

European initiatives in psychology education and research[#]

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Abstract: Psychology within the EU is likely to become more coherent as a discipline with initiatives such as the European Diploma of Psychology, and more and more countries adopting the Bologna process as the basis of their educational provision. In addition, text books now appear which are adapted from American versions, giving a »European« perspective. The European Federation of Psychologists Associations (EFPA), though it does not award research grants, is keen to promote initiatives such as the new European Research Council, which has recently come into existence. Within EFPA's Committee on Scientific Affairs, there are initiatives to make PhD arrangements more homogeneous across Europe, in order to enhance opportunities for migration and personnel transfer. Some current projects of international interest will be discussed. In particular, ethical issues need to be addressed on a broad scale, since the credibility of psychology, and public confidence in the profession, is dependent upon there being open and transparent ethical procedures. This applies to the conduct of professional therapy and also more mundane matters such as the ethical approval procedures adopted within individual psychology departments in which research is conducted by staff researchers and by undergraduates during training. The British psychological Society has recently produced a document, which is being considered currently for pan-European application, on this issue.

Keywords: psychology, Europe, research, qualifications, ethics

Evropske pobude v psihološkem izobraževanju in raziskovanju

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Povzetek: Psihologija v Evropi bo verjetno postala bolj koherentna disciplina, predvsem zaradi pobud, kot je Evropska diploma iz psihologije, in sprejemanja bolonjskega procesa v zakonodajah o izobraževanju v vse več državah. Danes učbeniki, ki so sicer priredbe ameriških verzij, že dodajajo temam "evropsko" perspektivo. V raziskovalni sferi Evropska zveza psiholoških združenj (EFPA), čeprav še ne dodeljuje štipendij, podpira razne "evropsko naravnane" pobude, npr. nastanek novega Evropskega raziskovalnega sveta pred kratkim ali predlog Komiteja za znanstvene zadeve, da bi poenotili doktorski študij v Evropi

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in povečali možnosti mobilnosti raziskovalcev. Prispevek govori o projektih mednarodnega značaja. Poudarja tudi poenotenje etičnih vidikov, saj sta kredibilnost psihologije in zaupanje javnosti v to stroko odvisni od odprtosti in transparentnosti etičnih postopkov. Ne samo v profesionalnih terapijah, tudi na posameznih ustanovah, ki se ukvarjajo s psihološkim raziskovanjem, in na univerzah, ki o tem poučujejo študente, je nujno sprejemanje etičnih načel. Britansko psihološko združenje je pred kratkim o tem izdalo dokument, ki bi lahko postal vseevropski dokument o etičnih vprašanjih v raziskovanju.

Ključne besede: psihologija, Evropa, raziskovanje, kvalifikacije, etika

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Psychology within the EU is likely to become more coherent as a discipline with initiatives such as the European Diploma of Psychology, and more and more countries adopting the Bologna process as the basis of their educational provision.

Across Europe, Psychology is one of the most popular academic subjects, and it becomes ever more popular, and especially among women—always about 70% of psychology students are female in all countries. In many central and eastern European countries it is taught as a single entity (all graduates head into “psychology” careers), but it teaches many transferable skills—psychology graduates (at bachelor level) should know about statistics and hypothesis testing, about literature reviewing, writing coherently to present an argument, decision-making, handling people and presentation skills. So psychology graduates are also valued in business and other areas. In the west, Psychology may also be taught as a single honours degree (“BSc or BA psychology”), but it can also be taught as joint honours, i. e. in combination with other valuable applied subjects such as computing, languages, philosophy, economics, business. The latter can lead to jobs in many areas only loosely connected to psychology. (However, about 33% of graduates enter professional practice).

When the European Federation (EFPA) was set up in 1981, it was in part in response to a need to harmonise training across Europe, and one of its objectives was to produce a pan-European qualification for professional practice. After many years of work, the EuroPsy (European Certificate in Psychology) has finally reached fruition. It originated with Ingrid Lunt at the Institute of Education in London (Ingrid is now at Oxford University), plus a committee of psychologists from several EFPA countries, to provide a common benchmark against which psychologists working in the professions (clinical, educational, occupational, counselling) can be “measured”. A pilot project is now being conducted in six EFPA countries: Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and the UK. The most recent meeting was held in Brussels in October, 2006. The issue at present is how to measure the competencies that are needed for registration. After that, assuming it is successful, EuroPsy registration will

be open to qualified psychologists in all 25 member states and 7 other European countries. A EuroPsy Professional Card will be launched.

The EFPA declaration of 2006 describes the EuroPsy as “the comprehensive European standard for the education and training of psychologists who qualify for independent professional practice” (European Federation of Psychologists Associations, 2006). The standard is “based on established scientific criteria for psychology as a science and profession”. It is interesting to see the words “science” and “scientific” featuring so much; we seem to be moving toward evidence-based practice and a more rigorous, scientifically respectable approach to dealing with clients, which is a positive development, I think. Why do we need EuroPsy? The idea is to allow greater mobility, since supply and demand vary widely across Europe. Also it addresses differences in the ways in which psychologists become registered and qualified in different countries. In some countries, there is no supervised professional practice incorporated in training. In Finland, for example (though I am not singling out Finland for special praise or criticism!), there is a generic term (and legally protected title) “psychologist” which is applied across all professional areas, and so someone qualified in psychology (after completing generic training, over 5 years) is able to fulfil roles as an educational psychologist in school; an occupational psychologist in business (human resources); or as a clinical or counselling psychologist in providing clinical assessment and therapy for patients/clients. In other countries, these areas of psychology are highly differentiated and have special training and accreditation under different “divisions” of the national professional body. How do we merge these traditions? The proposal is to have psychologists qualify for “membership of a list” for which it is necessary to fulfil certain criteria, or, if criteria are not fulfilled, it must be specified what that individual needs to do to meet those criteria. Some countries will be net donors, others net recipients, of course, depending on salary scales, and also language factors, I guess. The relatively high salaries paid to UK clinical psychologists (they earn much more than university lecturers!) make the UK a popular country, especially as many psychologists throughout Europe speak very good English. (Under proposed UK statutory regulation, a standard of ESL of 7 is likely to be required, and perhaps 7.5 or 8, for practice). I do not envisage a great outflow of UK psychologists to Sweden and Finland (or Slovenia, I guess). There will be other criteria set by individual employers, of course, in addition to the diploma, but the diploma is a good starting point. Eventually, if university curricula are merged, via the adoption of the Bologna ideals, then it will become much easier to assess exactly what an individual has studied, and what their qualifications comprise. At present it is guesswork to some extent. EFPA specifically argues against the Bologna idea of a 3 year training that could train professionals for the labour market; 6 years in total is required (3 + 2 + 1, giving 300 ECTS). The EuroPsy qualification is mainly intended to (a) increase potential mobility, but equally (b) to protect the public, since qualifications are properly scrutinised, and a commitment to ethical codes is also a requirement of registration. It is a stepping stone toward European integration in Psychology.

Language is likely to be contentious. At the EFPA general assembly in Vienna in 2003, which I had the pleasure of co-chairing, one delegate complained about the use of English on the EFPA web site, English language adoption for EFPA conferences and so on. “Shouldn’t EFPA”, he asked, “stand for the English Federation of Psychologists Associations?” I pointed out then that it is the size and economic power of the USA that largely drives this phenomenon; it’s to the US that many Europeans apply for grants (writing in English), they read much of the influential literature in English and translate their own works if they want broad circulation. It is frankly no pleasure to me, having the greatest admiration for the French and Russian languages, that a psychologist who is a native speaker of the language of Pushkin or Dostoyevsky, Sartre or de Maupassant has to speak “American” to contribute to international conferences! However, this is a phenomenon that we are stuck with. The French are especially concerned about promoting French language and culture, though in recent years they have had to give in to practical pressures. Even French government ministries now publish reports in English; they want circulation and if publication is in French, no-one reads them.

There were complaints at the last EFPA European Congress in Granada, when many talks were given in Spanish—it was suitable in Granada, since there were many local participants. I can assure you that in Prague in 2007, all materials will be available, well, not in Slovenian, but at least in English (or American, whichever you prefer).

Euro PhD

The Spanish have been especially active here (Jose Prieto) in arguing for pan-European accreditation of PhDs. But PhDs vary, and in discussions, many anomalies have appeared which make the exercise rather difficult: centrally awarded PhDs versus university-based awards, for example, and public defences versus more intimate viva voce examinations. PhDs can be early qualifications, versus late “doktorats”; the latter apply within France, so this is not just an eastern European phenomenon. But is accreditation necessary? Yes, if the PhD is a “guarantee” of mobility, but it is unclear what this means. Anyone can apply for university positions in Britain; there is no barrier. We already employ lecturers coming from Italian, Polish, French universities. Assessment is on the basis of grant-worthiness and potential, research track record, and language skills.

I think that there are misunderstandings about the situation in the US. It is often said that in the US, professionals can move from one state to another, but it’s not always so. In clinical psychology, those accredited and given practice certificates in one US state cannot often move to another without taking additional qualifications! Among university teachers, there are anomalies. The APA only accredits postgraduate qualifications, whereas both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications are accredited in the UK. Membership of British Psychological Society is achieved on

the basis of undergraduate qualifications. Because we accredit first degrees, it does happen that people from the US do not meet our criteria if they have studied liberal arts psychology, with less than 50% psychology in the total syllabus. They can be eminent researchers from prestigious universities, but do not meet our requirements for basic accreditation! Strange but true.

A European approach to Psychology?

Is it possible to identify a European approach to psychology, European syllabus and materials, as distinct from American? The European and American traditions are obviously close, but do they differ? According to Michael Eysenck (son of Hans), the development of psychology in the US began with a pervasive influence of behaviourism, whereas in many European countries it originated within philosophy: Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Mill and Kant (Eysenck, 2001). The great early European laboratories were those of Weber, Fechner and Wundt in Germany—often dualistic in approach and concerned with the ways in which inner perceptions and feelings reflected the psychophysical reality of the world “out there”. In fact, behaviourism also began there. It was while working in a German laboratory in the late 19th century that Sechenov (Sechenov who, in St Petersburg, led to Pavlov and Bechterev) noted that a horse would salivate at just the sight of its hay bag, and there the great traditions began, from St Petersburg or from New York. Interestingly, both Watson and Sechenov suffered similar fates at the hands of their rather puritan universities, both being ostracised for marital infidelities. But behaviourism was a late comer in Europe, it was one of many approaches in psychology. The influence of behaviourism (especially Watson and Skinner) was more enduring and deeper in the US. Michael Eysenck argues that at one end of a research continuum is theory-driven research (which may sometimes lack experimental rigour), while at the other end is the measurement of observables (which may lack theoretical rigour). The US can be seen to be more often located at the measurement end and Europe most often at the theoretical end. American personality research has focused on measurement, whereas Hans Eysenck (the father) argued for the need for a theoretical understanding of the genetic, biological underpinnings of individual differences in personality.

UK psychology has, of course, been very strongly influenced by US psychology, the Anglo-American tradition. Atkinson and colleagues (Hilgard and Atkinson—even used when I was an undergraduate), who, incidentally, became the first psychology textbook millionaires, were able to produce glossy expensive texts much favoured by students. They incorporated learning assessment and dialog box approaches which were useful didactic tools. But it was the size of the US market that enabled these to be developed. Someone from Oxford University Press commented to me recently that for “Oxford” read “USA”. But text books now appear which are adapted from American versions, giving a “European” perspective. Books (by Ameri-

cans but with European authors added) such as Carlson's *Introduction to Psychology* (Carlson, Martin, & Buskist, 2003) and Zimbardo's *Psychology: A European Perspective* (Zimbardo, McDermott, Jansz, & Metaal, 1995) are adaptations. In the past many of the examples given in US textbooks related to e. g. US coinage and US concepts. Some argue that Maslow's hierarchy is based upon a very American model of what drives people. It is a very individualistic model, while many European countries are generally more collectivist. Moreover, the style is different. As Neil Martin pointed out, American texts were criticised by editorial boards for "not taxing students enough": they "spoon-fed without evaluating the material they presented" (Martin, 2001). Also, large chunks of important research conducted by psychologists in Europe were routinely ignored. A recent American text trumpeted as a "definitive introduction to forensic psychology" featured no research by Davies, Gudjonsson, Bull, Canter, Memon or Bruce, all of whom are prominent Europeans in the field.

The European Federation of Psychologists Associations (EFPA), though it does not award research grants, is keen to promote initiatives such as the new European Research Council, which has recently come into existence.

I mentioned earlier that EFPA is keen to promote science. EFPA was called EFPPA (European federation of professional psychologists' associations) but its name was changed in 2001 to reflect the fact that science features in psychology as much as professional practice.

Recently the European Research Council (ERC) was set up. Guess, please: How many psychologists featured on the founding board in 2005?

The answer is: not one. Not a single psychologist. In the US it would have been different. We do have a job to do to convince the academic community in Europe that psychology is a science. This perhaps reflects what I said earlier; psychology varies across Europe, in part due to its history and inspirations (philosophers, also Freud). Psychologists do now feature as members of sub-boards of the ERC, I am happy to tell you.

The new ERC will be responsible for the funding of research on a Europe-wide basis starting with FP7. Probably as in the past big consortium arrangements will be favoured: many partners, multimillions of euros. But there are problems with big international consortia arrangements. They are much loved by bureaucrats (because they don't require much intervention from Brussels), but administration within a consortium can be a nightmare. Certainly, they do have the effect of drawing together European partners and traditions into symbiotic relationships. The EU seems to regard this as ideal politically, although many people working in science do not agree. In the past I have experienced projects which fail to deliver on some meas-

ures, because a failure to deliver by researchers in country X leads to a delay in the contribution of country Y and these delays in turn are compounded to create an impossible situation for country Z. Exchange rates and VAT exemption apply differentially across countries and sometimes people find themselves 150,000 euros in debt because these things had not been properly accounted at the outset. Also, in comments made by both the British Psychological Society's Research Board and EFPA's Committee on Scientific Affairs, often psychological research is cheaper (not fMRI!) than neutron accelerators, and sometimes we can use a laptop computer or even paper and pencil if necessary. I work in technological areas, but many do not. Many EU grants are vast; smaller grants would create more competition and greater inclusion.

Current topics of international interest

International articles in *The Psychologist*—which include Slovenia, of course—provide some examples specific to the countries concerned, and are worth consulting on the BPS website (see international committee pages on www.bps.org.uk). In the December issue, we cover Ukraine (the progress of psychology in the wake of the “orange revolution”) and Romania will be covered in January/February, about the time when they and Bulgaria accede to the EU. We try to cover topical countries. So far, about 30 have been covered.

We have heard at your conference about excellent neuroimaging work and electrophysiological work being done here in Ljubljana, also about positive psychology which features prominently in the west also, and if I don't mention these it is not because they are not important.

But if I had to identify some »emerging« priorities, there are 3 major areas of research that are worth highlighting and which I think are predominant—I hope that my international colleagues agree. They are (a) ageing and assistive technology research—includes disability and rehabilitation, (b) terrorism and cultural diversity (this has been a recent development) and the related areas of (c) culture and identity, also individual differences, gender issues (in relation to access to employment), and so on. I will only discuss the first of these.

Ageing, disability, and technology. I don't like to group ageing with disability, because many young disabled people see it as demeaning to be labelled together with old folk. However there is overlap in terms of the applications of technology. In each member state, assistive technologies have limited markets. For example, when the “possum” (in Latin, “I can”) communicator was introduced in the UK as an augmentative communication device (head-mounted touch device for keyboard or symbol board activation) it almost floundered. The special needs population who could use the device numbered only thousands. But within the EU as a whole, the total number of people with “special needs” might be 60 million (depending how the calculations

are done) so that what is economically non-viable in a member state becomes commercially viable across Europe. As with publishing and markets, size matters, and the EU in this instance provides a bonus by expanding markets.

Ethics

I mentioned earlier the attempts to create harmonisation in terms of ethical codes, principles and guidelines. There is an EFPA standing committee on ethics, chaired by Geoff Lindsay, and a European ethics metacode, to which your own Society subscribes. This covers mainly professional practice (in relation to clients) but there is also the more mundane matter of ethical approval for research within universities—granting approval for projects undertaken by staff and students. Recent discussions at the EFPA Committee on Scientific Affairs have revealed substantial variation in this sphere. Why is this important? I think, for four reasons in particular: To

1. Maintain the image of psychology and public confidence in the profession
2. Protect and enhance good practice
3. Avoid harm; protect participants; ensure after-care
4. Avoid negative publicity

It's important to begin at undergraduate level, when students are planning final projects at the end of their undergraduate courses. This is regarded as both a teaching and learning exercise, but participants should be protected at any level. Public confidence in our profession is dependent upon there being open and transparent ethical procedures. The British Psychological Society has recently produced a document, which is being considered currently for pan-European adoption, on this issue (British Psychological Society, 2004).

Ethics is a strange beast. Paradoxically, while the importance and significance of ethics and adherence to strong ethical codes is regarded as ever more important, I have never known an area within which conferences are as frequently cancelled as in ethics. Why? Ethics is “aspirational”; we exhort people to adhere to ethical codes, while accepting that it is not a question of “do this, it is ethical” and “don't do that, it is unethical”. Can we ever completely guarantee avoiding harm? Ethics is littered with caveats. A recent example of an unexpected ethical issue in the UK relates to a girls' school, where pupils asked to participate in a psychological study completed a body image and eating questionnaire, which was assumed to be ethically neutral. But afterwards, parents began phoning the school saying that, ever since participating in the study, their daughter had been viewing herself in the mirror each morning, not eating properly and risking anorexia. Having strong ethical approval in place does not prevent such problems but helps us to anticipate them and deal with them in ways that enhance psychology.

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