

Weekend Immersion in Foreign Language and Culture

Because of declining enrollment in foreign language programs, teachers and administrators are searching for ways to encourage students to enroll in foreign language courses and to keep them enrolled beyond the first year. Foreign language teachers know a trip abroad builds enthusiasm for foreign language study and helps students become aware of the importance of communicating in another language. However, most high school students do not have an opportunity to travel abroad. Simulating the foreign setting is one way to create cultural experiences for students who cannot travel abroad. This type of mini-immersion program moves the classroom to a home or church, extends the 55-minute period to 24 hours, and replaces the teacher with people from the community who are native speakers of the language.

The Huntsville City Schools have conducted Spanish, French, and German immersion programs during the last two years. Though there were some differences in program formats, activities were the same. Students arrived at a church or home at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday with sleeping bag and toothbrush. During the weekend they participated in games, sing-along sessions, simulated shopping, dancing, skits (performances were videotaped), slide presentations, and films. The furnishings and rooms were labeled with 3 by 5 cards.

Meals were perhaps the most enjoyable and most valuable learning experiences. Menus were selected and food was prepared with the help of the native speakers. Students had to learn not only the names of the foods but were required to use appropriate phrases in preparing, serving, and eating meals. The group discussed setting the table,

ordering courses, and differing table manners to make students aware of cultural differences and encourage them to engage in the customs.

On Sunday morning when students departed, teachers and administrators who had helped with the program were exhausted but pleased. Student evaluations, both formal and informal, were positive. Their responses in written evaluations included: "It made learning fun"; "It showed me what it is like to be in a place where only a foreign language is spoken"; "Colombian grub is really good"; "I met many interesting speakers"; and "I plan to take this language again next year."

While the program is time-consuming,

it does not place extra financial burdens on a school system. Students pay a fee (usually \$7.50) to cover the cost of food; teachers and resource persons volunteer their time. By altering instructional time, space, and resources, foreign language teachers can create a learning environment that increases students' enthusiasm for second language study, their awareness of the need to be able to communicate in another language, and the community involvement in a school program. As an alternative or supplement to classroom instruction, the weekend immersion program is an exciting way to learn more about the people, customs, and language of another country. □

Schedule

Estimated Time

Saturday

8:00
8:30
9:00
9:30
10:00
10:30
11:00
11:30
12:00
1:00
2:00

6:00
7:00
7:30
8:00
9:30
10:30

Sunday

7:00
8:00
9:00

Activity

Greetings and Introductions
Breakfast
Knots
Simon Says
Clothes Relay
Slides
Mail
Table Games
Lunch
Outdoor Games
Preparation of Scenarios
Preparation of *Bûche de Noël*
Table Games
Telephone Messages
Snack
Money Exchange
View Scenarios
Sing Along
A Play
Group Game
Dinner
Films
Bedtime

Wake Up
Breakfast
Departure

Games: Qu'est que c'est?, Scrabble, Monopoly, Petaque

Handouts: Registration packet, menu, target vocabulary, song sheets, (schedule for coordinators and resource persons)

Equipment and Materials: Magazines, invitations, videotape recorder, tape, television, camera, slide projector, slides, movie projector, film, clothing items, records, body chart, tele-trainer, maps, dictionaries, games, stamps, money, labels for household items, napkin rings with names.

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