VCE Psychology: Sample teaching plan

Sample Course Outline – VCE Psychology Unit 1: How are behaviour and mental processes shaped?

**Note:** This is a sample guide only and indicates one way to present the content from the *VCE Psychology Study Design* over the weeks in each school term. Teachers are advised to consider their own contexts in developing learning activities: Which local fieldwork sites would support learning in the topic area? Which local issues lend themselves to debate and investigation? Which experiments can students complete within the resource limitations of their learning environments?

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| **Week** | **Area** | **Topics** | **Learning activities**  |
| 1 | **How does the brain function?** | **Role of the brain in mental processes and behaviour** (influence of difference approaches over time to understanding the role of the brain; brain structure and function of the central and peripheral nervous systems; role of the neuron; basic structure and function of the hindbrain, midbrain and forebrain; role of the cerebral cortex) | * introduction to psychology: design and conduct an investigation to test the capacity of phrenology to predict personality; use the findings to discuss how the nature of ‘psychology’ has changed over time
* dissect a sheep’s brain; identify the hindbrain, midbrain and the forebrain (lamb’s brains may be purchased from supermarkets or from a butcher), or conduct a virtual dissection through the Whole Brain Atlas website
* make a ‘brain hat’ using plasticine, papier mache, a hollowed-out half watermelon rind or other suitable modelling materials and label the external features and sections of the brain; work in groups to produce plans for an adaptation of the ‘brain hat’ that shows vertical and horizontal cross-sections of the brain
* list the main functions of the spinal cord; investigate how injury or disease involving the spinal cord affects functionality
* demonstrate human brain plasticity using mirror drawing
* divide class into six groups: each group of students researches the development of myelin, synaptic pruning and frontal lobe development in infancy and adolescence; each group then presents their examples to the class; other class members use a data sheet to record information and responses
* using photographs from internet, compare the brain structures of other mammals such as a sheep and a mouse to a human brain; discuss how animal models can be used to understand human neurological disorders
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| 5 | **Brain plasticity and brain damage** (infancy and adolescence as periods of rapid development and changes in brain structure and function; impact of injury to the cerebral cortex; ability of brain to undergo adaptive plasticity; use of animal studies and neuroimaging techniques to develop understanding of human neurological disorders) |
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| 8 | **What influences psychological development?** | **The complexity of psychological development** (interactive nature of hereditary and environmental factors on psychological development; role of critical and sensitive periods; importance of attachment on emotional development; development of cognitive abilities; psychosocial development across the lifespan and influence on personality)  | * analyse twin and adoption studies to examine the influence of environmental factors of development, focusing on the elements involved in the research design of twin and adoption studies
* visit a zoo to collect qualitative and quantitative data related to animal behaviour and to examine the use of animals in research
* conduct a class debate about appropriate school starting age using research relating to the emotional, cognitive and psycho-social development of children
* design and undertake an investigation related to Erikson’s work on personality (for example, ‘Is the degree of reported self-confidence related to hope/loyalty?’)
* use Piaget’s theory to design, construct, test and report on the developmental appropriateness of a selected toy for a young child
* use a Socratic seminar (with one central person each representing typical behaviours, atypical behaviours, adaptative behaviours, maladaptive behaviours, mental health and mental disorder) to discuss how normality may be conceptualised
* design a poster describing the facts and misconceptions about mental illness; discuss how ‘facts’ can be distinguished from ‘misconceptions’
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| 11 | **Atypical psychological development** (conceptualisation of normality; mental health as a product of internal and external factors; major categories of psychological disorders; ‘two-hit’ hypothesis as an explanation for the development of psychological disorder) |
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| 15 | **Student-directed research investigation** | **Student-directed research investigation** (students work independently or in groups to investigate a question related to brain function and/or psychological development; outline relevant contemporary research that applies to their investigation; analyse the psychological concepts and scientific evidence that underpins their response to a question of interest; draw conclusions based on the evidence collected; and communicate the findings of their research investigation in a negotiated format to a selected audience)  |
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| 18 | **Unit** **revision** |
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