

Supporting academic staff in the tectonic shift to Block Mode

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Presentation type - Pre-conference workshop

Overview of workshop

In 2018, as an Australian first, Victoria University (VU) implemented the Block Model for first year students. With a cohort of 4000 students, VU completely changed the way students learn, from a traditional semester model, to studying one unit at a time for four weeks with no lectures or tutorials, and a strong focus on active learning. The results:

- Average pass rates increased from 76% to 84%, maintaining assessment standards
- retention increased by 7%
- More students achieving higher grades

This workshop will delve into the principles, programs and processes that supported academic teaching staff to achieve these results.

Target audience

Higher education professionals, including (but not limited to) learning designers, educational developers, academic teaching staff as well as learning and teaching leadership. Those with a curious and open mindset who are focused on high quality student centred learning will benefit from this workshop.

Intended outcomes for participants

By the end of the session participants will:

- Understand that structured, multidisciplinary and collaborative unit and assessment redesign contributed to the success of the block model.
- Understand that explicit instruction in active learning techniques contributed to the success of the block model.
- Know about 3 key constraints that disrupted traditional teaching methods and affected positive change.
- Have discussed and experienced a variety of contextualised teacher capability building techniques.
- Have applied their new knowledge to a simulated unit redesign situation.

Outline of activities

- Individual activity – what does L&T look like at your workplace, what would you like it to look like? 10 mins.
- Overview of block mode and its results (student and teacher voice) in 2018 (15 mins).
- Small group brainstorm of PD techniques –10 mins.
- Small group rotation activity introducing the 7 contextualised capability building approaches implemented at VU (45 mins).
- Introduction of constraints.
- Break.
- Simulation of block redesign process – all participants will receive a role in the collaborative team and redesign a unit and its assessment focusing on active learning.

Relevance of workshop to conference theme

Tim Dodd, from The Australian has called VU's block model:

"The most radical and comprehensive change any university in Australia has made in living memory to the way it teaches students." 22/8/2018

For both VU students and staff, transition to the block model has represented major **challenges, changes and opportunities**. And because of the scale of this change, VU now represents one expression of the **next generation in Higher Education**.

This workshop will unpack and analyse implementing this change in the area of curriculum and pedagogy. Specific elements of this workshop will explore:

- Improving **student learning** through active learning.
- Improving **student well-being and success** by structuring the curriculum to focus on one content area and one assessment piece at a time.
- Changing **academic practice** by **changing the academic environment**.
- **Developing academic capability** through supportive contextualised professional development based around structured, principles placed unit redesign.
- **Developing academic capability** through a shift to a culture of openness and sharing across and within disciplines, and across academic and professional staff.