

An illustration of school supplies on a wooden desk. At the top, a quill pen lies horizontally. Below it, a circular object, possibly a compass or a small clock, is partially visible. In the center, a rectangular chalkboard is tilted, with the title 'School Psychology' written in white. Below the title, the subtitle 'A Social Psychological Perspective' is written in a smaller font. At the bottom left, a ruler is shown, angled towards the bottom right. The background is a detailed wood grain pattern.

# School Psychology

A Social Psychological  
Perspective

Edited by

Frederic J. Medway

Thomas P. Cafferty

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**Thomas P. Cafferty**

*University of South Carolina*



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**School Psychology**  
**A Social Psychological Perspective**

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*This book is dedicated with love to our wives, Marcia and Loretta, and our children, Scott, Lauren, Carolyn, and Brendan, whose enduring support, encouragement, and interest in our careers has sustained and nourished our personal and professional lives.*

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## FOREWORD

School psychology has a long and consistent history of self-discovery after the fact. Due to its extremely applied nature, its practitioners tend to act first, responding to the needs of others, and then to reflect upon what it is they have done and the foundational bases for their actions. Strongly influenced by clinical psychology, school psychology most often has adopted the view that it is a specialty concerned mainly with individual differences; with persons in need of direct or indirect assistance for a wide variety of problems of the human condition as they occur in a place called school. The field's training programs have accepted as basic to the education of their students the substantive content areas expected in any professional psychology training program, including demonstration of competency in the social bases of behavior. But specialization has tended to emphasize those aspects of psychology dealing primarily with personality, abnormality, and individual behavior, in keeping with the emphasis on the troubled-person-as-client.

Yet, if you think about it, it seems obvious that the one area of psychology that may be most pervasive in school psychology, broadly speaking, is the field of social psychology. Can you think of any aspect of the work of the school psychologist that is not influenced in important ways by the presence of others, whether actual, imagined, or implied? What is there that school psychologists do that is apart from how they are perceived; how those with whom they work think and feel about them? What are the elements of the phenomenon we call *rapport*, an essential factor influencing whether or not our assessment results tell us something valid about the persons we

are trying to understand? What are the contexts in which teachers, administrators, and parents use our findings, advice, and interventions? How do we get others to hear what we have to say and to use the information we provide? Involved in all these questions are problems to be solved relating intrapersonal concerns to interpersonal, intragroup, and intergroup factors.

Of all practitioner psychologies, with the possible exception of industrial/organizational psychology, school psychology practice is most intimately tied to a particular kind of complex social setting that serves to define the specialty. We are not “school” psychologists for nothing. We are set apart from other psychologists by the social organization with which we are identified, and the problems posed by those who administer, teach, and learn in educational environments. The success of whatever it is we do is dependent on what others think about and do with our findings, suggestions, and ideas. We are primarily an indirect service delivery specialty, and that means we are helpful to the extent that others hear, respect, and work with us. These “others” we try to assist work in educational organizations or are concerned with teaching and learning, which is always an interactive process.

What is the nature of the problems others bring to us? Mostly they are problems about failure in interaction or failure in learning or behaving in a group, whether it be the classroom, home, or community. What are the impediments to being heard and used well by teachers, parents, and administrators? Do they not include attitudes toward children, misunderstandings, attributions of motives and perceptions? What factors affect how well we perform? Given that we have basic competencies in assessment, intervention methods, and evaluation, is it not our ability to get people to trust us, to understand us, and to use the good things we have to offer them because we have been able to overcome the differences between or among us?

In our psychological language, these questions relate back to a knowledge base that includes knowing about attitude formation and attitude change, interpersonal attraction and social acceptance, gender and race issues, organizational behavior, attributions, group dynamics, and interpersonal relations. In other words, if you think about it, social psychology may be the key foundational base in psychology that undergirds our ability to offer assistance to others. Whatever else we may know, whatever skills we may have, we cannot accomplish much without directly or implicitly understanding that we function in a social psychological world.

Throughout my career, I have recognized the importance of a social psychological perspective, mostly due to the good fortune of having an applied social psychologist as my mentor and teacher in graduate school. But, as a trainer of school psychologists, it did not occur to me to include social psychology as a requirement for my students, much less consider it as a major aspect of their formal education and training, although some of my students wisely chose to include course work in social psychology as electives in their

graduate programs. Perhaps there is something about the field of social psychology itself that contributed to this gap between my implicit understanding of its importance to me as a school psychologist and my failure to view it as an important foundation area for my students. The field of social psychology has struggled for decades with issues of scientific purity versus social action. Much of its literature has been specialized, dominated by laboratory research whose relevance has not been made clear to those of us who think of ourselves as human service providers. The literature in applied social psychology concerned with the social psychology of schooling is limited, and much of it has not had direct appeal to psychology practitioners.

Frederic J. Medway, a school psychologist with a social psychological background, and Thomas P. Cafferty, a social psychologist who teaches school psychologists in training, have undertaken to correct this imbalance. The book you are about to read, to my knowledge, is the first serious attempt in school psychology literature to provide a social psychological perspective to the clinical and social problems with which we work every day. It is a monumental undertaking that is long overdue.

Most books we read do not break new ground, but this book offers school psychologists an opportunity to shift perspectives from seeing clients as isolated entities who need to be treated to seeing them as social beings who virtually are never away in fact or in thought from others who populate their lives. As I understand the authors' intent, their book is a way for those in training or in the field to consider how they can better use this important body of knowledge—social psychology—to increase sensitivity to others and effectiveness as professional psychologists. It may also serve to encourage students to take additional course work in social psychology.

We all know we are living in a rapidly changing world, and we have chosen to be part of a rapidly changing profession. One of the critical changes taking place throughout the world involves greater recognition of the interrelatedness of people. More and more we realize how dependent we are on each other. Global education is no longer something others should be concerned about. Environmental issues involve interactions among societies and persons. We have witnessed only recently how shifts in attitudes and attributions influence world events and world order. In our small part of this world—school psychology—we too gradually have come to recognize the importance of interpersonal, interorganizational, and contextual factors in our work. We never function in isolation from those components that form the subject matter of social psychology, as professionals and as citizens.

Understanding and using the knowledge base and skills related to social psychological phenomena in our work may well make the difference between helping or not helping our clients, consultees, and our educational systems to make best use of our services. This is a book to read carefully; to think

about as we go about our daily professional assignments as educator, student, or practitioner. If enough school psychologists read this book and take its content seriously as a way of shaping a more socially perceptive perspective, it could positively influence our ability to continue to be part of a rapidly changing profession in a rapidly changing educational system in a rapidly changing world in which social psychological factors are always in operation.

*Jack I. Bardon*

## PREFACE

*Although clinical psychology is clearly related to medicine, it is quite as closely related to sociology and pedagogy*

—Lightner Witmer

In 1907 Lightner Witmer conceived of a new profession using clinical methods in the examination and treatment of individuals with psychological disorders. Witmer termed the new profession *clinical psychology* because the word “clinical” best described his view of employing systematic observation and experimentation to effect change in individuals. Witmer saw mostly children drawn from schools in Pennsylvania and is credited with founding school psychology as well as clinical psychology.

Lightner Witmer, like many of his contemporaries, viewed the study of sociology and social psychology as critical to the diagnostic and treatment process. However, during the last century, and especially within the last 30 years, school psychology has moved away from its early sociological roots so that today few school psychologists have taken more than one survey course in social psychology. And, it is our belief that even fewer recognize the importance of social psychology for school psychologists.

It is with a great sense of pride and excitement that we have attempted to reintroduce the contributions of social psychology to school psychology in *School Psychology: A Social Psychological Perspective*. The book itself represents a merging and cross-fertilization of our own professional identities, the first author being primarily identified with school psychology and the second author with social psychology.

The origins of this book go back many years and reflect our own career development. For nearly 20 years, Frederic Medway has been interested in the application of social psychology in school settings. Dr. Medway was studying for his PhD in social psychology at the University of Connecticut when, in 1972, he was offered an NIMH-sponsored internship in Long Beach, New York, under the supervision of Dr. Victor B. Elkin. Dr. Elkin's support and encouragement allowed him to spend a year functioning as a social psychologist in several school districts doing organizational consultation, modifying learning environments, and providing in-service training in group process skills to school staff. Returning to Connecticut to complete his dissertation, he was encouraged by several faculty members to try and integrate social psychology with educational practice. The most influential members of this faculty were Charles A. Lowe and Reuben M. Baron, to whom special thanks are due. Since 1975 Dr. Medway has been affiliated with the school psychology program of the University of South Carolina, where he has continued to train students in social psychological processes.

Dr. Thomas Cafferty was trained as an experimental social psychologist at a time when many in the field were becoming concerned about the loss of relevance for applied areas. He benefitted from the resurgence of interest represented by the program at Purdue, particularly in the work of Sigfried Streufert and his associates. Coming to the University of South Carolina in 1972, he was assigned to teach a graduate seminar in social psychology to graduate students, the majority of whom were in school and clinical psychology programs, and has continued to do so every year since. He brings a unique perspective of having discussed many social psychological principles with school psychologists in training and a sensitivity to the needs of applied psychologists.

The idea for this volume did not come until 1987 when we received an invitation by Drs. Terry B. Gutkin of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and Cecil R. Reynolds of Texas A & M University to contribute a chapter on the contributions of social psychology to school psychology for the second edition of the *Handbook of School Psychology* (Gutkin & Reynolds, 1990). In working on that chapter we realized that the interface between the two disciplines was broad and far reaching, and that one chapter could not capture all the many ways that social psychology impacts on school psychology practice. We realized that a need for a more detailed treatment existed and felt that both the theories and methods of social psychology were very important for effective functioning in school psychology. Thus, we owe a special debt to Drs. Gutkin and Reynolds, for recognizing the importance of social psychology for school psychologists and starting us on our initial collaborative writing, an effort that set the stage for this volume. Once a general idea for the book was developed, Drs. Thomas R. Kratochwill and James Ysseldyke were most supportive in encouraging us to pursue the project in con-

junction with the ongoing school psychology series of Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.

We made a decision early in the development of this book to focus it on school psychology and have contributors write for this audience. This is reflected in the title we chose. Our contributors were specifically asked to cover the classical, contemporary, and cutting-edge research and theory in their respective areas and to address, where applicable, the applications for school psychology. The volume is not as broad or basic in presentation as most existing introductions to school psychology; on the other hand, it is not as narrow as books that deal with one specific skill or technique, be that assessment, consultation, therapy, or other area. Thus, we see the book as most appropriate as a text in an advanced seminar course, as a supplemental book in an introductory course, and certainly, as an essential reference tool for all school psychologists.

There are three major sections in *School Psychology: A Social Psychological Perspective*. The first section is entitled "Theoretical Perspectives on Applying Social Psychology to Educational Practices." This section contains eight chapters that cover basic areas of social psychology (e.g., history, attitudes, attribution, attraction, research methods). These chapters review the basic research on which subsequent chapters build and contain many illustrations from educational practice.

The second section is entitled "Applying Social Psychology to Clinical Interventions in the Schools." It contains chapters covering many of the traditional areas of school psychology role and function including assessment, therapy, and consultation. Each of these areas are considered from a uniquely social psychological view.

The final section is called "Applications to Clinical and Social Problems." It covers specific educational and social problems, many of which only receive scant coverage in basic school psychology texts. Here important topics such as substance abuse, loneliness, and integration are reviewed with reference to the latest social psychological models.

We have put a great deal of effort into selecting contributors for this volume. The contributors include a combination of applied social psychologists knowledgeable about school psychology, and school psychologists who have made extensive use of social psychology in their research and practice. We feel that we have a nice mix of social and school psychologists, both university and school affiliated. In fact, this book is the first of which we are aware to include both school and social psychologists in relatively equal numbers.

Many individuals assisted in putting this volume together. We wish to thank Dr. Lester Lefton, our department chair, for his encouragement of our scholarship. Camilla Tezza and Dan McNiff aided us in many aspects of editorial work and index development, and Taffy Lemox who provided invaluable help in



typing parts of the manuscript. We also wish to express our appreciation to staff members at Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, particularly Christopher Pecci and Hollis Heimbouch for their tireless efforts in the editorial and production work.

Finally, we wish to offer our appreciation and love to the most important people in our lives, our wives, Marcia Medway and Loretta Cafferty, and our children, Scott and Lauren Medway and Carolyn and Brendan Cafferty. To you, this book is dedicated.

*Frederic J. Medway*  
*Thomas P. Cafferty*