The History of the Teaching of Psychology: Or, What Was Old is New Again

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Let's cut to the chase; by the end of this chapter, you will know that I am not a historian. Although I have an interest in the history of psychology and I have taught a capstone course titled History and Systems in Psychology, teaching a course in the history and systems of psychology is not the same as writing a chapter on the history of the teaching of psychology. When updating the history of psychology over time, "the modern history of psychology cannot, however, be written merely by adding chapters to the older history. Strange as it may seem, the present changes the past; and, as the focus and range of psychology shift in the present, new parts of the past enter into its history and other parts drop out" (Boring, 1950, p. ix). Even though Puente, Matthews, and Brewer (1992) presented outstanding work in their edited book Teaching Psychology in America: A History, there remains more of the history of the teaching of psychology to be told.

In my own study of the history of the teaching of psychology, I believe that by studying the artifacts of history, interested parties can gain insight about where the teaching of psychology is going by studying where the teaching of psychology has been. For my own analysis, it appears that what was old is new again. As my chief organizational scheme, I address the following historical categories: (a) the founding of psychological laboratories, (b) organizations and conferences, (c) textbooks and journals, (d) curriculum conferences, and (e) early teaching experiences.

Laboratories

One aspect of the history of the teaching of psychology may be observed in the establishment of psychological laboratories in the U.S. Wilhelm Wundt was the founder of the first psychology laboratory for research purposes in 1879 (demonstration laboratories existed a few years earlier in multiple locations; Hilgard, 1987). Training graduate students in the science of psychology, whether in the 1880s or today, involved the *teaching* of research methods. The first six laboratories established in the U.S. were (from Hilgard, 1987):

1883, Johns Hopkins University, by G. Stanley Hall

1888, Indiana University, by William L. Bryan

1888, University of Pennsylvania, by J. McKeen Cattell

1888, University of Wisconsin, by Joseph Jastrow

1889, Clark University, by E. C. Sanford

1889, University of Nebraska, by H. K. Wolfe

Thus, even before the formation of the American Psychological Association in 1892, a strong trend was emerging in the U.S. in the establishment of psychological laboratories dedicated to the advancement of research. These laboratories advanced our knowledge of human behavior only because the methods of psychology were being taught to students.

Organizations and Conferences

G. Stanley Hall founded the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1892, and it included 12 charter members. In examining the annual meeting records from APA in those early years, it appears to have taken a while for matters of teaching to reach the agenda. "The first genuine APA session devoted to the teaching of psychology occurred at the 1899 meeting, when a discussion was held on the question of how psychology should be taught" (Goodwin, 1992, p. 331). The topic of the introductory or first course in psychology was mentioned in the APA archives in some of

those early years, but not much else about the teaching of psychology. In fact, "between 1892 and 1945, with the possible exception of an interest in how the first course was to be taught, enhancing the teaching of psychology was not a priority of the APA, at least in the program content of the annual meetings" (Goodwin, 1992, pp. 340-341). With the founding of the Division of the Teaching of Psychology in 1946 (APA Division Two), that trend was about to change.

The history of the teaching of psychology can also be traced by its organizations such as the current Society for the Teaching of Psychology (STP) and its publications such as *Teaching of Psychology* (Griggs & Collisson, 2013). It is unclear how APA's Division of the Teaching of Psychology -- later renamed the Society for the Teaching of Psychology -- became Division Two of APA. But one account suggests that Division One (General Psychology) and Division Two (Teaching of Psychology) were numbered in that fashion because they may appeal to individuals who did not fit into the more specialized divisions (Wight & Davis, 1992). In fact, it may be this commonality in the importance of teaching psychology is ultimately the tie that binds. That is, the future of professional psychology fields (clinical, counseling, psychotherapy, industrial/organizational, and so on) depends upon psychology baccalaureates who are ready for the transition to graduate training -- both in knowledge retained and skills honed. Given that 75% of psychology baccalaureates do not pursue graduate education in psychology, it is essential that those individuals be prepared for the wide-ranging opportunities afforded to them (American Psychological Association, 2013; Landrum, 2014). Thinking about the current opportunities to educate 1.2-1.6 million undergraduates in introductory psychology in the U.S. annually, for most of these students it is their once-in-a-lifetime exposure to scientific psychology and the benefits that can accrue with insights into human behavior. The introductory psychology course has been viewed as a lynchpin for some time and continues to serve as our most visible bully pulpit for the advancement of psychology.

The importance of teaching conferences is unparalleled in the history of the teaching of psychology. Starting with the Mid-America Conference for Teachers of Psychology (MACTOP) in 1984, Beins (2005) observed that teaching conferences allow individuals of many different interests to come together to learn about and discuss teaching techniques that could be widely applied. Even though the discipline of psychology may be fragmented, it is the teaching of psychology that is the commonality across specialty areas and training models. Even though MACTOP no longer exists, its legacy is clear; many statewide and regional teaching of psychology conferences are active and flourishing, and each of the major regional psychology associations (NEPA, EPA, SEPA, MPA, RMPA, SWPA, WPA) features teaching of psychology sessions at their annual meetings.

Textbooks and Journals
The emergence of the teaching of psychology has to be viewed in the context of psychology emerging from philosophy. In fact, psychology courses were often seen as the method of entering into higher-level philosophy courses (Fuchs, 2000). Thus, prior to 1900, there were "fuzzy boundaries" with regard to philosophy courses and psychology courses, and therefore, textbooks and publications have overlapping boundaries as well. If the measure of the teaching of psychology includes the *mention* of psychology in textbooks, Weiten and Wight (1992) observed that the first American textbook to do so was likely by Brattle, written in Latin and made available in 1696 (as cited in Fay, 1939). Frederick Rauch published the first American textbook titled *Psychology* in 1840 (Hilgard, 1987), pre-dating the "formal establishment" of psychology by Wundt in Leipzig by 39 years. Wilhelm Wundt was the founder of the first psychological journal in the world, *Philosophical Studies*, in 1881; as for the first journal published in psychology in the U.S., it was the *American Journal of Psychology*, founded in 1887 by G. Stanley Hall.

Scholars in the teaching of psychology can also point to the founding of APA Division Two Division of the Teaching of Psychology in 1946 (later renamed Society for the Teaching of Psychology; STP). This division launched a newsletter in November 1950, and over the next 24 years 59 issues of the divisional newsletter were published (Daniel, 1999). Robert S. Daniel became the editor of the Division Two newsletter in 1971, and by 1974 he served as the editor of the newly launched (now venerable) divisional journal *Teaching of Psychology* (Wight & Davis, 1992. *Teaching of Psychology* is a well-established and premier outlet for scholarship concerning the teaching of psychology; there are additional journal outlets as well (*Psychology Learning & Teaching*, *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Psychology*).

Curriculum Conferences

The value of curriculum conferences dedicated to the psychology curriculum has been addressed by others (see Brewer, 2006; Mayo, 2010; McGovern, 1993), so only a brief review here is necessary. In 1951 the first national conference concerning the undergraduate psychology curriculum was held at Cornell University, with the conference report published a year later. Continuing in this theme, psychologists again met at the University of Michigan in 1960 and published their report a year later. Following a national survey of undergraduate departments of psychology in 1973, Kulik published a descriptive report of curricular variations across the U.S. In 1991 psychologists met again in person at St. Mary's College in Maryland, and the outcomes from this conference resulted in the *Handbook for Enhancing Undergraduate Education in Psychology* (McGovern, 1993). The Psychology Partnerships Project conference, hosted by James Madison University in 1999, included significant components of curriculum review and discussion, but it was not exclusively dedicated to curriculum discussions. Most recently, a 2008 conference hosted by the University of Puget Sound had participants discussing not only the undergraduate psychology curriculum, but also psychological literacy, the scientist-educator model, teaching and technology, desired outcomes from an undergraduate psychology education, and more. The Puget Sound efforts resulted in the Halpern (2010) edited book *Undergraduate Education in Psychology: A Blueprint for the Future of the Discipline*. Because many of the resources about the history of the teaching of psychology pre-date this 2008 conference, for more information about the Puget Sound conference, see vignette box 1.

William James at Harvard offered instruction in physiological psychology in 1875, and in that same year he taught a graduate course titled 'The Relation between Physiology and Psychology.' Both James and Wundt had laboratories for psychology demonstrations in 1875, but in 1879 that Wilhelm Wundt formally opened a psychology research laboratory in Leipzig, Germany (Boring, 1950). The historical preference of Wundt as the founder of psychology compared to James may lie in the teaching vs. research demands in academia that remain current today. That is, to identify Wundt as the founder implicitly demonstrates the importance of research in the new and emerging discipline of psychology. Also, the "founding" title may have also been influenced by those writing about the history of psychology, such as E.G. Boring (who was a student of Titchener, and Titchener was a student of Wundt). It is this date -- 1879 -- that many historians in psychology note as the formal founding of the discipline. With a new discipline in place, the introductory first course was not far behind.

At Harvard during the 1900-1901 academic year, Hugo Munsterberg from the Department of Philosophy offered a year-long "General Introduction to Philosophy" course, with the first half-year devoted to psychology. The text used for that half-year was by William James (1892), called *Psychology: The briefer course*. E. C. Sanford's idea (founder of the psychology laboratory at Clark University in 1889) for the first course in psychology was to make psychological knowledge directly

relevant to the student. In his words, "What sort of psychological knowledge are these young men or young women most likely to find useful, immediately or remotely, in the actual affairs of life?" (Sanford, 1906, p. 118). It may seem that undergraduate psychology education has strayed quite a bit from advice gems offered by early leaders like Sanford (1906) and Seashore (1910). For more on what's old is new again, see the vignette box 2.

Conclusion

The key points in this chapter include:
• Some of the earliest teaching of psychology occurred in psychology's first laboratories.
• APA deserves significant credit for the formulation and support of Division Two, as that organization (STP) has evolved into serving APA and non-APA members worldwide.
• Textbooks and journals stand as clear and identifiable artifacts in the development of the teaching of psychology.
• Conferences centered around curriculum matters have allowed educators the time and space to think deeply about what psychology majors should know and be able to do, and to consider by what means to provide meaningful learning experiences for students.
• In many ways, the early teachers of psychology got it right, understanding that the introductory course could make a difference in students' lives, the focus on skills, designing course tasks to have desirable difficulties, wanting movable chairs in the classroom, and even suggesting a precursor to the flipped classroom.

In addition to the sectional summaries provided above, I would add that teaching of psychology conferences continue to be as important today as they were in the last century. It seems as the world (and the teaching of psychology) becomes more digital, the experiences of educators at face-to-face conferences are more valuable and effective.

Any author of a chapter about the history of the teaching of psychology would be remiss if not to mention one of the legends in the teaching of psychology, Bill McKeachie of the University of Michigan. Notice that even though written a quarter-century ago, McKeachie's analysis and recommendations are just as cogent 25 years later:

> We now realize that the variables influencing learning are almost numberless. Because their interactions change from day to day, we need to move from pretest-posttest measures to studies of ongoing processes, from single-variable studies to individual students acting in groups, and from studies of outcomes of learning to studies of what goes on in the thoughts, feelings, and desires of students (McKeachie, 1990, p. 197)

I hope that as the teaching of psychology moves forward, educators will work to continuously improve our collective understanding of the teaching of psychology. The variables are complex and the interactions between person and environment can provide clues in identifying those evidence-based instructional practices. Historical artifacts will continue to provide important clues throughout time, and these clues are particularly important when exploring the history of the teaching of psychology.

Vignettes

1. The National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology (NCUEP):

Five Days at the University of Puget Sound in the Summer of 2008
Under the leadership of Diane Halpern (2010), the National Conference on Undergraduate Education in Psychology occurred during the summer of 2008 for five days at the University of Puget Sound. Of course, much planning occurred prior to arriving on-site, as the precursor to this conference was the St. Mary's College of Maryland conference in 1991. At the University of Puget Sound conference, Halpern led a stellar steering committee, and each member of the steering committee served on one of the nine working groups. Each working group was led by a faculty member but was assisted by a member of the steering committee (—i.e., in the list below, each faculty lead is followed by steering committee member). Those nine groups, with faculty leaders and steering committee members, attempted to answer the following questions:

Working Group 1: Why do we need to rethink how we educate students in psychology? Tom McGovern, Wally Dixon

Working Group 2: Who is teaching psychology, and what is the quality of instruction? Dan Bernstein, Courtney Rocheleau

Working Group 3: What is being taught and learned in psychology courses, including the impact of fragmentation of psychology toward specialized disciplinary societies and new interdisciplinary specialties (e.g., neuroscience) on the psychology major? Dana Dunn, Charles Brewer

Working Group 4: Who are the students in undergraduate psychology, and how do we challenge the traditional one-size-fits-all curricular approach to meeting the needs of a diverse student population? Linh Littleford, Bill Buskist

Working Group 5: When and where are students taking psychology courses? Jeff Andre, Ann Ewing

Working Group 6: What are the modes of teaching for different content, contexts, and students? Steve Chew, Mary Kite

Working Group 7: How can we promote learning with new technologies that include interactive learning agents and online programs that teach collaborative peer evaluation, game-based models of learning, and virtual learning environments among others? Keith Millis, Yolanda Harper

Working Group 8: How are we using knowledge gained over the last decade about effective teaching and learning? Frank Worrell, Bettina Casad

Working Group 9: What are the desired outcomes of an undergraduate education in psychology? Eric Landrum, Barney Beins

Ultimately, each working group prepared a chapter about the assigned topic that included specific recommendations for the future of undergraduate psychology education. Thus, 80 psychologists and academics, through working group meetings and plenary sessions, were ably led by Halpern and experienced staff members from APA's Education Directorate to work toward this goal: "we envisioned a future for higher education in which change could be brought about in a sound, scientific way that would yield long-lasting positive benefits for all of the stakeholders" (Halpern, 2010, p. 3).

2. Advice More than a Century Old:

Recommendations on Teaching the Elementary Course in Psychology by C. E. Seashore (1910)

Writing from the University of Iowa in 1910, Carl Seashore filed a report with the American Psychological Association that was subsequently published in Psychological Monographs: General and Applied. This general report was the accumulation of subcommittee reports, and Seashore was clear that the opinions expressed in this general report were largely his own.

Having said that, many of the observations made by Seashore about the introductory psychology course still hold true and are refreshingly honest over a century later (at least in my opinion). All of the following are direct quotes--enjoy!

 "The first course in psychology should be essentially the same in content and method whether it is taken merely for general culture, as a foundation for philosophical studies, or in the preparation for specific vocations; such as, education, theology, art, law, or medicine" (p. 81).

"Keep the student doing things, instead of merely listening, reading, or seeing them done" (p. 83).

 "Be reasonable and specific in all assignments and demand results. Set your task so that it may be performed when the assignment is made, and so that you may have constant information about the fidelity in work and the quality of results. The sophomore is an elementary student and psychology is necessarily somewhat abstract. Nearly every young teacher makes the mistake of treating the elementary class by the method of which he has become enamored as a graduate student. There should be a radical difference in the methods of the elementary course and following courses in psychology. It is absurd to treat the sophomore in psychology as a research student.

Insist upon the mastering of difficulties. One of the greatest wastes in college teaching is that we allow the student to shift when he encounters difficulty. Show him where the difficulty lies, spur him on, and hold him to the task" (p. 84).

 "All teachers who cannot find good text books should at once publish their own!" (p. 85)

 "The lecture is one of the best means of personalizing the instruction, yet it is one of the most abused methods. In the elementary course in psychology the mere information lecture should be tabooed" (pp. 85-86).

 "The elementary lecture room should be a well ventilated and well lighted hall furnished with movable desk chairs, blackboards, chart cases, projection lantern, gas, electric power, etc." (p. 90).

 "The teacher of psychology, as compared with the teachers of other college subjects, needs an exceptionally thorough preparation" (p. 90).

 "Psychology is perhaps unequalled by other college subjects in its power to influence the life of the student; the introduction to this subject should, therefore, be taught by mature members of the department" (p. 91).

 "'The teacher is everything.' In this there is great truth. As we have learned to respect the individuality of the pupil, we must learn to regard the individuality of the teacher" (p. 91).

Note. Seashore clearly used sexist language in his 1910 writings by always referring to the faculty member or the student as he or him. I have shared these quotes verbatim, meaning that the sexist references are still included. This is not to say that I mean to be sexist, but in a chapter on the

history of the teaching of psychology, this is an important point to make. It may be true that there were very few female students at the University of Iowa in 1910, but there definitely were some female students on campus, and some females were likely enrolled in psychology courses. Fortunately, we are much more sensitive to the existence of sexism today compared to a century ago.

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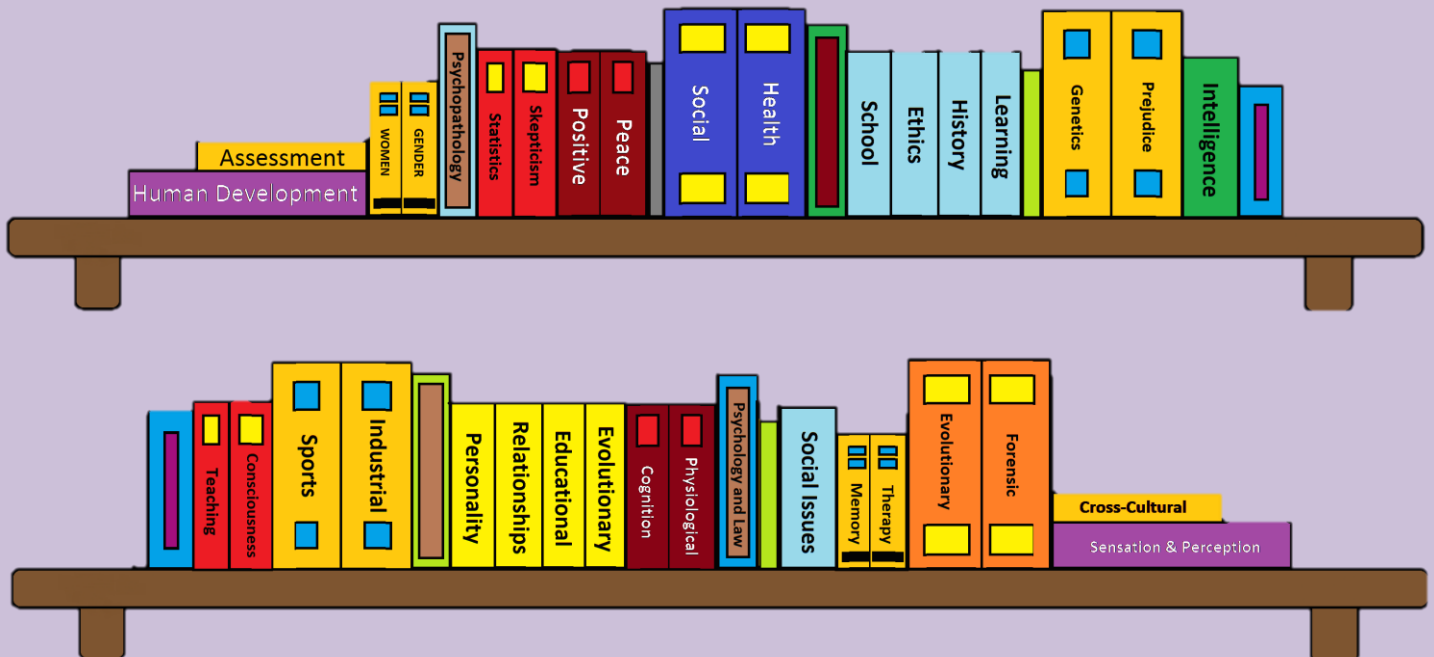
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