VCE Psychology: Sample teaching plan

Sample Course Outline – VCE Psychology Unit 3: How does experience affect behaviour and mental processes?

**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 nervous system enable psychological functioning?** | **Nervous system functioning** (roles of different divisions of the nervous system; conscious and unconscious responses; role of the neuron and neurotransmitters in normal functioning and in Parkinson’s disease) | * annotate a life-sized human outline with the divisions of CNS and their roles * work in pairs to test reflexes (knee-jerk, pilo-motor, plantar) * investigate reaction times in catching a falling ruler * discuss concepts of accuracy, precision, reproducibility and reliability using collated class data of the dimensions of a crumpled paper ‘clot’ * produce an infographic about the contribution of dopamine and GABA to Parkinson’s disease by accessing the Parkinson’s Victoria website |
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| 4 | **Stress as an example of a psychobiological process** (sources of stress; Selye’s GAS model of stress; Transactional Model of Stress and Coping; managing stress) | * use different ‘stress scales’ to measure stress * examine a case study related to coping with the trauma of a tsunami * student selection of an investigation related to self-perceived levels of stress: effects of different types of music; exercise; diet preferences * produce a pamphlet about stress management strategies * design, test and evaluate a lie detector * produce a PowerPoint presentation of personal examples of primary and secondary appraisal |
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| 6 | **How do people learn and remember?** | **Neural basis of learning and memory** (neural plasticity and memory formation; role of neurotransmitters and neurohormones in memory formation) | * students individually construct a model neuron using playdough; groups of students ‘connect’ neurons to demonstrate neurotransmitter and neurohormone action * investigate whether there is a relationship between memory and emotion |
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| 8 | **Models to explain learning** (classical conditioning; operant conditioning; observational learning; ‘Little Albert’ experiment) | * investigate classical conditioning: Wizz Fizz and salivation * discuss an issue involving operant conditioning: circus animal training * workshop examples to distinguish between negative and positive reinforcers, and negative and positive punishment * develop a strategy involving learning principles to address the issue of ‘hoon driving’ * use observational learning to make an origami animal * discuss the ethics of the ‘Little Albert’ experiment and suggest how the experiment could have been conducted more ethically |
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| 10 | **Process of memory** (multi-store model of memory; storage of long-term memories including implicit and explicit memories) | * student selection of an investigation related to favourable conditions for recalling information: time of day; cramming effects; use of highlighters or flashcards; background music * produce a pamphlet called ‘handy hints for improving study habit effectiveness’ |
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| 12 | **Reliability of memory** (methods to retrieve information from memory; effects of brain trauma on memory; factors influencing ability to remember; fallibility of memory) | * report on a class experiment on serial position effect * set up an ‘eyewitness testimony’ scenario and compare student reports of the activity |
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| 14 | **Practical investigation** | **Practical investigation** (experimental variables; scientific research methodologies and ethics; data organisation, analysis and evaluation; organisation of psychological concepts; nature of evidence; scientific report writing conventions) | * Poster evaluation: identify strengths/weaknesses/opportunities/threats of provided examples of scientific posters * Experimental design: student groups self-selecting topics related to learning and/or memory * Test: hypothesis formulation and experimental design * Student experiment: negotiation, confirmation and materials preparation * Student undertaking of experiment * Reporting/poster write-up phase |
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| 18 | **Unit revision** | | |
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