

Multicultural Education, Peace, and Democracy: Considerations of Civic Education in Wartime

Sigal R. Ben-Porath
University of Pennsylvania

Democratic societies involved in war should focus their attention on preserving their future generations' commitment to democracy and their ability to envision peace, which tend to erode as a result of a protracted focus on security. This is a major responsibility of the public education system, which is entrusted with the mission of creating citizens and whose foremost *raison d'être* is the preservation of democracy.¹ The aim of this essay is to identify the most productive concepts in multicultural theory related to reconciliation and to adapt them to the circumstances of a democracy at war.

Educators who are involved in the complex process of responding to conflict while preserving democratic inclinations can benefit from the insights developed by multicultural theoretical approaches and curricula. The goal of civic education for peace² is to respond educationally to conflict while continually supporting the effort to create democratic citizens. Similarly, multicultural education is meant to respond educationally to social conflicts, tensions, and differences while creating democratic citizens. I will focus on two issues within the vast literature on multicultural education that hold the most promise for enhancing programs of civic education for peace, as they express the relational aspects of multicultural thought. The first is acknowledgment, or reconceptualizing the "other" through overcoming stereotypes and learning to accept different perspectives on salient social matters. The second is forgiveness, including the political, social, and educational processes that can nourish it until it surmounts blame and hatred. While the analysis and pedagogical uses of acknowledgment in multicultural education can be applied directly within a curriculum of civic education for peace, the ensuing pedagogical model of forgiveness needs to be restructured for productive application to the social and educational circumstances of civic education for peace during wartime.

ON ACKNOWLEDGING PAST WRONGS TO A CONCRETE OTHER

Civic education for peace shares with multicultural education the goal of learning to know and respect the "other." In multicultural thought, the "other" usually consists of other citizens or members of the same society. Multiculturalism is meant to offer an opportunity to meet concrete others, to learn about their specificities, and to recognize our common humanity beyond differences: "according to one especially compelling formulation, [multiculturalism] is the radical idea that people in other cultures, foreign and domestic, are human beings, too."³ This formulation draws attention to those aspects of multiculturalism that can inform the aims of peace education. The alienation and dehumanization of the "others," be they members of a separate group within the same nation or of an adversary national group (in some cases this would not be a clear-cut distinction), offers the possibility of using similar reconciliation strategies. Learning to bridge rifts, to overcome

hatred, to take the other's perspective, and to recognize other historical narratives are all potential aspects of the two philosophical-political projects.

Multicultural education offers two lines of argument for overcoming past wrongs. The first is based on a demand for toleration, while the other focuses on the need for recognition and acknowledgment: "either citizens should tolerate their cultural differences by privatizing them, or they should respect their cultural differences by publicly recognizing them."⁴

The appeal to toleration, as presented by Michael Walzer, Joseph Raz, and Will Kymlicka, among others, suggests that the evaluation of cultural practices should remain within the borders of the cultural community.⁵ However, treating the differences between rival national groups as matters that lie outside the public sphere does not support efforts to work toward peace through educational and other public means. The argument for recognition and acknowledgment is more promising. It centers on a claim for public recognition of relevant differences among groups, including the benefits that attend such recognition. The demand for recognition is accompanied by an equally strong claim for acknowledgment of past wrongs as a way of appreciating the perspective of the concrete other.

Minority groups, often burdened by past wrongs and present discrimination, are further encumbered by a society that knows little about their culture, life conditions, and relational background. The basic reason for demanding recognition — for introducing all members of society to the unique features of subgroups with whom they share the public space — is because, as Charles Taylor observes, "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by *mis*recognition of others."⁶ Social recognition is central to an individual's identity and sense of self-worth, and misrecognition can gravely damage both. An essential component of recognition is acknowledging the past relations among groups within society, including ways in which they have wronged each other and the consequences of these wrongs on their present relative conditions.

This is far from a claim for an economy of "an eye for an eye." Looking for ways to understand the past does not ideally entail calculations of blame and contestation regarding the roles of offender and victim. This approach, both in the context of war and of multicultural tensions, may lead to sustaining conflict rather than prevailing over it. Nor does it mean that we need to vindicate historical actions in order for a different future to evolve. Rather, acknowledgment requires that all sides learn to look at their common history and their respective current conditions from a more complex perspective than is usually available to them. In a careful analysis of acknowledgment as a political prerequisite for amending past wrongs, Trudy Govier asserts that acknowledgment "is a necessary condition of willingness to make restitution and commit to positive change."⁷ She demonstrates how getting over denial and focusing our attention on (past and present) deficiencies constitutes a first step on the road to acknowledgment, and then to forgiveness.

Choosing to acknowledge rather than to deny or dismiss past wrongs is crucial to the process of overcoming mutual hostilities. This was the rationale of Truth and

Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa and other countries, where it was assumed that the goal of reconciliation should override any desire for retributive justice; thus the policy enacted preferred the public acknowledgment of atrocities to prosecuting offenders from the Apartheid regime.

One way for a society to formally acknowledge past wrongs is through studying them in state-sponsored public schools. Let me consider the role of education in generating and reflecting acknowledgment.

EDUCATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Multicultural education must confront the need to create a shared history from the narratives of various groups.⁸ Peace education requires less than that — it requires recognition of the other's perspective of history but allows former adversaries to hold on to their separate versions of the conflict (and other aspects of their histories). Hence, the main purpose of acknowledgment within the curriculum of civic education for peace is to uphold peaceful and democratic attitudes rather than belligerent ones. To achieve this, it must foster an acknowledgment of the (former) enemy's humanity, including his or her view of the past.

Multicultural education and peace education share the need to overcome a history of injustice and harm and to create a common vision of a positive future. Some argue that to maintain a "multicultural school environment," all aspects of the school must be examined and transformed to reflect the variety of cultures represented in the larger society in which the school operates.⁹ Multiculturalism reminds us of the need to acknowledge past wrongs, to recognize the many differences among groups within society, and to learn to forgive. These are all important potential contributions multiculturalism can make to the process of civic education for peace.

In a careful analysis of multiculturalism, Bhikhu Parekh expresses mistrust of the blunt attempt to incorporate a host of "other perspectives" into the curriculum. For him, a meaningful multicultural curriculum must conform to two conditions. "First, it should not be unduly narrow."¹⁰ Monocultural education is confined to presenting students with a narrow perspective of history and culture in the hope of enlisting them as supporters of the national culture or *amor di patria*. A major goal of multicultural education is thus to *expand* students' understanding of their nation's history through connecting it with the histories of subgroups, the region, and the world. Acknowledging the multiplicity that makes up a nation is an essential component of both a multicultural curriculum and civic education for peace. Expanding the students' horizons by including various perspectives on history and other subjects need not foster relativism. On the contrary, the study of local cultures and histories serves the aim of recognition central to both multicultural education and civic education for peace. When properly construed, it can serve as a springboard for acknowledgment.

The second condition Parekh mentions is a pedagogical one: "It is not enough to broaden the curriculum" by including different religions, historical perspectives, or cultures; "one should also bring them into a fruitful dialogue."¹¹ Dialogue is a pedagogical tool whose importance to civic learning, and particularly to civic

education for peace, cannot be overstated.¹² By generating classroom dialogue between teachers and students, between cultures and political perspectives, educators serve two key aims of multiculturalism, namely, acknowledgment and empowerment. They simultaneously serve a fundamental aim of civic education for peace — expanding the limits of acceptable opinions — thus supporting democratic deliberation. Creating a dialogue in schools supports the generation of a democratic political dialogue, which can, in turn, promote and sustain peaceful sociopolitical relations. By engaging in classroom debate and dialogue, students can develop an informed perspective and assess it in light of other possible views. They can learn to appreciate the contextuality of historical truths. Ideally, they come to realize the complexity of analyzing historical, political, and social circumstances. In the context of conflict, students can learn to consider the other side's perspective, going beyond alienation and dehumanization.

Bringing cultures and historical perspectives into a fruitful dialogue may serve as a first step in the long journey toward forgiveness. Positively and consciously reconstructing collective memories in order to make them more receptive to peaceful relations is a complex process. Undertaking this task in schools requires a mindful restructuring of the curriculum and of teaching methods. The renewed curriculum, expanded to include a variety of perspectives, can support the construction of a productive dialogue that works toward acknowledgment. To support both reconciliation and democracy, forgiveness must follow the acknowledgment of past wrongs to allow all parties to begin envisioning a positive common future.

FORGIVENESS AS AN EDUCATIONAL GOAL

Forgiveness is the next step after the acknowledgment of past wrongs, if one can create the proper conditions that enable it. The notion of forgiveness as a pedagogical practice and as a goal of moral education was introduced into educational theory primarily by multicultural theorists seeking ways to overcome past wrongs and to work toward the establishment of a just society. The moral education field has regained interest in the concept of forgiveness in recent years.¹³ Possibly prompted by a renewed interest in war and ethnic conflict, scholars have been debating different types of forgiveness and effective modes of teaching them. Moral philosophers are also debating epistemological and ethical aspects of forgiveness.¹⁴ Most of the literature on forgiveness relies heavily on religious traditions: “As enigmatic as the concept of forgiveness remains, it is the case that the scene, the figure, the language which one tries to adapt to it belong to a religious heritage (let's call it Abrahamic, in order to bring together Judaism, the Christianities, and the Islams).”¹⁵ This characterization assumes that the concept is personal rather than political — an assumption I call into question.

Contemporary educational and moral literature offers three basic models of forgiveness. All are based on the idea that forgiveness presupposes an identification of the other as guilty, hence requiring that the other acknowledge this guilt in order for the forgiveness to reverberate in the political sphere. The most radical of these models was developed by Jacques Derrida, who suggests that the act of forgiveness is entirely in the hands, and heart, of the victim, and that forgiveness must be given

unconditionally and without expectation of return. Forgiving the unforgivable is the only true act of forgiveness, for “if one is only prepared to forgive what appears forgivable, what the church calls ‘venial sin,’ then the very idea of forgiveness would disappear.”¹⁶ Thus forgiveness in its purest form cannot entail any expectation of restitution, repentance, or compensation.

This type of forgiveness, albeit noble, has little relevance outside religious and interpersonal relations. Establishing peaceful relations in intergroup and international situations seems to require further steps beyond the feeling, and declaration, of forgiveness.

Derrida’s model also fails to establish a link between justice and forgiveness. Restitution and the restoration of justice can be a prelude to a formal act of forgiveness. The demand to do justice, by punishing the offender or compensating the victim, can be presented by the victim as a precondition of granting forgiveness. More broadly, the acknowledgment of injustice in past relations or actions is seen as a necessary condition for ensuring that they do not recur after forgiveness is granted. This link between repentance and forgiveness is evident in two widely debated models of forgiveness, the “strict model” and the “relaxed model.”¹⁷

The “strict model of forgiveness” presupposes the wrongdoer’s repentance and/or just punishment, and proclaims that granting forgiveness is the victim’s moral (or religious) duty. Hence, if the offender repents the wrong he or she committed (with or without being punished, by God or man) and asks for forgiveness, it must be promptly granted.

In a position spurred by this type of strict model, Tara Smith argues that forgiveness is not a virtue but rather a moral duty of the victim, which derives directly from a claim of justice. For justice to be served, therefore, the victim *must* forgive the offender, once the appropriate conditions have been fulfilled; otherwise, the victim becomes a wrongdoer, an obstacle to justice.¹⁸ This view is rightly criticized as too formal or rigid, and too dependent upon an exchange economy.

The “relaxed view” is sometimes described as the “no problem” model of forgiveness.¹⁹ It is most commonly used in educational settings. Under this model, children should learn to forgive easily and with no demand for punishment or compensations. Children should be taught to forgive because “it is a matter, on the one side, of encouraging a willingness to apologize and make amends (if possible) combined, on the other, with a generous acceptance of people who have caused one hurt.”²⁰ Forgiveness here is not precisely a duty; rather, it is a social nicety. Admittedly, this model does not pertain to serious crimes, but Patricia White regards this as unproblematic: she claims that in such cases the two sides need not live together, and therefore the problem of forgiveness does not arise. This view can fail to apply even in contexts where interpersonal relations are involved, for example, domestic violence, and is even more dramatically inappropriate in some cases of group conflict.

Derrida’s model as well as the strict and religious views are thus only marginally relevant to education in the context of group conflict. These models are devoid of

political and historical dimensions, rendering the educational efforts associated with them out of touch with the historical and social specificities of the communities in which they are practiced. Teaching that one must always work on one's internal ability to grant forgiveness, especially in those circumstances where one has suffered the worst harms, means placing the burden of reconciliation primarily on the victim. Such an educational approach may inadvertently teach potential offenders that they are not liable for the wrongs they commit — they can sense that they are presumptively forgiven, without meeting any demand for punishment or reparation.

The relaxed or “no problem” model, as well, is only partially pertinent to intergroup conflict. White claims that this approach to forgiveness should be dominant in the education of young children, for it is a “generous-spirited attitude between equals” that is “well-suited to a liberal democratic multi-ethnic society.”²¹ However, equality and “harmonious living” between the two sides is not always possible in the face of intergroup conflict.

All these models are focused on the victim; in other words, they emphasize, following religious traditions, the moral requirement to forgive. The morality that they endorse is based on the perspective of the victim — her entitlements and duties. The educational approach that they endorse is focused on teaching students to consider their commitments and their possible responses to instances of harm done to them. Let me now offer an alternative.

LEARNING TO BE FORGIVEN

For the purpose of teaching forgiveness in the context of conflict, two variations on the previously described models are required. First, the model must focus not only on the perspective of the forgiving side but also on that of the side seeking forgiveness. Second, the model must give a proper place to claims of justice.

MEA CULPA

A public acknowledgment of past wrongs done by one's own group, accompanied by an appropriate apology — an acceptance of moral responsibility — can open the door for peaceful relations among former rivals. Some suggest that it might serve as the sole basis necessary for avoiding war.²² Certain political actors have manifested a similar sentiment by apologizing for historical wrongs done by the nations they represent to other nations and minority groups.²³

The sentiment expressed in this type of public apology frames the model that is most relevant to civic education for peace. It is an alternative to the three models described previously in that it is focused not on the duty of the victim to forgive (thus parting with the Abrahamic traditions and with most multicultural literature) but on the responsibilities of the offender to seek forgiveness. It is dangerous “to focus so much on the duty to forgive,” particularly in an educational setting, because such a focus risks encouraging an egocentric perspective that “no matter what we do or how we deal with it,” forgiveness will be granted.²⁴ Learning to demand and expect forgiveness entails the risk of feeding unequal power relations rather than overcoming them. Overcoming anger and blame occurs not through obliging victims to grant

forgiveness but rather through a sincere acknowledgment of wrongs and a common endeavor to establish the grounds for mutual recognition and peaceful relations.

The history curriculum is an educational site where forms of recognition, acknowledgment, and forgiveness are frequently negotiated and expressed. Learning to regard oneself and the group one belongs to as blameworthy from some other group's perspective can be a sobering educational exercise. Often, schools present "us" as a morally blameless entity. However, pressure from internal groups who have suffered injustices in the past or who are currently discriminated against may prompt changes in the curriculum to make it more inclusive and reflective of social reality. Acknowledging the complex history of injustice that some groups have suffered is a justified multicultural change to the curriculum that should be endorsed in the context of democratic societies at war as well. Complicating the history curriculum in this way serves the purposes of both peace building and democratic education.

JUST FORGIVENESS

As for the second modification required in order to delineate a conception of forgiveness suitable for the civic educational purpose of peace, the role that justice plays in the facilitation of forgiveness has to be carefully crafted. A proper response must not waive claims of justice, but it must also refrain from adopting a strict economic formulation of justice as a precondition for forgiveness.

A pertinent approach to forgiveness should take into account claims of historical and even personal injustice, and attempt to include them in an environment receptive to forgiveness. This does not mean that all claims can indeed be answered in full but only that they should be sincerely acknowledged. Forgiveness must presuppose justice, at least in the sense of the mutual acknowledgment of wrongs and the mutual understanding that these wrongs are not to be repeated. Thus, as in the public educational display of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, justice is expressed by the mutual recognition of what was wrong in the relational past and how it should be overcome. The expression of this message in the curricula of public schools is an appropriate first manifestation of such sentiments and commitments. To overcome conflict and its effects in a way that endorses democracy, the discussion of forgiveness has to be based on publicly accessible declarations and expressions of seeking and granting forgiveness. Absent access to emotional aspects of forgiveness fundamental to the interpersonal context, intergroup forgiveness has to be presented in public forms, education being chief among them. The declarative spectrum of forgiveness includes politicians and leaders publicly asking for or granting forgiveness for past wrongs (acknowledging them, as discussed previously, is the basis for this act). It also includes moments that can serve as public epiphanies, such as the celebratory signing of a peace treaty (in the case of international conflict), or a cordial meeting between leaders of opposing political regimes.

Teaching about the other side and learning to see history and current affairs from the other's perspective is a key, ongoing method of generating appropriate

conditions for acknowledging the other's perspective, accepting blame, and seeking forgiveness — the civic aspects of peace building. Part of the potential formal mechanisms of acknowledgment is the curriculum of the public education system. Hence, the inclusion of various perspectives on history serves both the purpose of overcoming the dehumanization of the other side that characterizes situations of conflict as well as the purpose of inviting forgiveness by publicly acknowledging the harm one's side caused the other and the justifiability of the other's claims. The construction of a common memory, or at least compatible (rather than adversarial) forms of communal memories, is important in establishing a foundation for a common peaceful future.

The relation of forgiveness and memory is complex. How do we reconcile the remembrance of past wrongs and the possibility of forgiveness? According to Cheshire Calhoun, wrongdoers want forgiveness “for the culpability that remains after excuses, justifications, restitution and repentant reforms have been made and accepted — a culpability that warrants our continuing to be resented.”²⁵ Avishai Margalit states that “successful forgiveness is not forgetting the wrong done but rather overcoming the resentment that accompanies it.”²⁶ This requirement differs from the common relational form of forgiveness in that the claim does not come from an agent seeking forgiveness but is a demand the victim places on him- or herself.²⁷ Considering the well-being of both the offender and the victim is clearly in the interest of both sides if they are to reach a state of forgiveness. Apologies, restitutions, and the restoration of justice on a large-scale group context can be enacted by a political decision. Their acceptance, accordingly, can symbolize forgiveness on the intergroup level, even when some individuals may take longer to feel and express such forgiveness. The educational system is the most powerful public mechanism available to lay the groundwork for seeking forgiveness, and for facilitating its acceptance, as a means to furthering both visions of peace and democratic attitudes.

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1. Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 2d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
 2. Elsewhere, I have called this idea “expansive education.” See Sigal R. Ben-Porath, *Citizenship under Fire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).
 3. Susan Moller Okin, *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? With Responses*, ed. Joshua Cohen and Matthew Howard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.
 4. Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 304–305. Gutmann demonstrates that, at least in the field of public education, the two options are not mutually exclusive.
 5. Michael Walzer, *On Toleration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); and Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
 6. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25.
 7. Trudy Govier, “What Is Acknowledgement and Why Is It Important?” in *Dilemmas of Reconciliation*, ed. Carol A.L. Prager and Trudy Govier (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2003), 71.
 8. An interesting example of a history textbook series that takes a multicultural perspective is Joy Hakim's *A History of U.S.*, 10 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). See Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 307, for a discussion of this work.

9. James Banks, *Education in the '80s: Multiethnic Education* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1981).
10. Bhikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 227.
11. *Ibid.*, 229.
12. The approach to liberatory education developed by Paulo Freire stresses the constructive potential of innovative pedagogical approaches (such as the dialogical approach) for challenging social issues. See Paulo Freire and Ira Shor, *Pedagogy of Liberation* (South Hadley, Mass.: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987). In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970), Freire discusses the need of both oppressor and oppressed to acknowledge their relational past in order to overcome its effects.
13. Patricia White "What Should We Teach Children about Forgiveness?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, no. 1 (2002): 57–67; L. Philip Barnes, "Forgiveness, the Moral Law and Education: A Reply to Patricia White," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, no. 4 (2002): 519–534; and Marianna Papastephanou, "Forgiving and Requesting Forgiveness," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 37, no. 3 (2003): 503–524.
14. Some prominent examples are Jean Hampton and Jeffrie Murphy, *Forgiveness and Mercy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Martha Minow, *Breaking the Cycles of Hatred: Memory, Law and Repair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Susan Brison, *Aftermath and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Joram Graf Haber *Forgiveness* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1991).
15. Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001), 28.
16. *Ibid.*, 32.
17. See Papastephanou, "Forgiving and Requesting Forgiveness."
18. Tara Smith, "Tolerance and Forgiveness: Virtues or Vices?" *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (1997): 31–41.
19. White, "What Should We Teach Children about Forgiveness?"
20. *Ibid.*, 64.
21. *Ibid.*, 66.
22. Michael Ignatieff makes this claim in the context of the Balkan wars in his *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (New York: Penguin, 1997).
23. Take, for example, President Bush's apology for America's involvement in the slave trade during a July 2003 visit in Senegal.
24. Papastephanou, "Forgiving and Requesting Forgiveness," 516.
25. Cheshire Calhoun, "Changing One's Heart," *Ethics* 103 (1992): 76–96.
26. Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, 208.
27. *Ibid.*, 74.