Editorial: Psychology or education?

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In the past few years there has been discussion as to whether *Social Psychology of Education* should be regarded as a psychological, educational or sociological journal. This might seem to be a trivial point, but the implications of this classification are substantial. While we all agree that the field of social psychology actually straddles two disciplines, namely psychology and sociology, the fact that the focus or object of study is education adds more complexity, and interest, to how the journal is regarded. SPOE is truly interdisciplinary. However, most listings of journals, whether for indexing, assessing, or cataloging purposes, tend to identify one subject area according to which a journal is classified. However, in the Springer publishers listing of journals, SPOE is listed under both psychology and education, which is appropriate. This practice partly reflects the origins of authors of submitted manuscripts. A rough estimate of author affiliations is that departments of education and psychology are almost equal, with sociology a third source. A study of published articles over a period of time should help clarify this interesting issue.

But what is more important is that the way the journal is regarded depends on the reference journals to which it is compared—education, psychology or sociology. As universities around the world become more competitive for research recognition, there is increasing pressure on academic staff to publish in a small number of select "high ranked" journals. However there is a logical fallacy in the expectation that all academics publish in a limited number of journals (this would be logistically impossible). Yet, increasingly we hear from academics in many countries of these directives, although the criteria for the selected journals vary considerably.

This practice has generated much discussion within the academic community. In the first instance, many journals, either because they are new, or because they are

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misclassified, do not receive the credit they deserve in journal rankings. Second, there are many highly specialized journals which are extremely important for a relatively small specialized audience, but they are given modest classifications because the vast majority of scholars in the discipline do not follow them. Therefore, while some ability to assess the importance of journals, and the articles within them, is essential, the variables which guide such assessment are neither always clear nor universalistic. Thus, in many respects, the traditional collegial practice of judgment by academic peers remains the best practice for the assessment of journal and article quality.

1 In this issue

This issue contains a wide variety of articles on a range of topics related to social psychological processes in schools. It is difficult to group them, so I will take each in order.

1.1 One article on teacher burnout in Greece

The lead article is about the very important topic of teacher burnout. Teachers in many countries of the world are being subjected to greater levels of accountability, and some have argued that one of the negative effects is an increasing level of burnout. Papastylianou, Kaila and Polychronopoulos report on a study of teachers in Greece which found that emotional exhaustion is a fundamental characteristic of burnout. Using the inventory of Maslach and Jackson, the authors studied 562 teachers in 79 schools in Greece. They found that the Burnout Inventory worked well in the measurement of burnout among Greek teachers. But more interesting, they also found that teachers in Greece experience only moderate levels of burnout, compared to available data from other countries. They suggest that teachers in Greece experience more satisfying personal lives, and are less work-oriented that their counterparts in other countries. This, they argue, offsets the negative effects of a high stress environment which is prone to cause burnout. While the authors admit to certain limitations in their study, these findings will be of interest to researchers of teacher burnout in other countries where comparisons are relevant.

1.2 One article on justice in schools

An increasingly important topic in the study of educational processes in schools is the extent of social justice, both in perception and in practice. As Resh points out in her introduction, teachers are major agents of justice distribution in schools. They reward and punish students, they evaluate and sort students, and they give grades and have an important role in the granting of certificates and credentials. Using 370 teachers who participated in the Israel PISA study, Resh analyzed the ways that they allocated grades, and also what they considered a just grade allocation system. She found that, at least in her sample, a meritocratic ethos prevailed in grade allocation beliefs, although there was a split in views about a universalistic or differentiated application

of grade criteria. She also found a difference between science teachers and maths and humanities teachers in the weighting given to student effort (the former) and performance (the latter). Resh discusses the implications of her findings for better understanding how teachers regard justice practices in the classroom.

1.3 Three articles on collectivism and group support in educational settings

The role of individual and group identity has been an important research theme in education. For the most part, studies have focused on the different cultures, individualistic or collectivistic, which dominate school and home behaviors. Three articles in this issue fall into this category. In the first article, Carson analyzes the beliefs that African American university students have about the purpose of higher education. Given that African Americans have a more collective identity than American Whites, Carson used semi-structured in-depth interviews of twelve African American students in a large state university. Using this qualitative approach she focused on the extent to which the students felt a sense of responsibility for the African American campus community. Carson's findings emphasize the importance of the African American collective identity in overcoming subtle racism and discrimination and promoting academic success in their group.

A related but much different perspective and study is reported by Bornholt, Maras and Robinson. Their interest was in the examination of group identity and pathways to study, work and family life. Drawing on a sample of young Australian school students in a typical regional city, the authors found that while individual-level motivations have significant influence for planned pathways, the integration of these motivations in a group identity is equally important. The authors discuss the implications of their findings in understanding the importance of unique group identities for explaining the complex processes through which young people make decisions regarding study, work and family.

The third article which focuses on the importance of the group or the collective in school settings is that by Murberg and Bru in Norway. Their research is about the effect of negative life events on depressive symptoms in a sample of high school students. Using two measuring points and longitudinal multivariate analysis, they found that peer support did not have an effect on depressive symptoms at time 2, but that teacher support did have a buffer effect. In other words, students who experienced negative life events, and who perceived strong teacher support, were less likely to report depressive symptoms at a later time. Although the findings were not entirely expected, especially with respect to peer support, the authors discuss the implications of their study for a broader definition of the teacher's role in helping students cope with personal stress.

1.4 One article on academic efficacy and academic success by ethnicity

The various factors which contribute to academic success vary by ethnicity. The article by Edman and Brazil examines the relationship between the perception of campus climate and a number of related variables for students at a community college in the United States. Using grade point average (GPA) as the dependent variable, Edman and

Brazil found that most of their predicted relationships were only partially supported, but the most interesting was the positive assessment of the campus climate by African American students and the lack of relationship between academic efficacy and GPA for both Caucasian and African American students. The authors discuss possible explanations for these unexpected findings, perhaps the most important being that the somewhat unique student population of community colleges in the United States results in different educational behaviors.

1.5 One article on need for cognition and performance expectancies

The study of academic motivation is fundamental to understanding academic performance. Incorporated in the notion of motivation is that of expectancy, that is, the extent to which the students expect to do well in their future performance. Dickhäuser and Reinhard regard the formation of performance expectancies to be a cognitive process. Also linked with the formation of performance expectancies is the self-concept, especially the notion of self concept of ability, and within that category, self concept of ability in different subject areas. Dickhäuser and Reinhard report their research on a sample of German 554 10th grade students, using mathematics and English. They found that self concept is indeed related to performance, but that performance expectancies, especially the need for cognition, mediate between the two. They conclude that future studies of performance expectancies need to include a cognitive component, the need for cognition, which is more closely linked to an individual's self-concept.

1.6 One article on principals' decision making

Principals are fundamental to the administrative structure of a school. Their decisions affect teachers, students, the curriculum, and the overall climate of the school. Miller, Fagley and Casella focus their attention on the frames (wording and "risky choices") within which the principals' decisions are made. Positive or negative framing, or decisions whose outcome is uncertain, they argue, are likely to make a difference in the decisions that are made. Their study is based on completed questionnaires, which included 6 hypothetical decision problems, from 71 principals of middle and junior high schools in New York. Miller, Fagley and Casella found that school principals' decisions are affected by frame effects, and that male principals made more "risky" decisions, that is, decisions whose outcome is uncertain. The authors discuss ways in which principals' decision-making processes may be "debiased", that is, less susceptible to frame effects. The study of "immune" principals, and the use of decision-making training techniques are two areas for future attention.

The articles in this issue cover a wide range of topics, and except for the three which concern various aspects of group support and the notion of collectivism, it is difficult to group the others in any systematic manner. Nevertheless they all address important educational issues from a social psychological perspective, whether it be teacher burnout, justice in schools, perceptions of campus climate, school principals decision making, or some form of group support or collectivism. Each of these research articles adds a little more to the cumulative knowledge upon which our understanding of these issues rests.