

PSYCHOLOGY *CURRICULAE* AND THE CHALLENGE OF BOLOGNA: AN ANSWER FROM A CULTURAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The re-organization of higher education through the “Bologna process” has imposed a qualitatively new study system for German language area universities. Psychological institutes and faculties have reacted very diversely to this challenge. At the newly-founded Sigmund Freud University (SFU) in Vienna, there opened a window of opportunity to answer that challenge from a cultural science perspective. Building on the ‘praxeological turn’ in the human and social sciences, the SFU psychology curriculum, which is described and explained in this article, aims at re-tightening the relations between research and practice, between research practice and teaching, and between phenomena and theoretical reflections. It is furthermore enriched by integrative import of knowledge from sociology, anthropology, history, and other cultural sciences, and rooted substantively in the rich history of classical psychology that happens to have direct Austrian origins (Vienna and Graz).

Keywords: Bologna Declaration, psychology curriculae, interdisciplinarity, phenomena-theories relations, cultural psychology.

The purpose of the Bologna Declaration, signed by ministers of education from 29 European countries on the 19th of June 1999 at the University of Bologna, is to create a pan-European higher education area by harmoniz-

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ing academic-degree standards and thereby to support mobility of students and professionals. In German speaking countries, the most obvious results of the so-called Bologna process is the introduction of an altogether new study framework for higher education along with its new degrees of bachelor and master. Traditionally, in these countries the lowest academic degree has been the Master's Degree (*Magister*), which was to be awarded after at least five years of studying – a time frame incompatible with the Bologna model.

The new framework goes along with huge challenges but also with completely new options for the psychological curricula. In Austria, state universities have reacted with some reluctance and rather slowly to that challenge. A private university – the Sigmund Freud University (SFU) in Vienna – was first to introduce a bachelor degree in psychology as a basis for master-level studies that were to follow. To discuss the conception of this B.A.-program is the subject of the present paper.

THE SPECIAL CONDITIONS OF GERMAN LANGUAGE AREA UNIVERSITIES

For psychology curriculae in the German-speaking world, the re-orientation necessitated by the Bologna model, is difficult for two main reasons: The imparting of professional qualifications in bachelor-courses, as is demanded in that model, constitutes a great challenge. At German speaking universities, basic courses in psychology have traditionally aimed at a general scientific education. Practical qualifications were taught in higher semesters, in postgraduate programs (e.g., in clinical and health psychology), or never. Another and a different challenge comes from the side of the law. In Austria, for example, the professional side of psychology is regulated by a special law; according to this law, a bachelor degree would neither entitle you to work self-employed in the field of psychology nor to use the title 'psychologist'.

Depending on local circumstances and orientations, psychological departments in the German-speaking world have reacted differently to the challenge of Bologna. Some big universities took the opportunity to offer several modules (e.g. sociology, political science, psychology, etc.) within a broader

context of social science studies (for example, University of Bern). This paves the way to a major/minor-system within the B.A.; e.g., you can do a major in psychology, and a minor in sociology, or vice versa. By virtue of this diversification, the idea of a Bachelor degree as a first professional degree for a psychologist is downplayed. In this model, the courses rather amount to a sort of preparatory study for ensuing master-studies. Some universities took the opposite direction and offered an already specialized bachelor in psychology as a trajectory towards a respectively oriented master-program (e.g., the University of Bochum offers a bachelor degree in economic psychology). Programs favoring such early specialization seem to better fit to the Bologna idea of the B.A. as being the qualification with which most university graduates will enter their professional career.

BASIC GOALS AND ORIENTATION OF THE SFU'S BACHELOR IN PSYCHOLOGY

In contrast, the psychology B.A. at the Sigmund Freud Private University is meant as a *studium generale* in psychology. By that, it aims to avoid two pitfalls:

1. a general social science bachelor degree (as in the major/minor-model) that lacks a direct professional perspective;
2. on the other side – too early specialization within psychology puts too many expectations on freshmen regarding their career trajectories.

At the SFU – while opting for a *studium generale* notion of the B.A. – we do not plan to retain the traditional diploma curriculum in a new disguise – a scenario which is threatening many German speaking institutes or faculties of psychology. Quite the contrary, the *studium generale* at the SFU will meet both ambitions of Bologna: to offer both a sound vocational preparation qualifications and a basic scientific education.

Accordingly, the basic conviction of the program is that a sound understanding of scientific thinking and practice can be directly relevant for the needs of the employment market. This is only true, however, if research methods and interests are not detached and alienated from economical and social

practice, but embedded into such practice; only then, they will unfold practical relevance in them. Within the SFU's bachelor program, students develop such understanding, above all, in the course of a profound and epistemologically reflected education in empirical research methods. To be acquainted with scientific ways of thinking and scientific research methods (in the above sense) offers the opportunity to distance oneself from the immediateness of personal impressions, to widen one's ways of perceiving, thinking and acting, and to efficiently develop potentials of one's environment. For example, thorough methodological expertise in interview methods represents not only important competence for empirical research, but is also relevant in a broad array of vocational contexts, e. g., in job interviews or diagnostic interviews.

In particular, the curriculum aims at fostering the following job-relevant qualifications in bachelor students:

1. Students should acquire communicative competences, by virtue of which they become able to recognize developmental potentials in individuals, groups and social systems, to develop such potentials (possibly in collaboration with other professions). The professional field that thereby opens for them could be characterized as that of a general psychological assistant in various occupational contexts, be it in marketing, advertising, education, in promotion of good health, etc.
2. Within the broad field of counseling services, SFU graduates should distinguish themselves from competing occupational groups by their ability to combine scientific thinking and empirical research methods with practical knowledge and, thus, to mediate professional and scientific concerns or ambitions in concrete practice. In the context of the present structural reforms of social policy in Europe, with their strong tendency to promote privatization in all fields of public social welfare, there will be an increasing demand for experts who are able to plan and to carry out measures of evaluation and quality control for private non-profit-organizations - measures which do not only meet managerial and economic but also social scientific demands.
3. This ability is not least about recognizing the lack or imitation of scientific expertise that exists in many areas (e.g. in supervision, coaching, mediation, etc.), and to make up for that lack - at least partially - in one's own practical work. SFU graduates should thus be in the position to recognize and criticize bad psychological practice in their own occupational fields, and to contribute to the reorganization of such practice.

As to the contents, the bachelor program at the SFU is committed to an overall cultural and social science perspective; it thus represents a clear alternative to contemporary mainstream psychology with its explicit adherence to the standards of natural sciences. However, criticizing the nomothetic orientation and self-(mis)understanding of modern psychology is not a purpose in its own. Rather, the reflection of the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of that orientation contributes to the more general understanding that the state of the art of psychology is the product of history and contingency, not the product of necessity. This very insight opens the space for alternative conceptions of psychology, especially for those beyond the single-person-paradigm. In overcoming that narrowness of mainstream scientific psychology, which is responsible for the irrelevance of many of its empirical results to every-day-life problems, emphasis will be on conceptions which intend to close the gap between 'individual' and 'society' (a gap pertinent both to traditional psychology and to different variants of critical psychology) or rather refuse to accept that gap from the very beginning. Therefore it will be necessary to direct part of the attention to theoretical conceptions usually excluded from psychological *curriculae* (e.g., Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' or Luhmann's theory of social systems, etc.), an exercise which is perfectly in line with another of the didactic core assumptions of the program: topics should be developed not only in a psychological perspective but also by casting a look looking through the eyes of other disciplines in which things are usually seen from a different angle. It is the intention of the SFU's psychology program to support such affinities and irritations. Finally, and continuing the last argument, SFU graduates should acquire competences to cooperate with members of other disciplines in their own vocational practice.

PSYCHOLOGY CURRICULUM BASED ON CULTURAL SCIENCES

The SFU bachelor program represents the first step towards a full study of psychology, which, in all its sub-programs, will be committed to such a cultural science orientation. Building upon the bachelor program, specialized master programs are soon to be introduced, namely in economic psychology,

cultural and media psychology, and performance and sports psychology. All these master programs will be permeated and inspired by a cultural science approach. The final stone to of the psychology curriculum will be a Ph.D.-program that is to be developed around research projects in the fields of media practice cultures, intercultural economic psychology, and migration research (given that they fulfil additional requirements, non-psychologists will be eligible to this Ph.D.-program, too).

OVERVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM

The structure of the curriculum is highly interwoven. Four core areas (theory; scientific methods and key competencies; basics of inter- and trans-disciplinary cooperation; practical psychological competences) are carried through the whole curriculum of six semesters. Courses logically build up within these areas. Additionally, at several points in the curriculum, strong cross-references are to be found in-between them: Admittedly, this relatively high degree of interweaving is working against a too flexible individual arrangement of the curriculum and against part-time studying (the latter is an aim altogether not encouraged in the model of Bologna).

Because of the comparatively small numbers of students per year in a private university, we expect and encourage relatively close peer-groups that will conjointly work their way through the curriculum. As we will discuss below, the interweaving of the curriculum furthermore encourages the students, first, to combine theories with scientific, professional, and life world/daily practice; and secondly, to compare different methodological and empirical paradigms in an experience-based manner, when these paradigms are simultaneously employed to approach related phenomena or research objects. Let us first consider the four main areas (i.e., the vertical columns in Figure 1) and then turn to the particularities of the horizontal, i.e. synchronous organization within the study semesters. In order to provide a vivid account of the curriculum, we shall look in more detail at the content and the teaching aims of one characteristic course in each of the four areas.

Figure 1: The SFU's bachelor curriculum in psychology

Theory		Methods and scientific key competencies			Inter- & trans-disciplinary cooperation	Psychological competencies
Semester 1						
History of psychological paradigms I	Accompanying seminar (history of paradigms)	Introduction to empirical human & social research	Accompanying seminar	Techniques of scientific work	Cultural anthropology	Encounter group
Semester 2						
History of psychological paradigms II	Accompanying seminar (history of paradigms)	Introduction to quantitative research methods	Accompanying seminar (inquiry)	Scientific writing	Sociology	Dialogue strategies
Semester 3						
General psychology I	Developmental psychology I	Qualitative research methods I	Accompanying seminar: (observing)	Statistics I	Economic sciences	Teambuilding
Semester 4						
General psychology II	Developmental psychology II	Qualitative research methods II	Accompanying seminar: (interviewing)	Statistics II	Media science and media theory	Moderation
Semester 5						
Social psychology I	Psychological diagnostics I	Preparatory seminar for bachelor thesis		Project management	Communication and language sciences	Crisis intervention and conflict management
Semester 6						
Social psychology II	Psychological diagnostics II	Bachelor's thesis			Neurosciences & cognitive sciences	Organizational lab

The area 'theory' is made up of five main subjects: history of psychological paradigms, general psychology, developmental psychology, social psychology, and psychological diagnostics, all of them are carried out throughout two semesters. In any of these subjects, the first semester covers core content of the respective field as it is found in the literature and/or practice of current mainstream academia. In the second semester, special topics will be selected and critically discussed from the perspective of cultural psychology, media theory, or sociology of science; phenomenological and/or hermeneutic approaches to these topics will be introduced, too.

The two semester lecture course on history of psychological paradigms is an exemption to this principle of double exposure. This course introduces the proposition of the cultural-historical genesis and constitution of thinking (and other human functions) as the 'genius loci' of the SFU's psychology curriculum. In a first step, this proposition is applied to the emergence of modern scientific psychology. The so-called problem of introspection is taken as the vantage point for exposing main accesses to psychology (i.e., European psychology of consciousness, behaviourism and cognitive revolution, hermeneutic approaches to psychology). Kant's dictum of the non-applicability of mathematics to "phenomena of the inner sense" then provides the starting point for reconstructing the problem history of classical psychophysics. At the end of the first semester, some lectures will be devoted to particular developments in Austria (Brentano, Meinong, and the school of Graz). The second semester presents main psychological trajectories of the 20th century. The European tradition will be exemplified with the school of Würzburg, the Berlin school of gestalt theory, and the school of Bühler in Vienna. Within the American tradition, the focus will be on Skinner's radical behaviourism and on neobehaviourism. Vygotsky's cultural-historical school, with its stark contrast to such approaches, opens the floor for discussing recent developments in socio-cultural psychology. At this point, the main tenet of the cultural-historical constitution of the human being, i.e., the primordially of culture for human existence, is extended beyond the cognitive realm, and especially to feeling, perception, and aesthetic judgement.

In both semesters, the lectures will be accompanied by seminars. Through close readings of canonic texts, the history and development of selected paradigms is reconstructed - not as an aim in its own, but in order to clarify, on this basis, their current appeal and plausibility. As can be inferred from this

exposure, it is the overall educational aim of these courses to convey an understanding of the historical development and history of psychological theory and, on this basis, to foster an apprehension of the 'discourse geology' of contemporary academic psychology - an understanding which is, unfortunately, all too often missing in graduates of psychology programs.

The other courses in this area put more emphasis on developing familiarity with the contemporary state of the art of the respective field. In terms of format, they combine lectures, (reading) exercises, and practice, thus enabling the instructors to develop exemplary content in more detail, and/or in close connection with practice (this format, i.e., encounter with practitioners in the field, will be even more typical of courses taught in the 'basics of inter- and trans-disciplinary cooperation'-area).

The combined title of the second core area, 'methods and key competencies', already transports our conviction that basic techniques of empirical research are of immediate practical relevance. They represent expertises, which are rightfully expected from academic psychologists at various points in their professional practice. In our experience with traditional psychological curricula, such expertise is only (if at all) acquired in the last phase of a diploma or master's curriculum, i.e., in the course of empirical research for the diploma or master's thesis. These key competencies include:

1. academic and non-academic text production (among others, composing surveys, reports, and position papers; presenting investigations and research for defined problem situations; creating presentations for in-house communications);
2. an ability to properly understand, proceed, and make use of empirical results, particularly statistics;
3. interview techniques (beyond research contexts, such techniques are key to an array of psychological fields of practice, e.g., in market and opinion research, in counseling, in diagnostic interviewing, in assessing job applicants, and in potential analysis);
4. observation techniques (basis for professional feed-back, presentation, moderation, and the opening up of new job environments);
5. the independent preparation, management and completion of small and medium-sized projects. To various degrees, these educational objectives are pursued throughout all the courses pertaining to the methods and key competencies-area.

In line with the general spirit of the curriculum, an introduction to the historical development of empirical research approaches in the social and human sciences marks the beginning of the 'methods and key competencies'-column (see Figure 1). It is shown that methodologies and research methods are spawned by different (implicit as well as explicit) epistemological principles. The research logic of qualitative-reconstructive and quantitative-standardized research paradigms will be presented, both structurally and exemplified through current research techniques and instruments. Attention is directed on thoroughly reflecting the common ground and the difference between every-day-experience and scientific experience – including its standards of understanding and its validity criteria. This should be the basis for a more realistic understanding of the development and conditions of professional expertise and of the peculiarities of such expertise. Again the lecture will be accompanied by a seminar, in which some of the issues will be developed in more detail and/or with the help of canonic texts.

The ensuing introduction to quantitative research methods focuses on research designs and methods of gathering numeric data. In the following two semesters the education in quantitative research techniques is to be deepened in courses, in which the students will be acquainted with the use of descriptive and inferential statistics in social sciences. Parallel to the two courses in statistics there are four courses in qualitative-reconstructive research techniques. They already build on the methodological and epistemological exercises of the 'introduction to the empirical human and social science research' in the first semester. Therefore, the focus can now be put on the classical research techniques such as participatory observation, narrative interview, group discussion, etc. Still, these techniques always are to be taught in close relation to the special methodologies, from which they have emerged. The unique potential of group discussions as a scientific research method, for example, would be missed without an adequate understanding of theoretical approaches to collectivity. In this context, it is worth mentioning that group discussions represent a good example for methods that operate beyond the single-person-paradigm, a paradigm solidly established in both our every-day and scientific thinking. Unfortunately, and mostly due to an alleged pressure of practical necessities, e.g., in market research, qualitative methods are often stripped of such meta-theoretical contexts. Such employment of methods far beyond their own scientific 'gross' weight, however, paves the way to quasi-scientific endeavours which may still look like science to the public, but actu-

ally replace and supersede it – a process we do not want to foster within the proposed program.

In the final analysis, it is only the understanding of the epistemological embedding of a research method that allows us to fully grasp its total bearing and, thus, to adequately judge the quality and validity of results that have been obtained with such method. This idea remains guiding also for the qualitative courses in the following semesters, which pay attention to qualitative techniques of data analysis beyond the mere systematizing of manifest content (as is the case with some forms of content analysis, which therefore have their systematic place in quantitative research methods). Narrative analysis, objective hermeneutics, documentary analysis as well as discourse analytical methods (e.g., conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis) belong to this category.

Throughout the whole second year of the program, the lectures in statistics and qualitative methods are accompanied by exercise-based seminars, which will be referred to later in the discussion of the horizontal structure of the program. The final stage of the ‘methods and key competencies’ track is the bachelor’s thesis. Before students start to write their thesis, they attend a preparatory seminar, which gives them enough time to prepare for implementing even empirical ambitions in a bachelor’s thesis.

Throughout the whole program ‘inter- and trans-disciplinary cooperation’ is imparted in a series of lectures on disciplines which are closely related to psychology: cultural anthropology, sociology, economic sciences, media science and media theory, communication and linguistics, neurosciences and cognitive sciences. In each case, these disciplines are taught in their own right and from their own theoretical epicentre – but with psychology in mind; i.e., the subjects used to exemplify the nature of the respective discipline should have relevance for or even some phenomenological or theoretical overlap with psychology. Discussing the contradictions, affinities, and irritations that surface in the course of such double exposure, should foster a more thorough understanding of the place of psychology in the canon of sciences, prepare the students for interdisciplinary endeavours, and for a possible further education in related master’s studies.

In linguistics, for example, the focus is on applied linguistics and on its importance for (empirical) communication and interaction research. The purpose is to sensitize students for communication processes and structures which they ‘naturally’ apply in their every day communication routines - but only intuitively; now they will learn to explicate, in a social scientific termi-

nology, what they already display and master in practice. Examples for this will be taken from the media, from the health sector, and from everyday interactions among friends or family members.

With the inclusion of 'psychological competencies' into the curriculum, the SFU's bachelor program places an emphasis on practical psychological skills, an emphasis traditionally absent from academic education in psychology, but highly needed and demanded in today's professional world. Graduates should be in the position to independently employ psychological and interventional techniques (dialogue strategies, team building, group leading, moderation skills, conflict management) in different professional contexts.

To reach that aim, the training takes place on two different levels. 1. The seminars will be carried out in form of competence-trainings known mostly from the world of business (including role play, case studies, scenarios, simulations, typical as they are in such training formats). 2. Beyond the role of participants, however, in each training unit students will have to reflect the ongoing seminar process from different points of view (e.g., meta reflection of the seminar design, or of the perspective of clients, etc.).

The course on moderating, for example, aims at developing an understanding of the specific role of the moderator with its strong focus on non-partisan process control. In order to be a convincing moderator, it is important, but not sufficient to know the basic techniques for moderating (e.g. metaplan, flip chart, presentation with different media). Rather, the ability to reflect one's own performance as a moderator and, on this basis, develop one's own style is the key to successful moderating.

Placed at the very beginning of the of 'psychological competencies' column, the encounter group should help to establish a development of constructive peer-group culture. In this group, students will experience themselves and their colleagues in their own (psychological) abilities and difficulties both of which are possibly related to their choice of study. The encounter group should foster a climate, in which students become aware of these talents and difficulties and learn to take response for them – if necessary, by seeking amicable or professional support.

Let us finally take a closer look at the horizontal structure of the curriculum. The courses of the first two semesters are inspired by the fundamental idea that scientific approaches, theories, and concepts are rooted in special historical and cultural situations. On a large scale, this idea of historicity will be developed in the lectures on history of psychology and in the introduction

to empirical human and social research. In a personal context, it may reappear in the encounter group, insofar subjective dispositions are a possible starting point for a culture-psychological approach to contemporary mentality.

In the third semester, a seminar mediates between different views of science (and of world) that are transported in the lectures on statistics and qualitative research methods. Whereas statistics is interested in standards delineated from logic and mathematics, the standards of qualitative research are anchored in daily practice (and enable that practice). Whereas in statistics attention is paid to measurement, qualitative research is based on the formal structure of understanding. However, both approaches work with – among others – methods of observation. In the seminar, the difference between the two forms of observation will be exposed in an experience-based format; in doing so, student's epistemological affinities will be put to the test. The same semester witnesses the start of the courses on developmental psychology – a field with excellent opportunities for exercising observation methods, e.g. in the field of mother-child-interaction. The seminar on survey methods in the fourth semester has a similar mediating function.

The two last semesters want to foster the students' ability for independent scientific work, as it will be exemplified in their bachelor's thesis. The preparatory course on thesis planning in the fifth semester has already been mentioned. At the same time, a special seminar on project management is offered, right in time for constructively planning and carrying out the work phases pertaining to the bachelor's thesis. Last but not least, a course on crisis and conflict management offers useful tools for self management and for overcoming problems which might (and hopefully will not) occur in the process of writing the thesis and of graduating.

GENERAL CONCLUSION: A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Introducing such an ambitious program requires lucky circumstances. Above all, the lacking tradition at a newly founded private university allowed for the construction of an 'ideal' program with no need to take into account grown institutional structures, existing 'teaching rights' or research interests of established staff. Moreover, and in strong contrast to the situation of Austrian state universities, all learning formats are tailored to small group sizes.

Unfavourable relations of teachers per student have repeatedly been reason for complaint in the annual situation reports of the chairman of *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Psychologie* (German Society of Psychology). While in Germany psychology belongs to so-called *numerus clausus* disciplines, Austria, up to very recently, did not know of notable access restrictions to university studies. As a result, the relation of students per staff has always been more unfavourable in Austria than it has been in Germany. Furthermore - after a EU-verdict of 2005 that forced Austria to open its universities to EU citizens regardless whether they have a study place in their home country or not- the situation threatened to fully get out of control. Austrian state universities, facing an unmanageable flood of (above all) German freshmen of psychology, reacted with introducing access-examinations.

A private university is not confronted with such problems. Highly qualified instructors can intensively support small groups of committed students and respond to individual needs, interests, and abilities from the very beginning. Moreover, the comparatively flexible structures of a private university can react fast to changing requirements both within science and in the labour market - a vision much in line with the spirit of Bologna. This is not to say (and so much should be evident in the light of its general orientation) that the above curriculum is only about catering for a certain market situation and reacting to its demands. Rather, at least in the long run, curriculae such as this want to co-create that market - by virtue of graduates, whose creativity, capacity for critical-independent thinking, and life long learning have been optimally facilitated throughout the whole curriculum.

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