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editorial: education in times of war

On Education

The 15th issue of On_Education deals with the history and present of wartime education in different times, sociopolitical contexts and geographical spaces, such as Ukraine, Japan, Sri Lanka, Cyprus, post-socialist Poland, post-civil war Lebanon, post-apartheid South Africa or post-fascist Germany. The issue focuses on the different – often Janus-faced and highly ambivalent – roles and functions that education systems tend to play in societies' responses to wars, in the preparation for war, as well as in the educational and sociopolitical dynamics that tend to shape educational systems before, during, and after wars (including so called 'cold wars'). We have invited analyses of these complex issues from different methodological perspectives, disciplines, and research fields (such as philosophy, history of education, comparative education, and others).

Keywords: conflict, democracy, democratic education, education in emergencies, war

> The odd thing is that no matter how much we learn about the horror of war, there are always people eager to be part of it, at least until they have actually experienced it.
> Nel Noddings (2012, p. 11)

According to a popular saying, the first casualty of war is truth. In times of war, calls for patriotic unity and ideological conformity tend to trump tolerance for ideological diversity and a critical engagement with competing political perspectives. Dissenting political voices are increasingly perceived with suspicion, distrust and as lacking loyalty to the national cause. Ideals of impartiality and objectivity (e.g. in journalism) are undermined by a suppression of disagreement, straightforward lies and propaganda. Instead of public deliberation of controversial political issues, patriotic enthusiasm and the willingness to contribute to the war effort become the order of the day (Ben-Porath, 2006). This seldom happens without the enemy being targeted by waves of xenophobia, racism and hatred, while ethno-cultural and religious minorities are marked as the 'enemy within'. As the spectrum of acceptable perspectives narrows, ideas of the citizen "revered in peaceful times as the cornerstone of democratic practices" are undercut by belligerent notions of citizenship, which focus on a "more powerful" idea, "namely 'the soldier'" (Ben-Porath, 2011, p. 317).

Since these and other developments in many respects also have severe negative repercussions for education, one may be tempted to state that if truth is the first casualty of war, then education is the second. 'Education' in wartime contexts, however, is usually far from innocent (from a historical perspective, see Engelmann et al., 2022; see also Seitz, 2004). One may even argue that without the widespread and protracted intergenerational provision of the cultural, ideological and educational

grounds for war, which is also in important respects disseminated by educational systems, it would be often hardly possible for any government to justify and lead a war in the first place. While the malignant and warmongering role that education can play is rather obvious in the case of authoritarian regimes and dictatorships, such as the 'pedagogy of violence' propagated in Nazi Germany (Tenorth, 2003), this also holds – albeit in significantly different forms – in liberal democracies. There are ample historical and contemporary examples which indicate that also here schools and educators are expected to contribute to the war effort; curricula and schoolbooks tend to be ideologically streamlined (e.g. via triumphalist versions of history; dehumanization of the enemy; see Roldán Vera & Fuchs, 2018); teachers face increasing political pressure to act in conformity with what is constructed as being in the national interest; and it is regarded as more important for students to develop patriotic sentiments than to critically reflect on the question whether the war may be actually just (see the analyses of democratic education in war by Ben-Porath, 2006; on teaching controversial issues during the cold war by Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017; Christophe et al., 2019; as well as patriotism and education after 9/11 in the US by Curren, 2020). Thus, even in liberal democracies "education" all too often "becomes war by other means" (Ben-Porath, 2006, p. 34), and educational media become "weapons of mass instruction" (Ingrao, 2009).

At the same time, the educational system can also be one of the central places where opposition to a war tends to be formed (e.g., against the Vietnam war in the U.S. and all around the world). In this way, education can function as a site of hope to overcome the dispositions and attitudes that provide the ground for wars (e.g., in the form of peace education; Noddings, 2012; see also the analyses of Østby et al., 2019 and Pinker, 2011 as well as the critical approach to peace education by Zembylas & Bekerman, 2017).

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