Students' presentations:
Does the experience change their views?

Paul Sander & Lalage Sanders, University of Wales, Cardiff

Introduction: Research has shown that students do not like student presentations, yet a case can be made for them. This study seeks to understand the effects that presentations have on students.
Method: Within an action research framework, two repeated-measures studies were completed, one with students undertaking assessed presentations the other with those doing non-assessed presentations. Respondents completed both measures of the Views on Teaching, Learning and Assessment questionnaire (VTLA, derived from Sander et al., 2000) at the start and at the end of each study. All respondents completed the Academic Behavioural Confidence scale (ABC, Sander & Sanders 2003) at the start of each study but its second measurement was taken when only part of each cohort had undertaken a presentation.
Results: In the assessed presentation study, students who had done their presentations showed an overall increase in ABC, (p<0.05) indicating improved confidence. No such increase was found after the non-assessed presentation. In both studies, students showed significant increases in their responses to items on the ABC that related to public speaking, (p<0.05). The VTLA revealed that experiencing presentations as a teaching method can help students feel more positive about them and able to acknowledge benefits of presenting than they did prior to this experience. It also confirmed that students find presentations daunting and some have some concerns about learning from peers.
Discussion: The different responses in the two studies may have been influenced by the way that presentations were integrated into modules at different levels. However, it would seem that the experience of presentations might raise student confidence in their own abilities although it is less likely to change their views of the prospect of presenting.

THE STUDY PRESENTED here has its origins in trying to understand students and their views and conceptions of different teaching and learning methods in order to engage with them better and help them to be more effective learners. The focus of this paper is student presentations, both as a means of learning for, and as a means of assessment of, the student. Our attempts at this are set against a period of great change in Higher Education (HE). Over the last decade, a higher proportion of school leavers have entered HE creating greater diversity in undergraduate cohorts (e.g. Biggs, 1999; Davis, 2003; Winn, 2002). Today about 40 per cent of school leavers are taking up HE places as opposed to 15 per cent a decade ago. This increase in student numbers and student diversity is happening against a background of decreasing resources. There are now students with a greater range of abilities, as measured by public examination results, and probably a greater range of commitment to HE as well as a greater range of skills that will enable them to cope in this environment. For effective teaching of this increasingly diverse student body, the learning and teaching strategies used must engage all students in order to achieve acceptable retention rates and to realise their potential.

The research framework in which this study was carried out is one of action research which places teachers in a position where they can be the researcher, enabling them to understand and guide their teaching practice (Stevenson, Sander & Naylor, 1995). Within such a framework, theories are to be seen as resources for thinking about problems of living and teachers have a professional practice that is supported, not by externally generated

theory or generalised principles, but by experience tested in teaching settings (Bridges, 2003). The teacher assumes responsibility, through personal agency and autonomy, in a democratic setting, for identifying problems, thinking of ways to solve them, carrying out the research, considering the data and using the outcome to inform teaching practice. Research framed in this way is both a means of continuing professional development and a means of promoting reflexive practice (Bridges, 2003; Norton, 2001).

Teaching is not only done by the officially designated 'teacher' and indeed teaching methods can be considered as lying on a continuum from being high in teacher participation and control to high in student participation and control (Brown, 1993). The traditional, formal lecture would be a good example of a teaching method, albeit not one that was much wanted, that was high in teacher participation and control. Conversely, student presentations would be a teaching method that was high in student participation and control, although also one that was not much wanted (Sander *et al.*, 2000).

Arguably, teaching methods, or learning environments like student presentations, that require students to be active and involved are more likely to be effective and further the aim of making students autonomous, independent learners (Schwartz, 2003). The formal lecture may have survived in higher education partly because it was relatively easy, once prepared, to deliver. Furthermore it was sufficiently effective for the relatively homogenous student population that comprised just 15 per cent of school leavers. Sadly there is some evidence (Butler, 1992; Lammers & Murphy, 2002; Schwartz, 2003) that the formal lecture is still over represented in higher education. As the current admissions policy to Higher Education is increasing the number of less academically prepared and perhaps initially less committed students, the passive, un-engaging, formal lecture may be increasingly ineffective as well as not being much liked.

Can the teaching and learning environment be designed to promote greater student participation, engagement and, hopefully, deep approach to learning in the students (e.g. Biggs, 1999; Hartley, 1998)? Whilst the traditional lecture may be enhanced to engage students more, making it more effective, (see Biggs, 1999) alternative teaching methods such as small group teaching, laboratory work where possible, or research projects may well stimulate students, promoting better involvement with the academic material (Brown, 1993), and hence better learning.

Action research that had worked well in developing effective tutorials for students on a distance-learning course (Stevenson, Sander & Naylor, 1996), suggested a possible strategy for structuring teaching and learning environments that might be more effective than the formal lecture. This strategy involved asking the students, before the course started, how they would prefer to be taught and why. This seemed to be a good strategy because students themselves are 'one of the best resources in any learning situation' (Rees & Harris, 1992), to which might be added that they are a frequently overlooked resource.

Reassured that the action research approach was a fruitful way of guiding teaching practice, the methodology was extended to examine students' expectations of teaching in traditional university settings (Sander *et al.*, 2000). When students were asked to identify the way they would most like to be taught during their undergraduate course, student presentations came ninth in a list of nine teaching and learning methods.

The message was clear: when asked to rate presentations as a teaching/learning method, students did not like them. The students gave two main reasons for their dislike. One was the stress and anxiety they frequently cause and the other was concern over the poor learning opportunities that may be given to peers when expected to learn from each presentation. There is some evidence that the relative importance of

these reasons for not liking presentations differs across different student groups (Sander & Stevenson, 2002; Stevenson & Sander, 2002). The students identified interactive lectures and well designed group environments like tutorials as favoured teaching and learning methods.

However, a case can be made for student presentations (Sander, Sanders & Stevenson, 2002). Biggs (1999, p.110) argues that 'there are good reasons to believe that putting students in a situation where they become the teacher can be very effective.' Three reasons are given: the student-teacher will present material from a different perspective; will be more aware of examples of ineffective communication from experienced teachers and avoid them; and to avoid losing face with their peers, the student-teacher will make great efforts to ensure that the material is correct. One way to put students in the role of teachers is through student presentations. Some examples of good practice can be found in Hounsell, McCulloch and Scott (1996) and Curtis (1999). Hounsell, however, notes 'A review of the pedagogical literature on oral presentations in higher education yields only a modest crop of findings, predominantly from small scale studies of practices in single course unit or module' (Hounsell & McClune, 2002, p.2).

Kember (2001) advocates students presenting the results of independent exploratory research to each other in class as a way of facilitating a move away from students' dependence on didactic/reproductive learning. Hansen and Williams (2003) compared two versions of the same cross-cultural class, a 'traditional' version and a 'contemporary' version, which included student presentations along with other teaching/learning innovations. There were no systematic differences between the two versions on the exam and course evaluation measures used which shows that at least presentations do no harm.

Hansen and Williams should be applauded for having a control group against which to compare their contemporary course, although the lack of systematic benefit for this course could be for many reasons other than its mode of delivery. In contrast, Giuliano (2001), showed that students could favourably receive a course that centred on student presentations, although there was no direct comparison condition. Student evaluation of the course showed that they valued both working on their own presentations and learning from the presentations of their peers.

Relying heavily on student presentations, DeSousa and Franck (1980) designed a course to develop the classroom presentation skills of foreign student teaching assistants. Evaluations of the class showed considerable benefit to the students. Hart and Williams (1992) structured a class into small groups, each of which had a good public speaker who acted as a role model and a challenge to the other group members who strove to match her/his skills. Outcome measures showed that this strategy improved the public speaking skills of students in presentation assignments. Lau (1988) worked closely with students as partners to increase their motivation in engaging in student presentations.

Motivating and engaging students through the use of presentations has been developed in the curriculum at Alverno College which centres the student experience around assessment-as-learning with the aim of providing education which is learner-centred, knowledge-centred, assessment-centred and community-centred (Hakel, 2001; Mentkowski, 2000; Mentkowski *et al.*, 2000). In essence, the educational programme at Alverno seeks to move away from education as a process in which declarative and procedural knowledge is 'given away' through lectures, books and journals, to an educational programme which seeks to ensure that students have useful knowledge and understanding which they can apply and use and will continue to do so beyond the end of the course. One of the ways this is done is by recognising that learning should be active and *interactive* (Mentkowski, 2000).

Interactive learning programmes give students communication skills, one of the eight abilities in the Alverno curriculum in which students must become proficient. In this context, communication means more than writing essays, referring to oral communication and social interaction in general. As two Alverno students say 'an idea is no good unless you can communicate it to other people', and 'in order to get along in this world, you have to be able to interact with other people' (Mentkowski, 2000, pp.79–80).

Rees and Harris (1992) argue for a place for student presentations in the undergraduate curriculum, suggesting that they offer a number of distinct advantages, all of which are likely to promote deep learning. Curtis (1999), in her survey of practice in higher education arrived at similar conclusions. The benefits of student presentations, according to these authors are:

- They provide variety in learning approaches.
- They provide stimulation for the group.
- They promote the sharing of information and enthusiasm amongst peers.
- They encourage autonomy and independent learning.
- They provide opportunities for the development of team skills and listening skills.
- They provide an increase in expertise of the individual student, not only in terms of knowledge, but also in presentation skills, confidence and self-esteem.
- They allow for the testing of knowledge and understanding in a situation where the tutor may assess whether the student is able to apply and extend previously gained knowledge in the form of concepts and theories to their own work.
- They increase the likelihood that students will consult original sources rather than textbooks, giving them familiarity with research methods and encouraging critical evaluation, which means that work in other areas of the course improves.

- They lead to an improvement in the quality of seminar discussion and participation.
- For courses that include student projects, presentations stimulate ideas for project topics, and suggest methods of data collection and analysis.
- They promote preparation (usually through role play) for specific professional/real life situations
- They provide an essential preparation for employability by developing a number of transferable and life skills.

If student presentations follow a series of fully referenced lead lectures, designed to provide summaries of the main theoretical and research issues in the area, then a learning context would have been created that matched the four criteria that Biggs (1999) suggests are paramount. These are a well-structured knowledge base, an appropriate motivational context, learner activity, and interaction with others.

There are known academic difficulties with student presentations, though, in addition to the students' concerns over stress levels and the quality of information they may be given. It is not unknown for students to complain that teachers are expected to teach. Indeed, one of Stevenson, Sander and Naylor's respondents remarked that they had paid to be taught (1996). In this context 'it is helpful to remember that what the student does is actually more important in determining what is learned that what the teacher does' (Shuell, 1986, p.429). Hartley (1998) draws attention to the fact that the criteria for a good presentation can be vague, which is of particular significance if the presentations are to be assessed. Also, student presentations can not easily be repeated, which means that, if the presentation is to be assessed, supporting evidence is needed to allow independent verification of any grades awarded or to resolve student appeals. Nor can they be assessed 'blind'. Finally, it is hard to see how a live presentation can be anonymised in the same way that an essay or an exam script can, which could

disadvantage the student if the presentation is to be assessed.

The research presented here seeks to understand students' responses and reactions to assessed and non-assessed presentations. The understanding sought here goes beyond the collection of students' views and explores the extent to which taking a course with presentations as a key component affects students' academic confidence. It is anticipated that having done presentations, students will be likely to have increased confidence in their ability to perform a range of academic behaviours (Sander & Sanders, 2004) and retrospectively value the experience of learning through presentations. In order to consider presentations as both a teaching strategy and as assessments, two studies were undertaken. The two studies are integrated in this report to avoid unnecessary repetition and to aid comparison where appropriated.

Method
Design
Two studies were conducted: one followed students undertaking non-assessed presentations (NAP) and the other students doing assessed presentations (AP). In each of these, an analytical survey method was used, with a 2 x 2 factorial design.

Independent variables
1: Repeated measures
   Measures were taken both at the beginning of semester (Time 1) and around 10 weeks later (Time 2)
2: Between subjects Condition
   Pre- or Post-presentation

Dependent variables
1: Academic behavioural confidence
2: Views of presentations (usefulness and enjoyment)

Subjects
Two opportunity student cohorts were recruited, comprising mainly females, in their late teens or early 20s. All were on a psychology degree course at a new university in South Wales. In the NAP study, students were on the second level of their degree ($N=100$), studying in the second semester whereas in the AP study students were in their third and final year on the same degree ($N=64$), in the first semester. In each case, the presentations were embedded in a single module (equivalent to 12 credit points). In this study, students were allocated to either the pre- or post-presentation condition through matching on A level points at entry and ABC score at Time 1. Such a matching procedure was not possible for the NAP study as students had to be allocated to presentation topics and dates before the ABC scores were available.

Materials
The Academic Behavioural Confidence scale, previously known as the Academic Confidence Scale that was developed by Sander and Sanders (2003) was used along with the VTLA questionnaire, which measured Views on Teaching, Learning and Assessment. This was developed specifically for this study from the USET questionnaire (Sander *et al.*, 2000). The VTLA collected students' views on a range of teaching and learning methods but only those on presentations were used in this study.

Procedure
All students in both studies completed both the ABC scale and the VTLA questionnaire at Time 1, the first week of a semester, during normal lecture times, with the co-operation of the lecturers involved. The different classroom procedures for these two studies meant that the procedure at Time 2 differed in detail and, therefore, is detailed separately below.

Time 2 – Non-assessed presentations
These students were Level 2 students on a core, developmental psychology module. Students were put into groups, alphabetically, of around 10 students per group. The set presentation topics were allocated sequentially through each group and each student was given a date for their presenta-

tion. Thus students were presenting to small groups of their peers with a member of staff circulating between presentation groups.

The second round of data was collected in the eighth week of the Semester in a lecture slot half way through the series of student presentations. Approximately half the students had not yet given their presentation, whereas the other half had. All students completed both the measures. A small group of students were about to give their presentation in the next two hours and these data, therefore, were not analysed as the immediacy of the presentations might affect their responses.

Time 2 – Assessed presentations
The students on the assessed presentation module were Level 3 students on a core research module, their final year project. This assessment requires the students to present their research proposal to a small group (eight to 10) of their peers with two members of staff present. This is a one-day event with simultaneous symposia, organised towards the end of the Semester. The groups are determined by commonality of the subject matter of the project.

Approximately 10 weeks into the Semester, and over a week before the presentations, respondents in the Pre-presentation condition was asked to complete the Acad-

emic Behavioural Confidence scale. For the other half, Post-presentation, the same measure was taken at the end of their presentation session (morning or afternoon). At that time, all the AP students completed the VTLA questionnaire. Table 1 summarises the procedure for the two studies.

Method of analysis
For the NAP data, those students who had been about to present were excluded from all statistical analyses.

Confidence Scale
The ABC was scored by taking the mean response for each person, thus an individual's possible score range was 1.0 to 5.0, to one decimal place, thus providing a 51-point scale. These were taken as interval data and the Kolomogorov-Smirnov test was not significant, therefore, the scores were analysed using a mixed Anova, the within factor being Time and the between factor being Condition, (pre- or post-presentation).

Analysis of individual statements was conducted comparing across conditions (using the Anova as above) and also global changes across a complete data set were examined using a related *t*-test. In both cases a protocol was followed to reduce the risk of a Type I error. This required an examination of the differences in means for each state-

Table 1: Procedure.

	Non-Assessed Presentations				
	Subjects	*N*	Date	ABC	VTLA
Time 1	All	100	Week 1	√	√
Time 2	Pre-presentation	38	Week 8	√	√
	Immediately prior	*30*		√	√
	Post-presentation	21		√	√
	Assessed Presentations				
Time 1	All	64	Week 1	√	√
Time 2	Pre-presentation	31	Week 11	√	
			Week12		√
	Post-presentation	30	Week 12	√	√

ment over time identifying those that had the greatest change. Analyses were run on those with the greatest mean change until a non-significant figure was achieved at which point analysis ceased.

VTLA

The scoring of the individual responses to the selected questions used a five-point scale (5 being the more positive rating). Where significance testing was required, a Wilcoxon Signed ranks test was used for the whole sample in the AP study (as these respondents all completed the second measure at the same point); and separately for the respondents in the two NAP conditions who completed this measure either before or after completing a presentation.

Results

The results are presented in three sections. First, the impact of presentations on academic confidence is considered, followed by a quantitative summary of students' views on presentations. Finally, the categorised students' views on presentations are presented.

Impact of presentations on ABC

The ABC scores are considered first followed by an analysis of the responses to individual items.

ABC Scale Scores

ABC scores (calculated as a mean of responses to the 24 items) could range from 1.0 (least confident) to 5.0 (most confident) and these are summarised for both studies in Table 2.

In the NAP study there was no evidence of change over time or between conditions. However, in the AP study, there appeared to be an increase in confidence at Time 2 for those who had completed their presentation (Post-condition), but not for those yet to present (Pre-condition). Analysis of variance showed that no main effects but a significant interaction between time and condition.

It is noteworthy that in the AP study, the means of the two conditions appear to differ at Time 1 despite respondents having been matched prior to condition assignment. However as there was no significant main effect of condition in the analysis it may be assumed that giving an assessed presentation has increased students' academic confidence as measured by the ABC.

Individual items in ABC Scale

In order to explore the effects in more detail the means for the individual items (some of which refer explicitly to presentations) on the ABC Scale were examined in both studies. In each case, global changes over time across the whole sample and changes between conditions over time were examined using the protocol described above.

Table 2: ABC Scores, Means (SD).

Sample	Time 1	Time 2	Anova	
Non–Assessed Presentations				
Pre-presentation	3.5 (0.48)	3.5 (0.46)	Time:	$F_{1,54}=0.3$, n.s.
			Condition:	$F_{1,54}=0.2$, n.s.
Post-presentation	3.6 (0.47)	3.6 (0.40)	Interaction:	$F_{1,54}=0.1$, n.s.
Assessed Presentations				
Pre-presentation	3.6 (0.48)	3.6 (0.49)	Time:	$F_{1,58}=2.6$, n.s.
			Condition:	$F_{1,58}=0.6$, n.s.
Post-presentation	3.5 (0.49)	3.6 (0.38)	Interaction:	$F_{1,58}=4.7$, $p<0.05$

Global changes

The changes in the mean ratings for each statement, Time 2 to Time 1, ranged from to 0.60 to –0.16 for the NAP Study and from 0.31 to –0.08 in the AP study. The statements with the biggest changes in the predicted direction are listed in Table 3.

In the NAP data, three statements showed significant increases in ratings from Time 1 to Time 2 whereas in the AP data only one was significant.

It is noteworthy that the ABC has three statements (3, 5, 10) that could be described as 'public speaking' statements, of these two showed a significant increase in the NAP data and one in the AP data. One of the significant statements for NAP students refers to giving a presentation to a small group of students, which is exactly the task that the students were in the middle of doing.

Changes between conditions over time

This analysis examined responses to individual items over time by condition (pre- or post-presentation). The only items that were analysed were those where the absolute changes over time showed a sizeable difference between the two conditions (Table 4 overleaf).

In the NAP data the item with the largest difference showed a mean decrease of 0.14 for the pre-presentation respondents and increase of 0.3 for the post-presentation respondents. The significant interaction shows that the two conditions responded differently over time, only those in the post-presentation condition reporting a significant increase in confidence about being able to read the background material. This is interesting, as those who had done their presentations should have read the recommended background material before giving their presentation.

Three items in the AP data were deemed to show big enough differences between conditions to be worthy of analysis. One of these items showed a significant effect of time and an interaction indicating that students in both conditions had reported an increase in confidence about responding to questions, but that this increase was significantly greater for those who had already given their presentation. For the other two, there were no main effects but significant interactions were found indicating that only the post-presentation group were reporting increased confidence in attaining good grades and remaining adequately motivated.

Summary

There were more global changes across the cohort in the NAP but more condition effects in the AP data. The statement showing a significant change most often is S3 (Respond to questions asked by lecturer...), which shows changes in three of the four possible comparisons.

Table 3: Item changes over time, Means (SD).

Sample	Time 1	Time 2	Paired t-test
Non–Assessed Presentation Study			
3. Respond to questions asked by lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre	**1.95** (1.11)	**2.18** (1.24)	$t=1.69$, df=55, $p<0.05$
5. Give a presentation to a small group of students	**2.86** (1.43)	**3.46** (1.21)	$t=3.99$, df=55, $p<0.001$
20. Pass assessments at the first attempt	**3.43** (0.74)	**3.75** (0.84)	$t=2.68$, df=55, $p<0.01$
Assessed Presentation Study			
3. Respond to questions asked by lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre	**2.19** (1.18)	**2.54** (1.32)	$t=2.87$, df=60, $p<0.01$

Table 4: Item changes by condition over time, Means (SD).

Sample	Time 1	Time 2	Anova	
Non-Assessed Presentation Study				
14. Read the recommended background material				
Pre-Presentation	**3.69** (0.92)	**3.56** (0.91)	Time:	$F_{1,54}$=0.59 n.s.
			Condition:	$F_{1,54}$=0.11 n.s.
Post-Presentation	**3.55** (0.89)	**3.85** (0.75)	Interaction:	$F_{1,54}$=4.38 $p<0.05$
Assessed Presentation Study				
3. Respond to questions asked by a lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre				
Pre-Presentation	**2.26** (1.21)	**2.35** (1.25)	Time:	$F_{1,58}$=8.89, $p<0.01$
			Condition:	$F_{1,58}$=0.28, n.s.
Post-Presentation	**2.20** (1.19)	**2.73** (1.39)	Interaction:	$F_{1,58}$=4.27, $p<0.05$
7. Attain good grades in your work				
Pre-Presentation	**3.53** (0.73)	**3.27** (0.87)	Time:	$F_{1,58}$=0.85, n.s.
			Condition:	$F_{1,58}$=0.18, n.s.
Post-Presentation	**3.27** (0.91)	**3.37** (0.81)	Interaction:	$F_{1,58}$= 4.10, $p<0.05$
22. Remain adequately motivated throughout				
Pre-Presentation	**3.47** (1.01)	**3.10** (1.09)	Time:	$F_{1,58}$=0.07, n.s.
			Condition:	$F_{1,58}$=0.63, n.s.
Post-Presentation	**2.80** (1.03)	**3.23** (1.07)	Interaction:	$F_{1,58}$=10.64, $p<0.01$

Views on presentations

Feelings about the usefulness and likeableness of presentations were collected on a five-point Likert-type scale, where the higher the score, the more favourable the view. Table 5 (overleaf) summarises students' views on these issues.

The medians for the non-assessed presentations show improved ratings for presentations as both assessment and as a teaching method across both conditions of interest (pre- and post-presentation). As there was a similar response in both conditions, the data were analysed as a single sample. The Wilcoxon Matched Pairs Signed Ranks test showed that as a teaching method presentations were rated as more useful (z=5.4, $p<0.001$) and enjoyable (z=4.0, $p<0.001$) and similar improvement in ratings for presentations as assessments (z=5.9, $p<0.001$ and z=4.1, $p<0.001$, respectively).

In contrast the AP data (where all respondents completed this measure post presentation) not only show no improvement in ratings, but what little change there has been in the median ratings for the sample as whole is in the opposite direction to that predicted making statistical analyses inappropriate.

Categorised student views on presentations

Students were invited to comment on what they perceived to be the positive and the negative aspects of a range of teaching and learning methods. Tables 6 to 9 (overleaf) present summaries by ranked importance of comments freely given. The more often a category comment was made, the higher this ranking, with one as the highest rank.

Table 5: Ratings of Presentations, Medians.

Non-Assessed Presentation Study	Time 1	Time 2
Pre-Presentation	(*N*=36)	(*N*=29)
How useful are presentations as a teaching method?	3	4*
How much do you enjoy presentations as a teaching method?	2	3
How useful are presentations as an assessment?	3	4
How much do you enjoy presentations as an assessment?	2	3
Post-Presentation	(*N*=20)	(*N*=15)
How useful are non-assessed presentations?	2**	4
How enjoyable are non-assessed presentations?	2	3
How useful are presentations as an assessment?	3**	4
How much do you enjoy presentations as an assessment?	2	3
Assessed Presentation Study	(*N*=60)	(*N*=57)
How useful are presentations as a teaching method?	3	2
How much do you enjoy presentations as a teaching method?	3.5	3
How useful are presentations as an assessment?	3	3
How much do you enjoy presentations as an assessment?	4	4

Variability key: *Lowest rating (1) not used; **Highest rating (5) not used. All other responses used full range.

Table 6: Non-Assessed Presentation Study: Positive Comments (ranked by frequency).

	Time 1	Time 2	
		Pre	Post
Make you do a lot of work	1	2	3
Interaction with peers	2	3	2
Your confidence increases	3	6	4=
Other's perspective	4=	5	1=
Promotes learning	4=	1	1=
Good practice for the future	5	4	4=

Table 7: Assessed Presentation Study: Positive Comments (ranked by frequency).

	Time 1	Time 2
Make you do a lot of work	6	–
Interaction with peers	2=	4
Your confidence increases	5	5
Other's perspective	3	3
Promotes Learning	1	1
Good practice for the future	2=	2

Table 8: Non-Assessed Presentation Study: Negative Comments (ranked by frequency).

	Time 1	Time 2	
		Pre	Post
They make me nervous/ I feel embarrassed	1	1	1
Problems with learning from peers	2	2	2
Non-specific statement of dislike	3	3	3

Table 9: Assessed Presentation Study: Negative Comments (ranked by frequency).

	Time 1	Time 2
They make me feel nervous/ I feel embarrassed	1	1
Problems with learning from peers	3	–
Non-specific statement of dislike	2	2
Someone else's views	4	3

The types of comments that were made across both student cohorts and at both times were very similar. There is a change in the rank order of the positive comments in both cohorts over time, whereas the negative comments show very little change in frequency either over time or across cohorts.

Discussion

The two student cohorts taking part in this study had different types of presentation to give; for one cohort presentations were being used as a teaching strategy and were not assessed whereas for the other cohort presentations formed part of an assessment for their final year project. It was predicted that getting students to act as teachers to their peers through student presentations would result in increased academic confidence and more favourable attitude to presentations. No prediction was made as to which type of presentation would be more effective in achieving this.

For the non-assessed presentations, the statistics show no effect of completing a presentation on the ABC scores. However, when the 24 constituent statements in the ABC scales were examined, one between-condition difference was found: Read the recommended background material, which suggests that those who had presented appreciated the need for background reading and felt more able to do this adequately. There were changes over time however, regardless of whether students had given their presentation or not. There were statistically significant increases in ratings for three statements: Respond to a question asked by a lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre, give a presentation to a small group of students and pass assessments at the first attempt. It is reassuring to observe that these students, whether or not they had given their presentation, felt more confident about giving a presentation to a small group of students. It is also reassuring to note that they felt confident about passing assessments at the first attempt. It is likely that changes occurred over time, regardless of condition to which these students were assigned, due to sustained exposure to presentations as part of the learning programme for the module. This cannot be established beyond doubt from these data, as there is no control, however, it would seem to be a plausible interpretation of the data.

The increases in perceived usefulness and enjoyment of presentations amongst this cohort also show some beneficial effects of taking part in this programme for all students. These increases may well have been because the students discovered that presentations could be beneficial and engaging way of learning. Module evaluations are consistently very favourable. In line with this, these students' views on presentations show that they appreciated that presentations were: (a) a good learning strategy which made them do a lot of work, and (b) gave opportunities for interacting with peers and hearing their points of view. All of these are commensurate with students profitably engaging with the presentations as part of their learning.

One statement in the scale explicitly asked students to rate how confident they felt in doing a presentation to small group of their peers. The overall rating for the whole cohort doing non-assessed presentations indicated an improvement, whether or not they themselves had yet presented. That there was no difference between the two conditions for this statement could suggest that just watching peers do their presentations could enhance individual confidence.

In contrast, in the assessed cohort, there was an overall increase in confidence for those who had presented but not for those yet to present, as demonstrated by the Condition/Time interaction. When the individual statements were examined, those who had responded after presenting had higher overall scores on three statements: Remain adequately motivated throughout, respond to a question asked by a lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre and Attain good grades in your work. Across the cohort overall, there was only one difference: Respond to questions asked by a lecturer…. This statement seemed to reflect an aspect of the student career most susceptible to improvement through presentations of any sort.

As final year students, the recognition that presentations were good practice for the future in the students' responses may well reflect these students' awareness of imminent interview and job requirements to give presentations. These responses also show that these students see presentations as helping the learning process. The students appreciate the interaction with peers and the different perspectives that can emerge from this. However, respondents did not show any improvement in their rating of enjoyment or usefulness of presentations either as an assessment or as teaching method.

Whether the between-condition difference in overall confidence is due to the presentations being assessed, or to the nature of the module structure in which the presentations were embedded, a cohort effect, or indeed, due to the fact that these students were in the final year of their degree, focusing on important final year marks and their future, is unclear. Consideration of the differences in the way presentations were embedded into the two modules could have an important bearing on the results. In the module where presentations were not assessed they were central to the students' learning experience and other students were expected to learn from each presentation. It may be that these are attributable to the fact that the students worked in small stable groups for five consecutive weeks, which introduces a further confounding variable. In the assessed presentation module, presentations could be seen as an imposed requirement that had to be satisfactorily delivered. Other students were not to be assessed on their learning from these presentations. This difference in the organisation of the teaching is probably a very significant factor in the different results for the assessed and non-assessed presentation studies.

The differences in the module organisation caused further methodological problems. The students experiencing non-assessed presentations all completed their Time 2 questionnaires at the same time. Some had already done their presentation; others were just about to do theirs, whilst the remainder had theirs in the next couple of

weeks. In contrast, those having assessed presentations completed their T2 questionnaires at different times. Half completed their questionnaires approximately one week prior to their presentations. For the other half of the students, their questionnaires were completed immediately after all students had completed their presentation. The difference between Time 2 and Time 1 for the assessed and non-assessed conditions was different, again due to the different module structure, with Time 2 being eight weeks into the module for the non-assessed and 12 weeks into the course for the assessed cohort. It was not practicable to restructure either of the teaching programmes in order to produce a perfectly controlled trial. However, the differences between the results of the two cohorts are informative.

Whilst the ABC scale provides some evidence for the increases in confidence, at least when giving assessed presentations, there was no evidence for 'post-presentation euphoria' as found by Sander, Sanders and Stevenson (2002). The fact that for one cohort between-conditions differences could be identified in three items clearly contributed to the overall effect in the between condition scores. This raises the question as to what the ABC scale is measuring, and whether the totalling of the individual items has validity. This is the subject of another paper (in preparation).

It would seem that the AP data showed that presentations could have a beneficial effect by comparing the two conditions. Whereas the NAP data suggest that the beneficial effects of presentations is not restricted to those who have themselves presented but rather observing their peers presenting seems to also to have some very useful effects.

Whilst the views on learning, teaching and assessment questionnaire did not set out to test explicitly Biggs' (1999) three predictions, the categorised student comments do offer some insight into these claims. Both student cohorts said that having a different perspective on the material was important to them. They also noted that presentations make you do a lot of work, helped learning and were an effective learning strategy. However, experience shows that the quality of student presentations can be very variable, suggesting that some students, at least, apparently do not mind 'losing face' with their peers. The quality of presentations (as opposed to accuracy of information) ranged from the best, putting the most effective teacher to shame to the worst as awful, often through the reading of a pre-prepared script. Both cohorts of students had been given extensive guidance on how to give an effective presentation. The assessed presentation cohort had even experienced three deliberately bad presentations from the teaching team, prior to their own presentations, to make the point. One of these was reading from script.

The negative student responses show that students have concerns about learning from their peers. This is in line with the USET study (Sander *et al.*, 2000), which showed that one of the big worries, particularly of the medical students, was that, the material that students present may not be accurate. This is in contrast to the one of Biggs' benefits of student presentations.

The considerable impact of presentations as stressful and an unpleasant experience for the students was found in this study, replicating earlier findings (Sander, Sanders and Stevenson, 2002; Sander *et al.*, 2000). Whether or not the anxiety generated by presentations actually causes any harm has been discussed elsewhere (Sander, Sanders & Stevenson, 2002). Sadly the experience of giving a presentation in what we would like to think was a supportive environment does nothing to allay student anxieties.

The students freely noted that one of the benefits of student presentations is interacting with peers and hearing alternative perspectives. This is noteworthy beyond Biggs' benefits from presentations, suggesting possible research in line with social comparison theory in general and Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2002) analysis of

frames of reference in particular. Social comparison is an intrinsic part of the self (Gardiner, Gabriel & Hochscild, 2002), and some situations make people's interest in others through social comparisons more likely (Stapel & Tesser, 2001).

In conclusion, this study shows that getting students to give presentations can have beneficial effects on academic confidence, although the nature and onset of these effects differs considerably with the way in which presentations are employed within the module. The VTLA data suggest that while students experience concerns about the prospect of presenting they may come to appreciate some benefits in line with Biggs' (1999) predictions.

Correspondence

Dr Paul Sander
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff,
Western Avenue,
Cardiff CF5 2YB.
Tel: +44 (0)29 2041 6893
E-mail: psander@uwic.ac.uk

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Appendix – Materials

Academic Behavioural Confidence Scale
How confident are you that you will be able to:

		Very confident					Not at all confident
1.	Study effectively on your own in independent/private study.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
2.	Produce your best work under examination conditions.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
3.	Respond to questions asked by a lecturer in front of a full lecture theatre.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
4.	Manage your work load to meet coursework deadlines.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
5.	Give a presentation to a small group of fellow students.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
6.	Attend most taught sessions.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
7.	Attain good grades in your work.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
8.	Engage in profitable academic debate with your peers.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
9.	Ask lecturers questions about the material they are teaching, in a one-to-one setting.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
10.	Ask lecturers questions about the material they are teaching, during a lecture.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
11.	Understand the material outlined and discussed with you by lecturers.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
12.	Follow the themes and debates in lectures.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
13.	Prepare thoroughly for tutorials.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
14.	Read the recommended background material.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
15.	Produce coursework at the required standard.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
16.	Write in an appropriate academic style.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
17.	Ask for help if you don't understand.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
18.	Be on time for lectures.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
19.	Make the most of the opportunity of studying for a degree at university.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
20.	Pass assessments at the first attempt.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
21.	Plan appropriate revision schedules.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
22.	Remain adequately motivated throughout.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
23.	Produce your best work in coursework assignments.		☐	☐	☐	☐	
24.	Attend tutorials.		☐	☐	☐	☐	

Views of Teaching and Learning

Teaching
Each of the following types of teaching methods are used at some point during this degree.

1. Please rate how **useful** you find each of these:

	Very much				Not at all
a. Formal lecture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Interactive lecture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Student presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Workshops	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Private study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Please rate how **much you enjoy** each of these:

	Very much				Not at all
a. Formal lecture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Interactive lecture	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Student presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Workshops	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Private study	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Assessment
Each of the following types of assessments are used at some point during this degree.

3. Please rate how **useful** you find each of these:

	Very much				Not at all
a. Coursework Essays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Practical Reports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Student presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Exams using essays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Exams using brief answers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Exams using MCQs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

g. *(*Multiple choice Questionnaires)*

4. Please rate how **much you enjoy** each of these:

	Very much				Not at all
a. Coursework Essays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b. Practical Reports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c. Student presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d. Exams using essays	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e. Exams using brief answers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f. Exams using MCQ*s	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

g. *(*Multiple choice Questionnaires)*

5. What do you like **best** about each of these three general methods
   Lectures ....
   Presentations ....
   Workshops ....

6. What do you like **least** about each of these three general methods
   Lectures ....
   Presentations ....
   Workshops ....