

# EuroPLAT

European Psychology Learning and Teaching

## December 2010 Newsletter

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### Christmas Greetings

We would like to wish all partners a Merry Christmas. Let us hope that the New Year will see the network continue growing.

The turn of the year allows us to summarise what we have achieved so far as well as to make plans for the future. In June all EUROPLAT partners met for the first time in Edinburgh. In October the project celebrated the first year of its life. Among other things we have managed to build and develop the website and complete the first of three research projects (for report update see page 2). In the coming year we will have a chance to meet again in Istanbul to discuss psychology education and plan ways of moving EUROPLAT forward.

However, to have a vibrant European network that is useful to the psychological community, each individual partner needs to develop national relationships and encourage sharing of teaching and learning resources. So, in addition to meeting in Istanbul we should all be contributing to each of the workpackages, where York can provide support and guidance.

On a positive note, we can be proud of the progress we have made so far. Over forty associate partners have joined the network and we are confident that this number will rise. The strong foundation has been laid, and we can build on it and see the project flourish.

### EUROPLAT and ECP

**Don't register yet!!! See page 5.**  
The abstract submission deadline for ECP 2011 is the 31st of December. Don't miss it!

### Visa

Before you plan any further, please check whether you need a visa to attend the conference in Istanbul, Turkey.

### Timesheets

Please submit a timesheet for the time spent working on the project as soon as possible.



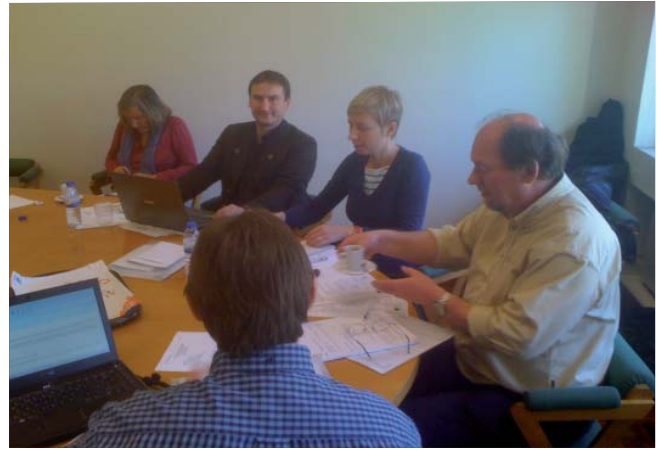
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### Core partners' management meeting

The fourth core project partners' meeting was held in Lisbon on the 3rd of December. The core partners from York, Aston, Lisbon, Salzburg, Vaxjo, and Ankara attended the meeting to discuss the progress of the project and the plans for the future. Meeting minutes will be available soon in the EUROPLAT publications section of the webpage [www.europlat.org/publications\\_1.htm](http://www.europlat.org/publications_1.htm).



## Innovation in the teaching of psychology in higher education in the EU

Peter Reddy, School of Life and Health Sciences at Aston University

The first EUROPLAT research report, on the state of innovation in learning and teaching in psychology across the EU, will be available shortly. Reviewing innovation across so many countries and universities is a challenging task and although the report has not captured everything it nonetheless lays down a benchmark which we can use to measure progress later. It also makes interesting reading.

To begin, a questionnaire was sent to EUROPLAT partners asking about the use of technology, the focus of teaching, and factors influencing change in teaching, ending with a free response section to describe current innovation.

The development of scholarship emerged as a key focus with the teaching of theory, research methods and research findings all seen as important along with academic skills such as critical evaluation and academic writing. Rising student numbers, technical change, and the need to find research time were factors driving innovation, suggesting rather pessimistically that saving time and money was more important than raising quality. The innovations described in the free response section were more optimistic however, showing teaching innovations

rooted in care for students' academic, personal and professional development.

The questionnaire was followed by a review of recent publications in learning and teaching in psychology that identified 56 articles, mainly from the two specialist journals, *Psychology Learning and Teaching* and *Psychology Teaching Review*. Both are UK based and research from Britain dominated the review, something it is hoped will be challenged soon by EUROPLAT members.

A thematic review of content generated 120 codings to 16 themes, the most frequent themes being teaching activities, constructivist learning, and assessment. Results are discussed in relation to the changing EU higher education context including growth in numbers, demands for accountability by governments, students and employers and the perception that university education may be an engine for economic growth.

The implications for the future importance of quality in learning and teaching are discussed and further EU opportunities for the dissemination of innovation are advocated. ●



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# Beyond the basics: Supporting students' vocational choices and employability skills through formal coursework

Anthi Loutisou-Ladd,  
Department of Psychology at the University of Cyprus

Helping psychology students define and successfully support their career path is essential for any department. Most have traditionally relied on informal academic advising and career services for this goal. More recently, many departments have formalised the vocational development and preparation of psychology students through field experience or career preparation type of courses. These courses typically have at least three distinct yet related functions:

## *(A) Supporting career planning and decision making*

Career choice is a complicated task and requires knowledge, skills and self-awareness. Psychology students face at least two unique challenges in regards to career choice. First, psychology is a diverse field of study offering a variety of career paths matched by few others (Sternberg, 2006). This variety can be both a blessing and a challenge from a career choice perspective. Second, while many psychology students enter university hoping to become professional psychologists, in some countries such as the UK, only a small percent of them will actually go on to do so (Lantz et al, 2008). Psychology instructors are in an ideal situation to support students in reaching career decisions. On one level, they can strengthen an awareness of the pragmatics of psychology and of various career paths, as recommended by Dillinger & Landrum (2002). This can be achieved through lectures, group discussions, assigned readings, informational site visits, and guest speakers. On another level, instructors can help raise students' self-awareness about their values, career preferences and interests, and strengths and limitations as recommended by Super and Thomson (1979). Effective teaching methods to raise students' self awareness include protected field experiences, weekly reflective journals, and instructor-guided exercises.



Photograph by Reinhold Behringer

*University of Cyprus, New Campus Nicosia*

## *(B) Fostering development of employability skills and skills necessary for graduate school admission*

From a learning theory perspective, students need to be taught these skills (e.g. preparing a curriculum vitae, writing cover and thank you letters, interviewing, communicating with prospective employers, working in teams, presentation skills etc). Instructors can structure and model the development of these skills through lectures, rubrics, samples, and guides. Towards the same goal, they can guide and support students to search autonomously for and secure a field placement.

## *(C) Encouraging the application of theoretical psychological knowledge to real world experiences*

Helping students integrate their theoretical knowledge about psychology with real world experience during a field experience or work placement of limited scope and time can be an effective way towards experiential learning. Instructors can also implement weekly reaction journals which allow for connection between theory and application of psychological knowledge.

## **Challenges for the Instructor**

The instructors of such courses should have the ability to address a diverse student audience with different career goals and at different career development stages. Such courses tend to be more time intensive

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for the instructor and typically require establishing and maintaining a network of professional and community partners. Instructors with clinical training may find that implementing their clinical skills helps to manage students' career stress and support their personal reflection and development.

## Conclusions

Formalized courses that focus on the career development of psychology students can be effective in increasing pragmatic knowledge and formulating perceptions about career paths (Loutsiou-Ladd, 2008). Further, they typically allow for the implementation of creative teaching methods and experiential learning, for more individualised contact with students and for bridging the gap between academia and community. Helping psychology students find their way and make career choices that they can support is priceless. ●

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*licensed clinical psychologist in Cyprus and Colorado, USA. Her primary teaching interests include professional training, clinical supervision, behaviour analysis, and supporting students' vocational development. Among other courses, she developed and teaches a required course titled "Applications of Psychology and Field Experience" offered to 3rd year psychology students at the University of Cyprus.*

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# The impact of psychology in management studies

## Ingo Bildstein, Institute of Entrepreneurship at the University of Liechtenstein

In the industrial economy workers contributed their brawn, but nowadays experts' brainpower is the most important source of competitive advantage for human capital organisations. As Peter F. Drucker put it in 1999: "The most valuable asset of the 20th-century company was its production equipment. The most valuable asset of the 21st-century institution will be its knowledge workers". Further proof for the importance of human resources in the knowledge economy is delivered by a certain Mr. Bill Gates, who once stated "Take away our twenty most important people, and I tell you we would become an unimportant company." In today's knowledge-intensive environment, it is impossible for a single person to know enough to solve increasingly complex and interdependent problems alone. Therefore, knowledge work is often about human interaction; new knowledge is created and

shared by teams of experts. Collaboration work is very improvisational – making it mandatory to perform it in close personal contact. In an attempt to further understand this important expert subpopulation, world-leading consulting company McKinsey developed a fine grained classification scheme, which can be accessed online via link: <http://whatmatters.mckinseydigital.com/flash/collaboration/>. The homepage impressively proves the practical relevance of functioning collaboration work, since most of the knowledge worker categories shown are heavily dependent on solving none-routine tasks in iterative processes. Motivating such professionals to deliver performance is at the heart of innovation, which is the key to long-term organisational sustainability and growth. The underlying problem is the dominating "homo economicus" idea of man in business

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management, meaning that humans are simple income maximisers who are solely motivated by extrinsic rewards. In the industrial economy, it was easy to determine individual contributions to tangible outputs. Hence carrot-and-stick motivational schemes did a good job in spurring individual work effort. Nowadays however, that motivational approach is outdated and counterproductive, due to the intangibility of knowledge work in- and output. Today it is therefore rather difficult to measure individual efforts to group knowledge creation and to allocate extrinsic rewards according to those individual contributions.

At the same time voluntarily sharing knowledge with colleagues leads to the arising of a social dilemma: having some idiosyncratic expertise always means gaining power and giving up valuable personal insights without adequate compensation is irrational from an individual point of view. Many experts are thus (legitimately) afraid that after putting their personal expertise into a database, the empty shell is no longer needed and they will be fired. Selfish team members might therefore not show full engagement, but free ride in teamwork. Fostering of non-reward-contingent voluntary efforts thus becomes decisive to avoid social loafing and to boost volition to deliver outstanding work results. Key elements of knowledge work(er) motivation, are fostering of intrinsic

motivation, trust and sense of camaradeire – and not waving with a big pay cheque. Nevertheless experts are aware of their central contribution to economic wealth creation and they do want to have a share in company earnings, too. Hence social, intrinsic and extrinsic incentives must be balanced to a coherent whole.



*Drucker Management Forum, Vienna, November 2010*

That should be an interesting occupational area for psychology graduates – of course some additional basic economic knowledge can't hurt to gain access to human resource management departments – but speaking from my own experience, working in the business community is an interesting option to take psychological knowledge into action. However, knowledge sometimes flows very slowly between scientific disciplines. As a result, many newsworthy research findings from socio-cognitive psychology haven't found their way into business schools and upper echelons so far.

Mastermind Drucker never explicitly picked up psychological considerations regarding knowledge worker motivation in his construct of ideas, but we already know that the knowledge age needs other motivational approaches to its antecedent societies. However, the required incentive arrangement is still fuzzy, indicating need for further research in the intersection of applied psychology and knowledge management. ●

*Author: Ingo Bildstein, EUROPLAT partner from Liechtenstein, was ranked #15 (out of 214 international submissions from junior researchers and young managers aged 35 and under) in the Drucker Challenge 2010 with his executive summary titled Tackling the 21st Century's Most Important Management Challenge by Seizing Innovative Psychological Considerations to Boost Knowledge Work Results. He participated in The Peter Drucker Management Forum, Vienna, on November 18th and 19th, one of the world's premier management conferences.*

### Do not register for ECP yet!

EUROPLAT has secured an agreement with the ECP for free entry for EUROPLAT partners to the first two days of the ECP conference in Istanbul during July 2011.

The EUROPLAT Annual meeting will take place **prior to** and during ECP.

Registration, travel and accommodation details will be sent out to partners in January. However, in the meantime, please keep the 3 to 6 July 2011 free to attend the event.



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## TEACHING PRACTICE

# Teaching statistics: What's wrong with maths?

Anna Lewandowska, EUROPLAT Project Officer  
at the University of York

Statistics is a required part of all psychology courses; however mention of the world 'statistics' gives many students the creeps. The reason is that statistics is inevitably associated with maths and mathematic calculations. This only makes the case worse for students choosing to study psychology for its humanistic values as they are often surprised to see such a strong focus on statistics within the curriculum. A study by Ruggeri, Dempster, Hanna, and Cleary (2008) reported that only 46.7% of undergraduate psychology students were aware of the statistical element of the course indicating that this lack of knowledge results in students not seeing the relevance between statistics and a the discipline of psychology. Moreover, the fear of maths causes high levels of anxiety among students which may in turn hinder their ability to learn.

There is much debate among academics over how much maths statistical teaching should contain. Some argue that the ability to perform mathematical calculations in a modern, computerised world is needless since it has nothing to do with teaching students statistical thinking (Seabrook, 2005) and does not reduce maths anxiety (Field, 2010). Dancey and Reidy (2004) stress the importance of conceptual teaching of statistics as it serves as a platform to understand mathematics. However, the ability to use formulae and perform calculations does not translate into statistical competency if it does not include the ability to reason and think (Rumsey, 2002). Others claim that even though students may survive using statistical software packages, it is desirable that they are capable of summarising and exploring data by hand if necessary (Mulhern and Wylie, 2005). In a way both sides are right. The ability to think logically has nothing to do with using complicated formulae that are hard to memorise and difficult to understand. On the other hand, some level of mathematical competency seems needed so as not to feel totally dependent on software packages. But the true problem lies beneath.

First of all we should ask what is so wrong with maths that there are advocates who advise to skip teaching it altogether. According to Field (2010), 43.8% of students

admitted that they liked hand calculations and the majority thought that "learning by computer was cheating" (Field, 2010, p.155). Do we skip teaching biology because at a more advanced level we need to deal with phenomenon one cannot see with a naked eye? In fact, I was always envious of my fellow colleagues who were good at maths as they clearly could have it all, if only they wanted to. After all the knowledge of maths does not prevent one from enjoying and understanding the writings of Virginia Woolf or Samuel Beckett whereas an absence of maths can close doors to professional development in the sciences. In my psychology first year, during one of the first logic seminars, I asked myself with bewilderment 'so you (whatever impersonal you I might have referred to) waited 12 years of my schooling only to teach me, how to think logically now?'. I was bemused. Nevertheless, I remember the pleasure of analysing arguments put in sentences in terms of them being true or false, even if they were as simple as: 'If it rains, the ground will get wet'. The point here is: the way to teach statistics is not by avoiding teaching maths since maths teaches you how to think logically. The way to teach statistics is by starting to teach logic which shows how to reason, argue, and conclude, then move on to teaching maths which in essence does the same as logic, only using symbols instead of words. If we start teaching students to reason that if  $p$  then  $q$ , we will fail, but if we teach them to reason 'if this then that' or 'if not this then that' they will have every chance to succeed (Marciniak, 2005). But this teaching needs to start early in the educational process. Ultimately, wouldn't the best time to teach reasoning and forecasting be "when a child who is about to go to bed asks the question: Do things exist even if we don't look at them?" (Maciolek, 2009).

Teaching statistics is not straightforward because it does not simply rely on memorising and reproducing material but on interpreting data and reasoning from variables which may be scant or conflicting. A lecturer also needs to overcome students' anxiety and resistance to learning material which students perceive as not relevant to their chosen field of study.

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How can the teaching of statistics and research methods be more effective? One way, recommended by many authors, is the use of humour and teaching through humorous analogy (Field, 2010; Zeedyk, 2005). Zeedyk reports that teaching through analogy is effective because “it ties common experience to a statistical concept, which gives that concept relevance and meaning for students” (p.101). On top of that teaching using humour reduces stress and anxiety, increases attendance and thereby improves understanding, makes a course more interesting and improves recall of information. It also humanises a lecturer hence building better bonds between the lecturer and the audience (Ibid.).

Another way to enhance statistical understanding and competency is by integrating lively examples from youth culture, newspapers etc., and real life scenarios into teaching and, in that way, endorsing with the principles of active learning and problem based learning (Wiggins and Forrest, 2004; Wiggins and Burns, 2009).

Using statistical software packages (e.g. SPSS) is commonplace when teaching undergraduates. Although the ability to operate software packages and analyse data using them is important, the computational competence does not always go hand in hand with the understanding of statistical concepts. To improve understanding Nabi and Rogers (2009) required students not only to submit hard copies but

to explain in their own words the outcome of the data analysis through the use of screen recorders. This allowed Nabi and Rogers to discriminate better between high ability students as well as to pinpoint areas of misunderstood concepts.

Last but not least a word about teaching statistics to postgraduate students. At this level students have usually completed some statistical training and the best way to utilise and integrate that knowledge is to design assignments where student can learn through teaching. For example, writing a statistical chapter for younger students enables active and deep learning as opposed to passive and surface learning (Bourne, 2008). Benware and Deci (1984 cited in Bourne, 2008, p.43) show that students learn more effectively when they are expected to teach what they themselves have learnt. In contrast, their learning is more superficial when they are expected ‘only’ to be tested on the material.

Students without a background in logic and well-developed critical thinking skills, may well shy away from maths and statistics. The challenge therefore in teaching statistics, which is multi-levelled, lies in helping students to take ownership of their learning process and to support them in developing skill in the basic building blocks underpinning statistics. This will also increase their competency not only in the university but will employ them with skills useful in the ‘real world’. And that is the overall aim after all. ●

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## Innovative Partner stories within the field of teaching and curriculum

### Improving students' academic competencies through research

Valeria Negovan, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Bucharest



Students at the University of Bucharest are being given extra opportunities to develop their research skills by undertaking research under supervision in place of two of their traditional seminar courses, an educational and a learning psychology course.

Small groups of students took a sample of data from a global project sample and analysed and presented the results at a real or simulated scientific event. This was under specialised supervision and provided the students with a stimulating context within which to practice scientific and academic methods of thinking and working.

We noticed that students involved in these activities show a more mature, focused and concrete attitude towards concepts than those who preferred traditional seminars.

If you have a suggestion, can think of better ways of doing things or would like to comment on anything, please feel free to contact us.

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### Reforming the university system in Greece.

Spyridon Tantaros and Elias Besevegis, Department of Psychology at the University of Athens



ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΑΙ  
ΚΑΠΟΔΙΣΤΡΙΑΚΟ  
ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ  
ΑΘΗΝΩΝ

There is a lot of discussion going on in Greece about the need to reform the university educational system. In this context, the Department of Psychology of the University of Athens has completed the reform of its programme of studies, which is a major step to the preparation of future psychologists in Greece.

In this respect, students who obtain the Bachelor's Degree have to a) successfully complete an increased number of courses on psychology and other relevant modules (208 ECTS), b) complete an increased number of hours of supervised practice in various settings (14 ECTS), c) follow a newly introduced preparation seminar for their dissertation (3 ECTS) and, d) write a dissertation, based on an empirical study that they conduct during the last year of their studies (16 ECTS).

With the expertise of the faculty members and the support of advanced technological equipment, this program will help the department adapt to the highly demanding educational environment.



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