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Module Overview: PS20220 – Social Psychology

For this teaching cycle, the module PS20220: Social Psychology was used and ran in semester 2 immediately after the previous teaching cycle. Given the last teaching cycle and the experimental nature of the Wikis, for this module the Wikis were assessed and allocated 10% of their overall module mark. The main rationale for this change was to reduce the potential for students to not engage with the activity as in the previous teaching cycle. As such, given that I was uncertain of the outcome I chose this module as our original cohort of students were enrolled and had only eight students; any negative consequences to their learning as a result for the Wiki would therefore be minimal. In general, the module aimed to provide an introduction to the core principles and theories in social psychology, without assuming any prior knowledge of the subject. In addition, the module also provided an overview of scientific methods in social psychology as well as introduce some of the applications of social psychology in modern life. The module covered topics such as social cognition, group processes, and social influence. The learning outcomes were as followed:

1. Define social psychology and understand the research methods used in social psychology.
2. Demonstrate a broad knowledge and understanding of key topics in social psychology.
3. Relate and contrast social psychological theories and approaches to the real world.
4. Be able to design and conduct a social psychology research report and deliver their results as part of a group.

As the modules in the previous teaching cycles, this module was a one semester module meeting twice a week via two 50 minute lectures and fortnightly seminars that lasted 2 hours. However, to encourage participation the Wikis were assessed (10%) in conjunction with one essay (30%) and end of semester exam (60%).

Focus of Teaching Cycle

Again, in line with the main theme of the teaching cycles, the main activity intended to promote independent and peer teaching and learning through the use of Web 2.0 applications, such as Wikis. As in the previous cycle, another outcome was to enhance student’s ability to engage with psychology literature to achieve the teaching cycles intended
outcomes, and therefore module learning outcomes. To overcome the disappointing results from teaching cycle two, including Wikis as part of the students overall module mark act as an incentive to increase participation. As such, 10% of their mark was allocated through participation in the wikis. As such, as in the previous teaching cycle, by using Wikis a 4th outcome from this teaching cycle raises students’ awareness of Web 2.0 applications as learning tools; increasing their transferable skills through using technology. Again, as in the previous two teaching cycles I feel that students will be learning new skills at an early stage that they continue using through their degree and into employment. However, rather than use the same procedure as in the previous teaching cycle, for this cycle I based the Wikis on an activity I had received as an undergraduate described in the previous teaching cycle. To reiterate, the activity promoted independent learning through students developed their own learning log and glossary of key terms and studies in Cognitive Psychology. For me, this was the best form of learning and I am keen to share this experience and examine the usefulness of this method with my students. To promote peer learning in conjunction with independent learning, the students were asked to work in pairs and allow their peers to view their Wikis for revision. The muddiest point was not used in this teaching cycle as students were provided with a list of key terms to research (appendix X).

Planning, Structuring, and Implementation

As in the previous teaching cycle, students were prepared for the activity by providing a description of the activity and the intended outcomes at the beginning of the semester during seminars. Students were shown how to edit and post onto the Wikis and were given the opportunity to ask questions. To supplement the demonstration, the ‘How To’ guides available from Information Services and the Blackboard Team were distributed. Students were then told that they were in charge of maintaining their pair’s Wiki (one student of seven chose to work alone). The Wikis had already been established by the lecturer and all students were required to pick one of the four groups set up and contribute and maintain their Wiki. The students were told to maintain the sight throughout the semester on a weekly basis. Students were then handed the list of key terms to research. Students were able to tackle each term in any order but the key terms should remain topic specific rather than presented as an alphabetised list (see appendix X for an example). Once the semester was complete, each group’s Wiki would be made available to the course so that all students could benefit from different groups’ contributions. Students were left free to be creative with their Wikis and no restrictions were implemented. As the Wikis were assessed, a Wiki specific assessment form was created based on an assessment form used on an
Information Technology in a Global Society (ITGS) course as part of the International Baccalaureate Diploma, and shown in appendix XI.

Results and Evaluation of Teaching Cycle Three

To evaluate the impact of using Wikis as an educational tool, the same Wiki evaluation form was used as in the previous teaching cycle (see appendix IX), and were are based on the portfolio’s main theme of increasing independent and peer learning and teaching. These forms were completed at the same time as the module evaluation forms in the final lecture.

On the whole, the Wikis had a large impact as all students participated in the activity and completed the activity to its fullest. When reviewing the evaluation form most students reported mostly having only moderate usefulness for the Wikis (see Table 2). Specifically, questions three to eight attempted to assess whether the Wiki facilitated students’ independent and (see table 2) peer learning and teaching. Most responses for these questions averaged a mean response of three and it appeared that the students in this cycle found the Wikis useful as a tool for understanding their course content and enhancing their independent research and learning, and would use and recommend the tool in future. However, they felt that the Wikis did not help in understanding more difficult concepts and issues covered in class.

Table 2. Mean scores for Wiki activity
The most positive response \((M = 3.8)\) was question eight, 'I would use Wikis in future to supplement my revision', while the least positive response \((M = 2.3)\) was question six, 'I felt peers contributions were very helpful'. The contrast in results is anecdotally both encouraging and disappointing as students recognised the Wikis potential but also that peer learning was not achieved; more likely to do with the activity rather than the Wiki as a learning tool. For example, students' informal comments during the course described how other group members did not contribute to the activity as much as others in the class. This may have been for reasons discussed in the previous teaching cycles, such as social loafing. Students then, were expecting their peers to have provided more useful information than they received and seemed disappointed that their peers work was not as detailed as hoped or of a similar level to their own.

As in the previous teaching cycles, students also provided generic feedback about the module using the same feedback form. Again, this module received high scores for overall satisfaction, where 83% agreed that they were satisfied with the course, but one student was only partially satisfied. Again, this is a very pleasing response from students and at the very least, the Wiki activity did not detract from their course satisfaction. Students however, did not provide qualitative feedback and so it is difficult to ascertain whether the Wiki activity contributed to their satisfaction with the course.

**Conclusions and reflection**

Overall, the use of the Wiki activity was a tremendous improvement than in the previous teaching cycle, and from that comparison I would consider this cycle to be a success. The students did a lot of work although there was some loafing, which is expected during group activities. The summative activity appeared to have positive effects and anecdotally, at least, it appears to have achieved some of the intended outcomes. Firstly, students engaged in further reading and this was evident in their Wikis, and students felt more confident in their knowledge and ability to understand research journals. Secondly, students felt that the activity was engaging as in teaching cycle one, and felt that they were teaching themselves. However, it appears that peer learning was not achieved because students felt that their peers had not performed as well as they had hoped. This might be one consequence of increased confidence in their own ability to research and present the material. Third, students genuinely felt accomplished in using Web 2.0 applications and upon reflection thought they were useful tools. This is evident in question eight of the Wiki evaluation forms.
There are of course drawbacks to using this activity in future, some of which were identified by students. Firstly, because students found their peer’s Wikis less engaging students relied more heavily on their own work. Although I strongly endorse this, I am concerned that students might miss out on the valuable contributions that their peer’s perspective can have on the same content. Secondly, the change to assessing the Wikis meant that students felt that other group members were not contributing enough, not just in their own group, but to the activity overall. I do sympathise with students as I, like many others, have experienced group loafers that benefit from the conscientiousness of others but at the same time drag the group’s mark down and the positives of the experience. However, working in groups is a common practice after University and a group management is a skill I feel students should learn to manage effectively. In future, it might be worth introducing into the rubric a stricter way of assessing individuals’ quality rather than history of contributions to try and prevent loafing. Additionally, the shift from having the activity not assessed to assessed seemed to make the students more motivated and therefore, although students would like to be free of assessments to engage in learning activities, in reality they would not engage with them as demonstrated in Teaching Cycle Two. As such, in future I will need to consider which activities to include in a module and how whether they should be assessed.

Despite the above drawbacks, I am pleased with the outcome of this activity and that the outcomes have been met. The students did a very thorough job and were generally happy to have taken part. The main points to be taken away and considered for the future with this activity is to think of ways to promote peer learning in a more effective manner and further prevent loafing by group members. However, I am encouraged that the students saw the potential of such an application in their education and learning strategies. As mentioned in the previous teaching cycle, students are also strategists in that they will only engage with academic activities that facilitate their grades. To be blunt, learning activities need to be turned into assessed coursework in order for them to full engage with their studies on a long-term basis (i.e. over a semester). If the Wiki could be turned into an in-class activity then this would abolish the need to have it assessed, but then the Wiki is meant for a more long-term use.