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Editorial

Introduction to the Special Issue, "Forgiveness Education Around the World: Considerations, Benefits, and Approaches"

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1. Introduction

This Special Issue of the journal *Educational Sciences*, titled "Forgiveness Education Around the World: Considerations, Benefits, and Approaches", introduces a collection of nine articles that explores the concept of forgiveness education across various educational contexts and development periods. Together, these articles highlight the growing importance of forgiveness education in promoting emotional and psychological well-being, as well as moral development, across diverse age groups, cultural backgrounds, and educational settings. The nine contributions featured in this Special Issue span multiple continents, cultures, and educational contexts, collectively illuminating the growing global interest in forgiveness and forgiveness education. As illustrated in these articles, forgiveness is recognized as a teachable virtue with implications for students, schools, and communities. The following introduction offers a brief summary of each article and discusses implications for practice and suggestions for future research, with a focus on growing and improving future forgiveness education, intervention, and research.

1.1. Overview of the Contributions

1.1.1. Forgiveness Education in Conflict-Affected Settings

This Issue opens with (Contribution 1) article, "Forgiveness Education in Conflicted Societies: The Lived Experiences of Arab and Jewish Fifth-Grade Children in Israel" and focuses on the experiences of both Arab and Jewish fifth-grade students living in Israel who participated in a social–emotional education program, consisting of fourteen, 90 minute lessons, grounded in forgiveness and agape love. The research included qualitative semi-structured interviews with students and teachers and field notes of class observations. The results illustrated that the students enjoyed the education and found it interesting and valuable, with participants also experiencing emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes. This study offers insight into how forgiveness education can foster empathy and resilience for youth living in environments with longstanding conflict. Furthermore, the authors highlight the benefit of offering students education that focuses on skills for managing conflict and injustice while reducing anger and violence and suggest that this education continue throughout children's schooling. According to (Contribution 1), a comprehensive approach has the greatest chance of reducing the likelihood of violent or criminal behavior in the future.

1.1.2. Curriculum Development for Middel School Students

In the article "Forgiveness education in fourth-through eighth-grade classrooms: Development and evaluation of a new forgiveness curriculum", Contribution (2) examines the effectiveness of a newly created forgiveness curriculum for middle school students

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attending three parochial schools, focusing on its impact on forgiveness, understanding of the curriculum, and anger. Both quantitative and qualitative data are presented, with results showing that the curriculum successfully promoted forgiveness and increased knowledge related to the curriculum. The authors conclude by emphasizing the benefits of forgiveness education as a prevention approach for violence and mental health and the importance of educating school professionals about forgiveness education. According to (Contribution 2), "Working with children on forgiveness skills might offer the opportunity to intervene early and for children to reap both immediate and lifelong benefits" (p. 16).

1.1.3. Theologically Informed and Culturally Sensitive Approaches

Focusing on the importance of considering the cultural contexts of students, the article, "Exploring forgiveness through theologically informed education: Lessons from Judaism" (Contribution 3) examines the integration of forgiveness education with Jewish theological principles. An example illustrates what a theologically sensitive approach looks like by integrating insights from Judaic sources into a forgiveness education curriculum. The need for culturally sensitive approaches to forgiveness that can be applied across different religious and cultural contexts is emphasized. Contribution (3) concludes that, "More research on religious and culturally sensitive forgiveness education with diverse populations is needed, as are experimental studies with multiple follow-up assessments to determine the long-term impact of forgiveness education on children and adolescents" (p. 13).

1.1.4. Philosophical Foundations of Forgiveness

Contribution (5) discusses the importance of defining forgiveness as a moral virtue that centers on beneficence and use the Aristotelian realist perspective framework for analysis in the article, "Forgiveness education from an Aristotelian realist perspective: Can we determine a good forgiveness education program?". Essential components of forgiveness that are important to include in forgiveness education programs are also discussed by highlighting two specific approaches: the process-based approach and the story-based approach. Practical implications with a focus on cultural variations and how they fit with the Aristotelian realist perspective are described. Emphasis is placed on the idea that a good understanding of forgiveness should inform good educational programs and that forgiveness education, properly understood as a moral virtue, can facilitate peace and well-being in individuals, families, and communities.

1.1.5. Teachers' Understanding and Practice of Forgiveness

Using a more practical lens and adding the educators' perspective to the conversation, Contribution (4) explores how 17 public-school teachers define, understand, and practice forgiveness in the article, "A qualitative exploration into how teachers understand and practice forgiveness". Through focus group interviews, the research revealed how forgiveness is conceptualized by educators and their thoughts on its role in fostering emotional well-being in students. Five themes were identified regarding teachers' understanding of forgiveness. Contribution (4) concludes that building a culture of forgiveness in schools would be beneficial for students, teachers, and larger society, in general, due to the multiple physical, mental, and emotional health benefits associated with forgiveness.

1.1.6. Interventions for Emerging Adults

The next article, "Forgiveness Psychoeducation with Emerging Adults: REACH Forgiveness and Community Campaigns for Forgiveness" by Contribution (7), shifts focus to forgiveness interventions for emerging adults, summarizing the effectiveness of the REACH Forgiveness program and related community campaigns, particularly in university

settings. It highlights the potential for forgiveness education to reduce mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Worthington concludes that more research with community samples is needed and suggests that a brief, 3.34 h Do IT Yourself (DIY) workbook may be effective for busy individuals, such as college students.

1.1.7. Forgiveness Education for Suicidal Adolescents

Addressing a more vulnerable population, Contribution (8) propose forgiveness education as a tool for addressing the emotional pain found in adolescents at risk for suicide in the article, "Incorporating the Developmental Considerations in a Proposed Forgiveness Education Intervention for Suicidal Adolescents". The authors discuss risk factors associated with adolescents who are suicidal and then analyze previous intervention research for this population. Identifying psychological pain as the greatest risk factor for suicide in adolescents, the authors explore the idea of forgiveness education and intervention as a way to address this pain and suggest that forgiveness education could be an essential part of suicide prevention efforts.

1.1.8. A Decade of Forgiveness Education in Greece

The article, "Ten years of teaching forgiveness education in the schools of Greece: Looking toward the future" (Contribution 9) offers a reflection on ten years of implementing forgiveness education in Greek schools. The article emphasizes the importance of culturally tailored programs and offers practical insights for expanding forgiveness education globally, both within schools and beyond. Galati offers several recommendations for future research, including the importance of extending forgiveness education to students' parents, continuous reforming of the curriculum, exploration into digital storytelling (DS), and the need for ongoing training and support for educators teaching forgiveness.

1.1.9. Moral Agency and Forgiveness Education

Lastly, Contribution (6) article, "Maximize the Impacts of Forgiveness Education with Moral Agency Development," argues that forgiveness education should do more than teach students how to forgive; it should also help them develop moral agency, or the ability to act according to their values. To enhance the impact of forgiveness education, Wong introduces the GMIRA method, which encourages teachers to help students work to be their "best selves," model this goal, and integrate moral agency into forgiveness lessons through invitation, reflection, and assessment. Because moral agency is adaptable across ages and cultures, these strategies can be used in many educational settings. Contribution (6) concludes by calling for future research on this combined approach.

1.1.10. Synthesis of Themes Across Articles

Based on the findings and insights from the articles, several key implications for future forgiveness education and intervention, along with suggested directions for further research, are given. These ideas, along with the nine articles in this Special Issue (2024), can help guide educators, researchers, and mental health professionals in refining and expanding forgiveness education, intervention, and therapeutic programs.

1.2. Implications for the Future

> *Reading about how everyday people understand and practice forgiveness made the concept feel more accessible. It's easy to think of forgiveness as something reserved for saints or spiritual leaders. But hearing from a fifth grader who said, "You don't have to forgive right away. They don't always apologize. Forgiveness is one step closer to healing," reminded me that forgiveness is a human process, not a perfect one.*

> *These perspectives made me more willing to forgive—not because I've mastered the process, but because I now see it as a journey I can walk at my own pace.* (Quote from a college student in an Interpersonal Forgiveness class, Fall 2025)

1.2.1. The Need to Expand Curriculum Integration

Several of these articles suggest that it is important to broaden curriculum integration. The effectiveness of forgiveness education, as demonstrated in US middle schools, elementary schools in Israel, Greek public schools, US colleges, and other contexts, suggests that such curricula should be integrated more widely across educational systems. This includes public, private, and alternative schools; various grades, universities, after-school programs; and religious instruction, as well as parent and community education. Using a comprehensive and developmentally appropriate curriculum, forgiveness education could begin in the early grades, with a focus on the healthy expression of anger and other uncomfortable emotions, the idea that all emotions are normal and natural, and radical kindness, which refers to the act of showing kindness even when it has not been shown first. It can then advance to the introduction of forgiveness and related concepts, such as empathy and perspective-taking in upper-elementary and middle-school/junior-high school. High-school students can explore topics such as self-forgiveness, inherent worth, the idea that all individuals have worth irrespective of their actions; read books with forgiveness-related themes, such as, *What Daddy Did* (Shusterman, 1991); and/or write about their own experiences with forgiving and being forgiven as part of a journal-style writing assignment, or use poetry to express their thoughts about forgiveness. College students enrolled in my "Psychology of Interpersonal Forgiveness" course frequently discuss the importance of including forgiveness education in the school curriculum and report that they wish they could have learned about forgiveness earlier in their schooling and how much it would have helped them if they had. Specifically, one student commented:

> *I had not given it much thought before, but I do think that this is something that should be taught to younger children in an academic setting earlier on. I also think that forgiveness should be a required class somewhere along the academic journey before high school. This way, when they face a hard time with somebody, they are able to understand the situation and forgive the person who hurt them. This is a very important skill to be aware of instead of the alternate, holding a grudge or doing something worse. I think doing this would make forgiveness more common, and an easier choice.* (Quote from a student in an Interpersonal Forgiveness class, Fall 2025)

Incorporating forgiveness education into character education and/or social–emotional learning programs could foster emotional resilience, improved perspective-taking, and improved student relationships, particularly in environments where conflict, trauma, and stress are high. Introducing students, when they are young, to the concept of forgiveness and educating them on what it really means and looks like to forgive, using a culturally sensitive curriculum based on the idea of forgiveness as a moral virtue, can have powerful positive implications.

Developing forgiveness education programs or workshops for parents of children receiving forgiveness education is also important, as discussed in Contribution (9) article. Many individuals in society hold misconceptions and misunderstandings about forgiveness (Freedman & Chang, 2010), and education for parents will enable them to reinforce what their students are learning in school. It can also provide them with education that may support them in their own healing from past experiences involving deep hurt and help them more effectively cope with future hurts. Freedman (2018) found that although the at-risk students in her forgiveness education were not doing their reading homework, students reported that their parents were reading the assigned book, *Forgiveness*

is a choice. Because forgiveness is such a complex topic, extending forgiveness education to the broader community, as illustrated in Contribution (7), can result in kinder and more compassionate communities.

The integration of forgiveness education into culturally and theologically informed perspectives, such as those from Judaism, highlights the need for culturally sensitive programs, as well as the importance of considering the context of students' lives. Future forgiveness education initiatives may be better received if they consider the diverse religious, cultural, and moral frameworks of students. Customizing programs to local or community contexts can enhance their relevance and effectiveness, ensuring that forgiveness education resonates with students' lived experiences while increasing its meaningfulness, as suggested in several articles in this Special Issue.

1.2.2. Teacher Training and Support

As discussed in several articles in this Special Issue, teachers and mental health school professionals play a crucial role in the implementation of forgiveness education and intervention. Educating and training teachers and mental health school professionals to understand and practice forgiveness themselves will be key to embedding these principles in the classroom and the larger school environment. Schools need to invest in professional development that equips teachers not only with the content and techniques to teach forgiveness but also with the ability to do so using a culturally sensitive curriculum with a focus on understanding forgiveness as a moral virtue (Contribution 5). Administrators who recognize the benefits of forgiveness education can make forgiveness and its related concepts, such as healthy emotional expression and leading with kindness, a focus of the entire school. Teachers' emotional health and their knowledge and understanding of—as well as their passion for—forgiveness will influence their ability to model forgiveness effectively for students. In addition to training and educating teachers about forgiveness education, continuous refinement of the curriculum is important, as is providing opportunities for further training and/or supervision in case teachers have questions about forgiveness education.

1.2.3. Forgiveness in Mental Health Interventions

The exploration of forgiveness education for suicidal adolescents suggests that forgiveness can be an effective intervention for psychological distress. The studies in this Issue, as well as in prior research, illustrate that forgiveness education and intervention can be beneficial for a variety of populations (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Rapp et al., 2022). Incorporating forgiveness-based interventions into mental health programs, particularly for young adults and adolescents dealing with trauma, depression, or suicidal thoughts, could provide a complement to traditional therapeutic methods (Freedman & Zarifkar, 2015). The focus on forgiveness, especially if using Enright's (2001/2011) four-phase process model, can help individuals address deep emotional pain and foster personal healing. Forgiveness education can help individuals work through their anger and other uncomfortable emotions, commit to forgiveness, and expand their view of the offense and offender. Students who have experienced deep hurt may need more intense education than is offered in the general classroom as part of a social–emotional learning or character education program. Counselors can offer small groups or individual counseling focusing on forgiveness to supplement what is taught in the curriculum (Skaar et al., 2015). As stated by a college student in my Interpersonal Forgiveness course:

> *I think I am surprised that to this day, I actually haven't had a therapist help me with the forgiveness process—which is why I personally want to help others start the process. I believe that forgiveness does help the one who does the forgiving. I personally have*

seen how my attitude towards the offender that caused me pain has shifted now that I have worked through accepting the pain. (Quote from a student in an Interpersonal Forgiveness course, Spring 2023)

1.2.4. Public Health Implications

The studies on forgiveness campaigns in universities, especially those conducted in diverse cultural contexts such as the one conducted in Colombia (Ortega Bechara et al., 2024), point to the potential of forgiveness education as a public health initiative and entire community focus, as is being currently explored in Israel (Sudilovsky, 2024). Universities and communities could benefit from large-scale forgiveness education campaigns aimed at reducing conflict, anxiety, depression, and other social and mental health issues. Given the positive effects on mental well-being, forgiveness education could be integrated into public health efforts aimed at improving the emotional resilience of young people and members of the larger community.

1.3. Directions for Future Research

1.3.1. Longitudinal Studies on Forgiveness Education

While current studies offer promising short-term results, further research is needed to examine the long-term effects of forgiveness education on emotional well-being, academic performance, and social relationships. Longitudinal studies could track students over several years to understand the enduring impact of forgiveness education, particularly in terms of its influence on conflict resolution skills, willingness and ability to forgive, emotional regulation, development of empathy and compassion, and psychological well-being and relationships.

1.3.2. Cross-Cultural Comparisons

There is a need for research to assess how forgiveness education is received and applied in diverse cultural and religious contexts. Future research should explore how forgiveness education can be tailored to various cultural frameworks and how these adaptations influence the effectiveness of the programs. Understanding the diverse ways forgiveness is understood and practiced across cultures will enrich global efforts to promote forgiveness in educational systems beyond the traditional Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) populations. Focusing on diverse cultures is important to improve the external and ecological validity of current forgiveness education and intervention programs.

1.3.3. Exploring the Role of Forgiveness in Preventing Violent and Aggressive Behavior

Given the potential of forgiveness education to reduce anger and psychological pain, further research could explore its role in preventing violent behavior and crime, particularly among adolescents and emerging adults. Studies could examine whether forgiveness interventions help reduce aggressive behavior, bullying, and interpersonal violence in school environments or communities.

1.3.4. Comparing Forgiveness and Other Mental Health Interventions

There is a need for research that examines the connection between forgiveness education and other therapeutic interventions. Studies could explore how forgiveness education can be integrated into existing programs for mental health, such as cognitive–behavioral therapy (CBT) or trauma-focused interventions, to offer a holistic and comprehensive approach to emotional healing and personal growth.

1.3.5. Teacher Perception and Professional Development

Research could further investigate how educators' knowledge and perceptions of forgiveness affect the implementation of forgiveness education programs. A deeper understanding of how teachers view forgiveness, whether as a moral virtue, psychological concept, or social skill, can inform the design of teacher training programs. Additionally, exploring how teachers integrate forgiveness education into the academic curriculum, for example as part of a social–emotional-learning curriculum or character education program, could provide valuable insights for improving program effectiveness.

1.3.6. Impact on Academic and Social Outcomes

Future research should also examine how forgiveness education influences academic achievement, student engagement, and peer relationships in the classroom. Studies could explore whether students who participate in forgiveness education demonstrate improvements in academic settings and in relationships with both peers and teachers. Data should also include observations, as well as self-report surveys and reports from parents and teachers. This type of knowledge could help contribute to a more positive and productive learning environment.

1.3.7. Evaluating Community-Wide Forgiveness Campaigns

With growing interest in community-based forgiveness interventions, more research is needed to evaluate large-scale forgiveness campaigns and their impact on both individual and societal well-being. Long-term studies could explore whether these public campaigns lead to reductions in collective stress, conflict, and/or mental health issues within broader populations, whether such campaigns have lasting societal effects, and what this specifically looks like for both individuals and the larger community.

2. Conclusions

Together, the articles in this Special Issue (2024) offer a comprehensive examination of forgiveness education from multiple disciplinary, methodological, and cultural perspectives. They suggest that forgiveness education is not only for individual emotional healing, but also important for wider social change, promoting healthier and more resilient students, individuals, and communities. This body of work contributes significantly to the growing literature on forgiveness and forgiveness education and sets a foundation for future research and practice that is theoretically based, culturally responsive, and developmentally appropriate. Multiple articles commented on the need for comprehensive forgiveness education in both schools and the community that considers cultural context and the importance of forgiveness education and training for both educators and mental health professionals. Future research should continue to explore the incorporation of forgiveness into different educational frameworks, cultural contexts, and mental health interventions to determine its specific benefits and support its application in meeting the emotional, psychological, and social and relational needs of diverse populations.

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