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See What Can Be Done

Helen Laville

PVC Education, Manchester Metropolitan University

The writer and essayist Lorrie Moore titled her 2018 collection of work See What Can Be Done after a phrase her editor used when commissioning a topic. One could take it as a recognition of pragmatic realism, meaning this is a challenging and difficult task, expectations are low, but we have to do something. But one could also read it as a statement of wonder, as a reflection on the endless possibilities of creativity, imagination and hard work. ‘It was a magical request.’ Moore writes ‘It suggested that one might like to surprise oneself. Perhaps a door would open and you would step through it.’

It is this reading of the phrase that I find so attractive in thinking about our institutional move to block teaching and learning. Our move to block teaching can be seen as a pragmatic response to the realities of the 20-21 teaching year. Staff and students will be navigating an uncertain year, with the strong possibility of individual and collective disruption. Block blended teaching as a design solution gives us the opportunity to respond flexibly across the year, to manage staff and student workload and helps us manage campus in more controlled way. While the context for teaching and learning remains a challenging one, block teaching simplifies our structures and allows us to concentrate our efforts, managing one thing at a time.

As this special edition of case studies demonstrates, colleagues at Manchester Metropolitan have not interpreted the logistical imperative of block teaching as an invitation to less imaginative, supportive or intellectually rich teaching. Rather they have embraced the potential, devising exciting and creative approaches to teaching across a

blended block delivery framework. Drawing on the generous sharing of good practice by those who have experience in teaching this way, colleagues have demonstrated flair and imagination. Equally, they have demonstrated their commitment to their students, and their ability to think through course design from a student point of view. The move to block-blended delivery has not been a scrappy exercise in cut and paste, squashing pre-existing material and delivery into a different package, but has rather promoted a critical refresh, exploring new ways of thinking about student engagement and success. Strong relationships between academics and professional and technical services have supported this approach, as the responsibility for ensuring an excellent student learning experience next year has been embraced as a collective responsibility across the university.

This exercise has been undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and sharing, and I am delighted that the journal *Learning and Teaching in Action* is taking a dynamic approach to capturing, exploring and sharing the work we will be undertaking this year. I have been tremendously impressed with the ideas that have already emerged, with the spirit of creativity, and with the determination to take positive and proactive steps by using the coming year as an opportunity to explore different ways of thinking about how we teach and how we learn. Many thanks to the contributors for the open sharing of their process; I look forward to learning with you.

“A little light, a little wonder, some scepticism, some awe, some squinting, some *je ne sais quoi*. Pick a thing up, study it, shake it, skip it across a still surface to see how much felt and lively life got baked into it. Does it sail? Observe. See what can be done.”

– Lorrie Moore