

The two kinds of applied psychology - The example of Germany

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Abstract

To better understand the development of applied psychology it seems essential to distinguish between two distinct pathways that lead to psychology being applied to practical problems. The first and older way is the application of psychological knowledge by professionals who do not define themselves as psychologists. The second and more recent way is the application of psychological knowledge by professionals who actually do define themselves as psychologists, and who are socially recognised as such.

In Germany, the first way was inaugurated in 1824, when teachers, and in 1825, when physicians were obliged from then on to learn psychology at universities in order to acquire the skills needed for the proper handling of students and patients respectively.

The second way developed more than a century later, when university graduates who had done extensive studies of psychology showed that they had exclusive knowledge to offer for the solution of problems in fields as diverse as industry, advertisement, traffic, personnel management, education, the legal system, and the field of health. Eventually, a curriculum for professional psychologists was established in 1941.

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The very concept of applied psychology leads to the question: Who is supposed to do the applying, i. e. who is the applying agent?

When we hear of applied mathematics, we assume quite correctly that mathematicians do it; when we hear of applied physics or chemistry, we assume quite correctly that physicists or chemists do it. When we hear of applied psychology, should we automatically assume that psychologists do it?

The picture in psychology seems to be analogous. Some applied psychologists work at universities or research institutes and try to find solutions to problems that are external to their field, and the majority of applied professional psychologists apply the knowledge acquired in their discipline to various problems in the world outside.

This, however, is not the full picture. For a considerable time, psychology was meant to be applied not by professional psychologists, but by various other professionals. It is only in the 20th century that a profession based on psychology came into existence. Let me take the case of Germany as an example.

I) IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURY APPLICANTS OF PSYCHOLOGY WERE NOT MEANT TO BE PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

During the era of Enlightenment the concept of a general science of man was propagated and called anthropology. It consisted of two parts, physiology and psychology. The educated German public in the 18th century took it for self-evident that there was a field of knowledge named psychology (Bell, 2005), and this field thrived. There was already the first journal of psychology, *Magazine for Empirical Psychology (Magazin für Erfahrungsseelenkunde)*, inaugurated in 1783. Carl Philipp Moritz, its founder, made it clear that he wanted to help to further a science of psychology that should result in practical benefits (Moritz, 1782).

Education was one of the principal objectives of the *Aufklärung*, and a science of education, pedagogics, was created. It became common sense that pedagogics has to stand on two pillars: ethics for defining the goals of education, and psychology for showing the ways leading to these goals.

Johann Friedrich Herbart, a proponent of this concept, he wrote extensively on the application of psychology (1897). Friedrich Eduard Beneke followed his example. He coined the expression *pragmatic psychology* for applied psychology and in 1851 founded the *Archives for pragmatic psychology or the science of the soul in its application in life (Archiv für die pragmatische Psychologie oder die Seelenlehre in der Anwendung auf das Leben)*.

In the 19th century, the application of psychology developed from a common sense idea into a legally defined and socially accepted product. This is how: The educational reforms Prussia introduced during and after the Napoleonic wars led to a completely new way of training teachers for the state-run high schools (*Gymnasien*). Students of education had to study at a university and pass a state examination. Ministerial rescripts of 21st August 1824 demand that psychology be among the subjects. This requirement was later adopted by most German states and also for the training of teachers for others kinds of schools.

The purpose of this requirement was not to produce professional psychologists, but to help teachers in their profession of teaching. Here we see the transformation of the status of applied psychology from an idea and a recommendation to an institutionalised practice. This institutionalisation took place long before pure psychology was institutionalised, as is witnessed by the fact that in 1824 and the following decades there were neither university chairs of psychology nor psychological institutes or laboratories anywhere on the globe (Gundlach, 2004a; 2007). Thus it comes as no surprise that there was neither a curriculum for psychology nor one for the training of professional psychologists. What was institutionalised here is psychology applied by professionals that were not psychologist.

Another Prussian ministerial decree, signed on the 7th January 1826, enhanced the demand for teaching on psychology. It charged everybody who desired to become a medical doctor to pass an examination which included psychology. Again, the purpose was not to produce professional psychologists, but to help physicians in their handling of patients. Again we see psychology applied by professionals that were not psychologists.

In sum: The 19th century witnessed an expanding demand in applied psychology - the applicants being not psychologists but members of other, traditional professions. The proposal of somebody studying to become a professional psychologist would have puzzled professors and the public alike.

II) IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY, THE FOUNDING ERA OF EXPERIMENTALLY GROUNDED APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY, THE APPLICANTS WERE ALSO NOT MEANT TO BE PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

The second half of the 19th century witnessed the introduction of psychological laboratories and of rigorous research standards. The passing from the 19th to the 20th century marks the beginning of an explosive growth of the interest in applying this reformed psychology (Gundlach, 2004b). I will name a few milestones.

In 1902, Wilhelm Wundt terminated his famous journal *Philosophische Studien*, the first journal devoted to experimental psychology. The reason given was the importance of covering the widening scope of the new psychology. A successor journal was launched in 1903, the *Archiv für die gesamte Psychologie (Archives for the complete psychology)*, and Wundt's disciple Ernst Meumann was its editor. Meumann, much interested in applying psychology to education, invented a new name, *Experimental Pedagogics*, and in 1905 founded a journal *Die Experimentelle Pädagogik*. This new field looked very much like what is still called Educational Psychology, and in 1910 it fused with the *Zeitschrift für pädagogische Psychologie*, founded in 1899.

What is of interest here is that although these new journals are obviously concerned with practical applications, there is not a hint that it should be professional psychologists who should apply it.

Educational psychology was not the only field of application that mushroomed in the years before the First World War. In 1903, William Stern founded a journal, *Beiträge zur Psychologie der Aussage. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Problemen der Rechtspflege, Pädagogik, Psychiatrie und Geschichtsforschung (Contributions to the Psychology of Testimony. With Special Emphasis on Problems of Justice, Pedagogics, Psychiatry and Historical Research)*. The first article is Stern's famous delineation of applied psychology (1903/1904) in which he for the first time uses his expression *Psychotechnik*. The idea that there could be professional psychologists is nowhere to be found in this journal.

In 1908, Stern terminated the journal in favour of the new *Zeitschrift für angewandte Psychologie (Journal of Applied Psychology)* which he edited jointly with Otto Lipmann. What is of interest here: Although these journals are obviously concerned with practical applications, again there is not a hint that it should be professional psychologists who should apply it.

The community of university teachers and researches of psychology looked with interest at the new developments. In 1908, at the third congress of the *Gesellschaft für experimentelle Psychologie* (*Society for Experimental Psychology*, later *German Society for Psychology*), Karl Marbe, the host, remarked: «It is evident, that a place of higher education that emphasises the alliance between science and practical usefulness has to exhibit a special interest in psychology, as it has so many different connections to medicine, jurisprudence and pedagogics» (1909, XI). None other than Wilhelm Wundt endorsed this statement (1909/1910).

In 1912, at the fifth congress of the *Society* in Berlin, Marbe gave a talk on *The Importance of Psychology for the other Sciences and for Practical Applications* (1912). He delineated the importance of psychology for the natural sciences, for medicine, for linguistics, philology, history, pedagogics, jurisprudence, national economy, and philosophy. But he did not even so much as hint that there could be a need for a profession of psychology. In the discussion, the Harvard psychologist Hugo Münsterberg (1912) who happened to be in Berlin as an exchange professor added that also «economic and social issues» could benefit from the application of psychology. Again, no sentence of the discussion took the direction of demanding applied psychologists.

In 1913, Aloys Fischer, *Privat-Dozent* in Munich, interested in psychology but neither a member of the *Society* nor present at the Berlin congress, published an article with the unheard-of title: «The psychological practitioner: A new profession» (1913). The journal he chose was one for the general educated public, *Kunstwart und Kulturwart*. To my knowledge, Fischer's call for a new profession of applicants of psychology did not generate any discussion.

III) THE CONCEPT OF A PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST AS APPLICANT OF PSYCHOLOGY GREW DURING AND AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND IT LEAD TO THE SECOND KIND OF APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

Münsterberg's reminder at the Berlin congress was appropriate. The applications of psychology in the economic sphere, in industry and administration, were principal forces in the expansion of applied psychology and eventually in the creation of the professional psychologist. But even more important was the role played by military psychology, a field not yet envisioned at the Berlin congress.

The First World War saw many psychologists working in this capacity in the German military service (Gundlach, 1996; 1999). When the war was over, the German industry and public administration and even trade unions voiced a demand for specialists working as psychologists. The German term used was «Fachpsychologe», in English best rendered as expert psychologist, psychological specialist, or - with some liberty - professional psychologist.

The academic psychologists reacted. In 1921, the seventh congress of the *Society* took place in Marburg. An unusual number of papers dealt with applied psychology (E. Stern, 1921). Next to the usual congress report, Lipmann & Stern (1921) edited a special report including long versions of the papers on applied psychology. Karl Marbe gave a speech on the *Position and Treatment of Psychology at the Universities* in which he stated that «the call by the authorities for practical expert psychologists resounds louder and louder» (Marbe, 1922, 150).

The organisation of practical psychologists made major advances. At the Marburg congress, the *Society* created a *Committee for Applied Psychology* which took over the organisation of special congresses and of meetings. Stern became president of this committee, Lipmann its secretary (Stern & Lipmann, 1921/1922). Independent of the *Society*, a *Union of Practical Psychologists* (*Verband praktischer Psychologen*) was founded during the Marburg congress. President of this union was Marbe, deputy president Walther Moede, and secretary again Lipmann. The agenda of this *Union* were the upholding of the interests of psychological practitioners, the prevention of those who had no proper psychological training from exercising practical psychology, and the preparation for a generally recognised curriculum for applied psychologists (E. Stern, 1921, 265).

None of this had been on the agenda of psychologists before the First World War. Times had changed drastically. The *Union* was definitively designed for expert psychologists as a proto-professional organisation.

But all the other professionals like teachers or physicians, who since the 19th century were somehow involved in applying psychology without defining themselves as psychologists, were still there, and were still interested in applying psychology in their traditional ways.

The march towards the creation of professional psychologists continued. In 1931, on the occasion of the eleventh congress of the *Society*, another union was founded: the *Imperial Association for the Advancement of Practical Psychology* (*Reichsvereinigung zur Förderung der Praktischen Psychologie*). Its goal was «to build a bridge between the expert psychologists and the practitioners of all fields of applied psychology: magistrates and administrators, employers, employees, and specific occupational groups as physicians, lawyers and jurists, teachers, economists, engineers, social workers etc.» (Lipmann, 1931, 269). Secretary of this *Association* was none other than Lipmann.

Soon after its foundation, the *Association* specified the social and professional groups from which it wanted to recruit its members:

- a) the expert psychologists who have a scientific training in psychology,
- b) representatives of the fields of practical application or neighbouring sciences whose scientific research touches on the field of psychology, e. g., physiologists, psychiatrists, hygienists, pedagogues, jurists, sociologists, national economists, business administrators;
- c) practitioners who in their professional activities have practical-psychological obligations and are seriously interested in psychology, e. g., engineers, organisers, advertising agents, vocational counsellors, staff directors, criminal judges, prison wardens, lawyers, teachers, teachers at business schools, physicians, social workers, leading managers in public institution, in industry, in commerce etc.; (Rupp, 1931).

This categorising of people interested in applied psychology exemplifies the two kinds of applied psychology which I wanted to delineate - those who have a thorough scientific training in psychology, named under a), and those who do not, but nonetheless apply psychology with whatever level of knowledge of psychology they had acquired during their occupational training, named under c).

What was still lacking was an unequivocal criterium to distinguish the expert psychologist from other users of psychological knowledge.

In 1932, the *Society* and the *Union* created a committee that was to work on regulations for an examination for psychological practitioners or expert psychologists. The *Imperial Association* welcomed this approach (W. Stern, 1932). But all these plans were shattered when National Socialism came to power in 1933. *Union* and *Association* were forced to fuse with the *German Society* (Geuter, 1984, 305) and thereby disappeared.

The goal of establishing a professional university degree was not abandoned. Again, it took the military to advance the cause of professional psychology. The rearmament of Germany in the Thirties multiplied the number of military psychologists required. As there was no recognised qualifying examination for psychologists, the army induced the Imperial Ministry of Education to introduce such an examination at the German universities which was effected in 1941. Since then, the title *Diplom-Psychologe* distinguished unequivocally the expert from the lay psychologist (Fischer, 1942; Kroh, 1941).

Consequently, the German Army edited a second edition of their brochure on how to become an expert psychologist in the Army (anon., 1942). Considering the course the Second World War took, it was a good fortune for the psychologists, that the highest echelon of the German government demanded the abolition of the army psychological service in 1942, for this enabled the curriculum for expert psychologists to continue after the war (Arnold, 1948), since one could tell the victorious allies that the Nazi government detested psychologists.

Since then, there is the curriculum for the expert, but the other curricula encompassing bits of psychology did not vanish. Teachers and other occupational groups that did not define themselves as psychologists, still had to learn some psychology, pass a psychology examination, and try to make use of it in practice.

The purpose of this paper is to point out that in doing research on the history of applied psychology we should look closely at who was meant to apply psychological knowledge, the expert psychologist or the lay psychologist, as this must show in the features of that knowledge. And this should apply to psychology worldwide. The case of Germany is used here merely as an example, as similar developments in other countries are very probable.

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