

## Description, Didactics and Evaluation of an Online Course on Media Psychology

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A virtual seminar and its basic didactics as well as some experiences and results of the evaluation are presented. The online portal consists of 14 modules and accompanying methodical excursions. The modules and their contents are worked through in linear sequence, each module within a week. Didactics combine imparting of knowledge by direct instruction and an avoidance of "sluggish" knowledge via stimulation of learner activities involving the usage of the knowledge acquired in order to perform well at various tasks. The first aspect is reflected by the three phases of the modules: initiation (test of prior knowledge, introduction to the topic and presentation of objectives), acquisition (working on the learning material) and consolidation (summary, final knowledge test, transfer tasks and providing resources). The second aspect is represented by the tasks, which lead to higher cognitive goals. They require planned activities partly as pairwork, and discussions. Learners are supported by means of tips on effective learning, an overview about existing and worked through modules as well as an overview about tasks that they had worked on and their success at solving them (in part with individual feedback). Online, the contents are presented concisely and illustratively, offline scripts are intended to allow deeper and more detailed processing. Experiences were positive; the evaluation showed a high acceptance of the seminar and a high level of achievement of cognitive educational objectives.

# DESCRIPTION, DIDACTICS AND EVALUATION OF AN ONLINE COURSE ON MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY

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## (1) Description of the Online Course on Media Psychology

The starting point of the online course is the **WWW portal**. It contains three sections: **(1) course issues**, **(2) modules**, and **(3) tasks**.

**(1) Course Issues:** This section contains introductions to technique, navigation and course organization, an overview on topics, a guide to learning and working and information about tutors and course participants.

**University of Regensburg**  
Faculty of Philosophy II  
- Psychology, Education and Sports Science -  
Chair of Psychology VI

Miss Christina Mayer successfully participated in the course "Children's and Youngsters' World of Media" (<http://seminar-medienwelten.de>) during the winter term 2006/2007. The course covered 3 semester periods per week.

Miss Mayer worked on at least 14 compulsory and non-compulsory exercises in 14 topics (two of them in cooperation with a course participant). The written solutions were scored by a tutor. Mark: 1 (Very good)

The course topics were as follows:

- media concepts and the discussion of media effects
- a framework of media effects - fundamentals of the psychology of communication and learning
- usage of media - specific methods and recent results
- media consumption as parasocial interaction and the media equation
- stereotypes and prejudice in media
- knowledge acquisition through mass media
- children/youngsters and advertising
- media-induced social
- media and the development of moral and prosocial
- sex within media
- violence and aggression in media
- fear and anxiety through media
- media effects within subjective perception and as reflected by media
- research of media effects and pedagogical/practical action methods (extra topic)

The course was conducted by the Chair of Psychology VI within the domains of Media and Educational Psychology, Communication within the Fields of Family, Health, Management and Psychotherapy (according to the examination regulations for the diploma in psychology DPO § 24, Hauptseminar) and Media Education (according to the examination regulations LPO I § 110b).

Regensburg, 21.03.2007 Prof. Dr. Helmut Lukesch

Fig. 1:

Affirmation of course participation. It shows the course topics as well as the work that had to be done

**(2) Modules:** The course consists of 14 modules (see Fig. 1) and accompanying methodical excursions as well as a glossary. The modules are structured in three phases (see Fig. 2): **(1) initiation** (test of prior knowledge, introduction to the topic and presentation of objectives), **(2) acquisition** (working on the learning material) and **(3) consolidation** (summary, final knowledge test, transfer tasks and providing resources). Online, contents are presented concisely and illustratively, offline scripts (available after the presentation of objectives) are intended to allow deeper and more detailed processing.

Kursbezeichnung: Medienwelten von Kindern und Jugendlichen  
Modulbezeichnung: Module  
Arbeitsaufgabe

Modul 12: Angst und Ängstlichkeit durch die Medien 20.05.2004

Angst und Ängstlichkeit durch die Medien

**Einführungs-Phase**  
Voraussetzung Einführung  
Lehrziele und Überblicke

**Erarbeitungs-Phase**  
(1) Angst vs. Ängstlichkeit  
(2) Medieninduzierte Angst  
(3) Verbrechensidentifizierungen in den Medien  
(4) Die "Freaky / Angry" -Hypothese  
(5) Bedingungen der Wirkung von Bedrohungsreizen

**Sicherungs-Phase**  
Zusammenfassung  
Abschlusstest  
Arbeitsaufgabe  
Zitierte Quellen  
Weiterführende Quellen

Glossar  
Methodische Exkurse

Fig. 2:

Screenshot of Module 12 „Fear and Anxiety through Media“. The right-hand side of the picture shows the three phases of each module

**(3) Tasks:** Learners can send in their task solutions and are supported by an overview of existing and completed modules, an overview of tasks that were worked on and success at solving them (with individual feedback) as well as model solutions for all tasks.

**Procedure:** The modules and their contents are worked through in linear sequence, each module within a week. It is assumed that learners spend an average of 3 hours working on one module. Tutoring takes place via email and newsgroup.

## (2) Didactics

The course mainly sets cognitive educational objectives. **Didactics combine** a mediation of knowledge by **direct instruction** and an avoidance of "sluggish" knowledge by stimulation of **knowledge construction**.

**Instructional aspect:** This aspect is reflected by the three phases of the modules, which are designed according to the **nine steps of instruction by Gagné (1985)**: (1) gain attention, (2) inform about objectives, (3) stimulate recall of prior knowledge, (4) present the material to be learned, (5) provide guidance for learning, (6) elicit performance, (7) provide informative feedback, (8) assess performance, (9) enhance retention and transfer.

**Constructivist aspect:** This aspect is represented by the transfer tasks. They serve educational objectives beyond knowledge and comprehension and aim at application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation (Bloom et al., 1969). All tasks provide **real world problems**. Learners are forced to make an active and self-determined construction of applied knowledge, alone and in guided cooperation as well as in discussions of task solutions, in situated and contextualised settings. Tutors are part of the whole and only help on demand.

## (3) Evaluation of a Preceding (Largely Identical) Prototype

**Question:** Is the course **manageable**, **useful** and **reasonable** for learners?

**Sample:** 33 female and 7 male students; mean age  $M = 24.7$  years ( $SD = 4.9$ ).

**Dependent variables and their measurement:**

- Acceptance** of the online portal in general (structure, functions, topics), the modules (structure, contents, additional resources) and the tasks as measures of future "appetence behavior towards online courses".
- Emotions** of anger, boredom and enjoyment during learning as important mediators of learning processes.
- Experienced self-efficiency** in the usage of computer and online course during participation as a measure for the manageability of the course and competence of actions, respectively.

The above variables were assessed with an online questionnaire that was administered after completing Module 10. Learners had to rate their agreement with various statements on a five-point Likert-scale (for acceptance and self-efficiency: *I agree via neutral to I disagree*; for emotions: *absolutely correct via slightly correct to not correct at all*).

- Time input** for selected work phases used for estimating the overall time input. The rating of time input as regards tasks was given whilst posting the task solutions; the rating of time input as regards modules was specified before the final knowledge test was started (consolidation phase).
- Transfer performance** as indicator for achievement of educational objectives. Performance was assessed by eight obligatory tasks (15-point system).

Table 1: Characteristics of scales

Scales	Items	M	SD	$\alpha$	Score Range
Acceptance Online Portal	6	25.90	2.36	.66	6-30
Acceptance Modules	13	54.93	4.76	.80	13-65
Acceptance Tasks	6	22.35	2.91	.75	6-30
Emotion Enjoyment	6	23.45	2.56	.72	6-30
Emotion Anger	5	10.03	2.15	.74	5-25
Emotion Boredom	6	11.07	2.39	.74	6-30
Self-Efficiency	10	42.35	5.40	.83	10-50
Transfer Tasks	8	102.75	6.55	.55	0-120

**Results and Discussion:** The mean course **acceptance** as regards structure and functions of the WWW portal as well as scope and relevance of topics was satisfyingly high. Learners also rated the structure of the modules (well-structured, etc.), their contents (interesting, demonstrative, comprehensible, etc.) and their additional resources (helpful, demonstrative, appealing, etc.) positively. The acceptance of tasks was also good. Tasks were rated as reasonable, clearly formulated, well-prepared and good to work on. The mean score of task acceptance was decreased by tasks being rated as slightly challenging ( $M = 3.53$ ) and balanced as regards amount of work ( $M = 3.03$ ). But on these items, medium ratings are preferable because they show the manageability of tasks as regards effort and difficulty. In general, acceptance ratings show that the course was well accepted, but single aspects should be improved.

**Emotions** of anger and boredom did not appear so often during learning; the learners mainly enjoyed the course. In the face of the importance of emotions for learning and their relationships to performance (Titz, 2001), these ratings are welcomed.

The participants reported a fairly high **self-efficiency** of course usage.

This reflects that the course creators successfully realized low technical demands, minimal error sources and transparency of interactivity.

Mean task **performance** of 12.84 out of 15 points ( $SD = .82$ ) reflects a high achievement of cognitive educational objectives. The course is successful in helping learners to reach the intended objectives.

Average **time input** for solving a task and studying a module was 78 and 47 min., respectively. This means an average 2.25 hours to complete a module. As time input on other activities was not included in the assessment, an average minimal time input of 3 hours per week should be assumed.

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