Report Template

ABOUT THE PROJECT
Title Scaled-up Social Psychology: A move in the right direction?
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Keywords (Max 4) Student-centered, active learning environments.

OVERVIEW
Overview, Aims and Context (the rationale including underpinning pedagogy) (summarise the activity in 2 or 3 sentences, max 50 words) A growing body of research indicates significant improvements in learning from adopting a SCALE-UP approach to teaching delivery including increased problem solving, deeper levels of conceptual understanding, better engagement and improvements in retention and attrition (Beichner et al., 2007; Dori & Belcher, 2004). This study sought to expand on this pedagogic evidence base by evaluating the use of a scaled-up approach to delivering a second year social psychology module. The initiative served to deepen student levels of learning as reflected in their academic achievement, enhance their level of engagement, improve their course satisfaction and problem solving skills and enhance their sense of belonging.
Description (a brief description of the activity; and how you have used innovative pedagogies and approaches in the curriculum design; max 200 words) The traditional lecture format for a second year Social Psychology module was replaced by 3 hours of activity-based instruction delivered as one teaching block each week for twelve weeks. Each block comprised activities to test and/or consolidate understanding of preparatory work; a series of twenty-minute mini-lectures were used to introduce new concepts; group and individual activities helped to clarify understanding and engage students more explicitly with the academic discipline; five minute summaries of sessional activities were also provided and; group and individual reflections on learning and group effectiveness were included. The evaluation involved second year students from the School of Psychology, within Ulster University. However, only those students studying Social Psychology were exposed to the intervention (N=42). To evaluate its effectiveness, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed. Specifically, a questionnaire survey was administered at the beginning and towards the end of the process, thereby allowing for a comparison of students exposed to the intervention with a group of second year students who were not. Feedback was also sought through focus groups and via the module evaluation process.

Design (methodological approach (qualitative and quantitative evaluation); and)

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed to evaluate the intervention. The former was a questionnaire survey; the latter involved a series of focus groups and feedback sought through module evaluation.

Questionnaire Survey:

The survey focused specifically on the following measures:

(i)   Student Engagement: The Student Course Engagement questionnaire (SCEQ) (Handelsman, Briggs, Sullivan and Towler, 2005) was used to measure student engagement. The SCEQ is a self-report 23 item scale with response options ranging from 1 (not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (very characteristic of me) assessing four dimensions of student engagement: skills engagement, participation/interaction engagement, emotional engagement and performance engagement.

(ii)   Problem-Solving: The Problem-Solving Inventory (PSI; Heppner & Petersen, 1982) was used to measure problem-solving appraisal. The PSI (Form A; Heppner & Petersen, 1982) is composed of 32 6-point Likert-type items rated on a 6-point scale ranging from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (6) that measure people's perceptions of their personal problem solving behaviours and attitudes.

(iii)   Student Belonging: Sense of belonging was measured using the 5-item Learning Community subscale contained within the Student Experience Questionnaire developed by McInnis et al (2001). These items concern student perceptions of the social experience of learning at university and indicate their sense of belonging to a community where learning with other people is a priority. Response options are based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

(iv)   Communication Skills: Communication skills was measured using the 4-item scale devised by Mullan and Kothe (2010). This is a self-rated semantic differential scale scored using a visual analogue response option with students rating each item on a score from 0 to 100. Each of the four items are related to self-rated communication ability (e.g. I think my communication skills are excellent, I am confident in my communication skills) and are summed to give an overall self-rated ability score.

(v)   Student Satisfaction: Course satisfaction was measured using the 9-item scale devised by Mullan and Kothe (2010). This is a self-rated semantic differential scale scored using a visual analogue response option with students rating each item on a score from 0 to 100. Each of the nine items are related to students' level of satisfaction with the course (e.g. I find the course useful) and are summed to give an overall satisfaction score.

Focus Groups Interviews and Student Evaluations:

Focus group interviews were conducted with two groups of participants enrolled in the Social Psychology module PSY310). Students were also encouraged to provide informal feedback during their weekly activity-based sessions and through the module evaluation survey. The sample size for this stage of the study was based on the recommendations of Morgan (1994). As such, each focus group comprised 8 participants. To allow for a

diversity of views on the topic two focus group discussions were conducted. This provided an opportunity to explore students' impressions of the intervention in more depth. The focus group discussions were conducted by an independent moderator (PhD demonstrator). A steering group comprising three academic staff and a student representative (i.e. a PhD demonstrator) met regularly to monitor and review progress. Ethical approval for data collection was sought and obtained from the School of Psychology's Filter Committee.

RESULTS

Findings and Conclusions: (provide information on results/findings, evidence and conclusions)

Findings suggest that the SCALE-UP approach had a positive impact on the student learning experience. For example, in terms of the module evaluation survey, a mean score of 4.69 (on a scale of 1 to 5) was obtained in response to 'overall satisfaction with the module'. Further, a mean score of 4.77 was obtained in response to the 'module was delivered in a way that was clear and consistent'. Here, the highest mean score was achieved in response to 'my learning experiences on this module were interesting and engaging' (4.85). In fact, none of the responses received in relation to the survey were below 4.27.

Perhaps more importantly, whilst there were no significant differences between any of the measured variables at time one (see questionnaire survey), those exposed to the SCALE-UP intervention reported to be more satisfied with their course at time two than those not exposed to the intervention (mean = 39.54 for intervention group; mean = 35.38 for no intervention group). The students exposed to the SCALE-UP intervention also reported a greater sense of belonging (mean = 20.90 for intervention group; mean = 18.39 for no intervention group), were more engaged (mean = 20.40 for intervention group; mean = 15.35 for no intervention group) and perceived themselves to be better at problem solving (mean = 128.36 for intervention group; mean = 120.04 for no intervention group).

Performance data for those exposed to the SCALE-UP intervention was also better than that obtained from previous cohorts. For example, the average coursework mark was 65.7% compared to 55.9% in 2013/2014 with 24.4% of students achieving a first class mark. Of particular note, was the better use made of the relevant research literature. Exam performance was also particularly pleasing. Indeed, the mean exam mark was 59.3% compared to an all-time low of 41.9% in 2013/2014. Moreover, 11.4% of students achieved first class marks (the figure was 5% in 2013/2014) and only one student failed the exam, although passed overall given their coursework performance.

Further, the qualitative data elicited from the focus groups and the module evaluation strongly suggests that students liked the more active approach to learning and teaching. More specifically, the findings indicate that they seemed to appreciate the module's applied nature, the increased focus on essay writing and liked being part of a small group. For example, students commented:

> "The lecturer for this module was able to allow us to partake in group work to help us in our understanding of different subjects. By doing this group work it was easier to obtain and remember the information presented to us"

> "The group work was an excellent change, it really helps in building understanding and confidence in the materials. Very good class, and overall one of my favourite classes."

"This was my favourite module, and I loved the interaction between the lecturer and student. Very approachable lecturers, a relaxing and enjoyable setting. Much better when it comes to retaining information. "

"Engaging tasks between students as well as between students and lecturers. Smaller classes allowed more interaction between students and lecturer. Lecturers can inspire students with previous studies that they have done. "

"I thoroughly enjoyed the topics covered in this module. XXXX really made sure each member of the class understood each topic in class before moving on. The small classroom and small number of people made me feel more comfortable especially when it came to asking questions. This also enabled me to feel more important and XXXX soon got to know me as a student in her class. "

"All the course materials and lectures provided were very interesting and there was plenty of further reading and recourses on blackboard. I particularly enjoyed working in the small groups in class on a Friday as I am quiet nervous to answer out in class and I feel this has helped my confidence"

"I absolutely loved this module, both XXXX and XXXX are superb. The lab report was interesting and was a pleasure to complete, I learned a lot about methodologies and statistics which I feel gives me confidence for my final year project, I didn't want this module to end. XXXX's lecturers are the best I have had at University and I will remember them for years to come. "

"This module was my favourite this year, I found that being in groups within a lecture room was a more relaxed atmosphere which allowed me to feel comfortable asking questions which I don't in other Lecture rooms. The material was very interesting and explained in detail throughout the lectures but also activities and group work which I found really helpful. The material is easier to remember through doing the activities which is making revising a little easier. Both lecturers were very approachable. Overall I feel that having the module for both Psychology and Social Psychology students is a good choice :) "

"Topics covered were very interesting and allowed us to delve in social psychology a lot more - applied social psychology to real life contexts and highlighted the important of social psychology. Really liked the lab report - a lot of help, support and guidance provided and XXXX always made sure everyone was at the same level of understanding. Also seemed very happy to help whenever we needed it. Wide range of sources provided for lab report to get us started, which was very useful (and generous!). Essay plan component of the module is great - allows us to engage with the material more outside of class and encourages us to find more resources to ensure we're not relying solely on lecture notes. Also enjoyed the interactive aspect of the classes - I felt more comfortable speaking out in class, as it was a smaller group and felt like I could contribute without being judged. Very different from a lecture hall set-up in which I wouldn't speak up and ask/answer questions. Really enjoyed XXXX's half of the module, as it gave us an insight into the psychological processes underpinning the intergroup conflict in the country, it was really enlightening to discuss how social psychology can be applied to an area of life specific to the people of NI. Lectures were delivered enthusiastically and XXXX always expanded on the lecture PowerPoints, which was great. Blackboard was also updated with in advance and lecturers provided appropriate reading materials."

"The class is small which makes it easier to speak out. Lecturers make you feel really comfortable about asking questions when you don't understand something and the teaching is relaxed which makes it easier to understand what is being taught. A lot of information provided on each topic."

"This module has been my favourite by far! I have really enjoyed the small class size as well as the opportunity to discuss topics with peers, feedback to the lecturers what we've discussed then have them feedback immediately where we have understood or identified any gaps in our understanding. The real life application examples used throughout this module has been invaluable also as being able to connect what we've learned with what we've experienced helps to consolidate the learning. Both XXXX and XXXX have a gift for reading their students and being able to see when a topic hasn't been understood fully or when a break is needed. The active learning approach has been an enjoyable learning experience and I would really love to have/have had more of it throughout the degree. Thank you!"

"The delivery of each lectures were presented interestingly and clearly which, I felt made the engagement process more effective. I enjoyed how there was more social interaction within the class. "

EVALUATION

Reflective Commentary (this should draw from your experience and identify what worked well and what were the key challenges;)

Whilst the students appeared to enjoy the approach taken in this module, they were initially somewhat apprehensive and reluctant to speak out in class. With this in mind, some thought is needed with respect to the nature and timing of activities. Good preparation is essential. The academic responsible for delivering the sessions must also be flexible and responsive to the needs of the students. Class size is also important; different activities may be required depending on the number of students involved.

Student Engagement (to be completed by the student partner): Impact on learning experience and sense of belonging;

The student partner facilitated the focus group discussions and analysed the quantitative data which together support the positive impact of this initiative on performance and the students sense of belonging,

Learning Environment and Engagement: your views on the appropriateness and effectiveness of physical spaces for engagement and virtual spaces to enhance learning.

The round table set-up in the room used for this module was ideal. However, the technology available is somewhat limited. It would also be very difficult to embrace this approach with large groups given there are currently no active learning spaces which cater for more than 60 students on the Coleraine campus.

Impact (please provide evidence of the impact on learning and/or teaching)

The project has had a significant impact on the student experience in Psychology as noted above.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

Transferability (consider how this activity might be used by colleagues in other schools/faculties and if it could be developed for a further Faculty interdisciplinary learning project)

The SCALE-UP approach could be used effectively in any discipline although it is dependent to some extent on class size. Certainly it would be difficult with large groups given the limited spaces currently available.

Dissemination (internal and external) (School and Faculty briefings, workshops, resources developed)

As yet, we have had little opportunity to disseminate our findings outside the School of Psychology, although the approach was highlighted during a recent revalidation and was commended by the review panel. However, we will share our experiences through the Faculty's existing networks (e.g. the Community of Practice initiative) and with colleagues across the University with the help of the Centre for Higher Education Research Practice (CHERP; e.g. lunchtime seminar programme and/or annual conference). Findings could also be published internally through the Faculty website and in the CHERP journal. Results could also be shared externally through relevant learning and teaching journals and conferences.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

References (using Harvard style, list literature and other resources that influenced your work)

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Attachments List and attach relevant documents/images in support of project activities