

From the President of IBILTA

Socrates would have loved the block. Discuss.

On trial for his life, Socrates is famously alleged to have said at one point, 'The unexamined life is not worth living' in response to being accused of corrupting the youth of Athens by encouraging them to question things they shouldn't: the state and the gods.

To live fully, according to Socrates, was to live a life of continual enquiry into the nature of all things, only by questioning everything can we begin to understand anything, especially ourselves and our purpose.

Socrates was relentless in his questioning. He likened himself to a fly and the state to a horse; he saw it as his job to repeatedly annoy that horse by biting and stinging it into action. It was this relentlessness that led to his downfall and being sentenced to death.

The block is to education what Socrates was to Athens: an inconvenient, ceaseless questioning conscience.

At first glance, the block appears to be no more than a timetabling variation, but so radical is this timetabling change that it sets in motion a process of enquiry and investigation that challenges the higher education status quo, its tradition and its values.

The block continually asks 'why?' Why twelve-week semesters, why four subjects at a time, why isn't the student at the centre of all we do, why are faculty given so much autonomy, when their job, in teaching and learning anyway, is to serve the student?

Responses to these questions are rarely grounded in educational concerns, rather they speak to tradition, to the need for students to go home at harvest and planting time to help on the farm and to linear, even Fordian, ways of working that emerged during the industrial revolution that have remained unquestioned ever since.

The block asks us to examine these methods and approaches, to reinvent them, to bring them into line with the expectations of 21st Century students who demand, from their educators, the same kind of user-driven access to resources and materials they demand from the media, entertainment, banking and other service industries they engage with.

This unending questioning turns the block into a process, not a project. To move to the block is (or should be) to commit to an ongoing state of flux. No two institutions are the same, nor do they serve the same cohorts. No two versions of the block should be the same either. Nor should the block remain unchanging at any one institution. It must be iterative and it must be responsive on a macro scale to issues such as AI, and on the micro level, in regard to how best to serve each individual student.

This journal aims to provide a forum for that ongoing questioning to take place. The writers featured in this publication, and the issues to come, and the editors who put the publication together are driven by that need to challenge the academic status quo, to do better and to corrupt the youth and those not so young, of academia by asking them to do the same. I think Socrates would have approved.

As President of IBILTA (The International Block and Intensive Learning and Teaching Association) it gives me very great pleasure to introduce the first edition of the *Journal of Block and Intensive Learning and Teaching*, or *JBILT*.