

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, Hemetsberger & Jacob, 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, Urdal & Dupuy, 2018 and Pinker, 2011 as well as the critical approach to peace education by Zembylas & Bekerman, 2017).

The 15th issue of *On_Education* deals with the history and present of wartime education in different 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).

The Editorial Team

References

Ben-Porath, S. (2011). Wartime citizenship: An argument for shared fate. *Ethnicities*, 11(3), 313–325.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796811407845>

Ben-Porath, S. (2006). *Citizenship under fire: Democratic education in times of conflict*. Princeton University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400827183>



- Christophe, B, Gautschi, P. & Thorp, R. (Eds.) (2019). *The Cold War in the classroom. International perspectives on textbooks and memory practices*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Curren, R. (2020). Patriotism, populism, and reactionary politics since 9.11. In M. Sardoč (Ed.), *Handbook of patriotism* (pp. 741–761). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54484-7_8
- Engelmann, S., Hemetsberger, B., & Jacob, F. (Eds.). (2022). *War and education: The pedagogical preparation for collective mass violence*. Brill Schöningh.
<https://brill.com/view/title/60868>
- Ingrao, C. (2009). Weapons of mass instruction: Schoolbooks and democratization in multiethnic Central Europe. *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, 1(1), 180–189.
<https://doi.org/10.3167/jemms.2009.010111>
- Noddings, N. (2012). *Peace education: How we come to love and hate war*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511894725>
- Østby, G., Urdal, H., & Dupuy, K. (2019). Does education lead to pacification? A systematic review of statistical studies on education and political violence. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(1), 46–92.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654318800236>
- Pinker, S. (2011). *The better angels of our nature: Why violence has declined*. Viking.
- Roldán Vera, E. & Fuchs, E. (Eds.) (2018). *Textbooks and war. Historical and multinational perspectives*. Palgrave MacMillan.
- Seitz, K. (2004). *Education and conflict: The role of education in the creation, prevention and resolution of societal crises – consequences for development cooperation*. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit.
<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/education-and-conflict-role-education-creation-prevention-and-resolution-societal>
- Tenorth, H.-E. (2003). Pädagogik der Gewalt. Zur Logik der Erziehung im Nationalsozialismus. In Sektion Historische Bildungsforschung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft (Ed.), *Jahrbuch für Historische Bildungsforschung* (Vol. 9, pp. 7–36). Klinkhardt.
<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:5741>
- Zimmerman, J., & Robertson, E. (2017). *The case for contention: Teaching controversial issues in American schools*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Zembylas, M. & Bekerman, Z. (2017). Some reflections on critical peace education. In C. Borg & M. Grech (eds), *Pedagogy, Politics and Philosophy of Peace: Interrogating Peace and Peacemaking* (pp. 147–160). Bloomsbury Academic.

Recommended Citation

Editorial Team (2022). Education in times of war. *On Education. Journal for Research and Debate*, 5(15).

https://doi.org/10.17899/on_ed.2022.15.0

Do you want to comment on this article? Please send your reply to editors@oneducation.net. Replies will be processed like invited contributions. This means they will be assessed according to standard criteria of quality, relevance, and civility. Please make sure to follow editorial policies and formatting [guidelines](#).