

Chapter-8

SURFACE V. DEPTH: MAXIMISING THE EFFICACY OF COHORT-BASED LEARNING IN CHALLENGING TIMES

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ABSTRACT

Intentional student-centred cohort-based models of education are embedded in various silos across higher education. This chapter summarises the literature on these models before plunging into findings from a mixed-methods study that one Canadian university undertook to examine its cohort-based model to redress challenges and identify approaches to maximise its benefits. Facilitating cohort-based models requires significant time and resources from both the instructor and the academic institution. It can be offered at either a surface level or with more depth and intention. Without engaging in ample preparation, employing targeted resources, and utilizing ongoing support to uphold a cohort-based model, the learning experience can be undermined and risky. Taking a deep dive, this chapter delves into the micro, meso, and macro-level tensions educational practitioners experience in exercising effective and equitable practice regarding cohort-based methods, and the sacrifices they make to comply with the shifting realities of contemporary higher education under neoliberal constraints.

Keywords: Cohort-based Learning, Student-Centred Education, Higher Education Pedagogy, Neoliberalism in Higher Education, Educational Equity, Instructional Resources, Mixed-Methods Research

CONTEXT

With an intentional student-centred design, cohort-based models of education are embedded in various silos across higher education. These are often affiliated with progressive pedagogy that favour hands-on practical social learning (Dewey, 1963). Anecdotal insight suggests its positive impact, yet little research exists on the efficacy of cohort-based learning or how to optimize it for diverse student bodies (see Dyson & Hanley, 2002; Hubbell & Hubbell, 2010; Hamann & Wunder, 2013; Oldham, 2017; Opacich, 2019; Watts, 2013).

This chapter draws on literature from two decades of interdisciplinary evidence on cohort-based models. These findings situate research that one Canadian university undertook to examine its own model to redress challenges that arise in this form of education and identify approaches to maximize its benefits (Manion & Green, 2025). A variety of academic literature clarifies that facilitating cohort-based models requires significant time and resources from both the instructor and the academic institution. As such, a cohort-based

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This chapter is a part of the book, *'Implementing Transformative Student-Centered Pedagogies in the Neoliberal Academy: Constraints and Opportunities'* edited by Frederic Fovet.

ISBN: 978-93-49926-91-2 (ebk); ISBN: 978-93-49926-11-0 (hbk); ISBN: 978-93-49926-31-8 (pbk)

The ebook and print version of this book are available at:
<https://dx.doi.org/10.46679/9789349926912>

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