

Introduction to the special issue on socio-emotional aspects of developmental and educational processes

Aleksandar Baucal¹ & Ana Altaras Dimitrijević^{1,2}

¹*Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade*

²*Institute of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Rostock*

For most people, be they psychologists or laymen, the concepts of development and education evoke images of progressing along a line of expanding knowledge, deepening one's understanding of the world, and multiplying and upgrading competencies. But lest we forget that each step up this ladder entails countless social or sociocultural interactions, and myriads of emotional experiences and transactions, we decided to take a detour from the usual path following mostly cognitive growth and change, to a more adventurous exploration of the diverse landscape which surrounds it – devoting this issue of Psihologija Journal to the *social and emotional aspects of developmental and educational processes*.

With such abroad topic at hand, and given only a limited amount of space to represent it, we are pleased to have put together an issue which does reflect current trends in the given areas of psychology, covering such up-to-date issues as emotional expressiveness and emotional intelligence in the family and at school; attachment beyond the caregiver-infant relationship; intercultural and inclusive education; or teacher-student interactions in the face of new technologies. From one article to the next, the vantage point changes to a different spot along the continuum of “social”, thus granting a view on emotion-related phenomena in various contexts, from intimate dyadic and small-group interactions among family members and friends, to such social encounters which take place in and mirror the educational system, including how it deals with disruptive behaviors, cultural differences, and students with “special educational needs” (i.e., those who require additional resources and support in order to achieve certain learning outcomes). Not surprisingly then, the present issue is also representative of diverse theoretical approaches and research designs, including not only the discourse of today's “mainstream” psychology, but of

a socio-cultural and critical perspective as well; moreover, it presents findings obtained by quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, as well as intervention approaches at both school and system level. Finally, speaking of methods, we have been careful not to leave out considerations of the tools with which we approach our research questions in the first place: of the nine articles included in this issue, two address the development/adaptation of instruments designed to assess educationally-relevant socio-emotional constructs.

The issue opens with two articles which broach several important aspects of the socioemotional life of adolescents, situated in the network of family and peer relations. In the first article, Sonja Čotar Konrad examines the relationship between adolescents' perceptions of their families' style of expressing emotions and the well-established dimensions of family functioning proposed in Olson's (2011) Circumplex model: cohesion, flexibility, communication, and satisfaction. Although the correlational design of the study precludes firm conclusions on causal relationships, its results strongly support the author's contention that fostering submissive expressions of positive emotions and simultaneously refraining from dominant expressions of negative emotions is of particular importance for achieving a balanced functioning in families with adolescents.

The second article is by Ksenija Krstić, whose research in recent years has focused on attachment and the development of self-concept in adolescents (Krstić, 2008, 2012, 2015; Krstić, Lazarević, & Stepanović Ilić, 2016). In this particular paper she also brings in the relatively novel concept of attachment to peers (besides the traditional view on attachment to parents), and expands her analyses to include the Big Five. She thus reveals that, attachment quality is rather weakly related to adolescents' self-concept, and ultimately puts forth the following conclusions: attachment to parents is not particularly predictive of adolescents' self-concept; attachment to friends remains significantly related to social self-concept in adolescence; and Neuroticism seems to eclipse attachment Anxiety when it comes to predicting self-concept.

The next two articles take up the topic of emotional intelligence, conceived either as an ability, or as a personality trait in the narrower sense (Petrides, 2011). In the first of these two contributions, Tamara Mohorić and Vladimir Takšić take a close look at the role of school-aged children's emotional understanding, regarded as the most cognitive branch of ability emotional intelligence (Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, & Sitenarios, 2001), as it pertains to two types of educationally relevant outcomes: academic achievement and social (prosocial vs. aggressive) behavior. Their study adds valuable evidence on the incremental validity of ability emotional intelligence in predicting academic outcomes (GPA) and aggressive behaviors at school.

Similarly encouraging findings are presented in the next article with regard to trait emotional intelligence as assessed by the Serbian adaptation of the TEIQue-Child Form (Petrides, 2009). This contribution by Sonja Banjac, Laura Hull, K.V. Petrides, and Stella Mavroveli is the result of intensive efforts

to devise a Serbian version of the TEIQue-Child Form, and validate it against an array of relevant, education-related criteria. The readership of *Psihologija Journal* is hereby not only informed about the possibility to predict school-aged children's emotion recognition ability, grades, and peer-assessed interpersonal qualities based on their trait emotional intelligence, but also presented with a tool to assess this construct in yet another population.

New means of making educationally relevant assessments is also what our next article is focused on. In this paper, Danijela Petrović, Tijana Jokić, and Bruno Leutwyler introduce a three-partite instrument designed to comprehensively assess the motivational domain of teachers' intercultural competence. Beyond presenting data in favor of the structural and convergent-discriminant validity of the newly developed scales, the authors make a valuable theoretical contribution by bridging the literature on teacher education, on the one hand, and considerations of intercultural competence, on the other. Incorporating prominent conceptualizations of intercultural competence into Baumert and Kunter's (2013) model of teachers' professional competencies, they've arrived at a tenable conception of teachers' intercultural competence, which then served as a solid rationale for instrument development.

Three papers that are following are employing different socio-cultural theories demonstrating how they could enable studies of the complex interplay between personal, institutional, social, and cultural processes (Bruner, 1991; Cole, 1996; Vygotsky, 1986; Zittoun, 2016). The paper written by Nathalie Muller Mirza opens this block. It deals with the intercultural relations within the formal educational context presenting an innovative intervention study designed to combat racism and related attitudes and emotions that might be brought into the classroom by students. The paper is based on the socio-constructivist approach which has become a very influential alternative to the essentialist approach to intercultural relations. Following such a theoretical and methodological framework, the pedagogical intervention presented in the paper explores the structuring effect of self-narratives assuming that through narration one might create a personal sense of coherence, as well as a new set of meanings supporting more positive intercultural relations.

Kovacs Cerović, Jovanović, and Pavlović Babić are using the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) which makes for a nice illustration of the contributions of the socio-cultural approach to the study of the inclusive education (Ainscow & César, 2006; Engeström, Miettinen, & Punamäki, 1999; Hjärne & Säljö, 2014). Their paper presents an inquiry of the introduction and use of individual educational plans (IEP) which have entered the education system in Serbia in the previous decade. The issue of inclusive practices and policy instruments is an issue that captures the attention of different actors and brings psychological studies into a hot "battle" field of politics, human rights activism, identities and interests of diverse actors and interest groups involved in the context of tensions between old practices and policies and new ones. The

paper presents an integration of results of four studies analyzing in an exemplary way the successes and unresolved contradictions in the implementation of IEPs as a critical tool in supporting development and learning of students requesting additional support and their inclusion in mainstream schools in Serbia.

A critical examination of the neoliberal agenda in education (outcomes based education, standardization, international comparative assessment etc.) and its implications is presented in the paper by Szulevicz, Eckerdal, Marsico, and Vaalsiner. This paper illustrates nicely a growing body of literature in educational studies putting at the first place the value issue and criticizing mainstream educational studies focusing on factors and effectiveness in a “pure technical” way (Bruner, 1996; Biesta, 2014; Marsico, Komatsu, & Iannaccone, 2013). In order to critically analyze some negative consequences of educational policies constituting the neoliberal agenda, the authors focus on the student disruptive behavior in the school context. In the paper, they suggest how the disruptive behavior is framed within the school context structured by the neoliberal policies and how such a framing fosters negative meanings of such behavior. As a result disruptive behavior is attributed only to the student and seen as a result of some student’s psychological difficulties leading to the pathologization. Based on the critical reflection authors propose two educational alternatives to the neoliberal approach – one advocating for the democratization of education and ensuring the professional autonomy of teachers, granting them power to make key educational decisions, and the second one arguing that a critical socio-cultural approach to educational issues, policies, and practices is necessary nowadays.

The final paper in this special issue, written by Seifried, Lenhard, and Spinath focuses on student learning at the university level, which has been a growing field of research in the last decade (Boud, Cohen, & Sampson, 2001; Brown, Bull, & Pendlebury, 2013; Lindblom-Ylänne, Haarala-Muhonen, Postareff, & Hailikari, 2016). The paper presents a study of the role that a new technology might have in the assessment of students’ essays and providing feedback to them (Stevenson & Phakiti, 2014). In an experimental study, the authors compare students’ acceptance and attitudes toward the assessment of essays generated by a software and by the teacher, and how this might affect students’ learning. The results show that students still prefer teacher-based than automatic essay assessments, although contemporary automatic assessment tools could provide high quality output. However, students are aware of some positive sides of automatic assessment, and their learning does not seem to be negatively affected by the source of assessment. In conclusion, the authors suggest that feedback to students at the university level should be based on a combination of software tools and teachers, especially in the context of the up-coming expansion of Massive Open Online Courses.

We hope that reading this last 2016 issue of *Psihologija Journal* will be as pleasurable and enriching an experience as was the opportunity to edit it.

Aleksander Baucal is a professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of Belgrade. His main field of interest are socio-cultural studies of developmental and educational processes and their inter-relation with socio-cultural contexts. His research studies are dealing with development of new competencies through symmetric and asymmetric social interaction within given socio-cultural setting. The author's work is also related to improvement of the traditional pre-post test research design by integration with the Item Response Theory (IRT) and involvement of qualitative case studies.

Ana Altaras Dimitrijević is Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology, University of Belgrade, and Research Associate at the Institute of Educational Psychology, University of Rostock. She pursues research topics at the intersection of educational and differential psychology, focusing particularly on issues related to giftedness and gifted education, alternative approaches to cognitive assessment (e.g., dynamic assessment), and emotional intelligence. She is also actively engaged in furthering the education of gifted students in Serbian schools.

References

- Ainscow, M., & César, M. (2006). Inclusive education ten years after Salamanca: Setting the agenda. *European Journal of Psychology of Education, 21*, 231-238.
- Baumert, J., & Kunter, M. (2013). The COACTIV model of teachers' professional competence. In M. Kunter, J. Baumert, W. Blum, U. Klusmann, S. Krauss, & M. Neubrand (Eds.), *Cognitive activation in the mathematics classroom and professional competence of teachers. Results from the COACTIV project* (pp. 25-48). New York, NY: Springer.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (2014). Evidence Based Practice in Education: Between Science and Democracy. In: A. D. Reid, E. P. Hart, & M. A. Peters (Eds.), *A Companion to Research in Education* (pp. 391-400). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Boud, D., Cohen, R. & Sampson, J. (2001). *Peer Learning in Higher Education: Learning from & with Each Other*. London: Kogan page limited.
- Brown, G. A., Bull, J., & Pendlebury, M. (2013). *Assessing Student Learning in Higher Education*. London: Routledge.
- Bruner, J. S. (1991). *In search of pedagogy*. New York: Routledge.
- Bruner, J. S. (1996). *The Culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Cole, M. (1996). *Cultural psychology: A once and future discipline*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Engeström, Y., Miettinen, R., & Punamäki, R. L. (1999). *Perspectives on Activity Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hjörne, E., & Säljö, R. (2014). Representing diversity in education: Student identities in contexts of learning and instruction. *International Journal of Educational Research, 63*, 1-4.
- Krstić, K. (2008). Povezanost pojma o sebi i predstave adolescenata kako ih vide "značajni drugi". *Psihologija, 41*(4), 539-553. doi:10.2298/PSI0804539K
- Krstić, K. (2012). School learning and student-teacher attachment. In A. Baucal & J. Radišić (Eds.), *Patchwork. Learning diversities: Conference proceedings* (pp. 164-172). Belgrade: Institute of Psychology.
- Krstić, K. (2015). Vežanost učenika i nastavnika kao faktor školskog postignuća. *Inovacije u nastavi, 28*(3), 167-188.

- Krstić, K., Lazarević, L.J., & Stepanović Ilić, I. (2016). Dropout as a Result of Education with No Space for Diversity. In A. Surian (Ed.), *Open Spaces for Interaction and Learning Diversities* (pp. 129-136). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Lindblom-Ylänne, S., Haarala-Muhonen, A., Postareff, L., & Hailikari, T (2016). Exploration of individual study paths of successful first-year students: an interview study. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 31, 1-15. doi:10.1007/s10212-016-0315-8
- Marsico, G., Komatsu, K., & Iannaccone, A. (2013). *Crossing Boundaries. Intercontextual dynamics between Family and School*. Charlotte, N.C. USA.: Information Age Publishing.
- Mayer, J. D., Salovey, P., Caruso, D. R., & Sitarenios, G. (2001). Emotional intelligence as a standard intelligence. *Emotion*, 1(3), 232–242.
- Oslon, D. H. (2011). FACES IV and the circumplex model: Validation study. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 3, 64–80.
- Petrides, K. V. (2009). Technical manual for the Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaires (TEIQue). London: London Psychometric Laboratory.
- Petrides, K. V. (2011). Ability and trait emotional intelligence. In T. Chamorro-Premuzic, S. vonStumm, & A. Furnham (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell handbook of individual differences* (pp. 656–678). Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Steinberg, L. D. (1990). Interdependence in the family: Autonomy, conflicts and harmony in the parent-adolescent relationship. In S.S. Feldman, and G.R. Eliot (eds), *At the threshold. The developing adolescent* (pp. 833-840). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Stevenson, M., & Phakiti, A. (2014). The effects of computer-generated feedback on the quality of writing. *Assessing Writing*, 19, 51–65. doi:10.1016/j.asw.2013.11.007
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Zittoun, T. (2016). Symbolic resources and sense-making in learning and instruction. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*. doi:10.1007/s10212-016-0310-0