

Structuralism: Wilhelm Wundt

Wundt (1832-1920) was the first person to call himself a psychologist and he shared the conviction of other German scientists that all aspects of nature, including the human mind, could be studied scientifically, an approach summarised in his book *Principles of Physiological Psychology*, and the first text book in psychology.

Wundt's approach was experimental in nature and his colleagues were conducted at the Leipzig laboratory. Over one hundred studies were conducted in the first twenty years of the laboratory's life. Wundt also explored the nature of attention and emotional feeling as well as word association.

Wundt defined psychology as the science of immediate experiences, and his approach was called structuralism, for the first proper school of thought to emerge in this history of psychology. Its subject matter was the structure of the mind, built from the elements of consciousness, such as ideas and sensations. These elements could be constructed into a table of elements similar to a chemical table of elements.

Structuralism's raw material was supplied by trained observers who described their own experiences. The observers were taught to engage in introspection (literally looking within), the use of which was governed by strict rules. Introspectionists observed stimuli and described their experiences. According to Boring (1953), observers participating in reaction time experiments had to produce approximately ten thousand introspective observations before their data were considered valid and themselves qualified introspectionists. Such introspection would occur under very well controlled conditions, so that the content of the conscious can be carefully understood and analysed.

Wundt's aims were threefold: to analyse the content of conscious experiences, to determine how the elements of conscious are connected, and to devise a law which would explain such connections.

In addition, attention began to shift from the study of the human mind to the study of human behaviour. Behaviourism provided a devastating and critical alternative to introspectionism.