Setting up VCE Psychology Unit 1 in 2005:
‘These are a few of my favourite things’

Maren Rawlings

Maren Rawlings was involved in the writing of the first and the third (2005-2008) VCE Psychology Study Designs. She is a co-author of Heinemann Psychology One and Two (second editions in press). This is a one page summary of her article in Labtalk, volume 48, number 2, 2004.

Three strengths of the new course in Unit 1 appear to be:

1. Integration of ethical principles in each area of study
2. Retention of the Introduction to Psychology as an area of study
3. Naming some types of representation of data that the students could be expected to learn.

How do we approach these topics to maximize the benefits?

1. Integration of ethical principles in each area of study

Introducing ethics allows for serious discussion of psychology as both research and practice from the outset. One problem with class discussion is ‘self-disclosure’. Using ethics as a framework, students can be brought to the understanding that class is not a coffee shop and in describing cases, they need to respect the rights of others even when they are not present. Ethics provides a framework for doing a deception exercise, such as the ‘Barnum Effect’ using something like horoscope predictions (see Labtalk vol. 48, no.1, 2004). Although a student can refuse to be a participant, this has always been the case. ‘Diffusion of responsibility’ and ‘audience inhibition’ provide contexts for exploring why people may not want such exposure.

2. Retention of Introduction to Psychology as an area of study

The three weeks spent on this area are useful to establish note-taking habits, regular homework and to revise the ideas of scientific method and report writing. Doing an ‘experiment’, such as Piaget’s balance problem, allows for the introduction of independent and dependent variables. The ‘dead white males’ listed provide opportunities for multimedia presentations and some live Australian females (eg. Jacqueline Goodnow, Felicia Huppert, Margot Prior and Philippa Pattison) might provide some insights into current psychological research.

3. Naming representations of data that students are expected to learn

VCAA allowed itself to specify something to do with basic statistics and we should be grateful. At last we have some year 11 level skill requirements in the course. We can access great frequency polygons in old (VCAB) examiners’ reports. We can examine bar graphs for prejudice and discrimination by looking at how they are presented. We can use box and whisker plots to examine skew within a range.

Making a Calendar or Year Planner

On my calculations there are 9 teaching weeks in each of term 1 and 2 next year. I suggest four school assessment tasks, due in the week beginning on the Monday date:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multi-media presentation</td>
<td>February 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Answer test</td>
<td>March 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empirical research activity</td>
<td>April 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay</td>
<td>May 23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last is really an extended answer exercise. I would have an examination in whatever format the VCAA shall prescribe for year 12 next year. The first two tasks are intended for formative reporting at the end of term 1 at the Parent-Teacher interviews. The latter three tasks are intended for report writing at the end of the first semester.

More details about how I plan to put the ideas in this summary into operation are available in Labtalk, volume 48, number 2, 2004. I have some amusing suggestions for multi-media presentations and some hints on how to report achievement. I specify the contexts for each assessment task and how to get one or two jumps ahead of the school administration.

Good Luck with the New Course,
Maren Rawlings, MAPS