Editorial

Lawrence J. Saha

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1 Intergroup behaviour in schools

In the previous issue of *Social Psychology of Education*, I discussed various aspects of diversity in educational settings and how these could affect academic and non-academic outcomes. One example of diversity in the previous issue was the race and ethnic compositions of classrooms and schools, and how the achievement gap between social groups manifested itself in a persistent manner. However there are other ways in which diversity occurs in educational settings, and these include gender, and various forms of disability. These dimensions of diversity can affect not only academic outcomes, but a range of non-academic outcomes, such as conflicts, bullying and harassment. In the end, these too can negatively affect academic outcomes. If the climate of the school with forms of diversity is positive, then this is likely to have a positive effect on all students. However if it is negative, it could be a disadvantage for one group or all groups of students.

Thus, it is important that research help understand the complexities of school diversity, irrespective of whether the criteria for diversity are race/ethnicity, gender, or some form of disability. Many of these complexities are addressed by a number of articles in this issue. In addition, several topics have been rarely studied by researchers and they throw new light on school and school-related behaviors which merit attention.

2 In this issue

This first issue for 2009 contains articles on a wide range of topics which reflect the general areas of the social psychology of education. These topics include intergroup and

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L. J. Saha (✉)
Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia
e-mail: lawrence.saha@anu.edu.au

social relations, classroom dynamics, learning disability, social identity, and moral judgement. Collectively these articles add to the richness and depth of our knowledge about the factors which affect everyday educational behavior in classrooms and schools.

2.1 Four articles on intergroup and social relations

Hallinan, Kubitschek and Liu report findings from their study of communally organized schools. Their interest lies in the extent to which these types of schools bring an advantage to the cognitive and social growth of students, which in turn is related to the relations between all persons in the school (teachers and students). Using data collected from Chicago's Catholic schools, the authors focus specifically on racial tensions within the schools and how they affect perceptions of community. Although not the only factor which determines perceptions of the school as a community, the mere fact that students talk to, and feel comfortable with students of another race, increases their perceptions of the school as a community.

Schools in which there are large numbers of migrants are subject to similar processes. Sakka reports findings from her study of primary and high school students in Greece who participated in a program designed to help teachers integrate migrant students into mainstream classroom interaction. Using scales which measured attitudes regarding cultural diversity, expectations, and the reasons the students consider the program to be important, Sakka found that the older non-migrant students held contradictory views about cultural diversity, leading her to conclude that the program needed to address the integration of all students, not just the migrant students.

In an unusual and important article, Galliger, Tisak and Tisak report findings from their study of student interaction outside the classroom and outside the school, namely while riding the school bus. In many countries of the world, in urban as well as rural areas, students go to school on special school buses. Because this is an event that occurs morning and night, five days a week, the interaction between students both continues, builds upon, and feeds back into interactions in the school. In spite of what is often heard concerning school bus behavior, Galliger and her colleagues found that most children exhibited prosocial rather than aggressive behavior, and contrary to expectations, aggressive behavior was more common among girls than among boys. In many respects, this study might be considered as similar to studies of interaction on the school playground in that it focuses on the behavior of students outside the classroom, but still within the school domain, where rules of conduct might be expected to apply.

The playground and school bus are locations where school bullying often occurs. Much research has been conducted on this topic in recent years, and a new contribution to this topic is found in the following article. Cassidy reports findings from his quasi-experimental study on bullying and victimization among 461 UK children aged 11 to 15 years of age. His focus is on the conditions of the victim which cause the exposure to bullying to be stressful. Cassidy argues that the coping process in the victims of bullying behavior is important. Two components are social identity and problem-solving ability, and these are important characteristics in predicting who becomes a

victim. However Cassidy concludes that bullying is also a group phenomenon and the problem needs to be addressed at that level.

2.2 Two articles on classrooms

The psychosocial climate of the classroom and its relationship with student academic outcomes is the focus of the study reported by Dorman and Fraser. They hypothesize that three antecedent variables (gender, grade level and home computer), and ten variables which measure classroom climate, such as student cohesiveness, teacher support and student involvement, would predict three student outcome scale variables, namely attitude to the subject, attitude to computer use, and academic efficacy. The contribution of this study is that antecedent variables, classroom environment variables, and outcome variables are analyzed in one model, and the findings indicate that improving the classroom environment can improve student outcomes. The authors discuss the implications of their findings.

Kaufman and Dodge focus on a relational aspect of the classroom environment, namely the extent to which student performance goals are contingent on relatedness to the teacher. Their study was based on university students and found that the kind of academic goals and sense of autonomy were related to the nature of the relationship with the teacher, and also with perceived value of the course. The results of the study are consistent with Self-Determination Theory and Achievement Goal Theory, and also have policy implications for how to improve university student commitment to courses, and how to lower attrition rates among university students.

2.3 Two articles on self-identity

Self-identity and self-concept are core concepts in social psychological research, and particularly in studies of academic achievement. In spite of the extensive literature there remain areas where greater research is needed. One of these is that of disability. Möller, Streblo and Pohlmann report on their research which focuses on the academic self-concept and achievement among students with disabilities. The authors test a generally held finding about persons with disabilities, namely that the self-concept works also with intrapersonal comparisons, and extends across disciplines, such that if a person thinks they will do well in one subject, they may or may not do well in other subjects. Using a sample of German school students about 15 years of age, and with disabilities, they found that the pattern for students with disabilities was the same as for the non-disabled students. In other words, self-concepts are domain-specific and do not necessarily cut across subject areas. This is true for students who are disabled as well as non-disabled students.

Hejazi, Shahraray, Farsinejad and Asgary examine how self-identity styles and academic achievement are related. The authors differentiate between three identity styles—the informational, the normative and the diffuse-avoidant. Using a sample of 400 high school students in Tehran, the authors found that the informational style had a positive impact on academic achievement, while the diffuse-avoidant style had a negative impact. Furthermore both the informational and normative styles were positively

related to achievement through the mediation of self-efficacy. The authors discuss how the latter concept assumes importance in facilitating academic achievement.

2.4 One article on moral judgment and critical thinking

The development of moral judgment in children has been dominated by the theories of Piaget and Kohlberg, and social determination theory. To a large extent the facilitation of this development has been thought to lie in the approach of classroom teachers in the encouragement of critical thinking. Weinstock, Assor and Broide tested the hypothesis that students' perceptions of their teachers as "autonomy supportive", which includes the freedom to make choices, would be more likely to result in the development of advanced moral judgment. Using data from 12th grade Israeli students the authors found that advanced moral judgment was linked with perceptions of the teacher as encouraging critical thinking, but not of greater choice, and that this relationship was greater in democratic schools. The authors discuss the relevance of their findings for teacher training.

The articles in this issue address a wide range of topics which touch upon social relationships in classrooms and in schools. In some cases, these relationships coincide with group boundaries which divide students, and provide additional knowledge about the various ways that they occur in classroom and school contexts. Taken collectively, these articles give us new insights into the rich dynamics of educational processes, and they make an impressive contribution to the literature on social psychological dimensions of education.

Lawrence J. Saha
Editor