

The power of the situation:

Students' motivational responses to studying in Psychology and Social Work

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Research being undertaken at the University of Newcastle examines the extent to which a problem-based learning approach (referred to at Newcastle as *experience-based learning*) influences students' motivation to learn and their approaches to studying. Particular attention has been given to examining how different achievement goals elicit qualitatively different motivational patterns, and how these goals are reflected in the broader context of the learning environment. In examining achievement motivation, this study has sought to determine the degree to which situational factors and instructional demands of the problem-based learning environment make different goals salient, and consequently affect how students think about themselves and approach their learning tasks.

Constructivist perspective of experience-based learning

The Social Work experience-based learning model is derived from a teaching model of constructivism. Individuals construct their own unique view of the world in order to understand, predict and influence their environment. Constructivism is based on a view of knowledge that differs from that of logical positivism, which holds that knowledge exists "out there" as objective truth. The "subjectivism" of a constructivist viewpoint is also often contrasted with that of "objectivism" in which "the world is completely and correctly structured in terms of entities, properties and relations...(and) experience plays no role in structuring the world; meaning is something that exists in the world quite aside from experience" (Duffy & Jonassen, 1991, p 7-8).

Constructivists emphasise the meaning that humans give to their experiences. Constructivists agree with postivists that there exists a real and tangible world that we can experience, but note that meaning is imposed on the world by humans, rather than existing in the world independently. There are many ways to structure the world and there are many meanings or perspectives for every concept and event. There is no one correct meaning that we can apply to the world. Constructivists argue that what we take to be objective truth is the result of a particular perspective. The multi-dimensional and plastic nature of reality is emphasised as is the human tendency to stretch and shape reality to fit many differing purposes.

Savery & Duffy (1995, p.32-34) provide a set of instructional principles which are informed by a constructivist framework: anchor all learner activities to a larger task or challenging project; support the learner in developing ownership for the overall project or task; design an authentic task; design the task and learning environment to reflect the complexity of the environment they should be able to function in at the end of learning; give the learner ownership of the process used to develop a solution; encourage testing ideas against alternative views and alternative contexts; and provide opportunity for and support reflection on both the content learned and the learning process.

Brooks & Brooks (1993) elaborate a framework from which to examine traditional and constructivist instructional principles and approaches:

Traditional Classroom Constructivist Classroom

Curriculum is presented part to whole, Curriculum is presented whole to part with with emphasis on basic skills, emphasis on inclusive concepts. Strict adherence to fixed curriculum as Curriculum is responsive to students and established is valued, the pursuit of student questions is valued.

Students are viewed as "blank slates." Students are viewed as participatory onto which the information is "etched" thinkers with emerging theories about by the teacher, the world.

Teachers generally behave in a didactic Teachers generally behave in an inter-manner, disseminating information to active manner, mediating the environment students for students.

Teachers seek the correct answer to Teachers seek the students' point of validate student learning view in order to understand the students' present conceptions for use in subsequent lessons.

Assessment of student learning is Assessment of student learning is inter-viewed as separate from teaching woven with teaching and occurs through and occurs almost entirely through teacher observations of students at work, testing and through personalized assignments such as student exhibitions and portfolios.

When learning is viewed through the constructivist paradigm, challenging open-ended investigations in realistic, meaningful contexts need to be offered as these allow learners to explore and generate many possibilities. When students frame their own problems, link learning to prior knowledge, and work on collaborative goals by sharing and discussing, they are motivated to learn. Intrinsic motivation is the key to developing a culture of learning in the classroom. It is through the development of such a culture will students learn and think like expert practitioners in a field of study (Jones et al., 1997; Savery & Duffy, 1995).

Conceptual framework of the present study

Students enter the classroom with prior subject-matter knowledge, skills related to acquiring new knowledge, and motivational tendencies that predispose them to different degrees of engagement in learning. These personal factors interact with the features of specific classes to determine what and how much will be learned. Conceptual and empirical work has focused on two features that affect learning: achievement goals and incentive structures (Ainley, 1993; Alibali, 1998; Ames & Archer, 1988; Ames, 1992; Archer, 1994, Archer & Scevak, 1998; Dweck, 1986; Harackiewicz & Elliot, 1998; Harackiewicz et.al., 1998; Nicholls, 1989).

Achievement goals (or goal orientations) refer to the motivational basis of learning, that is, the purpose for which learning is undertaken. The major distinction that has been made contrasts mastery (also termed task and learning) with performance (also called ego and ability) goals (Ames, 1992; Ames & Archer, 1988; Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1992). *Mastery goals* focus on the learning process with an emphasis on individual improvement, gaining new skills, and challenge. *Performance goals* are defined as a concern with outcomes such as grades, rather than process, and with one's ability, especially in comparison to that of others. There is considerable evidence that motivation and learning are facilitated in settings that promote mastery rather than performance goals (eg., Ames, 1992; Blumenfeld, 1992; Meece, Blumenfeld & Hoyle, 1988).

Classroom environment and students' achievement goals

The features of learning environments that induce either mastery or performance goal orientations include the types of academic tasks that students are assigned, classroom authority relationships, and the criteria used for evaluation and recognition (Ames, 1992). According to Meece et al., (1988), classrooms can be characterised as strong situations with fairly explicit expectations, structures and cues that influence behaviour (p.516). Ames & Archer (1988), Ames (1992), and Archer & Scevak, (1998) posit similar findings concerning the critical role that classroom structure and situational demands play in influencing student motivation. Conditions that support mastery goals are challenging tasks, a high degree of student choice and control, a focus on individual improvement, timely and useful feedback and individual evaluation (Ames, 1992), and opportunities for students to work together on assignments. Classes with these characteristics engender greater student engagement in the learning process than competitively structured classes that emphasise student ability comparisons and discourage collaboration.

Incentive structures are the criteria that determine how performance is evaluated (Slavin, 1996; Slavin et al., 1985). Under an individualistic criterion-based structure, rewards for performance are independent of other students' outcomes. With the use of cooperative structures, rewards are determined by joint performance (e.g., group grading procedures). In competitive settings, one learner's gain is another's loss when, for example, restrictions are placed on the percentage of students receiving a given grade. There is evidence that cooperative learning environments result in improved academic performance and that competition can be detrimental (Goodsell, Maher & Tinto, 1992; Slavin et al., 1985). However, the advantages of cooperation may be contingent on whether students are evaluated for their individual as well as group performance, and the advantages may even depend on whether reward is based on group gains rather than on absolute performance (Slavin, 1995). As with class characteristics that engender mastery goals, Ames (1992) argues that greater student engagement occurs in learning in classes that emphasise individual or co-operative, but not competitive, incentives.

Although goal orientation and incentive structures are often considered independently in the literature, class reward structures play an important role in determining goals (Ames, 1992). Instructional strategies that focus on individual improvement and that provide for cooperative experiences should engender a mastery goal orientation. Performance goals would be expected in classes with competitive incentive structures and an emphasis on inter-student comparisons.

One consequence of student engagement in the learning process is increased self-regulation. More involved and self-regulating learners place higher value on understanding; feel more efficacious, and make greater use of cognitive strategies such as organization, elaboration, and critical thinking (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Weinstein & Mayer, 1986). They also self-regulate through metacognitive processes of strategic planning (e.g. goal setting, problem analysis), monitoring progress toward task completion (e.g. comprehension), and regulation of study environments, levels of effort, and sources of assistance (Corno, 1989; Pintrick & Garcia, 1991; Zimmerman & Schunk, 1989). This self-regulation leads to higher performance levels compared with learners who are less conscious of their learning (Pintrich, Cross, Kozma & McKeachie, 1986).

Focus of the present study In light of achievement goal research, it is hypothesised that the approach of a problem-based curriculum will encourage students to adopt a mastery goal. Situational factors and instructional demands can affect the salience of a particular achievement goal and hence its adoption (Ainley, 1993; Ames, 1992; Ames and Archer, 1988; Archer & Scevak, 1998; Dweck, 1986, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Elliot & Church, 1997; Elliott & Dweck, 1998; Nicholls, 1989). Additionally, some research drawing on students' experiences of problem-based curricula suggest that problem-based curricula enhance intrinsic interest and active engagement in the subject matter, and enhance self-directed learning skills, and this enhancement may be maintained over time (Boud & Feletti, 1997; Brooks & Brooks 1993; De Vries, Schmidt & de Graff, 1989; Jones et al., 1997; Norman & Schmidt 1992; Schmidt, 1995).

Educational tasks link student motivation, student cognition, instruction, and learning (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Marx & Walsh, 1988). Tasks have been described as the instructional unit in classrooms. There is concern about a focus on low-level facts and skills and the omnipresence of rote learning in classrooms (Anderson & Smith, 1987; Brophy, 1998; Goodlad, 1983). According to Blumenfeld et al. (1991), students are afforded few opportunities to represent knowledge in a variety of ways, pose and solve real problems, or use their knowledge to create cognitively rich and complex learning outcomes. The prevalence of low-level tasks contributes to students' lack of understanding of content and process and poor attitudes toward learning (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

The introduction of more cognitively complex tasks which provide opportunities for solving authentic problems is an alternative. Drawing analogies from everyday learning, researchers argue that knowledge is contextualised; that is, learners construct knowledge by solving complex problems in situations in which they use cognitive tools, multiple sources of information, and other individuals as resources (Brown, Collins, and Duguid, 1989; Resnick, 1987). Moreover, because learning occurs in a social context, learners interact with and internalise modes of knowing and thinking represented and practised in the community (Toulmin, 1972).

The master-apprentice relationship is used as an analogy for the teaching-learning situation. Blumenfeld et al. (1991) argue that, like masters, teachers should scaffold instruction by breaking down tasks, use modelling, prompting and coaching to teach strategies for critical thinking and problem solving, and gradually transfer responsibility to the learner. The result is that learners are motivated to persist at authentic problems, connect prior knowledge and

experience with new learning, and develop domain-specific knowledge and thinking strategies to solve real-world problems (Blumenfeld et al., 1991). Further, Blumenfeld (1992), in her review of Ames' proposals for encouraging a mastery motivation in schools, contends that achievement goal theory could be strengthened by more explicit linking with the constructivist perspective of cognitive psychology and by acknowledging the social nature of learning. Meaningfulness comes from working with others on authentic tasks.

The present study

A study was undertaken with students enrolled in first year and fourth year Social Work studies near the end of their respective academic year. Achievement goals formed the theoretical framework for this study. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered.

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Quantitative data

The first part of the study was designed to delineate students' perceptions of the motivational 'climate' of the experience-based social work subject, and relate these perceptions to other theoretically relevant variables (including reported use of effective learning strategies, enjoyment, willingness to take further courses, preference for difficult or easy tasks, causal attributions and self-perception of ability. First and fourth year students were invited to complete a modified Ames & Archer (1988) questionnaire which was adapted to reflect a tertiary educational context. The questionnaire was introduced with the following sentence: *When you are completing this questionnaire you are asked to think specifically about your Social Work subject.* In all, 70 students (36 first year students and 34 fourth year students) completed the questionnaire.

One week later, all first and fourth year students were invited to complete the questionnaire a second time. The only difference was that students were asked to respond to the questionnaire in light of their first year Psychology subject. The questionnaire was introduced with the following sentence: *When you are completing this questionnaire you are asked to think specifically about your 1st year Psychology subject.* The same 70 students completed the second questionnaire. Students' first and second questionnaires were matched by a pseudonym they put on both questionnaires. The response rate was very high: 100% of the first year students completed both questionnaires, while 95% for fourth year students completed both questionnaires (the students were did not participate in the study were not on campus for those two weeks).

The questionnaire had four sections: a set of items to measure students' perception of the achievement goals encouraged by lecturers; a set of items to measure the study strategies used by students; a number of single items measuring students' attitude toward the subject, willingness to accept challenging tasks and perceived ability compared with other members of their tutorial group; and a series of attributional questions about the causes of success and failure.

Achievement goals A set of 33 items was designed to assess students' perceptions of the mastery and performance dimensions of the tutorial sessions of Social Work and

Psychology 1. A modified version of the scales developed by Ames & Archer (1988) was used, with a number of items re-worded to suit the university environment and to emphasise the role of the lecturer more than individual attitudes of students. Items were prefaced with the heading 'In this Social Work subject' or 'In this Psychology Subject' and students rated each item on a five point Likert scale ranging from *do not agree at all* (1), *agree* (3), to *strongly agree* (5).

For both data sets (that is, students' responses in relation to their Social Work subject and their responses in relation to their Psychology subject) a principal component factor analysis with a varimax rotation on the 33 items was conducted in an attempt to confirm an *a priori* classification of the items into mastery and performance goal categories (n = 70).

For the mastery scale, 14 items were selected on the basis of loading above .40 on the mastery factor in both data sets and below .30 on the performance factor in both data sets. For the Social Work data set, the Cronbach alpha was .89, and for the Psychology data set, the Cronbach alpha was .87. Because a mastery goal is concerned with developing competence, the items in the mastery scale focused on helping students to understand the work, working hard, acknowledging improvement, correcting mistakes, providing interesting tasks, and developing self reliance. The items in the mastery scale are shown in Appendix A.

For the performance scale, nine items were selected on the basis of loading above .40 on the performance factor in both data sets (though for one item in the Social Work data set a loading of .32 was accepted) and below .30 on the mastery factor. For the Social Work data set, the Cronbach alpha was .74, and for the Psychology data set, the Cronbach alpha was .85. Because a performance goal is concerned with demonstrating competence to others, or hiding incompetence from others, the items in the performance scale focused on competing with other students, negative emotions when students do not do as well as others in competitions or worry when work is seen as difficult, and wanting to know the marks of other students in the group. The items in the performance scale are shown in Appendix A.

The following correlation matrix shows the correlations between the mastery and performance scales in the Social Work data set and the Psychology data set. The matrix also shows the correlation of the mastery scales between the Social Work and Psychology data sets and the correlation of the performance scales between the two data sets.

Mast (SW) Mast (PSY) Perf (SW) Perf (PSY)

Mastery goal (SW) 1.00 -0.55*** -0.27* 0.54***

Mastery goal (PSY) 1.00 0.42*** -0.31**

Performance goal (SW) 1.00 0.07

Performance goal (PSY) 1.00

N = 70 * p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p <.001 SW = Social work, PSY = Psychology

Learning Strategies Students' reported use of effective study strategies in studying for Social Work and Psychology 1 was assessed using 18 items (four items written in the negative were reversed in coding) adapted from those used by Ames & Archer (1988) and three additional items. The items concerned planning strategies, elaboration strategies, that is, integrating new information with what has been learned previously; and monitoring strategies, that is, checking and understanding. The items described strategies that were generic to the process of learning rather than specific to the discipline. For example, *when I study for this subject, I set goals for myself* (planning); *when I study for this subject I try to pull together the information from class and what I read* (elaboration) and *when I study for this subject, I stop every so often to make sure I understand what I just read* (monitoring). The items in the scale were prefaced with 'in this subject' and students rated each item on five-point Likert scales from 'not at all typical of me' (1) to very typical of me' (5).

Causal Attributions Students were asked two sets of attribution questions relating to when they did well in class and when they did not do well in class. For each set, students rated the importance of ability (*you have ability in this area, you lack ability in this area*), effort (*you have worked very hard, you did not work hard enough*), strategy (*you used good study strategies, you did not use good study strategies*), the task (*the work was not difficult, the work was difficult*), and the lecturer (*the lecturer did a good job, the lecturer did a poor job*) as reasons for their performance. Five-point Likert scales (1 = not an important reason; 5 = an important reason) were used for each rating.

Adaptive approach to learning Students' willingness to learn was assessed by using four items measured separately on five point Likert scales: how relevant they found the subject (1-not relevant at all, 5-very relevant); how interesting they found the subject (1-not interesting, 5-very interesting); how enjoyable they found the subject (1-not enjoyable at all, 5-very enjoyable) and how willing they would be to take further subjects similar to Social Work or Psychology 1 (1-not willing at all, 5-very willing).

Challenge seeking Students responded to two questions about their willingness to accept challenge. They were asked how likely it would be that they would choose an assignment which would be difficult, but from which they would learn something useful (1-not likely at all, 5- very likely). They were then asked how likely it would be that they would choose an assignment that would be easy and for which they probably would get a high mark (1- not likely at all, 5-very likely). The second item was reversed in coding and then the two items were added together to make a challenge seeking score.

Perceived ability Students were asked to rate their ability in the subject compared with other students in their tutorial group (1-one of the lowest, 3-about in the middle, 5-one of the highest). Use of a single item to measure perceived ability relative to that of others comes from the work of Nicholls (Nicholls et al., 1989), who argued that a single, clearly defined question with a suitable response scale provides an accurate measure of relative ability.

Qualitative data

First and fourth year students who completed the questionnaire were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview (there was a section requesting participation at the end of the questionnaire). Interviewees therefore self selected to participate. Students who wanted to participate were asked to request an appointment with the first researcher via telephone or e-mail. Interviews were conducted within the researcher's scheduled consultation time, which provided a measure of privacy. Fourteen first year students and eleven fourth year students were interviewed. Interviews lasted approximately one and a half to two hours and were audio-taped for later transcription and analysis. The semi-structured interviews were guided by ten broad focus questions:

1. *How would you characterise experience-based learning?*
2. *How would you describe the tutor's role?*
3. *How would you compare experience-based learning with conventional instruction?*
4. *In what ways has experience-based learning influenced your learning?*
5. *What do you see as the strengths of experience-based learning?*
6. *What are the limitations of experience-based learning?*
7. *How would you approach a typical learning task? (Individual & Group)*
8. *What are the challenges and limitations of group-work?*
9. *How relevant are the assessment tasks?*
10. *To what extent have the learning tasks encouraged critical thinking and self-reflection?*

For the present study, students' responses to the third question, *How would you compare experience-based learning with conventional learning?*, are examined. All students' responses are produced in Appendix B.

As can be seen in the interview schedule a number of questions were posed in different forms, and repeated throughout the interview to cross-check accuracy and to elucidate differing perspectives and layers of meaning (Polit & Hungler, 1999; Sarantakos, 1998). Students were invited to review segments of the tape when and where they wanted to clarify a particular viewpoint, modify a segment of the dialogue, or to allow the researcher to check for accurate comprehension of the students' meaning. Audio-taped interviews were transcribed by a research assistant who was independent of the discipline area and who was skilled in processing unstructured qualitative data.

Adding a qualitative section to the study is consistent with constructivist philosophy, that the only person who understands the social reality in which she lives is the person herself. Themes explored within the interviews included: overall student perceptions of experience-based learning; perceptions of the tutor's role and influence on the classroom environment; comparison of experience-based learning and conventional instruction; strengths and limitations of experience-based learning; collaborative group-work; approach to learning and assessment tasks; critical thinking; interest and meaning.

Phenomenological approach This part of the study lent itself to phenomenological research methods as the aim of phenomenology is to describe the learning experience as it is perceived by the participants.

Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p7). Phenomenology enjoins us to attend directly to the things themselves [zu dem Sachen selbst] (Husserl, 1965, p146).

Phenomenology is concerned not with philosophies but with 'things themselves' (Husserl, 1965), phenomena that present themselves to us as conscious human beings. If we lay aside, as best we can, the prevailing understandings of these phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, possibilities for new meaning emerge or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning (Crotty, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen 1997). As a methodology phenomenology has been applied to research in the social and human services, especially in sociology (Steiner, 1996 ; Luckman, 1978), and Social Work (Bogdan, & Taylor, 1994 ; Padgett, 1998) where it has been used to explore social processes in terms of trying to understand how people construct and interpret meaning (Crotty, 1998).

Approach to data analysis Various schools of phenomenology have developed approaches to data analysis. In the social science area three methods of data analysis are those of Colaizzi (1978), Giorgi (1985) and Van Kaam (1966) all of whom are from the Duquesne School of Phenomenology. In the present study methods developed by Colaizzi (1980) guided data collection and analysis of relatively unstructured interview material. Additionally, elements were drawn from Van Manen (1996), and Dickelmann et al. (1989).

The present study involved the following procedure: reading all of the interviews to develop an overall conceptual understanding; identifying themes through line-by-line exploration of expressed meanings; discrimination and extraction of emergent themes; clustering and organising thematic commonalities, divergent or unique constructs; monitoring consistency and reliability of coding, resolving inter-rater disagreements by returning to the whole transcript for clarification; integrating core themes into an exhaustive description of the phenomena under study; and canvassing participants about the findings thus far as a validating step.

To assist in handling the large amount of semi-structured data, a relational data base management program (ACCESS 2000) was used. This program allowed transfer of discrete thematic sections from each of the transcripts and facilitated organising, sorting, retrieving and cross-checking of material. Structurally, a separate field was created to accommodate broad emergent themes derived from each student's dialogue and responses to specific research questions. Additionally, a field was constructed to gather core themes (commonalities and uniqueness) which aided the refinement of more discrete categories for analysis and interpretation.

There was a constant comparison of themes and categories, and the routine cross-checking of data with the original transcripts which were consulted throughout data analysis. Further attempts to maintain reliable thematic analysis and coding involved the use of two external researchers who were invited to cross-check themes and codes identified in verbatim student transcripts. In particular, the principal areas concerning the initial question, exploring the tutor's role, and the comparison of differing instructional experiences were examined to gauge initial reliability and again at a later stage to discern consistency across first year and fourth year student responses. Not surprisingly early inter-rater reliability scores were in the range of 86.25%. In later sampling the inter-rater reliability scores had increased to 94.4%, which is consistent with the reliability principles elaborated by Miles & Huberman (1994).

Displaying the qualitative data Following procedural suggestions put forward by Miles & Huberman (1994), the core themes derived from the analyses were counted and graphically displayed. Matrices, graphs, flowcharts and other sorts of visual representations assist in making meaning of data, as well as in exposing gaps, inconsistencies or areas where more data are needed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Padgett (1998) also supports the use of matrices, graphs, and simple frequency counts in an attempt to identify patterns or clusters of themes and categories.

However, Berg (1989) cautions that by reporting the frequency with which a theme or core concept appears in interview data, researchers may inflate the magnitude of this observation. Undoubtedly, it is 'more convincing for their arguments when researchers demonstrate the appearance of claimed observation in some large proportion of the material under study' (p.107). However, descriptive statistics do not necessarily reflect the nature of the data or variables. In short, researchers must be cautious not to claim magnitudes as findings in themselves. The magnitude for certain observations is presented to illustrate more fully the overall trends in the analysis.

Results

Quantitative data

The first purpose of this study was to develop scales to assess students' perception of the classroom climate developed by lecturers in a Social Work course and a Psychology course, and to link these perceptions with theoretically relevant variables including reported use of effective study strategies and approach to academic study. Because the focus was a comparison of students' responses in Social Work and Psychology, analyses were conducted on the sample as a whole, not by year level.

Descriptive statistics and t-tests Table 1 shows the means and standard deviations for all the variables (except attribution variables shown in Table 2) as students rated them in the Social Work subject and as they rated them in the Psychology subject. Table 1 also shows the results of *dependent measures t-tests* that compared the Social Work and Psychology means. The mastery goal scale and the performance goal scale are reported as scores out of five. This was done to allow for ease of comparison of the scales across Social Work and Psychology because the scales contain different numbers of items (14 items in the mastery goal scale and nine items in the performance goal scale). The t-tests show statistically significant differences in students' rating for all variables except *Perceived ability* and *Difficulty of the subject*.

Students perceived a stronger mastery goal climate in Social Work and a stronger performance goal climate in Psychology. They reported greater use of good study strategies in Social Work than in Psychology. They also indicated a greater willingness to undertake challenging tasks in Social Work, more relevance in Social Work, more interest in Social Work, a willingness to take more of the same sort of subjects in Social Work, more enjoyment in Social Work, and more approachable staff in Social Work. The mastery goal and performance goal means in Social Work and Psychology are shown in Figure 1.

Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for students' success and failure attributions in Social Work and Psychology. For each attribution, students responded on a five point Likert scale anchored with *not an important reason* (rated 1) and *an important reason* (rated 5). In each case Table 2 also shows the results of dependent-measures t-tests that compared Social Work and Psychology means. There were only two statistically significant differences between the means for attributions to account for poor performance. Students indicated that failing because of a difficult task was a more important reason in Psychology than in Social Work. Students also indicated that failing because of poor teaching was a more important reason in Psychology than in Social Work.

Correlational analyses For the Social Work subject and the Psychology subject, students' scores on the mastery goal scale and the performance goal scale were correlated with all other variables except the attribution variables. The correlations are shown in Table 3. For the mastery goal scale there were a number of statistically significant correlations for both Social Work and Psychology. Students who perceived a strong mastery goal in the classroom reported greater use of effective study strategies than students who did not perceive a strong mastery climate. These students also indicated a greater willing to undertake challenging tasks, found the subject more interesting, were more willing to take similar subjects in the future, found the subject more enjoyable, and found the staff more approachable than students who did not perceive a strong mastery climate. Students who perceived a strong mastery climate found the subject more relevant in Psychology but not in Social Work. Students who perceived a strong mastery climate indicated that this subject was more difficult than other subjects they were taking in Social Work but not in Psychology.

For the performance goal scale there were fewer statistically significant correlations and no consistency across the Social Work and Psychology data. For Social Work, students who perceived a strong performance goal climate in the classroom were less likely to report using effective study strategies, less likely to take on challenging tasks, less likely to take similar subjects in the future, and less likely to enjoy the work than students who did not perceive a strong performance goal climate. For Psychology, the students who perceived a strong performance goal climate were less likely to perceive the staff as approachable than students who did not perceive a strong performance goal climate.

Table 4 shows the correlations between goal scales and attributions for success and failure in Social Work and Psychology. There were few consistent correlations across the two subjects. Students who perceived a performance goal climate were more likely to attribute their success to ability and to attribute failure to a difficult task than students who did not perceive a performance climate.

Regression analyses It might be expected that students who see themselves as among the best students in the class, compared with students who rate themselves as average or below average, would be the ones to report using effective study strategies, to be willing to accept challenging work, and to be willing to take similar classes in the future. In the present data, students' rating of their relative ability was correlated positively with perception of a mastery climate in Social Work ($r = .24^*$). There was a similar but not significant correlation between students' ability rating and perception of a mastery climate in Psychology ($r = .22$ ns). It might be then that the relationships between students' perception of a mastery climate and their reported use of learning strategies and an adaptive approach to studying reflect conceptions of themselves as competent learners rather than the effect of classroom climate.

To demonstrate that students' perceptions of a mastery climate predicted use of learning strategies, challenge seeking, and willingness to take similar subjects in the future over and above that of perceived ability, a series of stepwise regressions was conducted with perceived ability, mastery climate, and performance climate entered as independent variables. The results are shown in Tables 5 and 6. For learning strategies, students' perceptions of a mastery climate is the most significant predictor of reported use of effective study strategies in both the Social Work data and the Psychology data. For challenge seeking in the Social Work data, perception of a performance climate was the most significant predictor, but with a negative rather than positive Beta weight. Perceived ability was the next significant predictor of challenge seeking, with perception of a mastery climate the least significant predictor. For the Psychology data, perception of a mastery climate was the only significant predictor of challenge seeking. For willingness to take similar subjects in the future, perception of a mastery climate was the most significant predictor for the Social Work data. For the Psychology data, perceived ability was the most significant predictor, followed by perception of a mastery climate.

Qualitative data

As noted earlier, for the present study students' responses to Question 3 were examined because this question focused on comparisons of students' responses in Social Work and Psychology (*How would you compare experience-based learning with conventional learning?*). It should be noted that students did refer to subjects other than Psychology such as Sociology and Law when discussing their experience of conventional learning, but most students did make reference to their first year Psychology subject. All responses are produced in full in Appendix B. (A series of XL graphs have been produced which show in bar form the frequency of students' responses to certain themes. It is not possible to

integrate these graphs into the current Word document. Please contact the researchers if you would like a copy of these graphs).

Some of the major themes that emerged from students' responses to Question 3 are described below.

- Students spoke of the anonymity of the large Psychology classes (mass lectures followed by large tutorial groups and large laboratory groups) compared with greater individual attention afforded them in Social Work classes. In the smaller Social Work groups they were encouraged to express their opinion and made to feel that their opinion was important. In Psychology, the tutors' role was seen as working through the chapter of the textbook that was covered in the mass lecture.
- In Social Work, students felt there was more integration of theory with practice. Clients often came on campus to talk to students. In Psychology, on the other hand, there was little attempt to show students how theory presented in lectures could be linked with social work activities.
- It was important to cover this material in Psychology because each chapter was the basis of a quiz that counted towards the final mark. Students spoke of rote learning material to pass these quizzes. It was important to do well in the quizzes because the final examination was considered very difficult: students who did poorly in the quizzes had little chance of passing the final examination.
- Students recalled a very different approach to feedback. In Social Work, feedback was provided in more in a formative than in a summative fashion: feedback occurred during the semester rather than at the end of semester; the feedback was provided in an interview or with extensive written material; and the feedback focused on ways in which the student could improve her performance. This sort of feedback rarely was provided in Psychology.
- A few students expressed dissatisfaction with the Social Work approach of encouraging students to work independently with little direct guidance from tutors. Within the experience-based approach, tutors were not to provide direct answers to students' questions. Rather tutors posed questions to the students in an attempt to encourage them to resolve dilemmas and questions by themselves. Some students found the reluctance of the tutors to discuss matters openly and to indicate how they would approach a question a source of frustration. The students who experienced difficulty in adjusting to the experience-based approach generally were high achieving students who were accustomed to, and performed well in, a more traditionally organized lecture-tutorial format.

Discussion

The quantitative analyses demonstrated that students perceived a stronger mastery goal climate at work in their Social Work subject than in their Psychology subject. Students also perceived a stronger performance goal climate at work in their Psychology subject than in their Social Work subject. In addition, in their Social Work subject students reported using more effective study strategies, indicated a greater willingness to undertake challenging tasks, reported greater relevance, interest, enjoyment, a greater willingness to undertake similar subjects in the future, and saw the lecturing staff as more approachable than they did in their Psychology subject. The attributional analyses produced few differences. Students

were more likely to attribute poor performance to a difficult task or to poor teaching in Psychology than in Social Work.

The correlational and regression analyses were conducted to explore the ramifications of achievement goal theory. Consistent results emerged for a mastery goal climate in both the Social Work and the Psychology data. That is, students who perceived a mastery goal climate in the classroom reported greater use of effective study strategies, more willingness to undertake challenging tasks, more interest, more enjoyment, and more approachable staff than students who did not perceive a mastery goal to be operating. Less consistent results emerged for a performance goal in the Social Work and Psychology settings. There were either negative correlations or no significant correlations with the "adaptive learning" variables noted above.

For the correlations with the success and failure attributions, there were few consistent correlations across Social Work and Psychology. In both settings, students who perceived a performance climate were more likely to attribute good performance to their high ability and to attribute poor performance to a difficult task than students who did not perceive a performance climate. The regression analyses were conducted to consider the combined impact of perceived ability and perception of a mastery climate on those variables that could be considered adaptive for learning. The analyses showed that, in general, perception of a mastery climate was a more significant predictor of an adaptive approach than students perceived ability relative to others in their class.

The qualitative data complemented the quantitative data and provided additional insights into the motivational consequences of different approaches to study at the university level. Both the statistical analyses and the interview data suggest that the Social Work experience-based approach encourages a mastery goal orientation which results in a sense of: regulatory control, use of deeper processing strategies and more effective learning approaches, interest, and active engagement in knowledge building. Mastery oriented students report using the sort of study strategies that enhance conceptual understanding of material. In sum, situational factors and instructional demands can influence the salience of a particular goal and encourage its adoption.

The findings are consistent with the literature that points to classroom variables and instructional practices that can influence whether or not students adopt a particular goal orientation. For example, a mastery goal orientation can be encouraged when the teachers' instructional approach is designed to promote meaningful, rather than rote learning, is adapted to students' interests, promotes positive peer relationships and emphasises the intrinsic value of learning. Evaluation practices, design of tasks and grouping arrangements have been consistently identified as structural features of classrooms that influence a wide range of motivational processes including task preferences, self concept of ability, interest in learning, and persistence.

Students are more likely to exhibit a motivation to learn when the teacher provides instructional support, constructive feedback, establishes realistic but challenging goals, and encourages effort and progressive development. It is noteworthy the importance that students ascribe to the formative feedback which is provided in Social Work after each learning task. They saw this as an opportunity to correct errors and develop new strategies. In contrast, the students describe a sense of frustration with receiving largely negative, brief, and summative feedback in Psychology, a process they saw as prohibiting changes to their approach to study.

One aspect of the experience-based approach that needs more examination is the tutor's refusal to give learners information that will help them with their study. Students are

expected to be self regulating, to find information by themselves, not to have "the answers" presented to them on a plate. Too rigid an adherence to this approach may be counter-productive. Students become frustrated, knowing that their tutor has valuable information that he or she refuses to share with them. Another aspect of the experience-based approach that is designed to encourage self-regulation but that can instead engender frustration and a lack of motivation to learn is the lack of clear guidelines in learning tasks. Students are given little direction about how to approach the task and are unsure as to whether or not they have completed the task satisfactorily. These frustrations will be explored more thoroughly in future papers.

To conclude, in the present study Achievement Goal theory has been used to explore students' motivation in university classrooms, particularly students' motivation within an experience-based curriculum. Based on statistical evidence, and data drawn from qualitative inquiry, the experience-based approach does appear to encourage the adoption of a mastery goal orientation. The Social Work approach has the potential to empower learners to 'construct' meaning, to act and to do rather than to listen and to repeat.

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Table 1 Means and standard deviations for variables of the study, within a Social Work subject and a Psychology subject, followed by paired t-tests comparing Social Work means and Psychology means.

Social Work Psychology

(n =70) (n = 70)

Paired

Mean St Dev Mean St Dev t-test

Mastery climate # 3.69 0.64 2.64 0.63 7.83***

Performance climate # 2.88 0.60 3.43 0.75 -5.00***

Strategy use (18 items) 60.41 13.97 50.96 11.83 -5.83***

Choose challenge (2 items) 6.94 1.78 4.71 1.86 7.88***

Perceived ability 3.23 0.78 3.13 0.72 0.80 ns

Relevance 4.56 0.85 3.16 1.10 8.26***

Interest 4.24 0.94 3.21 1.23 5.72***

Take more subjects 4.03 0.93 2.80 1.21 6.43***

Difficulty of subject 3.51 1.07 3.77 0.94 -1.43 ns

Enjoyment 3.93 1.00 2.81 1.16 5.89***

Approachable staff 3.63 1.02 2.69 1.22 5.21***

p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p <.001; ns = non significant

Mastery climate contains 14 items; reported here as a score out of five.

Performance climate contains 9 items; reported here as a score out of five.

Table 2 Means and standard deviations for attributions for success and failure, within a Social Work subject and a Psychology subject, followed by paired t-tests comparing Social Work means and Psychology means.

Social Work Psychology

(n =70) (n = 70)

Paired

Mean St Dev Mean St Dev t-test

Success attributions

Ability 3.83 0.93 3.71 1.01 0.77 ns

Effort 3.87 1.13 3.87 0.98 0.00 ns

Good strategies 3.60 1.21 3.47 1.09 0.80 ns

Easy task 2.94 1.31 2.63 1.19 -1.85 ns

Good teaching 3.44 1.18 3.33 1.18 0.63 ns

Failure attributions

Lack of ability 3.34 1.25 3.16 1.25 -1.21 ns

Lack of effort 3.73 1.31 3.70 1.12 0.17 ns

Poor strategies 3.66 1.19 3.51 1.10 1.02 ns

Difficult task 3.14 1.16 3.93 1.08 -4.52***

Poor teaching 3.01 1.31 3.50 1.24 -2.74**

p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p <.001; ns = non significant

Table 3 Zero-order correlations between a mastery goal climate and a performance goal climate and motivational variables within a social work subject and a psychology subject

Social Work Psychology

(n = 70) (n = 70) _____

Variables Mastery Performance Mastery Performance

Strategies (18)# .68*** -.34** .57*** -.11

Perceived ability .24* .11 .22 .04

Choose challenge (2) .46*** -.48*** .47*** -.16

Relevance .21 -.11 .52*** .00

Interest .48*** -.15 .62*** -.09

Take more subjects .40** -.23* .43*** .12

Difficulty of subject .34** .02 .05 -.06

Enjoyment .45*** -.34** .50*** -.13

Approachable staff .35** -.15 .63*** -.30*

p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p<.001 # shows number of items in scale

Table 4 Zero-order correlations between a mastery goal climate and a performance goal climate and attributions for success and failure within a Social Work subject and a Psychology subject

Social Work Psychology

(n = 70) (n = 70)

Mastery Performance Mastery Performance

Success attributions

Ability -.09 .37*** -.16 .37***

Effort .20 .24* .27* .00

Good strategies .27 -.12 .20 -.01

Easy task .34** .27* .20 -.01

Good teaching .03 -.16 .08 .09

Failure attributions

Lack of ability -.12 .11 -.36** .19

Lack of effort -.16 -.37** .20 .04

Poor strategies .16 -.27* .26* .10

Difficult task .27* .29* -.24 .33*

Poor teaching -.12 .07 -.41*** .19

p <.05; ** p <.01; *** p<.001

Table 5 Stepwise regressions for Social Work and Psychology predicting *Learning Strategies* and *Challenge Seeking* from independent variables *Perceived ability, mastery climate* and *performance climate* (n = 70)

Learning strategies Challenge seeking

Social Work Social Work

Order of entry Order of entry

R² Mastery .46 (Beta .56) R² Performance .23 (Beta -.45)

Increment in R² Increment in R²

Ability .04 (Beta .25) Ability .20 (Beta .39)

Performance .04 (Beta -.22) Mastery .05 (Beta .25)

Total R² .54 Total R² .48

Psychology Psychology

Order of entry Order of entry

R² Mastery .33 (Beta .53) R² Mastery .22 (Beta .47)

Increment in R² Total R² .22

Ability .04 (Beta .21)

Total R² .37

-

-

Table 6 Stepwise regression for Social Work and Psychology predicting Willingness to take similar subjects in the future from independent variables Perceived ability, mastery climate, and performance climate (n = 70).

Willingness to take similar subjects in the future

-

Social Work Psychology

Order of entry Order of entry

R² Mastery .16 (Beta .34) R² Ability .26 (Beta .41)

Increment in R² Increment in R²

Ability .07 (Beta .27) Mastery .11 (Beta .41)

Total R² .23 Performance .05 (Beta .23)

Total R² .41

Appendix A Factor analysis results (Principal component analysis, varimax rotation) for mastery and performance goal scales

Social Work Psychology

F1 F2 F1 F2

Stem: *In this Social Work/Psychology subject:*

The lecturer wants us to enjoy learning about SW/PSY .42 .62

The lecturer stresses that hard work is the key to success in this course .47 .60

The lecturer gives us interesting work to do .75 .78

The lecturer makes sure we understand the work .81 .56

The lecturer wants us to learn how to solve problems on our own .59 .68

Students often do extra work because they want to gain more information .50 .46

The lecturer pays attention to whether I'm improving in my work .70 .42

The lecturer encourages trying even though we make mistakes .68 .63

We work hard because the lecturer wants us to know more about SW/PSY .70 .63

The lecturer encourages us to work for a high grade .57 .52

Students are urged to be self reliant in their work .44 .65

The lecturer wants us to try new and difficult tasks .65 .66

The lecturer wants us to present novel solutions to problems .67 .48

Students are given a chance to correct their mistakes .66 .45

Students compete against each other to get high marks .75 .71

Only a few students can get high marks .54 .58

Students feel bad when they do not do as well as others .52 .68

Students try hard to get the highest grades .44 .70

Students compete to see who can do the best work .69 .78

The lecturer lets us know if we're better or worse than other students .32 .67

Doing better than others is important to me .55 .51

Students want to know how others score on assignments and tests .57 .69

I worry when the work is difficult .42 .42

Eigenvalue 8.84 3.18 9.10 3.61

% of variance 24.54 11.88 19.26 19.24

Only factor loadings greater or equal to 0.40 are presented (except for one).

F1, Factor 1; F2 Factor 2

Appendix B

Students in Year 1

Question 3: How would you compare experience-based learning with conventional instruction?

Student #01

[...In a nutshell, from the start we were treated as valued and as individuals... a lot of time was spent on sharing our personal journey and the work we were given was interesting and fitted in with the 'big -picture' of the overall course and future work in the field. ...In contrast, mostly I went along to the other subjects and 'fitted-in". There wasn't much opportunity for student discussion, the lecturer or tutor talked mostly and we listened, took notes, and tried to get a handle on their position and ultimately the final assessment. Some subjects simply require rote learning to get through with reasonable grades... A lot of the material was not connected to social contexts and I found it a real effort to stay interested and connected. Mostly I just worked out how best to get through the subject with the best grade I could get. Overall, the mass lectures were a waste of time -. The odd lecturer made some sort of connection with the group - but with huge numbers, it's not really possible. Social work was different, the classes were smaller, the assessments had parts which connected up the different subjects and encouraged a lot of open debate about really contrasting ideas and value positions...the learning tasks and the tutors challenged us be self directed to think critically, read widely, consult with people in the community and form a personal stance and a commitment to working for some kind of social change. The tasks had meaning beyond the classroom...]

Student #02

[...For me Psychology provides the most contrast, from my experience it's about rote learning to get through the exams and continue in social work...It's not a matter of knowing or understanding much of what's behind issues, it's a matter of being given material, digesting it and giving it back to them in the required way... Psychology it's like you've given me something and I've had to take it on board...but, I don't experience it or find any meaning of my own... the social work approach has confronted me with the gaps in my knowledge, my ignorance, my stereotypes I guess, driving my own kind of discovery has encouraged me to learn more, it's made me aware of the great gaps in my knowledge... ...The biggest single motivator when we're working on an individual task is the group drawing on the knowledge of the group and the fact that we all must contribute to the final product or we are going to be 'letting someone else down'...each project we collaborate on is made up of all our efforts and it takes a real commitment...]

Student #03

[...Well, the difference is from the experience in social work I'm not going to go out on prac with just a lot of theory, we are working on real kinds of social work tasks from the beginning... ...Unlike the psych mass lecture and tutorial style of learning the social work experience leads pushes me to explore wider levels of understanding...Unlike the traditional lecture-based subjects where things are prescribed and presented in neat frameworks, in social work I have to search for answers and work at creating my own meaning...I'm learning

to test my own thinking about choices, and the solutions I put forward have to be workable and I'm asked to defend my ideas...It's not like just adopting a lot of givens or adopting party lines pushed by various disciplines, or particular lecturers like in our other subjects this year, I have to own my own position on things...]

Student #04

[...my comparison actually begins at Tafe College. My studies at Tafe College like my Psych subject currently were very structured and I had limited choice of what material I could explore and questions I needed to address for final essays...the format was mostly chalk and talk from my point of view and I was fairly passive in this process...I memorised the material for exams, and worked within the set guidelines when doing assignments. I approached the course and the tasks as was expected by the lecturer...In comparison, in social work, it's being directed down some set path. As a team we work in small groups to solve or suggest some approach to dealing with whatever social issue we've been given to problem solve...the biggest difference in social work is that tasks contain a real issue that social workers deal with daily... Social work feedback is explained as not only linked to my work currently but also is linked to the way feedback will be provided in the field through supervision...we're encouraged to use the feedback as a preparation for later in field prac and I suppose later as social workers in the field...The feedback in psych hasn't always been useful...it's hard to know what to make of some of the comments on essays as there usually largely negative or don't really spell out how I might do something differently...the psych classes are so large that trying to get some personal sense of direction is a bit of a struggle...much of my time goes into keeping up with the tutors reading out the set chapters which I have to grasp to do the quizzes and exams...]

Student #05

[...I'd compare the degree of student involvement...In social work I'm heaps more active and involved in the learning, lots of hands-on direct practice of skill building and testing my thinking, that sort of thing...I'm not solely focused on my own achievements like grades and that kind of stuff, it's much more collaborative, we work as a team to problem-solve cases and the tasks, and we share the outcome as a team...Lecture/tutorial kinds of subjects present me with a different kind of drill and process, here I'm expected or at least encouraged to compete against others for marks and that sort of outcome, here I work alone to produce work which is prescribed kind of top-down from others...basically the trick to get through this process is to rote learn the information as best I can and feed it all back in exams or as much as I can recall...Social work's a totally different kind of deal where I have to work through an issue with others, the focus is on trying to understand the material not just skim through it and try to pick out bits to memorise...group research is directed at bringing our research to some resolution where we put forward a preferred course of action, or a way of grasping the issues in a kind of framework...there is a tangible outcome which forms part of a presentation where we have an opportunity to relate our thinking and analysis to the wider group...I suppose this is the key aspect really the dialoguing and testing ideas in the group, the debates and sharing our thinking with others...]

Student #06

[...the most glaring difference for me is that some psych lecturers appeared to find the first year mass lecture a real toil and I'm not sure they really saw a lot of value in taking a really personal kind of approach to make it at all interesting... ...Psych was much about absorbing the set material and memorising general facts for the exams...I worked hard and did fairly well really... Social work was very much different, the material captured my interest, I could relate to the ideas and see how what I was exploring was connected somehow to working

with people....assessments in social work were also different, the assessments had parts which connected up the different subjects, encouraged a lot of open debate and clarification about really different perspectives and value positions...another relevant point is that social work was focused on really making some sort of substantive change...]

Student #07

[...The experience based model in social work is very interactive and revolves around the group working on a task, the group solving some sort of issue. In contrast, in Psych there's more structure, there's set readings, labs to attend, tests linked to the text, and greater clarity of what's expected, how to go about doing an experiment, writing a report, writing a Psych essay. Routinely, I remember material really well and enjoy the challenge of grasping the material and the kinds of assessments they offer in Psych... In contrast, in social work you're provided with very little structure, and you have to be self-directed working along with other group members to solve or respond to some kind of challenge that's posed to the group, in social work it's up to the students to search for the material and then argue their case...That's unlike Psych. In Psych the tutor takes a very active role in the tutorial, in social work the tutor more or less only guides us, we have to discover our own kinds of outcomes. And this can be really frustrating. Often you want the tutor in social work to solve part of the puzzle for you, tell you how to do part of the task, that sort of thing. But they don't just solve things for us, they pose more and more questions, the tutors require us to explain our processing, explain our ideas, explain the links we're trying to make... What's ironic from my point of view is that although I struggle with wanting to be given some more structure and some guidance, I think that maybe the model has forced me to work much harder, I've had to apply myself more consistently. I've wanted to resolve the kinds of problems that have been given to us to work on, and this has pushed me to read more extensively, collaborate with others, and learn to work effectively with the others in the group...]

Student #08

[...Experience-based is about being actively involved in problem-solving, actually doing something, working through some learning issue rather than being passive...experience-based learning contrasts for me with working within the constraints of someone else's imposed structure of set tasks, set questions, and limited freedom of choice to run with different ideas, and explore more radical solutions or radical line of inquiry...In contrast Psych is a graphic example of some fixed, timetabled set of coursework, the focus seems to be fixed on being able to memorise the 13 chapters, complete the quizzes and mini-essays and parrot it all back, even if the course material doesn't all gel together well, and even if you don't have the available time to relate the material to any practical kind of context...]

Student #09

[...Psychology for me provides the clearest comparison. In Psych, I basically work to get a pass. It's not difficult to achieve a pass without too much effort if I just stick to the text. It's spelt out clearly what you have to do week by week, and what you have to memorise for the assessments. Essays are easy enough with the main arguments outlined in the text and provided in lectures, and they're provided in advance so you've got time to plan for it. In psych I have a fairly good sense of how much is enough work to get through the assessments...You don't have to understand it fully, you just need to stay close to the guidelines, memorise the material for exams and overall come up with what's expected...Social work's another kind of deal altogether it's not spelt out for you, what you need to do to get a pass, it's really easy to fail so I'm pretty much compelled to stay on top of things...]

Student #10

[...Firstly, experience-based learning is about taking control of our own learning, being self-directed and searching for our own practical responses and solutions, this can be pretty well contrasted with submitting to someone else's learning as they define it and offer it in a structured way...although I'll admit that I find the structured courses have certain positives like for example, I can usually clarify fairly readily the amount of work I need to do so that I can get a pass comfortably, and I have a capacity to memorise the course materials well, and can construct a reasonable essay, it's not all that engaging or interesting...the very structured courses are usually dry kind of theory driven, repetitious kind of work, that has as its major goal an exam or major essay, and that's it basically...from my perspective learning that's caught up in some kind of personal meaning like in social work is quite another thing, and when I'm engaged in that kind of process I want to extend myself, I want to know more, understand things better because the learning is interesting to me internally, rather than imposed on me externally...And I have a key role to play in choosing what's important rather than someone doing that for me...]

Student #011

[...The other subjects - Psychology and Sociology are more straightforward. They give you the material, and you can see straight away what's expected of you, and basically you know how to go about. And I guess that's a lot easier than trying to fathom out what social work is demanding of you...While it's a lot more demanding, the social work course forces you to cover more material, it forces you to read widely and discuss the topic, and that somehow helps me learn more and understand the material in a more integrated sort of way. I'm not just looking at single topics and feeding that back in an essay or seminar. I'm learning how to connect up ideas, and link material from a lot of different areas...in the process that thinking, discussion, and debate that occurs in social work is reflected in my assessments, where I'm challenged to look broadly and analyse every piece of information... that inquiry process, and final piece of work that I present is something I've created, it's come out of my learning process, as distinct from some kind of structured process, like in Psychology or Sociology...]

Student #012

The experience-based approach is good in terms of interactions with others and having a more grounded idea of what you're doing ... But, its' downside is the amount that I have to put into the reading, the searches, the group time and wondering endlessly - have I covered what was asked for? At least in sociology, psych and communications studies it's straightforward what's required. And I can balance the workload, set priorities and work within those demands. However, in Social Work there's choice I guess, and that's all a part of learning, and it's all up to us to direct our own learning and come up with our own meaning. Having to do things for myself far outweighs the negatives, and I guess I can see that in what I've accomplished this year in the course. Apart from social work the tutors are in control of the tutorials and it's pretty much structured around the lecture and the readings that have been set for each week. In social work the tutor is less involved in lecturing to us and spends more time in the small groups encouraging us to carry out the task and explore the issues. Like I said earlier, we have to come up with the research. It's our responsibility to direct our learning... it would be a bit comforting to have some more structured kind of input in social work, an it would make it heaps more easier but maybe the benefits wouldn't be worth the learning? It's kind of a struggle, sometimes wanting to be directed, and sometimes really being aware of the benefits of experiencing the learning which you own personally...]

Student #13

[...Psychology provides the clearest comparison. ... In Psych we stay pretty much fixed on the one text, and that dictates the focus of lectures and the tutorials that follow on. Tutorials are really labs, so there's not a great deal of discussion or interaction either. ...it just all reversed to 'chalk and talk' and basic rote learning for the major exam. The odd lecturer in Psych could bring the material alive and that was engaging. But, for the most part it was dead boring. The material is presented in a more lively sort of way in social work, and it's engaging in itself. Rather than sitting immobilised like some sponge simply absorbing information I have to sort through the material in social work and critically analyse my thinking and the different perspective put forward. And that's discussed and sorted through in group. In social work I spend a lot of time reflecting on my own thoughts, and really questioning what's going on here rather than just accepting everything. It becomes an active process that kind of ongoing critique. Within a rote-learning situation I become quickly turned off and mostly concentrate on what I can minimally do to get through easily...]

Students in Year 4

Question 3: How would you compare experience-based learning with conventional instruction?

Student #401

[...Psych, sociology, philosophy, they're such different worlds in terms of learning compared to social work...I use the theories from my other subjects in social work and I apply ideas from social work to the issues raised in the other subjects...By far the strongest foundation knowledge I draw on though is my practice knowledge which I bring from the field, and which I've developed in the group research...It's that practice knowledge that I call on to test approaches in terms of a real context, or research drawn from an applied context...I've made those connections because I've had to find a way of bringing all the different approaches together in some kind of comprehensible whole. In psych and sociology is all about theory there is a never-ending series of perspectives. The problem is though, trying to make sense of it all and trying to apply it in some social context, this has been a real struggle at times... In social work I've been exposed to more theories in a very broad kind of way, but in social work I've made some strong connections with hoe these perspectives are played out or apply in a real context....Psychology is heaps more individualistic in terms of learning, it's very competitive, and it's very structured and authoritarian in what's prescribed for you, and the lack of choice makes it very rigid...And having said all that there's parts of that structure and individualistic approach which I'm attracted to, suits my personal style and I function very well in. but, by my final year in psych I've found that I need the kind of stimulation and sharing of ideas that I have in social work. So, it's quite unexplainable really. I've discovered in this later period how much I need to make use of the group discussion...In Social work I see the relevance for a collaborative approach, and this shifts the focus from me the individual competitor for marks and accolades, to group achievement and a collective kind of process....personal choice is a big feature too, along with directing your own learning there's the opportunity to select different ways to address the topics you're presented with, and, the opportunity to select different ways to address the topics you're presented with, and the opportunity to argue for alternative frame works to be considered...]

Student #402

[...I feel very competent to make comparisons and contrasts given my previous experiences in very structured traditional academic fields...From the experience that I've had, the structured learning has been good where I need to accumulate a lot of facts, and didn't need to really critique it at any meaningful level. In situations where memorisation and summarising material from standard sources was required I found that all very easy. And could leave a lot of study until before exams, or work in a very narrow area for a major paper...however, looking back over that experience rote learning I think I learnt very little, I took the lecture notes, memorised what was needed for the final exams, regurgitated it, and fairly quickly forgot it, just put that behind me without having any understanding of that material... when I look back I'm not certain that anything really stayed with me...In social work I've had to make sense of learning issues myself, it wasn't like I just had to absorb something put forward as, 'you must memorise this' and 'you must not question it'. In taking charge of my own learning I've had to construct my own meaning, not align myself superficially with some set or organised structure...Social work has been about: my discovering things, my inquiry, and my analysis of taken for granted theoretical formulas and perspectives. And, it's focussed on critiquing social work as part of that structure of knowledge, ideas, and power, that internal critique has featured as a very big part of my learning...the way the learning in social work focuses on a reality based context is a very significant factor in the learning process...Learning to develop tools, intellectual and practical, that can be applied to a situation and tested, facilitates that integration of knowledge and skills while working to deal with a real kind of task...Having a practical task and an authentic kind of issue to work on has been the most important thing. It's helped to ground the theory...]

Student #403

[...I suppose, I've always been a very motivated kind of individual and I came to the social work course with a lot of information gathering skills, that sort of thing. But I wasn't as confident as I am now in carrying out a piece of research, or critically analysing literature or reports. So, that confidence, and being able to demonstrate that in the course has been very influential. And I've been able to develop and draw on a wide knowledge base through being encouraged to be self directed rather than being directed by some set program...My whole writing style, my public speaking ability and my ability to work independently has grown immensely. And that's carried me through some really challenging situations in field practice too. I've been able to respond to challenges, work independently and make a real contribution in the work place. And my supervisors have observed that, and talked about what I conceptualise, and can do in a practical context...I perceive the social work course as encouraging me to develop those skills that I can apply, and I've seen the positives that come from being able to respond to difficult and very diverse situations. So I've been able to test that knowledge and those skills in a professional area, an area I think has a lot to contribute to society...]

Student #404

[...Given the extreme contrasts I'm unable really to make any links...I guess what is different however, is the way theories are explored in a social context so that the application of theory,, it's strengths, and limitations are examined in a practice context...in social work I'm involved with exploring theories at different levels in the group research and individual tasks ...Unlike the structured courses I'm involved in, where I listen, read, memorise, and then usually quickly write up an essay, or complete an exam, in social work there's no one fixed method...

I can't just seize on a set of readings, or refer to a set text, and work out an answer or a structure to a task...I have to grapple with forming some understanding of the issues, and find some method to solve the task, and I need to work out how to finally present my ideas in an intelligent form, and I need to be able to demonstrate my analysis and argument...The method that allows that process in social work is the group work it provides a forum for us to discuss, debate, and to test our ideas...allows us to experiment with theories, ideas...]

Student #405

[...Comparisons are difficult, however, personally, I experience a tension around enjoying the self discovery and the critical inquiry in social work, while at the same time wanting some input at critical points. What I envisage as a best option isn't a lecture-based model, but some sort of provision of very tailored content at key points in the problem-solving which would enhance our own exploration and discovery around a topic or issue...For me I'm aware that I need some content knowledge provided around an issue and I can work from that through discussion and further research really well...While I am very certain about the need for some structure in that transitional stage of entering the experience-based model of learning, and I believe how that's dealt with is critically important...I'm not advocating spoon feeding knowledge...input would have to be balanced so that the whole experience and the group based research wasn't made redundant to someone outlining or prescribing all the ideas. So, it's a puzzle really, how much is too little, how much is too much structure...]

Student #406

[...Experience based learning as compared to my other more traditional courses is about doing something in a practical way, in a real context, and then building on that skills base as you develop further and face challenges of increasing levels of complexity...From my view, it's exploring knowledge and testing out ideas in a real situation, and it's about developing conceptual tools to action those ideas...that taking action might be to learn research skills, to explore and gather information, to critically analyse, to discuss, to generate ideas around intervention, to provide practical crisis support and effective interpersonal skills, to work toward social change, and so forth...Experience based learning begins with actually experiencing some features, or themes, that surround an issue and that's the basis of discussion. I think that's the key aspect from my experience - the amount of discussion, elaborating ideas and the interplay of different perspectives that emerge...The level of confidence I've developed is significant to me in this course too. The practical skills combined with knowledge of social work theory and other disciplines, has prepared me to take up a position as a beginning social worker...And that level of competence has been observable to me in field practice and has been confirmed by my supervisors...Part of that sense of competence has been developing a kind of professional identity in the course, and having the opportunity to test that out on campus and in the field situation...It's very meaningful to know where all the effort and study is directed towards, in terms of being able to see what it is that social workers do in their practice...]

Student#407

[...Coming from a very formalised education system where I knew my place, and held the teacher in a god-like role it's been a shock to find the openness of the experience based model. We don't sit safely behind a desk, in neatly spaced rows, we sit in a circle, have eye contact and discuss issues as a group, and our individual perspectives have equal value...The experience-based model is very much a group process, we work collaboratively to solve a problem or an issue...We work as a team to take an issue, and research it through to the stage of taking some kind of action, and dialoguing that in the group presentation...Over the four years, I've experienced a gradual process of refining my values,

beliefs and my thinking. I've gradually developed a more sophisticated set of tools which I use to define concepts, critique and debate ideas, and I've learnt how to operationalise those ideas into some kind of action...I would compare psychology, sociology, and law by emphasising my experience of the rigid lecture approach, the structure of the large tutorials and workshops, the set text based focus, the teacher as being in control of that process...The emphasis given to the teacher dispensing the knowledge, like I'm some kind of absorbent sponge there to absorb all of that...in that kind of very directive format I have to synthesise someone else's point of view into some form, and basically transmit that back in an assignment, a presentation or an exam...I sense in that fixed structure that there is very little choice and not much interaction between students over lengths of time and I'm not sure if that's very conducive to my learning in any meaningful way...Whats confusing though is that in a kind of paradoxical way I both loathe that lack of collective research and interaction and love it. Personally, when I'm working on a fixed task, in a very structured area, and I'm in control of that, it's very pleasurable, and I like competing with myself to achieve really good outcomes. So, it's like being pushed and pulled by two competing forces...Equally, my very hands-on work and the challenge I find in social work, makes me very passionate about that kind of very practical and experiential approach to learning, but I also know that I like to also work in a structured kind of subject, and that order and clarity of what's required of me is very reassuring...Because of the contrasts between the two learning approaches I have to continually adapt to the different expectations that each model challenges me with and that's not always easy to negotiate...Each discipline and subject area seems to see it's expectations as having more importance. So, say in social work, it's as if that's all that matters. That's the only focus. Whereas in reality you have other subjects to complete which are equally demanding and complex in their own right...The kinds of struggles I have in structured subjects built around a lecture, and mostly inactive tutorials, is lack of participation, lack of choice, and the level of passivity that's encouraged by that approach. Some of the lecturers in sociology, and many of the lecturers in psychology and law, simply pontificate and talk down at the students, and frankly that does nothing to engage me in anything that's meaningful...]

Student #408

[...The things that I can perhaps compare were the small groups for tutorial in social work. I like that small group collaboration and I learn really effectively where I'm able to discuss and exchange ideas freely...In Psychology Sociology and Law the lecturers don't invite any meaningful interaction, and any questions I have don't usually get clarified in the tutorial. That's frustrating, because, it means it's hard to build knowledge, apart from rote learning the set work, that's going to be highlighted in the exams or short answer papers...When I am able to discuss what I'm exploring and confront different points of views I'm able to redefine and test my ideas in that kind of interplay. If I have to sit through classes where little discussion occurs it's very difficult to stay enthused and engaged...The relationship with lecturers and tutors is important too, I need to feel supported in expressing my ideas even if those views are really tentative and at times seem confused. Often in Psychology, Sociology and Law, I've got the impression, that if my ideas don't fit the mould, or if they question the party-line then that's not really welcomed. I've found it's a lot easier to demonstrate that I'm taking things in keep my mouth shut and feed back to them what I know the find acceptable, and what will receive reasonably rewards in the form of marks....Mass lectures are the most tedious, I feel compelled to go along and gather copious notes to be able to feel secure preparing for exams where I can recant it all back...In tutorials where there's little discussion it's hard to keep focused and motivated. Tutors in Psychology particularly monopolise the discussion with time taken mostly covering old ground which was explored earlier in the lecture...Assessments are mostly set out with few choices and all are circumscribed by the readings, so, there's not much room to move beyond the structure that's imposed...It pretty much comes down to playing the game that's mapped out to achieve good marks...]

Student #409

[...Experience based learning begins with the students own experience of a social issue, a problem, a kind of complex situation, and from there the learning unfolds through grappling with the situation to discover some solution...in social works hands-on model knowledge and skills are developed and applied to a real task which is grounded in a professional context...Learning tasks are constructed around real issues, tasks, and contexts...This approach I've described in social work is one where I am encouraged to be a self-directed learner rather than some passive receptor of knowledge...the learning places emphasis on the knowledge about, and the skills in the use of the self, time is spent on exploring and refining beliefs and values, and this connects with ethical responsibilities...through encountering my own belief systems, my values and ethical frame I can work towards developing a better understanding of how our my own history impacts on others, and how my interpretations and gut reactions, are often bound up in and coloured by my personal dynamics and my own experiences...self awareness and reflection is important to us as researchers too. We will need to assess the social, political and ethical ramifications of our research and evaluate ourselves in that process...contrasting this active experience as a learner in social work is the Mass lecture format of Psychology with no interchange of ideas whatsoever, a process followed by mostly inactive tutorials where someone reads form a paper or the set text...It's all mostly aimed at a structure around a mini test, major exam, or the essays that are required. For me as a learner this all drives a mostly mechanistic process where the signals are that I have to memorise and cram a lot of information to get through the major exams and reproduce the goods to succeed in the quizzes built around the set text...I guess, the other really different aspect is the competition for marks and the kind of one-upmanship that goes on particularly in psychology and law. It's very much driven by individual achievement and that's obvious in tutorials, and the push to obtain the few top grades, the lack of interaction and lack of real debate is another feature. What has struck me is the lack of collaboration between students, but I guess, the way the tutorials are set up it really doesn't aim to encourage much interchange between individuals...]

Student #410

[...Social work practice subjects are the most interesting, there very participatory and involve a lot of personal development exercises, interviewing and groupwork activities. Second and third years were much the same with increased skill development and time spent in field practice. Theory was integrated in practice workshops, and that knowledge and skills were built on in field placement...The experience of the Newcastle model has been far more challenging than what I've known in my other areas of study. The challenges here are principally in the discovery of knowledge, and the practice of practical social work skills, which are explored in real situations...Unlike my studies in Psychology and Sociology for instance, the approach presented to us in social work emphasises a critical approach to knowledge and professional practice...I've had to work at being really grounded in theory and able to defend and debate my ideas, skilled at gathering literature, refining information, analysing and discussing, this process has pushed me to refine my ability to research and put forward my ideas verbally and in written form...The vehicle for much of that discovery and critique has been the small group which I've found both challenging and very enriching. Grappling to find answers, and solutions to really complex challenges, along with my peers as so-collaborators, has been rewarding...I have been given a great deal of time, energy and support...]

Student #411

[...In a sense, I learn more more effectively in a qualitative way, in an experience-based learning approach, than I do in a lecture, tutorial format...When I'm directly involved in the

inquiry, discovering my own information, refining and generating my own knowledge, putting my own ideas and research to the test it's much more interesting and more engaging in a personal sense...In my Psych studies where I passively sit in a lecture for hours of being talked at, effectively listening to information that's not connected in any tangible or practical way to a context I can comprehend, then I just drift off, or busy myself with writing notes to fill in the space of time...When I'm gathering information largely to replicate in an exam, it's not entirely inspiring, it requires memorisation and a lot of rote learning usually before the exam, and then it's lost in my head somewhere, with all the other trivia I'm forced to absorb and parrot back as required...Lectures where someone talks at me, or relates material in a disconnected sort of way, does not engage me in a meaningful process...Sitting through material that's largely lifted straight from the prescribed text creates a very passive and boring experience which does not generate much interest...Some of the theory that's presented in Psych mass lectures is so obtuse that it's impossible to grasp...apart from writing down copious notes, which don't always at a later point in time convey understanding, I'm left with few options than to basically memorise the text as best I can and hope for the best in the exams ...]