Introduction: the present and promise of the social psychology of education

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A decade ago, a person seeking to bridge the gap between social psychology and education would have been well advised to prepare for a long journey. Today, however, the gap largely has been bridged, as more and more researchers take up the byways that join the two disciplines. This volume is a testament to the burgeoning literature that encompasses the pathways linking social psychology and education.

Charting the present: the field of social psychology of education

A newcomer to the area of social psychology of education might wonder where the field fits in relation to other, more established disciplines. Is it merely social psychology applied to a particular area of interest? Or is it a subdiscipline of the field of education, looked at from the vantage point of the social psychologist?

The most appropriate answer to the question is that it represents an amalgamation of the two fields; it is not merely social psychology, nor is it simply education. Instead, the social psychology of education re-presents an interface of the two fields, which has produced a broad range of theories, research, and data that speak to the interests of educators and psychologists. Researchers in this area have both pushed the theoretical boundaries of the field of social psychology and produced solutions to difficult problems that have eluded solutions from people in other fields, to which the chapters in this volume attest. The oft-quoted words of Kurt Lewin, one of the towering figures of social psychology, are still appropriate: "there is nothing so practical as a good theory" (Lewin, 1951, p. 169).

Although a commonly agreed upon label has yet to evolve – the area has been variously (and somewhat inelegantly) referred to as "the social psychology of education," "educational social psychology," or sometimes

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even "social educational psychology" – the degree of interest in the subject is substantial.

The number of publications relating to this area in scholarly journals is impressive. For example, a tally of the articles published in the last three years in the *Review of Educational Research* – the major review journal in the educational research field – shows that close to 40% relate directly to topics studied by social psychologists. Moreover, social psychology as a discipline is increasingly emphasizing applications, and education is one of those areas to which its theories are being applied with some frequency. For instance, a recent volume in the series *Applied Social Psychology Annual*, sponsored by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, was devoted to social psychology applied to education. A number of universities have instituted courses in social psychological factors in education. Also, the increasingly national interest in education has brought with it the realization that many educational issues ranging from the improvement of the quality of schooling to the introduction of technological innovations such as computers have important social psychological components. These examples provide evidence of the growing interest in the area.

This volume has two principal purposes. The first is to examine the major research areas within the social psychology of education. Each chapter presents an author's work that explicitly illustrates how social psychological theory has been used to guide research on a topic of direct relevance to education. Moreover, the range of work represented in this volume will expose readers to the dominant themes in the field.

A second purpose of the book is to provide solid, informed suggestions to educators regarding solutions to current educational problems. Each author was charged with providing as much practical, problem-solving advice for educational practitioners as possible. They have succeeded: The authors move beyond mere "window-dressing" statements and instead, while acknowledging the limitations of their research, elucidate the implications their results presently or at least potentially have for problems facing educators. The chapters here, then, provide information and guidance on both theoretical and applied levels.

The field of social psychology of education: an introduction

The current themes and areas of interest that characterize the field of social psychology of education are exemplified by the chapters in this volume. The major thrusts of the social psychology of education – as

represented by the parts and chapters of this book – are best viewed within the broader context of social psychology. The following overview of this book serves as a framework from which to view the field of social psychology of education as well as its relationship to social psychology in general.

Part I: the individual in a social context

It seems somewhat curious that a field devoted to *social* factors in education should, at its most fundamental level, consider the individual. Yet social psychology has always been concerned to a large degree with people in contexts in which social interaction is merely a secondary consideration. Indeed, the field of social psychology has recently seen a resurgence of interest in the concept of self (e.g., Schlenker, 1985). It follows, then, that some of the most basic research being carried out in terms of social psychology of education employs the individual as the major focus of analysis.

Much of the current work within the field relating to the individual unit of analysis is based on attribution theory. Attribution theory is concerned with people's explanations of the causes of behavior – both others' and their own. Growing out of the rich social psychological tradition of person perception, attribution theory has focused on whether people attribute the causes of behavior to the situation or the individual, to ways in which responsibility for success or failure is determined and to how attributional decisions affect subsequent behavior.

Because attribution theory rode the zeitgeist of the 1970s into all corners of social psychology, it is not surprising that it also has had an important impact on research on the social psychology of education. In fact, it is hard to differentiate at which point some of the major theoretical expositions of social psychology leave off and the social psychology of education begins. For example, Bernard Weiner's influential theorizing and research on determining the causes of success and failure (Weiner, 1979, 1985) typically use an experimental paradigm related to *academic* success and failure.

The fruits of this tradition are borne out in the first two chapters in this volume. Forsyth's chapter (chapter 1) considers students' reactions to success and failure from an attributional perspective. He traces the development of attributions of an academic nature, how success and failure impact on the kinds of attribution that are made, the ways in

which attributions determine expectancies about future performance, and how attributions affect future behavior.

Graham's chapter (chapter 2), which employs a more narrow and molecular view of attribution theory, uses an attributional approach to explain achievement motivation in black and white children. Her analysis suggests that teachers may communicate unintended messages to minority children, in which their expressions of sympathy for poor performance lead to attributions of low ability on the part of the children. Moreover, Graham suggests ways in which particular instructional strategies may communicate low ability attributions to children, thereby reinforcing poor performance.

Another major division of social psychology of education, which takes a primarily individualistic approach, is the study of attitudes. The study of attitudes comprises one of the oldest areas within social psychology, and it is not surprising that it has spawned a wide range of studies within the field. Research on teacher attitudes and student attitudes, the factors that produce such attitudes, and the impact that attitudes have on behavior have been thoroughly investigated (e.g., Brophy and Good's 1974 volume on teacher–student relationships).

Smith's chapter (chapter 3) in this volume addresses what is probably the most critical issue to grow out of social psychological research on attitudes: the nature of the relationship between attitudes and behavior. He reviews the background of the controversy that has been at the core of the study of attitudes and then applies his analysis to a classroom setting by examining the relationship between classroom behavior and student attitudes toward the subject matter being covered in the class. The work cited in Smith's chapter suggests that attitudes remains a fruitful and important area of study within the context of the social psychology of education.

Part II: teacher–student interaction

One of the core areas of social psychology of education concerns the relationship between teachers and students. Social psychological approaches take the view that the affective and cognitive qualities of the relationship between the two prime players in educational settings are crucial to the nature of ultimate success of the student's performance – and, in a sense, the success of the teacher's performance as well. The distinguishing characteristic of this kind of research is that it is assumed that the behavior of one individual has an effect on the other.

There are different kinds of research that fall under the rubric of

teacher–student interaction. One key area is that of teacher expectation effects. Exemplified by the chapter by Harris and Rosenthal (chapter 4), this line of theory and research considers how teachers' expectations about their students are communicated to and affect the performance of their students. As an outgrowth of more theoretical work on self-fulfilling prophecies, this research has developed to the point where Harris and Rosenthal have been able to derive a four-factor theory and trace the degree of support for each factor, using a meta-analytic framework. Work on expectation effects has also been expanded conceptually to en-compass how *student* expectations about a teacher's competence as a teacher are transmitted to the teacher and affect the teacher's perform-ance, in a way analogous to the effects of teacher expectations (e.g., Feldman & Theiss, 1982).

Another level of teacher–student interaction is represented by non-verbal behavior. The role of facial expressions, paralinguistic cues, and body movements in the transmission of emotions and other kinds of communication is no less important in teacher–student contexts as it is in any other situation (Woolfolk & Galloway, 1985). In fact, social psychologists' concern over the affective quality of interaction has led them to attend particularly to the nonverbal context of teacher–student interaction.

Several chapters in this volume attest to the importance of nonverbal behavior. For instance, Harris and Rosenthal's chapter on the trans-mission of teacher expectations demonstrates the importance of the nonverbal channel of eye contact in mediating teacher expectations. Feldman and Saletsky's chapter (chapter 5) focuses directly on nonverbal behavior, considering its role in interracial teacher–student interaction. Their research suggests ways in which teachers may unwittingly com-municate negative attitudes toward students of a different race during teaching interactions.

Some investigators have taken a more global approach to classroom interaction, a stance illustrated within the Bar-Tal and Bar-Tal chapter (chapter 6). They point out that classrooms represent social systems, with their own norms, roles, sets of beliefs, and interaction patterns. The actors within these social systems are influenced by each other, and the social system as a whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Part III: cooperation and conflict in the classroom

Cooperation, bargaining, negotiation, and the resolution of conflict have always stood as a central topic within the field of social psychology.

Beginning with the classic studies of Sherif (Sherif et al., 1961), who studied intergroup conflict in a summer camp, studies of cooperation and conflict have evolved into sophisticated mathematical models of the processes underlying bargaining and negotiation (e.g., Miller & Crandall, 1980). During this evolution, several theories of cooperation and conflict have had enormous influence on social psychology: Thibaut and Kelley's social exchange theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), the prisoner's dilemma bargaining paradigm (Rubin & Brown, 1975), and the Deutsch and Krauss (1960) series of studies on cooperation and threat using the Acme-Bolt trucking situation.

Workers in the area of social psychology of education have been influenced by these works in a number of respects, and the area of cooperation and conflict in educational settings has become one of the most active areas within the field. One of the first researchers to build upon this tradition was Aronson, who devised what he called the "Jigsaw" team learning technique (Aronson et al., 1978). In this method, a group of students are each assigned a portion of a lesson to learn; they then must teach their portion to the other members of their group. The success of the group as a whole, as well as each individual, is dependent upon the success of the members in cooperating with each other in the teaching process. The technique has been successful in promoting cooperation among students of different races as well as enhancing group cohesiveness.

Slavin's chapter (chapter 7) in this volume summarizes the current status of work being carried out in this tradition. In his chapter, he discusses a number of techniques for using the benefits of cooperation in school settings, suggesting some very specific classroom interventions designed to enhance learning through the use of cooperative methods. He concentrates on the "Team Assisted Individualization" procedure, in which a complex system of team assignments are used to promote cooperative learning within the classroom.

Miller and Brewer's chapter (chapter 8) takes a more theoretical view of cooperative team techniques. In examining means of promoting positive interracial relations, they provide an elegant evaluation of four theoretical models that can explain the effects of structured intergroup cooperation. Their analysis, and the data that support it, have implications beyond just cooperative learning procedures, extending to such broader areas as homogeneous ability groupings and school desegregation.

In what at first glance seems to be a departure from much of the work in this area – which stresses the positive outcomes of cooperation –

Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (chapter 9) discuss the benefits of creating conflict and controversy within the classroom as a means of enhancing student achievement. They argue that appropriately controlled and structured conflict has the potential for enhancing both learning and social behavior. In actuality, their arguments are not as much at odds with the work on cooperation as it might first seem, because the conflict that works most effectively is that which occurs within the context of cooperation toward an interdependent positive goal. Cooperation, then, is necessary to make controversy effective.

Part IV: social aspects of motivation

Questions regarding the factors that enhance student motivation have played a prominent role in the social psychology of education. While motivation per se has not been a central topical area within the field of social psychology – except for some work on particular needs, such as the need for achievement and affiliation – motivational concepts are employed in a number of ways within the social psychology of education.

Motivational issues are central to a number of chapters in this volume. For instance, both Forsyth's and Graham's chapters in this volume (chapters 1 and 2) look at motivation from an attribution theory perspective, showing how attributions relating to the causes of school success can have a profound influence on motivational factors relating to achievement.

In Part IV of this volume, "The social aspects of motivation," several chapters address student motivation even more centrally than Forsyth's and Graham's. Ames (chapter 10) demonstrates how the learning environment of the classroom is a partial determinant of motivation. She discusses how the classroom environment and structure affect such motivational factors as the cognitive engagement of students, the value that is placed on achievement, student self-perceptions, and even the ways in which students think. The chapter suggests some specific means of enhancing long-term student achievement.

Chapter 11, by Brophy and Kher, reports research examining the ways in which teachers socialize a very specific sort of motivation – what the authors call "the motivation to learn." Here, the focus is on how teacher behavior can produce better and more motivated learners through the use of specific kinds of motivational statements. Building on social learning theory, expectancy x value theory, and work on intrinsic motivation (e.g., Bandura, 1977; Lepper, 1983; Parsons & Goff, 1980), they

suggest ways in training teachers to behave in a way that will socialize and enhance student's motivation to learn.

The final chapter in this section, by Baden and Maehr (chapter 12), draws upon a rich tradition both within traditional social psychology and the social psychology of education of investigating the effects of sociocultural diversity. They suggest that school culture has a powerful effect on student motivation and performance, and their work suggests how such culture can be modified to confront students coming from diverse sociocultural backgrounds.

Part V: education, culture, and society

Whereas social psychology as a whole has generally shied away from studying broad social trends and societal institutions, leaving that approach to sociologists, investigators interested in the social psychology of education have showed somewhat less hesitation in tackling some of the broad social issues that are directly related to education. There are at least two reasons for this. First, social psychologists of education are less tied to traditional experimental techniques and procedures than are workers studying more theoretical questions. Second, schools are institutions, and it is difficult to grapple with some of the more profound problems of education without taking an institutional and organizational perspective as an important and necessary level of analysis.

The final two chapters in the volume take such a broader approach. Chapter 13, by Dubrovsky, Kiesler, Sproull, and Zubrow, examines how the introduction and use of computers varies within two different college communities. They describe how the students in the settings are socialized into the new culture that has arisen due to rapid technological changes in society – what they call the "computing culture." They discuss ways in which educational organizations can introduce novices most effectively into this new culture.

Finally, chapter 14, by Cooper, examines a phenomenon that might be called the social psychology of the social psychology of education. He provides a case study of the ways in which the values and attitudes of researchers in the field of social psychology of education influence their interpretations of a body of research – in this instance, the reseach on the effectiveness of desegregation. The topic of desegregation provides a particularly apt example of social psychology of education: It demonstrates a classic melding of findings and traditions taken from the field of social psychology, and it applies them to one of the most difficult

and important educational issues facing society. Yet Cooper's paper also shows that some of social psychology of education is still "promise" as opposed to "reality"; even a panel of experts, using the most sophisticated methodological and analytic tools available to summarize a body of research, were unable to agree fully on the meaning and implications of previous research in the area.

Future prospects

If the present is represented by the chapters in this volume, what does the future hold in store for the field? There are a number of emerging trends that are likely to have wide impact on the future of social psychology of education. Three are substantive (an increasing emphasis on social cognition as a theoretical construct, the development of quasitherapeutic methods based on attribution theory, and the introduction of computers into schools), and one is related to the standing of social psychology of education relative to other subfields of social psychology.

Social cognition: understanding and organizing the world

If one were to identify the hottest topic in traditional, theoretical social psychology during the mid-1980s, it would likely be the increasing emphasis on social cognition. Social cognition is the area that investigates how people understand, organize, and recall information about the world. Encompassing some of the more traditional areas of person perception and attribution theory, it also is built upon more recent findings from the area of cognitive psychology.

The central concept of social cognition is the construct of *schema*. A schema is an organized body of information stored in memory (Fiske & Taylor, 1983; Rummelhart, 1984). The knowledge that is held in a schema provides a representation of the way in which the social world operates. Schemata also provide a means of categorizing and interpreting new information related to the information held in the schema; further, they allow people to organize behavior into meaningful wholes, forming personality types known as prototypes.

Because several of the most fruitful areas of interest to social psychologists of education are particularly amenable to analysis using constructs from social cognition, one prediction that can be made with some confidence is that the concepts of social cognition will become more prevalent in the field. For example, within an educational context,

people can be viewed as holding schemata not only for salient objects in their environment – such as classroom, school, or lessons – but also for particular classes of people (teacher, principal, and student, for instance). Moreover, schemata and prototypes extend not just to others but to the self as well, and they are likely to have profound influences on student and teacher behavior within educational settings.

Development of attributional "therapeutic" treatments

Attribution theory, which, had such an important impact on social psychology throughout the 1970s, is likely to continue to have a major influence on the field. One outgrowth that is of particular relevance to the social psychology of education is the development of a number of quasitherapeutic interventions based on attribution theory (Försterling, 1985).

An excellent example of this, with a number of important implications, is seen in the work of Timothy Wilson and Patricia Linville (1982, 1985). In their studies, they devised a program for college freshmen to change the way they view the causes of their own school performance – in essence, modifying their attribution about the causes of success and failure. To do this, Wilson and Linville exposed students to information that demonstrated that difficulties in performance were due to temporary factors that were amenable to change, rather than to permanent, unmodifiable causes.

In the program a group of freshmen who reported difficulties with their first-semester performance were given information showing that most students' performance shows improvement over the course of their college careers. Actual videotaped interviews with upperclassmen were shown, which discussed how their grades had improved during their years in college. Compared to a control group who received no information, the students who received the positive information showed a significant response to the treatment. While 25% of the control group students had dropped out of college by the end of their sophomore year, only 5% of the experimental group had dropped out. In addition, the grade point average of students in the experimental group increased a mean of .34 points, whereas that of the control group declined by .05 points. Finally, students in the experimental group performed significantly better on a battery of test items than did those in the control group.

These results suggest a number of conclusions. First, attributions about one's self are amenable to change. Simply providing salient information