Teaching of psychology in Brazil

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Psychology programs were first recognized in Brazilian universities during the mid-20th century. Prior to that, psychology had been taught in conjunction with other programs such as medicine, law, and education. The growth of psychology programs has been rapid in the last 25 years. From the time the Brazilian government first established a 5-year degree program in 1962, the number of psychology programs regulated by the Ministry of Education has increased to about 150. Graduate programs, established in 1965 and 1968, are also rapidly expanding. Psychology teaching draws on both European and US traditions in content and teaching methodology. A sociocultural psychological orientation is emphasized. Psychologists are prepared in 5-year undergraduate programs including 2 years of internship and extensive coursework in all areas of the discipline, including neurophysiology, psychobiology, social psychology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, health psychology, and organizational psychology. Programs must follow national curriculum guidelines. There is no consensus as to which textbooks to use in particular courses and these decisions are generally left to the discretion of the professors. The preference is for use of customized collections of readings rather than books. Textbooks are thought to provide one-sided perspectives and to discourage library research. The increasing availability of on-line journals and e-books has revolutionized information access in Brazil, as in the rest of the world, and these are often used. The goals of undergraduate psychology programs are to prepare capable psychologists to work in a variety of capacities to benefit Brazilian society as a whole. The majority of psychologists practice in urban areas. Community organizations and social movements operating in rural areas may also have psychologists on staff. The optimism, respect for diversity, and dedication to democratic principles that are leading Brazil quickly into strong economic and social prominence in the 21st century are reflected in the teaching of psychology.
électromécaniques a révolutionné l’accès à l’information au Brésil, tout comme dans le reste du monde. Ces médias sont également souvent utilisés. Les buts des programmes de psychologie visent à préparer des psychologues capables de travailler dans une variété de contextes afin de venir en aide à la société brésilienne dans son ensemble. La majorité des psychologues pratiquent dans les milieux ruraux. Les organismes communautaires et les mouvements sociaux opérant dans les milieux ruraux peuvent également avoir des psychologues parmi leurs intervenants. L’optimisme, le respect pour la diversité et le dévouement aux principes démocratiques qui mènent rapidement le Brésil dans une forte proéminence économique et sociale au vingt-et-unième siècle sont reflétés dans l’enseignement de la psychologie.

Los programas de psicología se reconocieron inicialmente en las universidades brasileñas hacia mediados del siglo veinte. Antes de esto, se había enseñado psicología conjuntamente con otros programas como medicina, leyes y educación. El crecimiento de los programas de psicología ha sido rápido en los últimos veinticinco años. Desde el momento en el que el gobierno de Brasil estableció inicialmente el programa de cinco años en 1962, el número de programas de psicología regulados por el Ministerio de Educación ha aumentado a aproximadamente 150. Los programas de grado, establecidos en 1965 y 1968, también se están expandiendo rápidamente. La enseñanza de la psicología se deriva tanto de la tradición europea como de la estadounidense en cuanto a contenido como a metodología de la enseñanza. Se hace hincapié en una orientación sociocultural. Se prepara a los psicólogos en programas de pregrado de cinco años que incluyen dos años de internado y en el trabajo asignado para los cursos en todas las áreas de la disciplina, inclusive neurofisiología, psicobiología, psicología social, psicología clínica, psicología evolutiva, psicología de la salud y psicología organizacional. Los programas deben ajustarse a lineamientos curriculares nacionales. No existe un consenso respecto a qué libros de texto emplear en los cursos específicos y se deja estas decisiones generalmente a la discreción de los profesores. Hay preferencia por el uso de colecciones lecturas a la medida más que por libros. Se piensa que los libros de texto presentan perspectivas unilaterales y desalientan la investigación bibliográfica. La disponibilidad en aumento de revistas en línea y de libros electrónicos ha revolucionado el acceso a la información en Brasil, tal como en el resto del mundo, y se usan a menudo. Las metas de los programas de pregrado en psicología son preparar psicólogos capaces de trabajar en una variedad de destrezas para beneficio de la sociedad brasileña como un todo. La mayoría de los psicólogos practica en áreas urbanas. Las organizaciones comunitarias y los movimientos sociales que operan en áreas rurales cuentan también con psicólogos como parte de su personal. El optimismo, el respeto a la diversidad y dedicación a los principios democráticos, que conduce rápidamente a Brasil hacia la prominencia económica y social en el siglo 21, se refleja en la enseñanza de la psicología.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Psychology, or at least ideas related to psychology, were first taught in Brazil as part of philosophy programs in Jesuit schools from colonial times onward (Massimi, 1990). The way for modern psychology was paved with the foundation of schools of law and medicine in 1827 and 1832 respectively, and with the organization of normal schools to train teachers in the second half of the 19th century (Lourenço-Filho, 1971). *Investigações Psicológicas*, the first general psychology book written in Brazil, was published in 1854 (republished 1973) by Eduardo Ferreira França (1809–1857). França was a professor in the medical school of Bahia who had been trained in Paris (Campos, 2001). His book was a comprehensive manual based on French psychology, integrating the sensualist philosophy of Etienne Bonnot Condillac (1715–1780) with the spiritualism of Maine de Biran (1766–1824). Henrique Roxo (1877–1969) conducted the first experimental research in psychology in 1900. He wrote a doctoral thesis on the duration of psychological acts, and defended it in the medical school of Rio de Janeiro. Roxo used a psychometric instrument developed by experimental Italian psychologist Grabiele Buccola (1854–1885), and introduced psychology as a requisite science for psychiatry. Roxo’s work appeared in Brazil at the same time that Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) was conducting his experiments in Russia, and his is the first psychological experiment written in Portuguese (Pessotti, 1975).

Emil Kraepelin, former student of German psychologist W. Wundt, influenced the use of psychology in Brazil in the medical field. He conducted experiments with mental patients in laboratories installed in hospitals (Hearnshaw, 1989). An important laboratory of this type was established in a hospital in Rio de Janeiro in 1923 (Centofanti, 1982; Penna, 1992). The laboratory, associated with the International Mental Hygiene Movement, operated until 1932. The equipment came from Paris and Leipzig. Polish psychologist Waclaw Radecki (1887–1953), a former student of Édouard Claparède (1873–1940) at the University of Geneva, directed the lab. This laboratory
focused on psychological testing and personnel selection. It was the centre for training early psychologists in Rio de Janeiro.

As may be expected from this background, when psychology first began as a profession in Brazil during the late 19th century, medical school faculties taught psychology courses. This practice continued until the mid-20th century. Early psychological experiments were conducted in the medical school in Rio de Janeiro (Lourenço-Filho, 1971). A second historical influence came from educational psychology. More information on the history and current status of psychology as a discipline in Brazil can be found in the Handbook of International Psychology (Stevens & Wedding, 2004).

A mix of European and North American influences combined with uniquely Brazilian developments to create the current dynamic exchange within the discipline, where phenomenological and experimental research orientations co-exist, creating a lively and healthy pluralism within scientific dialogue. The Brazilian government since 1962 has formally recognized psychology training within separate schools of psychology contained in the Brazilian university system. In that year, a law established the 5-year professional training program at universities that leads to licensure as a psychologist (Biaggio & Grinder, 1992).

INSTITUTIONS AT WHICH PSYCHOLOGY IS TAUGHT

After the beginning of psychology in normal schools, schools of medicine, and colleges of law in Brazil, the Brazilian government organized universities during the first half of the 20th century and began to regulate all existing professional schools, including law, medicine, dentistry, and engineering. Teacher training was assigned to the faculty of philosophy, sciences, and humanities. This was the birthplace of liberal arts in Brazil. The State of São Paulo created the first liberal arts university in 1934. Later, psychology was housed in liberal arts.

In Brazil, the best universities are state and federal universities. By 1980, 34 federal universities, 1 in each state in Brazil, had been established. Higher education in Brazil rapidly became the “crown jewel” of the country, far outstripping the rest of the Americas in terms of resources allocated, evaluation mechanisms, and calibre of faculty. A low student-to-teacher ratio (one full-time instructor for every nine students was the average in the year 2000) and high level of funding (average spending per student in 1995 was US$7000, compared to US$2440 per student in Uruguay, US$3770 in Spain, and US$6020 in France) characterizes Brazilian universities (Castro, 2000).

The federal government in Brazil is the entity that both regulates and funds these public university programs. In addition, the federal government regulates all professional programs in private schools, including psychology. At present, as the government utilizes the input of psychologists and professional organizations, this seems to be an efficient and satisfactory model.

Today appears to be a “golden age” for psychology programs in Brazil. A variety of high-quality and carefully monitored programs have been developed by faculty members who have trained at some of the best universities in the world (from Johns Hopkins to the University of Iowa to the University of London to the Sorbonne). They work closely with a small group of carefully selected students who will have no difficulty entering the workplace when their degrees are completed, whether as university faculty or in the private sector, and further influence the expansion of the discipline.

Over 150 undergraduate psychology programs exist at Brazilian universities, which are regulated, evaluated, and accredited by the Brazilian Ministry of Education. Public and private universities with respected programs in psychology accept, on the average, only 1 in 25 applicants. Only 1 in 40 applicants are accepted in programs at some of the best public universities in Brazil. The acceptance rates at less rigorous private colleges with steep tuition rates are considerably higher.

GOALS OF TEACHING

The goals of undergraduate psychology programs are to prepare capable psychologists to work in a variety of capacities to benefit Brazilian society as a whole. The majority of psychologists in Brazil practice in urban areas. Community organizations and social movements operating in rural areas may have psychologists on staff, although few NGOs actively employ or involve psychologists. Hospitals, industry, and social service agencies in rural areas do, and a few psychologists may support themselves in private practices in their rural hometowns. The majority of Brazilian psychologists, however, are employed in or around the cities, most of them working in private clinics.

A sociocultural psychological orientation is common among Brazilian practitioners, and is
stressed in psychology courses. This perspective, similar to Vygotskian social interactionism, emphasizes the influence of environment and social conditions on human development and seeks to improve individual mental health in tandem with the social, environmental, and economic conditions that directly influence it. University psychology programs provide instruction and experiences to enable psychologists to work in this cultural milieu.

Graduate programs seek to prepare psychologists who are also competent researchers and teachers. Those with graduate degrees in psychology will work at universities as faculty members or in government social and regulatory agencies. Planning and conducting research in psychology to address social problems and develop useful treatment methods is paramount to success in these positions, as are public relations and instructional skills. Graduate programs focus on developing these skills.

**NATURE OF CURRICULUM, METHODS, AND APPROACHES**

As in most of the world, with the exception of the US, Brazilian psychologists are prepared in a 5-year undergraduate program including 2 years of internship and extensive coursework in all areas of the discipline, including neuropsychology, psychology, social psychology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, health psychology, and organizational psychology. Programs must follow national curriculum guidelines, although there is some freedom of choice allowed, resulting in slightly different areas of emphasis from program to program. Graduates of an accredited program may apply for licensure and then practice in any area for which they ethically feel prepared. Internships and additional specialization programs often determine this self-selected practice orb.

Faculty-to-student ratio in psychology programs is generally excellent, especially at the public universities. Small classes, extensive mentoring, and cooperative learning seminars characterize the best programs. The focus of undergraduate programs is on application and practice rather than research, however. Research typically begins at the graduate level. This is partially responsible for the current gulf between research and practice in Brazil, but it is being addressed. Iniciação Científica (Scientific Initiation), a program funded by federal and state agencies, supports research activities at the undergraduate level. The program involves students in research activities with graduate students and faculty mentors by the second year of college. As a result, it is not unusual to see undergraduates co-authoring works with faculty and graduate students. This supports a current trend to include students in research from the beginning of their undergraduate programs. If this trend continues to grow, a better understanding of the role of research in practice is likely to characterize future Brazilian psychologists. In general, though, undergraduate education is applied; specialization is self-selected by internship. With the exception of a few supplemental classes in philosophy, sociology, and biology, students study psychology almost exclusively during their university preparation. An overview course, a course on careers in psychology, courses in various branches of psychology such as social psychology and developmental psychology, and a course on history are generally included, along with several applied courses focusing on counseling practices, psychological assessment, and psychoanalysis. Practical teaching and internships also form a large part of training.

Initially, most materials and textbooks used in Brazilian psychology programs were translations into Portuguese from the works of such European psychologists as Ribot, Dumas, Binet, Wallon, Janet, Claparède, Freud, and Piaget (Penna, 1992). However, the works of Americans such as James, Dewey, and Thorndike were also studied. By the time the profession was officially established, Portuguese translations of texts by distinguished American psychologists such as Allport, Hilgard, Keller, Klineberg, Rogers, and Skinner were also included. The infusion of funds and the growth of programs in the 1970s resulted in more translations of US textbooks in various fields of psychology. Many aspects covered in American texts do not apply to Brazilian culture, though, so these texts are now seldom used. Recently, textbooks by Brazilian authors have become more common, especially in the areas of social psychology and psychoanalysis. An early example of this was a book edited by Klineberg, a Canadian psychologist educated at Columbia University in the US and a former professor at McGill University, who came to teach in a psychology program in Sao Paulo. His book included chapters on each of the major branches of psychology taught in Brazil (social, psychoanalytic, educational, developmental, etc.) written by well-known Brazilian authors.

There is no consensus as to which textbooks to use and these decisions are generally left to the discretion of the professor. The preference is for the use of customized collections of readings rather
than books. Textbooks are thought to provide one-sided perspectives that tend to force students into a single mode of thinking and to discourage library research and development of individual interests. The increasing availability of on-line journals and e-books has revolutionized information access in Brazil, as in the rest of the world. This, combined with Brazilian textbook writers who have summarized contemporary research from around the globe, allows extensive study of recent international scholarship.

**ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING OUTCOMES**

As mentioned previously, the structure of psychology departments within Brazil is legislated by the federal government and evaluated, in cooperation with professional associations, by the Ministry of Education.

The most rigorous and selective programs are within public universities. These institutions attract the best faculty and most capable students. Tuition is not charged at public universities. Education is free for students who qualify based on rigorous examination and selection processes. Competition is steep. Undergraduate screening in Brazil is equivalent to the screening in the US in top clinical graduate programs. Depending upon location and program reputation of the federal university (there are over 50 federal universities in Brazil), only the top 5–25% of applicants will be admitted.

The Catholic universities, PUC, where psychology programs began in the 1950s, are also extensive in Brazil. Students who attend one of the Catholic universities must pay tuition, and admission to psychology programs is slightly less competitive than at the federal and state universities, but several excellent programs, including those located in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Porto Alegre, are supported within this system. There are also many private universities that offer specialized programs in psychology. Although the Ministry of Education also regulates them, the program quality is inferior to that of the other systems, the tuition fees are higher, and the admission criteria are less stringent.

Exam scores are the primary consideration for admission to undergraduate programs. Because of the competitive exam-based admission structure, students have basic skills assessed at entry, rather than exit, from a program. Clinical skills are assessed during internships, and performance in classes assesses learning outcomes. In addition, students complete a university exit exam; average scores of students on this national exit exam are used to rate the overall quality of university programs. Psychology programs within the universities also undergo assessment in the form of program reviews and site visits by a branch of the Ministry of Education. Reviews of each program occur on a frequent basis, and evaluations are given on a 3-year cycle. Each program is awarded a score of 1 to 5 (with bonuses occasionally given to outstanding programs, allowing ratings of 6 or 7). Programs must score at 3 or above to continue. Program funding is determined based on evaluations—a true merit system. Committees assess class syllabi, objectives, materials, and faculty credentials, combined with the average scores of students on the national psychology exit exam required of all psychology students before graduation, to determine whether or not undergraduate programs are allowed to continue.

**NATURE OF DEGREES AND REGULATIONS GOVERNING PSYCHOLOGISTS AND PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAMS**

Licensure in Brazil, as in all of Latin America and much of Europe, is granted after an intense and focused 5-year undergraduate program that includes a 2-year internship (Gilgen & Gilgen, 1987). In Brazil, the internship is over 1500 contact hours under close supervision as well as an average of 20 classroom contact hours per week for the first 3 years, followed by an average of 10 or more contact hours for the last 2 years of education. Upon completion of an accredited undergraduate psychology program, graduates are eligible for licensure by regional/state branches of the Federal Council of Psychology once they apply and pay a fee. This intensive preparation is the sole route to licensure in psychology in Brazil. A graduate degree in psychology, without the requisite undergraduate degree from an accredited Brazilian university, will not result in licensure and there are no reciprocal agreements with other countries. A psychologist migrating from another country to Brazil must have transcripts evaluated and then complete the missing elements of required undergraduate training to be licensed.

Licenses are granted by the state, but requirements are the same throughout Brazil. The government, through the Federal Ministry of Education, works closely with the various national psychological associations in establishing guidelines and in overseeing, evaluating, and accrediting university psychology programs resulting in licensure.
FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Because of the manner in which psychology has evolved in Brazil, the use of electronic resources and the relatively recent development of graduate programs, often by faculty educated abroad, psychology in Brazil is already very international in nature and reflects global trends. In addition, the job outlook for psychologists in Brazil is good. Psychologists are integral and respected parts of interdisciplinary teams in most Brazilian institutions and workplaces, and most Brazilians are as comfortable visiting a psychologist as a physician or dentist, and just as likely to make use of mental health services as those directed at physical health. Schools, churches, and state agencies alike routinely make referrals. The greatest challenge to Brazilian psychology currently is to effectively integrate research and practice. Steps are being taken to address this challenge, such as Iniciação Científica (Scientific Initiation) and the recent Brazilian Congress of Psychology, which will continue every 4 years. The current trend to integrate undergraduate and graduate programs and involve undergraduate students in research from early in their training will also assist to accomplish this.

Defining what comprises good research is a challenge. The strong European roots in phenomenological and observational research and psychoanalytic traditions within Brazil, combined with the current status of experimental and cognitive programs, which receive the highest ratings from the Ministry of Education, guarantee that phenomenological and experimental theory and research are likely to continue side by side in Brazil for many years to come, to the benefit of both perspectives (Gomes, 1998). Correspondingly, a variety of assessment tools are being developed or translated and adapted for use by Brazilian psychologists (Alves, 2002; Kroeck, 1988; Nascimento & Figueiredo, 2002; Noronha & Alchieri, 2002; Nunes & Hutz, 2002). Instrumentation and statistical methodology in psychological research and practice in Brazil compares very favourably to those fields in other countries (see Primi, 2002). Strong observational and qualitative traditions in developmental psychology co-exist with experimental methods (see Gomes, 1998).

Brazil is a rapidly developing country. The optimism, respect for diversity, and dedication to democratic principles that is leading Brazil quickly into strong economic and social prominence in the 21st century is reflected in the development of psychology in this country. Value of people, quality of life, and respect for individual and human rights characterizes modern Brazilian society. This meshes well with the ideals of the discipline of psychology and makes the field accepted and respected in this country, as attested by its rapid growth in the last few decades. In addition, Brazilian pragmatism, humour, social consciousness, and ability to adapt, born of past political experiences here, enriches the critical thinking and creativity necessary for scientific advancement in the field. An awareness of scarcity of resources improves efficiency. Psychology is currently poised for entry into a golden age, perhaps even greater than that experienced in the 1940s and 1950s in the US, if current social, political, and economic trends continue.

REFERENCES


