Introduction and overview

Introduction

This module offers an introduction to psychological intervention based on historical and multicultural perspectives of the nature of human beings and practices of human interaction. This first learning unit outlines the content of the module, which is called 'Introduction to Psychological Intervention'. It also explores how the various contexts of learning are brought together in the module. It asserts that learning is embedded in multiple contexts, and it presents the information age, the fourth industrial revolution and decoloniality as pronounced contexts of learning.

A psychological intervention is an interaction informed and governed by some understanding of the nature of human beings. As such, the module intends to equip students with knowledge of psychological intervention within historical, cultural and subject disciplinary contexts. Students are introduced to African, Eastern and Western modalities of psychological intervention to foreground different manifestations of agents of intervention, the roles of agents of intervention and the official structures and processes that formulise and licence particular actions as legitimate forms of intervention. Also of interest, are the principles and frameworks that render interventions ethical.

The module lays the foundation for psychological intervention

The module is about psychological intervention. Psychological intervention is a broad field, covering advanced theories and focussing on specialist skills. It takes several years of study to master the theoretical and practical know how that enables one to conduct interventions. This introductory module lays the theoretical and practical foundation from which you can build your future competence in psychological intervention.

The module follows a particular route into psychological intervention

The module's point of departure is togetherness as the fundamental condition for psychological intervention. One cannot have an intervention without togetherness. Therefore, it is important that you understand what togetherness means and how to establish togetherness.

The first stop along the route into psychological intervention is consultation. Intervention is imbedded in consultation. A client has a concern and approaches a consultant for help. The consultant decides on the intervention needed to address the client's concern. However, the consultant first needs proper consultation with the client to ensure that the intervention they embark on is relevant

and likely to be successful. This module introduces you to consultation and provides theory to assist you in your consultation. It is about the nature of psychological intervention in different cultural contexts, such as a traditional African context, an Eastern context, and a Western context.

The second stop on your journey into psychological intervention is how interventions can be defined as psychological interventions in different cultural contexts. Your discussions of the psychological nature of these interventions require a lot of theory. You need to study theoretical perspectives of intervention, psychological intervention, and the spaces of psychological intervention.

The third stop on your journey is consultant competence. Consultants decide on appropriate interventions and implement them. This means consultants need to be skilful in executing interventions and they need knowledge that support their interventions. In other words, consultants must be competent in the field of psychological intervention. This raises another concern. How would you know that a consultant is competent?

The fourth stop is the final stop on your journey, which is referred to as intervention ethics. Ethics is a difficult topic because it is about the right and wrong ways of behaving and of doing things. The problem is that there are no absolute truths to help us distinguish between right and wrong. We rely on cultural and personal values to separate ethical from unethical conduct. Related to this is when and why would an intervention be considered unethical? We also delve into the official ethical code that governs psychological conduct in South Africa and interrogate whether it is sufficient, or in need of revision?

| The module contributes content | This module offers foundational theory and, as such, it serves as a precursor to more advanced modules on psychological intervention. As an introduction it focuses on the characteristics and ethics of psychological intervention in general. It is not an exercise in practical training. One needs extensive knowledge of psychology and intensive training to qualify as a psychological practitioner, and this module is the first step in this direction. |

Module Outcomes

This module comprises three broad learning outcomes. After completing this module, you should be able to:

- identify and assess the appropriateness of a psychological intervention, an agent of intervention and the role of the agent

of intervention in different historical, cultural and subject disciplinary contexts
- identify cultural, societal and subject disciplinary structures and processes that formalise and legitimise psychological intervention
- apply ethical principles and frameworks to assess the ethics of a psychological intervention.

Importance of understanding key concepts

In subsequent learning units, you will be introduced to key concepts, the understanding of which is very important. Key concepts help you understand and form a mental picture and enhance your understanding of knowledge. It will also help you make sense of the world around you and to make informed decisions.

Learning in context

A learning opportunity is embedded in multiple contexts

This module will provide you with an opportunity to learn something new. It is very important for you to know and understand the context before executing the tasks included in the learning opportunity. Learning does not happen in isolation. It requires engagement with subject material and interaction with other people. These engagements and interactions occur in the module and, as such, the module is a context for creating and maintaining togetherness in learning. However, the module itself is not an isolated learning opportunity. It is part of an academic programme, and it is presented at a particular period in our own history (local context) and the history of the world (international context). Thus, any opportunity to learn is embedded in multiple contexts as is our lives. When we select a particular learning opportunity, we do so because of our interests and needs, and these interests and needs are grounded in the contexts in which we exist.

A learning opportunity perturbs one's comfort zone

To learn means to acquire knowledge and skills that one did not possess before. Learning changes one's understandings, including one's interests and needs and impacts one's views. Therefore, one may select a learning opportunity based on particular interests and needs but then find that the learning opportunity also covers other fields of interest and aims to satisfy needs beyond one's immediate needs. In other words, one may find that a learning opportunity perturbs the interests and needs that one feels comfortable with. However, this is what learning is all about. If a learning opportunity does not take one beyond one's current fields of knowledge and skills, it is not worth signing up for.

A learning experience is

We react intuitively to learning opportunities. We find them interesting or boring, relevant or irrelevant, important or

inconsequential. It does not matter what words we use to describe them. The bottom line is that our learning is rewarding or not rewarding. It is rewarding if it expands our interests and if it satisfies the needs we develop along the way. We tend not to examine our intuitive reactions to learning opportunities but sometimes it is a good idea to stop and reflect. Embarking on a new learning opportunity is such an occasion. However, the problem with new learning is that we may not be quite sure how much we need the learning or how interesting it may turn out to be. So, we have to carefully consider our circumstances and the world around us to see whether the learning we embark on could be worthwhile. For example, we need to consider whether the knowledge and skills we are likely to acquire would enable us to function better in the world and help us to become better learners. If one is not interested in the knowledge and skills offered by the learning opportunity or one thinks it will not help one to function better in the world or become a better learner one will not find the learning opportunity rewarding.

The world as a learning context

A new world order

We know the world is changing fast. Some changes are obvious such as the impact that new technologies have on our daily lives. Others are more fundamental and less apparent, such as the shifts that occur in how we perceive and understand the world. All these changes come together in how the world is organised. During the industrial age we favoured hierarchical organisation. We knew where and how we fitted in. We preferred standard ways of doing things. We acquired the knowledge and skills we needed to live productive lives. But the information age brings a different kind of organisation. Former hierarchies are dismantled. We establish ourselves in networks that are dynamic and fluid, and in which our positions change regularly. We constantly need new knowledge and to acquire new skills for continually repositioning and redefining ourselves in an era that has become known as the fourth industrial revolution.

The information age
and the fourth
industrial revolution

The information age is an era that began in the mid-twentieth century with the advent of computer technology. Computers enabled the processing and storage of huge amounts of information. They added value to information and changed information itself into a commodity. Finally, information became a more valuable commodity than the physical commodities traded on world markets, especially because it was fluid and flexible. It could be used to represent physical commodities and it could itself be embodied as physical commodities. It enabled a virtual world in which everybody and everything could become connected. The virtual world in which everybody can connect is the internet of people. This world is known to us. But we are now also moving

into an era in which everything can connect. This is the beginning of the internet of things. Things are able to connect if they have some form of intelligence, which means at least some form of processing power and memory. Things are developing fast in this direction. In fact, the development is fast enough to be called a revolution. It is known as the fourth industrial revolution (4th IR).

The 4th IR is about cyber-physical systems. Cyber-physical systems are physical systems that incorporate machine learning and artificial intelligence to show humanlike behaviour. The psychology of human cognition already plays an important role in the design and implementation of thinking machines but the area that increasingly expands psychology's interest in the nature of humanity is the field of human-machine systems. These systems are about human-machine interactions and increasingly about interlinking biological bodies and physical machines. These are known as cyborg systems. Psychology's core interest, which is the interest in the nature of humanity, is expanding into the field of cyborg systems.

In a way, we have been cyborgs for a long time. A person wearing eyeglasses to improve vision or riding a bicycle to move faster are examples of interlinked and interacting human-machine systems, but the 4th IR is changing us into a different kind of cyborg. Eyeglasses and bicycles are technologies that we add to our bodies to enhance our behaviour, but the 4th IR is about incorporating technologies inside our bodies, and our bodies inside technologies. It is not about experiencing the world differently it is about existing differently in the world. In other words, it is less about experience and more about lived experience. Also, it is less about technology and more about technique.

Here is an example to demonstrate what this means. A person wearing contact lenses uses lens technology to enhance their experience of the world. This changes their lived experience of what it means to be a seeing person. They exist as a person with improved sight, but this lived experience includes the experience of having to live with the added technology such as the need to clean and disinfect the lenses. However, the experience of having to live with the added technology fades when the technology gets incorporated into the body, as for example when the person's biological lenses are replaced by artificial ones. In the case of implanted artificial lenses there is no experience of having to live with added technology. The person forgets about the technology and ceases to think of themself as a person with artificial lenses. Instead, they think of themself as a person with a particular visual ability, as a person possessing a technique they deploy in enhancing their behaviour.

The replacement of lenses is commonplace and fairly straightforward, but it is only the beginning of accepting more advanced technologies into our bodies. Also, the 4th IR is not simply about incorporating technology into our bodies. It is also about immerging ourselves into cyber-physical systems. Already, most people have some form of presence in cyberspace using social media. Technologies of virtual and augmented realities further encourage cyber-physical immergence. In the near future, we will sit inside interconnected self-driving vehicles, which would mean not only being physically immerged in but also being at the mercy of advanced cyber-physical systems. The deep-learning and artificial intelligence capabilities that we already see in the physical systems we interact with pull us into an increasingly humanlike environment. We should also be mindful of the impact that the 4th IR will have on the environment. Central to this commitment is the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), which calls on us to align our strategies and operations to the principles of a respect for human rights, fair labour, respect for the environment, and a commitment to anti-corruption. The UNGC consists of ten principles, with principle nine, in particular, emphasising the need to encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally-friendly technologies.

Psychology has a major interest in who we are, how we exist in, interact with and experience the interconnected world of cyber-physical systems. We are beginning to look differently at ourselves. In this world, we are interconnected through exchanging information. On the one hand we are the sources producing the information we exchange, but on the other hand we are the products of the exchanged information. This is a major shift in how we understand ourselves.

The information age and the 4th IR not only change who we are and how we understand ourselves, they also constitute a significant force in democratising the world. They dismantle hierarchical and authoritarian systems through networks of interconnectedness and constant exchange of information. A world objecting to hierarchy and authority and interested in democratic systems is, by its very nature, deeply concerned about phenomenon like colonisation, decolonisation and decoloniality. It is not surprising to see these terms permeate our thinking at all levels of our existence.

Colonisation, decolonisation and decoloniality

Colonisation is the appropriation of a domain. The domain can be a physical space, but it can also be a set of ideas. When one country colonises another, it takes control of the other's land, and it forces its ideas on the people of the colonised country. However, colonisation is not always this obvious. It can occur in subtle ways

and on a more personal scale. In fact, it can occur right here in this module. For example, the texts used in this module are written by a subject specialist. These are academic texts. They are about psychological theory and psychological ways of thinking. They are intended to inform a student about psychology. On face value, this seems to be above board. It may be what the subject specialist (the lecturer) and the student want but when one thinks about this carefully it is in fact a form of colonisation. The student has a wealth of personal experience, but in these academic texts the student's experiences are appropriated by psychological theory. Hence the student is led to understand themself and their world in terms of a colonising psychology.

Decolonisation is the disappropriation of a colonised domain. Theoretically one may be tempted to think of decolonisation as the reverse of colonisation, but this does not work in practice. For example, the liberation of a colonised country cannot take the country back to exactly what it was before colonisation. Likewise, a student who learned to interpret their experiences psychologically can reject the psychology that colonised their thinking, but they cannot return to a purely pre-psychological understanding of themself. In practice, decolonisation cannot simply destruct what colonisation constructed. It has to put something in place to replace the constructions of colonisation. The problem is that any replacement is also a construction. For example, when I object to my experiences being understood in terms of a particular psychology, let's say a Western psychology and I accept a different psychology, let's say an African psychology, to interpret my experiences, I am in fact replacing a Western construction with an African construction of experiences. Although this may work well for me because I may be more comfortable with an African construction of my experiences, I have not escaped the fact that my experiences are colonised by some form of psychology. Therefore, if we are not careful colonisation and decolonisation may trap us in an endless cycle of repeated colonisation.

Decoloniality is resistance to repeated colonisation. We get trapped in cycles of repeated colonisation because we entertain presuppositions that we are not aware of but nevertheless rely on to guide our understandings. For example, the above discussion of the colonisation of experience by psychological theory rests on the presupposition that there is a difference between having an experience and thinking about the experience. In other words, we presuppose that experiences can be thought about and explained and based on this presupposition, we develop the idea that our explanations reveal the truth of our experiences and that some explanations are closer to the truth than others. However, it is not

correct to assume that a particular explanation of an experience reveals the real truth of the experience while another does not because there is no truth in the experience itself. An explanation does not uncover or reveal the truth of an experience, it constructs the truth of the experience. Therefore, colonising experience by one kind of psychological explanation can be replaced by colonising experience by another kind of psychological explanation without obstructing the truth of experience. The truth of experience is not about how true an experience is or how truly it is explained. The truth of experience is offered by the presupposition that experience can be subjected to explanation, that it can be colonised.

Decoloniality resists the truth of presuppositions. For example, it resists the fact that a person's experience can be appropriated (colonised) by psychological explanation and it does so by maintaining that the inverse is also true, namely that psychological theory can be appropriated (colonised) by experience. In other words, from a decolonial perspective psychological explanation can be colonised by experience as much as experience can be colonised by psychological explanation. In other words, if psychology can be used to understand what our experiences are and what they mean, it is equally true that our experiences can be used to understand what psychology is and what it means. In short, the discipline of psychology defines our experiences as much as our experiences define the discipline of psychology.

The psychological programme as a learning context

The module is a stepping stone

An academic programme consists of all the modules that have to be completed to obtain the credits required for a qualification. Each of the modules in a programme contributes to the qualification. The modules are grouped into levels. The higher the level the more advanced the module. This module is an entry level module. It is presented in the first year of registration for the qualification. As such it is a first stepping stone in your journey to graduation.

The module as a learning opportunity

In this module, opportunities to learn are grounded in togetherness

A module is an opportunity to learn, but learning opportunities are not necessarily similar. They differ in many ways. Some may be more formal than others, some more intense and some more complex. They are based on different learning approaches, and they implement different learning processes. This module is characterised by the notion that learning is grounded in togetherness. This will be the subject of Learning Units 2 and 3.

Disclaimer: The material in this unit was adapted from learning material developed by Prof

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