

Psychology in the Ukraine

UKRAINE has just undergone its 'orange revolution', bringing to power a president (Yushenko) who declared his intent to rid the country of corruption and the trappings of old-style communism – though recent events have shown that this is likely to be a lengthy and dangerous process. Still suffering the legacy of the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, and a population haemorrhage, how is the country faring? Has the optimism been justified, and how will psychology fare in the new climate?

Psychology in the Ukraine

Psychology both benefited and suffered in the Ukraine, as it did in other regions of the old CCCP. It was prominent as the practical and scientific component of pedagogy, but in the 1930s, pedagogy was abolished in one of Stalin's famous decrees, so that teaching materials and textbooks were confiscated from departments and subsequently destroyed. Between 1930 and 1990, psychology as an independent discipline was widely taught at Pedagogical and Humanitarian Universities. Psychology was also traditionally taught in schools and now, although it is taught as a non-compulsory discipline, interest among students is high, and it rates sixth in popularity behind law, economics, management, medicine and business studies. Since 1991 there has been an enormous expansion in psychological research output.

Past Ukrainian psychologists

In the 1920s, following the 1917 Russian revolution, a famous group of Russian psychologists (including Vygotsky, Leontiev, Luria and Ananiev) set up a school of psychology in Kharkov University in Eastern Ukraine, thus

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escaping the dangers of practicing in the Russian cities, from where they undertook ethnic and developmental psychological research. Legacies of that era still remain. Ukrainian psychologists are especially noted in developmental and pedagogical fields and their unification.

A school developed in the first half of the last century by the most prominent Ukrainian psychologist, Gregory Silovich Kostiuk, was founded on the idea that success in any learning process lays in the combination of the development of

personality and interactive teaching. This notion undoubtedly stems from the theoretical heritage inherited from Vygotsky. In Kostiuk's research, the main tenet was that learning and upbringing (*vospitaniye*) play a significant role in the development of personality.

Following this lead other psychologists such as Rubinstein, Leontiev and Galperin (famous for theories of activity, and the interactive development of personality), Elkonin (theory of developing in teaching), and Ball (puzzle theory) established Soviet psychology as a respectable and prominent discipline, while in the Ukraine, Romenesh introduced a broad cultural approach to the history of psychology. Mention should also be made of Shevchenko, a literary giant regarded as the 'Ukrainian Shakespeare', who is also credited with producing insights which guided early developments in the country's psychology.

Where do psychologists train?

Around 1990 the number of psychology departments in Ukrainian Universities had hit an all-time low. Output was limited, with the Kharkov and Kiev National Universities graduating only 50 psychology students per year. Yet now each of the Pedagogical Universities across the country (about 30 of them) graduates the same number per year. Psychology and pedagogy are taught in many universities and departments of higher education, not only in humanities departments, but also in medical and technical schools. Governmental departments (mainly based

Vygotsky

at the universities) play a significant role in the training of young psychologists. The various departments of the Ministry of Health trains clinical psychologists and psychotherapists.

At present, a student enters an institute or a university, completing the *bakalavra* (baccalaureate) in four years, followed by an extra optional year to complete a Magister (master's) degree. To be qualified as a psychologist, a certificate or diploma that indicates a completion of a relevant course is required, though the same qualification can be obtained by a student who already has a first degree in another discipline. On completion of a degree in psychology an undergraduate can enter the *aspirantura*, which is the equivalent of a research PhD, which is then followed (often much later) by a doctoral degree, the *Doktor Nauk* (Doctor of Science).

Non-governmental (private) universities also graduate many psychologists but due to a rapid increase in psychology's popularity, quality is sometimes sacrificed for quantity and the standards of specialists can be very low. A challenge for the Ukraine is that not all universities have sufficient expertise, techniques and well-designed methodologies to produce high quality psychologists.

Where do psychologists work?

A number are employed in government, such as the various departments of the Home Office, working in personnel, and with local populations. In non-governmental infrastructures, psychology also plays a role. Psychologists occupy many roles that have materialised in recent years as society has changed – in personnel, marketing, as analysts, image-makers, political advisors, or for psychological consultation by private firms.

In the curiously-named 'Ministry of Extreme Situations', psychological services are put to use in establishing close rapport with individuals affected by extreme events and circumstances. The ministry has inaugurated five centres that mainly provide psychological help for the victims of the Chernobyl disaster: the irradiated territories as well as in the relocation settlements.

Where is research conducted?

The main coordinating institution in psychological research is the Kostiuik Institute of Psychology, within the

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Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko leaving the polling booth – rapid political change has increased research interest

Academy of Ukrainian Pedagogical Sciences (www.psy-science.kiev.ua). The Academy has other institutes that run projects in various psychological spheres: the Psychological Institute of Professional Education, the Institute of Behavioural Problems, the Institute of Social and Political Psychology and many others including the Ukrainian Scientific Methodological Centre for Applied and Social Psychology.

In Kharkov's National University, a faculty of psychology was opened in 1972 and became independent of other disciplines in 2001. Work focused on memory problems, but recently its research interests have expanded into areas which in the past would have been regarded as exotic or anti-communist, including forensic psychology, political psychology, ethnopsychology, ecological psychology and psychotherapy.

Current projects

Psychologists are variously involved in security-related work, and addressing the effects of the Chernobyl disaster, which are many and varied (for example the current reluctance of young couples to have children for fear of birth defects).

Rapid political change has led to research interest in differences among ethnic minorities (of which Russians have become one). Indeed, voting in the election which gave rise to the orange revolution was often along ethnic lines, groups differing in terms of religious beliefs and political preferences (the western part of the Ukraine being pro-Western, the eastern part, pro-Russian, for example). Negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities living in the Ukraine were covered up for many

years but now they are acknowledged and psychologists are helping to counter them. Four current projects are summarised here:

Views of the younger generation

This consists of two sub-studies. The first (as yet unpublished) investigated the formation of ethnic stereotypes among school pupils – particularly that negative stereotypes may arise from the playing of popular computer games such as 'The War of the Russian Bandits and Ukrainian Nationalists'. The second examined the role of textbooks used by teachers on the formation of ethnic stereotypes, revealing that every year, Ukrainian literature and history textbooks tend to place emphasis on a particular historical period or epoch that shows a negative image of other nationalities. For instance, much time and space is devoted to the historical period known as the Tatar-Mongol invasion, and the invasion by the Crimean Tatars of Ukrainian towns and villages. Such restriction to a short period of Ukrainian history has affected the perception of schoolchildren toward contemporary Crimean Tatars. Children have been found to express negative attitudes toward this group, despite, in most cases, having had no or limited contact with it (Pavlenko, 2003).

Age, identification and in-group choice

This project (Pavlenko *et al.*, 2001) examined the age dynamics of the regional, ethno-national and supranational levels of identification in children and adolescents living in Ukraine. Also, the project investigated the age specificities of the ethno-national belief structures according to the in-group of the individual concerned. The study revealed, after interviews with four groups of 120 Kharkov children, at ages 6, 9, 12, and 15 years, that the formation of the territorial and ethno-national identification system in children and adolescents from Ukraine starts from an identification with the regional level community of the city. The choice of ethno-national community as an in-group is usually complete by 12 years of age. A distinctive age dynamic can be traced in the choice of ethno-national group as an in-group. It moves from bi-ethnic identification (ie. both Ukrainian and Russian) in the younger age groups toward a strict and unambiguous identification in

older ones (either Ukrainian or Russian). With increasing age, the cognitive complexity of children's ethnic beliefs increases.

Development of national, ethnolinguistic and religious identity

This project (see www.surrey.ac.uk/psychology/nerid) compared the ethnolinguistic and religious identities developed by children and adolescents in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia and Azerbaijan with those in England, Scotland, the Basque Country, Catalonia and Andalusia. It revealed extensive and pervasive differences in identity development in these different socio-cultural contexts, relating especially to ethno-national group, geographical location, and the language used for teaching in their schools.

Political trust and participation Of particular significance to the Ukraine is a current study relating psychological factors such as ethnic identity to the formation of political trust and political activity among young people.

Educational psychology: A success story

Today, there are 10,000 specialists working in primary and secondary schools, colleges, gymnasiums and so on. Psychology is widely employed in family services. At present 800 regional social centres for young people have been initiated by the government. But as demand for psychologists has increased, so have debates about course contents and methods used to train them. A number of suggestions have been made to try to stabilise the chaos in the system, particularly to be more selective when recruiting psychology graduates, to reinforce guidelines for training in practical and applied psychology, and to integrate

the experience and knowledge of international psychologists (while still respecting cultural differences).

A need for better regulation

Demand for psychological knowledge is high in many spheres of modern social life. However, there is no single regulatory body to establish basic guidelines for psychologists to work with. In some areas i.e. in the law of education, social protection of the population, services working with young people, guidelines and major principles are emphasised and implemented in practice. Nevertheless, clear governmental regulations are sparse in the Ukraine. Such regulation is much needed since self-appointed pseudo-psychological agencies are unprofessional; they can fail to provide the clients with basic psychological help, placing them in a vulnerable position.

Besides, new reforms demand that extra expense is invested in teaching and professional training. A priority for Ukrainian psychologists is to encourage Western colleagues to initiate further collaboration in this field in the form of exchange programmes, seminar organisation and so on. However, needless to say, blindly mimicking Western methodologies may well cause misunderstanding amongst Ukrainian psychologists; implementation of Western methods without a full understanding of professional terminology creates ambiguities, and some practitioners may fail to take into consideration cultural issues that are unique to their Ukrainian clients.

The Ukrainian Psychological Society

The Society was founded in 1990 when the country split from Russia, but it was recently reorganised and is run by the academic Professor Sergej Maksimenko. In October 2005 the first Congress of Ukrainian Psychologists took place, and a reorganisation of the society was agreed.

Professionalism among Ukrainian psychologists is partly regulated by governmental agencies, and partly via an Ethical code first introduced by the society in 1990. Regulation appears to be working, since there has been not a single report indicating non-compliance with the code. Nevertheless, the development of such systems in educational and applied psychology is regarded as the 'weakest

link' in Ukrainian psychology; there are not many governmental or non-governmental universities that offer their students consistent ethical guidelines. More scientific research is needed to investigate the current state of psychology in relation to ethical conditions and compliance.

The future

In the near future, the radical steps that Ukrainian psychology has to take are to develop applied principles that are consistent with the demands made by a modern, dynamic society. In our opinion, the development of applied psychology in particular will stimulate the development of scientific research in psychology in general.

One of the many ways to increase professionalism is to initiate and encourage the active participation of Ukrainian psychologists at international conferences, seminars and workshops organised by European and American colleagues. In addition, working with Russian psychologists might also help to ease the situation since many Russian colleagues have established long-standing contacts with influential Western schools of thought which are of great interest among Ukrainian psychologists (symbol drama, child psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and different interpretations of NLP, and cognitive behaviour therapy, among others).

The whole of Ukrainian society is undergoing a transitional period in its history – moving away from the Soviet schools (which are highly respected, for producing well-educated and thoughtful graduates) toward contemporary European standards (which are not well thought-out yet). Such a painful but necessary transition will undoubtedly affect the status of psychology in the widest sense— advice from Western colleagues can be extremely helpful in this sphere.

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