

OBITUARY

Victor Anthony Battistich (1952–2008)

Marilyn Watson and Marvin W. Berkowitz

On June 30, 2008, our cherished colleague, Victor Anthony Battistich, died suddenly and unexpectedly at his home in Creve Coeur, Missouri. He was 55 years old. Vic, as he was called by all who knew him, was an associate professor in the division of educational psychology, research, and evaluation in the College of Education, at the University of Missouri—St. Louis, and a member of the Executive Committee of the university's Center for Character and Citizenship.

Vic was born and grew up in Sacramento, California, receiving his BA degree in psychology from California State University, Sacramento, in 1974. He received his PhD in personality and social psychology from Michigan State University in 1979, where he focused on person-environment interactions. Following graduate school, he was an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Cleveland State University before returning to California in 1980, to become part of the core research team of the Child Development Project, at the Developmental Studies Center in Oakland, California. In 2003, he joined the faculty at the University of Missouri—St. Louis.

Vic is world renowned 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 ... usually repeatedly. His name has become synonymous with empirical rigor in character education, his work the gold standard in the field.

He is best known for over 2 decades of program evaluation work on the Child Development Project (CDP) in the 1980s and 1990s, and well into the current decade. However, he did not like being pigeon-holed as a program evaluator; a fair complaint as he was also a theorist, critic, and creative synthetic thinker. While his title at the Developmental Studies Center, Deputy Director of Research, clearly indicates that he was strongly involved in program evaluation, he was integral to all aspects of the CDP—establishing the research and theoretical bases for the program, and honing the practical components that formed the core of the program, as well as its ongoing formative and summative evaluation. It is the impressive corpus of this work that is so frequently cited for its theoretical, methodological, and evaluative value. Clear in his work is his fresh and

critical eye toward research. He was happy to integrate qualitative and quantitative methods well before it became vogue. He was vocal about the need to not be a “knee jerk” researcher and adapt to the realities of the context, in his case particularly schools. He appreciated the conventions of research, but understood them to be just that ... mere conventions.

Vic’s desire to do work that would help to make the world a better place, combined with his long term interest in the effects of context on behavior and development, led naturally to his life-long research focus on the effects of school and classroom environments on children’s social, ethical, and intellectual development. 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. He is internationally recognized for his expertise in the areas of character education and prosocial development, and in research design and data analysis. Vic’s scientific work encompassed several related fields: character education, substance abuse prevention, school sociology, delinquency prevention, and moral development. He has authored or coauthored over 50 professional publications, including journal articles in education, child and adolescent development, pediatrics, psychology, prevention, and public health and chapters in the *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development*, *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, *Handbook of Moral Development*, *Handbook of Classroom Management*, and *Handbook of Research on Schools, Schooling, and Human Development*.

Vic was a dedicated and caring teacher and mentor. He began his career with 1 year of

teaching and took a 23 year hiatus at the Developmental Studies Center before returning to his love of academia and teaching. But even before formally returning to academia, he periodically taught classes and constantly mentored graduate students. With the growth of the Internet he was sought out by students around the world and never said no. His students sing his praises as one who would give them all the time they needed, never condescended, and always make the difficult much easier for them to grasp. As a colleague he was no different, seamlessly serving and challenging at the same time. He made all those around him better and was a consummate team member at both the Developmental Studies Center and the Center for Character and Citizenship. It is not a coincidence that he was a seminal player in the formation of two such successful organizations.

Vic is survived by his widow, Martha Montgomery, two daughters, Sarah and Caitlin, and a brother, Martyn Battistich.

On July 6, 2008, a memorial service was held at the Faith and Des Peres Presbyterian Church in Frontenac, Missouri. A second memorial will be held at the Character Education Partnership’s upcoming National Forum on Character Education, October 17–19 in Arlington, Virginia.

His family has requested that if people want to make a memorial donation in his honor, that it go to the Center for Character and Citizenship at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Send contributions to Beatrice Shivers, Center for Character and Citizenship, College of Education, One University Boulevard, St. Louis, MO 63121.