

Victor Anthony Battistich (1952-2008)

Victor Anthony Battistich spent his entire career as an applied social psychologist concerned with the impact of school culture on student socio-moral development. He was unique in integrating social- psychological research expertise, sociological school climate theory, developmental psychological research and theory, and statistics. This integration provided the scholarly and practical worlds of education with novel, powerful tools and knowledge to promote healthy schools.

Vic was born September 9, 1952, and grew up in Sacramento, California. A rebel from a young age, he learned to be self-sufficient even as an adolescent. He received his bachelor's degree in psychology from California State University, Sacramento, in 1974. He received his doctorate in personality and social psychology from Michigan State University in 1979, where he focused on person-environment interactions. He initially accepted a position as an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Cleveland State University. However he soon was offered a job that was too good to refuse.

The Developmental Studies Center (Oakland, California) had received a five year grant to create, implement, and evaluate the Child Development Project (CDP), a novel elementary school-based project to create an ideal school for both academic achievement and pro-social development. Vic's planned 3-5 year hiatus from his academic career track instead lasted 23 years. Teaming with Eric Schaps, Daniel Solomon, Marilyn Watson, Catherine Lewis, and other leading figures at the Developmental Studies Center, he created a corpus of work that may be unparalleled in the field of elementary school reform.

Although Vic was known primarily as a program evaluator, particularly in the field of character education, it is difficult to find anything written about research in character education where he is not cited. His role in designing, implementing, and analyzing the evaluation data for the Child Development Project (CDP) is at the heart of his contributions to the literature. However, he preferred not to be pigeon-holed as a program evaluator. This was a fair complaint since he was also a theorist, critic, and creative synthetic thinker. While his title at the Developmental Studies Center, i.e., Deputy Director of Research, clearly identified his central role there in program evaluation, he was integral to all aspects of the CDP. This included the empirical and conceptual rationale for the design of the program, helping to create the practical components that formed the core of the program, and designing and implementing the ongoing formative and summative evaluations.

Vic had a fresh and critical eye toward research. He integrated qualitative and quantitative methods well before it became the vogue. He was vocal about the need not to be a "knee jerk" researcher and to adapt to the realities of the context, in his case the schools. He appreciated the conventions of research but understood them to be just that - mere conventions. He was always intrigued by the challenge of conceptualizing

school climate and then empirically evaluating it and its impact on student learning and development.

A large part of his passion and motivation for his work came from his genuine desire to improve the common good. His entire career was dedicated to understanding how schools might create the kinds of environments that would nurture in children the competencies and values needed to become a force for good in the world. Vic's scientific work encompassed several related fields: character education, substance abuse prevention, school sociology, delinquency prevention, and moral development. He authored or co-authored more than 60 professional publications, including journal articles in education, child and adolescent development, pediatrics, psychology, prevention, and public health, as well as chapters in various handbooks of moral behavior, teaching, classroom management, and human development.

Throughout these years at the Developmental Studies Center (DSC), Vic continued to mentor graduate students, both those who worked at DSC and those from around the world who sought out his help based on his publications and reputation. He taught classes part-time at local universities, and officially and unofficially directed numerous theses and dissertations. In this way he kept his passion for teaching alive.

As the original Child Development Project team slowly disbanded after more than two decades, Vic once again heard the call to return to academia. In 2003 he accepted a position as associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. There he joined the Executive Committee of the Center for Character and Citizenship alongside Marvin Berkowitz, Wolfgang Althof, Melinda Bier, and Terry Jones. Together they attracted numerous evaluation projects of character education programs and numerous invited writing projects, some of which happily reached fruition before Vic's premature and untimely death. He also dove into his teaching and in a very short time had a large following of graduate students. At the end he was working on evaluating a large multi-site federal grant (Social and Character Development), evaluating other federal character education grants, creating a compendium of character education assessment instruments, helping to develop a masters level program on character and citizenship education, and developing a graduate course on personality and social development.

In his memory, the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) has established the Victor A. Battistich Memorial Graduate Award to be given annually to a UMSL doctoral student who demonstrates excellence in empirical research on school climate and/or character education. Vic died suddenly and unexpectedly at age 55 at his home on June 30, 2008. He is survived by his widow, Martha Montgomery, two daughters, Sarah and Caitlin, and a brother, Martyn Battistich.

Marvin Berkowitz, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Marilyn Watson, Developmental Studies Center