

## Conceptual change in psychology: Why being confused is beneficial for learning

Jason M. Lodge\*<sup>1</sup>

ARC Science of Learning Research Centre & Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education,  
University of Melbourne

### Abstract

Psychology, as a disciplinary area of study, has unique epistemological attributes that require careful consideration during the process of curriculum design. Unlike most other disciplines (with some notable exceptions) students enter into psychology programs with extensive experience in the basic subject matter: thought, emotion, personality and behaviour. Even students entering higher education straight from secondary school have broad experience in dealing with and attempting to predict and understand the thinking and behaviour of others. Many of these experiences, however, develop into theories and notions about the discipline and the practice of psychology that are not always accurate (Lodge et al., 2011). The theories that people naïve to the body of knowledge in psychology develop on the basis of their experiences have been described as ‘folk psychology’ (Arico, 2010). Previous conceptions of the subject matter, like folk psychological notions, can be a hindrance to learning in some instances but can also be powerful levers for conceptual change when used strategically as part of a deliberate design for learning (Vosniadou, 2012). In this presentation, I will discuss the results of studies in an ongoing program of research being conducted as part of the ARC funded Science of Learning Research Centre on the essential role of confusion in conceptual change. I will then explore the potential implications of this research for curriculum design in psychology by drawing on notions of productive failure (Kapur, 2008) and desirable difficulties (Bjork & Bjork, 2011). As part of this exploration, I will describe methods that have been found to be particularly successful in using confusion to overcome misconceptions in other disciplines where students bring extensive prior experience into class with them, such as physics (e.g. Muller et al., 2007). The ultimate aim of this presentation is to outline an alternate approach to curriculum design and sequencing in psychology that does not take a hierarchical path from recollection to application to critical appraisal of knowledge but rather exploits misconceptions and confusion as mechanisms for promoting lasting conceptual change.

### References

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\* Jason is the recipient of the APS Early Career Teaching Award for 2014

<sup>1</sup> Jason M. Lodge, ARC Science of Learning Research Centre, c/o Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne. Level 1, Elizabeth Murdoch Building, Parkville Campus, Vic. Australia. 3052.  
E: jason.lodge@unimelb.edu.au