



		University	Strathclyde
		Department	Psychology
		Module	Basic Psychology
		Overview	The traditional first year Basic Psychology class, which accommodated approximately 600 students comprised 48 lectures, 4 tutorials and 10 supervised practical laboratories over the year. Assessment comprised two paper-based multiple-choice tests over the year (25%), tutorial participation and associated 200 word mini-essays (4%), participation in an experiment (5%) and a final exam in which students were required to write three essays from a choice of twelve topic questions (66%). Students received an additional 5% for participation in experiments and other studies run by the department and its students.
		Drivers for change	The large class size limited the opportunity for individual feedback and assessment was time consuming, with high costs in staff time in terms of marking and supervision. Multiple-choice tests provided only summative feedback (i.e. marks), with little if any feedback provided for written coursework. Students were reluctant to interact in tutorials, even when the introduction of short assessed essays ensured content engagement.
		Intervention	Transformation of assessment was achieved through the introduction of progressively more complex formative assessments (scaffolding) throughout first year, which were linked to supportive peer discussion processes. In 2005-6, the first stage of the intervention was piloted with a group of 78 students, split into peer groups of 6, who were invited to take part in on-line group presentations designed around incrementally challenging tasks that depended upon peer collaboration. In the presentation task, students are initially asked to develop a 50 word answer to a set question individually. These short answers are then distributed to a pre-assigned study group for comment and discussion via the institution's e-learning environment, WebCT. Thereafter, a 100 word answer to a more difficult question is developed collaboratively and after feedback (in the form of model answers), a 300 word final submission is developed by the group and a further model answer supplied. Post-test questionnaires and 2 focus groups revealed a positive student response to the experience and indicated that peer collaboration had enhanced their understanding of topics and confidence in their learning ability. The current intervention involves rolling out these changes across all curriculum topics, reducing the lectures by half (from 48 to 24) and redistributing student time across 20 online exercises similar in form to those in the pilot. These activities are supported by a virtual learning environment (WebCT) the use of model answers selected from the students' postings and by subsidiary reading material. The transformed assessment structure includes class tests (20%), the on-line exercises (10%), the research participation scheme (5%), and degree exam (65%). The intervention has increased self, peer and tutor formative feedback before, during and after each online learning exercise and has helped build a learning communities. Further research will show whether this intervention has helped the course leader identify students in difficulty, reduced administration, improved progression into second year and, importantly, improved exam performance.
		Activities	
PROCESS	EMPOWER-MENT	NICOL'S 7 PRINCIPLES OF GOOD ASSESSMENT DESIGN	Principle 1 (clarify criteria) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Prior to undertaking the tasks in the online group project, students are able to access answer guidelines. 2) Following their initial 50 word on-line individual submission, students are able to download model answers before, during or after stages 2 and 3 of their group submissions. 3) Students gain progressive clarification of goals and standards through the repeated cycle of submissions and adaptations before submitting the final on-line group presentation.
			Principle 2 (self-assess, reflect) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Students reflect on their on-line submissions in light of comments from their peers 2) A scaffolding approach has been used for the tasks, with the firsts three exercises asking the students to give classification of terms and to list facts, and the four subsequent tasks requiring a collaborative essay. 3) Students can self-evaluate the quality of their submission by comparing it with the tutor-provided model answers. 4) Students can assess the growth in their confidence over different stages of the task.



ENGAGEMENT GIBBS & SIMPSON'S 4 CONDITIONS OF TIME & EFFORT ON TASK	Principle 3 (tutor feedback)	1) During the on-line task, students receive feedback in the form of answer guidelines and teacher selected exemplars.
	Principle 4 (peer feedback)	1) Students obtain on the spot generic feedback from peers using WebCT while the assignment is being completed. 2) Students engage in debate around the selected question in order to assess the strengths of their own argument and reasoning and that of the other group members. This enables them to compare and contrast their own knowledge with their peers while increasing autonomy by encouraging them to explore information or interpretations outwith the course remit. 3) Students can gain increased understanding of feedback when it is provided by peers since it is likely to be formulated in linguistic terms that they as fellow students are more familiar with.
	Principle 5 (motivation)	1) The staged complexity of the questions (scaffolds learning development) and the focus on learning rather than marks should enhance students' motivation 2) The social support, group cohesion and reinforced social identity from being a group member may help to strengthen self-esteem.
	Principle 6 (close feedback loop)	1) Students can close the learning and performance gap through the repeated learning, practice and feedback cycle offered by the progressive stages of the on-line assignments.
	Principle 7 (shape teaching)	1) Staff can gain student feedback through monitoring of the on-line submissions, in terms of both discussion content and performance.
	Condition 1 (in and out of class)	1) Students must submit 3 answers for each of the assignments, which provide multiple opportunities for study and revision between each submission.
	Condition 2 (spread evenly)	1) The tasks rely on effort and adequate allocation of study time of all of the members of the group who must work together as a team to ultimately develop a group answer ensuring engagement of all students with peers, tutors and content material.
	Condition 3 (deep not surface)	1) Students can ensure that they are engaging in the appropriate kind of study by recording comparing and contrasting their understanding of the task, feedback and learning strategies with other students in the virtual learning environment. This encourages them to think at a deeper level about learning both in and out of class time
	Condition 4 (high expectations)	1) Students are able to meet learning expectations by referring to standard answer guidelines, model answers and by engaging in peer discussion and reflection on tasks and feedback.



OUTCOME	Efficiencies	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Savings have been in terms of staff teaching time with the reduction of lectures from 48 to 24.2) Marking time is reduced with on-line assessment and automatic generic feedback based on exemplars
	Informal Learning Gains	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Increased engagement with peers and concepts2) Students were substantially more autonomous in their approach to learning than in the traditional format.3) Peer feedback increased student reflection through active engagement and debate.4) Student questionnaire and focus group responses indicated that group work was a useful aide but requests for more individual feedback and increased staff monitoring5) Staff considered students performing well beyond competence levels of 1st year6) Staff observations of increased and more evenly distributed student time on task.7) Staff can observe students progress much earlier on and make interventions or adjustments8) Student questionnaire responses indicated that students considered the new system to offer them more flexibility in their learning
	Formal Learning Gains	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) There was a significant improvement in the average student mark from last year with the mean score going from 51.1% to 57.42%. (t= 8.079, df = 906, p= 0.000, one tailed).2) The failure rate has dropped significantly from 13% failing the final year exam, to 5%. In addition, the failure rate for the whole course has dropped from 12.1% to 2.8%.3) The gap between psychology majors and non-psychology majors has been closed. In 2005/06 the average pass rate for majors and non-majors was 55.4% versus 48.52%. In 2006/7 students majoring in Psychology had an average score of 57.61% and other students averaging 57.45%.