. (1995). Improving the middle school climate: Alternating -day block schedule. Schools in the Middle, 5 (1), 28-34.

Hackmann, D. G. (1995). Ten guidelines for implementing block scheduling. Educational Leadership, 53 (3), 24-27.

Hackmann, D. G., & Schmitt, D. M. (1997). Strategies for teaching in a block-of-time schedule. NASSP Bulletin, 81 (588), 1-9.

Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). Ethnography: Principal in practice (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Hanson, M. E. (1996). Educational administration and organizational theory (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Hargreaves, A. (1994). The changing world of teaching in the 1990s. Orbit, 25 (4), 2-5.

Hoover, L. A. (1999). Implementing block scheduling: A success story for long-term staff development. NASSP Bulletin, 28 (5), 1-4.

Holzman, M. (1993). What is systemic change? Educational Leadership, 22 (7), 18.

Houston, P. D. (1993). Wanted: Transformational leaders. Thrust for Educational Leadership, 22 (5), 10-12.

Hurley, J. C. (1997a). The 4X4 block scheduling model: What do teachers have to say about it? NASSP Bulletin, 81 (593), 53-63.

Hurley, J. C. (1997b). The 4X4 block scheduling model: What do students have to say about it? NASSP Bulletin, 81 (593), 64-72.

Irmsher, K. (1996, March). Block scheduling (Report No. RR93002006). Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 393 156)

Jenlink, P. M. & Kinnucan-Welsch, K. (1995). Constructing a new taxonomy of change: Michigan administrators' perspectives on current change processes. Journal of School Leadership, 5 January, 87-107.

Korvetz, M. & Cohick, D. (1993). Professional collegiality can lead to school change. Phi Delta Kappan, 75 (4), 331-333.

Kramer, S. L. (1997). What we know about block scheduling and its effects on Math instruction, Part II. NASSP Bulletin, 81 (587), 69-82.

LeCompte, M., & Preissle, J. (1993). Ethnography and qualitative design in educational research. London: Academic Press.

Lunenburg, F. C. (1995). The principalship: Concepts and applications. Prentice Hall: New Jersey.

Marshak, D. (1996). The emotional experience of school change: Resistance, loss, and grief. Bulletin, February, 72-77.

Marshall, M., Taylor, A., Bateson, D., & Brigden, S. (1995). The British Columbia Assessment of Mathematics and Science: Preliminary Report. Victoria, BC: British Columbia Ministry of Education.

Matthews, J. (1997). Alternate Schedules: Blocks to success? NASSP Bulletin, 24 (1), 1-8.

McLaughlin, M. W. & Pfeifer, R. S. (1988). Teacher evaluation: Improvement, accountability, and effective learning. New York: Teachers College Press.

McLaughlin, M. W. (1990). Embracing contraries: Implementing and sustaining teacher evaluation. In J. Millman and L. Darling-Hammond (Eds.), The new handbook of teacher evaluation: Assessing elementary and secondary school teachers (pp. 403-415) California: Sage.

Merton, R. K., Fiske, M., & Kendall, P. L. (1990). The focused interview: A manual of problems and procedures (2nd ed.). New York: The Free Press.

Miller, D. (1991). Handbook of research design and social measurement. (5th ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Mish, F. C. et. al. (1990). Webster's ninth new collegiate dictionary. Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc.

Mistretta, G. M. & Polansky, H. B. (1997). Prisoners of time: Implementing a block schedule in the high school. NASSP Bulletin, 81 (593), 23-31.

National Education Commission on Time and Learning. (1994). Prisoners of Time: Report of the National Education Commission on Time and Learning. Washington, DC.: U. S. Government Printing Office.

National Education Association School Renewal Network (1990). A description of the Wasson High block schedule. Retrieved 11/12/99 from the World Wide Web: <http://k12.oit.umass.edu/block/The.Block.Plan.1990.txt>

Newberry, A. (1994). Organizational change: Overcoming the inevitable depression. The Canadian School Executive, 14 (5) 3-6.

- O'Neil, J. (1995). Finding time to learn. Educational Leadership, 53 (3) 11-15.
- Owens, R. G. (1998). Organizational behavior in education (6th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Patton, M. Q. (1986). Qualitative evaluation and research methods. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Putnam County Schools (1996). Frequently asked questions on the high school 4:4 block schedule. Retrieved 11/12/99 from the World Wide Web:
<http://www.citynct.net/putnam/4by4.html>
- Queen, J. A., Algozzine, R. F., & Eaddy, M. A. (1997). The road we traveled: Scheduling in the 4X4 block. NASSP Bulletin, 81 (588), 88-99.
- Raywid, M. A. (1993). Finding time for collaboration. Educational Leadership, September 30-34.
- Redding, J. & Catalanello, R. F. (1992). The fourth iteration: The learning organization as a model of strategic change. Thresholds in Education, May/August, 47-53.
- Ryan, L. , Kilcher, A., & Hynes, R. (1993). Prism, 2 (1), 18-21.
- Scott, D. & Usher, R. (Eds.). (1996). Understanding educational research. London: Routledge.
- Seidman, I. E. (1991). Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences. Columbia University, New York: Teachers College Press.
- Sergiovanni, T. (1995). The principalship: A reflective practice perspective (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Shortt, T. L., & Thayer, Y. V. (1997). A vision for block scheduling: Where are we now? Where are we going? NASSP Bulletin, 81 (593), 1-15.
- Sherman, R. R. & Welsh, R. B. (Eds.). (1988) Qualitative research in education:

Focus and methods. London: The Falmer Press.

Smith, E. (1998). The trouble with block. American School Board Journal, 185 (1), 35-36.

Staunton, J. (1997). A study of teacher beliefs on the efficacy of block scheduling. NASSP Bulletin, 81 (593), 73-80.

Staunton, J. & Adams, T. (1997). What do teachers in California have to say about block scheduling? NASSP Bulletin, 81 (593), 81-84.

Steen, C. A. (1994). The reality of change in education and its impact on education systems, teachers, and teacher organizations. ATA Challenge, 31 (1), 27-31.

Stewart, A. (1998). The ethnographer's method. Qualitative Research Methods, 46, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Tilley, S. A. (1998). Conducting respectful research: A critique of practice. Canadian Journal of Education, 23 (3), 316-328.

Van Alfen, C. (1994). Policy as a stimulant to curricular growth in rural education. Rural Educator, 16 (1), 1-4.

Wacholz, P. B. (1994). Making sense of reform: The role of students in educational change. English Journal, 83 (7), 80-82.

Wagner, T. (1998). Change as collaborative inquiry. Phi Delta Kappan, 79 (7), 512-517.

Wagner, T. (1993). Systemic change: Rethinking the purpose of school. Educational Leadership, September, 24-28.

Wannamaker, N. (1994). The need for systemic change. Orbit, 25 (4), 12-15.

Watson, N. (1994). The role of the teacher. Orbit, 25 (4), 9-11.

Wang, P. C. (1995) School improvement a joint effort. Thrust for Educational Leadership, 25 (1), 25-27.

Weasmer, J. & Woods, A. M. (1998). The Clearing House, 71 (4), 245-247.

Wiersma, W. (1995). Research methods in education: An introduction. Needham Heights: Massachusetts.

Wronkovich, M., Hess, C. A., & Robinson, J. E. (1997). An objective look at Math outcomes based on new research into block scheduling. NASSP Bulletin, 81 (593), 32-41.

Yin, R. (1994). Case studies research: Design and methods. (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A

Research Questions

The major research questions that this study plans to address are:

1. How do school administrators describe their block scheduling experience in their school?
2. How do teachers describe their block scheduling experience in their school?
3. How do students describe their block scheduling experience in their school?

The questions that were asked in the interview to seek out the responses to these questions included:

1. What are the positive results of implementing block scheduling at your school?
2. What are the negative results of implementing block scheduling at your school?
3. Were there special considerations (in-service to administrators by district office/to teachers by administration/to students by school personnel) given to you in preparation for the block scheduling? If yes, in what form?
4. How has the delivery of courses been affected?
5. What impediments to implementing block scheduling have administrators encountered?
6. How have these impediments been overcome?



