Psychological Literacy:
A Compendium of Practice

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Contents

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Case study author details are provided alongside each study within the Compendium.

Case study index

Authors	Institution	Case study title
Cachia, Hughes, Griffin, Fox, Townshend and Ohl	University of West London	Using psychological literacy throughout the curriculum to develop students as scientist practitioners: an overview of psychological literacy at the University of West London.
Brunsden	Nottingham Trent University	Real-world organisational engagement in modules
Cachia	University of West London	Enhancing psychological literacy through seminar activities within an occupational psychology module
Elcock and Jones	University of Gloucestershire	Developing psychological literacy through innovative assessment
Griffin	University of West London	Psychological literacy developed through peer mentoring as a psychology undergraduate
Hadlington	De Montfort University	Embedding employability skills in psychology
Hill	Nottingham Trent University	Professional practice in psychology
Hughes	University of West London	Pyramid clubs and UWL students: groups leading groups
Kent and Skipper	Keele University	Using social psychology in the workplace
Maunder	University of Northampton	Early applied experience: helping first-year students to bridge theory-practice gaps
Mayer, Pauli, Worrell and Carr	The University of Roehampton, the University of West London and Canterbury Christ Church University	Psychology undergraduate research apprenticeship scheme
Pauli, Worrell, Balloo and Street	The University of Roehampton and the University of West London	Developing psychological literacy through peer-assisted learning
Reddy	Aston University	Preparing for the psychology sandwich year
Rosenkranz	Newcastle University	Developing psychological enquiry through peer-mentoring
Smith and Morton	University of Exeter	Applying social psychology: practising what we preach
Walker	Cardiff Metropolitan University	Work, volunteering and applied psychology
Watt	University of Stirling	Psychologically literate students at Stirling
Weinberg	University of Salford	Occupational psychology case study

Note that case studies have been presented in alphabetical order, with the exception of Cachia et al, which provides an overview of practice across a university programme, including three case studies within the Compendium (Cachia; Griffin; Hughes).

Aims of the Compendium

Psychological literacy, and the related concept of psychologically literate citizenship, are gaining in importance within the psychology community in the UK higher education sector. The increased interest in these topics was in part driven by changes to the British Psychological Society (BPS) accreditation criteria for undergraduate psychology programmes (2014), which state that the skills acquired through the study of psychology at undergraduate level:

> *"represent a coherent set of knowledge, skills and values that underpin students' psychological literacy and which enable them to apply psychology to real life contexts. These scientific, critical thinking and ethical skills encapsulate the contributions a psychology graduate can make to the workplace and to society more generally".*

In response to this new emphasis on psychological literacy, the HEA produced some introductory resources (Mair, Taylor & Hulme, 2013; Watt, 2013) for academic psychologists to provide guidance on the concept and to stimulate reflection on ways in which psychological literacy might be embedded within the undergraduate psychology curriculum in the UK. This Compendium does not aim to replicate existing resources outlining the scope of psychological literacy, but rather seeks to develop them via a practical approach.

A recent study by Hulme and Kitching (in press), on behalf of the HEA and the BPS, confirmed that psychology educators are challenged by developing practical approaches to embedding psychological literacy within the curriculum, and to assessing it. This compendium is a response to this finding; it contains case studies from a variety of UK higher education providers, exemplifying the ways in which they have supported the psychologically literate development of their undergraduate students. It is hoped that the reader will be stimulated and inspired to both use these examples, to benefit from the experiences of others and to develop their own creative solutions to embedding psychological literacy within the curriculum.

The Compendium itself is intended to be a dynamic and evolving document; if you have case studies that you wish to contribute to a future edition, please contact us.

Outline of the Compendium

This Compendium includes contributions from the following higher education providers: University of West London, University of Gloucester, Nottingham Trent University, Keele University, University of Northampton, Aston University, Newcastle University, University of Exeter, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Salford University, University of Roehampton, Canterbury Christ Church University and DeMontfort University.

Psychological literacy can be embedded within all parts of the psychology curriculum (Mair et al., 2013), but it does lend itself more naturally to some topics than others. The case studies in this Compendium draw upon the following topics and approaches to teaching (names in brackets are those of the case study authors):

- social psychology (Kent & Skipper; Smith & Morton);
- occupational psychology (Cachia; Hill; Kent & Skipper; Weinberg);
- experiential learning (Griffin; Hughes);
- psychological enquiry (Rosenkranz; Watt);
- psychology in everyday life (Elcock & Jones);
- peer-assisted learning (Pauli et al);
- developmental and educational psychology (Maunder);
- employability (Hadlington; Reddy; Walker);
- psychological research methods (Mayer et al.; Watt);
- mental health (Brunsden).

Not all units covering psychological literacy activities were assessed formally. The level and types of assessment varied and although some were novel, such as using Pecha Kucha (Brunsden) and assessing peer-assisted learning (Pauli et al.), reflective pieces were the most usual form of assessment. Teaching and learning activities varied and included many interactive techniques, such as:

- critique of psychology in the media (Elcock & Jones);
- placement, volunteering or work based learning (Hadlington; Hill; Hughes; Maunder; Mayer et al.; Reddy; Walker);
- seminar discussion or group work (Cachia; Kent & Skipper; Smith);
- peer mentoring (Griffin; Pauli et al.; Rosenkranz);
- enquiry-based of project-based learning (Brunsden; Weinberg).

Although some institutions report a whole-course approach (see the Cachia et al; Watt), and another case study involves level four and six students (Rosenkranz), generally case studies highlighted psychological literacy in a specific module or unit within one level. These often were facilitated by one proactive academic rather than a team. In contrast, two case studies present collaborative schemes involving more than one university (Mayer et al; Pauli et al).

Psychological literacy was mainly found at level six (eleven case studies: Cachia; Griffin; Hughes; Hills; Kent & Skipper; Rosenkranz; Smith & Morton; Brunsden; Weinberg; Hadlington; Pauli et al.), with only three examples at level four

(Rosenkranz; Maunder; Elcock & Jones), two embedded within a placement year (Reddy; Mayer et al.) and one example at level five (Walker). Although it was encouraging to see that many students were exposed to psychological literacy, only five case studies were based on core units or modules, suggesting that many students can proceed through a university degree without explicitly encountering psychological literacy-based units. The majority of case studies were based on optional units and some were based on voluntary extra-curricular activities (Rosenkranz; Maunder; Mayer et al.).

Within the Compendium, case studies have been presented in alphabetical order according to author name. For each case study, responses to the following prompts have been provided:

- Key words;
- Synopsis (summary of the teaching of psychological literacy at the institution);
- What did you/the participants do?
- What happened/is happening as a result?
- What are your critical reflections?
- What worked? What didn't?
- What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

In some cases, authors have also provided information about where the reader can find out more about their work. In addition, many authors have provided contact information, and are happy to be contacted directly by interested individuals with enquiries about the case studies they have presented here.

Following the case studies, a list of further reading and resources to facilitate the embedding of psychological literacy into the curriculum is provided at the end of the Compendium.

Using psychological literacy throughout the curriculum to develop students as scientist-practitioners

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An overview of psychological literacy at the University of West London

The Department of Psychology at the University of West London embraces the concept of psychological literacy as the pathway to enhanced employability. Throughout the BSc (Hons) course, there is a running thread of embedded opportunities for students to reflect and consolidate their attained knowledge with practical applications. The emphasis is on the relevance of identifying how knowledge, skills and abilities relate to and influence students' personal and professional development. This important aspect of their learning is addressed across their years at university.

At foundation year level, students embark on a reflective journey considering how various psychological concepts and theories can help them develop personally and professionally. They are guided to consider issues such as their own learning style, relationships and well-being. As part of their assessment, students prepare a personal development action plan which helps to put their focus on their future career goals. This focus is followed up at level four where students are introduced to applied general skills such as academic writing and authorship, and to different occupations with psychology as their first degree. Practitioners from diverse settings share their experience within their role, whilst also indicating how psychological knowledge informs their understanding and practice. At this level, students need to write up a short description of a career that they are interested in pursuing, including the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities. In addition, they need to identify what activities they must engage in to fill the gap between their present and required knowledge, skills and abilities, thus emphasising a systematic approach to employability and a continuous focus on reflection.

Levels five and six present the core BPS curriculum and key applied areas, such as occupational psychology. 'Experiential Learning', a compulsory module at level six, addresses psychological literacy directly. Students are required to focus on the next step in their career by engaging in a 30-hour work experience within a setting related to their aspired profession. Module assessment consists of two reports: a progress report which includes a reflective assessment of the knowledge, skills and abilities acquired throughout their course and how they are relevant to their desired career; and, an evaluative report on the psychological theories and concepts applicable to their work setting. They are also required to make evidence-based recommendations for better practice. This module concludes the progressive employability stream that runs from the students' first to final year.

Three case studies, presented later within this compendium (Cachia; Griffin; Hughes), sample three of the opportunities offered to our final-year students to

develop their psychological literacy. The students' response and outcome from the diverse systems in place to achieve this goal highlight our responsibility in guiding them to becoming graduate scientist-practitioners. Each of these three case studies contains more detail on how the psychology programme at the University of West London has progressively embedded employability and psychological literacy as part of the student experience.

Real-world organisational engagement in modules

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Key words

Applying psychology; Module assessment; Organisational involvement.

Synopsis of the case study

The module 'Theory and Application to Mental Health' is run using enquiry-based learning focused on scenarios provided by external organisations who have specific interests in, and needs relating to, mental health and psychological wellbeing. These include charities, occupational health departments, private training companies and academic journals. The module is delivered using enquiry-based learning with organisations providing the topics for enquiry. However, they have no direct contact with the students, with the module leader instead acting as a gatekeeper into the organisations if this is needed. Generally, however, it is not, as the enquiry stimuli provide information to the students not only about the suggested research foci but also about the commissioning organisation itself. The information is sufficient to enable them to identify research questions suggested by the stimulus as well as setting these in the appropriate contexts specific to the particular organisation. Students then conduct research to address the identified questions and to generate solutions and recommendations for organisational practices, all of which must emerge from and be rooted in psychological theory and evidence. Students then present their findings and recommendations at a conference, which an organisational representative attends to hear these and to question them about their work. Their presentations take the form of Pecha Kucha presentations; these are time-limited presentations, containing twenty slides presented for just twenty seconds each, meaning that students have to be extremely succinct and focussed. They need to ensure that everything they present is not only salient to the organisations but also sufficiently rooted in psychological theory and evidence to meet course assessment requirements.

What did you/the participants do?

Students were given an enquiry stimulus (rather than choosing their own). This ensured that all participating organisations had their issues addressed. Students then spent some time breaking the stimulus down into its key psychological components. The scenarios included obvious areas of psychology (for example, posttraumatic stress in emergency service workers) but also areas that were not so immediately obvious (for example, architectural design for the elderly). The ultimate aim of this consideration was to identify any research topics, questions or practical problems within the scenario that they felt psychological understandings, theory and evidence could assist with or improve. During the research process new topics and questions were identified as a result of the continuing research enquiry. Students were encouraged not only to consult the psychological literature but also that from

other disciplines, if it was relevant and added context to the psychological understanding. For example, the economic and political landscape in which organisations were operating could limit the nature of their recommendations if these were to be possible for implementation rather than representing an ideal but unrealistic way forward. Students were also encouraged to research their 'commissioning' organisation in order that their eventual recommendations were certain to be innovative and make a novel and positive contribution to the organisation's existing policy and practice. However, students were not allowed to make direct contact with the organisations. This meant that organisations could participate and benefit from the module merely by submitting a scenario and attending the conference with no other burden or expectations on their time. In addition to their presentations students were encouraged to generate as many or as few additional materials to pass on to the organisation as they felt appropriate. This provided the organisations with tangible benefits as well as enabling students to feel they had made a genuine applied impact on the organisation's practices.

What happened/is happening as a result?

Participating organisations were thrilled with students' work and commented that they had not realised that psychology, and psychologists, had so much to offer them. This suggests that the module not added to the students' own psychological literacy but also to wider understandings of what psychology is and can be. Many of the students are continuing their relationships with the organisations, with some carrying out sponsored activities on behalf of participating charities, some acting as voluntary research assistants and others collaborating to produce joint publications, marketing materials etc. Many of the materials that students produced are also now in use within the organisations, for example, training materials for delivering seminars preparing people for the experience of retirement, and promotional leaflets to encourage men to seek help for depression. All of the participating organisations expressed a desire to continue in their relationship with the module and committed to providing further enquiry stimuli. Some have also spread the word to other organisations who have now approached us with offers to be future participants. In addition the Division of Psychology now has a link into these organisations to explore other ways that we can meaningfully collaborate.

What are your critical reflections?

Students acquired knowledge of the utility of psychology in contexts that were not explicitly psychological domains. It was evident not just that students' problem solving and critical understanding were enhanced but also that they appreciated anew that psychology was relevant for *all* human activities. Students commented that they now recognised that psychology was relevant wherever and whenever a person or group was thinking or acting. Previously they had perceived psychology as linked to one of the specific sub-disciplines (e.g. cognitive, social, biological etc.) or to the protected titles (e.g. clinical, educational, forensic); now they clearly understood that psychology was not a disparate categorical endeavour enacted within discrete domains but instead a holistic encounter with daily human existence. This suggests that the module had achieved its intentions in developing and exploiting students' levels of psychological literacy. What was particularly notable was that their implicit literacy was brought to the fore and brought into explicit

consciousness, giving them the confidence to believe they could carry their understandings with them beyond the academy and into their daily lives. This conscious understanding clearly added value to their studies as they began to articulate the recognition that their degree was not 'wasted' if they did not continue to study psychology further, practice as a psychologist or even to work in explicitly psychologically-related domains. Instead, they were able to express an understanding that their degree had added value to their lives through the daily encounters they had, both in and out of work.

What worked/what didn't?

Although the organisations were enthusiastic and impressed, arranging a day for the conference that they could all commit to sending a representative to was logistically extremely difficult. A number of substitutions were made that meant perhaps the most ideal person was not always sent on their behalf. Despite this all organisations did send someone and they were able to engage the students in some challenging questioning and critique of their work. Their presence changed the feel of the event radically from the usual student presentations in a classroom to a genuine professional conference. The formal conference structure brought added benefits in that it gave most of the students their first conference experience. During the module students were initially very anxious about the Pecha Kucha requirements, and so the module leader delivered a few so that they became less of an unknown quantity. Following these, students enthusiastically engaged with these and in module feedback commented frequently on this being one of the strongest aspects of the module. Despite the constraints of the Pecha Kucha, the amount and range of information and evidence that students included within their presentations were impressive.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Consider incorporating a module that has holistic concerns drawing across the entire spread and focus of psychology, as well as attending to its blurred boundaries with other disciplines and the wider context in which psychology occurs. Encourage organisations to work with psychology departments to develop assessments that can benefit both them and the students but which do not necessarily require a large involvement of their time or other resources.

Enhancing psychological literacy through seminar activities within an occupational psychology module

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Key words

Scientist-practitioner; Psychological theory application; Applied psychology; Work psychology; Occupational psychology

Synopsis of the case study

'Introduction to Occupational Psychology' is an elective module that runs in the second semester of the final year of the undergraduate programme. It is aimed at introducing students to a variety of psychological issues related to the workplace and how psychological principles may be functional to enhance well-being and productivity in organisations. The application of psychological theory and research methods in the work context are addressed, both at an individual and organisational level. At an individual level, this module addresses employees' attitudes at work, motivation, stress, career development, and their psychological contract with the organisation. It also deals with commonly-occurring processes at an organisational level, such as personnel selection and assessment, training and development, group and team work, leadership and organisational change situations.

The seminar sessions for this module take the format of a case study where the lecturer presents the students with a typical scenario of an organisational practice (for example, recruitment) or employees' experiences (such as maintaining job satisfaction through organisational change). Working as teams of five students, they must formulate a strategy on how to analyse the presented case, design and implement an intervention, and finally evaluate its effectiveness. Their formulation must be substantiated with psychological theory and research evidence, presented in this module and all the other modules taught throughout the course. At first, students only manage to link psychological knowledge presented in this module's lectures and find relating knowledge attained from the core modules difficult. However, as the module progresses, this practice eases because they develop a clearer understanding of the typical processes occurring in people's affective, cognitive and behavioural endeavours. Students have expressed how such psychological literacy has aided recognition and appreciation of their own ways of functioning.

What did you/the participants do?

The learning format for this module is a one-hour interactive lecture where the organisational processes mentioned above are focused on separately, followed by another one-hour seminar activity in smaller groups (20 students). In this second session, students are placed into teams of five participants and presented with a 'problem' or task, typically put forward to an organizational consultant. They have to come up with a 'solution' (or project design) substantiated with psychological theory

and research evidence within an allocated time of 20 minutes. For this formulation, they are also required to identify methods to conduct a 'problem' analysis, and an evaluation of the implemented design. Then, they must pitch their proposal to the group, supporting their choices with their rationale. Through discussion as a group, we ultimately come up with a decision regarding which would be the most robust and cost-effective method.

The final proposal generally incorporates aspects from all four presented solutions. This exercise aids the development of psychological literacy as students have to draw from all the psychological knowledge attained throughout the course, such as research methods, individual differences, learning theories, social and developmental psychology. They also draw knowledge from their own experiences of the addressed organizational practices. For instance, for employee selection, the students' task is to conduct a job analysis of a Lecturer in Psychology, then use that information to prepare a job description and person specification leading to writing up an advert for the post. Through this exercise, the four psychometric principles of standardisation, objectivity, reliability and validity take prominence, bringing further clarity to these concepts.

The relevance and effectiveness of these seminars lie within the fact that even if students do not choose to work as an organisational consultant, all the covered topics are issues and processes they will experience in their own lives, irrespective of the work setting in which they are subsequently employed.

What happened/is happening as a result?

Students initially find it very hard to take on the 'expert' role when they are asked to put forward their recommendations. They are more comfortable with the lecturer presenting case studies of how I relate psychological knowledge to practical applications in the workplace. Indeed, in the first seminar sessions, I usually have to help them in identifying what psychological theories relate to the decisions they make in formulating their solution or project design. For instance, they are not immediately aware of why they would decide on a particular research method over another. It almost comes naturally to them to choose an interview over a survey in a specific situation but they need to be prompted to explain what informed their decision. They find it even harder to recognise psychological theories which adequately define a presented 'problem'.

Progressively, they 'find their voice' through participating in these seminar group activities. The main benefit is the growing feeling of empowerment as they come to think of themselves as budding competent professionals. Naturally, this outcome is not uniform across the student group and remains difficult for some, predominantly those who were less engaged in learning the psychological theory presented earlier in the course.

What are your critical reflections?

Around one-third of the student group participate in this elective module. In my introductory lecture, I ask the students their reason for choosing this module. Generally, it is either because they are interested in becoming occupational

psychologists; or because it fits well within their timetable! My initial task is to get the latter as engaged as the former. Otherwise, experience tells me that the seminar activities would not be successful. One way of achieving this goal is by presenting the students with a vast list of vacancies (such as Recruitment Consultant; Training Executive; Project Manager; Talent Management Analyst; Research Associate; Personnel assessment developer; Career Counsellor) for which their psychology degree makes them eligible to apply, due to the knowledge, skills and abilities they attain. I address this matter in the first lecture. They are always pleasantly surprised, especially when I use one of the recruitment websites to demonstrate how these vacancies are available at present.

My other task is to help them understand that even if they might never actually engage in designing and implementing organisational interventions, it benefits them to know the backstage processes involved and they can use this information to their advantage. For instance, knowing that an employee selection process requires the match between the job description and person specification enhances their chance of being short-listed for a desired vacancy. Such awareness is useful in preparing their application, by showing a clear link between these two aspects when presenting their knowledge, skills and abilities. Another example I like to put forward is the benefit of their understanding of the group processes involved in the workplace, such as group think and different leadership styles.

What worked/what didn't?

Students progressively enjoy ownership of the seminars as the sessions are dominated by group discussion and argumentation of the different positions put forward. The lecturer's role becomes one of facilitating, time keeping and maintaining focus. Here are some students' comments received through the module evaluation survey:
"Role play, games and exercises are an amazing way to remember the theory."
"This module has helped me in my relationship with my current employment. It helped me improve at work, and deliver good work at university."
"Ecological and educational seminars"

This approach has not worked well with students who are not open to feedback. In one particular session on group work, teams of five were analysing the different roles they tend to take following a group task exercise, and reflecting on whether this role changes in diverse settings. One member left the session after being told gently by another group member that he was perceived as not having contributed equally to the task. Even after the lecturer approached him, the student was not willing to process this feedback. Such instances are not conducive to reflection and learning. More emphasis on the value of feedback for personal and professional development is now placed at the start of the module.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?
I encourage higher education psychology staff to take this bottom-up approach to enhance their students' psychological literacy. It enables them to perceive any future experience as a setting where they can use their attained knowledge to inform their practice and truly become scientist-practitioners.

Developing psychological literacy through innovative assessment

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Key words

Assessment strategy; Everyday psychology; Media psychology.

Synopsis of the case study

Our syllabus at University of Gloucestershire includes a 30 CATS level four module, 'Psychology in Everyday Life', which has the broad aim of developing psychological literacy for everyday experience. A key perspective in the module is to examine the psychological claims that surround us, in the print and broadcast media and in popular psychology publications. We believe an essential aspect of psychological literacy is to become a critical consumer of such claims, insulating students against belief in psychobabble and psychological myths. We lecture students about the dangers of media misrepresentation and engage them in seminar activities to develop a critical stance, but the key development of such skills comes through assessment, wherein students are required to put their insights into practice and engage in active learning. Another aspect that we wish to develop is the ability to share their knowledge in a way that is accessible and understandable to those without psychological training. This highlights the value of popular writing in psychology that is not misrepresentative of the evidential and theoretical base, and encourages a perspective of "giving psychology away" (Miller, 1969).

We use two assessment activities, addressing psychological literacy from the perspective of the consumer, and also the perspective of the sharer. In this case study we describe the two assessment tasks and provide our evaluative reflections.

What did you/ the participants do?

The first assessment task asks students to compile a portfolio of media representations of a psychological topic and produce a critical commentary. Students find five or six newspaper articles, broadcast media clips, or popular websites, on an issue such as relationships, parapsychology or television violence. They produce a 1000 word commentary that briefly summarises presentations of the issue as represented in the media samples, and then contrasts this with accepted theory and evidence from the disciplinary literature. Students conclude with an analysis of the relationship between disciplinary and public psychology.

The second assessment task requires students to work in groups to produce blog-style web posts using a co-operative authoring tool (the wiki facility within the Moodle virtual learning environment). The posts address an issue of public interest, such as happiness and wellbeing or persuasion, and need to be written in an accessible style

as if for the general public. This includes supporting arguments with reference to web material that is of appropriate academic quality yet accessible both practically and in writing style.

What happened/is happening as a result?

In the first assignment, students showed the ability to identify misrepresentations in media psychology, to apply psychological knowledge in identifying such misrepresentations, and to formulate informed counter-representations based on evidence from the discipline. In addition, students clearly demonstrated improved theoretical understanding of the issues covered.

In the second assignment, students were able to produce well-argued and well-evidenced posts that were nevertheless accessible to their non-psychology peers. Students had an increased understanding of how knowledge can be shared usefully. In addition, they developed more technical skills of writing in different registers, the ability to identify high quality public psychology, and the use of collaborative tools to support group working.

What are your critical reflections?

We believe that these are valuable assessment tasks that are effective in achieving their intended aims, and particularly in enhancing psychological literacy. Students enjoy the tasks and see the value of them. They also appreciate the opportunity to do assessments other than the traditional essay. In future we are considering asking students to identify topics for their blog posts on the basis of interviews with members of the community.

What worked/what didn't?

Although the assessments worked well there are some caveats. The choice of topic is key to the success of both tasks, and a given topic may be suitable for one task but not the other. For example, a blog post warning the reader of the persuasion techniques used to influence opinion is successful, but this is a difficult topic for the portfolio task. Relationship advice in popular magazines is a very suitable topic for the portfolio assignment, but perhaps inappropriate for the blog post. In addition there was some friction in the use of the collaborative writing tool. Training was provided, but even so some students preferred to have face-to-face meetings for writing group posts.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

We recommend that colleagues consider the use of such assessment tasks to develop psychological literacy and become more critical consumers of public psychology.

Where can we find more details?

The best of the wiki articles will be published on our psychology course blog. http://uglospsychology.wordpress.com/

Psychological literacy developed through peer mentoring as a psychology undergraduate

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Key words

Mentoring; Support; Guidance; Self-esteem; Supervision; Empowering; Transferable skills

Synopsis of the case study

Mentoring is a voluntary activity that a number of students engage in as part of the 'Experiential Learning' module (see also Hughes, below) in their final year at the University of West London. An understanding of the structure of an organisation, an understanding of their role within it and experience of observing psychological theories in practice are reflected through written assignments.

The University Mentoring Service has been involved in coordinating activities such as peer mentoring and disability mentoring. A peer mentor is a student who has progressed further than their mentee on the same course. A disability mentor is a peer mentor who has additional knowledge of registering with the University's Well-Being Service and studying with a disability.

The act of writing assignments about mentoring encourages students to reflect and learn from their experience. It builds psychological literacy as students recognise just how relevant the psychological theories and concepts they have studied are to everyday practices and to their own experience.

A key issue for mentors is the difficulty found in putting theory and training into practice. Despite preparation, a lack of confidence and anxiety can be experienced at the start of a peer mentoring relationship, which takes place on a one-to-one basis. This lack of confidence can hinder the development of a successful mentor pairing. Furthermore, issues around both the mentor's and mentee's levels of self-esteem can make the experience challenging for both parties. However, overcoming anxiety and recognising that, as mentors, they have the ability to make a difference to another student's confidence and self-belief can be highly rewarding and empowering for all involved.

What did the participants do?

Psychology students who wish to mentor initially attend 'Experiential Learning' seminars where they learn more about the service, how it is delivered and what would be expected of them as mentors. It is then essential for students to attend training to gain a greater understanding of their role and any challenges they might face.

During training issues such as boundaries and confidentiality are addressed and hypothetical situations are considered to allow students to explore various possible responses. Students are encouraged to share ideas in small groups before comparing views with the wider group. Mentors are also encouraged to reflect on their own experience of being a student, the University and the course when providing guidance and support to a peer.

Once trained, each mentor is paired with a student working at a level below them on the same course. Mentors are asked to make initial contact with their mentee by email and to arrange their first meeting. A coordinator is present at this first meeting to ensure that all parties are clear about what a mentor can offer but also about the limitations of the service. The student-mentor relationship can be complex and mutual understanding of what each party can offer and expect is essential.

Supervision is given to all mentors and a drop-in support service, which is run on a daily basis by the mentoring service coordinators, allows mentors and mentees easy access to support, when needed.

What happened/is happening as a result?

Mentors gain transferable skills that will, potentially, improve their future employability, including problem solving skills, awareness of boundaries and confidentiality, interpersonal skills development, increased confidence and enhanced reflective skills. They also gain a greater understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and are able to observe psychological theories in practice.

As a peer mentor it is quite common to find that the mentee has low confidence and self-esteem in relation to their studies and their peer group:

Mentee: 'I found my mentor extremely supportive and encouraging – especially the emotional support when I felt insecure about my ability to hand in my first assignment. As a mature student with dyslexia I still feel challenged, but not so afraid of the outcome'.

The mentor is able to offer encouragement, advice and support having already overcome the challenges the mentee now faces while, at the same time, being able to recognise how far they have progressed themselves:

Mentor: 'Personally I think it helped me to define myself better. I really enjoy this work and I have decided that I will go on to become a mentor in secondary schools or colleges or even universities'.

What are your critical reflections?

Overall, mentoring within the module has been successful in allowing psychology students to not only gain practical experience of providing support and guidance to others but to develop reflective practices. It has also been highly rewarding with some students benefiting from both experiences as a mentor and a mentee:

Mentee and mentor: 'In the first year I used the mentoring service and it inspired me to become a mentor. It was such a great help in the transition from college to university and settling into the new environment. Becoming a mentor and helping others is something I love'.

However, there can be problems in establishing a pairing with delays in the mentors and mentees first meeting. In some cases the first meeting does not happen at all. This appears to be a problem experienced by other universities. It may be the case that, despite reassurance during training that a mentor does not have to have all the answers, there is still an anxiety experienced by mentors about not meeting a mentee's expectations. It may also be the case that the mentee feels that being a mentor is synonymous with high achievement and success and this might engender a sense of inadequacy. Once the paired mentor and mentee have met, these issues seem to evaporate very quickly but the difficulty is in ensuring that the first meeting actually takes place.

Having an introduction group meeting, where a number of students are paired by the mentoring coordinators, is now proposed, with tea and coffee available to make the occasion feel more positive, comfortable and welcoming.

What worked/what didn't?

In addition to the arranged supervision sessions, support for mentors and mentees could be readily obtained through the Mentoring Service's daily drop-in support sessions. The drop-ins also provided non-mentored students with an opportunity to gain support and learn more about the mentoring opportunities available to potential mentor volunteers and mentees. This ensured that all parties were well supervised, informed and supported.

Where pairings were successfully established the support provided by mentors was found to be highly beneficial:

Mentee: 'Having good lecturers reminds me of the reason why I chose my course but having a mentor has helped me finish my first semester when I felt unsure or overwhelmed. It's nice to know she's there to support me and give me that bit of encouragement because it goes a long way'.

Seminars run as part of the 'Experiential Learning' module also provided an opportunity for mentors to share their experiences as a group while remaining mindful of issues around confidentiality.

Despite guidance during training, problems were often experienced around establishing pairings. Mentors are asked to email their allotted mentee but the mentees often didn't respond. This may be due to issues around low confidence or self-esteem, on the part of either the mentor or mentee.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

The 'Experiential Learning' module in year three promotes the development of psychological literacy by allowing students to see psychological theories work in

practice. This gives students an opportunity to meet new challenges under guidance and with supervision. It is recommended that all psychology degrees offer similar opportunities. Mentoring is particularly suited to students working at level six as it allows them to consolidate and appreciate all they have learnt while supporting a peer working at a lower level.

Where can we see more details?
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sy3cX-xl1zs

Embedding employability skills in psychology

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Key words

Employability; Reflection.

Synopsis of the case study

Embedding employability within the undergraduate curriculum is seen as being of key strategic importance to ensure students are equipped with key skills and competencies. In light of this a third year (level six) module was designed and implemented in September 2012 with two key aims: (a) to embed elements of employability within a standalone module which was credit bearing; and (b) to give students the opportunity to present key experiences from work experience or volunteer work in the context of psychological theories.

What did you/the participants do?

Initially students are asked to complete 50 hours of work experience over the academic year, from the end of May up until the end of March the following year. This work experience can be an existing part-time job, volunteer work or a trip organised through the current DMUGlobal scheme. The emphasis is on the experience rather than the actual job itself, and the key here is that students see the application of their skills and psychological theory in all jobs and placements.

Students are required to submit two portfolios over the academic year, with the first one being a discussion of the key competencies they have developed over their time in higher education, as well as reflection on where these skills have been developed with the course and how. They are also required to submit a current curriculum vitae (CV) as well as evidence of conducting relevant job searches in areas relevant for them, highlighting what further qualifications or experience they would need should they wish to pursue them. The second portfolio asks the students to reflect on their work experience. They are expected to highlight key incidents or experiences and then use psychological theory to help explain such situations whilst also trying to provide thoughtful solutions to such issues. The work must be evidenced with relevant research and is referenced in standard APA-style.

What happened/is happening as a result?

In the academic year 2013-14 it was decided that the 'Employability Skills and Psychology' module would be made a compulsory part of the final year for all students enrolled on undergraduate psychology degrees. Previous students from the course when it was offered as an optional module have given a lot of positive feedback, with many commenting that it helped them not only improve their CVs but

also got them to think about evidencing their competencies more clearly. Many have also noted how the module prepared them in terms of advice for interviews, preparing to enter the graduate job market as well as giving them direction for future study.

What are your critical reflections?

Getting students to engage in aspects of personal development and employability can be tricky at the best of times. Many students still express the attitude that if something is not assessed it is not worth doing, which is obviously a misapprehension and something that we were keen to dispel. However in order to make sure students engaged in the module it was necessary to attach marks to their experiences, which proved to be more difficult that was first envisaged. Students are often confused by the nature of reflection and evidencing their experiences and this needed to be explicitly demonstrated through the use of examples.

Students found it hard to explore the link between the experiences they had accrued during work experience and the application of psychological theory to such experiences. This is an essential skill that many graduates are missing out on, particularly when trying to map often very abstract theories onto daily experiences. However with a bit of guidance many of the students performed very well, and produced some really good pieces of work that made a good link between experiences and theory.

What worked/what didn't?

The module has run to date with numbers that are far below the next cohort coming in so it remains to be seen if the current module template is suited to 100+ students. In terms of the current cohort, many students were disappointed with the grade for their first piece of work, and it was apparent that they were trying to make a comparison between a reflective discussion and a formal essay. For many students the ability to critically reflect on their core skills and evidence these is one they really just "don't get". Most provided very vague descriptions of the skills they had and how they had developed but provided no clear evidence or statement about where such skills had been enhanced.

In terms of administration of the module, it is very time consuming even with small numbers. As a check, the module leader telephones employers or volunteer organisations to ensure that the students are actually working where they say they are and that they have completed the allocated time. Similarly the marking of the portfolio assessment can be extremely time-consuming, especially when it comes to exploring each of the individual theories that students included in their reports.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Including a module that allows students to enhance employability as well as experiencing key facets of psychological literacy should be explored wherever possible. Giving student the chance to reflect on their key competencies whilst also engaging in a practical application of key psychological theories is something they do not do very often, and the result can be very rewarding and interesting.

Professional practice in psychology

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Key words

Work-based learning; Problem solving; Enquiry-based learning; Applied professional context.

Synopsis of the case study

This module works with a wide range of organisations to ensure students graduate with an experience of professional project work across a range of applied areas of interest. This skill in applying academic content to real world settings demonstrates their successful work-based problem solving. Within this level six compulsory module there is a series of lectures which provide students with occupational and organisational psychology, as well as a focus on the qualities of applied, professional work and there will normally be opportunities to learn from guest speakers. Students then apply this new knowledge and their existing knowledge of psychology from across their degree to a real life issue from one of our partner organisations. This is completed within workshops which run alongside the lectures. Within these workshops, students form small project teams to explore their chosen issue using enquiry-based learning. This means that their acquisition and application of knowledge is developed through peer learning facilitated by module staff. The project team then work as a group to produce a PowerPoint presentation and executive summary of their proposed solution to the problem. Each year the student project teams then disseminate their solutions to the issues back to the organisations through a multidisciplinary conference organised and run as authentically as possible by the module staff. This adds valuable and transferable experience to the student experience to take with them in the world of work. This module essentially models psychological literacy; as a concept, a process and a framework for lifelong learning within a wide range of careers.

What did you/the participants do?

In order to generate the enquiries for the students to then engage with, the partner organisations spend a brief amount of time (usually around 20 minutes) talking through their issue with the module staff. The module staff then develop this issue into a scenario and pass this back to the organisation for their approval. Once approved, all the scenarios on offer that year are made available for the students to choose within their project teams.

What happened/is happening as a result?

The students are developing a sense of how to apply their knowledge to situations, events and contexts outside of the university. The organisations we work with are very committed to the module and generally find the student work useful. As

students are engaged in real world enquiries on issues of importance to our partner organisations there is the opportunity for students to make a genuine contribution to the work of the organisation. In the past this has occurred in a variety of ways including changes to policy or practice within an organisation, or the development of frameworks for multiagency working between the partner organisation and other organisations.

What are your critical reflections?

Developing this style of teaching from within our community engagement activities is intensive, both in time and expectation management (of both students and organisations). The development of the teaching materials is facilitated almost exclusively through professional relationships which are hard to quantify within a modern academic workload system. One aspect which is quite surprising for those willing to try this new approach is the demand for the module staff to model the behaviour in reverse with organisations. Organisations generate enquiries alongside the module staff for the enquiry-based learning process within the module. The ability of the academic to identify and capture the issue within a scenario (or enquiry, these are used interchangeably), is demanding. It helps considerably if the module staff have conducted a wide range of consultancy/applied work with an organisation previously, maybe in their own research. The rewards for all involved more than justify the utter loss of control of how the topics are 'taught' to students. This is contrary to traditional academic approaches and feels very unfamiliar, but is entirely in line with the enquiry-based learning approach. Even academics familiar with the teaching method of enquiry-based learning might become uncomfortable with the unpredictability of handing over the idea generation of the enquiries to other stakeholder groups. Once the more traditional academic trusts the process of the teaching method, the validity of the enquiries and accepts that the students guide themselves within their project teams, it becomes much more comfortable and very enjoyable. This initial discomfort for staff applies also to students who initially struggle with the freedom enquiry-based learning gives them and the professional trust this format of module invests in them.

What worked/what didn't?

This module has run for nine years now and we have identified some challenges and preferred ways of working throughout that time. Unnecessary tension is put on the relationship between staff and partner organisations if students can contact the organisations. This is because student interest is usually higher than the organisations can support. Therefore in order to prevent the organisations absorbing indirect costs of participation in the module (through managing student communications) we thread outcome-oriented ethics of responsibility through the module (to address obvious wider applications as well), outlining and modelling professional ethics within applied work. One of the essential developments of the module is the approach we have developed of embodiment; of transferable skill sets, of global citizenship, of psychological literacy, of professional working, of work-based problem solving. When we first started running the module we frequently spoke about these things in student-friendly language and framing, outlining how they could take these aspects with them once they have left Nottingham Trent University and moved out in to the world of work. Over time, we realised that aspects of the module

which had the biggest impact were the exercises and approaches that modelled these behaviours in action for our students, rather than leaving them to imagine their application in the abstract. This has resulted in changes to the assessment for this module to be as closely aligned to professional outputs as possible. We have even considered an assessment in the form of a business case, on the basis of developing transferable, highly sought-after applications of skill sets. On this basis the module team continues to develop the module in line with the philosophy of embodying professional lifelong learning, development and application of both skills and knowledge.

One aspect to be aware of is that this style of teaching with students who have long experienced supported, direct knowledge transfer throughout their engagement with education is challenging for them. It is typically well-recognised that at level six students are risk averse, therefore this way of engaging with knowledge and skills brings a range of reactions. Not all of this reaction is positive, until after graduation and entering the world of work. It is then that we have on average 20 emails per academic year saying they now see the value of the module. Some of our relationships with our partner organisations have been developed by past students who now contribute to the module in a new role.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

The power of this module is not just in the formula of what we do, when and how, but in the underpinning teaching philosophy. We do not teach skills and then ask students to think of ways to transfer those in an abstract setting, but we facilitate and model the practice and application of those skills within new contexts to evidence how they can be transferred.

Where can we see more details?

http://www.ntu.ac.uk/apps/news/139572-3/Professional_Practice_in_Psychology_Conference_2013.aspx

Pyramid clubs and UWL students: groups leading groups

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Key words

Pyramid clubs; Group work; Children; Socio-emotional development; School-based; Experiential learning

Synopsis of the case study

As part of their 'Experiential Learning' module (see also Griffin, above), some students volunteer to run Pyramid clubs, a school-based intervention for children aged 7-14 years exhibiting early signs of mental health problems. Pyramid clubs focus on those who internalise their difficulties and display anxiety, depressive symptoms and poor peer relationships. The intervention involves a group of club leaders (students) planning and running activities for a group of children in the school. They receive two days of Pyramid-specific training, as well as covering some of the key issues (active listening, stress in organisations, team working/roles in teams) in their lectures and seminars.

Students are allocated to schools in groups of four to deliver a 10-week programme of activities. They have to use their knowledge and skills to adapt a suggested programme to the needs and interests of their particular group, with a view to improving the children's socio-emotional skills. In the process they have the opportunity to experience many of the theories they have learnt, including the stages of a group's development, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, social support, experiential learning, conformity, prevention, modelling and empowerment.   For most, it is their first opportunity to experience how these theories impact on real people's lives.

What is most illuminating is the lack of contact that many students have had with children, especially children who are experiencing psychological difficulties, before starting a club. The result is that they find the first weeks stressful as they struggle to apply what they have learnt on their course and to display the psychological literacy required. Eventually, as they relax into the experience, reflect on their observations of the children, and with support from the Pyramid Project Co-ordinator, it all drops neatly into place, leaving them, and the children, in a far better place to get on with the rest of their lives.

What did you/the participants do?

Students at the university have been delivering Pyramid clubs in local schools for over 10 years. They have to put their interest forward through a formal process of application form, references and attendance at training. The training covers the key aspects of the club – group work, an understanding of social and emotional development in children, risk and resilience factors leading to mental health difficulties, safeguarding, managing behaviour and planning and delivering activities for children.

Four types of therapeutic activities are offered at Pyramid clubs: food (including food preparation) and drink; art and crafts; games; and circle time; and the training is delivered in an experiential way to give the students an opportunity to practice these in advance.

Once trained and suitably vetted (enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service – DBS - checks), the Pyramid project co-ordinator organises the students into groups of four. The groupings take into account their availability, gender and ethnicity (the local schools have quite different ethnic populations and we match ethnicity and language where we can) and the strengths of the students.

Each Pyramid club consists of no more than 12 children, selected using the Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire because they exhibit difficulties in emotion and/or peer relationships. Clubs run mainly after school for 90 minutes for ten weeks, with the students working together to plan and deliver the activities each week and taking it in turn to be the 'lead' club leader on the day. The students produce a written plan for every session and make written observations on every child after each session. There is a formal post-club review of each child to allow schools to make onward referrals if necessary. Where urgent issues arise that cause concern during the club, the students will raise them with the Pyramid project co-ordinator and/or directly with the school.

What happened/is happening as a result?

Some students are using the clubs or access to the schools as a topic for their dissertation. Others use it to help confirm their future career direction, with some deciding they definitely do wish to work with children, perhaps in teaching or educational psychology, while others arrive at the conclusion that group work is definitely not for them.

The students begin to see in real life the connections between different topics studied as part of their course and begin to understand how health, mental health and public health; cognitive, neuropsychology, developmental and occupational psychology all combine together with public policy on education and social care to produce the flesh and blood child who they meet on a weekly basis. For many, there is a 'light bulb' moment as it all starts to make sense.

Relationships are quickly developed with the children who love having young adults (who are not teachers and who they can call by their first name) delivering fun activities for them.   Seeing the children change and develop over 10 weeks brings a huge sense of satisfaction for the students, while working through the inevitable difficulties that arise can be challenging and frustrating.

What are your critical reflections?

It becomes apparent through the seminars and training that some students are likely to be more capable of delivering the intervention than others. Many students are attracted to this volunteering opportunity because they recognise something about their own experiences and feelings as a child in the typical Pyramid club child: for

some students that is a positive attribute, whereas others have yet to overcome their own shyness and potentially will empathise but not offer suitable role models for the children. However, in the course of running the clubs, not only do the children gain in confidence and social skills, but so do many of the students. Ensuring a good mix of abilities and personalities in each club leader team is therefore important. Sometimes the challenges of working with a group of their peers can be even more difficult than working with the group of children. Inevitably, some students have more time and more insight, or are simply more experienced and confident in working with children and so they take a bigger role in the club, while those with less time and perhaps less confidence or knowledge can find themselves side-lined. By focusing on the needs of the child and providing a structure for the ten weeks overall and for individual session planning, most of these difficulties can be overcome.

Whilst their academic studies enable psychology students to analyse people and situations, it is quite clear that many students need support to take action based on that analysis. Seeing an experienced club leader lead a session is very important for them to set the right tone for a club and to be able to deal confidently with the many unforeseen difficulties that inevitably arise when working with groups of children.

What worked/what didn't?

Most of the difficulties that arise in setting up and running Pyramid clubs relate to the schools taking part. Some are very slow to identify and get permission for children to attend clubs, while others do not faithfully follow the guidelines provided by the university. Although this can cause additional work for the Pyramid project co-ordinator and result occasionally in a child being selected for a club who is really not suitable, on the whole this does not impact on the student experience.

Above all, the students need to talk to the children and establish good working relationships if they are to provide any sort of therapeutic input, and some students struggle to do that. Those students who make the effort benefit the most, which is a very useful life lesson for them, and having a team rather than a single group leader means that the children are not seriously impacted even where one or two club leaders struggle with interpersonal relationships.

What is beyond doubt is that the children who attend clubs benefit hugely, and that most of the students do so as well.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Group work can be a very effective means of delivering psychological interventions, and is possibly the only way to help children develop the social and friendship skills they need, but it does require good psychological literacy if it is to be delivered successfully. Pyramid is a manualised early intervention that offers students an enjoyable and comprehensive opportunity to develop the necessary skills for working in and with groups, and many more universities could be offering that opportunity to their students and their local schools.

Where can we see more details?

www.uwl.ac.uk/pyramid

Using social psychology in the workplace

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Key words

Applied psychology; Psychology in the workplace; Employability; Practical skills; Job descriptions

Synopsis of the case study

Many of our psychology graduates do not go on to study and work in psychology. The aim of this module was to equip students for the transition into the workplace by encouraging students to reflect on how they could use their psychology knowledge in the workplace; and also to develop understanding of the recruitment process. The module came about because we had repeatedly heard from employers that graduates lacked 'real world' experience, and from students who were unsure of how to move from university to employment successfully.

In order to develop these skills in our students we considered three of the most common career destinations for our graduates (marketing and advertising, teaching and business) and ran sessions covering key theories and topics in these areas. The classes also involved practical elements where students were asked to apply knowledge to novel problems.

To assess these skills students formed groups and were presented with an invitation to tender for contracts from schools and businesses. For example, a local council wants to develop an advertising campaign to promote bedtime reading. Students were asked to develop the campaign and also to create a research-informed rationale to illustrate that their ideas had a good chance of working in the real world. They had to present their ideas orally to the group. In the second part of the module students were presented with lectures on recruitment and selection methods and interviews. As well as learning about research in these areas, students also took part in practical exercises to learn about techniques.

The module evaluation suggested that students felt that they had improved their ability to apply psychology to novel situations and that they knew more about selection processes. As tutors we also saw a marked improvement in our students' abilities to apply and synthesise knowledge across the course.

What did you/the participants do?

The module covered three psychology topics that could easily be varied from year to year or across subject areas. Teaching was organized into ten two-hour sessions over a 12 week term: Advertising, marketing, teaching, leadership, management, assessment advice and support, coursework presentations, recruitment strategies, and finally, interviews.

Each teaching session was designed to get students thinking about how they could make subject-specific knowledge relevant to a workplace situation. We anticipated that students would struggle to support their ideas with relevant research evidence and we built activities into each week to enable them to practice the skills that would be required for the coursework.

The coursework required students in groups of four or five to form psychology consultancy firms and prepare tender documents to bid for a service contract. The options for the coursework were:

a) design a marketing campaign to promote bedtime reading to parents of Key Stage 1 children;
b) design a training programme to boost the confidence of primary school teaching assistants;
c) design a training programme to boost the effectiveness of mid-level managers in a large logistics company.

The tender documents consisted of 1500 words detailing what they would do if they won the contract (project proposal outline) and 1500 words justifying why their plan was likely to work based on psychological theories and findings (research-informed rationale). Both elements were equally weighted in the mark scheme. The student groups pitched their design in a class presentation a few days before submitting the written tender. This allowed for formative feedback and support with the novel assessment format. An end-of-module exam required students to write two essays (from a choice of three questions) about the three psychology topics, and one essay (from a choice of two questions) about recruitment.

What happened/is happening as a result?

The module ran for the first time in Autumn 2013 as an elective module for 22 final year undergraduate students. As expected, students initially struggled to strike a balance between being innovative and creative with their ideas, whist still supporting their plans with research evidence. There was clear progress on this front as the weeks progressed and we were able to increase the complexity of the in-class activities.

In the student end-of-module evaluation 100% of respondents agreed that the module had helped them to work effectively as part of team, 84% agreed it had helped them apply psychological knowledge to real world situations, and 92% said the module helped them to understand recruitment and selections strategies. Further, 85% of students reported that they valued the applied nature of the module and said that informal feedback within class was very positive. It was a challenging module but the students seemed to enjoy it and particularly valued the practical element.

What are your critical reflections?

Group work formed a substantial part of the module as we strove to make the coursework similar to real work situations. The marks in the group course work report were higher than those in the individual exam, which supports our observations that group work enhanced students' performance in these applied tasks. Upon reflection we felt that more work was needed to help students transition from group-based applied thinking - in which different students may have been responsible for the creative and research-focused aspects - towards individual applications of psychological knowledge which was required in the exam. We are exploring ideas to help develop these skills.

We were initially cautious about running a final year module with such a large element of group work. To reflect individual performance and minimize social loafing we used WebPA so that students could give anonymous peer assessments for others in their group. These assessments and our own observations were used to moderate group marks. This allowed us to give higher marks to students who had contributed more and lower marks for those who had contributed less. Although this was the first time the students had done any formal peer assessment, no students reported any concerns or problems around the peer marking and the end-of-module evaluation indicated that 76% thought using peer assessment to moderate group marks for individuals was a good idea. In future years, we may be tempted to increase the weighting of the peer assessment to permit great variation between the marks of group members.

This module prompted us to consider the role of degrees in preparing students for work. Although the initial ambition and design of the module had a dual goal, once the assessment regime had been finalized we found ourselves focusing far more on applying psychological knowledge than on helping students prepare for work. This is something we will continue to re-evaluate in future years.

What worked/what didn't?

The coursework was highly successful. Students engaged with the process well, contributed during class, and generated a wide range of original ideas. It was clear that they benefited from tailored class activities each week to practice blending original ideas with support from established theories. We were able to see them improve each week and apply these skills in the tender documents. In future we will be working with people from the local community, for example schoolteachers to develop invitations to tender based on real problems that they face. The module will therefore have a positive impact on the wider community and also give students more experience of 'real world' situations.

Student performance in the exam was slightly disappointing. We felt that they struggled to show the same creativity and critical thought that they had shown during group work. Overall, student grades were commensurate with other modules so there wasn't an issue with the difficulty level of the module. As previously discussed, this poorer performance may have been due to the fact students took on different roles in the group work (creative versus research) and we therefore intend to

encourage students to take on different roles in class work to improve their abilities in different areas.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Based on our experiences with this module, we would recommend that others consider how to help students apply psychological knowledge in their future workplace as this was the key element which students seemed to enjoy and value.

Early applied experience: helping first-year students to bridge theory-practice gaps

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Key words

Educational psychology; Placement; Volunteering; Theory-practice links; Employability

Synopsis of the case study

This case study reports on a first-year module on developmental and educational psychology, where we have included a volunteering placement in an education setting as part of the required activities. Students are asked to identify and organise an educational volunteering opportunity, which subsequently forms part of their module assessment. The aim of the volunteering is to help them gain valuable experience in education settings which contributes to employability skills and CV development; alongside helping them to build links between theory and practice. The structure of the module, and activities for them to complete in relation to their volunteering, encourage them to reflect on the observations and experiences they have made, and consider how these compare and contrast to psychological theory and research in the field of developmental and educational psychology. This experience at year one is built upon by further (and more extensive) volunteering opportunities in years two and three. These opportunities reflect the progression of students – moving from more descriptive tasks in year one (relating observations to theory) to critically reflective tasks in year three (evaluating a service or provision) - thus enabling the students to gain extensive educational experience, whilst also demonstrating their ability to apply the theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom to real-world settings. Not only is this useful for their learning, but also for their ongoing career development when they graduate.

What did you/ the participants do?

As part of a first-year module on a specialist degree in 'Developmental and Educational Psychology', students arrange a minimum of 15 hours volunteering in an educational setting. The range of settings that would be suitable for this can be quite broad, providing learning is taking place in some form. Examples include nursery settings, primary or secondary schools, further education colleges or universities, sports clubs or fitness classes, continuing professional development or training, out of school activities and societies including after school clubs, brownies/scouts, dance and drama groups. Students spend time in these settings observing what is going on, and contributing as appropriate. During the time they are volunteering, classroom sessions for the module take place online, helping students to reflect on things they are observing and consider how they link to relevant psychological theory. Examples include online activities focussing on approaches to learning, behaviour

management, and relationships between learners. When they return to class, students work in groups to prepare a presentation on their experiences. They are encouraged to identify themes arising from their observations within their groups (such as areas of similarity or difference in behaviour management strategies or teaching approaches) and consider the role of context, type of learning taking place, and learner characteristics to help explain some of these themes. In the presentations, groups talk about their volunteering experiences, what patterns or themes have been identified, and how these relate to relevant psychological theory identified through background reading they have carried out. There is also a placement report where students complete an individual assignment reflecting on their own volunteering experience, and how what they observed relates to psychological theory and research.

What happened/is happening as a result?

This is the first year that the module has run this way, as previously it was entirely classroom based. The students have just returned to class following their educational volunteering, and they have all reported finding the experience extremely valuable. They are 'buzzing' with things they have seen, and have plenty to talk about with each other. This has really stimulated group discussions and classroom activities. To help nurture the cross-fertilisation of ideas, and aid the identification of themes and patterns between very diverse settings and experiences, I devised a class activity based on a series of discussion questions about what was observed. Examples included:

- What kind of learning was taking place? What was the evidence that the learners were learning? How engaged were the learners and what factors might have contributed to this?
- What sorts of interactions did you observe between learners, and how did this contribute to their learning? What challenging behaviour did you observe, and how was this handled or dealt with?

Groups were asked to consider each question, and talk in turn about what they had seen in their own volunteering experience. They were then asked to identify, based on everyone's stories, areas of similarity or difference, and consider reasons for these emerging patterns.

Students are currently working on preparing their group presentations and subsequent placement reports, so we will shortly be able to comment on their response to these tasks.

What are your critical reflections?

Finding ways of helping students to develop employability skills during their degree is being increasingly emphasised, and I feel that this example offers one effective way of doing this. Many of the students I teach want to progress into careers in education settings (whether through teaching, child and adolescent mental health services, educational psychology, special educational needs, research or further study) where experience in the field is essential. We have always included volunteering placement opportunities in year two and three, but extending this to first year is new this year.

Feedback from our final year students has been that the placements they have conducted during their degree have been extremely valuable in enabling them to make successful applications for PGCE and teach-first courses, other jobs in education settings, and careers options where experience is needed alongside academic qualification. I have found it valuable for me as a teacher to help students gain experience, and facilitate their abilities to make links between what they are learning in class and what is happening in the 'real world'. You start to see the lights go on! Having said that, there have been some challenges with the organisation of the module. I've needed to embed several deadlines (for placement forms and arrangements, group tasks, etc.) into the module timetable to make sure everyone is on track. Some of the weaker students have struggled to take the initiative to make the necessary arrangements, and have needed a lot of support and encouragement. My experience of running the module this year has highlighted the importance of putting in place guidance, instructions and support very early on so individuals don't fall behind.

What worked/what didn't?

Including the volunteering as a required element has definitely been beneficial for the students, and they have all really enjoyed the experience. They can all see the benefits of getting work experience, and have enjoyed discussing how their observations and experiences relate to the academic knowledge they have been gaining in the classroom. However, there have been some teething problems relating to students finding suitable voluntary placements, and making the necessary arrangements in time (including allowing time for DBS clearances to be processed, if these were needed). This has meant that not all students were doing their voluntary placements at the same time, which made facilitating some of the online exercises and group activities more problematic. In subsequent years, I will be building in more support for this, by encouraging students to start making necessary arrangements much earlier. I will also be engaging the volunteering service at the University (who can support students finding suitable volunteering opportunities) more on the module by inviting a representative to come and speak to the students directly during class. These kinds of developments will, I hope, encourage the students to organise their volunteering much earlier to avoid some of the delays we have encountered this year.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Consider integrating volunteering opportunities into taught courses, forming part of the assessment, to enable students to get valuable work experience, and apply their academic knowledge in relevant settings.

Psychology undergraduate research apprenticeship scheme

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Key words

Research skills; Employability; Advanced research training; Academic confidence.

Synopsis of the case study

The purpose of the 'Psychology Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Scheme' (PURAS) is to provide an opportunity for talented and ambitious second-year undergraduate psychology students to participate in original research with staff and other members of the university community during their summer holiday. The scheme provides students with 'hands-on' research experience, developing their potential and interest in research, and giving them an insight into the scientific research process. As part of the department's wider recognition and rewards agenda, participation in this scheme also provides students with a competitive edge in terms of employability. Unlike other research assistantships, PURAS aims to create a reciprocal training scheme in which students assist in departmental research activities, and members of staff provide unique, small-group training opportunities that extend beyond what can be offered within the normal undergraduate degree programme.

PURAS is focused on developing students' research skills and enhancing their confidence interacting in an academic setting. The internships give students the opportunity to engage with all aspects of current research taking place in the department including paradigm development, grant applications, participant recruitment and testing, data analysis and interpretation, and communication of findings. Whilst students engage with similar activities throughout their undergraduate degree, they often have difficulty connecting individual tasks, spread across various modules, to how current psychology research impacts on the world outside of academia. Through hands-on experience students are able to build confidence in their psychological literacy, engage with various methodological decisions about the research process, and contribute to research with the potential of real-world influence.

What did you/the participants do?

The four week programme consists of individual meetings between students and their project supervisor, weekly group personal development planning sessions led by the PURAS supervision team, and research assistant duties on one of the research projects (led by the principal researcher on the project). Typically, three to five research projects are available for students to apply for individually. On these projects, students engage in a variety of research tasks including: engagement with

online questionnaire software, advanced literature searching, participant recruitment, data coding, inter-rater reliability coding and analysis, data entry, qualitative data analysis, quantitative data analysis using SPSS, and producing written results sections. Students are also given the opportunity to attend any lab group meetings or research team meetings that take place in order to actively engage with and shape any decisions or considerations that are currently taking place in regards to the research project. PURAS students are also given the unique opportunity to present their summer work at the Roehampton University Student Conference during the following academic year.

The personal development planning sessions are specifically aimed at building students' core research methods knowledge as well as developing their employability skills and encouraging career planning. Previous personal development planning sessions have included:

- advanced qualitative data analysis;
- advanced quantitative data analysis: multiple regression and mediation analyses;
- making future academic and career plans: Q&A with current Psychology PhD researchers;
- making future academic and career plans 2: building a CV, writing a cover letter, and interview skills.

The future academic and career plans sessions are held both as a group and individually. In the individual sessions students are encouraged to discuss their personal career and academic aspirations and to bring in copies of their CVs for feedback from their PURAS supervisor. At the end of the programme students are required to write a short reflective report on their experience and they are strongly encouraged to use this opportunity to relate the specific skills they have developed to their future academic and career aspirations.

What happened/is happening as a result?

The PURAS programme has received overwhelming positive feedback from both staff and students who have been involved. As a result, the programme has received further support from the department allowing more internships and projects to be offered each year. PURAS interns demonstrate a noticeably increased confidence in terms of their psychological literacy and interactions within the academic community. One student who was previously unsure about their research abilities is currently being considered for a research-based PhD studentships and relates this back to his experience on PURAS: *"It was really enjoyable being in such a dynamic research environment, working alongside and learning from professionals in the field."* Students have found the group personal development planning sessions to be particularly useful because they were guided through the process of developing their career goals and writing CVs and cover letters that were suitable to the courses and/or jobs that they were interested in. Although professional development is an important aspect of their undergraduate modules, the interns found that the small group sessions made them think about their career development earlier and in a more focused manner than they would have on their own:

"The scheme has made me think forward and explore my options in a more realistic manner than before. I now know which postgraduate courses I want to apply to and where they realistically will take me, largely as a result of the guidance and advice I have received during these weeks."

What are your critical reflections?

This program is an incredibly important and unique opportunity for undergraduate students. Often there is a mismatch between what students perceive they are learning during their degree and what they believe happens out in the real world. This programme helps students to make critical connections between the skills they are developing and their future careers, and importantly to participate in research that has the potential to have real world impact. Another very important result of this programme was the peer support that the independently developed. According to one previous student:

"A really important part for me was working alongside other students…I found that if there was something one of us was unsure about, or struggled with, there was always someone who had strength in one area and we would help each other out."

Furthermore, as student numbers at universities continue to increase, a greater importance should be placed on finding opportunities for students to engage with individual members of staff outside of prescribed teaching sessions and the PURAS scheme does just that:

"The scheme has provided valuable opportunities to meet with and talk to both staff and PhD-students in more informal settings than one would usually experience within a university, in which we have had the chance to ask questions and receive guidance on further studies and career options."

What worked/what didn't?

Overall this scheme has been incredibly successful. The high-calibre of students who compete for these internships results in a scheme that is very easy to run as the students are highly motivated and conscientious. The length and timing of the scheme have proved to be some of the more difficult obstacles. A large number of staff are unavailable over the summer holiday period, which reduces the number and variety of projects that are available to students each year. Furthermore, in order to run individual projects, supervisors are often developing their research programme and gaining ethical approval during the already busy exam period running up to the summer holiday. Another challenge is that the four week duration of the scheme and timing in July makes it difficult for students who are reliant on a steady job over the summer holiday to take part in the scheme.

Although we have attempted to situate the programme at the beginning or end of the holiday rather than in the middle, this has proved very difficult due to demands on staff time in relation to other teaching-related duties.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Ideally this scheme should be run on a yearly-basis and planned well in advance of the summer term in order to allow staff to incorporate PURAS into their yearly research plan and to allow motivated students to plan their summer work around this opportunity. A wide variety of projects, staff, and students should be sought in order to provide the best-rounded experience whilst also aiming to keep the competitive nature and small-group feel of the current programme.

Developing psychological literacy through peer-assisted learning

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Key words

Peer-assisted learning; Reflective practice; Personal development; Enhancing confidence

Synopsis of the case study

Peer-assisted learning (PAL) is an optional module available to a small number of students in their final year. Unlike more informal peer-mentoring schemes this module is designed to deliver academic content as well as formal opportunities for personal reflection and practical engagement with students learning at a lower level. The aim is to develop students' flexibility in applying knowledge, and to build confidence in interacting with others and gaining practical experience in effective face-to-face communication. Furthermore, students need to apply knowledge about the psychology of learning creatively (e.g. to help motivate first-year students to engage with research methods tasks) as well as reflect on their own processes of learning in relation to their role as peer-assisters.

Peer-assisting activity is focused on research methods, an area of psychology which many students even in their third year find quite difficult. The principle of 'learning-by-teaching' is particularly pertinent to research methods as students in their third year are preparing to conduct their final year research project. However, the benefits of engaging with peer-assisting in a formal, credit-bearing context are much wider than mere revision of research methods concepts and can include transformative learning experiences with respect to students' perceptions of what they are able to do as psychologically literate citizens. Students clearly recognise the value of the module in developing transferable skills. Whilst many universities provide students with the opportunity to participate in peer-assisting schemes on a voluntary basis, we feel that formalising this experience in the context of an academic module reaches students who would not normally be able or inclined to engage in such activities as volunteers, be that because of lack of confidence or lack of time.

What did you/ the participants do?

Students taking this module are required to attend taught sessions every other week and weekly first-year research methods workshops. Academic content in taught sessions is focused on the psychology of learning and encompasses topics such as theories of learning, individual differences in learning styles, motivation, self-regulated learning and group dynamics in collaborative learning. Alongside the

academic study of the psychology of learning, students are required to commit to attending first-year research methods workshops regularly.

Peer-assisters were carefully briefed with respect to their role, which was clearly distinguished from a teacher or tutor role. They were briefed with regards to the contents of each assisting session prior to the class in a face-to-face mode and virtually via the virtual learning system. Their task was to assist first-year students with practical tasks set in the workshop and be on hand for any queries. The workshop is led by a senior tutor who supports peer-assisters with any difficult issues or queries which may arise. Students are also encouraged to discuss their experiences with peers and reflect on their own learning in relation to the academic content in class. Towards the end of the module students begin to take control of formal teaching activity as this shifts towards student-led presentations of academic papers they have found useful in informing their practice as peer-assisters.

Peer-assisting students are required to write a weekly reflective journal on their experience with first-year students in which they are strongly encouraged to relate their observations to both the academic content and their own experience of learning. Tutor feedback is given on journal entries on a regular basis. Students are also required to present at least one academic paper to their peers in the latter part of the module. The module is assessed by a reflective report on psychological factors in adult learning and their impact on peer-assisting experiences, which is based on (but not the same as) the learning journal.

What happened/is happening as a result?

Students typically approach the module with trepidation. They lack confidence in their ability to be useful in research methods workshops and they are fearful of 'saying the wrong thing'. They emerge from the module with confidence in their ability to make a useful contribution in an uncertain context and understand their own and others learning processes. We have involved a range of different students on this module in presentations for internal and external teaching and learning workshops and conferences. Feedback from the audiences of such events has typically been surprise at how articulate and confident the peer assisters were. We did not specially select 'good' students, but rather encouraged as many students as possible to engage with these opportunities. The benefits of the module in terms of developing psychologically literate citizens are also evident from students' own reflections on the module (e.g. *"I have learnt to apply knowledge to theory and practice"*, *"transferable skills +++"*).

What are your critical reflections?

The benefits of the PAL module extend far beyond what was anticipated in terms of the personal development of students taking this module. We were also able to observe increased retention and achievement of first-year students. This was not so much an effect of the help with specific research methods tasks the peer-assisters were offering, than the opportunity for first-year students to understand the broader context of research methods in the psychology curriculum from the perspective of students who were about to embark on their dissertations. The effect of another

level of communication about general issues such as the *raison d'être* of research methods was frequently commented on as important aspect of their work by peer assisters.

Additionally, by having peer-assisters available to them, the first-year students were provided with other students who had more experience than students in their class and who could be asked questions that they may have felt uncomfortable to put to teaching staff. This advantage was noted in the research methods module feedback forms and this highlights a potential missing link between students and teaching staff, where peer-assisters were able to provide a unique and enhanced learning experience to the first years that the teaching staff could not.

What worked/what didn't?

The assessment by learning journal and critical reflection in relation to the literature on the psychology of adult learning was an important vehicle for peer-assisters to become aware and articulate their own processes of learning. However, it has been difficult to persuade students to sign up for this optional module. It seems that the prospect of teaching research methods worries prospective students. It is therefore very important to be clear about students' role as assisting first-year students' learning rather than being expected to teach. This has been difficult to communicate effectively in module briefings prior to optional module sign up, so further work is needed to make the module seem more attractive to potential students. Currently the peer-assister role is clearly defined in the first session of the module, but this could be moved pre-enrolment on the module, so that students who are anxious about teaching research methods are not deterred. Additionally, we could highlight more of the transferable skills that are developed on the module, as there are some clear developmental benefits for students beyond the standard experience on a module.

There were also logistical issues of pairing this module with the first-year research methods module. This meant that the research methods module convenor had to ensure that all workshop tutors knew how many peer-assisters to expect and that the peer-assisters were adequately supported by the senior tutor without this drawing their attention away from the first years. This could be difficult to monitor at times and since the peer-assisters were still students themselves, their attendance in peer-assisted sessions needed to be recorded and their performance needed to be managed.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

We would recommend embedding peer-tutoring in a module rather than offer it as a voluntary opportunity because it is more likely to reach those students who would really benefit from this process in terms of personal development and who would not be likely to volunteer due to lack of confidence or commitments outside university.

Where can we see more details?

Useful resources:

Tennant, M. (2006). *Psychology and Adult Learning.* Third edition. London, Routledge.

Topping, K. J. (1996). The effectiveness of peer tutoring in further and higher education: a typology and review of the literature. *Higher Education, 32*, 321-345.

Dissemination of this project:

Balloo, K., Pauli, R., Street, B., Worrell, M., Koulouris, P., Fialho, J. (2013). *Peer Assisted Learning: A way forward for engaging students with statistics?* Workshop presented at the Sigma Northwest and North Wales Maths Network Hub event on supporting the development of students' statistics skills, Liverpool, UK.

Balloo, K., Clemente, I., Daley, L., Hassan, M., Pauli, R., Street, B., Worrell, M. (2013). *Third Years supporting First Years through Peer Assisted Learning.* Paper presented at the University of Roehampton 10th Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, London, UK.

Preparing for the psychology sandwich placement year

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Key words

Employability; Placement preparation; Careers

Synopsis of the case study

The case study is about a sandwich placement as a vehicle for developing employability and psychological literacy and explains how students are prepared for and engaged in this activity.

What did you/ the participants do?

Eighty percent and rising of Aston University BSc Psychology students take a sandwich placement year. Employability work starts in the first year; students commence by making a personal development plan with a personal profile, and carrying out two occupational studies (one must be a career path outside professional psychology) and a career action plan. The majority of the employability content, however, is located in the first semester of the second year via the 'Employability and Interpersonal Skills' module delivered by academic and placement team staff together. This includes academic and practical briefings on placement and employability issues, work on effective CVs and applications and successful interview technique followed by mock interview workshops in which each student, dressed to impress, takes part in interviews as both panellist and candidate. Later, there is a counselling and interpersonal skills component for the health professions, clinical settings and business, which includes some small-group skills work. The highlight is the November Psychology Placement Fair and Employer Showcase where the final-year students display posters (part of the placement assessment) summarising their work placement experience. It is attended by local employers and is timetabled for all psychology undergraduates.

Semester two includes health and safety and other practical pre-placement advice and much casework by the placement team with individuals who are uncertain or unsuccessful. Students have placement mentors available to them, receive a regular placement bulletin, access to a placement jobs website, one-to-one appointments and a document check service (CVs, cover letters and application forms).

Placement year assessment in psychology asks students to focus on developing awareness of their own competencies, interests and aptitudes and on recording evidence of competency development. Regular logs are required as well as a poster presentation.

What happened/is happening as a result?

Recent growth in psychology placement uptake is from a long-standing base and is to some extent a self-sustaining student tradition. It is worth noting that in programmes where a minority take a placement, those who do so lose touch with their peers as they will have graduated by the time the minority return. Returning placement students have to face making new relationships in their final year. Where the majority take a placement, it is those who do not do so who face the loss of their cohort. Their final year is with unknown, older and more experienced students returning from a year's work and this potential for isolation perhaps pushes hesitant students to opt for a placement. There is data on the benefit of the placement year (e.g. Moores & Reddy, 2012; Reddy & Moores, 2012) for degree grade and early career progress. Students are more mature and self-aware and are able to articulate and give work-based examples of their developing competencies, interests and aptitudes backed up by experience and by employer references.

What are your critical reflections?

Entry to professional psychology is at the age of 22+ (rather than 18+ as for medicine and related professions). It is highly competitive and requires both graduate success with the Graduate Basis for Chartership (GBC) and relevant experience. The placement year confers a powerful advantage and many psychology students take posts as honorary (unpaid) assistant clinical psychologists. Unpaid placements are supported by additional student loan, to an extent by the university, by evening and weekend work and by parents. The placement year supports social mobility by giving talented students access and strong support to aim for opportunities, but unpaid placements favour the well-resourced and may limit mobility. Many students take clinical placements, but is this the best use of their time when many will not enter the psychology professions? Biesta (2006) notes that higher education is changing from "learning to be" to "learning to be productive and employable." To what extent do these two dovetail and should we adopt Barnett's (2009) suggestion that higher education should embrace the third pillar of "being and becoming" as well as "skills" and "knowledge"? Does placement preparation help student to "be" and to develop the scholarship and intellectual (epistemic) virtues that Barnett (2009) writes about? I would like to think that we can resolve these divergent aims within psychological literacy.

What worked/what didn't?

Promoting work placements is a long term policy at Aston University and reflects both the University's Charter of 1966 and the aims of the original institution, Birmingham Municipal Technical School, in 1895. The policy is widely disseminated and influences applicants' choice of institution. It is difficult to say if it works; it is what we do. However the points made above about the nature and aims of higher education remain open to debate. Students certainly want access to careers that allow them to practice as psychologists, and they frequently judge the placement year as the most valuable part of their degree. They may be less enthusiastic about the demands of preparing for employment and selection.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Join the debate about the place of employability in psychological literacy, and of both in higher education; about the blend of knowledge, scholarship, skills, work experience and personal development in a psychology degree; about the soul of the discipline in university education.

Where can we see more details?

Lantz, C. (2011). *Psychology student employability guide*. York, Higher Education Academy.
http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/detail/subjects/psychology/Employability-guide

Moores, E. and Reddy, P. (2012). No regrets? Measuring the career benefits of a psychology placement year. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 37 (5) 535-554.

Reddy, P. and Moores, E. (2006). Measuring the benefits of a psychology placement year. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* 31 (5) 551-567.
Reddy, P. and Moores, E. (2012). Placement year academic benefit revisited: effects of demographics, prior achievement and degree programme. *Teaching in Higher Education.* 17 (2) 153-165.

Reddy, P., Lantz, C. and Hulme, J.A. (2013). Employability in Psychology, a guide for departments. York: Higher Education Academy.
https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/3269.

Developing psychological enquiry through peer mentoring

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Key words

Peer-mentoring; Peer-assisted learning.

Synopsis of the case study

The School of Psychology runs a peer-mentoring programme as part of the introductory module 'Psychological Enquiry'. Final-year students act as mentors to groups of first year students and meet with them in weekly, timetabled sessions during the first semester of the academic year. The aims of these sessions are:

- to support the transition from school-based to university-based learning;
- to facilitate social integration and form study groups; and
- to support the development of academic skills relevant to the study of psychology, such as referencing, use of evidence, writing and oral communication.

The mentor sessions are embedded within the wider module, so that each session run by the mentors is linked to a teaching session run by staff, such as lectures and tutorials. The interplay between staff-led teaching and student-led support highlights the relevance of the topics to the students and provides a context for the mentor sessions within the wider field of psychology. Peer mentoring is a promising method for developing psychological literacy: mentees can practice academic skills with their peers and learn from the experience of older students. The mentors have the opportunity to lead a group, share their own experiences in psychology and support the learning of their peers.

What did you/ the participants do?

The mentors are recruited from the final (third) year cohort and receive initial training from the module leader. Subsequent training is on-going: the mentors and the staff coordinator meet in the same week as the mentors meet with their mentees for briefing and discussion.

The mentor sessions are focused around key topics (e.g. psychological myths; correct referencing; use of evidence; etc) and the mentors receive a skeleton structure and materials/activities for the session. In the discussion with the staff coordinator, mentors can amend this skeleton structure and bring in their own ideas on how to run the sessions. Moreover, the planned structure allows ample time for further discussion so that the mentees can bring up any issues with their mentor during their sessions.   In a typical mentor session, the mentor invites the mentees to discuss any issue regarding their psychology degree and their wider university experience. The role of the mentor here is one of peer-support: they can share their own experience of university life and how they tackled similar issues. If there are

issues that require further attention, the mentor can point towards the appropriate university support infrastructure (i.e. personal tutors, student well-being services, etc.). Once initial discussion has abated, mentors can begin introducing the activities: these usually relate to specific academic skills such as referencing, use of evidence, academic writing etc. The context for these skills (i.e. how they relate to the study of psychology etc.) is given in the staff-led lectures, so in the mentor session the aim is to provide an opportunity for practice and development of these skills. The role of the mentor here is to facilitate the activities (which are usually performed in pairs or small groups) and to provide peer support.

What happened/is happening as a result?

The peer-mentoring component of 'Psychological Enquiry' is popular with both mentors and mentees: the mentees welcome the interaction with a more experienced student, while the mentors appreciate the opportunity to develop their own skills in team-leading and communication. Acting as a mentor and being the facilitator of peer-assisted learning can be fruitful preparation for the supportive relationships that are so important in many strands of professional psychology. Those final year students that act as mentors have an opportunity to practice and develop skills and competences relevant to counselling, therapy and education. After they complete their time as a mentor, they have the opportunity to critically reflect on their experiences as part of the final year module 'Professional Skills'. From the mentees perspective, the peer-groups that they worked in with their mentors are maintained in other modules in the wider degree as study and tutorial groups.

What are your critical reflections?

Embedding peer mentoring into the psychology curriculum is a propitious method of enhancing the learning experience of the students. The structured interaction between peers who are at different stages in their degree appears to be of mutual benefit for the development of psychological literacy. Psychology is a broad discipline that incorporates numerous approaches and therefore requires the mastering of a broad set of academic skills, such as the application of the scientific method as well as discursive scholarship and essay writing. Arguably, there a few academic disciplines that require such a variety of skills as psychology (Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education, 2007) and peer-mentoring programmes may provide extra means of support for developing and mastering theses skills. Secondly, many students entering psychology have pervasive misconceptions about the discipline that often persist throughout the first year, if not beyond (Gardner & Dalsing, 1986; Lamal, 1979; Standing & Huber, 2003). Discussing expectations and perceptions with peers and more experienced students can help clarify what psychology is and what to expect from its study. Lastly, the many strands of professional psychology often incorporate training in supportive relationships, as counsellors, therapists or educators (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000). The role of the mentor is good preparation for these relationships and undergraduate students acting as mentors have the opportunity to begin honing and developing skills necessary for professional psychology. The point here is that peer mentoring schemes are highly beneficial for the support of students within a psychology degree

and can contribute greatly to the training and development of psychological literacy, both from the perspective of the mentor as well as the mentee.

What worked/what didn't?

What works:

- Mentors can develop their own skills by supporting younger psychology students;
- Mentees appreciate the input from more experienced peers, who have been in the same situation a few year back;
- New students are put in a situation where they can quickly develop ties to their peers and form study groups;
- The interplay between staff-led lectures and peer –led support allows for intense learning of relevant psychological skills.

Challenges:
- Mentors are not staff – it's important to discuss boundaries and to clarify the role of the mentor to mentees;
- Setting up a structured mentor programme requires a lot of time and dedication – mentors require ongoing staff support and training.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Peer-mentoring programmes have to be relevant to the students' needs to work effectively. One way of achieving relevance is to embed the mentoring into the course and to pair the session with staff-led teaching.

Where can we see more details?

Rosenkranz, P. (2012). Integrating Peer Mentoring into the Psychology Curriculum: from an extended induction to an academic skills course, *Psychology Learning & Teaching*, 11(2), 201-208. http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/plat.2012.11.2.201

Presentation:
http://www.ncl.ac.uk/quilt/assets/documents/LTC2012Rosenkranz.pptx

Applying social psychology: practising what we preach

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Key words

Applied psychology; Authentic assessment; Creative problem solving

Synopsis of the case study

Psychology at the University of Exeter is characterised by a focus on discovering new knowledge and in translating the benefits of that knowledge into innovations and interventions that have the potential to change individuals, groups, and societies. In developing and delivering our final year seminar module, 'Applied Social Psychology: Health, Environment, and Society', we sought to embed this goal into all elements of the module, by actively engaging students in the learning process and encouraging them to develop creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to respond to uncertainty and novel problems. Our goal was for students to progress from simply learning about different theories and approaches in the field of social psychology to actively applying that knowledge to real-world social problems. In other words, we wanted students to start to *think* like an applied social psychologist.

In many applied psychology courses, students study theories and are taught how to apply these to well-selected problems (e.g., using the Theory of Planned Behaviour to understand health behaviour). In the real world, however, the order is reversed: people are confronted with novel problems and the practitioner has to uncover theories and constructs that help them to understand the problem in order to be able to change the behaviours that are causing the problem. The aim of our module was to help students develop a general approach that could be used when faced with any novel or unfamiliar problem. We did this by teaching students how to use the PATH approach. The PATH approach (Buunk & van Vugt, 2013) refers to the stages of identifying and describing the *Problem*, using social psychological theory to *Analyse* the problem, developing a *Test* (or process) model to explain and understand the problem, and designing an intervention (*Help*) based on the test model.

What did you/ the participants do?

The module is comprised of four broad topic areas (health behaviour, organisational behaviour, social harmony, environmental behaviour). Each week, a group of students select a social problem (e.g. drink driving, conflict in Sudan) and present the nature of the problem to their peers (i.e. the Problem phase). Students are encouraged to look outside of academic texts to gather statistics on the problem, newspaper articles, commentaries, interviews with stakeholders etc., to arrive at a clear definition of the problem. Next, as a class, students analyse existing social psychological research to identify constructs that can be used to build an explanatory model. We encourage students to take a multi-theory approach, recognising that the

answer to any problem is unlikely to lie in a single theoretical framework. Next, students work in small groups to build process models to illustrate the relationships among these constructs and to devise theory-based interventions. Once students are familiar with the PATH approach, other activities were introduced, again focusing on enhancing students' psychological literacy. For example, students are asked to bring in existing interventions and to evaluate these based on their psychological knowledge. In another class, after the group had presented the problem, the other students broke up into consultancy teams and developed an analysis and intervention to pitch back to the class. Collectively, the class acted as the commissioning agent, evaluated the pitches, and decided who should receive the contract and why. This process enabled students to both rehearse their learning in a real world scenario and to consider that process from the different perspectives of applied researcher/consultant and commissioning agent/government body.

Assessment complements the classroom-based activities and focuses on developing students' ability to apply psychological knowledge to unfamiliar situations. In the coursework, students have the freedom to select their own social problem and use the PATH approach to understand and propose interventions. In the examination, students are exposed to unseen and novel problems, often reflecting current world events, and again asked to address those problems as an applied social psychologist.

What happened/is happening as a result?

At the time the module was introduced, other final year seminars assessed using a traditional essay format whereby the module convenor selects the questions for students to answer. However, in developing our module, it was important to us that we adopt more authentic assessment. That is, in a module on applied social psychology, students should be expected to apply psychological knowledge themselves, rather than merely learning about the ways in which others have applied social psychology to real world problems. In recent years, one of us (JRS) has been Director of Education for Psychology and has been actively encouraging colleagues – particularly new colleagues – to employ more authentic and varied assessments in their modules that mirror the kinds of activities that psychology graduates might encounter. As a result, final year students now undertake a wider range of coursework formats, including writing scientific blogs or opinion pieces, writing executive summaries for non-academic audiences, or undertaking and reflecting upon interviews with employees. Most recently, all module convenors have been encouraged to reflect upon their own assessment practices and consider including more authentic forms of assessment for their module content.

What are your critical reflections?

One of the key issues in the module is overcoming students' resistance and anxiety about both learning and being assessed in a different way. In the beginning, many students express concern that they have not done anything like this before and worry that they will never "get" the PATH approach, particularly in relation to building process models. As a result, it is important to spend the first part of the module closely supporting students in developing their skills and modelling how to use the approach. Then, in the second part of the module, it is important to give students the

freedom to express those skills and develop mastery over the process and a sense of self-efficacy.

Another focus for student anxiety is the fact that the coursework is not a standard essay. Final year students are quite naturally focused on their final award classification and can be resistant to writing different forms of assessment to those in which they have had more practice. To manage student expectations around the assessment it is important to provide a clear structure and guidance to students and to provide examples of good practice from previous years. In addition, we encourage all students to meet with us on an individual basis so that we can help them refine their process models and their proposed interventions. Despite these anxieties, it is clear that students develop useful skills as a result of the module and their experiences are beneficial in helping them express those skills to potential employers.

What worked/what didn't?

As a whole, the module works well: students comment on the usefulness of the skills gained and many students produce very high quality work that truly demonstrates an innovative approach to the problem and to the literature. However, as noted above, it is vital to manage student expectations around doing something different. If the pedagogical rationale for the module and its activities are not clear to students, this can produce resistance to the aims of the module. One aspect of the module that can work less that optimally is the student presentations. The quality of these presentations can be variable, not only in terms of the content but also in the presentation style. In particular, students often rely too much on presenting points from the assigned readings each week, rather than genuinely following the processes outlined in the Problem phase (e.g., getting statistics, finding lay opinion), indicating a reluctance to engage with the approach. However, this can be overcome by meeting with the students prior to their presentation to discuss what should be covered and to ensure that they stay on track.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

It is important that we design modules and assessment that allows students to develop and express their psychological literacy. However, it is just as important to explain the rationale for apparently "non-standard" activities so that students can perceive the value of such activities for their personal and professional development.

Work, Volunteering and Applied Psychology

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Key words

Work placement; Critical reflection; Applied psychology; Employability.

Synopsis of the case study

Promoting psychological literacy entails reorienting what and how we teach students in a way that emphasises psychology's relevance (Dunn et al., 2011) and providing students with work experience opportunities can encourage them to develop their psychological literacy in a socially responsible way. (Trapp & Akhurst, 2011).

As part of the process of initial professional development, focusing on psychological literacy, critical thinking and reflection, career planning and employability, which runs through the BSc (Hons) Psychology at Cardiff Metropolitan University, we have developed a work placement module at level five, 'Work, Volunteering and Applied Psychology', to provide students with the opportunity to develop both their employability skills and their understanding of the different contexts within which a psychology graduate may work. The placements offer students the opportunity to experience psychology in a work and community context, and the assessment encourages them to focus on their own experiential learning and its relationship with psychological theory.

What did you/the participants do?

The department previously offered a student volunteering module, mentoring year 10 pupils in local schools in an area with a high level of social deprivation. We chose to replace this module with one with a specific psychology focus.

Level five psychology students completed a work placement in an organisation with a psychological context.

Working with local organisations, mainly in the third sector, we sourced a range of placements covering clinical, forensic, health, occupational and educational contexts. Placements offered a range of opportunities and all placements were graded on their level of responsibility and intensity, so students could choose a placement suited to their needs.

The minimum number of hours to be completed was 30, but placement providers could offer longer placements as appropriate. Students have to complete the number of hours agreed to complete the placement.

Students went through a full recruitment process, applying for a range of opportunities. After placement providers had shortlisted, we hosted an interview day and placements were offered to the students.

Students started their placements from October 2013 onwards.

A series of lead lectures at the start of the autumn term covered practical issues about attendance and assessment and also the five psychology pathways (clinical, forensic, health, occupational, educational) available for placements, focusing on the psychological issues they may encounter within their work placement.

Once a student had accepted a placement they were designated an academic supervisor who worked with them on the assignment on an individual basis.

The assessment had both an employability and academic focus, with 40% graded by the placement provider, focusing on employability skills demonstrated, and 60% from a placement incident report, reflecting on their experience and how it related to psychological theory.

What happened/is happening as a result?

We are expanding the number of placements available for 2014-15 with new placement providers signing up for next year and hope in future years to expand the number of pathways offered to include sport psychology, counselling psychology and marketing psychology.

For 2014, we will offer placements through the summer break, so that students can complete their placement before the start of the academic year, reducing the pressure on their time.

We piloted level six work placements this year with 10 students mentoring looked-after children and working with an educational psychologist and the county youth mentoring team. This has worked well and the students have benefited enormously form the opportunity to meet with a range of professionals and so we will expand the level six placements across the other pathways next year, where we can source suitably challenging roles.

We do not expect a high uptake of placements at level 6 due to the high volume of work in the final year, so we have been working with our placement providers to offer work-based research projects. Initially, the placement providers have been asked to provide the research question, but in future years, students and placement providers could work on the question collaboratively. Students will work in the organisation and the participants will be drawn from the service users.

What are your critical reflections?

When we embarked on the process of introducing placements we had no idea of the amount of work it would take. Having found that there was a lot of interest from the students, we decided to offer the module to all level five students the following year

and did not consider the administrative impact this would have on the academic team.

We chose to implement a full recruitment process as part of the module and although this created a lot of work for staff, students and placement providers, it was a very useful process for the students to go through and it ensured that placement providers chose the students they felt were most appropriate for their organisation. Despite the work involved, we will continue with this process. From 2014-15, we will have designated administrative support from the school placement office and this will enable us to expand the work-based learning opportunities we can offer.

Many of the placements required a DBS check and it was agreed that organisations would do the checks. However, this meant that there have been delays with start dates as students and providers got to grips with the new DBS system. We are currently looking at how we can ensure that these delays do not happen in future and are considering doing the DBS checks in advance, or students completing the forms in advance of interview and documents provided as part of the interview process.

The module has been very successful in its first year. The students have proved themselves to be mature and reliable, with only positive feedback from the placement providers. The students have also been very positive about the opportunities afforded them and have enjoyed the placement experience.

We chose to deliver the module primarily through supervision in order to ensure that students received the individual support that they needed, using the same assignment across all pathways, a reflective report, which follows Kolb's reflective learning cycle. At this stage, this seems to have been successful, but some students have engaged with the process more than others, so we are considering a more formal timetable for supervision to ensure that students receive the best support possible.

What worked/what didn't?

Overall, the implementation of placements has been a success, yet there are aspects that could be improved and refined.

The recruitment process worked very well, giving the students the opportunity to develop their application and interview skills, yet there were issues with DBS checks taking a long time and so delaying start dates.

The placement providers also needed a high level of support as for most this was their first experience of student placements. There were a number of forms that needed to be completed and getting these returned was sometimes difficult, with multiple visits and email support needed. Some placements were delayed in their start due to placement providers not being ready, so some placements had to change their focus.

Students chose the module and their preferred pathways before the end of level four, so we knew roughly how many placements were needed. We started the year with

more placements than students, but some students were very focused on their chosen pathway and chose to apply for only a select number of placements, none of which they were offered, so additional placements have needed to be sourced throughout the year. We have learned that it is necessary to have many more placements than students, as not all students will accept any placement.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

Work placements offer excellent opportunities for students to develop psychological literacy and employability skills and experience, but involve a high level of administrative work to implement and support. New placement providers need a lot of additional support so a realistic amount of staff time needs to be given to developing work based opportunities.

Psychologically literate students at Stirling

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Key words

Real-world; Research projects; Confidence; Independence; Leadership;
Collaborating.

Synopsis of the case study

Stirling students undertake an unsupervised group research project with a real-world problem as their final piece of work. In order for them to be able to succeed at this, we spend the year leading up to this point building confidence and independence and provide students with leadership opportunities. This project embodies psychological literacy because the projects, being real world, are usually broad in the psychology they rely on and require students to do some problem solving using their knowledge, skills and insight learned by studying psychology – thereby demonstrating to themselves and others how far they have achieved psychological literacy. We have an element of citizenship in this programme in that the students are given an intended client who their report should be designed for: in other words, they are asked to work for the better good of some person, organisation or community. In many cases, we find that the reports students produce are actually useful in the real world.

The key step in this is the step that leads students to be willing to undertake a research project on the basis of their own independent confidence. In the months preceding this, we work at developing this independence and confidence in students. Unlike the earlier years of their degree programme, there is almost no traditional delivery of teaching to students in their final year. If they want to know something, we tell them to go and find out. All the classes work on the basis of students presenting to students, facilitated (encouraged and applauded) by staff.

For the most exceptional students, we have some significant leadership opportunities. Some final year students design, develop and deliver modules to their peers with minimal staff involvement. Final year (in their 4th year at Stirling) students are used to deliver statistics teaching to second year students: they do some lectures and all the tutorials. The ethos of this teaching is to conceptualise it as learning how to do stats, by repeated practice until it is natural and easy. In effect we replace statistical authority by a system of peer encouragement.

What did you/the participants do?

All students sign up for a group project in March of their final year. They choose from a set of outlines provided by staff. For each project there is a title and a paragraph explaining the issue. Occasionally, if required there is a single reference. No more

than this is given to the students and they have no idea which member of staff proposed the topic. From this point onwards, they are academically on their own. No instruction, supervision or other academic help and support is provided. They must answer the project question on the basis of what they have learned to date. They are given support for the group-working element of this – where needed – but no hints as to how to proceed with the work.

All of the projects are of a form that requires students to take knowledge, insights, methods and skills that they have acquired during their degree programme and apply them to a real world issue. Often that issue is complex and multi-dimensional and they are told to do what they can in the time available.

They are given six weeks to do the work and to produce two reports: a technical report for an identified stake-holder in the issue and a non-technical report for a lay audience. The work will typically involve gathering evidence (data) and processing it appropriately. They are given no instructions about the reports, except a word limit. They are free to determine for themselves how best to present their answer.

Students taking leadership opportunities are invited to discuss with myself. If they wish to do statistics teaching to second years, we get them to do a trial (part of a) lecture to their peers; if they wish to run a student-led elective module, I discuss in detail their proposal and their motivation. If either is not to my satisfaction they are gently but firmly turned down. Those accepted into these roles are then supported during the process of delivery by regular meetings.

What happened/is happening as a result?

The unsupervised projects are invariably done with success – often with real insight and imagination. This has some very interesting and powerful consequences. Our students feel professional; they articulate the skills and knowledge that they have demonstrated. This is in sharp distinction to their starting point at the beginning of their final year when the idea of an unsupervised project seems daunting. Our staff begins to take some justifiable pride in what these students are demonstrating. This point is worth emphasizing: letting someone go and do something without any instruction or supervision feels risky. But it is a crucial step: just like letting a child ride a cycle without you holding the saddle. Our experience is that it is safe, however; our students are ready and able to do this. They become better people for doing it, not least because they can take all the credit for the outcome.

The student leadership also works well. The students who take these opportunities tend to have the highest rise in their fourth year grades compared to third year. They all say that they feel massively more confident in themselves. They all are aware that the experience is a valuable one for making applications for postgraduate courses and employment. Interestingly, the students who are led by their peers also do very well. Our observation is that the best student-led electives are typically the most productive and enjoyable. Students learning statistics in second year do very well, better in our experience that previously when the module was taught by staff and postgraduate students.

What are your critical reflections?

My own personal reflections are somewhat unexpected. Overall, I find a new pleasure in my job driven mostly by a strong communal sense shared with the students that this matters for them and that they see quick and observable gains in themselves. There is a complete switch in my role: I am no longer an engineer of their grades; I am a collaborator in their growth. I believe that there is a new dignity in this role, akin to the dignity I observed in university lecturers when I was a student decades ago. This feels very important. Provided the students can understand this different role (and a lot of the early weeks of the year are given over to this), then we work differently and almost entirely collaboratively.

I see most students flourish under this system. Not all do, and I will reflect on that separately. Students' grades improve but that isn't the intention. More to the point, they begin to feel differently about themselves. A quote from a student this year at our graduation:

"You see all those oral presentations you made me do and the work we did together to make me feel ok about it. Well, I just went for an interview last week and I was the only person being interviewed who wasn't nervous. It all paid off."

Not all students can cope with this different agenda. Those weak students who aren't able to risk a challenge feel more exposed. Typically, given 80% female students, the weaker male students can struggle. We don't yet have a fix for this. The catch is that an alternative route would be adopted by some students who would actually cope fine with this one. For now, we invest large amounts of time with the struggling students keeping them going.

For me, personally, psychological literacy is more about attitudes, especially confidence and independence, than anything else. In that sense, it is the most ambitious and yet most desirable goal for a university education.

What worked/what didn't?

The projects that are produced are nearly always of a good quality. Interestingly the grade distribution shows that the more able students are not disadvantaged but the less able students gain an advantage.

More importantly, we discover that the students really do become psychologically literate citizens. They are able to reflect well on their performance and frequently acquire a strong desire for their findings to be used. In terms of their development, we are giving them a good opportunity to demonstrate what they alone are capable of. This feeds into their applications for further study or work.

The group nature of the work is important; collective confidence is much better than individual confidence. It does bring problems occasionally with groups that don't work effectively. We deal with this by a form of permissive group working and reporting. Groups are free to split; group members are free to share the results of their efforts with group members who are also working, but to withhold them from

group members who are not working. We offer significant support for helping to mend groups when required.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

The strongest recommendation we would make is to give your students the opportunity to do something significant without academic instruction, supervision or support. We find that this is a formative experience for many.

Where can we see more details?

Watt, R. (2013). Developing the psychologically literate citizen at Stirling. York, Higher Education Academy. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/node/7555.

The BSc (Hons) Psychology programme at the University of Stirling was awarded the Award for Innovation in Psychology Programmes by the BPS in 2014-15 for its embedding of psychologically literate citizenship into the curriculum. Details of the award can be found here: http://www.bps.org.uk/award-innovation-psychology-programmes. The BPS intends to publish further information on the Stirling award on its website in the near future.

Occupational psychology case study

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Key words

Occupational psychology; Problem-based learning; Consultancy; Workplace behaviour; Well-being

Synopsis of the case study

The applied approach to student learning in the 'Occupational Psychology' module at Salford University encourages students to think critically about theoretical models by considering their use in real-world settings. The aim is to encourage improved well-being in a workplace of their choice. Whilst many choose this final-year undergraduate module for its relevance to the workplace, it is recognised that only a small number are likely to be budding work psychologist. However this does not deter us from fostering an appropriately critical perspective of workplace behaviours, including those which many students have already encountered as employees. For those not yet in the workplace an increased awareness of some of the challenges ahead is no less an important asset. Class-based lectures and discussions about a range of topics, from bullying to work-life balance, each linked to well-being at work, mean that students do not experience this module at an emotional distance, but rather as living topic in which they are the key players.

This encourages the student to play the role of an organisational consultant, using their psychological knowledge to inform recommendations which they develop as though they are the practitioner, using theory to inform problem-based solutions. By focusing on well-being and giving students the opportunity to personalise their learning in terms of job choice, it is hoped they can take ownership of the problems they identify and from there a sense of empowerment in relation to the workplace. As a sense of control is a key determinant of well-being at work, students are able to raise and consider meaningful issues and to develop a personal ethic around implementing change for the common good – arguably the key aspiration for psychologists and those wishing to apply psychological principles.

What did you/the participants do?

Each student is encouraged to take a problem-based approach to their own job or one with which they are familiar, or even one to which they aspire, and analyse the key issues which impact on the individual carrying out that job, whether it is him/her, a family member or friend or a generic worker in that role. If they wish they can interview the person carrying out the job. Commonly identified problems include a lack of control, poor managerial practices, unreasonable workloads, and work-family conflict. However the stipulation is that having been made aware of a range of models developed by occupational psychologists, that they select one which will provide a theoretical basis for their analysis. A balance of situation- and person-

centred models is covered so that the student can choose any from six approaches in relation to just about any job, e.g. Warr's Vitamin Model; Karasek's Job Strain Model; Affective Events Theory. The permutations and variety are boundless. Having selected their model and job, the student must use their analysis to highlight recommendations for change in the workplace linked to the issues arising – once again the research literature must be used to support their proposals which they should evaluate in light of the likely obstacles they feel their recommendations may face.

Past examples have included typical jobs carried out by students while earning money to keep them financially solvent, such as bar and retail work, as well as careers in which they hope to work, or have previously worked, including teaching, health and social care. However this is also a forum in which employees as diverse as international sportsmen and women, hairdressers, estate agents and nightclub bouncers get to exchange views on improving their respective experiences of working.

What happened/is happening as a result?

"This is the most useful assignment I have ever done", one student told me. As an ex-nurse, she went on to say how the case study experience had given her the opportunity to evaluate the reasons underlying her emotions about the work environment she had left. Whether this serves a therapeutic function looking back, or, as others have found, an opportunity to learn about potential career paths, there are hopefully benefits in using the assignment to hone analytical and problem-solving skills, which facilitate growing confidence in dealing with often complex scenarios. With employability in mind, students have also found the exercise a successful selling point at job interviews, where they can demonstrate that they have not simply carried out relevant research about the role for which they are applying, but they can also talk in an informed manner about how they might approach it. If this helps to develop the kind of 'savvy' that employers of graduates call out for, then the feedback seems to be positive. Of course this is not to say that students need this assignment to develop job-related awareness, but the argument for including such an exercise within undergraduate programmes is a strong one. For those whose employers are also keen to learn this can represent a golden opportunity to impress.

What are your critical reflections?

As a psychologist specialising in workplace matters, I consider the experience of encouraging students to think critically about the quality of their working lives to be highly significant. I feel confident that if students are encouraged to grasp real-world situations from a perspective of improvement then they are better equipped to deal with situations that not only they face, but others for whom they are responsible as managers or advocates will encounter too. Without explicit mention I suspect as a class we are really focusing on the politics of the workplace; we know it exists and shapes so much behaviour, but we are often reluctant to point it out and address it. Of course this does not mean that work is all bad news and that nobody can be trusted, but instead that students' expectations of work need not be unrealistic or indeed unnecessarily constrained. Some of the most memorable exchanges in class

feature students sharing their experiences in previous job roles with other students, debating why a situation arose and how they were able to deal with it. Naturally there are both happy and less happy endings, but always opportunities for learning. I am not shy about sharing my own work experiences as appropriate and by doing so I try to demonstrate that we should take care to preserve the anonymity of the organisations we choose to scrutinise. The development of a personal ethic is part of the process which some may call political awareness-raising. This type of consultancy comes naturally to many students, who will often refer to organisations and employees by fictionalised names and whose recommendations are rarely without substance.

What worked/what didn't?

It can be tempting to bite off more than can realistically be considered in 2000 words, so students are encouraged to focus on a particular job, rather than a whole organisation; however this does not always channel enthusiasm away from attempting to solve the challenges facing the UK National Health Service.   I sometimes fear that an individual may barge into their workplace and begin to 'lay down the law' with potentially negative consequences for their employment, but we do talk about the potential pitfalls of trying to introduce change in the workplace and I am confident that nobody yet has landed in organisational 'hot water' as a result of this exercise. It is not always easy to evaluate the potential downside of one's own recommendations, especially after finding ringing endorsements for it in the relevant literature, but this critical reflection is one aim of the exercise and the second assignment in the module follows up on this. Students demonstrate they have gained the following: analytical ability in a workplace setting, skill in using the relevant literature to help build a business rationale, an awareness that alternatives to the status quo at work do exist and ethical and political capacity in considering how change can be implemented.

What do you recommend to others as a result of this?

I believe the case study approach to organisations can really help students apply psychological principles to real-world settings – by choosing workplaces which are important to individuals it is possible to enable students to foster a sense of ownership over challenges faced and hopefully enhanced control in developing solutions. In other words, workplace scenarios provide fertile ground for growing the skills of would-be psychologists and valuable employees alike.

Further resources

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