

Initially published on the Chartered Association of Business Schools Blog. Link [here](#)

Opinion **Learning & Teaching**

Implementing block teaching in large-scale business school settings

30th April 2024



As the Covid-19 pandemic recedes, the higher education sector, particularly business schools, face unprecedented challenges (Dixon, 2024). This is not least because the number of students entering higher education has significantly increased (ONS, 2018), surpassing expectations even during the pandemic (Bolton, 2022). As a result, large-scale teaching contexts are becoming more common in business schools worldwide, so that they have had to increase their capacity to address the needs of an ever more diverse range of students (Rowley, 2003).

As these challenges mount, block teaching can potentially offer a promising solution to meet those needs. By compressing class hours into concentrated periods, block teaching offers opportunities to experiment with diverse instructional methods, catering to evolving learner needs beyond traditional semester-long structures (Tang et al., 2022). This departure from conventional modes of delivery, has been shown to encourage the exploration of innovative teaching styles, thereby enriching the student learning experience and fostering overall engagement (Ambler et al, 2021; Dixon and Makin, 2024). Additionally, the inherent flexibility of block teaching accommodates students with external commitments, mitigating burnout and addressing diverse learning preferences (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002).

When implemented and designed carefully, block teaching can bring together active, collaborative, and experiential pedagogies, encouraging forms of active learning (Buck et al., 2023; Slevin, 2021). In particular, the strategic implementation of block teaching offers three key advantages in large-scale educational settings:

1. Enhanced student engagement

By reducing the number of classes students have to focus on simultaneously, block teaching enhances student engagement and reduces the risk of burnout (Daniel, 2000). This reduction in concurrent classes allows students to concentrate more fully on the material being taught, leading to

greater understanding and retention of knowledge (Oraison et al., 2023). The condensed format of block teaching can also provide students with a more dynamic learning environment, as they can fully immerse themselves in the subject matter without the distractions associated with prolonged breaks between classes (Dixon and Makin, 2024). At the same time, for students with commitments outside of their studies, such as part-time jobs or caring responsibilities, the flexibility offered by block teaching enables them to manage their time more effectively, ultimately enhancing their engagement with the course material (Schuetze and Slowey, 2002).

2. Innovative teaching practices

The concentrated nature of block teaching necessitates the exploration of innovative teaching practices, facilitating interactive learning experiences tailored to diverse learning styles (Buck et al, 2023). With fewer classes to cover the curriculum, instructors have the freedom to experiment with different instructional methods, such as flipped classrooms, case-based learning, or problem-based learning (Slevin, 2021). This diversity of teaching approaches not only caters to the varied learning preferences of students but also fosters deeper learning by encouraging critical thinking, collaboration, and practical application of knowledge (Tang et al, 2022). By challenging students to apply theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios, block teaching better prepares them for the demands of the workplace, aligning with the objectives of business schools to produce graduates who are both academically proficient and professionally competent (Buck et al, 2023).

3. Peer-to-peer interaction

Block teaching thrives on peer-to-peer interaction, overcoming social isolation prevalent in large-scale teaching contexts (Buck and Tyrell, 2022). In a block teaching format, students spend extended periods of time together in the classroom, providing ample opportunities for collaboration, discussion, and peer learning (Tyrell and Shalavin, 2022). This collaborative learning environment not only fosters a sense of belonging and camaraderie among students, but also facilitates meaningful peer networking opportunities. By working closely with their peers, students gain valuable interpersonal skills, communication abilities, and teamwork experience, all of which are highly valued by employers in today's job market (Buck et al, 2023). Peer-to-peer interaction can also enhance the overall learning experience by providing students with different perspectives, insights, and feedback, ultimately enriching their understanding and appreciation of the subject matter (Dixon and Makin, 2024).

As universities continue to grapple with the long-term repercussions of Covid-19, particularly with the challenge of trying to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student cohorts, block teaching can function as a strategic tool to confront the difficulties inherent in large-scale teaching contexts (Dixon and Makin, 2024). Through the adoption of innovative teaching practices, the enhancement of student engagement, and the promotion of peer-to-peer interaction, block teaching has the potential to create more effective learning environments, that can be used to enhance the success of both students and teaching staff (Tyrell and Shalavin, 2022). By strategically integrating block teaching into their educational frameworks, business schools can harness the benefits of intensive modes of delivery in a way that adapts to the evolving educational landscape, whilst at the same time enriching the overall student learning experience.

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