Wrexham University Research Online

Journal Article

Enrichment week: Promoting confidence in public speaking and group discussion

Robbins, M. & Roch, N.

This is a pre-publication version of the following article, published by the British Psychological Society. The definitive version of this article is available at:
https://explore.bps.org.uk/content/bpsptr/32/2/49

Recommended citation:

Robbins, M. & Roch, N. (2026). Enrichment week: Promoting confidence in public speaking and group discussion. *Psychology Teaching Review*, 32(2), https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsptr.2026.32.2.49

Enrichment week: Promoting confidence in public speaking and group discussion

Professor Mandy Robbins*
Associate Dean, Faculty of Social and Life Sciences, Wrexham University

and
Dr Natalie Roch
Principal Lecturer, Psychology, Wrexham University

Address for correspondence:
Department of Psychology
Wrexham University
Mold Road
Wrexham
LL11 2AW
mandy.robbins@wrexham.ac.uk

Abstract

Each year, Wrexham University's Psychology Department hold their 'Enrichment Week'; an opportunity for all students to engage in extracurricular activities related to their degree. The students complete assessments during the course of the week, for the majority this is a presentation and/or group work. This evaluation uses a post-engagement questionnaire to gauge student attitudes toward Enrichment Week. Students generally express varying degrees of concern about individual presentations and group work. To measure the students' attitudes towards these elements of enrichment week the *Personal Report of Communication Apprehension* scale was included (Ebrahimi, Pallesen, Kenter & Nordgreen, 2019). A total of 47 students completed the questionnaire. All level 7 students were invited to participate in a focus group and two participated. Findings demonstrate that students are overwhelmingly positive about their experience of Enrichment Week and consider it to be a valuable learning experience. Students experience higher than average levels of anxiety around their presentations compared to their group work. This greater anxiety with regard to presentations is in line with previous research (see for example the meta-analysis undertaken by Tahir, Khor, Mozaka, Kayode, & Khan, 2017).

Keywords: presentations, group work, anxiety, assessment

Introduction

Wrexham University is committed to widening participation and in 2025 was ranked first in the UK for social inclusion for the eighth year in a row. The students who attend the University are significantly more likely to come from backgrounds with low participation in higher education. Usually, students are from lower social-economic groups and often first in their family to study for a degree. The profile of the psychology student cohorts at Wrexham University reflects the widening participation agenda with two-thirds classed as mature students. The cohorts are also predominantly female with less than five males within each year group. In 2019 the psychology team put in place an 'Enrichment Week', which takes place annually. The overall aim is to enhance the student experience and develop students' skills.

Enrichment Week

The Department of Psychology at Wrexham University have been running an enrichment week for all students (level 3, foundation year, through to level 7 postgraduate taught masters) for 6 years. Over this period the week has developed from hosting one outside speaker and student group presentations to staff to a much more varied format. All students have a presentation assessment scheduled for enrichment week and the presentations are to their peers and assessed by members of the academic team. Two student cohorts have to write a reflection on a Keynote presentation that they attend which is submited for assessment. Over the course of the week there are guest speakers who may present their research or provide their lived experience of working within different professions linked to Psychology. In addition, past students are also invited to talk to current students about their 'journey' from being a student to their current role working within a related field of psychology. All these presentations provide the opportunity for a question and answer session. Students also take part in 'The Enterprise Challenge', whereby different organisations, for example local charities and businesses, present a problem they have to the students. The students work in groups to come up with solutions to the problem presented using psychological concepts and theories. The students then present their solution to the organisations. It is a competition, and the outside organisations select the winner and a prize is awarded.

There are four main aims of Enrichment week. First, to provide a real-world experience of presenting to an audience in a supportive environment. Second, to provide students with the opportunity of bringing their developing understanding of psychological concepts and theories to a real-world problem presented by an outside body. Third, to broaden their horizons so they can see the possibilities that might be available to them on the completion of their course. Fourth, to provide an opportunity for all year groups to mix together and hear each other's presentations. We have found this to be particularly helpful for levels 4 and 5 where they can attend level 6 dissertation presentations. As demonstrated by Hidayad, Lestari, Laoli, Anam, and Despita (2023) oral presentations to students' peers have many benefits including the development of greater levels of self-confidence.

In the 6 years that Enrichment Week has been running the teaching team have noted that presentation anxiety is always, understandably, present among the students. This manifests itself both when they are required to present individually and as a group and is also found in other student cohorts, for example trainee nurses (Schulenburg, *et al,* 2024). Rahman and

Pinky (2023) in their study among 283 students found that students were most anxious about public speaking rather than group work and recommended universities provide students with appropriate opportunities to develop their communication skills.

Methods

All the students who took part in Enrichment Week were invited to complete a short questionnaire that contained 18 questions about their attitude and experience of Enrichment Week followed by the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension scale (PRCA-24: Sawyer, 2016). They were also invited to complete a question that indicated their level of study (from l3 through to l7). There was also the opportunity for students to complete a free text box. As there were no free text responses for the level 7 cohort a focus group was put in place to explore their views of Enrichment Week (two participants). Ethical approval for the study was given by Wrexham University's Ethics Committee.

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension Scale (PRCA-24) is a 24-item scale measuring attitude toward participation in meetings, public speaking, meeting dyads, and group discussions. For this evaluation two scales were utilised, group discussion and public speaking. Both scales are assessed on a five-point Likert scale: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree and agree strongly. The six items for each scale are computed to create a latent variable.

The 18 attitudinal statements about Enrichment Week were also assessed on a five-point Likert scale. Each aspect of Enrichment Week was covered within these statements from the guest speakers 'The range of keynote speakers was appropriate', to the enterprise challenge 'The Enterprise Challenge offered no beneficial opportunities to me,' to the organisation of the week 'The organisation and running of the Student Conference was poor'.

The open-ended question invited the students to tell us anything else they wished to about Enrichment Week.

The focus group invited the participants to respond to a series of open-ended questions on what they enjoyed about Enrichment Week, what they found challenging, and what they would change.

Results

A total of 47 students completed the questionnaire. Approximately 60 students took part in Enrichment Week providing a response rate of 78%. The majority of the students were from level 3 (40%) and level 4 (51%). Overall, the students reported that Enrichment Week was a positive experience for them. For example, nearly 90% (89.4%) agreed that 'Enrichment week was beneficial to me.' The Keynote speakers were very much appreciated by the students with 95% agreeing that the research discussed by the Keynote speakers was interesting. One level 4 student stated that 'The Keynote speakers were amazing!'. The Enterprise Challenge part of the programme was not received as positively by the students as other areas of Enrichment Week with endorsement dropping to just over three-quarters (77%) who agreed that 'the Enterprise Challenge allowed me to apply my knowledge to a real-world problem.' Overall, the students found Enrichment Week a positive challenge. Table one presents the percentage item endorsement of the 18 questions focused on Enrichment Week.

-Insert table 1 about here-

The data were explored for differences between the different levels of students in their response to the eighteen-enrichment week attitudinal questions. Despite the small cohort sizes the level 3 students presented a less positive attitude toward their enrichment week experience, particularly in respect of the enterprise challenge. Levels 4, 5 and 6 consistently reported positive responses of 90% and above whereas the level 3 students reported responses of 68 and 79% in respect of the enterprise challenge.

As mentioned above Wrexham University is a widening participation university and students generally struggle with confidence particularly around public speaking and group discussion, both important components around the assessment undertaken during Enrichment Week. The following presents the results of the analysis of these two sub-scales from the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) Scale. The first sub-scale is formed of six items related to public speaking. The second sub-scale is formed of six items related to group work.

-Insert tables 2 and 3 about here-

Both scales report a good level of internal reliability as measured by the alpha co-efficient, exceeding the .65 recommended by DeVellis (1991). Tables 2 and 3 demonstrate that there is more anxiety among the students regarding public speaking than around group discussion.

Generally, it is only around one-fifth of students who feel comfortable with public speaking while nearly two-thirds are comfortable with group discussion.

Table 4 presents the t-tests comparing the Wrexham students with the published norms for both scales. When comparing the mean scale scores for Wrexham University students with regard to public speaking is 13.83, lower than the norms (19.3: McCroskey, 1982) and higher for group discussion 18.98 compared with 15.4. Table 4 demonstrates that the difference between this sample and the published norms are significant. Although, caution needs to be applied to the t-tests given the difference in sample sizes between the norms and the Wrexham students. This difference between public speaking and group discussion was effectively summed up by one student 'Not everyone had a chance to speak in the presentation workshop. Though I do not enjoy public speaking, it would have been nice for my peers to get to know me as I have gotten to know them. Would possibly make me less anxious.' (level 4).

-insert table 4 about here-

The free text comments provided by the students at the end of the questionnaire were positive. The following comment left by a level 4 students provides a good insight

> 'Enrichment week was of huge benefit to me. I feel very lucky that it was organised.'

The free text comments focused on two main areas. The impact of the keynote speakers, for example:

> 'The keynote speakers inspired me and the opportunity to talk with students across the levels was fantastic. I built networks within university that feel invaluable. By the end of the week, I felt excited by the prospect of research and just how diversely a psychology degree can be applied. The enterprise challenge offered me real world experience which boosted my confidence. The opportunity to work on presentation skills was also invaluable.'

And the presentations

> 'speakers were really inspiring/motivating and taking notes made me more engaged (knowing I had an assessment on it); really nice to see other research (level 5/6 and past students).'

The focus group data was also demonstrates a positive view of Enrichment Week. The participants both focused on the keynote speaker who had been a student at the university in the past:

> '… I really enjoyed her talk she was really good, and of course she's been at the uni as well, yeh, I really enjoyed her talk she was brilliant so I think in future talks, people who have been at the uni before, yeh a definite advantage just cause obviously she'd been in the same place as where they are now, I really enjoyed her talk, I really did.'

They also considered that the week changed their attitude towards the lecturing team, for example:

> 'and has helped my learning as I'm not afraid to go up to a lecturer and ask for any sort of help because everybody is so open and enrichment week I think does that very well as it shows all of your personalities rather than just walk into a room teach and then go, it builds a repour a suppose between students and lecturer.'

The participants did not raise issues about presentations; however they did share their views on the group work element of Enrichment Week with one recognising the transferable skills the opportunity provided:

> 'obviously in psychology we are going to have to work with a hell of a lot of different um well, people from different teams so it was really good to have that diversity in there.'

Discussion

Enrichment Week was set up with the intention of meeting four main aims. First, to provide a real-world experience of presenting to an audience in a supportive environment. The results from the public speaking scale of the PRCA-24 are revealing, given how significantly lower the students' scores are on this scale compared to the population norms. Rahman and Pinky (2023) also found that students were more anxious about public speaking than group work. More opportunities to practice these skills are key to developing the students' transferable skills for when they leave their academic studies.

Second, to provide students with the opportunity of bringing their developing understanding of psychological concepts and theories to a real-world problem presented by outside organisations. The Enterprise Challenge seems to have gone some way to providing the students with that opportunity and there was the recognition from the students that working in

a group to respond to an outside need/problem was equipping them with useful skills. However, nearly a quarter of the students did not feel that they had gained from taking part in this challenge. This is a similar number of students who demonstrate that they do not feel confident when working in groups from the results presented on the group discussion scale of the PRCA-24. There is further work to do with students to support them to develop the skills they need to enable them to be more confident in engaging in group work.

Third, to broaden their horizons so they can see the possibilities that might be available to them on the completion of their course. This aim was well met according to the evaluation provided by nearly all (apart from two) of the students who took part. The presentations given by the two alumni were the key to broadening the students' horizons and challenging them to see what was possible for them. The key here is found in the qualitative outcomes where it is clear that students say the alumni who presented at Enrichment Week as peers, they had previously been on the same programme of study and had gone onto use their understanding of psychology in their future careers. As Hidayad *et al* (2023) demonstrated, greater self-confidence, in this case self-belief, comes from peers rather than lecturers.

Fourth, to provide an opportunity for all year groups to mix and hear each other's presentations. This aim was achieved, and students reported that the week helped them to develop their own research ideas, however, they did not specifically refer to this as a positive for the week.

Overall, the experience reported by nearly all the students who took part in the evaluation was that Enrichment Week was positive, and they gained from their active participation in the week. However, level 3 students did not report such a positive experience of Enrichment Week as other students.

Conclusion

For students who are from a widening participation background it is important that they feel enabled to approach the lecturers for support with their work when they need it. One of the outcomes from the evaluation was that Enrichment Week gave the students greater confidence in their willingness to approach their lecturers. This outcome was not something that was anticipated. The less positive experience of the level 3 students maybe as a result of

not all their learning at this level taking place within the Department of Psychology. Some of their modules are taught across the University and they would be taught with other disciplines. This may lead to a weaker sense of belonging to the Department which can equate to less favourable student experience (see for example Kahu, Ashley & Picton, 2022). This needs to be explored further with this cohort.

To provide students with an opportunity and a challenge outside of their normal academic engagement with their programme of study is valuable as is demonstrated by this evaluation. We will leave the final word to one of our students.

> 'Thanks for enrichment week! It wasn't really something I thought I'd be comfortable with, but it was structured well, easing my anxiety. Also, everyone discussed after how inspired they felt after the keynote speakers. Its not often I see university students inspired so congratulations!' (level 4).

References

DeVellis, R.F. (1991). *Scale development: Theory and applications.* London: Sage.

Ebrahimi, O.V., Pallesen S., Kenter, R.M.F. & Nordgreen, T. (2019). Psychological interventions for the fear of public speaking: A meta-analysis. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 10, (488). doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00488.

Hidayad, F., Lestari, D., Laoli, A., Anam, S. & Despita (2023). Academic success in the oral presentation course and overall self-confidence. *Asian Journal of Applied Education*, 2(3), 293-302. doi: /10.55927/ajae.v2i3.4189.

Kahu, E.R., Ashley, N., & Picton, C. (2022). Exploring the complexity of first-year student belonging in higher education: Familiarity, interpersonal, and academic belonging. *Student Success*, *13*(2), 10-20. doi: 10.5204/ssj.2264.

Tahir, H, Khor, J., Mozaka, G.M., Kayode, B.K., & Khan, T.M. (2017). Prevalence of communication apprehension among college and university students and its association with demographic factors: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Archives of Pharmacy Practice*, 8, 87-103.

McCroskey, J.C. (1982). An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication (4th ed.). Prentice Hall. McCroskey, J.C., Richmond, V.P., Berger.

Rahman, M.M. & Pinky, F.T. (2023). Communication apprehension among the communication students of Bangladesh. *Athens Journal of Mass Media and Communication*. 10, 1-16. doi: 10.30958/ajmmc.X-Y-Z.

Sawyer, C.R. (2016). Communication apprehension and public speaking instruction. In P. Witt, and B. Boston (Eds.). pp 397-426, *Communication and Learning*, De Gruyter: Mouton.

Schulenburg, S.L., Goldberg, D., Kreps, G., & Mi O, K. (2024). Communication self-efficacy and communication apprehension in a national sample of undergraduate nursing students: A cross-sectional study. *Nurse Education in Practice.* 77 doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2024.103977

Table 1: Attitude toward enrichment week

Statement	Agree %	Not certain %	Disagree %
Enrichment week was well structured	94	4	2
Enrichment week was varied in content	94	4	2
Enrichment week offered me an opportunity to Develop my transferable skills	87	11	2
Enrichment week was beneficial to me	89	11	0
I did not see any purpose to Enrichment Week	6	6	87
The range of keynote speakers was appropriate	91	9	0
The research discussed by the keynote speakers was interesting	95	2	2
I did not find the keynote speakers to have any benefit to me	8	13	79
There was a good structure to the programme	83	17	0
The organisations and running of the programme was poor	2	19	79
The student conference was beneficial to me	79	17	4
The student conference helped me to develop my research interest ideas	70	23	6
The Enterprise Challenge allowed me to apply my knowledge to a real-world problem	77	17	6
The Enterprise Challenge offered me an opportunity to develop my transferable skills	83	13	4
The Enterprise Challenge provided me with networking opportunities	51	36	13
The Enterprise Challenge offered no beneficial opportunities to me	15	23	62
The Enterprise Challenge was well organised	72	23	4
Enrichment week offered me the opportunity to build new and develop existing relationships with the psychology community at WU	83	15	2

NB: agree and agree strongly responses have been summed. Disagree and disagree strongly responses have been summed. Percentages have been rounded to nearest whole number.

Table 2: Public speaking

Item	% agree	item-rest-of-test
I have no fear of giving a speech	19	.81
I feel relaxed while giving a speech	21	.90
I face the prospect of giving a speech with confidence	26	.72
Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a speech	72	.84
My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech	68	.79
While giving a speech, I get so nervous I forget fact I really know	64	.75
Alpha		.93

Table 3: Group discussion

Item	% agree	item-rest-of-test
Generally, I am comfortable while participating in group discussions	62	.82
I like to get involved in group discussion	64	.64
I am calm, and relaxed while participating in group Discussions	39	.81
I dislike participating in group discussions	24	.78
I am tense and nervous while participating in group Discussions	43	.78
Engaging in group discussion with new people makes me tense and nervous	60	.76
Alpha		.91

Table 4: t-test

Scale	sample		norms		t	p<
	mean	SD	mean	SD		
Public speaking	13.83	5.9	19.3	5.1	-6.29	.001
Group discussion	18.98	5.4	15.4	4.8	+4.45	.001

Sample N=46 for Public speaking and 45 for Group discussion: Norms N=40,000